

**A Transmogrifying Discourse of Sexual Violence: Resisting, Redressing and Re-writing
Racial Scripts in Contemporary African American Women's Theatre**

by

Amna Haider

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Examining Committee Membership

The following served on the Examining Committee for this thesis. The decision of the Examining Committee is by majority vote.

External Examiner	Dr. E. Patrick Johnson Professor
Co-Supervisor(s)	Dr. Frances Condon Associate Professor
Co-Supervisor(s)	Dr. Vershawn A. Young Professor
Internal-external Member	Dr. Naila Keleta-Mae Assistant Professor
Internal Members	Dr. Jennifer Harris Associate Professor
Internal Members	Dr. Andrew McMurry Associate Professor

Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

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Abstract

This dissertation examines contemporary African American women's theatre that addresses the absented and erased reality of black women as victims of sexual violence. This thesis investigates how contemporary African American Theatre and performance unfolds two realities of rape: one reality is of the erased victims, and the second of the perpetrators of sexual violence. Working at the intersections of gender and black feminist studies, critical race theory and performance studies this dissertation studies how the African American creative impulses are re-writing rape narratives by deconstructing debilitating racist myths and stereotypes. It seeks to expand limited definitions of rape in legal discourses, pointing out limitations of concepts like date rape and issues of consent, but also looks at forms of sexual violation that simply do not usually register within legal parameters like lesbian rape, rape through verbal sexual harassment, and medical rape. Furthermore, this project engages with racist stereotypes that either nullify black women's experiential realities of sexual violence or demonize black men. One of the main objectives of this dissertation is to examine the perpetrators of violence as well as the victims through dramatic and performative engagements with sexual violence. Therefore, this thesis examines the rapist, be it a man, a lesbian, a mother, or an adolescent youth as part of African American contemporary Theatre's engagement with the narratives of rape. This equalizing representation of sexual violence as an act not just done to black women, but *is* done by men and women *to* black women makes African American Theatre and performance redress the imbalance wherein black women as victims of sexual violence bore the burden of the violence committed against them alone. This impulse to redress the imbalance raises many thorny issues of black manhood, black motherhood, and the role of black community that these playwrights fiercely bring into conversation, not to repeat historical racist narratives this dissertation

contends, but to re-evaluate the roles and responsibilities of black people, and what it means to be black in the face of sexual violence.

The first section of this dissertation examines silence around the reality of rape of black women. Beginning with Robbie McCauley's *Sally's Rape* I look at the relevance of the slave rape history for contemporary audiences. Additionally, *Sally's Rape* looks at the burial of rape histories as national crypts that helps maintain myths regarding rape and black sexuality. This past assessment of rape impacts understandings of the present rapes of black women as elucidated in another play -- through Misty DeBerry's *Milkweed*. What does it mean to break the silence around sexual violence for the victim? This question is addressed by examining Aishah Rahman's play *Only in America*: a play that was inspired by the Anita Hill-Clarence Thomas Senate Hearings based on Professor Hill's sexual harassment allegations against USA Supreme Court Justice Thomas in 1991, when he was being vetted for the job by the USA Senate.

The next section reveals how Suzan-Lori Parks' plays and Aishah Rahman engage with the politics of the gaze and the process of absencing the victim. This murderous gaze that looks at and looks through black women is examined first through hypervisibility of Venus Hottentot in *Venus* and Professor Hill, and then through the invisibility of Hester La Negrita in *In the Blood* to show how black women the processes through which victims of sexual violence and violations are made to disappear, and with their disappearance goes the understanding and possible retribution for the sexual violence committed against them. Furthermore, this chapter also examines how black women experience rape through the sexually invasive scientific and medical violations of their bodies.

The last chapter examines black children and young adults caught in vicious cycles of intergenerational violence, how they experience or perpetrate rape, furthering cycles of violence

through the works of Dael Orladersmith and Kia Corthron. Two important aspect analysed here is first, the hidden wound of internalised racism and its manifestation through rape, and second an examination of violence by victims of rape.

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my parents, Nasir Humayun Haider and Yasmin Nasir.

You are missed more every day. I hope you are proud of me.

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Chapter 1, Introduction: Understanding African American Women's Rape Realities

you ain't nothing but a black woman! who told you anybody wanted to hear from you? this aint the 60s you know....and you know what happens when a black woman opens her mouth to say anything other than do it to me!

hattie gosset, "Who told you anybody wants to hear from you?"¹

black women are the beached whales of the sexual universe, unvoiced, misseen, not doing, awaiting *their* verb.

Hortense Spillers, "Interstices: A Small Drama of Words"²

Playwright, poet, and editor, hattie gosset, writes of her fear and her anxiety that as a black woman what she has to say is of no value, unless she issues a sexual invitation: "do it to me!" (gosset 175) As the stereotypes about black women as hypersexual persist so does the lack of value that underlie black women's racial experiences as has been identified and articulated by gosset. gosset's concerns are especially relevant when the erroneous perceptions of black women's perpetual sexual availability render them unseen and unheard as victims of sexual violence. Black women's erased reality in rape narratives is exemplified in the black history of sexual violence from slavery through Jim Crow era to the present. This dissertation argues that late twentieth century and contemporary African American women's plays that focus on sexual violence formulate a resistance narrative to the racist sociological, historical, legal, and medical discourses wherein black women as victims of rape disappear. The eight contemporary plays I analyse -- plays by Robbie McCauley, Misty DeBerry, Aishah Rahman, Suzan-Lori Parks, Dael Orlandersmith, and Kia Corthron -- function as counter stories that write into being black women as legitimate victims of sexual violence. Thus, these plays are a reclamation endeavor by black women playwrights, on behalf of black women, of their right to articulate and have value attached to what they say about their experiences of sexual violence and sexual trauma. For these

¹gosset, hattie. "Who told you anybody wants to hear from you? you ain't nothing but a black woman!". *This Bridge Called my Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. edited by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa. p. 175.

²Spillers, Hortense. "Interstices: A Small Drama of Words". *The Routledge Language and Cultural Theory Reader*. edited by Lucy Burke, Tom Crowley and Alan Girvin, p. 153.

playwrights the persistence of the outright denial, or the minimization of sexual violence, because the survivor is "nothing but a black woman", is unacceptable (Gossett 175). Instead, it is precisely because these *are* black women's experiences of survivorship of sexual violence that they are valued and validated in these dramatized resistance narratives.

This study investigates how contemporary African American dramatists and performers work to expose how black women's bodies have been imprinted by the history of slavery and racism in America. Black women, both individually and collectively, have been written into racialized and racist frameworks perpetuated by and within the dominant western discourses. Consequently, black women's own experiential reality risks being written out, without witnesses and without being heard. The task taken on by African American women dramatists is to not only reveal the process of destruction and erasure, but more importantly, to undertake a process of re-construction, re-evaluation, and re-assessment of the history of sexual violence as experienced by black women. African American women dramatists pose a challenge to the historical, social, cultural, and legal depreciation of black women's experiences and realities in narratives of rape as realities that have been imprinted on their bodies by others. So successful has been this process of imprinting black women with the stereotypes of sexual promiscuity and immorality that black feminist theorist Hortense Spillers, in her article "Interstitials," acknowledges that any discussion of sexuality remains an "unarticulated nuance" for black women (153). I find that this lack of articulation is even more profound and noticeable in the narratives and discourses of rape of black women. As the stereotypes and myths defining black women, black sexuality and bodies, and black femininity and motherhood, have been insidious and long lasting, their dismantling in traditional rape narrative, in discourse, and in the cultural imaginary, through theatre and performance has been an equally long and painstaking endeavor.

Consequently, African American drama and performance is a powerful platform that diligently continues to redress black women's "unvoiced, misseen, not doing, awaiting *their* verb" absented status (Spillers 153; emphasis in original). Black women playwrights show through their characters that black women both as victims and as survivors of rape, will no longer be imprinted on by others, but will inscribe their own lived realities of sexual violence into discourse.

As a woman from Pakistan who has grown up in a patriarchal culture and society, I am keenly aware of a woman's vulnerability, and how in a patriarchal culture like Pakistan rape is always a woman's fault. In a society where the honor of the whole family is placed on a woman's shoulders and it is the victim who is blamed for bringing dishonor to her family if she is raped, I empathise how victims of sexual violence would choose to remain silent when family, society, culture, and law would deny women status of legitimate victims. My research into sexual violence stems from this belief that neither the silences can or should be allowed to persist nor the wounds inflicted by sexual violence on body, mind, and language be left unintended. For a victim to speak up is as essential to speak up for the victim and bringing into conversation difficult but necessary aspects of sexual violence requires courage. I find that African American dramatists and performer exhibit this unflinching courage with their devotion to examining sexual violence within their communities and race.

The dramatised articulations about black women's experiences of sexual violence become even more complicated as the black dramatists not only write about interracial violence perpetrated by whites onto black bodies, but they also tackle the topic of black perpetrators of sexual violence onto black women. Concerning this latter topic the plays reveal that Black men have also felt the debilitating burden of stereotyping since slavery. This has led to a black communal silence around black victimizers of sexual violence. It is a silence that is even

observed to be paralleled in the critical discussions of the plays. My research examines this silence, this void regarding black perpetrators of sexual violence to show that the depictions of sexual violence in African American Theatre bring into focus the unacknowledged realities of rape of black women. How much are the present instances of sexual violence against black women implicated by the past violence on black people? How much does the past sexual violence still resonate in the present discourses of sexual violence? These are vital questions underwriting the re-working of narratives of rape by African American contemporary theatre. I contend that black dramatists' delineations of the rapists are not reiterations of the stereotyped or caricatured figures found in the racist historical dominant discourses. Rather, contemporary drama show perpetrators of violence as ambivalent characters, who are themselves victims of racism, living in an oppressive society, and living with the burden of a hostile history. While bearing the burden of racism can never justify sexual assault, the fact that both black men and women are subject to historical suppression does serve as a point of complication in dramatic discourse. Therefore, the present study of black contemporary plays dealing with sexual violence shows how African American women dramatists create a deliberate tension through their delineations of victimisers, how they problematise any simple or straight forward readings of sexual violence, as found in the historical narratives of rape.

The experiences of sexual violence presented in African American contemporary women's theatre requires us to better understand what trauma theorists Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub identify as "*what we do not yet know of our lived historical relation to events of our times*" (xx; emphasis in original). Within the context of black experiences of sexual violence this "*lived historical relation*" requires us to see how much the past is embedded in the stereotypes and myths about black women (and black men) and how the past still informs, or rather

misinforms, present day perceptions of the rape of black women and of their status as victims. African American contemporary theatre re-writes racist narratives and scripts that inhibit, falsify, or misrepresent black lived experiences of rape by evaluating the underlying historical and social conditions that fostered and naturalised environments of explicit and implicit racism. Playwrights and performance artists, like Robbie McCauley in *Sally's Rape* (1989) and Suzan-Lori Parks in *Venus* (1996), re-visit the relevance of past sexual violence and exploitation for contemporary audiences. They vivify the pain and sexual trauma of black women who have either been forgotten, or have been overdetermined by history. Playwright Misty DeBerry, as a rape survivor herself, works to expand the discourses of rape of black women and queer black women in *Milkweed* (2009) by highlighting the redundancies and limitations of rape categories in legal discourses. Not just black women, but black children and adolescents are also caught in cycles of violence, and in turn inflict violence. This is a central concern in Dael Orlandersmith's *Beauty's Daughter* (1995) and *Monster* (1996) and Kia Corthron's *Breath, Boom* (2000). Cultural studies scholar Sabine Sielke contends in *Reading Rape: The Rhetoric of Sexual Violence* that rape narratives in America are "overdetermined by a distinct history of racial conflict" (2). She further argues that "narratives of sexual violence ponder not an alien and uncontrollable part of human nature but the power dynamics of [United States'] particular culture" (2). Building on Sielke, I examine what it means to be black and to be a victim or a victimizer in this "particular culture", where the "power dynamics" ensure the erasure of the black victim of rape and the demonization of black victimizers. Furthermore, my research shows how contemporary African American theatre poses a challenge to these "power dynamics" and these delineations by asking us to look at the environment of racism wherein these sexual violations take place.

Where Theatre Studies scholar Davida Bloom regards dramatic texts as "a window through which readers can better understand the society and time period in which the texts were written and therefore provides a barometer of cultural change" I ask: What if the dramatic enactments, rather than being a gauge for measuring cultural change, are also in the process of bringing about cultural change? (6) It is well established that historically, black performance, as a specific iteration of African American creative expression, is used as a "site of opposition" to slavery; it is an expression that has grown out of the experience of survivorship in the United States (hooks, "Performance practise" 210). Critical insights provided by bell hooks and Saidiya V. Hartman show how performance-as-art in addition to being an instrument of survival has historically been a vehicle of resistance, "as a rite of resistance" in African American creative impulses (hooks, "Performance practise" 211). Noted African American feminist, bell hooks, equates black performance practices to the process of decolonization and identifies them as critical to the efforts for liberation by challenging both the dominant white and the black middle class culture of decorum ("Performance practise" 211). I extend hooks' application of resistance in black performance to dominant white and black communal cultures to apply the element of resistance to the discourses stereotyping and mythologising black women. The elements of survival and resistance -- that is surviving not only sexual violence but it's aftermath by resisting efforts wherein black women are silenced or erased as credible victims -- are still in play in contemporary African American performance and dramatic art.

Hybrid forms of theatrical performances are emerging that encapsulate features of both traditional dramatic form and live performances. These hybrid forms are constantly pushing the boundaries and perceptions of what is possible in dramatic art. They create a new dynamics wherein the theatrical space (onstage, offstage, or the audience) becomes fluid; where the

writer/actor/character dialectic is mobile as the performer steps in and out of his or her role; where the verbal, visual, and aural senses converge, coalesce, and confound. In short, a new discourse is enacted where every performance is potentially transformed. Performance studies scholar Peggy Phelan in *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* looks at the "ontology of performance" as transformative and ephemeral in nature where "[p]erformance's only life is in the present.... It can be performed again, but this repetition itself marks it as 'different'" (146). Contemporary African American theatre is transforming and increasingly incorporating elements of live performance. Plays like *Sally's Rape* showcase this evolving hybrid form when playwright McCauley steps in and out of her roles as character, performer, or playwright, where the audience are her co-performers, and the play/performance proceeds in a collaborative and interactive manner. Or when the playwright, Dael Orlandersmith performs multiple roles and characters in dramatic monologues in *Beauty's Daughter* and *Monster* as solo performances. Within the theatrical milieu solo performances have emerged as a dynamic medium wherein black writers as performers are able to site and situate their black bodies to "conjure a whole range of identities, and in doing so articulate a series of repressed voices" (Wallis and Shepherd no pg). As performances foreground black performers bodies as metonymic sites that provide a way "to discern the dialectic between the material body and representation of body" (Johnson xx). Herein lies the potential of how playwrights such as McCauley and Orlandersmith as performers are expanding the genre to create space for the emergence of black experiential realities, where they get to stand up and stand out, to speak up and talk back, to create meaning and make room for meaningful insights into black lives with the audience potentially "becoming ethically contracted as witnesses to what s revealed to them here and now" (Wallis and Shepherd no pg). Thus, unlike other mediums when theatre, dramatic and solo performances foreground

narratives and iterations of sexual violence that the audiences are compelled to respond to, to bear witness to, to be involved and invested in sexual traumas, bodily wounding, and violations, that unfold in front of them.

I argue how transitioning parameters in African American performance show an evolving medium where the discourse on sexual violence and abuse requires new understandings and an "active intelligence" from the audience (Schechner, "Interview" no pg). African American contemporary theatre articulates through both its content and its form that understanding black women's experiential reality is not a foregone conclusion, always already fully articulated and understood. Similarly, each black victim of rape is not a stereotyped "being", but each victim who suffers and survives, their pain, their trauma, and their rape experience is individual. Consequently, African American theatre and performance functions as a counter discourse where transformations in the medium disrupt myths and undermine stereotypes within dominant or popular narratives, where by "presenting a non-conventional *form*, playwrights can more effectively depict non-conventional *content*" (Bloom 159). Such hybrid transformations in African American contemporary theatre disallow the continual perpetuation or easy assimilation of myths and stereotypes about black women and men and their sexuality in the national or cultural psyche.

Historical and Legal Overview

This present study of late twentieth century and contemporary African American dramatic renditions of sexual violence need to be seen against two historical trajectories to understand which stereotypes, scripts, myths, and discourses contemporary African American artists are currently in conversation with. The first is the history of devastating stereotypes about black personhood --womanhood and manhood -- dating from the days of slavery to present day

race and gender discourses. It is imperative to see to what extent the stereotypes that have defined and caged black women (and black men), that they are still in the process of breaking out of, continue to have currency and to influence perceptions of race in socio-cultural contexts. Closely linked to this history of the erroneous perception of black womanhood in the development of rape narratives is the second trajectory found in the legal and judicial frameworks in rape cases when applied to black women. The legal implications of these stereotypes are revealed as between 1930's and 1960's 455 men were executed for rape in the United States, of which 405 were black men (Gavey 27). In these cases nearly all the complainants were white women. However, it was not until 1999 that a white man was executed in America for raping not *a* black woman, but six black women. Serial rapist, Gary Michael Heindnik was sentenced to death because he had kidnapped, tortured, and raped six black women, killed two of them, while holding them prisoner in his basement. This judicial disparity clearly demonstrates that while slavery and segregation have passed into history, black women as victims of rape are struggling to be recognized as credible victims of sexual violence just as white women unquestionably are. Not only black women, but black men too are primarily perceived as perpetrators of sexual violence in the cultural imagination that informs and underwrites the legal proceedings and the judicial mechanisms. Thus, both black women and men continue to be victims of socio-cultural perceptions in crimes of sexual violence.

As we begin to trace how ideas of race led to the creation of erroneous perceptions about black people it is important to remember that current research shows that human races are genetically identical sharing 99.9 % of their genetic makeup, and that "more variation is found *within* so-called racial groups than *between* them ... in other words, we are more alike than we are different, racially speaking" (Khanna ix; emphasis in original). Yet present day racist

perceptions persist! This brings to attention an ironical use of science: when it suited the Western dominant race to subjugate an entire race of people science was bought into service to create biological categories, yet when science disputes racial categories such scientific findings carry little weight. Moreover, it is not an easy task to completely eliminate or disassociate how perceptions of one's race that have taken centuries to sediment shape and influence how one is seen. Personal race identities continue to clash with racialized identities especially when perceptions of race can be a definitive identity marker for some people. Former Vice-Chancellor of Equity and Inclusion at the University of California Berkeley, Na'ilah S. Nasir considers race to be an especially "challenging aspect" in forming identities. For Nasir the "nuance[s] and complexity that are inherent in the multiple ways we live race" can be overlooked when we homogenize or essentialize race (4). Thema Bryant-Davis and Carlota Ocampo in their article "The Trauma of Racism" assert that the "scientifically racist inaccuracy -- the historical construct of race -- has become a lived socio-political reality" (577). However, they point out that dismantling this "scientifically racist inaccuracy" of the construction of race can become problematic as "deconstructing race may be construed as denying [black people's] reality" (577). When race continues to be a central factor determining socio-cultural and political experiences impacting the lived reality of black people, the denial of race or essentializing nuances within race holds the danger of mirroring the historical denial and erasure of black people's lived reality. Therefore race, despite being a historical and scientific construct, within this research is central to the discussion of sexual violence as it is experienced and articulated by black women.

Crucial to the examination of normative readings of rape narratives is the unpacking and reassessing of ideological frameworks underlying forms of sexual oppression, where the sexualization of race and the racialization of sexuality overlap. Contemporary African American

Theatre and performative art contests normative readings of sexual violence by disrupting such overlaps of race and sexuality as fallacies of essentialism. Critical Race theorists Michael Omi and Howard Winant define racial formation as "a socio-historical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed" (124). Omi and Winant challenge the nineteenth century erroneous racist scientific mindset by considering race not as biologically constructed, but as a fluid social phenomenon. For them, racial formation and racial categories emerge through the workings of social and everyday activities, rather than being biologically determined features of any particular race. Omi and Winant's theorization of "racial categories" as socially constructed phenomenon re-frames racist ideologies which masqueraded as scientific facts during slavery. These pseudo-scientific facts defined black people as racially inferior, sub-human, and savages. Racial categories are also fluid because they have been politically expedient. For example, sociologist Nikki Khanna shows that at one time Irish immigrants were not considered white as indicated by the racial slurs used against them "green-nigger" and "coal-cracker" (ix-x). Historically, when such pseudo-scientific racial categories have been applied to black women as biological categories to serve political and economic purposes, then the emergent rhetoric of black sexuality becomes really harmful for black women who have suffered sexual violence without the sexual violence against them being acknowledged as a crime.

During slavery the equation of black women with animal bestiality and savagery allowed their bodies and their sexuality to be exploited by white slave owners. This was achieved when white slave owners projected onto black enslaved women their own debasement and lasciviousness by perceiving black women as sexually wild. An instance of this debasement of enslaved black women's sexuality is recorded in founding father Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia*. In chapter 14, Jefferson states his belief (reflecting the fear of white slave

owners at the time) of the sexual threat posed by black men to white women in addition to misconstruing black women's sexuality with bestiality. Jefferson postulated that black men's "own judgement in favor of the whites, declared by their preference of them, as uniformly as is the preference of the Oran-utan (Orangutan) for the black women over those of his own species" was evidence of the superiority of white people (145). In *Most Blessed of Patriarchs*, Annete Gordon Reed and Peter S. Onuf show the inconsistency of such a claim made by Jefferson. They point out that the Orangutan in Africa was "an animal [Jefferson] had never seen, in a place where he had never been, a place where Orangutan actually do not live" (no pg). Such popular misconceptions as President Jefferson's, co-relating black women's sexuality in terms of sexual attraction with animals, acted as a cover meant to serve sexual and economic needs of the white slave owners. What is disturbing is the tenacious persistence of these distorting myths and images about black women in dominant discourses and the public imagination. This was evidenced as recently as 2016, when the former First Lady Michele Obama was called "a (sic) ape in heels" by Pamela Ramsey Taylor, the Director of Clay County Development Corporation on her Facebook page (Narayan *CNN*). Resultantly, Ms Taylor was suspended initially, then fired, and reinstated a month later. The racist mindset that continues to describe black people, even those as educated and accomplished as Michele Obama in bestial terms requires more than dismantling; it requires a decolonisation of the public imaginary.

The pathologization of black sexuality was created in polar opposition to the vision of white women's sexuality and womanhood. Wherein the Madonna image was used to explicate white women's purity, in contrast the image of the whore described black women's assumed promiscuity in the cultural imaginary. Feminist studies scholar Evelyn M. Hammonds, in her article "Toward a Genealogy of Black Female Sexuality," expostulates that "[b]lack women's

sexuality has been constructed in binary opposition to that of white women: it is rendered simultaneously invisible, visible (exposed), hypervisible, and pathologised in dominant discourses" (170). When white women were perceived as being pure and chaste, they were considered inviolate and thus could be raped. Within nineteenth century discourses black women however, were deemed as expendable where any and every sexual act against them was permissible. Such misconceptions about black women have led to their continual violation with impunity by white slave owners, as the stereotype of black women as sexual savages prevailed. This logic underwriting racism made a black woman "a sexual savage, a non-human, an animal [who] cannot be raped" surmises black feminism and gender studies scholar, bell hooks (*Ain't* 52). With their humanity thus negated, all sexual violations against black enslaved women ceased to exist as crimes. Historian, author, and poet, Gerda Lerner in *Black Women in White America*, highlights the socio-cultural advantages for slave owners that the creation of the "myth of the 'bad' black woman" had where all black women were misconceived as morally loose and ready for sexual exploits: "Every black woman was, by definition, a slut according to this racist mythology; therefore, to assault her and exploit her sexually was not reprehensible and carried with it none of the normal communal sanctions against such behavior" (163). Black women have historically struggled, and continue to struggle, for the "normal communal [and legal, I might add] sanctions" that such reprehensible behavior warrants. This struggle is evidenced in contemporary African American Theatre which acts as a counter narrative to such a racist mythology.

One of the legacies of slavery that still persists, and is in itself a form of violence, is that black women are predisposed to immorality and promiscuity continues to misconstrue them in public imagination in the twentieth century. The ending of slavery did not necessarily translate

into an ending of such misconceptions and faulty definitions of black womanhood, especially black sexuality. hooks elaborates that black women's rape was not just an attack on their sexual integrity but it "led to a devaluation of black womanhood that permeated the psyches of all Americans and shaped the social status of all black women once slavery ended" (*Ain't* 52). Analysing the flux of images on television hooks surmises that "the predominant image" associated with black women in America is that of "the 'fallen' woman, the whore, the slut, [and] the prostitute" (*Ain't* 52). My research looks at how contemporary African American plays' active engagement with these stereotypes and myths surrounding black sexuality acts as a destabilizing apparatus that pursues a historical re-interpretation of the overdetermined iterations of black women's sexuality. A case in point is Suzan-Lori Parks' play *In the Blood* which is centered on the sexual exploitation of the protagonist Hester La Negrita. In the play it is the chorus, representing society, which blames Hester's circumstances on her race: "BAD NEWS IN HER BLOOD" (11). However, as Parks intends, the audience can clearly see the exploitative systems which are to be blamed for Hester's situation rather than racist essentialism attributed to "HER BLOOD" (11). Thus the task at hand is to free the minds which still make black women bear the historical burden of the logic of "racist mythology".

hooks, while unearthing the racism underpinning the First Wave of Feminism in early twentieth century, points out the detrimental effects underlying the assumptions that "white American woman's experience is made synonymous with *the* American woman's experience" (*Ain't* 137; emphasis in original). Underwriting this presumption is a "luxury" enjoyed by "the dominant race that can make it seem that their experience is representative" of all American women when the "word woman is synonymous with white woman" (hooks, *Ain't* 138). A tangential impact of the universal application of "*the* American woman's experience" is the

"Othering" of the experiences of women of color when they are reduced to "de-humanized beings who do not fall under the heading woman" (hooks, *Ain't* 138-139). Yet nowhere is "the American woman's experience" more Othered than in the difference between how white and black women's experiences of sexual violence are received, perceived, portrayed, and consumed in public imaginary. A case in point is Eldridge Cleaver's rapes of white women which he claimed were "insurrectionary act[s]" against white men (*Soul* 14). Later the possibility of Cleaver teaching at University of California in 1968 would so horrify then Gov. Ronald Reagan that he said "[i]f Eldridge Cleaver is allowed to teach our children, they may come home one night to slit our throats" (qtd in Kimball 215). Yet Cleaver, refining his technique, his "*modus operandi*", by "practicing on Black girls in the ghetto", never got these fearful or horrified reactions, because these black women were as hooks shows, were considered to be "de-humanized beings" (*Soul* 14). Where is the horror and the outrage for the violence suffered by black women in the ghettos, that Gov. Reagan expressed for white women? Contemporary black Theatre and performances, by foregrounding the pain and sexual trauma, "humanize" the absented, erased, or scapegoat black victim of rape. Thus the natural reactions of horror, fear, and outrage automatically reserved and elicited for white victims of rape, are now demanded for black victims.

Black women have not only been absent from white feminist studies, but in early race discourses as well, where black experiences would only refer to the experiences of black men. Critical race feminism theorist Elizabeth V. Spelman in *Inessential Woman* calls attention to the racism and sexism embedded in advocacies of "sexblindness" and "colorblindness" (130). For Spelman, "sexblindness" and "colorblindness" are "vicious" acts, as they support the idea that either "all experience is male experience or that all experience is white experience" (130). In

either case black women's experiential realities are absented. American poet and feminist writer Adrienne Rich, further expostulates that such advocacies are acts of "white solipsism" because they ensure the "utter erasure of [black women's] particular reality", as both cases of all "male experience" or all "white experience" write out black women's lives, experiences, and voices (300). Additionally, a direct effect of such detrimental discourses of "white solipsism" that hooks, Spelman, and Rich do not address is how the all male or the all white experiences ensure that black women as victims of rape fail to be recognised. Thus sexual violence against black women would be submerged beneath white women or black male experiences. It is a disservice to black women when different life experience of black and white women have been used against black women for differential treatment to Other them (Spelman 130). At the other end of the spectrum from difference is sameness, where elimination of difference as Othering gets replaced by sameness. The sameness approach does not recognise the uniqueness of experiences of black women. Promoting "colorblindness", that is, all women black and white should be treated the same is another form of erasure. Black women's experiences of sexual violence should not be synonymised with white women's experiences because their history and their socio-cultural reality is not the same as white women's. Hence discussions of "sex blindness", "color blindness", and "white solipsism" disallow the acts of sexual violence perpetrated against black women, that is crimes against an absented and erased group, to get acknowledged, much less addressed. Rather than being engaged with the "difference" and "sameness" discourses and debates, African American dramatists place black sexual violence center stage as experiences deserving of standing alone, of being studied alone, and of needing to be dealt with alone, without being sidelined, submerged, or erased by white women's experiences of sexual violence.

If black women were considered to be "sexual savages" so were black men, as their perceived sexual potency was a constant threat felt by white slave owners during slavery. The fabricated threat of black men's sexuality reached mythic proportions during the Reconstruction era with the perpetuation of the "myth of the black rapist". As a result, public lynching became the most popular form of social redress and vigilante justice for white men, in all rumoured cases of a black man raping a white woman. Literary historian and cultural critic Koritha Mitchell in her seminal study *Living with Lynching* looks at lynching as "theatrical productions", which had "familiar characters (so called black 'rapists' and white 'avengers')" (6-7). These characters would "perform a predictable script" entailing a public spectacle consisting of forced confessions, mutilations, torture, and burning (7). Journalist and editor Ida B. Wells reported over ten thousand lynchings taking place between 1865-1895 in her pamphlet, *A Red Record*. The act of lynching perpetrated against black men and women became symbolic of the institutionalized political acts of terror oppressing black people. Yet the act of lynching was not the only act of violent oppression imposed on the black community during the Jim Crow era. Political activist and black feminist scholar Angela Y. Davis in *Women, Race, and Class* looks at lynching as a "valuable political weapon" as the "institution of lynching, in turn, complemented by the continued rape of Black women, became an essential ingredient of the post-war strategy of racist terror" (185). Herein lies the peculiar irony underlining sexual violence during Jim Crow: while the alleged rape of white women was being publically defended, the rape and gang rape of black women was not only socially sanctioned, but at times accompanied the lynching of the black men by avenging white mobs. Thus the pretext of the defence of white womanhood provided opportune moments for the rape of black women during the lynching acts of terror.

The lynching of black men and the rape of black women during Jim Crow did not produce horror on an equal scale. Sociologist Patricia Hill Collins points out in *Black Sexual Politics*, that lynching and rape as crimes against black people were perceived in terms of race and gender, where the "targets of lynching as ritualized murder, Black men carried the more important burden of race", which relegated black women as victims of rape to "carry the less important burden of gender" (216). Collins points out how the crime against gender was considered "less important" than the crime against race. Nowhere is the operation of this historical imbalance, as pointed out by Collins, more visible in recent memory than the Anita Hill-Clarence Thomas Senate Hearings in 1991. These hearings were held to investigate allegations of sexual harassment made against Justice Thomas by Professor Hill. Justice Thomas termed these investigative Senate hearings a "high-tech lynching", using the history of lynching as a well crafted defence to project himself as a victim.³ His strategic use of the historical phenomenon of the specter of lynching allowed the reality of Professor Hill's sexual harassment claims to be submerged against the terrifying phenomenon of lynching in the ensuing rhetoric and debates. Where on one hand the crime of sexual violation of black women (both historically and during the Anita Hill-Clarence Thomas Senate hearings) was displaced by the crime of lynching, the logic underlying the rape of black women was sustained nevertheless. Davis describes this logic as "an aggression against Black people as a whole, for the mythical rapist implies the mythical whore" (191). Professor Hill's treatment during the hearings (especially some of the questions posed to Professor Hill by the Republican Senators), confirmed that black women's sexuality is perpetually misperceived by the "mythical whore" discourse and

³All quotations of the Hearings are taken from *The Complete transcripts of the Clarence Thomas-Anita Hill Hearings, October 11, 12, 13, 1991*. edited by Anita Miller. Hereafter referred to as *Hearings*. p. 157.

rhetoric established during slavery, endured during the Reconstruction and Jim Crow eras into present times.

The virulent impact of the history of devaluation of black womanhood holds the cultural imagination hostage to perceive black men as the demonized rapists and white women as the only legitimate rape victims. Black women as victims of sexual violence are further victimized when they are denied the legitimacy automatically given to white women. African American studies scholar Hazel V. Carby, in *Reconstructing Womanhood*, brings attention to the imbalance in public discourses between these two attacks on the black community: lynching which caught public attention, and rape of black women which was talked about only in conjunction with lynching. Carby points out that "the institutionalized rape of black women has never been as powerful a symbol of black oppression as the spectacle of lynching. Rape has always involved patriarchal notions of women being, at best, not entirely unwilling accomplices" (39). Why has this violence against black women never been the "powerful" indicator of black oppression? At the basis is the persistence of the idea that black women are "not entirely unwilling accomplices", which therefore problematizes the sexual violence perpetrated on them.

For feminist author and activist Susan Brownmiller the event of a black man raping a white woman is symptomatic of "America's political schizophrenia" (230). Only in America would a wolf whistle by precocious black teenager Emmett Till at a white woman incite a racist vigilante mob to murder him, while the rape of countless black women is glossed over in dominant discourses. The rape of a white woman, alleged or real, has created a murderous vigilante frenzy in the white American psyche as evidenced by the fate of the nine Scottsboro boys who were falsely accused of raping two white women in 1931 when their only crime was to ride in the same train carriage as the white women. Or in what became "one of the most widely

publicized crimes in the 1980's" the New York Central Park jogger's case where a white investment banker Trisha E. Meili was allegedly raped by black and Hispanic teenagers in 1989 (Farber B00003). They were convicted, even though their DNA did not match with the DNA from the rape kit. However, the very week of the New York Central Park jogger's tragedy 28 other rapes were reported in New York, including a horrific gang rape of a woman of color who was thrown from the top of a four story building causing fractures of her ankles and legs, a shattered pelvis, and extensive internal injuries (Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins" 1267-1268). Yet while the white investment banker's experience garnered widespread public attention and sympathy, this black woman's rape barely made an impact on the public consciousness. This discrepancy once again highlights and reinforces the ambiguous low status that a black woman has as a victim of sexual and physical violence. Carby notes that the "links between black women and illicit sexuality consolidated during the antebellum years [have] powerful ideological consequences for the next hundred and fifty years" (39). As exemplified by these instances, whether it is the 1930's or the 1980's, the American cultural imagination is dominated by the image of white women as genuine victims of rape, with black women as problematic, ambiguous, or culpable victims.

With black women caught in the unchanging image of "not entirely unwilling accomplices" in sexual violence, black men too are living with the historical burden of "myth of the Black rapist" as they are similarly tied to debilitating images of black masculinity as hypersexual, aggressive, dominating, and threatening (Carby 30). Historically, black masculinity has been defined in terms of the phallus, as novelist and social critic James Baldwin recognised that "to be an American Negro male is also to be a kind of walking phallic symbol: which means that one pays, in one's own personality, for the sexual insecurity of others" (290). It is important

to question how much of this "sexual insecurity" of white men, (a legacy from the days of slavery) that black men have internalised, where they too define for themselves their black masculine identity as a "phallic symbol". The issue of black masculinity has been central to the sexual violence that DeBerry and Orlandersmith address in their plays, *Milkweed* and *Monster* respectively. It is through the characters of Darren and Winfred, both black men who assert their masculinity through sexual violence, that these dramatists highlight the need for a re-evaluation of definitions of black masculinity. Both Darren and Winfred see, in the black women they rape, the assertion of female autonomy as a challenge to and a rejection of their male virility. Thus, rape becomes a means of redress and a method of containment of misperceived threats to their black masculinity. Black dramatists pose the question to us what kind of masculinity is it that sustains itself through inflicting pain and sexual trauma? For Collins, as for DeBerry and Orlandersmith, "sexual dominance associated with the phallus becomes an important indicator of masculinity" where "[v]iolence against 'strong' Black women enables some African American men to recapture a lost masculinity and to feel like 'real' men" (*Black Sexual Politics* 206, 231). The "sexual dominance" definition of masculinity is as unhealthy for black men as it proves to be violently dangerous for black women. Collins advocates for an imperative need for "new definitions of masculinity that uncouple strength from its close ties to male dominance" (*Black Sexual Politics* 200). Black dramatists by foregrounding the rape of black women by black men assert the need for a re-evaluation of the "sexual dominance" criterion of black masculinity.

Another long lasting impact of the "myth of the Black rapist", with the attendant stereotyping of black men with rampant uncontrolled sexuality, has been black communal silence surrounding intra-racial sexual violence. The twentieth century witnessed political efforts by black people and communities during the Civil Rights era for race equality and racial

uplifting. This included projecting positive values into being black as shown through the "Black is beautiful" catchphrase from the Black Power and Black Pride movements. What have been the effects of the efforts of racial uplifting for black women who have been victimised by black men? In a sense the "burden" of uplifting the race, (I say "burden" here and not the responsibility or efforts for uplifting), was doubly placed on black women's shoulders. Black feminist studies scholars such as Collins in *Black Sexual Politics* and Charlotte Pierce-Baker in *Surviving the Silence: Black Women Stories of Rape* examine how black women surviving black sexual violence have been expected to subordinate their interests and mute their voices for the general communal racial progress. Collins highlights "self-censorship" as a black cultural norm that gagged black victims of rape because of the pressures they faced against "'air[ing] dirty laundry' in a White society that viewed Black men as sexual predators" (*Black Sexual Politics* 226). What this "self-censorship" entailed for black women was not speaking out against members of their own race when they were sexually victimized by them. The fear of perpetuating or reinforcing racist stereotypes of black men as "sexual predators" or reviving the "myth of Black rapist" has led to explicit and implicit efforts to render silent or to remain silent in the face of intra-racial violence, especially in cases of sexual violence. Thus black women have been confined by communal ties that "urge them to protect African American men at all costs" (Collins *Black Sexual Politics* 226). The present study re-evaluates the role of black community by raising the question that if black women are to protect black men "at all costs" who would protect them against intra-group sexual violence?

Pierce-Baker, writing of her personal experience as a woman gang raped in her own home by black men, felt that the task of maintaining a positive image of black men had been an agonizing one. She writes of her personal struggles of projecting a positive black race image for

her white friends and for her son at a time when her own world view had been shattered by black men: "I was afraid of Black men I didn't know ... I felt responsible for upholding the image of the strong Black man for our young son, *and* for the white world ... I didn't want my son's view of sex to be warped by this crime perpetrated upon his mother by men the color of him, his father, and his grandfathers" (*Surviving* 64). Pierce-Baker had the additional responsibility of her son's healthy psychological and emotional growth as a black boy to consider. Thus, she chose to remain silent, chose to hide her fears, and to "uphold" positive images of black men so as not to distort or to "warp" her son's perceptions of black men in general. For Pierce-Baker the eventual breaking of the silence was "surviving" the self-imposed silence that the burden of race loyalty to her community had placed on her. This responsibility of black community in addressing intra-group sexual violence is a central concern in black contemporary theatre.

Davis in *Women, Race, and Class*, draws critical attention to the "anonymous rapists" who are protected by the unreported rapes which involve black women. Historically enslaved black women, whether working in the fields or in slave owners' mansions, were vulnerable to sexual violence. Black women's "historical experience proves that racist ideology implies an open invitation to rape" them (Davis 199). It is important to consider how much of the same mindset from days of slavery still prevails where black women can be raped almost with impunity. Davis links this "open invitation to rape" to the class structure of capitalist society where sexual coercion is reinforced by the working class women's economic vulnerability to exploitation (199). Consequently, in the present moment race, gender, and class have become the triple factors that help create a framework, whether it is patriarchal or capitalist, exploiting black women's vulnerability. Aishah Rahman examines this triple bind in her play *Only in America*, a play inspired from Anita Hill-Clarence Thomas Senate hearings. The public spectacle that

ensued revealed how Professor Hill, as in the history of black women, becomes a scapegoat to protect the Presidential Supreme Court nominee Justice Thomas. Acknowledging the rapist out loud, as Rahman's character Cassandra does in the play and as Professor Hill did during the Senate hearings, is essential in shifting the discussion from black women, who are perceived to be incapable of getting raped because they are "inherently", "essentially", and "racially" immoral to the "anonymous rapists" who escape scrutiny or accountability for their crime because the victim has been silenced, or has chosen to remain silent. The re-focusing of discussion to the perpetrators of violence is integral to address and redress understandings of the crime of rape, as it pertains to black victims and victimizers.

The impetus to end the silence surrounding black women as victims of rape, a silence that might be self-imposed or imposed by community, cannot end without fearlessly focusing on the perpetrators of sexual violence. Black women don't get raped, they *are* raped. Therefore to complete the equation black women cannot be recognized as victims of sexual violence unless their rapists are also acknowledged by breaking the silence around the racial and gender profile of rapists. So heavy has been the historical injustice of the "myth of the Black rapist" and the "spectre of lynching", that even decades later it is difficult to raise this issue, for the fear of repeating this historical injustice against black men is a real possibility. Yet the failure to speak out and address the sexual violence within black communities allows the crimes to recur. For historian Adele L. Alexander when "virtually any sexual encounter between a black man and a black woman -- no matter how questionable, distasteful, or even violent the circumstances -- [is] noncensurable, consensual, and frankly just "business as usual", then sexual violence becomes an impossibility (16). In these circumstances how can such an impossible act as the rape of a black woman by another black person, which can never be anything other than "noncensurable,

consensual, and frankly just 'business as usual'", be punishable? Does this lack of recognition of a crime between black people within black communities not repeat the historical injustice of the lack of recognition of black women as victims of rape? Such perceptions where rape as a crime cannot and does not exist because the black victim is presumed to be racially immoral and hypersexual need to be addressed. African American contemporary Theatre boldly confronts the fairytale of such "noncensurable, consensual" sexual encounters between black people which are in fact, rape. The plays examined in this research look at rape realities and rapists in the present context where the perpetrators of sexual violence (such as a black man, a black lesbian, a black adolescent youth, and even a black mother), need to be first acknowledged. To acknowledge their existence as rapists means to recognize a crime. More importantly, only when we acknowledge the perpetrators of sexual violence can we begin to understand the psychodynamics motivating them to commit the crime. This is not to create another myth, or to repeat historical myths, as the perpetrators of sexual violence are not cut and dried villainous figures. Rather, African American playwrights show us that these perpetrators are flawed human beings, who are themselves the victims of systemic and pervasive racism.

Contemporary representations of sexual violence in theatre and performance make us ask whether the narratives of sexual violence can be re-written only by ignoring or negating violence within communities of color, rather than by confronting the perpetrators of sexual violence? Why has the responsibility of managing positive race images been placed on black women's silence? Why is the onus not on addressing sexual violence against black women irrespective of the racial identity of the victimizer? Why is it easier for communities, who fear being regarded or branded as "pathologically violent", to target the victim of violence rather than redressing the victimizer? Are the patriarchal frameworks of communities to be held responsible for this suppression of and

re-traumatising of the black victims of rape? And in essence, by not holding the rapist to accountability, who is responsible for creating a rape conducive environment? This thesis grapples with these questions raised by African American playwrights' fearless representations of intra-racial and in-group sexual violence against black women.

Legal Implications

The destructive impact of socio-cultural dominant narratives, cultural stereotypes and myths, that define black womanhood (and manhood) in stereotypical ways has legal impact as well. A brief look at the historical development of rape laws, both in American slave states and the Anglo Saxon laws, makes it imperative to see how racist stereotyping and patriarchal mindset doubly victimizes black women. In the slave states the laws were designed to protect white women only, as it was their moral and sexual integrity that was of social value. In the eyes of the law no such crime existed where the rape, or even an attempted rape, of a black woman or a black child occurred. In 1859 Mississippi Supreme Court overturned the conviction of a black slave named George who had raped a nine-year-old black enslaved girl in *George (a Slave) v. State*. George's counsel successfully argued that "[t]he crime of rape does not exist in this State between African slaves ... The regulations of law, as to the white race, on the subject of sexual intercourse, do not and cannot, for obvious reasons, apply to slaves; their intercourse is promiscuous" (Morris 1249). The laws applicable for protection of white women were not designed for protection of black enslaved women "for obvious reasons" as the legal reasoning was based on racist framework. It is a world where any and every sexual violation or violence between black people is considered "promiscuous" in the eyes of the law, hence the rape of even a child who is nine-year-old "does not exist". The court, reflective of this prejudiced mindset, passed the judgement that "there is no act which embraces either the attempted or actual

commission of a rape by a slave on a female slave" (Morris 1252). The underlying rationale was a lack of recognition in the eyes of the law of the right of black women having any moral, bodily, or sexual autonomy because "[m]asters and slaves cannot be governed by the same common system of laws" (Morris 1252).

Although the slave laws are no longer in operation, the mindset underlying slave laws where black "intercourse is promiscuous" is still in operation. Scholar of criminology and criminal justice Gary LaFree, in *Rape and Criminal Justice*, examines the differential treatment of black men as opposed to white men when accused of rape, and looks for discriminatory patterns in the application of law in sexual assault cases. A direct result of his research into the differential treatment of black men is to unearth the deeply embedded devaluation of black womanhood in sexual assault cases in legal proceedings and judicial frameworks. LaFree traces the current pattern of devaluation and racist discrimination to pre-Civil War era when black and white offenders were treated differently. The Penal Code in Georgia gave capital punishment to slaves or free people of color who were convicted of rape or attempted rape of white women, in contrast to a white man who was fined, imprisoned, or both if convicted of raping a black slave or a free person of color (141). The "attempted" rape of a white woman deserving capital punishment to an "actual rape" incurring a mere fine shows the differential "value" of white versus black victim of rape. LaFree draws the conclusion that judicial system exists to maintain the dominant social fabric of white supremacy which entails granting access of white men to black women, while severely restricting black men's access to white women (141).

How far does this differential value placed on white and black women still exist in dispensing legal punishments for rape today? LaFree, based on the Indianapolis police, prosecution, and court records, concluded that black men who were accused of assaulting black

women accounted for 45% of all reported rapes, but only 17% received sentences of six or more years. By contrast, the ratio of reported cases of black men accused of raping white women was 23%, however 50 % of all accused black men received sentences of six or more years (133). LaFree traces how the law is applied "most harshly" when black men are accused of raping white women, and "least harshly" when the victim is a black woman: "blacks who were suspected of assaulting white women received more serious charges, were more likely to have their cases filed as felonies, were more likely to receive prison sentences if convicted, were more likely to be incarcerated in the state penitentiary ... and received longer sentences on average" (139-140). Lynching might be a historical phenomenon, yet the black rapist-white victim dyad still has a powerful legal and judicial impact. The "more likely" instances of rape being treated more vigorously or more seriously with the black rapist-white victim dyad as opposed to when the rapist-victim share the same race profile shows a legal and judicial system still held hostage to the legal mindset during slavery. Civil Rights advocate and scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw shows that from the days of slavery black women are "essentially prepackaged as bad women within cultural narratives about good women who can be raped and bad women who cannot" ("Mapping the Margins" 1271). When black women are defined by an "allegedly essential nature" in racist history, when this purported "essential nature" of women of an entire race condemns black victims to the realm of make-believe, when it "make[s] Black women's rape either less believable or less important", for the victims it creates a mistrust of the legal and judicial systems. The victims fear being further victimized again because their rape is "less believable", or even worse "less important" in the eyes of legal and judicial system.

If the rationale underwriting slave laws was a denial of black women's right to bodily integrity and autonomy, then the patriarchal basis of Anglo-Saxon rape laws that were based on

class value of victim of rape, equally deny black women justice because of their low hierarchal social status. Lorene M. G. Clark and Debra J. Lewis by analysing the historical origins of contemporary rape laws reveals that the Anglo-Saxon laws in *Rape: The Price of Coercive Sexuality*, rape was punished by offering compensation and reparation to either the husband or the father of the raped woman (115-116). Historian Dorothy Whitelock in *English Historical Documents* shows that during the reign of Æthelberht the fine was 50 shillings to the owner if the maiden was carried off by force, 20 shillings if the maiden was betrothed at a bride price in compensation (359). These compensation sums were paid to the women's "owner", because it was the husband or the father, who was regarded as the injured party. Thus, the woman's objectification as property under the law erased her as a victim in her own right, as "rape [was] an act of theft and trespass against the legal owner of the sexual property (that is, the woman) in question" (Clark & Lewis 116). The woman was "merely a third-party 'beneficiary' of the law", a law that was designed to protect men in their ownership of their property which included valuable women (Clark & Lewis 119). As with other property offences rape reparation had to coincide with the property value, that is the socio-economic standing of the woman raped. Whitelock shows that it was 50 shillings for a noble-born widow of the highest class, 20 shillings for one of second class, and 12 shillings for one of third class; the abduction of a nun was a particularly grave offence, carrying the compensation of 120 shillings (375). The rape of a ceorl's slave girl was fined 5 shillings to be paid to the ceorl, and if the slave was raped by another slave the punishment was castration (Whitelock 375-77). What remnants have survived of women as property perspective in the Anglo-Saxon law is the socio-economic status adding or discrediting the credibility of the victim of rape. Now it is the class of a victim of sexual violence which becomes a crucial factor in determining the credibility of the victim and the plausibility of the

crime. This leads to an obvious question, what about women who are not considered to be socially "valuable"? For black women their race and class play a definitive role in placing "value" on a victim of rape, then law as a reflection of its society withholds justice from women who are not white, middle or upper class. Parks' character Hester La Negrita as a poor unwed mother of five children on welfare who is a victim of rape, sexual coercion, and sexual exploitation makes us question the parameters of social "value" and its legal implications. Women such as Hester are "open territory victims" who have "diminished sexual or reproductive value" (Clark and Lewis 124). Since slavery black women have been seen as "open territory victims" who have struggled to be accorded a socially valuable status translating into their recognition as a legitimate victims in the eyes of the law.

Additionally, Clark and Lewis identify "open territory victims" as those women who "defy traditional expectations of respectable, acceptable, female behaviour" (124). Within heteronormative discourses the defiance of "traditional expectations" of femininity renders black sexual agency deviant and black lesbian victims of rape invisible to the legal eye. Thus, the legal framework becomes a means not to provide justice, but a surveillance system maintaining the dominant heteronormative social system. It is a way of policing "non-traditional" behaviors. The law punishes by denying justice to those black victims of rape when their behavior "def[ies] traditional expectations" (Clark and Lewis 124). Consequently, any behaviour that falls outside the narrow domains of respectable and acceptable female behaviour is punished by what Joyce E. Williams and Karen A. Holmes call the "second assault", a term coined by them to address the "assault of judgments and attitudes" facing victims of rape in legal and judicial proceedings (xi). Furthermore, Deborah Tolman and Tracy Higgins illustrate in their article "How Being a Good Girl can be Bad," that women's sexuality has always been "suspect", especially when "women

act as sexual agents, expressing their own sexual desire rather than serving as the object of men's desire"; when they do that they are "portrayed as threatening, deviant, and bad" (205). Thus black women when exercising sexual agency court the danger of resurrecting the debilitating myths of sexual promiscuity, and secondly, would be seen as defying traditionally approved heteronormative roles of submissive femininity. Within this socio-cultural milieu a black woman exercising sexual agency is found to be doubly "suspect" and doubly "threatening, deviant, and bad" (205).

The threat of the "second assault" has created a mistrust of the legal systems of protection. Plays like *Milkweed*, *In the Blood*, and *Only in America* examine this mistrust from the victim's perspective. With characters like Glow, Stain, Hester, and Cassandra, African American playwrights look at black women who are victims of sexual violence, and yet are reluctant to approach the police because they feel that their experiences of rape will be heard with incredulous disbelief. The historical, social, and legal devaluation of black women shows black women's struggle to survive in a sexually violent environment where recourse to the law or judicial system is not an option for black victims. *Milkweed* shows the characters of Glow and Stain who get raped while on a date, yet both choose silence rather than report the crime because they are aware of the credulous reactions and wall of disbelief they will face. What then are the repercussions of this form of "silence"? Invisibility! Cultural theorist, Mieke Bal says that "rape makes victim invisible" (142). For Bal, this invisibility is both physical and psychological as the rape destroys a victim's sense of self. How does a victim's race contribute to this trope of invisibility? Black women, as has been shown in historical, sociological, or legal discourses, despite being legitimate victims of rape have always been invisible beings. But now the black victims of rape are choosing to remain invisible as a form of protection against the "second

assault". It is easier to remain "unseen" so as not to repeat the assault of being "misseen".

Confronting labels and stereotypes remains an ongoing struggle for black people. Their persistence in the cultural imaginary requires a decolonizing of the cultural mindset. Spillers, in her article "Mama's baby, Papa's Maybe," shares her own experience as a black woman of the difficulty in moving past stereotypes as the labels "are markers so loaded with mythical prepossession that there is no easy way for agents buried beneath them to come clean" (65). Getting to the real people is no easy task. Franz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks*, says of his own experience, "I am overdetermined from outside ... Already the white looks, the only true looks, are dissecting me. I am *fixed*" (94; emphasis in original). Being liberated is not enough when the minds and the cultural imaginary are still held captive to the stereotypes about black people that prevailed during slavery: "[e]ven though the captive flesh/body has been 'liberated' ... dominant symbolic activity, the ruling episteme that releases the dynamic of naming and valuation, remains grounded in the originating metaphors of captivity and mutilation so that it is as if neither time nor history, nor historiography and its topic, shows movement" (Spillers, "Mama's Baby" 68). As resistance narratives, contemporary African American theatre challenges the continuing influence of "the only true looks" that persist in "fix[ing]" black women and black men in "originating metaphors of captivity". As counter narratives, they reveal the present struggles of black women experiencing sexual exploitation, coercion, and violence in a socio-cultural milieu wherein the "dynamic[s] of naming and valuation" remains unchanged. Thus African American playwrights and performers enter into this "politics of representation", that sociologist and cultural theorist Stuart Hall, defines as "the way meaning can be struggled over, and whether a particular regime of representation can be challenged, contested and transformed" (8). They seek to dethrone the "particular regime[s] of representation" that have reigned over

creating meanings that classify black women and men, black sexuality and black victims of rape. These artistic endeavors engage in de-colonizing the minds and cultural imaginary to continue efforts to liberate black women's representations still held captive to dominant discourses of twentieth century. As a researcher I seek to excavate, along with the African American artists, the "buried" truths and to "strip down through [the] layers of attenuated meanings, made an excess in time; over time" covering, masking, or erasing the overdetermined black bodies, especially when these black bodies have been further traumatised by rape (Spillers, "Mama's baby" 65). Moreover, I study how African American plays and performances question the cultural imaginary that presumes to allocate whose looks are the "the only true looks", and to help escape the entrapment of these presumed "true looks".

Literature Review

Black artists have struggled over theatrical art and space: from theatres, to production, and to roles wherein black reality can emerge to counteract white theatre's representations of black people. Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o shows how language as culture mediates through the "image-forming agent in the mind" (15). For Thiong'o this process of image-forming encapsulates "[o]ur whole conception of ourselves as a people, individually and collectively", irrespective of whether those pictures and images "correctly correspond to the actual reality" (Thiong'o 15). Black theatre from its earliest theatrical renditions has undertaken a revisionist task to re-present black reality. William Brown's African Theatre staged *The Drama of King Shotaway* in 1823 as the first black play that testifies to black theatre resisting the distorting "image-forming" power of white theatre. Brown's play revised Park Theatre's white version of the Black Carib revolt against the English in St. Vincent as represented in *The Carib Chief* in 1817. When Blackface minstrels emerged as a popular form it created a caricatured theatrical

reality and identity for black people that was more an "expression of white fantasies and fears" than it was reflective of black reality (Brundage 44). Based on a few stock characters of the coon, the dandy, and the trickster, Blackface minstrelsy was "a fundamentally racist undertaking, neutering a race's identity by limiting it to demeaning stereotypes" (Taylor and Austen 3). With Blackface minstrelsy once again the power of distorting pictures and images which did not "correctly correspond to actual reality" of black people was in effect. Black theatre, which flourished during the Harlem Renaissance, presented a black reality beyond the "racist undertakings" inherent in the "image-forming agent[s]" that Blackface minstrelsy imposed on the American cultural imagination. In black theatre the public saw black mothers as survivors of past rapes by the same white man, it saw how these rapes impact children's future (in *Blue Blood* [1927] by Georgia Douglas Johnson); it saw a young black woman, who despite her love for children, forgoes marriage and motherhood in face of the reality of lynching (in *Rachel* [1916] by Angelina Weld Grimké); and it saw how a mulatto son struggles for recognition by his white slave owner father (in *Mulatto* [1935] by Langston Hughes). It is these historical truths and these violent realities about black people that black dramatists wrote into existence from the beginning. The struggle, announces playwright Willis Richardson, has been not only for "plays with Negro characters ... [but] another kind of play -- the play that shows the soul of a people, and the soul of this people is truly worth showing" continues to present day (217). The type of play that Richardson identifies in his essay "The Hope of a Negro Drama" sought to convey the humanity of black people, to express their hopes and dreams, to illustrate their lived experiences and struggles in racist environment where emancipation from physical subjugation did not translate into emancipation of both the oppressors and the oppressed from annihilating images embedded in language. The struggle to present black reality in theatre continues: in particular now the

struggle is to dismantle the distorting "image-forming" stereotypes that are imposed on the reality of black women as victims and survivors of sexual violence.

Like drama, African American literature, especially novels, have been deeply engaged with black women's traumatic experiences of sexual violence. From slave narratives of Frederick Douglass and Harriet A. Jacobs, to novels like *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) by Zora Neale Hurston, *The Bluest Eye* (1970) and *Beloved* (1987) by Toni Morrison, *The Color Purple* (1982) by Alice Walker, and *Push* (1996) by Sapphire, to name a few, the African American women's reality, wherein sexual violence in its manifold manifestation occurs, is represented. Whether it is incest suffered by Pecola Breedlove, Celie or Clairese Precious Jones; or rape by slave masters, as in Sethe's case by the school teacher's nephews; or Nanny's daughter Leafy's rape by her school teacher, sexual violence has been a fundamental thematic concern. These novels are investigations into changing socio-cultural mores and perceptions of black women's sexuality and gender, into "*how American culture talks about sexual violence and, more important, how it has learnt how to do so*" (Sielke 7). The conversation about sexual violence that I am engaging with has deep resonances in African American literature; however, performance and theatre hold a unique and quintessential historical significance in African American culture. Therefore, my investigations into rape narratives and their representation in African American performative and dramatic art move beyond the question of "*how*" that underwrites Sielke's *Reading Rape*. My research investigates the *embodied* practises wherein black women take center stage to confront, challenge, subvert, and destabilize dominant narratives of sexual violence to ask: *who* is the black woman who is raped beyond the myth and stereotype; *who* rapes her; *what* does it mean to rape an invisible yet hypervisible black woman; *why* is this victim of sexual violence silent or silenced; *who* will speak up for the countless

silent victims of rape; and finally, *who* will fill in the representational blanks and gaps in the over-determined iterations of black women in rape narratives?

Scholarly attention to contemporary American drama offers few exclusive studies of African American women's theatre focusing on sexual violence. Davida Bloom in *Rape, Rage and Feminism in Contemporary American Drama* looks at how contemporary dramas support or contest cultural myths about rape, rapists, and raped women. However, her examinations of rape scripts and rape narratives focus on the victim-rapist dyad that is predominantly white. Additionally, her analysis of gendered sexual behaviors underwriting rape scenes details rape in conjunction with feminist movements in the twentieth century. She co-relates the negligence of attention to the rape of black women by white men through discussion of *Sally's Rape* in light of feminist movements. However, African American women's Theatre is doing crucial work to widen the profile of the perpetrators of violence such as a black lesbian, an adolescent youth, and even on rare occasion a black mother. This lack of attention to black perpetrators and victims is a gap that the present research seeks to fill. Barbara Ozieblo and N. Hernando-Real, in *Performing Gender Violence: Plays by Contemporary American Women Dramatists*, examine the social conditions underlying violence, with one chapter dedicated to African American playwrights. In a chapter titled "Survival Strategies in Recent Plays by African American Women Playwrights" Peninda-Hernández traces the shift from victim to agency in African American plays. She locates survival in face of violence through further acts of violence: these acts range from tolerating violence to hurting oneself, to killing one's child or the perpetrator. By looking at inflicting violence as a strategy of survival what Peninda-Hernández overlooks are the strategies for healing in her analysis. I, too examine violence as a coping mechanism that is a result of sexual violence, but my research looks at how sexual violence begets violence as an initial strategy of

survival, healing from the trauma of rape requires confrontation and forgiveness. I examine a crucial aspect of healing by identifying the African American contemporary performances as therapeutic sites that heal through naming the rapist, through confronting the perpetrators of sexual violence, and through opening up the dramatic space for dialogue with audience. Lisa M. Anderson in *Black Feminism in Contemporary Drama* (2008) examines how black theatre incorporates the values of black feminism. She develops a black feminist aesthetic from her reading of contemporary plays by black women artists, identifying "a *core*, a commonality among these very different women" as they "construct and reconstruct history and identity" (115). In her ten-point black feminist aesthetic she identifies one aspect as "the abuse that black women suffer at the hands of men of all races" (116). However, Anderson's broad inclusivity of the nature of "abuse" is gendered and therefore limiting. She does not take into account the abuse that black women suffer at the hands of other black women, or that black children and adolescents suffer in their homes. These are some research gaps in the critical and scholarly engagement with African American plays that I address through my readings of rape in contemporary African American women's performances.

There is a dearth of full book-length critical material on contemporary African American performances focusing on sexual violence. However, critical focus on these plays does include scholarly articles. In Chapter 1, "Unlocking the Crypt and Breaking the Silence: Silent and Silenced Histories of Rape", I look at Robbie McCauley's social experiment and performance play, *Sally's Rape* (1989), Misty DeBerry's *Milkweed* (2009) and Aishah Rahman's *Only in America* (1993). Jennifer L. Griffiths, in her article "Between Women: Trauma, Witnessing and the Legacy of Interracial Rape in Robbie McCauley's *Sally's Rape*", uses the "contestive relation" between black and white people to focus on how trauma cannot be healed if witnessing is denied,

thereby resulting in socially produced trauma. In addition, she examines the working of traumatic memory and cultural memory, as both conceal traumatising events which resurface later to destabilize the subject. I expand this examination of the burial of memories by looking at Marianne Hirsch's concept of "retrospective witnessing by adoption" where McCauley, as a descendent of her enslaved great-great-grandmother Sally, physically and psychologically embodies Sally's rape in performance. This embodied experience of rape is not narrated or acted, but the act of violation is re-lived by McCauley. Additionally, McCauley's performative act of standing naked on the auction block is a critical moment of witnessing, testifying, and healing, where she not only invokes the past site of black people's dehumanization, but invokes it to invest it with agency that was denied to her ancestors. My reading of the play utilises the theory of cryptonymy introduced by psychoanalysts Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok in *The Shell and the Kernel* to relate how failed mourning leads to the creation of psychic crypts where patients bury their traumatic memories; this concept was extended by Holocaust scholar Gabriele Schwab in *Haunting Legacies* to look at post-war Germany's Denazification state policy as creating national crypts where an entire postwar generation buries its history of being perpetrators of violence. I apply the concept of national crypts to critically look at how McCauley's play hints at national crypts in American cultural memory wherein white people have buried their painful legacy of being children of perpetrators, and being the children of sexual violence under white indentured servitude. Thus my research draws attention to not only how generations later the trauma of sexual violence impacts children of victims but the children of victimisers as well.

DeBerry's *Milkweed* moves the conversation from interracial rape in *Sally's Rape* to more contemporary intra-racial and same sex rapes. Francesca Royster in her article, "Witness and the

Politics of Readdressing Black Pain and Pleasure: Misty DeBerry's *Milkweed* ", focuses on the black body as a site of both pain and pleasure, locating her discussion in the historical denial of black women as valuable humans. However, I contend that DeBerry's play looks at the silences maintained around contemporary black-on-black and woman-on-woman rapes. I examine how both these categories of sexual violence are deeply hidden under communal and social heteronormative structures. DeBerry's engagement with black-on-black rape raises key concerns of what black masculinity can mean, how sexual violence can establish it, and how erroneous such conceptions of masculinity that are rooted in dominance can be. By looking at feminist advocate Susan Estrich's definitions of rape in *Real Rape: How the Legal System Victimizes Women Who Say No*, I examine DeBerry's efforts of widening the "typical" and "standard" rape situations where "real" rapes are defined and perceived as "prosecutable" rapes in legal frameworks. These "prosecutable" rapes sideline other rapes, such as "simple" or "technical" rapes which are far more common (Estrich 10). In addition, I examine how DeBerry demystifies lesbian rape to highlight another community shrouding the violence within its compact of silence. I argue that she expands the narratives of sexual violence by introducing the image of the female sexual perpetrator as well as the lesbian victim of rape, both missing from debates and discourses of sexual violence. Thus, DeBerry's play demythologizes the idea that women don't batter and don't rape. When the law and society punishes the victim whose sexual choices defy traditional heteronormative patterns, such dramatic engagement with lesbian sexual violence disallow rape in marginalised communities to slip through the discussions.

In Chapter 2 titled "Process of Ghosting as Manifestation of the Rape Act", I look at Suzan-Lori Parks' plays *Venus* (1996), *In the Blood* (1999) and Aishah Rahman's *Only in America* through the politics of visibility and the gaze as lenses which create ghostly presences

of victims of rape. Saartjie Baartman's spectre has remained in history as the iconic Venus Hottentot. Parks' play *Venus* re-possesses the spectre of Saartjie Baartman to re-create a flesh and blood woman who has been overdetermined; she has been misread and misrepresented historically, culturally, biologically, and scientifically for centuries. Stacie McCormick, analyzing Parks' techniques in "Witnessing and Wounding in Suzan-Lori Parks' *Venus*," looks at how the colonial gaze that marked Venus is turned in the play on the gazer rather than at the object of the gaze. Harvey Young looks at the gestural and aural physicality of language in *Venus*, at the "stopgaps" of textuality, in his article "Touching History: Suzan-Lori Parks, Robbie McCauley and the Black Body" (6). Perhaps the most controversial and critical reception of *Venus* has been by Jean Young in her article "The Re-Commodification and Re-Objectification of Saartjie Baartman in Suzan-Lori Parks' *Venus*". J. Young argues that Parks employs the logic of the oppressor in her portrayal of Venus as "complicit" in her own downfall and therefore Parks "reifies the perverse imperialist mindset", so that Baartman is "twice victimized: first, by the nineteenth century Victorian society, and again by the play, *Venus*" (700-701). I use French sociologist and cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulacrum to examine Venus Hottentot as a simulated image that for centuries has been grafted onto Saartjie Baartman. My analysis of *Venus* will stem from the examination of the annihilating gaze of the three choruses and Venus' owners in the play who "watch" Venus, exemplifying the "murderous power of images" (Baudrillard 6). In addition, I emphasize how reduction to scientific curiosity, is a manifestation of the rape act, as inherent in this process is a lack of agency, bodily violation, and trauma. Lastly, I re-examine Parks' characterization of Venus as "complicit". I contend, that unlike J. Young's reading of the play as "reifi[cation]" of the imperial mindset, Parks uses it as a strategy to disengage the images that have been grafted onto Venus for centuries, and to assert

that despite centuries of hypervisibility, Baartman's reality is incomprehensible and elusive.

In the Blood is a play where Parks writes in a resistance narrative to the stereotypes imposed on black women through the character of Hester La Negrita, who ostensibly seems to reinforce these stereotypes as an unwed mother of five children on welfare. Carol Schafer's "Staging a New Literary History: Suzan-Lori Parks' *Venus*, *In the Blood* and *Fuckin A*" looks at the plays as reconstructions of literary genres to situate women in literary tradition created by Western European men that had omitted women. In "Suzan-Lori Parks: Rearticulating the Laws of Race and Gender in African American History", Letitia Guran analyses *In the Blood* as depicting black motherhood and womanhood in the context of matrimony, sexuality, child bearing, and child rearing. The focus on motherhood is a popular area of analysis that Verna A. Foster also contributes to in her article, "Nurturing and Murderous mothers in Suzan-Lori Parks *In the Blood* and *Fucking A*". While the overwhelming focus has been to analyse the depiction of motherhood and its devaluation as linked to the devaluation of black women, I look at Hester La Negrita as a sexually exploited and medically violated figure, whose rape occurs not just sexually, but in the robbing of her body's reproductive organs, thus stealing her will and autonomy, and her ability to be a mother. I locate Hester in two African American histories of oppression: one is her institutional sexual exploitation by Welfare, and the second is her "spaying" by the doctor as representing the forcible governmental policy of Eugenics perpetrated against African American women. Underwriting both histories of oppression is the devaluation of black women that plays out in the stereotypes of Jezebel and Welfare Queen, which Parks reworks and re-frames. Both histories of oppression function in the play to cleanse the social fabric by making Hester disappear, rendering her a ghostly presence. Thus, I explore black women, as exemplified by Saartjie Baartman and Hester La Negrita, as caught and lost between

the spectrum of hypervisibility and invisibility of vision.

Within the parameters of sexual violence an important materialization of sexual violence is sexual harassment. When sexual harassment is verbal in nature both the sexual violence and the victim are rendered suspect and problematic as there is no evidence of physical violence. Sexual harassment is recognised today as a form of violence, as the #metoo movement indicates, with victims coming forward and being believed rather than being vilified. From Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein being accused of rape and sexual harassment by actors such as Gwyneth Paltrow and Ashley Judd, to director Roman Polanski, to *House of Cards* lead actor Kevin Spacey, or Ben Affleck, the list of men accused of sexual misconduct seems endless. However, the response to complaints of sexual harassment have now changed, with the people accused often being fired or choosing to resign. The credit for this changed perception and reaction to sexual harassment goes to law Professor Anita Hill, whose testimony against Presidential Supreme Court Justice nominee Clarence Thomas in the Senate Judicial Committee in 1991 created a national awareness about the workplace crime of sexual harassment. However, at the time of the hearings themselves, Professor Hill as a victim disappeared and what remained was a problematic black woman whose testimony raised more concerns about her in the Senate hearings than the person she accused. The evidence of this disbelief is that the accused Justice Thomas was sworn in as Supreme Court Justice, even amidst this cloud of uncertainty about his merit and his credibility. Aishah Rahman's play *Only in America*, written in response to Anita Hill's character bashing by Republican Senators, confronts the reality of verbal sexual violence as a type of sexual violence that is experienced by her protagonist Cassandra as a form of psychological rape. I employ *Only in America* as an anchor play, wherein my analysis of Rahman's treatment of sexual harassment against the Hill-Thomas Senate hearing backdrop

enriches the discussion and understanding of sexual violence as discussed in Chapter 1 and 2. My examination of this play looks at how sexual violence is enacted in and through language, who has access to language, and how it is language itself wherein the perpetrators of violence can be identified, confronted, and defeated.

In my last chapter, titled "Child and Adolescent Sexual Violence Begets Violence: Recurring Cycles of Intergenerational Violence and Manifestation of Internalised Racism", I look at three plays *Beauty's Daughter* (1995) and *Monster* (1996) by Dael Orlandersmith, and *Breath, Boom* (2000) by Kia Corthron. An equally important area that my research into sexual violence examines is the delineations of perpetrators of sexual violence. Like the silenced victim who is rendered invisible in rape narratives, the victimizer by default also escapes critical attention. I examine the mother as a potential victimizer in *Beauty's Daughter*. Just as black womanhood and sexuality were debased and attacked in dominant discourses, black women have been negotiating with stereotypes surrounding motherhood as well: from asexual Mammy, to emasculating Matriarch, to the Welfare Queen. These stereotypes have been holding black motherhood in their debilitating grip for centuries. Emerging from these stereotypes is the reality of black women who struggle with personal aspirations and family roles, who are victims of systematic racism, or who become addicts abusing alcohol or substances. The struggle of black mothers to balance personal aspirations and responsibilities can sometimes result in child abuse. All three plays show family units with absent father figures and a struggling mother figure. *Beauty's Daughter* draws the focus to Beauty the mother figure who inadvertently sexually abuses her daughter Diane, and impairs Diane's healthy sexual growth. With Beauty, Orlandersmith deliberately takes the audience into dangerous waters. Her aim is not to castigate the mother figure, thereby repeating the historical injustice done to black mothers, but to show,

however rare the event, that a mother, too, can involuntarily sexually harm her child. These rare instances also need to be discussed. Additionally, an important area of examination is the form of the play, wherein Orlandersmith's employment of violence in language through the use of poetry helps to create a crescendo of violent images culminating in images of sexual violence. Hence the language of violence manifests as the violence in language through the medium of poetry.

In *Monster*, Orlandersmith looks at how black teenage boys and girls are negotiating their black identities against environments of racism and internalised racism resulting in cycles of abuse and violence. In the play, the protagonist, Teresa's rapist Winfred, establishes his black masculine identity through sexual violence, and uses black music as a catalyst to perform rape. Through the rape scene Orlandersmith, I argue, asks difficult questions regarding black masculinity, especially as the black youth Winfred negotiates his black masculinity in ways that implicates black men by extension in the historical racist narratives of the "myth of black rapist". Winfred's performance of black hyper-masculinity through sexual violence raises important consideration regarding how black youth negotiate their black identities. However, Orlandersmith wants us to ask who is the real "monster" in the play: is it the easily identifiable rapist, or the racist environment that inflicts racial wounds and initiates cycles of violence? Tommy J. Curry, in his book *The Man-Not: Race, Class, Genre, and the Dilemmas of Black Manhood*, examines how young black boys achieving the status of manhood in a white supremacist society is a form of "a racialised masculinity" (130-131). For black men, this racist form of masculinity is not perceived to possess the "recognizable intellectual maturity and social standing of a citizen", but is based on "deadly masculine caricature" of barbarism and savagery that the dominant fabric of society imposes on them (130-131). In line with Curry's argument, I examine how Winfred's tragedy lies in his buying into and consuming this caricaturised

"racialised masculinity" where his manhood is achieved not through "intellectual maturity" or any other definition, but through sexual domination.

Kia Corthron's play, *Breath, Boom* looks at the character of Prix, a young sixteen-year-old girl as the leader of street gang violence. Lisa M. Anderson, in her book *Black Feminism in Contemporary Drama*, in a chapter titled "Kia Corthron's Everyday Black Women", looks at Corthron's play in terms of social justice issues affecting black people in contemporary America. Her analysis of *Breath, Boom* focuses on female gang violence where she examines the nature of violence to "both transform and contaminate the violent", and implications of staged violence on the audience (92). My analysis of the play is rooted in the examination of the psychological haunting of the victim, Prix, by her rapist Jerome, who is her mother's long term boyfriend. I postulate that the psychological haunting of Prix by the ghost of her rapist is a form of sexual trauma, and it is by exorcising this ghost that Prix's healing from childhood sexual trauma begins. Additionally, I also examine how Corthron manages to use the performing body to indicate the process of working through trauma and working towards forgiveness.

For historian Nell Irvin Painter, the perception of black men from threats to white womanhood, as encapsulated in the Scottsboro boys and Emmet Till tragedies in the American imaginary, have been reappraised from their original casting as rapists to victims of white supremacy. However, there has been no such historical equivalence where black women typecast as immoral, hypersexual, and lascivious have been reappraised as credible victims of rape. For Painter, black women have not been able to "use our history of abuse as a corrective to stereotypes of rampant sexuality" (212). I contend that African American theatre is undertaking this reappraisal and each play contributes to "corrective" efforts of changing the stereotyping of black women in the American imaginary. In *Knowing What We Know: African American*

Women's Experience, advocate and sociologist Gail Garfield details that black women's experiences of violence based on their history that is shaping the social and cultural context "destabilize[s] the 'conceptual boxes'" to show "the tensions, contradictions, and dilemmas that lie beneath the dominant norms, explicit assumptions, and structural arrangements" (9). My research is rooted in how the African American theatrical performances are mirroring, reflecting, and refracting these processes of "destabiliz[ing] the 'conceptual boxes'" that have constrained and caged black women as women, as mothers, and as victims of sexual violence. Garfield argues the need for a "willingness to look at the fullness of African American women's experiences" (19). African American artists demand of their audiences this "willingness" to see the "fullness" of black lived experiences in all its beautiful and ugly, humble and vicious, terrible and terrifying aspects, encapsulated not only as victims and survivors of rape, but as victimizers and perpetrators of sexual violence as well: all who are finally victims of racism.

Chapter Two: Unlocking the Crypt and Breaking the Silence: Silent and Silenced Histories of Rape

History of the past is simply folklore. History has to be connected to the realities of the present.

Robbie McCauley, "Robbie McCauley: Obsessing in Public, An Interview"⁴

Within the Negro community, you really have to redefine rape. You never know about them.

A judge qtd in Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Whose Story is it, Anyway?"⁵

History, as a collection of master-narratives and as an authoritative repertoire of past events, is now questioned by the consideration of local narratives (Lyotard xxiv). This consideration leads to an obvious question when we engage with the master-narratives of history: whose history is it anyway, yours, mine, or ours? In an interview with Vicki Patraha, playwright and performer Robbie McCauley talks of her play *Sally's Rape* (1989), and posits that when history is considered only in terms of the past events, if it is unconnected to the realities of the present then it becomes merely "folklore". Robbie McCauley, with her focus on the rapes during slavery in *Sally's Rape*, Misty DeBerry, with her treatment of sexual violence in the present in *Milkweed* (2009), and Aishah Rahman, with her engagement with Anita Hill-Clarence Thomas Senate hearings in *Only in America* (1993), allow us to see how certain realities and truths can cease to exist in the master-narratives of history. The realities of rape, when they are either glossed over, forgotten, or erased, are relegated to the realm of myth and storytelling. Bringing the realities of rape out of the realm of storytelling requires a confrontation with the grand narratives of history. It also requires a confrontation with how much the grand narratives are still dictating the perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors in the present. Literary theorist Linda Hutcheon in *The*

⁴ McCauley, Robbie. "Robbie McCauley: Obsessing in Public. An Interview". Patraha, Vicki. *A Sourcebook of Feminist Theatre and Performance: On and Beyond the Stage*. edited by Carol Martin. p. 28.

⁵ Crenshaw, Kimberlé. "Whose Story is it, Anyway? Feminist and Antiracist Appropriations of Anita Hill." *Race-ing Justice, En-Gendering Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas, and the Construction of Social Reality*, edited by Toni Morrison. p. 413.

Politics of Postmodernism, makes a valuable distinction between the actual events of history and the narratives that are created out of history, as "the brute *events* of the past and the historical *facts* we construct out of them" (54). Thus engagement with history, especially with the history of sexual violence experienced by black women, requires challenging the makers and the disseminators of grand narratives of history. This challenge entails a deconstruction of the constructed "historical *facts*" in order to deal with the "brute *events*" of sexual violence, especially when racist judicial mindset requires such "brute *events*" to be re-defined for black people as "[y]ou never know about them" (Crenshaw, "Whose Story is it" 413). And finally, the deconstruction of "historical *facts*" necessitates that black women take control of the discourse, of the master-narrative by writing into existence black women's historical and current experiential reality of sexual violence. This is a task that McCauley, DeBerry, and Rahman take up with their dramatic rendition of the "brute *events*" of sexual violence.

McCauley's play *Sally's Rape* was first performed in Performance Space New York (or as it is popularly known, PS 122) in 1989 before it was performed at the Studio Museum of Harlem in The Decade Show Performance Series in 1990. The play is a nonlinear and interactive performance text where McCauley moves between the present and the past, between acting and performance, between scripted and unscripted moments (the latter with the audience), to showcase black women's historical experiences of sexual violence and what these historical experiences mean for the present generation. McCauley's ancestral history of rape is central to the play. In *Sally's Rape*, McCauley is both the actual relative (she is the great-great-granddaughter of the play's titular Sally who was repeatedly raped during slavery), and the performance artist/character in the play. McCauley's ancestral history is revived in the play through an inter-racial exchange, both on stage between herself and her co-performer Jeanne

Hutchins, and off stage when the audience is invited to become part of the performance. By repeatedly collapsing the fourth wall during the play, McCauley's interactive play transforms into a hybrid form where it is neither pure theatre nor pure performance. The hybrid form thus complements the content of the play that seeks to disrupt the totalizing nature of history. *Sally's Rape*, therefore deconstructs the "constructed" nature of the history by dismantling the content of historical "facts" wherein black victims of rape did not exist. The play grapples with the dilemma of growing up with a legacy of past sexual violence, where the silencing or the repression of the horrific history of sexual violation, traumatises the current generation. By reviving the violent legacy of the rape of black enslaved women through her own ancestor Sally's rapes, McCauley picks up various historical moments wherein the rape of black enslaved women and white women in indentured servitude have disappeared from the grand-narrative of history. McCauley's play and performance validates how the violent past continues to imprint the present through its very absence or its negation.

Unlike traditional dramatic enactments, in *Sally's Rape* the historical rape of enslaved black women is revived by McCauley by re-living the sexual violence. McCauley does not simply act, but performatively shows the impact of past sexual violence by embodying the traumatic experience of Sally's rape. McCauley's performative re-visiting, through a psychological and physical embodiment of her great-great-grandmother Sally's repeated rapes on her own body, re-writes the folklore of rape that did not officially happen, "no matter how many times they [the plantation owners] come down there [slave quarters]" (*Sally's Rape* 232). Sexual violence against enslaved black people was not considered a crime. Rather, this violence was a white man's privilege because the victim of rape was deemed subhuman to accommodate white sexual appetite. Moreover, sexual victimization was necessary to increase the labor force in the

South. By re-visiting her ancestral history of sexual violence McCauley also rescues other histories of rape from disappearing permanently by remembering that certain classes of white women were also victims of rape during slavery. These rescues, then, dovetail with my argument that African American theatre forms a counter narrative wherein the silences around sexual violence, both in the past and the present, are being acknowledged, heard, and broken.

I argue that *Sally's Rape* rewrites the dynamics of secondary witnessing by changing and challenging the conventional writer-actor-audience dialectic associated with traditional theatre. *Sally's Rape* is a social experiment where the play's script has openings for interaction with the audience. As a dynamic performative art piece *Sally's Rape* allows for a deeper level of audience engagement, where McCauley "invite[s] them [the audience] to participate and the ritual happens differently each time" (Patraka, "Robbie McCauley: An Interview" 36). This fluidity of the script allows contemporary audiences to contribute to the deconstruction of official narratives of history of sexual violence during slavery. Consequently, content is balanced by the form of the play as the audience interaction allows McCauley to present new meanings and new narrations with every performance. Herein, McCauley's performance, the physical and psychological embodiment of Sally's sexual exploitation, challenges traditional audience responses to a woman's body in the grip of experiencing sexual violence. Thus, it is no longer enough to allow the audience just to watch. The audience as witnesses are grappling with the trauma of a silent and silenced history of racial sexual violence with McCauley. Crucial to this line of examination into the dynamics and theoretical understanding of secondary witnessing is Marianne Hirsch's concept of "retrospective witnessing by adoption" ("Marked by Memory" 76). Of particular relevance is Hirsch's extension of the spatial and temporal lines for participation while witnessing, which accommodates later generations' experience of, and association with, past

trauma.

Like witnessing, equally relevant to the processing of trauma is excavating repressed objects causing trauma. Psychoanalysts Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok's theory of cryptonymy, in their influential study *The Shell and the Kernel*, is an apt framework to understand how subsequent generations of both perpetrators and victims of sexual violence deal with their violent legacies. Abraham and Torok contend that unprocessed trauma is a result of failed mourning for the "lost object", which is then locked away in the psyche as crypts and buried secrets. These buried objects of pain are passed onto subsequent generations as transgenerational haunting. Holocaust scholar Gabriele Schwab extends Abraham and Torok's concept of personal crypts to national crypts in her study of the impact of the Holocaust on later generations in Germany in *Haunting Legacies*. I employ the framework of cryptonymy as expostulated by Abraham and Torok, and Schwab to show that McCauley's performative endeavor aims at locating and then unlocking the crypts, by breaking the public and national silences around the history of sexual violence during slavery. Consequently, I explicate how McCauley's play engages with children whose ancestors might have been perpetrators as well as children whose ancestors were rape survivors who have either forgotten or repressed their ancestral links to history of sexual violence. Where for the former dealing with their legacy of ancestral violence, and surviving that legacy, requires a denial of history of rape during slavery by keeping the crypt locked away, for the latter an active engagement with this legacy allows the silences to be broken. The persistence of such cryptic silences over past sexual violence show how the maintenance of silence binds the future generations in a continuous pattern of disavowal and disengagement. For McCauley the histories that she seeks to decrypt are shared histories and should not be considered as "folklores" because the audience are a part of this history, "it's not

folklore, it's not something they're outside of" (Patraka, "Robbie McCauley: An Interview" 35). McCauley's play helps the audience to locate and disturb these national crypts, and to open up the theatrical space for conversations, discussion, and debates.

While McCauley looks at black women's racial experience of rape in the context of the past's present-ness, that is, the past's relevance in the present moment, Misty DeBerry in *Milkweed* looks at rape, not in the inter-racial context like in *Sally's Rape*, but at the occurrences of rape within the same race and the same gender context. Even though a critical perceptual shift of the historical rape of black women during slavery has occurred, an equally important critical perceptual re-shifting is required regarding the present rapes of black women. A solo performance play, *Milkweed* was performed by the playwright herself in 2009 in Annie May Swift Hall Studio. This play was part of the Department of Performance Studies "solo/black/woman" Performance Series at Northwestern University. *Milkweed*, through the rape of two of its three characters Stain and Glow, undertakes a perceptual re-evaluation of black women as victims in same race and same gender rapes. *Milkweed* has three monologues that are centered on the three characters Stain, Bernadette, and Glow. On a symbolic level these three women represent the three stages in the growth of the Monarch butterfly, that is the central symbol in the play. The butterfly feeds on the milkweed poison to survive. This poison becomes synonymous with violence and rape as depicted in the play. Milkweed poison then is an apt metaphor for the black women in the play who have had to survive the forced consumption of the poison of sexual violence. Francesca T. Royster extends this metaphor further and equates milkweed with the rape culture in America. Royster says that the "rape culture that we're forced to live within the reality of violence, [and the] continued violence against us" means "making our home within poison" (352). This equation of milkweed not only with sexual violence itself, but

with the rape culture means that Glow and Stain will survive by understanding the destructive potency of the rape culture wherein both victims are silenced.

Milkweed dislocates the conventional twentieth century rape scripts based on inter-racial and heterosexual violence by presenting rape reality within one race and gender group, that is, black-on-black and woman-on-woman sexual violence. DeBerry negotiates the minefields of race and sexuality as they have defined and continue to define black women and black men within the discourse of sexual politics and sexual violence. The scripts of hypersexual masculinity attributed to black men in the mythology of rape-lynch discourse address sexual violence in outmoded terms. In the interests of projecting positive race images to counteract such stereotypes, the violence against black women has been silenced by the communal code that discourages "airing dirty laundry" in a racist society. I consider how contemporary black plays, such as *Milkweed*, are dislocating stereotypical scripts of racist sexual violence and of heteronormative sexual violence. I argue that as the crime of rape has evolved, the unaccounted silences surrounding rape require re-reading of the normative narrations of sexual violence. A case in point that I examine is how the concept of "date rape", raised by Ntozake Shange in her choreopoem *for colored girls who thought the rainbow was enuf*, has evolved into a "rape dressed as a date" to convert the dating scene into rape settings in *Milkweed* (321). Additionally, DeBerry highlights the ambivalences surrounding the politics of rape by introducing how sexual arousal or climax during the rape act problematizes the nature of sexual violence. Thus when the lack of agency associated with rape is compounded by the experience of sexual arousal during rape, the clear cut understandings of rape as sexual crime are undermined, further silencing the victim. I argue that DeBerry's play emphasizes the imperative need to check the spread of the poison of sexual violence by drawing attention to such "gagging" mechanisms: in a cultural

milieu where an aura of disbelief exists undermining the legitimacy of a black victim of rape, then the attitude of family, intra-group communal politics, law enforcement, and judicial mechanisms effectively silence the victims of rape like Glow and Stain. Furthermore, Glow and Stain's experiences of rape highlight how rape narratives and the attendant legal discourses need to be expanded and aligned with the practical realities of sexual violence. DeBerry's play therefore engages with stereotypical and limiting definitions of sexual violence to acknowledge rape as a more complex phenomenon than the legal and judicial frameworks recognize.

In their Feminist Theatre criticism, *Performing Gender Violence*, editors Barbara Ozieblo and Noelia Hernando-Real acknowledge how "theatre, particularly women's theatre, has been a useful tool in awakening awareness of violence" (2). For Ozieblo and Hernando-Real, women's theatre has been pivotal in portraying the "suffering" that is caused by domestic and social violence. Such representations of suffering, they contend, make the violence real because women playwrights bring an empathetic perspective to the plight of victims of violence. However, I build an argument that black women's performative art and theatre is a "useful tool" not just in "awakening awareness", but in undertaking an ongoing engagement that challenges, re-defines, and re-writes past and current understandings and definitions of sexual violence against black women. While Glow and Stain choose to be silent, what does it mean for a black woman to break her silence on sexual violence? Aishah Rahman's play *Only in America* produced in 1993 engages with the reality of what happens when a black woman finally breaks her silence about workplace sexual harassment. *Only in America* was written in response to Anita Hill-Clarence Thomas Senate hearings in 1991 that investigated Professor Hill's allegations of sexual harassment against Presidential nominee for Supreme Court, Justice Thomas. As a victim of sexual harassment, Professor Hill's treatment by Republican Senators during the Senate Hearings

was the inspiration for Rahman, which she dramatically explicates through her protagonist Cassandra's workplace sexual harassment by her boss Oral. Rahman's protagonist, like her namesake in Greek mythology, the Greek prophetess Cassandra, also utters the truth but no one believes her. The burden of history, where black women were denied recognition as victims despite sexual violations, was re-lived by Professor Hill during the Senate hearings. What Professor Hill poses is a challenge to such discourses and narratives in history wherein black women as victims of sexual violations do not exist. Unfortunately, at the time of the Senate hearings alternative narratives were not widely accepted to accommodate this challenge. These narratives were in the making, and Rahman's play is one such narrative. Additionally, I examine who has access to language, who controls the medium to effectively enact violence through language, and how the victim of rape and sexual harassment's lack of access to language further entraps them. Thus, collectively, the plays *Sally's Rape*, *Milkweed*, and *Only in America*, are counter narratives that break the silence around sexual violence through performance and theatre.

Sally's Rape

Rape has always been an "unspeakable" crime because it silences the victims. It is a crime which induces shame and guilt within the victim. Rather than blaming the rapists, the victims blame themselves. At times, the first instinct of the victim after rape is to cover up, rather than uncover or report the crime. This instinctual need for silence in the victim is reinforced by the silences imposed by families and communities, as well as silences that have been maintained in national and historical discourses around rape. In her interview with Patraha, McCauley reveals how her performative endeavor in *Sally's Rape* is motivated by the "concept of speaking the unspeakable", in particular speaking about her ancestral legacy of sexual violations (26). Yet, McCauley's aim is to move the audience beyond mere catharsis experienced in traditional

Theatre. For her the play provides its audience with "an opening for movement, as creating a ground work for dialog" (Patraka, "Robbie McCauley: An Interview" 26). A play with a central focus on sexual violence, as indicated by the play's title *Sally's Rape*, McCauley provides the audience with this "opening" and "groundwork" for dialogue about the "unspeakable" crime which renders its victims silent. As the direct descendent of her great-great-grandmother Sally who had been repeatedly raped by her white slave owner, McCauley initiates dialogue through her play by showing how the past sexual violence is not disconnected from the present. For McCauley sexual crimes of the past continue to inform, impel, and influence the present moment and contemporary black lives. As theatre evolves into performative art in *Sally's Rape*, McCauley undertakes a performative embodiment of the actual rape of her great-great-grandmother on her own body while she stands on the auction block. Sally's rapes are crimes that happened in the past which McCauley, in a pertinent dream/nightmare scene in the play, re-lives and experiences as violence being committed on her body. McCauley intends to "help think and speak about those things that are blocked" (Patraka, "Robbie McCauley: An Interview" 26). This endeavor to confront what is "blocked" needs more than just the act of speaking out during play. The play seeks to unblock national crypts through evoking the past sites of bodily sexual trauma: enslaved black women's bodies on which sexual violence was perpetrated, and the auction block where enslaved black people were disempowered and dehumanized. Thus, *Sally's Rape* will unblock cryptic silences and allow the audience access to forgotten, silenced, or repressed histories of sexual violence.

For McCauley, her great-great-grandmother Sally's rape is not just history, something that happened in the past, that can be glossed over or can be easily dismissed: "[a]most everyone in my mother's family was half white. But that wasn't nothing but some rape" (*Sally's Rape* 220).

The reality of "[a]lmost everyone" in McCauley's family being half white is a part of black history of sexual violence that McCauley carries with her like a living fact. During the performance in one dream/nightmare scene McCauley's experiential reality merges with Sally's when McCauley experiences in her own body Sally's horrific reality of a body under sexual attack. What McCauley re-lives as a dream/nightmare I contend, is a psychical embodiment of the violence that had been experienced by her ancestor. In short, this is the legacy of sexual violence that McCauley as a child is born into, that she has been raised with, and that she has to live with every day. Marianne Hirsch developed the idea of "postmemory" experienced by the second generation children of Holocaust survivors as striving to "*re-activate* and *re-embod*y more distant political and cultural memorial structures by reinvesting them with resonant individual and familial forms of mediation" (*The Generation* 33). McCauley's "postmemorial work" in the play is to "*re-activate* and *re-embod*y" the painful aspects of her family's history that she had learned at her grandmother's knee. These aspects are held hostage by the silences in public and national discourses around the rape of enslaved black women. Knowing the horrific and the heroic elements of her ancestral legacy is not enough for McCauley when the truths of her legacy become myth once she steps outside the family circle.

Hirsch extended her concept of "postmemory" when she developed the notion of "retrospective witnessing by adoption". This "witnessing by adoption" accounts for, not just second generation familial confrontations with the reality of the Holocaust, but more general and cultural responses to individual Holocaust experiences. Hirsch defines "retrospective witnessing by adoption" as "adopting the traumatic experiences -- and thus also the memories -- of others as experiences one might oneself have had, and of inscribing them into one's own life story" ("*Marked by Memory*" 76). McCauley extends the application of "retrospective memory by

adoption" within the performative space, when she experiences her great-great-grandmother's rape as if she herself is Sally being raped as an experience "one might oneself have had".

McCauley's "witnessing by adoption" is not simply of the memories of what she has learnt at her grandmothers knee about Sally's experiential reality; rather for McCauley stories about Sally's rape have transformed into an embodied affinity with Sally's lived reality of rape.

For McCauley Sally's rapes do not translate the experience of sexual trauma as transgenerational haunting, but she extends the haunting of past sexual violence into an experience that is almost a transgenerational possession. McCauley's intergenerational inheritance of the trauma of sexual violence is experienced as psychical violence. While performing McCauley is not simply haunted by the memories of her great-great-grandmother Sally's violent experiences, but in one dream/nightmare scene she experiences Sally's rape as if she is Sally being raped. McCauley here is almost possessed and in the grip of ancestral sexual violence experiencing her great-great-grandmother's rape as if she is being raped. Trauma Theorist Cathy Caruth has explicated the experience of trauma as a form of possession: "To be traumatised is precisely to be possessed by an image or an event" (4). For sociologist Avery Gordon, haunting consists of those "singular yet repetitive instances ... when the over-and-done-with come alive" (xvi). I would further qualify here that it is the quality and the nature of the "com[ing] alive" of the "over-and-done-with" instances of the past that turns haunting of past trauma into what can be almost a possession for later generations. In the dream/nightmare rape scene the past sexual violence experienced by Sally "come[s] alive" for McCauley, so that Sally's rape is inscribed not just into McCauley's own life story as a memory, but into her very body and on her mind. In this dream/nightmare scene McCauley experiences the helplessness, the hopelessness, the fear, and the pain that her great-great-grandmother Sally would have

experienced during her actual rapes. No longer is McCauley a separate entity from Sally, but McCauley almost *is* her great-great-grandmother caught up in that moment when her great-great-grandmother was/is being raped:

In the dream I. I am Sally being (*An involuntary sound of pain*) b'ah. Bein' bein' I ... I being bound down I didn't I didn't wanna be in the dream, bound down in the dream I am I am Sally being done it to I am down on the ground being done it to bound down didn't wanna be bound down on the ground. In the dream I am Sally down on the ground being done it to. In the dream I am Sally being done it to bound down on the ground. (*Sally's Rape* 231)

The litany of repetitive phrases, "Bein' bein'", "being done it to", "bound down", "didn't wanna be", "on the ground", and the "*involuntary sound of pain*" are indicative of being caught up in a nightmare. This repetitiveness is reminiscent of the impact of violence on survivors who relive the traumatic event in vivid nightmares. By embodying the sexual violence perpetrated on the body of an enslaved woman into her own present body, McCauley is able to show how the present is very much "bound down" to the sexual violence of the past, and that the present-ness of past violence cannot be ignored. In *Traumatic Possessions*, Jennifer L. Griffiths considers how the processing of trauma at times evades conscious understanding and leads to "memory becom[ing] encoded on a bodily level and resurfac[ing] as possession" (1). From the beginning of the play McCauley asserts that she carries her great-great-grandmother within her: "she's in me" (*Sally's Rape* 222). McCauley's embodied affinity with Sally, with her violent ancestral legacy, is so attuned that McCauley "encode[s] on a bodily level" Sally's violent experiential reality of rape. McCauley's performance of Sally's rape as a nightmarish possession of traumatising sexual violence, of being caught in a rape act so that McCauley re-lives the terror

and the horror of being dispossessed of her bodily autonomy as if she almost *is* Sally, allows the audience to see how the present generation is still grappling with their violent legacies of ancestral pain and suffering.

When haunting becomes almost a possession, when McCauley becomes Sally, "I am Sally", then the past merges with the present. For Gabriele Schwab the "legacies of violence not only haunt the actual victims but are also passed on through the generations" (1). McCauley performance extends the process described by Schwab, as to how these haunting legacies operate and how they are "passed on". Schwab equated her experiences of growing up post World War II listening to the war stories of her family with being an "empty vessel to hold a deeper terror that remained untold, a silence covered by words, a history condemned to secrecy" (43). During performance McCauley similarly becomes a vessel, as she too contains within her a violent legacy. Yet her purpose is the opposite of what Schwab's is, as described in *Haunting Legacies*. Where Schwab, as a child, tried to connect the missing dots to get to the elusive hidden core at the center of the war stories, "something untold, silenced, violently cut out" of the familial stories, for McCauley her personal legacy has neither been "untold", nor silenced, or been a secret within the familial circle (Schwab 43). Rather, McCauley's personal legacy has been glossed over, downplayed, and white washed in dominant national narratives and the cultural imaginary as just "some rape".

At one point in the play McCauley extends her embodied affinity with Sally to become the embodiment of other enslaved black women who had been victims of rape. In this short scene, McCauley claims that "I I I become others inside me" which leads her to holler periodically at white men who are passing by at a bus stop, "YOU RAPED ME! GODDAMN MOTHERFUCKER! YOU RAPED ME!" (*Sally's Rape* 232) For McCauley, this introjection of

the violent reality of other enslaved black women leads to a loss of control where she yells at strangers. Does she consider the passing white men to be the descendents of white slave owners, who are ignorant or oblivious of their own violent legacies. Is McCauley's confrontation a form of a reminder of shared legacies: Is it a reminder of her painful legacy as the descendent of an enslaved black woman sharing this legacy with white men? French philosopher and literary theorist Jean-François Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition* says that the "performativity of an utterance, be it denotative or prescriptive, increases proportionally to the amount of information about its referent one has at one's disposal" (64). McCauley's "performativity of an utterance" of the rape of enslaved black women as "YOU RAPED ME", or "I am Sally down on the ground being done it to", is indeed very powerful. Her utterances are rooted in the referent, that is in the crime of Sally's rapes, and by extension the history of rape of black women under slavery. McCauley's embodied performance of the experience of sexual violence in the dream/nightmare scene, or in the bus stop scene, allows the audience to see the traumatic aftermath of the history of slavery where generations later the descendants are still bound down. While the public, as exemplified for McCauley by the passing white men at the bus stop, seem to be oblivious to this violent history.

The dream/nightmare scene, wherein McCauley embodies Sally's rape, occurs on an auction block. The auction block in slave markets represented the violent and sexual commodification of black people during slavery: "the auction block functioned under the regime of institutional slavery as both a slave market and an unregulated brothel" (Ernest 238). The process of commodification of enslaved black people on the auction block included objectifying the person, annihilating their subjecthood, and dehumanizing them by reducing them to mere flesh or body parts; elements experienced by women when sexually attacked. In the play, by

choosing to stand naked on the auction block, McCauley taps into and revives the shocking reality of African American history for contemporary audiences. She resurrects the history of enslaved black women's naked bodies on public display through her own naked body to make the audience visually comprehend, "Do you see this now? Now can you see me, who I really am, and that this is essential to who I am?" (Patraka, "Robbie McCauley: An Interview" 30). It is one thing to read about the historical reality of enslaved black people being sold on auction blocks, but to be literally and unexpectedly confronted by the vulnerable, fragile, and exposed black body to the spectator's gaze is an unsettling theatrical experience. For McCauley, "essential" to her identity is her ancestral history of enslavement which includes the objectification and dehumanization of her ancestors on auction blocks, and in order for the audience to "see" her, who she "really" is, such a visual resurrection is necessary.

As opposed to an actor playing a character on stage, a performance artist's potential to embody, project, and represent more than their self or one character during performance is boundless. For Performance Studies scholar Peggy Phelan this potential is the equivalent of a magic act where the performer "disappears". She states in *Unmarked* that "[i]n performance, the body is metonymic of self, of character, of voice, of 'presence.' But in the plenitude of its apparent visibility and availability, the performer actually disappears and represents something else" (150). McCauley, in that moment of "visibility and availability" on the auction block is no longer just herself. As the performer she actually "disappears" and her naked "body is metonymic" for the uncountable members of her race who had been dehumanised on the auction block. Thus, McCauley's performance of sighting her own black body on the site of the historical devaluation, dehumanization, and commodification of black people's bodies allows her to metonymically invest her body with historical reality of auctioning during slavery. McCauley

demands attention in this space by resurrecting a dominant history and a narrative in which black people had disappeared as mere flesh. By making visible her history and her legacy with her own naked body on the auction block, McCauley renders viscerally visible the horror experienced by her ancestors.

Neither the rapes that dispossessed enslaved black women, like Sally, of their bodily autonomy, nor the auction block that dehumanized black people would finally define who they are. Rather as exemplified by Sally it is her achievements and hard work after emancipation that are Sally's legacy for all the women in her family:

THEY SAY SALLY WAS TOUGH. BOUGHT A HOUSE AFTER SLAVERY TIME.
... LIVING IN ONE OF THE RED HOUSES, PAYING BY THE MONTH, TOOK IN
WASHING, CLEANED UP THEIR HOUSES FOR MONEY.... SAID SHE DID ALL
THAT AND NONE OF US EVER HAD TO BE WHORES. (*Sally's Rape* 230-231)

It is in "ONE OF THE RED HOUSES" that Sally reclaims herself, just as decades and generations later McCauley reclaims the auction block with her naked body. Sally's heroic efforts to provide safety to her children so that "NONE OF US EVER HAD TO BE WHORES" re-writes the racist mindset at the time. It is a mindset in which the idea of virtue and black women could not simultaneously coexist. This mindset is epitomised by a Southern white woman writing in *The Independent* that "I sometimes read of virtuous Negro women, hear of them, but the idea is absolutely inconceivable to me ... I cannot imagine such a creation as a virtuous black woman" (qtd. in Giddings 444). Thus, McCauley seeks to restart conversations to write into narrative Sally's efforts to protect her children so that "NONE OF US EVER HAD TO BE WHORES" against a social mindset where it is "absolutely inconceivable" that there can be a "virtuous black woman". This writing into narrative begins by McCauley "being a witness by

choosing to remember. What's important about the witnessing is that the audience is doing it with me" (Patraka, "Robbie McCauley: An Interview" 35). McCauley is opening up black and white shared history to a collective witnessing, a mutual dialogue, and a participatory working through, by making the audience a part of the witnessing paradigm. She uses the theatrical space to make the audience question the perceptions of black women in history as "WHORES", as inconceivable "virtuous" creations against the reality of Sally's rapes and life after emancipation.

McCauley explains to Patraka that the auction block was meant to jumpstart conversations that had ceased because of guilt and shame: "I'm carrying shame, and many others are carrying guilt. And those two are distortions of information and of the material that we are living with. When the material of our past turns into shame and guilt, we stop talking about it" (Patraka, "Robbie McCauley: An Interview" 28). Thus by standing naked, exposed, and vulnerable on the resurrected symbolic stage of her people's public commodification, McCauley seeks to restart the conversations that have been submerged under the burden of shame and guilt. In addition, McCauley provides the audience with her motivation in the play: "I wanted to do this -- stand naked in public on the auction block. I thought somehow it could help free us from *this* (*Refers to her naked body*)" (*Sally's Rape* 231). By reviving the auction block history, McCauley with her exposed body in its stark nakedness, rewrites the history of shame associated with the exploited black women's bodies. Talking about sexual violence lessens the shame that victims of rape feel after experiencing violence. It is a shame that they should not be made to feel. Similarly, McCauley too seeks to free the shame associated with the naked, exposed, and vulnerable black bodies in slave history through her own naked body. It is a matter of choice where McCauley is choosing to revisit this painful moment in her ancestor's enslaved history: "I wanted to do this". Hence having agency to make this choice within the performative space

allows McCauley to first revive a shameful part of history, but revive it in order to redress the shame and replace it with pride. African American literature scholar Saidiya V. Hartman in *Scenes of Subjection* looks at the black body as a site of pain in black performance: "an exercise of agency directed toward the release of the pained body ... It is intended to minimize the violence of historical dislocation and dissolution -- the history that hurts" (77). McCauley, like her great-great-grandmother Sally's hard work (so that "NONE OF US EVER HAD TO BE WHORES"), invests the naked, violated, and abused black enslaved women's bodies with new meanings and associations. Standing naked is an "exercise in agency" wherein she "release[s] the pained body" from the violence of the "history that hurts". In short, by symbolically resurrecting the space of her ancestors' objectification and disembodiment, the site where the black people had been disowned, orphaned, and divested of all familial ties, McCauley reclaims that space. She works through the shameful and guilt-ridden hallmarks of the history of slavery to reclaim "the history that hurts" and invest it with agency and decision making.

Yet the process of working through shame is incomplete unless the crime is acknowledged and one can be set free from the burden of guilt. In *Sally's Rape*, a short but pertinent scene centers on the dominant collective memory that is rooted in the denial of rape and sexual exploitation of African American enslaved women. In a key moment in the play, occurring in the library of Smith College, McCauley shows how historical myths are created in the national collective memory where aspects of complicity in violent acts are silenced and erased. Thereafter, generations grow up with a fabricated history that whitewashes the perpetrators' acts, and thus denies any need for acknowledgement, much less accountability. The erasure in national collective memory that McCauley highlights is reminiscent of post Second World War German politics of silence regarding the Holocaust. In Germany this silencing was

initiated and maintained by the government's censoring efforts through, *Weideraufbau* the process of Denazification. This process created a national narrative based on elimination of any trace of collective responsibility of the German people for the Holocaust. In *Haunting Legacies* Schwab looks into the effects of this political policy on the later generations. She notes that "[s]ilencing the past by not wanting to see is one of the many such futile attempts to numb the inheritance of pain, guilt, and shame of the second generation" (34). By co-relating the silence with a numbing effect shows that the denial of one's ancestral or familial past results in inheriting of a trauma that manifests as a traumatic wound. It is a wound that cannot be benumbed by the aesthesia of silence. This political act of historical re-writing in postwar Germany has a co-relative in the social and cultural acts of historical revision actively perpetrated by academic institutions in America. McCauley, with her co-performer Jeannie Hutchins, opens up the traumatic wound of denial of rape during slavery in the play.

Along with the victims, it is also pertinent to look at how the descendants of the perpetrators of sexual violence deal with their legacy. McCauley sets the scene of the traumatic wound of denial of rape at a crucial point in American history during the Civil Rights era in 1964. While the political landscape is on the cusp of historic change, the scene between McCauley and Smith College graduate encapsulates a time of desperate forgetfulness for the latter, who would rather quit her job than acknowledge the reality of rape of enslaved black women:

ROBBIE: In 1964 at the library job a U.S. history major who'd graduated from Smith College said-

JEANNIE: I never knew white men did anything with colored women on the plantations.

ROBBIE: I said "It was rape."

Her eyes turned red. She choked on her sandwich and quit the job. (*Sally's Rape* 225)

The history major student's ignorance is expressed in the innocuous "did anything" is countered by McCauley's stark truth that it "was rape". There is no room to negotiate with the assertive reality of the rape act. Here the U.S history major from Smith College, undoubtedly a white graduate student, whose historical consciousness has been fed on a select diet of nullification, falsification, and distortion of history, is oblivious to another history that has been violently written on enslaved black women's bodies. It is a history that has passed onto the children of violence generations later through stories learnt at their grandmother's knees. The US history major "chokes" on her food and decides to quit her job after this episode rather than acknowledge, accept, or even fight for her contested version of history. Jennifer L. Griffiths looks at this scene from the perspective of the victim's descendants. She shows how the denial of trauma by a potential witness, in this case the US history graduate, leads to a double tragedy and a "double trauma" for the victim, as the witnessing required for healing is denied to the victim (3). This denial to be a witness is further traumatising the victim. For Griffiths, the US history graduate is not being asked to accept blame for what her ancestors did, but to accept responsibility by choosing not to remain outside of their shared history of sexual violence during slavery, by choosing to remain "untouched and untouchable" (3). Quitting her job is a refusal to be part of the conversation about historical rape of enslaved black women. The Smith college graduate will not allow any other version of history to contaminate her pristine history where "anything" between a white man and an enslaved black woman could be a possibility. Her refusal to engage, and her removal of herself from the orbit of possible engagement by quitting her job, is an attempt at insulation. It is an insulation from "the inheritance of pain, guilt, and shame" of her shared history and legacy of sexual violence with McCauley. For Schwab "People

have no choice but to be responsive to and to take responsibility for the history they inherit no matter on which side of the divide they were born" (26). Here the denial of history of rape during slavery is also a denial of ownership of one's possible connection to a violent past which McCauley cannot allow to persist. One has to be "responsive"!

Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok's concept of cryptonymy is pertinent to the discussion of buried or denied histories. They contend that if a loss is not mourned it leads to the creation of crypts in the mind where the object of loss is buried. They refer to the contents of the psychic crypts as "[i]nexpressible mourning erects a secret tomb inside the subject" which holds the lost object (130). They compare the crypt to a cocoon formed around a chrysalis wherein the lost object is buried as a "painful reality, forever *denied*: the 'gaping wound'" (142). Schwab extends Abraham and Torok's concept of cryptonymy from personal crypts to collective national ones. Postwar Germany was a nation in denial. It was a silent nation refusing to mourn the horror of the Holocaust. For Schwab, this refusal to mourn made the past a painful denied reality that eventually became the "gaping wound" for the nation. Thus a secret national crypt was constructed in which the Germans "buried what they had lost yet denied having lost: their sense of themselves as a human people" (Schwab 46). When the lost object is buried and its existence is denied in the national memory it cannot be mourned. To mourn the German people would have to first acknowledge the loss, a loss represented by the Holocaust as a loss of their humanity. McCauley too wants her audience to become aware of the "gaping wound[s]" is our history. The physiological reactions of the US history graduate whose her eyes turn red and who chokes on her food hints at vested interests as more than outrage. Her quitting her job is a means to keep the national cryptic silence intact, to allow the possible violent secrets of her ancestors to remain buried and undisturbed. Jeannie asks the audience if the Smith College graduate was

"denying...? lying ...? or dumb ...?", and following audience reactions comes to the conclusion that, "Yeah she was dumb. I keep telling you that" (*Sally's Rape* 225). An Ivy League education fosters her ignorance but there is no excuse for it. For McCauley, academic institutions have been instrumental in the national endeavor to keep their students unaware, and thus keep the dominant cultural memory hostage to a historical master-narrative that is more myth than facts. McCauley's performative interactive piece ensures that the audience as co-performers agree with Jeannie that the Smith College graduate was "dumb" because of her refusal to dig deeper, to look beyond the surface, and to be complacent in her Ivy League fostered ignorance. Nevertheless, it is not possible to maintain this posturing of innocence by disavowing all avenues of possible engagement with counter narratives and counter histories.

By extension McCauley is also implicating the audience itself in this complicity to remain ignorant or in denial. After the performance McCauley and Jeannie invited the audience to enter into conversation that the play had initiated. In his article "Beyond a Liberal Audience," William Sonnega mentions a white man in the audience who brings up President Thomas Jefferson and his slave mistress Sally Hemings with whom President Jefferson had several children. Another white man in the audience corroborated the romanticised national version as "Jefferson apparently loved her" (qtd. in Sonnega 95). The naivete of these two white men in the audience to still believe a sanitised version of the relationship between a slave owner and a female slave after watching a play centered on the rape of enslaved black women is incredible. It seems that McCauley's revelations of her personal legacy of sexual violence where all the children on her mother's side were bi-racial, a result of "nothing but some rape" (*Sally's Rape* 220), where slave masters got their manhood when they came to slave quarters because they had "a right to land, cattle, Negroes, and other livestock ... pigs... dogs", is a history still being denied

by some white members of the audience (*Sally's Rape* 231). Sonnega reveals that McCauley was unable to let this denial persist. In response to the credulous observations of the two white men, McCauley as in the scene with the US history major, calls a rape as rape. Whether it was Sally Hemings, or her great-great-grandmother Sally, their sexual encounters with slave masters were not love, romance, or a relationship leading to marriage: McCauley asserts "I know what rape is during slave time, and I call that rape. If there was so much romance, why didn't Jefferson marry Sally and change history?" (qtd. in Sonnega 95) This co-performance between the two white men in the audience and McCauley shows us that the conversations cannot end with the play. The persistence of denial and the tenacity of disavowal of rape during slavery that has taken centuries to cement, as explicated by the views of the two white men in the audience, will change slowly. However efforts to dismantle the fairytales of love and romance between slave owners and enslaved black people need to be continue.

McCauley further adds to the contents of the national crypt with the possibility that it encloses not only the "lost object" belonging to the perpetrators of violence, but white victims of rape. McCauley in her discussion of language points out to Jeannie that the instinct for self-preservation, rather self-delusion, can also be attributed to the burial of shameful aspects in a history which testifies to the victimisation of the white people. Consequently, history of slavery in America has another narrative that has been masked by a "kind of delusion, self-deception" (*Sally's Rape* 228). Jeannie fears the possibility that McCauley sees more about Jeannie than she herself does, and that McCauley will "get underneath and pull something out. That you can see it and I can't" (*Sally's Rape* 228). Thus, Jeannie fears the possibility of revelation, of facing something buried "underneath" the conscious that Jeannie would prefer not to know is there. McCauley argues that Jeannie has successfully avoided those historical accounts of slavery that

"covers something in your history that makes your idealism a whim. It angers me that even though your ancestors might have been slaves - because they did have white slaves ... only made black slavery mandatory ... that history has given you the ability to forget your shame about being oppressed by being ignorant, mean or idealistic" (*Sally's Rape* 228). Hence, McCauley points out that the ability "to forget [one's] shame" and to "cover something in [one's] history" are attempts to keep the possibility of white slavery (reference to rape under white indentured servitude) locked away in a crypt by white people. McCauley raises the troubling possibility that the history disowned by the present generation is not just as children of perpetrators unwilling to acknowledge their place in a legacy of violence, but maybe as children sharing the same history of rape, victimization, and slavery with black people's "mandat[ed]" slavery. For McCauley both aspects of possible inclusion into this forgotten historical narrative are shameful for subsequent generations. Therefore making it imperative for them to remain "ignorant, mean, or idealistic", in short, leaving the content of the crypt undisturbed. However, the crypt will not and cannot be allowed to remain buried. Repeated efforts such as McCauley's performance by actively engaging with the audience will unlock the past, will counteract the "ability to forget", and will disengage the instinct for self-preservation required for keeping the crypt locked away.

Milkweed

Where McCauley's performance had been to revive the history of rape of enslaved black women as rooted in her family history for contemporary audiences, DeBerry's engagement with the crime of rape in *Milkweed* arises out of understanding of the instinct for silence from her personal experiences of sexual assault. She is not a victim of rape but a rape survivor who has had to overcome this self-silencing that is a product of shame, a culturally produced form of control over women's minds and bodies. Healing can only begin once the self-imposed silence is

broken. As DeBerry says in her interview with Raquel L. Monroe, "I wrote this for me -- a queer black artist who has survived several experiences with sexual trauma -- I wrote it for all other black/women/queer identified folk who can say -- me too in whatever way "me too" means for them" (345). *Milkweed* as a play is a tool for empowerment for the playwright and meant for black women who have suffered and who are still suffering in silence. It is an opportunity to recognise themselves in the reflected and refracted images that the play offers and be able to say, like DeBerry, "me too". Writing *Milkweed* out of her own experience of sexual violence began for DeBerry by "deliberately listening -- reading -- documenting black women -- black queer women's stories -- not only what we said -- what we didn't say and most importantly how we said or didn't say any of it ... specifically where sexual trauma was underneath it all" (Monroe, "Interview with Misty DeBerry" 342). Accordingly, the rape stories in *Milkweed* emerge out of this "deliberate listening", a listening that is focused on victim of rape's silence, on "what we didn't say" or "how" some things are not said.

Milkweed expands the audience's consciousness about rape by dramatically looking at and engaging with black-on-black and woman-on-woman rape crimes. Accordingly, DeBerry picks two strains in sexual violence discourses that have not drawn as much public attention as black-on-white and white-on-black rape crimes have done both historically and culturally. She makes us question the lack of attention to rapes which fall outside of the particular racial context of black-white rape dyad. Why has such a silence been maintained? Maybe because of what black women and queer black women "didn't say". Or maybe because no one was listening to or listening for the stories embedded in their words and their silences. It is through the characters of Glow and Stain that DeBerry initiates the process of "deliberate listening". These two characters are victims of date rape whose experiences expand perceptions of how date rape is understood

and perceived. They choose to be silent over reporting the crime. Moreover, even as DeBerry works to expand perceptions regarding rape reality, victims of rape are still grappling with a legal and judicial mindset where a racist judge clarified for the jury that for black victims one needs to "redefine rape" as "you never know about them" (qtd in Crenshaw, "Whose Story is it" 413). Or when jurors discredit testimony of black victims because "You can't believe everything they say. They're known to exaggerate the truth" (qtd in Crenshaw, "Whose Story is it" 413). Within this culture of (dis)belief seeing black women as legitimate victims of rape, breaking the silence maintained by such victims is as crucial as breaking the myths about black women.

As an African American woman, Glow's light color bears witness to a legacy of sexual violence in her ancestral lineage. The light color of her skin marks Glow as a liminal figure in her community. She exists on the borders between black and white race lines: she is a part of both races, yet is not fully accepted by either race. Her light skin color makes her an anomaly because she is too light colored for black people and too dark colored for white people: "the white kids couldn't connect with me, the black kids wouldn't connect with me. Too dark for one, too light for the other ... hair too nappy for both" (*Milkweed* 330). The rejections arising because of her skin tone by kids of both black and white races is a legacy of racism inherent in the politics of pigmentocracy that continues to impact race and intra-group race relations. Glow's search for belonging between races makes her vulnerable to exploitation. These rejections lead her to make choices that further feed her insecurity and sense of self. A case in point is her choosing to date Darren, not for who he is, but what dating him will mean for her in her black community: acceptance. Thus, Darren is the embodiment of "The Black Man" who makes Glow feel "Cool. Special. Validated. Better than my yesterday's me" (*Milkweed* 330). Additionally, dating him would get Glow "grade-A approval in [her] black community" (*Milkweed* 330).

Dating the right black person will result in communal acceptance and lessen Glow's insecurity about her own self-worth that has manifested by being rejected by the two main race groups to which she belongs.

In Glow's estimation what defines "The Black Man" is paradoxical and confusing. Her first impressions of Darren are that he has "bad juu juu" which makes Glow initially avoid him (*Milkweed* 330). Yet when she does date him he is the perfect gentleman. Glow's conception of being a perfect date is to "honor his black man-ness" through a gendered submissive behavior (*Milkweed* 330). Submissive compliance makes Glow more desirable according to the patriarchal socio-cultural notions of femininity which qualify sex roles, and maintain passivity and submissiveness as attractive feminine characteristics. When Darren pours a drink, she drinks it. He fixes a snack, she eats it. He tells her to join him in the backyard and she does so. This compliant pattern of behavior reinforces a patriarchal conception of a dominating masculinity set against submissive femininity that leaves no room for female autonomy. At the first sight of dissent, of Glow resisting a masculine authority that she has been at pains to authenticate and foster, her date becomes a nightmare. Black feminist studies scholar Patricia Hill Collins situates black patriarchy firmly within the Western ideological framework where definitions of black masculinity and black femininity are drawn from white patriarchy. Collins elaborates that "hegemonic masculinity is predicated upon a pecking order among men that is dependent, in part, on the sexual and physical domination of women" in Western culture (*Black Sexual Politics* 225). African American men, for Collins, have not developed a black gender ideology that challenges this "pecking order" within white Western heteronormative society. Resultantly, black men, too, draw upon the dominant paradigm in Western ideologies of hyper-heterosexuality where violence "constitutes the next logical step of their male prerogative" (*Black Sexual Politics*

225). Darren's masculinity will be reinforced either through Glow's submissive behavior or through the "next logical step" of rape if she resists: "if I have to hurt you I will" (*Milkweed* 332). Darren's threat to Glow to submit or otherwise he will hurt her is exercising his "male prerogative" within the domination framework underlying "hegemonic masculinity". This violence, wherein black masculinity is predicated is modeled on white masculinity, is identified by Royster as one of the poisons "ingested, acted upon and reconstituted in black bodies" (360). Thus when the black definition of masculinity is created in binary opposition to black female submissiveness, black men emulate a Western framework wherein dominance/submission becomes the model framework wherein black violence is aimed within the group. Darren's rape of Glow is emulating a white "pecking order" within intra-group relations in order to maintain black masculinity.

Darren's reaction when Glow resists his suggestion of getting intimate for the first time on his neighbour's porch changes the tenor and the balance of power of their date suddenly and unexpectedly. His threat of hurting her is not accompanied by the raising of his voice. It is a menacing, quiet, and steady voice that threatens her. However, Glow's compliance in the face of Darren's threat is misread and has both characters acting out of a ritualistic courtship script within standard heterosexual and gender relations. This cultural heteronormative script frames men as dominant pursuers resulting in women's submissive compliance, which for clinical psychologist Nicola Gavey sets up the "cultural scaffolding of rape" (3). Such dominant/submissive and pursuer/pursued gender roles provide "cultural scaffolding" and help create "pre-conditions for rape" in Western courtship rituals (3). Within these cultural scripts a woman's resistance, even her passivity, is culturally coded as token resistance and is presumed to be a "faux front that masks her real underlying desires" (Gavey 22). Thus, when the social

mindset prevails that a woman is a coy temptress, then her very real protests become socially and culturally coded as a "faux front". Within this culturally endorsed courtship script women's experiences of sexual violence get discredited. While Darren acts out the seduction script and probably misreads Glow's initial resistance as a "faux front", Glow's reality is date rape. This seduction script normalizes rape conditions into courtship rituals.

Glow is raped but no one believes her. Confiding to her mother the next day leaves her feeling even more alienated. Her mother reacts by saying "[t]hat sounds strange" and goes to work (*Milkweed* 333). DeBerry forces us to ask what is it exactly that her mother finds "strange"? The fact that her daughter was raped, that she was raped by a black man, or that she was raped while on a date? Or the fact that the rape was not attended by the expected display of screams, struggles, beatings, rage, or injuries? Or worse, that her daughter survived the ordeal to tell about it? Would Glow's rape be less "strange" for the mother if her body was discovered in a ditch or an alley? Like Ntozake Shange, DeBerry looks to explicate the "strange" realities of the "simple rape" act. Shange, in her choreopoem *for colored girls who have considered suicide/ when the rainbow is enuf*, was one of the first black dramatists to draw attention to "date rape", and more importantly, draw attention to the disbelief that is associated with date/acquaintance rape. Within the choreopoem, the section "Latent Rapists" clarifies what a real rapist looks like in the socio-cultural and legal mindset:

a rapist is always a stranger
to be legitimate
someone you never saw/
a man with obvious problems. (31)

Within these narrow parameters a sexual assault on a date can never be considered "legitimate". Feminist advocate Susan Estrich differentiates between "real" and "simple" rapes in her research study *Real Rape*. The prototypical "real rape" makes other rapes a "technicality" because they are not prosecutable practically. Prosecutable "real rape" narrow definitions include "more than one man, or strangers, or weapons and beatings" (Estrich 10). However, Estrich identifies that "simple" rapes are "far more common, vastly underreported, and [a] dramatically ignored problem" (10). Both Estrich and Shange clarify that when sexual violence is by one man who is not a stranger with "obvious problems" such cases of "technical" or "simple" rapes sound "strange".

DeBerry is breaking the silence not just with respect to the profile of the rapist. She is also at pains to demythologise the conventional perceptions of a rape situation. Rape narratives that define the rapist as either angry, violent, overtly threatening, or using weapons are more credible legally and judicially. Similarly a credible victim's behavior is categorized as protesting, struggling, and screaming. These are validated expressions of resistance to the crime of sexual violence. However, rape is never any less than rape even if the rapist is quietly menacing, even if the victim is silent, or if she is frozen in resistance or fear. Our cultural pre-programming equates a victim's non-consent embedded in her silence or in being frozen as submissiveness or passivity, consequently the victim's resistance is rendered problematic. DeBerry, like Shange, challenges and speaks out against this cultural tendency to disparage, dispute, or mute the victim's voice unless the rape fits into a conventional narrative of a prosecutable "real" rape.

Glow's mother's disinclination to give any credence to her daughter's traumatic experience, and her denial of the occurrence of the sexual violence by her refusal to believe in Glow, together constitute a denial to be a witness. For trauma theorist and clinical professor of

psychiatry Dori Laub, the testimony of a trauma is not complete until the listener as a witness is included in the process because without the listener "the place wherein the cognizance, the 'knowing' of the event is given birth to" remains empty (57). For Laub, it is the listener who presents a "blank screen on which the [traumatic] event comes to be inscribed for the first time" (57). Glow's mother's refusal to be the "blank screen" for her daughter where Glow can inscribe her experiential reality of rape for the first time is rendering stillborn the birth of the "'knowing' of the event" of her rape. The credulous reaction of Glow's own mother by her refusal to be a witness not only impacts the nature of the testimony but undermines the victim's experience. Trauma studies scholar Kalí Tal in *Worlds of Hurt* identifies such occurrences as "disappearance" . For Tal this entails "a refusal to admit to the existence of a particular kind of trauma" is accomplished by "undermining the credibility of the survivor" (6). Disappearance, then, is one of the strategies wherein the testimony of survivors becomes problematic. Glow's mother exemplifies a cultural mindset where she unwittingly undermines the "credibility" of her daughter's reality by the non-witnessing mechanisms which make Glow's testimony "disappear". It is these kinds of, in this case familial, refusals to acknowledge the existence of particular kinds of trauma that make victims and survivors like Glow's experiences "strange". The mother through her disbelief makes her daughter's rape a non-event that dies in the womb of Glow's initial articulation. Glow's mother's reaction of dismissing her daughter's rape as "strange" and going to her work as if nothing traumatic has taken place in her daughter's life is troublesome. DeBerry raises the possibility for us whether the mother would she have shown her daughter more concern if her rapist was white? Or has rape become such a constant in black women's lives that it can be brushed aside and one just moves on with one's daily routine? Neither possibility

seems adequate enough to explain the "strange[ness]" of a mother's reaction to her daughter's rape.

After confiding in her mother, Glow confronts her rapist Darren with his crime. But it marks another failed attempt at finding some sort of closure. Darren subverts this confrontation by making Glow, the victim of his violence, responsible for what happened to her. He seeks to reinforce Glow's insecurity about being a black woman with "You just don't know shit about being with a black man" (*Milkweed* 333). Glow is at fault as she is incapable of either handling a black man, or perceiving rape in what was a "normal" sexual encounter for Darren. Either way Darren implies that Glow is not a true black woman because a true black woman would "know shit about being with a black man". With such a black male prerogative in play DeBerry asks, what are the expectations and what are the roles a black woman is supposed to fulfill in a relationship with a black man? Why is Darren's black masculinity threatened in the face of Glow's will, her autonomy, and her voice? Or is forceful sexual dominance required for Darren's masculinity to thrive? DeBerry looks at how race and gender stereotypes affect black women as victims of sexual violence because of their inability to conform to the stereotypes of feminine submissiveness. Furthermore, the inability to validate these stereotypes leads to further rejection, disbelief, and discouragement within one's family and community. This failed attempt at getting recognition, at holding Darren accountable, shows the very limited venues black victims of rape have within their own community when the rapist is black. Glow's attempt at calling a black man to accountability for sexual violence is a betrayal of her race, and such attempts will be perceived as "simply colluding with racism" (Gavey 28). Thus crimes against gender are subordinated to forestall crime against race. Natalie J. Sokoloff and Ida Dupont in their article "Domestic Violence and Intersections of Race, Class, and Gender," clarify that "claims by some African

American men that racial oppression is more fundamental than gender oppression should be seen as an unwillingness on their part to take responsibility for their victimization of African American women" (57). Darren's response to Glow reflects this "unwillingness" to take "responsibility" for his "victimization" of a black woman by making it seem that the black woman is insufficient or is unable to handle a black man. DeBerry wants the audience to question whether the black history of racism, racist stereotyping, racial oppression, and/or racial violence provides the rapist, if he is black, a free pass? Does the burden of one's history enable one to commit crimes in the present without fear of liability or accountability?

These considerations are especially relevant to black men, who have carried the burden of a misconceived historical stereotyping which casts them as hyper masculine and sexually aggressive. This burden has its root in the development of the rape-lynch discourse which in the post-Reconstruction era led to a systematic wave of violence against black men. The rape-lynch discourse of the "myth of the Black rapist" or "the myth of the Black beast" was a form of socio-economic control of the newly emancipated black community. This rape-lynch narrative re-worked the stereotypes from the slavery era: black women were immoral and licentious and therefore unrapable; white women were chaste and virtuous and therefore victims of sexual violence; black men were primitive brutal beasts and prone to raping white women; and finally, white men were guardians of white chastity and would administer their own form of public vigilante justice. These scripted roles were a form of political terrorism which used a white woman's alleged rape as the pretext for lynching of black men. Such lynchings were often accompanied by the gang rape of black women by white vigilante mobs. However, what has survived from the Jim Crow era were the deceiving representations of black people. During the 1950s and 1960s efforts were made by African American people to overturn these false historical

projections of immoral sexuality and violent bestiality, and replace them with positive images rooted in Black Pride and Black Power movements. Yet these stereotypes still have currency in the public imagination. The instances of rape of black women by black men are silenced in the interest of projecting and sustaining positive race images. Darren's dismissal of the rape allegation with the defence that it was simply black masculinity in action that Glow is unable to understand or respond to problematises the very positivity that had been invested into being black. Collins, in her book *Black Sexual Politics*, shows how black women were "pressured to remain silent" and that part of their "self-censorship had to do with reluctance to 'air dirty laundry' in a White society that viewed Black men as sexual predators" (226). Through Glow's rape DeBerry posits the question to us whether positivity within black community can be sustained if the "dirty laundry" is aired? She asserts that it is time to now confront and address sexual violence within the black community and that doing so will be a cause of pride for the community. Therefore, invest new meaning in the pride of being black.

DeBerry's play raises concerns regarding treatment of rape within black community through Glow's mother and Darren who function both as individual characters and as representatives of black socio-cultural mindset in the play. Feminist writer and activist Diana E. H. Russell in *The Politics of Rape: The Victim's Perspective* interviews Ruth Somers, a light skinned black woman who is raped by a black man in 1969. It is the reaction of the police that was as traumatizing for her as the rape itself. Met with disbelief, Somers perseveres and goes to the police station to file a complaint. The young black police officer at the police station counter tells her, "You ought to give a brother a break" (158). In response to this pressure on black women Ruth responds, "*Damn the brother! What about the sister?*" (158). How far does the young black policeman's reaction to the black victim of rape who wants to file a complaint hours

after being raped embody the sentiments of the community? In her real life account of gang rape by black men, Charlotte Pierce-Baker has felt this burden of silence imposed on her as her duty and loyalty to her race because of the racial profile of her rapists, "I felt responsible for upholding the image of strong black men for our young son, *and* for the white world with whom I had contact" (64). The policeman's suggestion, Pierce-Baker's sense of race responsibility, and Glow's mother's reaction all point to an inclination, rather an encouragement to silence the victim if her rapist is black. Therefore, in the interests of "upholding the image of strong black men", in protecting the image of one's race, and in combating the burdens that black men have had to historically fight and displace, black women are victimised again. Traci C. West calls this being "psychically severed" from the only community available to black women. They are "on exhibit precisely at the same time as they are confined to the invisible cage" of silence (West 59). Through Glow's intra-racial rape DeBerry seeks to break this "invisible cage" of silence and to free them, not just women who have been raped but also their relatives and their friends, to ask the same question that Ruth Somers had asked "What about the *sister*?"

An important consideration that DeBerry raises by showing intra-racial rape is how sexism underlies racial loyalty and solidarity when race loyalty is placed above moral and ethical considerations. Racial reasoning has been the core framework "regulat[ing] black thought and action" says Cornel West in his article "Black Leadership and the Pitfalls of Racial Reasoning" (392). For C. West the interests of black women suffering sexual violence within their race have been placed second to the well being of the race and its survival in a racist society. C. West contends that for the reality of black women's sexual violence to be acknowledged and fairly dealt with the framework of racial reasoning needs to be dismantled (393). He proposes replacing "racial reasoning with moral reasoning, to understand the black freedom struggle not as

an affair of skin pigmentation and racial phenotype but rather as a matter of ethical principles" (393). When the framework guiding and molding black thought would be based on "moral reasoning" and "ethical principles" there would be no fear of addressing rape within one's community. Additionally, there would be no need to put pressure on black women to maintain a silence and subordinate their interests for the larger good of the community, irrespective of what the personal costs are to maintaining this silence. It would allow black communities and black victims of rape to confront and address the perpetrators of violence, rather than allowing the perpetrators to roam unchecked, protected by the black community on the basis of their skin color. It would also free black women from the fear of backlash from their community as they would no longer be regarded as traitors to their race for breaking the silence around intra-racial rape.

The other key question that DeBerry addresses in *Milkweed* through her depiction of rape is this: are women always the victim? She is expanding the sexual violence paradigm from racial to gender lines by expanding the construction of the rapist's profile. With growing awareness surrounding gay, lesbian, and transgender communities more consciousness is required to firstly address and then redress sexual violence permeating within these communities. For DeBerry, heteronormative sexual violence within African American community is just part of the picture of the sexual violence in society. She is seeking to enlarge our vision by looking at current narratives of sexual violence that are changing as the sexual landscapes evolve. Just as there is a reluctance in African American communities to allow victims to hold black perpetrators accountable, a similar taboo and restraint inhibits queer communities when it comes to talking openly or voicing sexual violence within their community. Jennifer Patterson in *Queering Sexual Violence* describes this as a desire in the community to believe in "queer utopias" where "same-

sex sexual violence, outside of institutional settings like prisons and the armed forces, was rare, if not almost impossible" (49). These communities too have borne and continue to bear the historical and socio-cultural burden of stereotyping and homophobic hatred and prejudices. Thus, similar to black communities there is a reluctance to address violence within the queer communities openly. Jeanne Cormier in her article "Coming Full Circle" in *Naming the Violence* addresses the implications of the lacklustre role of the lesbian community in confronting violence within their community. When queer community "turned their backs ... or they did not believe, or look fully" into narratives of violence, they have in essence abandoned the victims (124). For Cormier, as a community they need to "learn to be response-able, responsible where we have not been" to sexual violence within the ranks (124). DeBerry's play by drawing focus to lesbian violence thus demands of its audience to be "response-able" to the existence of sexual violence in queer communities.

The image of a female sexual perpetrator is as uncommon in rape narratives as that of a lesbian or a bisexual victim. Both these images are uncommon or absent in narratives of sexual violence because they emerge in groups that are marginalised, and thus rendered invisible in dominant heteronormative discourses. Consequently, DeBerry depiction of lesbian rape in *Milkweed* enlarges the outdated and/or limited heteronormative narratives and perceptions of rape. Sociologist and community activist Lori B. Girshick in *Woman-to-Woman Sexual Violence* examines the societal belief that "women are not violent -- women do not rape and women do not batter" which allows female perpetrators greater freedom (10). Socially, women have become accustomed to assume that the perpetrator of violence are men, consequently they feel "totally without safety, and the depth of [their] betrayal is greater" when the sexual violence committed against them is perpetrated by another woman (Girshick 10). DeBerry's depiction of lesbian rape

is writing into discourse a manifestation of sexual violence, a racial and gender profile of a perpetrator and a victim that have no register in dominant cultural imaginary or in legal discourses.

For DeBerry, a victim's choice of remaining silent or invisible does not make the problem disappear. It is through Stain's rape that DeBerry raises the concerns of how sympathetic the legal and judicial systems are to lesbian rape, when lesbian desire itself is considered abnormal. In her article "Toward a Genealogy of Black Female Sexuality," feminist studies scholar Evelyn M. Hammonds looks at how "certain expressions of black female sexuality will be rendered as dangerous, for individuals and for the collectivity" (101). She locates black lesbian desire as one such expression leading to wariness and silence because a black lesbian is constructed as "'deviant' sexuality exists within an already pre-existing deviant sexuality" (101). Consequently, this "deviant" framing binds black lesbian victim in a double jeopardy where the victim's race and sexual orientation are already suspect and problematic. By speaking up, would a lesbian victim of rape be opening herself up to further victimization in a possibly homophobic legal environment? Knowing the cultural mindset that looks at black lesbians, their sexual orientation, and their sexual preferences as "deviant" silences black lesbians in the face of sexual violence. Scholar of criminology Gary LaFree in *Rape and Criminal Justice* considers the laws as mechanisms for maintaining the existing heteronormative power structures where people "forfeit legal protection because they live outside the legal or moral structure of society" (151). Thus women who "violate" traditional sex roles "forfeit legal protection" and are unable to get justice when raped. LaFree identifies the legal and judicial systems as "institutional arrangement for reinforcing women's gender-role conformity" (151). It is through Stain's rape and her reluctance to seek justice for herself that DeBerry renders visible lesbian date rape as a narrative of sexual

violence that have always been peripheral to legal discourses of rape because it is outside the "moral structure" of heteronormative society.

Stains' section in *Milkweed* begins with Stain's rumination about her name. With a name like Stain she has been branded and defined while growing up. She wonders whether the name is an indictment on the circumstances of her birth. Yet despite these thoughts Stain is a confident young woman. Unlike Glow, who seeks validation for herself and her black identity through her interaction with Darren, Stain exudes confidence in herself. She is the one who pursues Sheila, "chatted her up. Got her number. Called her" (*Milkweed* 319). Even on their first date Stain is fully involved, "I wanna do it, I want to do it! I'm so excited, I'm ready to go" (*Milkweed* 319). Yet DeBerry is not leading the audience to what is commonly perceived as a "date rape". In retrospect Stain realizes she had never been the one in control, she had had only the façade of control: "[i]t wasn't a "date rape" ... like somewhere within the night the date turned into rape. This was a rape dressed up like a date ... everything went according to [Sheila's] plan. She knew what she was doing" (*Milkweed* 321). For DeBerry, the concept of a date rape has evolved from rapes occurring on dates to dates now providing the context and setting for a premeditated rape by some unscrupulous people. Coerced or forced sexual violence is the calculated end goal if sexual consent is absent during the date.

Most definitions of "date rape" assume the prototypical rape scenario. They categorize perpetrators as men. In *The Language of Sexual Crime* British linguist Janet Cotterill legally defines date rape as a specific type of acquaintance rape where "a man has sexual intercourse with a woman without her consent" (99). This legal categorization needs to be expanded as the gender allocations are, if not redundant, certainly limited. Secondly, within these heteronormative parameters the issue of consent, whether a woman did or did not intend to

submit, or whether there was any verbal and physical resistance on her part becomes troublesome. Lois Pineau's feminist analysis of date rape posits that women have been the targets of "unscrupulous victimization" as the "present criterion of consent is the belief [that] it is reasonable for women to agree to the kind of sex involved in a 'date rape', or that it is reasonable for men to think they have agreed " (221). This "reasonable" criterion is rooted in the ideological framework where man is the pursuer and the woman is pursued in the ritual of seduction. The legal framework still needs work to untangle where seduction becomes assault, and consent becomes forced submission. As consent of the woman and reasonableness of belief of the defendant in the consent of the woman are deciding factors in date rape cases the law still favors the man on the presumption of consent underlying the dating scene in the courtship ritual. For Pineau, the legal arguments about date rape needs to consider "what is reasonable from a woman's point of view that must provide the principle delineation of a criterion of consent that is capable of representing a woman's willing behavior" (Pineau 10). While Pineau makes a valid argument advocating the women's perspective of consent in date rape, I would argue the validity of laws, legal definitions, and discourses that are still rooted in and restricted to heteronormative orientation of the gender of the victim as a woman and the victimizer as a man. Pineau's building a case for the re-focusing of arguments where "reasonableness of belief" of the defendant is a woman's consent during date rape is a male oriented defence law. This needs further elaboration to include perpetrators of sexual violence who are not men. Thus gender based legal arguments are out of touch with, or unconcerned by, manifestations of sexual violence permeating and perpetuating in society that fall outside of these heterosexual parameters. Or facets of sexual violence that can potentially destabilize the legal arguments that are based on men as perpetrators of sexual violence.

Date rape definitions are predicated on the issue of consent within heteronormative context which negate gender neutrality. Race and legal studies scholar Ashlyn K. Kuersten in *Women and the Law* looks at how legal defences in rape cases dovetail with the biological urge defence as a legal argument. Here men who are accused of date rape are defended under the "biological imperatives of men who are engaged in sexual intercourse and removed male accountability for sexual assault" (Kuersten 143). If this line of biologically determined argument exonerating men from taking accountability is taken seriously (and it is to a certain extent, as this defence has been pivotal in rape cases rulings favoring male defendants) then it is placing date rape firmly as a heteronormative phenomenon. However, there are more factors at work here. Date and acquaintance rape is not just about sexual urges running rampant, but violence as a means to gain power, control, and dominance. These elements are not exclusive to certain groups, but underlie and define all relationships irrespective of race, gender, or sex, as they are based on what sociologist and community activist Lori B. Girshick calls "hierarchical structures of dominance" (164). Like heteronormative and patriarchal relationship frameworks which are "reflective of existing social norms, hierarchies and abuses of power, entitlement, ownership and control can exist in lesbian relationships" as well (Girshick 164). Lesbian date rape therefore, highlights that the biological argument underlying heteronormative date rapes need to be re-evaluated as a convenient gendered defence in rape trials.

When Stain's date Sheila "says point-blank, with such a calm in her eyes 'No. You're gonna do what I tell you to do'", she is exercising power not with violence but with the threat of violence (*Milkweed* 320). Stain narrates how she felt mentally victimised and controlled by Sheila: "she just put it in my head so simply that she meant to do me harm if I didn't do exactly as she told me" (*Milkweed* 320). Like Darren, Sheila too controls and dominates her victim

through the threat of violence, a threat that is exercised not through physical dominance of her victim, but by a mental domination. This threat leaves the victim with no physical evidence of being forcibly overpowered. In her article "Rape as a legal Symbol," Professor of political science and gender studies Kristin Bumiller asserts that "objective standards [are] fundamentally inconsistent with the social reality of rape: Women who are sexually attacked are concerned with their survival, and not with the demonstration of nonconsent" (77). The "social reality" of Stain's rape is "concern with [her] survival" because Sheila had "put it in [her] head so simply that she meant to [do her] harm". Accordingly, DeBerry expands the parameters of the contexts of how in some instances of date rape occurs where domination and submission are more mental struggles rather than physical actions. Sheila's intimidation tactics require the audience to understand that the standardised aspect of physical force used to overpower victims in rape is not the only aspect legitimising the occurrence of sexual violence. Consequently, her play asks of the audience to question how legal definitions and discourses cemented in heterosexual male violence can be expanded to accommodate instances of sexual violence that problematise prototypical gendered models of sexual violence.

Rape is considered to be one of the most underreported crimes, a crime that shrouds its victim with feelings of blame, guilt, and shame. If the victim of sexual violence is inclined to feel that they somehow invited the attack for which they blame themselves rather than their rapist, DeBerry raises the possibility that in such a situation how much greater would be the shame and guilt if the victim sexually responded during the rape act? Norwegian Professor of Philosophy Arne Johan Vetlesen, while examining collective sexual violence in *Evil and Human Agency*, looks how rape is a crime that makes the body of the victim, which is a source of pride, self-esteem, and self-identity, turn on itself. Rape is a crime which makes the victim feel unclean, as

evidenced by the instinctive need of some victims to take a bath to cleanse themselves. And the body which is a source of pride becomes a "thing-like 'object'" that the victim "drags around, reminding oneself only of the body's fall from grace" (Vetlesen 218). These feelings of "fall from grace" result in a "*shame-producing* form of evil" (Vetlesen 203). DeBerry touches upon a silenced "*shame-producing*" aspect of the rape crime to raise awareness around an unacknowledged element in some instances of sexual violence: how does a victim deal with rape if one sexually climaxes or becomes sexually aroused during rape? Would this not lead the victim to feel a renewed sense of guilt and shame? Would it not intensify the need for silence? Or even more tragically, make the victim question the nature of the violence one has experienced: whether the rape was rape at all? In the play *Stain's* rape, her fear, her helplessness, the dissociation of the mind from the body while the violence is being perpetrated on her body, are all nullified for her at the end: "I finally leave my body _ I cum" (*Milkweed* 320). She does not pursue justice for herself because she feels complicit in this violence perpetrated on her: "Still I never did tell nobody - you know - legally. I never reported it or nothing like that. Anyway what I look like trying to prove I didn't want it time I came" (*Milkweed* 322). DeBerry shows how *Stain's* sexual response during rape silences her as it blurs the lines between violation and voluntary participation, and problematizes for *Stain* the very claim of being a legitimate victim of rape.

In the shame culture surrounding rape where victims at times remain silent it is not surprising that sexual arousal or climax is a silent issue as it reinforces perceptions about the victim's complicity in her own victimization and problematizes the nature of the crime. A victim's sexual orgasm during the rape act is "one of the least-discussed but most significant aspects about sexual assault" according to therapist and counsellor Matt Atkinson (188). It leads

one to ask oneself a fundamental question that Atkinson identifies: "Is 'orgasm' proof that a rape victim 'enjoyed it?'" (189) In the play sexual orgasm makes Stain doubt her own rape reality: "what I look like trying to prove I didn't want it" (*Milkweed* 322). DeBerry is emphasizing that since rape is not a normal situation, hence normal sexual responses cannot and should not be perceived as signs of enjoyment, pleasure, or acquiescence in a rape context. Neither should such responses be equated with complicity. Atkinson discusses sexual responses during sexual violence as neurobiological response of the victim under threat: it is a "form of *self-defence*" of the victim's body, a "'fight-or-flight' response", where the victim's autonomic nervous system becomes hyperactive for the sake of the victim's survival (189). DeBerry has shown how the victims themselves misunderstand their rape experiences as complicit, and are rendered silent by the guilt and shame of what they perceive as their own body's betrayal. Furthermore, such a physical response would be misunderstood by the rapist, police, lawyers, judges, and jurors as expression of pleasure and consent, which are in fact a defensive physical response for the victim's survival. In consequence, *Milkweed* shows that what is commonly perceived as sexual pleasure when placed within the sexual violence context needs to be re-evaluated not as sexual pleasure but as the victim's body's instinct for survival. There needs to be more public awareness as these are not typical circumstances and thus standard physical responses do not apply.

DeBerry draws our attention to this taboo aspect of the rape act that condemns the victims to silence, as their very understanding of the crime committed on their bodies becomes ambiguous. *Milkweed* breaks the silence by drawing attention to what Stain experiences during the rape, and how it de-motivates her, like so many rape victims against speaking out and pursuing justice. Thus, through Glow and Stain's experiences of sexual violence DeBerry raises consciousness about rape realities which render victims silent.

Only In America

Yet no matter how traumatic breaking the silence for the victim of sexual assault can be, no matter what the personal cost will be for the victim, if the silence continues, so does the crime. Aishah Rahman's play *Only in America* engages with the reality of workplace verbal sexual harassment as a form of linguistic, verbal, and mental rape. The play shows the struggle to speak out, and the virtual impossibility of being heard, understood, or believed, when one does speak out against sexual harassment. Rahman's protagonist, Cassandra, a victim of sexual harassment by her boss Oral struggles against workplace constraints to gain access to a language to tell the truth about her rape. Set against the Anita Hill-Clarence Thomas Senate hearings, *Only in America* highlights how gaining access to language to relate one's experience of verbal sexual violence, especially as a black victim, is an arduous journey. This struggle over language, over narrative, and over the right to tell one's truth was experienced by Professor Hill during the Senate hearings.

Workplace sexual violence and harassment of black women dates back to slavery where working in the fields, or the plantation mansions, was accompanied by rape at the hands of overseers or the slave masters. Harriet Ann Jacobs's experience of sexual harassment where her master Dr. Flint would whisper "foul words" in her ears, and where he would "people [her] young mind with unclean images" can be regarded as one of the first documented accounts of verbal sexual workplace violence against black women (44). Post-slavery black women would work menial jobs wherever they could find them, mostly consisting of the work that no one else was willing to take up. hooks elaborates how harassment from the streets would followed them to their work places: "Everywhere Black women went, on public streets, in shops, or at their places of work, they were accosted and subjected to obscene comments and even physical abuse

at the hands of white men and women" (*Ain't* 55). Contrarily, Professor Hill's real experience, and Cassandra's dramatic re-enactment of it, shows that higher education, having a successful career, or being a professional lawyer, does not necessarily mean protection for black women from sexual harassment. Neither do such accomplishments ensure the automatic recognition of a black woman as a credible victim of sexual harassment.

Rahman centers the play on the theme of language and who has access to it. Cassandra speaks an incomprehensible language in the play, wherein Lilli her speech coach is teaching her how to speak English. Rahman uses Cassandra's incomprehensible language as a metaphor to elucidate how black women as victims of violence speak but their words are not really understood. Even when the words are there, the comprehension is not. Lilli has to make an effort to understand what Cassandra says. It is only at the end of the play when Cassandra gains access to a comprehensible language that she is able to say out loud with one word her lived reality of "rape". While Cassandra lacks access to language, her boss Oral (aptly named by Rahman for the nature of sexual violence he perpetrates) not only has access to it but has the power to manipulate it and commit violence in and through language. An important aspect of the nature of sexual harassment revealed in the Anita Hill-Clarence Thomas case, as dramatically enacted in Rahman's play, is that a sexual assault can be verbal in nature rather than physical. Subtly invoking the First Amendment Oral justifies his verbal sexual assault on Cassandra as merely innocuous: "Don't get so upset. I'm just talking. Using words. It's a free country and I can talk sexy if I want to" (*Only* 19). For Oral using only words as a defence highlights the problematic nature of sexual harassment in Professor Hill's and other work place sexual harassment cases. When there is nothing as tangible as physical evidence that could be used to prove the violence experienced is sexual harassment, the ephemeral nature of words renders ambivalent the

experiences of sexual violence.

Look, Ms. Jackson. Rest assured I'm not going to touch you. I want no physical contact. No bodies. No odors. No secretions. No pubic hairs. What I love is smut. A sanitary blending of lechery, sight and speech. Smut. Visual. Verbal. Hygenic. Each word is a picture. Each picture an orgasm. Smut eases me. Smut makes me happy. You know how I feel when I'm happy? I feel limp and wet all over from Cassandra's tongue. (*Only 20*)

As the nature of sexual harassment becomes clear Oral shrewdly continues to rationalize that as there is no physical contact or force, and because he is "not going to touch" Cassandra, or "want[s] no physical contact" with her, hence she should be assured of the "innocence" of their exchange. However, Professor Hill's testimony pointed out that within the work place environment discussing certain topics like women's body parts or pornography were not only inappropriate, but a form of sexual intimidation and verbal assault. A case in point is Professor Hill remembering a particularly disturbing episode even after ten years when Justice Thomas had pointed out to her that there was a pubic hair on his coke in the middle of a work related discussion. Just as Professor Hill still suffers from Justice Thomas' words after ten years, Oral's words "No bodies. No odors. No secretions. No pubic hairs" have the power to hurt and terrorize Cassandra. It is with the power of language, with a "sanitary blending of lechery, sight and speech" that Oral transforms the office from a professional workplace into a hostile environment, so that the office becomes a strange and unfamiliar cage for Cassandra.

Rahman's play is in constant dialogue with the actual proceedings of the Anita Hill-Clarence Thomas Senate hearings. Rahman reveals the farcical nature of the Senate hearings investigating Professor Hill's allegations which put Professor Hill on trial rather than Justice Thomas when Oral challenges Cassandra in the play:

There's nothing wrong in here. I'm only talking, I'm only talking, I'm only talking and the evil is in *your* imagination. And besides who are you going to tell? The President? Congress? What are you going to tell them? That I'm the demon they created? The nightmare of the nation? (*Only 21*)

When sexual violence manifests as verbal violence it makes it all the more harder to prove the damage especially as Oral's refrain "I'm only talking" undermines the nature of how the victim experiences the assault. This dig at the Senate hearings that complaining or speaking out will be of no use tragically was correct, as the Republican senators questioned Professor Hill not as a credible victim but as a suspect telling tall tales, with the pre-mediated aim of discrediting her testimony.

Rahman takes into account that one of the narratives undermining Professor Hill's testimony was that she was portrayed as an ambitious career woman, whose accusations of sexual harassment became problematic because she did not quit her job when faced with sexual harassment. In the play, while Cassandra focuses on her work and does not pay attention to her boss Oral's bragging, he accuses her being "so ambitious" (*Only 17*). Thus dedication to one's career works against the victim as within the work place environment, job opportunities can be used as bait to exploit the victim: Oral promises to recommend Cassandra to a "power position on the Circuit" (*Only 17*). Professor Hill was disbelieved as a credible victim because she chose to stay in her job in spite of the verbal sexual abuse. Rather, when she was offered a better position she transferred with Clarence Thomas from Department of Education to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) which made her claims of sexual harassment suspect for the Senate committee. Herein the narrative of the "ambitious" career woman works to destabilize the credibility of the victim of sexual harassment. As Senator Specter asked Ellen M.

Wells, a witness for Professor Hill that "knowing Professor Hill as you do, and in the light of your statement, 'so outraged, have to do something,' what would that something have been? Would it have been to follow him from one job to another? ... Or would it at least have been not to maintain that kind of an association?" (*Hearings* 267). Or as J. C. Alvarez testified in the Senate hearings based on her own experience of sexual harassment that "Her behavior just isn't consistent with the behavior of a woman who has been harassed, and it just doesn't make sense ... It has to make us all suspicious of her motives" (*Hearings* 297). Thus, either Professor Hill was not the victim that she was claiming to be, or she was the emasculating ambitious black superwoman who was robbing black men of their fair share of work opportunities by ambitiously climbing the career ladder, or pulling down a black man who had made it to the top of the career ladder. The Republican Senators' portrayal of Professor Hill does not take into account black women's workplace reality and how their careers would be affected professionally by the "logical" course of action that they are propounding.

The reality of a woman, especially a black woman, quitting a well paid job or rejecting a better job offer and easily finding an equivalent one is rare. This is well elucidated by Oral whose threats and coercion stop Cassandra from fleeing despite the sexual harassment:

MS. JACKSON, HALT! Just where do you think you'll be working after you walk out of this office? Hamburger helper? Cigarette person? Bus person? Shampoo person? Para person. Gal Friday? Greeter? Messenger? Self-Starter Off-the-books? ... (*Each job he names propels her back into her office until she finally once again is facing him. Oral continues to drone on forcing her backwards in front of the empty cage. She mouths sounds but now none come forth. Oral's voice continues relentless even after the LIGHTS are off.*) Nanny? Mammy? Freelance? Hostess? Part time? Sitter? Picker? Sorter? Entry

level? Assistant person? Trainee? Processor? Operator? Dispatcher? Check out? Taxi?

(*Only 22*)

Just like Suzan-Lori Parks' character Saartjie Baartman (discussed in the next chapter) was fearful of returning home penniless where all her suffering would be for nothing, countless women like Professor Hill, and Rahman's dramatized character Cassandra, face this choice of losing what they have worked so hard to achieve if they "walk out". They choose to persevere -- despite the sexual harassment that essentially places them in a cage and makes their claims of harassment, just that: *claims!* Notwithstanding Senator Specter's imputation, a victim by choosing to stay in her job does not cancel out her charge of sexual harassment, or render the claimant suspect, as it did for some Republican Senators. Rather it bespeaks the limited choices black women have (as Oral's barrage of low paying jobs clarify) where the reality of "walking out of this office" means losing one's career, thus forcing countless working women to stay. There is a vast difference between world views, work place realities, and career opportunities of the white male Senators who judged Professor Hill's decisions from a position of power against that of black women who are struggling to maintain their jobs while being victimized.

Countering insinuations which deem sexual harassment a fable and discredit the victim if they choose to stay in the workplace, Rahman's play shows how easily and quickly the office workspace becomes uncanny and dangerous. Oral shifts gears from offering Cassandra possible promotion to sexual innuendos "I-am-ready", "He's ready too", "He's been waiting", "He's hungry" (*Only 18*). Despite Cassandra's repeated attempts to keep the conversation focused on work, Oral by using what he calls "sexy talk" to verbally traps Cassandra in the work place. Therefore, as in other forms of sexual violence, in verbal sexual harassment the power dynamics play a critical role in disempowering the victim. Yet the cultural mindset at the time of the

Senate hearings would consider "sexy talk" to be as harmless as Oral is portraying it. In "Puzzled and Disgusted but Fixed on Hearings" in *The New York Times* D. Johnson quotes a white female observer who believed that what Professor Hill claimed probably had happened to her, but Professor Hill was nevertheless "making mountains out of molehills. I suppose he did harass her a little bit. I personally believe he probably did all of those things. But they are making too big a deal out of it. It's not like he's been raping women" (A16). Here rape is understood to be only a physical violation and by protesting verbal sexual violence Professor Hill was "making too big a deal", even while the interviewee believed that "he probably did all of those things". Professor Hill's testimony and Rahman's dramatic presentation of it, both argue the same point that it *is* "too big a deal" because verbal sexual violence is a form of rape.

Sexual harassment is a rape committed through a different means, wherein language is the instrument of penetration, and the mind replaces the body that is being invaded and overpowered. Professor of Comparative Literature Claudia Brodsky Lacour, while analysing the use of racism in the Anita Hill-Clarence Thomas Senate hearings, equates "verbal sexual harassment [to] a mental violation, a form of rape without the traces of semen to identify" (141). Rather than a physical violation, which at the time of the hearings in 1991 was the only recognizable form of sexual crime against women (but not always recognized in case of black women as has been argued in this research), verbal sexual harassment spread its venom more insidiously. Rahman shows how Oral's words entrap Cassandra by effectively disempowering her. His words force her to occupy the golden cage that he brings into the office but despite the fact that the cage door remains unlocked, just as the office door is unlocked, Cassandra cannot walk out. Cassandra has the actual physical freedom to walk out and walk away from her job anytime, yet she becomes mentally entrapped in the cage, in the office, and in her job when Oral

overpowers her with his "sexy talk". Like the impact of rape, sexual harassment too works to demean the victim's self-respect and self-esteem. It elicits shame, depression, and disgust, the emotional trauma that Professor Hill admitted during her testimony to have experienced in response to Justice Thomas' harassment: "the nature of the conversation was disgusting, embarrassing, degrading", and "I was very depressed. I was embarrassed" (*Hearings* 92). Lacour identifies how Justice Thomas' constant references to pornography was a form of "mental violation" where "[w]ithout attacking, even touching [Anita Hill's] body he was murdering with words, killing whatever was free in her, free to believe she had the liberty to do and imagine what she wanted" (148). A classic impact of long term abuse is breaking the victim's spirit, the imposition of one's will upon another, and to "murder" the victim's free will. Herein the fatal power of words is ably demonstrated where verbal sexual violence "break[s]" working women's spirit and free will. This emotional trauma can be debilitating as we see how successfully Oral robs Cassandra of her will power and freedom with the power of his words and the authority of his position.

The cage becomes an important metaphor reflective of how sexual harassment creates a hostile environment in the workplace which places women in mental cages. The confident, assertive, and funny Cassandra that we see in Act One - where she is dancing and lip syncing to Aretha Franklin's "Respect", or when in response to Lilli's story of being attacked Cassandra leaps of the massage table "*a ball of fury, yelling screaming and giving Karate kicks and chops to LILLI'S attacker*" - that Cassandra eventually disappears (*Only* 4). By the end of Act One this self assured and secure person is robbed of herself. Under the barrage of Oral's verbal sexual attack she "*becomes more birdlike and neck and arm movements as well as vocally as she emits the gurgling, strangled swallow sounds*" (*Only* 18). Finally, she is backed into the cage whose

door in not locked: such is Oral's power over Cassandra that he knows she will not and cannot break free of the mental cage he has locked her in. This is the nature of sexual harassment wherein the Oral's speech act performs a function that J. L. Austen described as not mere description of words but the words having the power to perform a deed. He described the performance utterance as "to *say* something is to *do* something" (12). Where Austin identified the performative function of the speech act in terms of people getting married when they say "I do", in the context of sexual harassment as experienced by Professor Hill in person and Cassandra in the play, the impact of violence in language is more than a speech act, it is a perlocutionary speech act. Austen defines the perlocutionary speech act where "[s]aying something will often, or even normally, produce certain consequential effects upon the feelings, thoughts, or actions of the audience" (101). Thus Oral's "sexy talk" as a perlocutionary speech act is successful as it "produce[s] certain consequential acts" when it reduces the yelling and screaming "*ball of fury*" Cassandra into making "*gurgling, strangled swallow sounds*" (*Only* 18). Despite Oral treating words as innocuous, for being guilty of nothing more than "sexy talk", his words are performing a violence as they immobilize, disempower and violate the victim.

Rahman works with animal imagery to convey Cassandra's entrapment as a victim of sexual harassment. Where Oral downplays the impact of his verbal sexual assault ("Don't be such a prude. I'm only talking. What harm can words do?") the audience is witness to Cassandra's transformation (*Only* 20). As Oral "*stalks and finally corners*" Cassandra in her office, Cassandra's body as she tries to move away contorts and resembles a bird. The bird imagery is relevant as Rahman draws on literary references where Philomera in Ovid's *Metamorphosis* changes into a bird after her brother-in-law rapes her and cuts out her tongue so she cannot tell anyone. Philomera is turned into a bird by the gods where she forever sings of her rape. Like

Philomera, Cassandra with "*gurgling, strangled swallow sounds*" becomes a metaphorical representation of every victim of sexual violence who, if like Professor Hill or like Glow speak out, their words remain incomprehensible "*gurgling*", "*strangled*", and "*strange*" sounds. Professor Hill broke her silence reluctantly, knowing as every rape victim who takes the witness stand does, that another assault - the assault of disbelief - will come their way. Nevertheless, the sexual violence cannot end unless the victim speaks out and names the perpetrator of the crime.

A central concern raised by Rahman is to highlight the difficulty of a victim speaking out, of the courage and the effort it takes to utter the truth of one's victimization. Cassandra's speech therapist Lilli's motto is that "a silent woman is a defenceless woman" is reflected by Cassandra's helplessness in the play (*Only 5*). It is only towards the end of the play that Cassandra is able to utter in a "long, loud howl that seems to emerge from her very bowels": "RRRRRAAAAPPPPPPEEE!" (*Only 40*). Finally, Cassandra is able to articulate, find access to a language, and regain an agency, that has been denied historically and even contemporarily (as shown by Professor Hill's experience) to black women. The ability to speak, more importantly to name the crime, allows Cassandra to have a power and control denied to black women as victims of sexual violence:

(gurgle, gurgle) Rape!

(gurgle) Rape! "I speak the truth that no one wants to

(gurgle) believe" Not Father, Mother, Sister, Not My People

(gurgle, gurgle) There is no rape among us. She who cries

(gurgle, gurgle, gurgle) "rape" Works against us Dishonors our House I swallow

Swaalloow words Swallow agony ...

(gurgle gurgle) RAPE You

(gurgle) feed on us RAPE You belch with our pain. RAPE

(gurgle gurgle) You are bloated with our lives (*Only* 42)

Cassandra's final "gurgle[d]" words show how the burden of one's violent reality, a burden shared by Glow and Stain, should not be "Swaallow[ed]". Not only does Cassandra name the crime, she also debunks the myth that "[t]here is no rape among us" because if this myth is broken it will "Dishonors our House". She challenges this mindset prevailing within black community that virtually strangles black victims of sexual violence. Crenshaw points out how "[o]ur historical silence functions in much the same way that Hill's silence did; we have played along all this time" ("Whose Story is it" 432). Like Pierce-Baker, black women have time and again "Swaallow[ed] words, swallow[ed] agony" to prioritise what is good for their race over themselves. This has created an imbalance within black community that is content to "feed", "belch", and become "bloated" on the silence of black women's suffering as a result of sexual violence. Professor Hill was publically disowned by some sections of the black community, as Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton elucidates, because by breaking her silence Professor Hill made the black community "face the most dreaded of confrontation" within their house: Hill's allegations pitched loyalty to race against loyalty to gender (246). However, Norton contends that sweeping issues of sexual abuse within the community under the carpet means "giv[ing] sanction to that abuse" (246). For Hill, the credibility of black women, black men, and black community are not disparate issues, but interdependent: "I believe that our credibility as a community turns on our willingness to address wrongs within as well as outside it. Equality begins at home" (288). Just as Lilli's "most lethal weapon" is her mouth (which saves her from a guy choking her in rage in Act 1), Cassandra's words empower her at the end of the play by reducing Oral to an "*empty robot-like voice*" who finally loses language (*Only* 43). Therefore,

speaking out is a woman's biggest weapon. While theatrically Rahman ends the play with Cassandra triumphantly walking out of her office, Professor Hill's did not her walk away victoriously from the Senate hearings. At that moment, the ultimate position of legal and judicial power was given to Professor Hill's victimizer, when the accused Justice Clarence Thomas was sworn in as Supreme Court Judge in 1991, with the Senate voting 52-48 in his favor.

However, Professor Hill by speaking out led to what is now known as the "Anita Hill effect". Emerging from the ashes of Professor Hill's unsuccessful attempt to get justice, 1992 became the "Year of the Woman" as more women ran for public office than ever before. For the first time 106 women ran for the House out of which 47 won the election: when the Washington state legislature convened in 1993 out of 147 seats 40 percent of the seats were held by women (Carpini & Fuchs 35). The number of women in the Congress itself rose from 29 to 48 in 1992. The Senate had a record number of 6 women including an African American Senator Carol Moseley-Braun, and a Puerto Rican Senator Nydia Margarita Velázquez who came to the House for the first time (Norton 245). Additionally, Hill's courageous testimony paved the path to create more awareness about sexual harassment, with 7407 charges filed in 1992 rising to more than 12000 complaints being filed with Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in 1993 (Bystrom 268). Furthermore, the face of the Senate Judiciary Committee also changed when the Committee chair Senator Joseph Biden brought on two women Senators in 1992 in an effort "to make amends for allowing Republicans to arduously question Hill" (Bystrom 275). And finally, President Bush who had vetoed a civil rights bill that would award monetary damages to victims of sexual harassment in 1990, following the Senate hearings the bill was passed and became law. This was an attempt by the "Senate and President [who] faced the need to convince the women of the country that they were serious about taking action against sexual harassment" (Ross 229).

Under the new law women could sue for damages up to \$300,000. Now women had legal recourse to justice and financial restitution when sexually harassed. By speaking out Professor Hill changed the male gendered political face of United States and women gained access to positions of political power and legal protection.

Bumiller urges the need for creating not only a "protected space" that is "a refuge in which women's words are believed", but also for "a language in which the full impact of the stories of victims are heard" (82). *Sally's Rape*, *Milkweed*, and *Only in America* by probing aspects of sexual violence -- physical, psychological, and verbal -- allow black performance and theatre to speak that language where the "full impact" of the "strange" stories of rape, past and present, can be fearlessly told. These plays are an empowering mechanism allowing African American women playwrights to encourage black victims to break their silence and motivate them to say "me too".

Chapter Three: Process of Ghosting as Manifestation of Rape Act

To write stories concerning exclusions and invisibilities is to write ghost stories ... the dialectics of visibility and invisibility involve a constant negotiation between what can be seen and what is in the shadows.

Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*⁶

We gotta crack the heart wide open, cause when it healed up last time it healed up wrong, crack it open and reset it, heal it right. Crack the mind wide open cause when it healed up, our thoughts healed up wrong.

Suzan-Lori Parks, "New Black Math"⁷

Suzan-Lori Parks' plays, *Venus* (1996) and *In the Blood* (1999), are what sociologist Avery Gordon calls "stories about exclusions and invisibilities" (17). In this chapter, I will analyse these two plays as "ghost stories" where Parks' protagonists, Saartjie Baartman and Hester La Negrita's reality, as black women and as black victims of sexual violence, are in a "constant negotiation between what can be seen and what is in the shadows" (Gordon 17). Parks explores the two extremes of the visibility spectrum, hypervisibility through Saartjie Baartman as the "Venus Hottentot" in *Venus*, and invisibility through the character of Hester La Negrita in *In the Blood*. The former character as a stereotype is forever present in the cultural imagination, and the latter character is surviving in the nameless here and now. In this chapter I will examine how the politics of visibility in western discourses regarding race, when manifested as hypervisibility and invisibility, produce and perpetuate forms of haunting. Such haunting occurs in Parks' plays when the protagonists are reduced to absent presences through what I call the process of ghosting. As opposed to the popular use of the term "ghosting" in dating situations, the process of ghosting as I apply the term involves the violence of vision which makes characters' realities disappear, so that only a shadow of their real selves remains to be seen by other characters in the plays. Even though the protagonists are center stage their real selves continue to disappear, or

⁶ Avery Gordon. *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological*. p 17.

⁷ Suzan-Lori Parks. *New Black Math*. *Theatre Journal*, 57.4 (2005): 576-583. p. 583.

more often are deliberately made to disappear from sight. They are effaced and made invisible by the violence of vision, more precisely, the violence of the dominant Western cultural vision of black women. This process of the protagonists becoming steadily invisible by being reduced to objects or stereotypes thus leads to their haunting. "To haunt does not mean to be present" say Derrida: contrarily, I contend that Parks' protagonists haunt precisely because they *are* present, yet are absented (*Spectres* 202). As absented presences on stage, these protagonists are moved out of sight into one's peripheral vision. Hence, sight and vision become key lens to analyse the creation of ghostly figures out of characters that haunt Parks' theatrical landscapes.

In literature, ghosts and phantoms are frightening phenomenon that need to be expelled or exorcised in order for the normal order to return and maintain itself. Thus, the ghosts -- as otherworldly phenomenon, as the return of the dead, or as the repressed past -- disturb the equilibrium of the present. Only their successful removal will right a "time [that] is out of joint" (Shakespeare *Hamlet* 1.5.196). Yet ghosts are more than a return of the past, of repressed memories, or manifestation of the unconscious. Ghosts, by their very nature are liminal beings who disturb our normal vision. They draw our sight and our comprehension to sites wherein the concrete and tangible reality blurs. Hence, they haunt! The haunting of spectres therefore acts as a reminder: the "living present is scarcely as self-sufficient as it claims to be; and we would do well not to count on its solidity and density" (Jameson 39). When the "solidity and density" of the "self-sufficient" present is problematised by the presence of ghosts, it is important to ask who are these ghosts? This is the very function that Parks' protagonists raise for us. Derrida "draw[s] haunting into the very construction of a concept. Of every concept" (202). Hauntology, then becomes the study of the Other -- of the denied or of the erased -- in every concept and in every

discourse. He further qualifies that the specter denotes the "visible, but of the invisible visible, it is the visibility of a body which is not present in flesh and blood" ("Spectrographies" 38).

Contrarily, my study of protagonists, Saartjie Baartman in *Venus*, Hester La Negrita in *In the Blood*, and Cassandra in *Only in America* in this chapter as ghosted specters looks at the opposite: the invisible, but of the visible made invisible, it is the invisibility of the wounded, traumatised and violated black body present in flesh and blood. Gordon feels that "[t]o study social life one must confront the ghostly aspects of it" (7). My study of *Venus*, *In the Blood*, and *Only in America* is a study not only of the "ghostly aspects" of historical, sociological, and scientific Western discourses that Parks, and the political discourse that Rahman, introduce in their plays, but more importantly the study of the processes of how these "ghostly aspects" are created out of their protagonists.

At the one end of the spectrum of visibility is the phenomenon of the "Venus Hottentot", who has existed for centuries as a hypervisible black stereotype, while the woman behind the stereotype, Saartjie Baartman barely registers in public memory. Parks' play *Venus* revives Baartman as the woman who was rendered invisible, whose reality was made to disappear into the creation of hypervisible icon. As the Venus Hottentot, Baartman became a stereotype for her race, for black women, their sexuality and body type, in Western discourses and in cultural imagination. When she was alive, Baartman was exhibited in nineteenth century freak shows because her body type, in particular steatopygia, the condition which includes the layer of fat on her bottom created a particular sexual fascination for her white audiences. This fascination even extended to influencing fashion and led to the creation of the "bustle" in Victorian dresses which emulated Baartman's physiognomy and was also popularly known as the "Hottentot bustle" (Hobson 61). Later Baartman's dead body was dissected as a scientific curiosity by Georges

Cuvier, a nineteenth century naturalist, to prove the African race as sub-human. Her genitalia were exhibited in a jar to display the "apron", that is the extra skin covering the labia, as scientific evidence of the differences between European and African races. Thus, what became encapsulated within the appellation of the Venus Hottentot were both the nineteenth century fears and the attractions for black people, in particular for black women. As Hobson notes that the "Black Venus is an enticing representation of sexualized, exotic black femininity, the Savage Hottentot is a repulsive icon of fear and monstrosity" (21). Within nineteenth century Western scientific discourse on race, Baartman as the Venus Hottentot became an exotic sexualized lens that would be applied to black women, no matter how they looked, where they came from, or how different they were from Baartman. Subsequently, from nineteenth century onwards, at some level, all black women were perceived to be the Venus Hottentot. While presenting the nineteenth century sexualised lens Parks' play simultaneously dismantles this racist gaze to make the audience aware of the frames and discourses within which Baartman is being pinned to make her into the Venus Hottentot.

The play *Venus* was first performed in the Joseph Papp Public Theatre in 1996 and later Off Broadway at the Signature Theatre in 2017. The play won two Obie Awards in 1996, of which one Obie Award was for Parks' playwriting. With *Venus* Parks initiated an intense and involved dialogue as the play's first critical reception had mixed reviews: the play was considered a "strangely flat work" in which the themes of racial and sexual exploitation were a "protracted exercise in the obvious" (Brantley, "Of an Erotic" C3); contrarily the play was also an "inter-racial, inter-sexual, and inter-cultural pageant" where Parks "portray[ed] the humiliation of blacks in white society without complaint or indictment" (Brustein 29); or the play "reifies the perverse imperial mindset" (J. Young 670). As a revival of Baartman's life, the

play *Venus* revives the process of Baartman's erasure from history. In the play Saartjie Baartman never appears by her name, only as The Girl in the first two scenes of the play, and from the third scene onwards as The Venus. Parks' decision not to name Baartman mirrors Baartman's fate, as with both names in the play Baartman is present, yet she is not. Parks' re-staging of Baartman's life begins with the reminder "thuh Venus Hottentot is dead", a literal reminder that, yes, the character in the play, and the icon in history, is dead (*Venus* 3). But more importantly, in line with my argument, that this is a symbolic reminder to make us remember that Saartjie Baartman is also dead, ghosted long before Venus Hottentot actually died. From Venus' death with which the play begins, the plot circles back to the very beginning in Scene 31 set in South Africa and moves in a reverse linear direction back to Scene 1, when Venus actually dies in Paris. With this circular structure of the plot the play ends where it began, with the death of Venus Hottentot. In *Venus* Baartman's journey from anonymity to hypervisibility follows the real life journey of Baartman, the play moves from South Africa when Baartman is The Girl who travels to London and then Paris where she will be exhibited as The Venus. During this journey Baartman is sold by The Brother to Mother-Showman, who in turn sells The Venus to Baron Docteur. These characters are based on Saartjie Baartman's real life owners, Hendrick Cezar, S. Réaux, and Georges Cuvier. However, the play does not adhere strictly to all the historical facts as Parks sought to "question the history of history" itself and with this play embraced history's "unrecorded truths" (Sellar 50). Parks, while defining what a black play is, writes that it will "crack open" the minds and the hearts of audiences, to "reset" the minds and hearts that have "healed up" over time, but like bones reset by quacks, people's thoughts and perceptions have "healed up wrong" ("New Back Math" 583). Consequently, Parks seeks to "open" up our minds to viewing Baartman as a woman with many possibilities, not as the misrepresentation of her as

the Venus Hottentot depicted in racist nineteenth century history and science. Parks' liberties with the historical material is an attempt to make the audience re-evaluate and re-assess their thoughts and perceptions of the stereotype of Venus Hottentot that is projected onto black women.

Parks' next play *In the Blood* premiered at the Joseph Papp Public Theatre in 1999. Unlike the mixed critical reception of *Venus*, *In the Blood* was favorably applauded as an "extraordinary" play which leaves the audience "feeling pity and terror", "thrilled", and "comforted by its mastery" (M. Jefferson no pg). Existing on the bottom rung of society, the play's protagonist Hester is a poor black mother of five children by different unknown fathers. She is on welfare with no skills or education, and has no job prospects. Consequently, Hester is an easy person to dismiss, to forget, to judge, and to exploit. Her reality, however cannot be summed up by these facts about her life, although the characters in the play, including the Welfare lady, the "spay" doctor, her friend Amira Gringa, and the evangelical priest, easily do so. As the story progresses, Hester's world keeps contracting, the sky keeps falling in and it becomes more and more difficult for Hester to make ends meet for her family: "ends got further apart" for her (*In* 46). I will look at how *In the Blood*, as a play that is about sexual exploitation, presents the process of ghosting of the protagonist Hester La Negrita as a black woman whose perceived reality is unappetising or unacceptable, therefore the process of rendering her absent ensues. Additionally, I examine the complicity of various classes and professionals, as represented by the characters of Welfare, Amiga, and Hester's "spay" doctor, in this process of absenting of Hester's reality. *In the Blood* is a play I contend, that looks into how an acceptable reality is constructed, sustained, and perpetuated as the only reality of a black woman on welfare by effacing Hester La Negrita's contradictory and fluid realities. Gordon in her study *Ghostly*

Matters says, "that which appears to be not there is often a seething presence, acting on and often meddling with taken-for-granted realities" (8). When people like Hester are made to disappear, their realities re-emerge as "seething presence[s]" that disturb and disallow the persistence of "taken-for-granted realities". My analysis, in line with Bianca Del Villano, examines how "the ghost opens a space of interrogation" (14). Hester opens this "space of interrogation", an interrogation of the socio-cultural, historical, medical and political milieus wherein as a black victim of sexual violence she is erased and rendered a ghostly presence. Moreover, this play requires us to understand that any representation of truth and any narration of reality requires a searching for the invisible, and a probing into the gloomy shadows and blind spots of society that have been populated with "seething presence[s]" such as Hester.

Hester La Negrita challenges, problematises, and deconstructs a number of stereotypes about black women and their sexuality and about black mothers, arising out of, but not restricted to, the stereotype of the "Welfare Queen". During Ronald Reagan's presidency the welfare policy in America became increasingly racialized and gendered. By re-casting poor African American mothers as the "Welfare Queen" (a stereotyping that began during Reagan's presidential campaign with Reagan's political rhetoric that made repeated exaggerated references to Linda Taylor), the Reagan administration ensured that the state discourses on poverty issues would divest the state's responsibility to the poor people. This led to a conversion of the poor black people from needing or deserving state help to sponging off American tax payers' hard work. This conversion further provided the American public with a racial and gendered image of the "Welfare Queen" to despise. With Hester La Negrita, Parks initiates a dismantling of the convenient scapegoat encapsulated in the perception of the "Welfare Queen" as a burden on American tax payers. Hester's reality, though unseen by characters on the stage, is nevertheless

made visible to the audience to challenge and destabilize the debilitating "Welfare Queen" discourse and political rhetoric in which poor black women like Hester are implicated or are symbolised.

As resistance narratives both of Parks' plays challenge the visions about black women as seen through the stereotypes of the Venus Hottentot and the Welfare Queen in Western discourses. I further argue that Parks' plays complicate any straight forward narrative of exploitation by blurring clear cut lines between characters who are exploited victims of oppressive systems as merely pitiable figures, and characters who resourcefully try to use the oppressive system to gain some advantages for themselves, and thus seem to buttress the stereotypes. Parks talks about her character Baartman as "multi-faceted. She's [a] vain, beautiful, intelligent, and, yes, [a] complicit " character (M. Williams C1). Parks' categorization of her character Baartman as "complicit" holds the danger of opening up minefields of criticism by implying that the oppressed people, in particular the real Baartman was responsible for her own oppression. Indeed, this was how the play was perceived at its reception: Ben Brantley wrote in *The New York Times* Theatre Review in his article titled "Of an Erotic Freak Show and the Lesson Therein," that Park's character was not "an uncomprehending victim" but "[t]his woman is clearly an accomplice in her own humiliation" (no pg). However, it is important to see Parks' intention in creating Baartman as a character who is strategically manoeuvring the oppressive system to her own advantage, thereby presenting Baartman as a resourceful and resilient survivor. Parks considers her plays to be "a blue print of an event: a way of creating and rewriting history through the medium of literature" ("Possession" 4). In *Venus* this "re-writing" of history re-writes Baartman as a character who is both an exploited victim, and as a woman "complicit" in using the prejudices of the racist oppressive system to her own advantage, thereby

reinforcing those prejudices within the context of the play (and for some in the audience as well). Hester, too, is an easy target. As a person she has been sexually exploited, coerced, and gang raped, but in turn she also tries unsuccessfully to use sex for personal gain. The blurred lines between the exploiter and exploited person in Hester do not allow for an easy or comfortable interpretation of her character. She both is and is not always a victim. Nevertheless, Hester, like *King Lear* is "more sinn'd against than sinning" (Shakespeare *King Lear* 3. 2. 59). By problematising the straight forward narrative of sexual exploitation Parks discourages an identification with or judgement against her protagonists. It is not easy to only pity or to only condemn them. I emphasize that this mode of unease is theatrically effective as it requires the audience to grapple with effaced presences, like Baartman and Hester, who are ambivalent characters. Rather than comfortably summing up Parks' characters as pitiable figures of sexual exploitation, Parks demands of her audiences to clear up their vision and see her characters as more than the sum of biased preconceptions inherent in either the victim or victimizer categorization.

Both protagonists Baartman and Hester are not merely victims of sexual exploitation as has been discussed so far. Rather their plight is worse! Both become prey of the scientific method that has labeled, and the medical scalpel that has cut into them. Their bodily integrity is violated: their bodies are invaded, cut up, and their body parts are cut out without their consent. Their tragedy does not end here. This bodily abuse is compounded when their reality is made to disappear in scientific and medical discourses. It is within the frameworks of nineteenth century Western science and within the Eugenics policy in America, Baartman and poor black women like Hester are rendered absented presences. Thus, I assert that absenting a character's real self though bodily alteration by scientific and medical procedures, and then reinforcing this physical

alteration through strategic invisibility in Western discourses are forms of violation which needs to be read as manifestations of the rape act. Parks' heroines present us with the challenge to recognise and to keep on seeing them, even as they are made to vanish from sight to be replaced by distorted projections. In consequence, they continue to haunt and linger in the textual and theatrical spaces.

Aishah Rahman's play *Only in America* theatrically re-presents the process of ghosting through the protagonist Cassandra to exemplify how the real Anita Hill was absented during the Senate hearings. Cassandra's physical presence on stage becomes problematic when another character, the cleaning lady Scat woman chooses not to see her. For Rahman, Cassandra's being rendered unseen as a victim of sexual harassment in the play mirrors Professor Hill's disappearance in the witness chair when she testifies against Justice Thomas. Professor Hill's testimony became submerged in the narratives that were created to "understand" her experience of verbal sexual harassment by the Republican senators. As a black woman, Professor Hill provided a problematic figure to the all white and all male Republican senators, who in their efforts to protect the President's nominee for the Supreme Court intentionally made Professor Hill disappear with their investigative questioning. The process of actively submerging Professor Hill's testimony of verbal sexual abuse with countering narratives which portray Professor Hill in suspect terms by the Republican Senators, and even some sections of the public, forms the basis of Rahman's play. Cassandra is a deliberately unseen presence on the stage who dramatically re-presents Professor Hill's experiential reality as a witness during the Senate hearings.

All three plays through their protagonists, Baartman, Hester, and Cassandra, not only look at the process of disappearing of these characters in the play, but the plays also serve as counter narrative to the process of looking. The plays re-deploy the gaze when they look back at

the dominant Western discourses. This re-deployment allows Baartman and Professor Hill as real people, and poor black mothers embedded in the Welfare Queen stereotype, to re-materialize through the characters of Baartman, Cassandra, and Hester. This looking back allows the audience to re-engage with conversations surrounding the stereotypical images, and to recognize not only how the real people are ghosted within discourses, but more importantly how this process of ghosting is a form of violence of the dominant cultural vision.

Venus

Parks' theatrical re-visiting of Baartman's life as Venus Hottentot in the play *Venus*, is a re-visiting of the historical annals to reconsider, revise, and re-write the history of one woman's misrepresentation and misperception. Despite two centuries of public exposure and notoriety as Venus Hottentot, only vague information is available about Baartman, thereby making Baartman a convenient person to have been sculpted into various discourses as Venus Hottentot. Baartman was born in 1789 in Kaffaria in the interior of Cape Colony of South Africa belonging to the Khoi-Khoi (or Khoi-San) people of South Africa. While working domestically, according to some accounts as a field hand, for Dutch settler Peter Cezar she (presumably) agreed to work for his brother Hendrick Cezar by being publically exhibited, although no evidence exists of this agreement. Another account documents Baartman attracting the attention of a ship doctor William Dunlop with whom she agreed to visit England where she could make a profit by exhibiting herself. In London she was exhibited in semi-nude, apart from a painted face and a feather apron around her waist, from 1810 to 1814 at 225 Piccadilly. There were also private viewing which suggest the possibility of her being sexually violated or prostituted, although this possibility remains undocumented. In 1814 Cezar sold her to S. Réaux, a showman of wild animals, who exhibited Baartman (alongside a baby rhinoceros) from eleven in the morning till

ten at night for over a year. It was while she was being exhibited at a social function for French politicians that she attracted the attention of Napoleon's personal surgeon, the French anatomist and naturalist, Georges Cuvier. After her death in 1815 (the cause of her death remains a mystery: multiple accounts exist claiming misdiagnosis, syphilis, tuberculosis, or alcohol poisoning) her body was dissected by Cuvier. Cuvier sought to scientifically prove Baartman, and through her black people's location, as the lowest human species in the Great Chain of Being. Cuvier ensured that death and dissection were not the end of her notoriety, nor of the public's fascination with her by making a plaster cast of her body, and by preserving her genitals and her brains in a glass jar. Baartman's remains were then showcased for nearly two centuries after her death in Musée de l'Homme. The Musée de l'Homme kept her remains on display before they were shelved by museum curators because they were exciting the public, tourists, and visitors to sexual indiscretions such as groping and masturbation. Her remains were finally returned to her home in South Africa for a proper burial in 2002, eight years after President Nelson had requested the French Government to return Saartjie Baartman.

Where is the real Saartjie Baartman in these two centuries of exhibition, display, and hypervisibility? Cultural and postmodern theorist, Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulacrum becomes a pertinent framework for analysing the operations of the annihilating gaze that has marked Baartman. For Baudrillard, simulacrum is what comes to overwhelm the real, nullifies the real, and eventually appears to precede the real. He exemplifies the operation of simulacrum through the analogy of the map which becomes more real than the territory it marks and describes. Baudrillard theorises that the "territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it. It is nevertheless the map that precedes the territory ... that engenders the territory" (1). The iconic figure of Venus Hottentot can be seen as a simulated image that is reminiscent of the

Baudrillardian map that "precedes", "survives", and "engenders" Saartjie Baartman. The unreal reality of Baartman, or an "un/reality" as I call it, is created through the hypervisibility of Venus Hottentot over centuries. Who Baartman really is, remains unseen. Performance studies scholar Phelan in *Unmarked* remarks that "[v]isibility is a trap; it summons surveillance and the law, it provokes voyeurism, fetishism, the colonialist/ imperial appetite for possession" (6). Thus for centuries Baartman has remained, in line with Phelan, visibly trapped as the Venus Hottentot. She has been consumed and possessed by the hungry, voyeuristic, fetishistic, and colonialist gaze. Her consumption and her possession has been perpetuated through the dissecting gaze that has cut into Baartman, cut out who she was, and marked her as the Venus Hottentot. In the play Parks' creative liberties with the historical material offers us possibilities that blur the lines of the Baudrillardian map. The play *Venus* asks us as critical readers of history to re-view the discourses and stereotypes that have been grafted onto Baartman to create the hypervisible Venus Hottentot as a sexual oddity and fetish easily available for normative consumption.

I examine this creation of the un/real Venus through the dissecting gaze of the three choruses in *Venus*: the chorus of eight wonders, the chorus of the court, and the chorus of anatomists. These three choruses embody three Western discourses: sociological, judicial, and scientific, that together represent a case for looking, seeing, and gazing as forms of bodily violation. As well as the choruses, I also examine Venus' various owners, The Brother, Mother-Showman, and Baron Docteur, who come to embody the racist nineteenth century sociological and scientific gaze contributing to the Venus Hottentot phenomenon. Parks' play actively engages with the complicated history of looking at Baartman, as she tells Shelby Jiggets in an interview: "there's a lot of watching in *Venus*. In *Venus*, the doctor is watching Venus, and the Resurrectionist is watching everybody. Then actually at the end he becomes the watch, the death

watch on Venus. So, it's all this kind of looking. There's a whole lot of looking going on" (313).

Is Parks' *Venus* another chapter of "all this kind of looking" in the long history of looking at Saartjie Baartman? Or does Parks engage anew with the phenomenon of Venus Hottentot in order to redress the politics of violation and wounding inherent in the act of looking?

Furthermore, does Parks' *Venus* re-direct how we look in order to disengage our gaze? Very conscious of my own gaze, all these questions anchor me, as I too, look at the character of Baartman, while examining the multiple ways she is still being looked at and looked through in the play, and how the play looks back with a counter gaze.

Parks regards the theatre as an "incubator" where she can re-member and re-stage history: "I'm working Theatre like an incubator to create 'new' historical events. I'm re-membering and staging historical events, which through their happening on stage, are ripe for inclusion in the canon of history" ("Possession" 5). Thus Parks' "re-membering" of history works to excavate Baartman, the woman whose reality was obliterated under the impetus to make Baartman a representative of her people and her race. Inherent in the theatrical re-visiting of Baartman as the Venus Hottentot is Parks' impulse to include other possible versions or visions of Baartman as promising realities destabilizing the documented history of the Venus Hottentot's centuries long exhibition. Furthermore, the play highlights how exhibitionism operates: it manipulates and plays on people's ignorance, their lack of knowledge, and their fears. The play shows how this very ignorance and fear turns the imagined and the unreal into real, to create an un/reality that then masquerades as 'real'. Exhibitionism, spectacle, and hypervisibility replace the real Baartman with the un/real Venus Hottentot.

Venus Hottentot's history, I maintain, is a simulated discourse. This discourse had "factually" placed Baartman, under the white man's racist historical and scientific eye as nature's

anomaly, or as "too" natural, to be more precise in a primeval state for European civilization. Either possibility made her humanity expendable because her very status as a human being was made questionable. The play takes us to the very beginning, when Saartjie Baartman is an ordinary and unknown girl. The Girl is shown, through stage direction, as a "*meticulous and vigorous*" worker while she scrubs the floor so that "*the floor shines*" (*Venus* 18). This seemingly small and inconsequential detail is important, as a hint to us of who Saartjie Baartman could have been, before the notoriety of Venus Hottentot devoured her. As the European gaze falls on Baartman she will be consumed by it, as it overwhelmingly carves out categories to define, describe, and prescribe who and what she is. The Man and The Brother, representing the historical Dutch settlers Peter Cezar and his brother Hendrick Cezar, mark Baartman as "a splendid freak" (*Venus* 23). The process of creating the un/reality of Baartman as Venus Hottentot begins in this very scene as this hard working girl disappears before the European gaze of The Man and The Brother. Baudrillard stipulates that the fourth phase of simulacrum is "the *absence* of a profound reality", where the image has "no relation to any reality whatsoever", and comes to stand in for the real (6). Scene 31 begins with Baartman's immersion in the process of construction of the simulated image. As a woman she is seen as and will become a "splendid freak" for the European people. This characterization of Baartman has "no relation to [her] reality whatsoever" but initiates the process of her "*absence*" in discourse.

The Brother tempts The Girl to come to England where she will be presented as an "African Dancing Princess" with the prospect of "mak[ing] a mint" by dancing (*Venus* 25). In this scene, while the incredulous prospect of being a princess, ("A Princess. Me?") is tempting for Baartman, she repeatedly says, "Im a little shy" (*Venus* 25). As the play proceeds, and more people look at and look through Baartman, her initial shyness at the prospect of public

exhibitionism in this scene is forgotten. Rather, as she becomes more and more visible to the public eye, Baartman as the girl who is hard working, meticulous, and shy disappears from view. With these initial fleeting impressions Parks brings us possibilities of who the real Baartman might have been. She asks of us, as spectators and as readers of history, to see beyond the images and myths perpetuated as facts in building up Venus Hottentot as a "splendid freak". For Baudrillard, images are not "a sign [that] could refer to the depth of meaning", rather he invests images with murderous intent, reminding us of "the murderous power of images, murderers of the real" (Baudrillard 5). From this scene onwards, Baartman's journey first to London and then to Paris, is a journey in absenting or in murdering the real woman. As Baartman's hypervisible and hyperreal simulacrum, the Venus Hottentot emerges, it leaves room only for "the orbital recurrence" of her simulated images in various discourses (5). In the history of looking at Venus Hottentot, in the simulated reality of the Venus Hottentot, and through the Western misconception of who, what or how black women are, when the Venus Hottentot becomes the lens through which black women are viewed, the "murderous power of images" dominates.

From the setting of South Africa in Scene 31 the play moves to when Saartjie Baartman first arrived in England in 1810. Her situation is presented through the Chorus of the Eight Human Wonders. This Chorus occupies a peripheral space in society where it exists to substantiate the normative body. Collectively this group of grotesque bodies can only be safely seen in a contained spaces such as freak shows. The chorus repeatedly debates whether it is better to tell The Girl what is in store for her or not:

tell her some lies

Or the bald truth: that her lifell go from rough to worse.

Or we could say nothing at all.

What difference will it make?

Shes sunk. Theres no escape from this place. (*Venus* 29)

Historically it is a time when England had abolished slavery, yet for the Eight Human Wonders as for The Girl, their condition of captivity is reminiscent of slavery. For them there is "no escape from this place" (*Venus* 29). They are the only ones who notice that

[s]he looks like she is about to cry

Go up to her say something nice. Cheer her up make her feel welcome

I remember my first day here.

I didn't know which end was up. (*Venus* 29)

This is the first instance in the play where the trope of tears is seen by people who recognise Baartman's pain as they are fellow sufferers. The gaze of the Chorus, as people whose suffering makes their vision clearer, is a vision which comes from a site of difference. As this site is considered an anomaly it brings attention to how problematic and how blind the normative vision is. By situating Baartman's reality as clearly seen only from a point of difference from the normative standard, Parks' makes us question the "normality" of the normative criterion. Later Baartman's pain and her tears will remain unseen, though physically obvious to the audience, they disappear from view, just like Baartman herself though highly visible will disappear from view.

This Chorus is owned by Mother-Showman, who becomes Baartman's next owner after The Brother. For "just a penny and a half", Mother-Showman cajoles the audience that "you can gawk as long as you like./ Waiting for yr gaze here inside/ theyre all freaks and all alive" (*Venus* 40-41). She invites the regulating "gaze" of society; provides opportunities to "gawk" at the "freaks" who by some miracle are "alive"! Even though it is the Chorus of Wonders who are

being "gawk[ed]" at, they still have sight in a society blinded by its very normativity.

Philosopher and psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva, in *Powers of Abjection* looks at abjection in terms of what the normal body rejects which include elements such as blood, pus, or vomit. Abject elements are what the body banishes, yet these banished or rejected elements do not cease to impact the normative body. For Kristeva such abject elements "disturbs identity, system, [and] order" with their "in-between, [and] the ambiguous" state (4). The Chorus of Wonders form such a site of abjection as the existence of their bodily differences can potentially "disturb" the order and systems of a normal society. It is from this "in-between" and "ambiguous" site of abjection that the Chorus sees a fellow sufferer in The Girl. Their recognition of her pain and her disorientation guides the audience to see the same. While the Chorus of Wonders provides a sympathetic countering gaze to the normative gaze with its propensity for surveillance, it nevertheless positions Baartman as another fellow freak. Thus, their sympathetic gaze can be just as wounding as the normative gaze. Additionally, by positioning Baartman within the Amazing Wonders as the only gaze that sees her clearly, the state of Baartman's own normalcy continues to disappear.

Mother-Showman introduces her show of wonders as the "most lowly and unfortunate beings in God's universe" who will "surprise, intrigue, horrify and disgust" the audiences (*Venus* 40). Whatever deviates from the norm will paradoxically both attract and repulse. The grotesque body provides an interesting framework for understanding the paradox of desiring yet disposable bodies such as the Chorus of Wonders. Here physical appearance becomes the central element for creating categories of human beings. Russian philosopher and literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin considers a grotesque body as "a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created" (Bakhtin 317). Within this milieu Baartman's body

becomes a grotesque body in the Bakhtinian sense for her white masters, first for Mother-Showman and later for the Baron Docteur. She is not merely different from them, as in belonging to a different race, that is, as the "not-me" Other. Toni Morrison in *Playing in the Dark* highlights the process of Othering as the Eurocentric tendency to view blackness as "the projection of the not-me ... a fabricated brew of darkness, otherness, alarm, and desire" (38). Baartman is in the "act of becoming" for her various owners. She is never a complete being for them until they assign a distorted meaning and a demeaning value to her. In their quest for economic or scientific exploitation Baartman is never a finished product. Contrarily, she has the potential for being "continuously built" up and re-fashioned -- or as Parks puts it "dis(-re)member[ed]" -- to be repackaged as Venus Hottentot, the "Big Bottomed Girl" drawing in crowds (*Venus* 95).

For Mother-Showman, Baartman with her mixture of the erotic and exotic qualities as encapsulated in her appellation Venus Hottentot, is an embodiment of the goddess of love, and a representative of her people, the Hottentot race. She will save Mother-Showman's "little show [that] was in the red" when Baartman's "big bottoms friendsll" will make the show profitable and put "us safely in the black!" (*Venus* 45) Baartman is going to be exploited beyond a "grotesque" or an "abject" body, as just a "splendid freak", like the other wonders. By constantly drawing attention to her posterior Mother-Showman will make her represent a sexualized object. Theorists such as feminist film scholar Laura Mulvey have identified how women are exploited when they are made to embody a visual sexual appeal only. Mulvey in her essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" locates women as a leit-motif of erotic spectacle in cinema. For Mulvey when women are cast specifically to invite the male gaze their only function is "*to-be-looked-at-ness*" (11). As Mother-Showman predicts in scene 27, and as history narrates it, Venus

Hottentot's exhibit was monetarily profitable for her exhibitors because she was promoted and projected with this "*to-be-looked-at-ness*". Mother-Showman promoted Baartman's "big bottom" as sexually appealing with an exotic Othered difference. Scene 27 ends with the Negro Resurrectionist reading from Robert Chambers' *Book of Days*, "[w]ith an intensely ugly figure, distorted beyond all European notions of beauty, she was said by those to whom she belonged to possess precisely the kind of shape which is most admired among her countrymen, the Hottentots" (*Venus* 21). Here the "European notions of beauty" is the standard against which Baartman is judged to have "an intensely ugly figure", as a distortion of the norm. Yet beauty is a prescriptive and a confining ideal. Ugliness, on the other hand, like Bakhtinian grotesqueness, resists confinement within cultural norms. Literary critic and philosopher Umberto Eco contrasts beauty with ugliness: "Beauty is, in some ways, boring. Even if its concept changes through the ages, nevertheless a beautiful object must always follow certain rules ... Ugliness is unpredictable and offers an infinite range of possibilities" (10). Mother-Showman's creation of Venus Hottentot is outside the standard rules demarcating European notions of beauty. With the "Great and Horrid Wonder of her great heathen buttocks" Baartman "offers an infinite range of possibilities" for creation to Mother-Showman to exploit (*Venus* 52).

Mother-Showman invokes a number of paradoxical responses from her audiences by promoting her product, Venus Hottentot's body as "Great", "Horrid", and a "Wonder". All three qualities converge to explicate the infinite possibilities of the phenomenon of Venus Hottentot. Couched in terms of contradictions, Mother-Showman makes Baartman's posterior both great and horrid, that is, appealing and unappealing simultaneously. Mother-Showman's fixation of Baartman's body (or rather one part of her body "her great heathen buttocks") is both in terms of a sexual fetish and a commodity fetish (*Venus* 52). The elements of eroticism and exoticness

amalgamate to fetishise Venus Hottentot's body for European audiences. This fetishism has created a fascination with black women's posteriors that continues until today. Destiny's Child, for example rose to stardom crooning "My body too bootylicious for you". Rap artists also paid homage to black women's posterior in songs such as Sir Mix-A-Lot's "Baby got back", Mystikal's "Shake Ya Ass", and 2 Live Crew's "booty rap" aesthetics. These examples show continued contemporary sexual partiality for black women's bottoms. This fascination has been marketed quite profitably through celebrity stars such as Jennifer Lopez, and appropriated by reality TV personality Kim Kardashian, and Latin pop star Shakira through her hit song "Hips don't lie". bell hooks elaborates that the "protruding butt is seen as an indication of a heightened sexuality": Venus Hottentot was the original icon on whose posterior had been erected the appeal of this "heightened sexuality" ("Selling Hot Pussy" 123).

It is important to see *how* Baartman is being projected. Baartman is an object of desire made available to see, touch, paw, poke or worse: "Go on Sir, go on./ Feel her if you like", or "Paw her folks. Hands on. Go on have yr pleasure" invites Mother-Showman to her audience (*Venus* 54-55). The language of invitation being used by Mother-Showman ("[f]eel her", "[p]aw her", "have yr pleasure") are blatant sexual opportunities. Critical and Postcolonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha co-relates fetish with identity formation, as that which "gives access to an 'identity' which is predicated as much on mastery and pleasure as it is on anxiety and defence" (20). Mother-Showman specifically projects Baartman's "heathen buttocks" as a sexual fetish which will grant men a masculine identity predicated on their sexual "mastery": "Yr not a man -- until youve hadder" compels Madam-Showman (*Venus* 45). By co-relating a re-affirmation of manhood through sexually mastering Baartman, Mother-Showman presents an invitation and a challenge to her audience. Venus Hottentot becomes a sexual fetish where she is too strange to

be desired (a recognition of the difference inherent in her "heathen" body), and yet paradoxically a mastery of this very difference and strangeness is what guarantees proof of a man's sexual prowess. Cultural historian and theorist Hartmut Böhme further elaborates on the "difference" inherent in the sexual fetishised object where "fetishism is constructed as the paradigm of all perversions" (296). Desiring Venus Hottentot therefore, is being promoted as a "manly" pursuit; yet a "[h]orrid" perversity underlines this manly pursuit where desiring her means desiring an "intensely ugly figure" (*Venus* 46). Nonetheless she possesses "the kind of shape which is most admired among her countrymen, the Hottentots" (*Venus* 46). She is desirable for the very reason she should not be because her sexual allure is presented as a "perversion" of the standard.

Is it merely a strange and exotic creature that the Mother-Showman is inviting the audience to see and feel? Or is she actively creating a market demand by investing a value in Baartman? Philosopher and economist Karl Marx looks at "commodity fetishism" as a process in a system of exchange that invests commodities with an "enigmatical character", as a "mysterious thing", or as having a "fantastic form" (37-38). These are values that are not inherent in the commodities themselves, but a perception is created so it seems as such. Mother-Showman creates this commodity fetishism by projecting onto The Venus an exotic sexual value, and investing her body with a unique sexual mystique that will make her consumers into men. A perversion, yet a sexual challenge! Thus the Venus Hottentot emerges, as more than an "Othered" or a "not-me" projection for Mother-Showman's audiences, but as a commodity fetish with an exotic and an erotic sexual allure.

Baartman, however as the woman behind the projected sexual and commodity fetish, remains withdrawn from this process: "standing there with yr lips pokin out/ like uh wooden lady on uh wooden ship" (*Venus* 52). She is unwilling to follow Mother-Showman's directives to be

inviting: "look uhlive/ smile or somethin/ jesuss/ stroke yr feathers/ smoke yr pipe" (*Venus* 52). She is inanimate, "uh wooden lady" who does not "look uhlive", much less alluring her audiences by using sexually stimulating gestures like smiling or stroking her feathers. Here Parks destabilises the historical narrative that represents the Venus Hottentot as a hypersexual phenomenon to re-direct the audiences' attention to Baartman's undocumented suffering, to draw attention to her trauma which did not make it into documented history. Plain for the audience to see is Baartman's unwillingness to invite or incite the audience. Though she is placed center stage, and is the center of attention as Venus Hottentot in these scenes where Mother-Showman is inviting her bodily and sexual violations, Parks shows Baartman's mental and emotional retreat in the face of public humiliations. The "wooden" expressions and body movement are indicative of both a reluctance to be part of Mother-Showman's scheme, and of an emotional insulation that is symptomatic of victims of sexual violence. This emotional and mental withdrawal is now recognised as a survival strategy to deal with the trauma, especially if the ongoing sexual trauma is long term. These "wooden" expressions also destabilize critical misreading of Parks' intentions when she characterized Venus as "complicit". Herein, it is clear that Venus, despite claiming in the Court room scene that she is here to make a "mint" is nevertheless a victim. Yet Venus Hottentot is accorded nothing by those that speak for her or of her: she is not a victim or a sufferer, only a fetishized commodity to be used for sexual exploitation.

The next chorus to direct its piercing gaze on Venus Hottentot is the Chorus of the Court in Scene 20. It is a scene where justice comes drenched in self-righteous and self-congratulatory tones. This chorus is reflective of more than justice being carried out: it reveals how racial prejudices underlie the discourse of nineteenth century law and justice. This scene is based on the actual trial brought forth against Venus Hottentot's exhibitors for perpetuating slavery and

indecent in the post-abolition era in England. It was fought by the Attorney-General before the Court of the King's Bench in 1814 on behalf of the African Association. In his opening statement the Attorney General applied "to the Court on behalf of this unfortunate female who was exhibited to the public under circumstances of peculiar disgrace to a civilized country" (qtd. in Altick 270). In addition, he had affidavits from people who had visited the "unfortunate woman" as evidence, but the "details would not be fit for the court", as the nature of the exhibition was "too offensive and indecorous" (qtd. in Altick 270). Repeatedly, the Attorney General uses terms "unfortunate female" and "unfortunate woman" but never Baartman's name, so that it could be any "unfortunate" woman for whom the legal system is pursuing justice. Thus, from the very beginning of the court case the Attorney General sets the tone of erasure, where he will cancel out Baartman's reality as an individual person, to speak of her or speak for her, but never to her or with her. Baartman becomes an absent presence in the legal discourse that seeks justice for her to sustain its semblance of a "civilised country". She is everywhere yet nowhere in the legal discourse.

Parks mirrors this process of erasure in the play. In the courtroom scene with its 10 parts Baartman as a person is hardly there. What is present is another setting for the exhibitionism of Venus Hottentot as a spectacle. The Negro Resurrectionist begins this Scene 20A with a footnote, a musical extract from R. Toole-Scott's *The Circus and Allied Arts*, showing that Venus Hottentot's body as a spectacle on display:

And now good people let us go

To see this wondrous sight

We'll have uh gawk, toss her uh sweet

Such recreation can't be beat. (*Venus* 72)

Even though the audience of the spectacle changes, its nature does not. Reminiscent of Mother-Showman, the legal proceedings offer another opportunity to "gawk" at the "wondrous sight" where Baartman is put on display for the "good people['s]" entertainment. Parks reinforces the idea of the court case being entertainment as the legal proceedings begin with "Let's get this show on the road" (*Venus* 73). Thus, Parks presents the court case as more of a theatrical piece than a means of wielding justice to ensure that Baartman was protected against her exploiters and that she got her fair share of earnings. It was a show put on to uphold the "honour and credit of this country" where Baartman is the means put to this glorified end (*Venus* 73). During the entire proceedings she is held in jail, a prisoner who is ironically being defended as a victim in need of protection, while her exhibitors as defendants roam free. Her earlier cage and the jail become synonymous: both mirror her actual status where Baartman is incarcerated both literally and in a legal discourse that silences her, that lock down an image and a representation of her.

Parks adds to the spectacle with the testimony of witnesses. While key witnesses such as Mother-Showman and Baron Docteur never appear, the testimony of witness 2 (that is based on hearsay as she "saw nothing" herself) becomes a macabre joke on the legal system (*Venus* 77). Witness 2's testimony relates to what her dead husband had said to her of his visits to Baartman. Her testimony gives equal weight to representing Baartman as a victim of molestation as well as Baartman possessing pagan powers. A case in point is the feather that Baartman gave the witness's husband which apparently resulted in fatalities: "[a] fight ensued. 3 men died. Uh little boy went mad. Uh woman lost her child ... the shock of her killed him, I think, cause two days later he was dead" (*Venus* 77). Thus, even while Baartman is a victim the witness's gaze marks her as unnatural. What is reflected here are the superstitious fears, anxieties, and insecurities of the masses being projected as possible sorcery onto Baartman. When she is perceived as having

magical unnatural powers, which hold her inadvertently responsible for these fatalities, Baartman's victim status is problematised. Parks posits the question to her audience whether the evidence of Baartman's mistreatment by her audience when they "poked her", "pinched her", and made her utter "uh sigh or two" to "protest the pawing" (all acts witnessed by the Witness 2's husband, as testified by the witness 2 in court) get canceled out against the supposed magical powers of the tokens she bestows on her audience? (*Venus* 77) Parks develops this idea by contrasting these fatalities which create a dark picture of the Venus Hottentot, with what Baartman herself attributes to the feather: good luck, fertility, and aphrodisiac. Thus, Baartman's own voice tells of a more innocent attribution than the picture that is built by Witness 2 who sees Baartman as a threat. The opinion of the witness is reflective of the general perceptions of Baartman as different and threatening with even the Chorus of the Court asking her, "Are you a witch?" in Scene 20I (*Venus* 81).

Historically, the Venus Hottentot was never given a chance to tell her side of the story in the trial. Her point of view was conveyed in court through the Attorney General for the reason that she barely spoke Dutch. Parks' play rectifies this absence of voice by allowing Baartman to speak. Scene 20I begins with the Chorus of Court's harassment of Baartman on the stand, first bombarding her with questions without giving her a chance to utter a word. She is not being asked to answer, rather to "spit it out!" (*Venus* 81). And second, when she is unavailable for comment she is threatened: "Don't push us, Girl! We could lock you up for life!" (*Venus* 81). Even the tenor of the questions asked -- "Are you happy?/ Are you witch?/ ... Did you like it was it good?" -- reveals the prejudices of the Court as a system already implicated in the racist structure that is seeking to provide her justice (*Venus* 81). These questions show that the Chorus of the Court does not see her as an exploited woman, but one who possibly "like[d]" her

experiences. These questions are reminiscent of defence strategies in rape trials where the onus is put on the rape victims to prove their innocence, and of the patriarchal mindset which sees black victims of rape as "not entirely unwilling accomplices" in the crime committed against them (Carby 39). Similarly, the questions reveal that for the Court Venus Hottentot is presumed to be a "not entirely unwilling accomplice" in her own victimization and exploitation.

Baartman's answers during trial are wilfully misconstrued in Court. Rather it is easy to misunderstand her as the Chorus of the Court already views her as suspect. On the surface her reply "Im here to make a mint" positions her as "complicit" and reinforces how she is being seen by the Court (*Venus* 81). Consequently, Baartman is a scandalous woman who is "happy", "like[s] it", for whom it was "good". Yet if we regard her confession of "mak[ing] a mint" as being "complicit", and her exhibitions voluntary as the Court does, we will misread Parks' intentions. Parks defined her character Baartman as "multi-faceted. She's vain, beautiful, intelligent, and, yes, [a] complicit" character (M. Williams C1). This idea of being "complicit" is problematic as it seemingly holds Baartman as liable for her own mistreatment. Contrarily, Parks' use of "complicit" is not to add to Baartman's victimization, but to show Baartman's ability to use the biases and prejudices of the judicial system resourcefully to gain some advantages for herself. It is through Baartman's strategic rhetorical manoeuvring during the court scene that Parks breaks historical molds and offers fresh possibilities for us to re-view her. Baartman's intention of "making a mint" does not mean that she is willing or asking to be dehumanized, caged, and sexually exploited, but that she wants a chance to be free in the future. Her fears are centered on the goal of not returning home poor: "[a]fter all Ive gone through so far/ to go home penniless would be disgraceful" (*Venus* 81). Thus "mak[ing] a mint" will in the end justify or least make bearable all that she has suffered, sacrificed, and lost. Baartman's

answers reveal to the audience what her fears are, thus humanizing her for the audience. Sadly, the court hears what she says, but does not listen closely to her to understand what she means. Thus, her fears of going home as a failure essentially remain unsaid.

Parks did not want to write of Baartman as a mere victim. For Parks, black people are "encouraged to be narrow and simply address the race issue. We deserve so much more" (M. Williams C1). Thus she strives to write in a black reality that portrays black people as more than victims or sufferers, and to show their resilience and resourcefulness in face of oppression. During the court scene, Baartman is mentally agile when she resourcefully uses the Chorus of Court's views and biases to gain what she wants. When she is accused of "bear[ing] God's bad mark" and of "blacken[ing]-up the honor of our fair country", in a co-op play mode she uses these prejudicial ideas to convince the court not to be forcibly sent back to her home country:

If I bear thuh bad mark what better way to cleanse it off?

Showing my sinful person as a caution to you all could,

in the Lord's eyes

be a sort of

repentance

and I could wash off my dark mark. (*Venus* 82)

What is the "bad mark" here? For the chorus Baartman's color and her body, especially her bottom once again becomes a focal point in terms of marking her as an anomaly. Here the religious discourse is used within legal proceedings by the Chorus to reinforce racist demarcations. Baartman in turn plays on this idea of using the religious discourse to her advantage. If her body is the "God's bad mark" as claimed by the Chorus, then her only repentance in the "Lord's eyes" is not to cover up or go home, but to cleanse herself by using her

body to caution her audience. Although the legal discourse couched in religious terms marks Baartman, she adroitly negotiates this debasing discourse. This is not to suggest that Baartman actually believes what she is saying, nor is this Parks' intention. Rather, she shows an impressive presence of mind to convince the Court that it is in their best interests that she stays.

When Baartman is asked if she had ever been "indecent" or "nasty", her answer is simple, "Never./ No. I am just me" (*Venus* 83). Baartman has never been anything but herself; it is other people whose gaze designates her as "God's bad mark", or a possible witch. Baartman's successful appearance in Court is a performance act that imbibes elements of both "presentation" and "representation" in performance as described by Performance Studies scholar Vershawn A. Young. V. A. Young differentiates between representation as the "depiction of actions, ideas, laws and behaviors", and presentation as the "unscripted and deliberate behavior of everyday life" ("Performing Citizenship" 21). This distinction allows us to understand Baartman's appearance in Court as a performance, rather than a confession. Baartman is seen as "God's black mark", and she will even choose to "present" herself in those terms to the Chorus, yet her actions have always been "unscripted" irrespective of how they are viewed and represented. Her actions have always been a "presentation" of herself: "I am just me" (*Venus* 83). Thus within the explicit strains of victimization and complicity emerging in the Court scene, Parks allows Baartman's character more possibilities in her dealings with the Chorus of the Court: unlike the real Saartjie Baartman who was never given any opportunity to state her case.

In addition, this court case is revealed as a mockery of justice when it comes to the conclusion that Baartman "lives under no restraint", "she seems well fed", and "her show is part of/ God's great plan" without once talking to her exhibitors (*Venus* 84). Visually this mockery is reinforced when Baartman is shown caged like an animal with "the stench of her shit in this pen"

during the court scenes (*Venus* 94). The Court scene ends with its real purpose served: it has been established for all to see that the legal system in England is exceptionally fair: "it is very much to the credit of our great country/ that even a female Hottentot can find a court to review her/ status" (*Venus* 84). Echoing the Attorney General's legal discourse of erasure the ending does not clearly establish Baartman as an individual person for whom justice had been sought. She is a representative of her race, and the Court's benevolence and fair mindedness has been established that people of other nations, such as a "female Hottentot", not Baartman in particular, has had her day in Court. Interestingly, the Court's role has not been to dispense justice to a victim but to "review her/ status". Despite Venus Hottentot's hypervisibility, Baartman remains unseen, rather she has been erased from sight in the legal discourse. What exists now is an unreal simulated reality, perpetually refashioned as "The Venus" after this court case.

Following the historical narrative, Henrick Cezar quickly sold Venus to S. Rèaux after the Court trial in 1814; similarly in the play *Mother-Showman* sells her to the Baron Docteur following the Courtroom scene. Thus begins the final spectacle of Venus Hottentot that lasts for nearly two centuries. If not entirely human, then what is she? This question baffled the scientific mind of the time. Georges Cuvier became the scientific connoisseur, the "Anatomical Columbus" whose life's work was to discover and categorize the Venus Hottentot as "the missing link" between humans and animals in the "Great Chain of Being" (*Venus* 126). Thus, the Western natural and social sciences played a pivotal role in constructing a primitivist discourse that sought to situate African people, with their misperceived wild instinctual tendencies, in a "fluid border zone" between human and animals (Collins, *Black Sexual Politics* 99). With the Chorus of Anatomists the theme of murderous gaze developed with the previous two choruses reaches a new and dangerous dimension: Baartman is now an object of curiosity, a closely observed and

scrutinised entity, in order to establish her as sub-human. From a "splendid freak", a heathen, a possible witch, she will now be stripped of her humanity. The last Chorus under Baron Docteur's leadership will reinforce its previously held scientific beliefs by linking African people to apes. Baartman is a woman reduced to worse than an oddity or fetish when placed under the clinical eye of science.

Scientific knowledge is based on minute observations, thus looking is key to gaining knowledge. Yet this looking is not uninformed by ideological frameworks that guide and influence how or why one looks, and in Baartman's case distort the information gleaned through observation. Here we witness how scientific language erases Baartman's humanity and reduces a flesh and blood woman to measured and measurable body parts. Feminist philosopher Moira Gatens clarifies "difference" in her article "Power, Bodies and Difference" as "mechanisms by which bodies are recognised as different only in so far as they are constructed as possessing or lacking some socially privileged quality" (232). Science, in the eighteenth century, was one such "mechanism" which created difference in terms of "lacking", not just social but racial and biological "privileged qualit[ies]". Although the Chorus of Anatomists acknowledge that Baartman's ability to learn French in a six months time period is remarkable and it "[t]hrows all of those throw-back theories back in the lake", however they are cautioned by Baron Docteur that "We study people as a group/ And don't throw away our years of labor/ because of one glorious exception" (*Venus* 115). Where the Chorus of the Court did not acknowledge Venus Hottentot as an individual, the same tragedy underlies the Chorus of Anatomists and Baron Docteur's viewing of Baartman. They do concede that Baartman is a "glorious" individual whose superior intelligence proves their "throwback theories" are hollow or incorrect. Yet, science is susceptible to prejudicial coloring where problematic evidence, as exemplified by Baartman, will

be disregarded. Or more precariously, where scientists will mold contradictory evidence to suit preconceived theory. Irrespective of how much Baartman contradicts scientific "facts" and "years of labor", she is merely an "illustrative prop" on whom the scientific community seeks to hang their racist scientific theories (Mermikides and Bouchard 2).

Parks problematizes the historical narrative of scientific exploitation and abuse by introducing the element of love between Baartman and Baron Docteur. Parks has been lambasted by critics such as Jean Young for taking liberties with the historical account. For J. Young, the "sexual coercion of Saartjie Baartman is assiduously eroticised" with the introduction of the love angle (703). Yet this element, I contend the Parks seeks to present Baartman as a black woman capable of being loved and not just desired as a sexual anomaly. Unlike McCauley who asserted that there can be no romance between master and slaves (as discussed in the previous chapter), Parks' dramatic liberty by tweaking the historical narrative and having the Baron Docteur fall in love with Baartman serves an important purpose of disorienting historical discourses on Saartjie Baartman. By presenting Baartman as an individual person who is loved, rather than a person belonging to the Hottentot race who is "freakishly" desirable, Parks asks of the audience to look beyond the simulated images to seek the individual with possibilities that has been eliminated. An important aspect of this love angle is that it is not a romanticized version but is riddled with ambivalences. The Baron Docteur has Baartman undergo two abortions, is unwilling to be seen in public with her, or to leave his wife for her. Worse still, he allows his aspirations of scientific discovery to overcome his hesitations of "dis(-re-)membering" Baartman. Thus, her tragedy is amplified: her trust betrayed by the very person who loves her, her body's integrity is violated by the objectifying scientific vision with its intrusive findings seeking self-validation through her and at her expense.

Parks uses the performance space to disorient the audience. She aims to bring the audience out of their comfort zone by disengaging the gaze of the audience. In a theatrical experience reminiscent of Bertolt Brecht's alienation techniques Parks uses the Intermission as a scene in the play. She disorients the audience where according to stage directions the audience is invited, rather "*encouraged*" to move around, get a drink, and do all the usual things as is the norm during Intermission, while the Baron Docteur continues to read his observations of The Venus from his notebook (*Venus* 95). Baron Docteur's observations add a new sinister level to the legal discourse of erasure by showing how scientific discourse "dis(-re-)members" Venus Hottentot. As the Negro Resurrectionist clarifies for us in Footnote 8, the process of maceration is literally "separating the flesh from the bones so that the bones may be measured with greater accuracy" (*Venus* 122). The language of science that is so matter of fact, logical, and unemotional is especially disturbing as it describes each and every body part of Baartman, from her height, weight, face, hair, the insides, and the outside. Will the audience be able to disengage themselves from Baron Docteur's monologue with its medical jargon during Intermission? Or does the audience, which has made an emotional connection with the character of Baartman, find such a factual discourse of maceration painful because it paradoxically talks about Baartman, but not about the Baartman they have come to know? It shows Baartman as an absent presence at center of Baron Docteur's study of maceration. Yet in this study Baartman is stripped of all semblance of her humanity and dignity by the scientific language wherein she is reduced to a nameless corpse whose insides are laid bare. This is a manifestation of rape, as here it is language that violently enacts the robbery of Baartman's bodily integrity and identity, it is her but not her. In this Intermission scene of her "dis(-re-)memberment" Baartman is the invisible subject, there are no indications, no name, or any other identity markers for the audience to

locate her. Her erasure in the scientific discourse where Baron Docteur's voice drones on leads to a hauntological eerie feeling where Baartman becomes a ghostly presence for the audience.

Baron Docteur's gaze was disguised as a lover's gaze, yet he legitimizes his research findings by informing the audience that "for the record she submitted to these examinations as willingly as a patient submits to his doctor's eyes and hands" (*Venus* 114). Both the Baron Docteur and the Chorus of Anatomists take advantage of Baartman because of their medical positions. With the former, Baron Docteur reassures Baartman when he buys her "Stand still stand still, sweetheart/ I'll orbit./ Don't start Ive doctors eyes and hands", thus it is the doctor's persona that lends him a credibility as it renders his gaze and his touch professional and trustworthy (*Venus* 90-91). And with the latter, when Venus tells Baron Docteur that the Chorus of Anatomists "touch me sometimes./ When yr not looking", a touch that she clearly perceives as sexually intrusive, is dismissed by Docteur: "How could they not? Touching you is -- well, it's their job" (*Venus* 139). Venus has been a specimen under the clinical gaze where the medical persona acts as a camouflage for sexual violations. This sexual exploitation is reminiscent of the "spay" Doctor who takes sexual advantage of Hester La Negrita in *In the Blood* because he was "lonesome", that is discussed later in this chapter. Yet like the Baron Docteur macerates Baartman's body, the "spay" Doctor performs a hysterectomy on Hester without her permission. Scientific and medical violations compound the sexual exploitation of both of Parks' protagonists.

The Baron Docteur's scientific gaze observes with a calculated pre-mediated intent. There are no innocent discoveries being made but Baartman is observed both in life and after her death with racist intent to prove racist theories about African people. French philosopher and social theorist Michel Foucault in *The Birth of the Clinic* indicates that the medical gaze of a doctor

gets validated as it has the support and the weight of the institution behind him, "a gaze that [is] not content to observe what [is] self-evident.... It [is] calculating" (89). It is this "calculating" gaze that is not content with what is "self-evident" about Baartman. Baron Docteur accepts that Baartman is famous when she is just herself: "you were just yrself and the crowds came running" (*Venus* 107). This is the second instance in the play when there is acknowledgement that Baartman has been only herself, it is the people around her who are not "content" with who Baartman is, who choose not to see her, but see in her a culmination of their hypothesis and pseudo-theories. A case in point is Baron Docteur locating similarities between Baartman and through her entire race, and primates because both share a "considerable portion of this/ muscle/ always arises from the long *flexor* tendon while in man alone/ the whole of it commonly takes origin from the *Os calcis*" (*Venus* 102). The unparallel access to her body and the affixing of meaning to the insides of her body create an "alienated embodiment", where Baartman is disenfranchised and unhoused from her own bodily ownership (Howson 163). During her life Baartman's body has been medically claimed without her consent or knowledge to be studied by the Anatomists. After her death her body's sanctity has been violated, she has been cut open and preserved in a jar, "pickled" for exhibition by Baron Docteur. This violation is the equivalent of a scientific rape that has lasted centuries for Baartman. Thus a racially biased scientific mind, with a racist medical gaze, that is masquerading as objective scientific discourse is brought into the service of establishing, maintaining, and perpetuating racist categories as scientific and biological truths.

With all three choruses Parks shows the systematic erasure of Baartman from sight and from discourse, to be replaced with the un/real simulation of The Venus in her stead. Such is the power and attraction of this simulated identity that it has survived for centuries. Parks' theatrical

impulse, *Venus* is an attempt to dismantle and destabilize this simulated un/real image, and re-introduce into discourse the forgotten, buried, written over, and written out person of Saartjie Baartman.

In The Blood

From the hypervisible ever present Venus Hottentot, Parks' next play *In The Blood* is set "Here" , in any unnamed city in the States, anywhere under an unnamed bridge where Hester La Negrita lives with her children. The lack of specificity is central to creating invisibility about people who exist on borderline spaces and become ghostly presences in society. Hester's home is under a bridge, where the bridge functions as a transient and liminal space. Pertinent as the setting of the play the bridge, as both Hester's home, and as embodying and symbolically reflecting Hester's social standing, is a "liminal space, a transition, a border, a place in-between" (Bishop 56). This unnamed bridge can be everywhere, anywhere, or in a "nowhere place" (Bishop 56). Parks gives no other qualification so that the audience can place this bridge. It is in this borderless zone, in this placeless in-between space that Hester raises her children. Forgotten by and lost to society Hester has made a life and a home "Here". The bridge adds a further dimension to qualify Hester's peripheral socially outcast existence. She just does not have a borderline existence on the fringes of society, but a kind of forgotten and ghostly existence, an in-between-ness that, like the bridge, is a "kind of limbo, a nowhere place" (Bishop 56). Hester thus, has become a ghostly figure barely registering on the social barometers; though present, she is an absent presence. Thus, the setting of the placeless and nameless bridge is an apt site that reflects Hester's place in society.

Like her literary namesake, Hester Prynne in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, Hester La Negrita too lives an ostracised life. Yet there are major differences between

Hawthorne's protagonist and Parks'. Hester Prynne's race still offers her protection where she is ostracized but will not be ghosted like Hester La Negrita. Hester Prynne's home at the edge of town which provides her safety from social indictment, Hester La Negrita's home under the bridge offers an illusion of safety. This space is easily accessible, and its sanctity is easily infiltrated and violated. The play begins on this note of violation as Hester's sanctuary has been invaded and hate spilled onto the walls of her home. The word "Slut" has been written on the wall, a word her oldest son Trouble is unwilling to say out loud to her. This verbal attack on Hester's character is as hurtful as a physical one. Physical wounds heal, but an attack on one's character, self-esteem, or self-respect do not mend as easily. At times the wounds inflicted by the violence in words, such as racial slurs or abusive language, remain gaping wounds that do not lose their potency to inflict pain. Sociologist Gail Garfield in *Knowing What We Know* distinguishes between physical violence that "*scars a body*" and other types of violence that demeans a person's social self. That latter's impact is more profound as such violence "*scars a life*" (33). The play opens with this instance of verbal violence which as a reflection of the judgement of society has infiltrated the sanctity of Hester's home attacking Hester personal and "social self". The wounding impact of this hate speech results in fatal consequences in the last scene of the play when Trouble, Hester's son finally says the word "Slut" out loud, and Hester loses control and batters her eldest son to death in a rage.

The play begins and ends with a chorus representing society, that like a group of gossiping women, pass judgement (like the profanity "Slut" written on the wall) on Hester. Before the audience meets Hester, the chorus introduce and apply erroneous stereotypes about black women and black mothers to Hester. Thereby, they reflect a social bias against Hester because she is an unmarried black mother with five children on welfare. For the chorus these

facts about Hester reinforce stereotypes of black promiscuous sexuality and black rampant fertility, of black immorality and depravity, stereotypes that have survived from slavery into the present day:

WHO'S THE DADDY"

SHE WON'T TELL

SHE WON'T TELL CAUSE SHE DON'T KNOW [...]

SHE MARRIED?

SHE AIN'T MARRIED

SHE DON'T GOT NO SKILLS

CEPT ONE

CANT READ CANT WRITE

SHE MARRIED?

WHAT DO YOU THINK? [...]

SHE KNOWS SHES A NO COUNT

SHIFTLESS

HOPELESS

BAD NEWS

BURDEN TO SOCIETY

HUSSY

SLUT

PAH! [...]

CAUSE I'LL BE DAMNED IF SHE GONNA LIVE OFF ME

HERE SHE COMES

MOVE ASIDE

WHAT SHES GOT CATCHY [...]

YOU DON'T WANNA LOOK LIKE YOU KNOW HER [...]

BAD NEWS IN HER BLOOD (*In* 10-11)

Parks introduces a barrage of stereotypes here that are gender, class, and race based: Hester is an immoral, unskilled, untrustworthy, and diseased woman who has to be kept at a safe distance. As a poor black woman she is perceived to have no skills, "CEPT ONE", that is trading her body. As a poor black mother she is not considered worthy of government support but is considered a "BURDEN TO SOCIETY" who is "LIVING OFF" society. And the most detrimental of all the erroneous racist stereotypes, that the "BAD NEWS" is "IN HER BLOOD", and so she is racially predisposed to such irresponsible behavior. Stereotypes obliterate one's reality and replace them with false perceptions. Critical and Postcolonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha qualifies how a "stereotype is not a simplification because it is a false representation of a given reality. It is a simplification because it is an arrested, fixated form of representation" (27). Moving beyond "false representation" to an "arrested, fixed form" of representing black women are the stereotypes of Jezebel and the Welfare mother. Dorothy E. Roberts in her article "Punishing Drug addicts who have Babies" shows how the implications of the Jezebel stereotype impact black women as mothers. She considers Jezebel an "ideological construct" which "legitimated white man's abuse of Black women. The stereotype of Black women as sexually promiscuous helped to perpetuate their devaluation as mothers" (390). The persistence of the myth of animalistic female sexuality, promiscuity, and fertility falsely attributed to African American women to justify their status as sexual property of white masters under slavery has continuous relevance in present day discourses. By having these stereotypes of "SHIFLESS", "HOPELESS",

"SLUT", and "HUSSY" as Parks' starting point, the play works backwards to unpack these distorted biases and "arrested, fixated forms", to get to the complex and fluid reality of Hester La Negrita. This complex reality of Hester, both as a black woman and as a black mother, encompasses both a woman who has been sexually exploited and gang raped, and a woman who, when necessary, uses sex to get by, and as a mother who loves her children yet will kill her oldest son Jabber in a fit of rage.

Through Hester La Negrita, Parks challenges, problematizes, and deconstructs the stereotype of Welfare Queen used so effectively to represent African American women as leeches during Ronald Reagan's campaign and presidency in 1976. This stereotype casts poor black women who are the recipients of the welfare system as parasites feeding on the American tax payers hard earned money when these women use their children as meal tickets. Thus from the political rhetoric of the Reagan presidential campaign and presidency emerged a "hyperrational" woman who is "milking" the system by having more and more children to maximise her profits, and by refusing to enter into marriage as it would jeopardise the government benefits (Gustafson 36). In short, the political rhetoric converted the poor mothers who were welfare recipients into calculating, lazy, and irresponsible women. African American Studies scholar Wahneema Lubiano, in her article "Black Ladies, Welfare Queens, and State Minstrels," considers the "Welfare Queen" narrative as a "demonic" one, because in this narrative the "Welfare Queen" is made to represent "moral aberration", "an economic drain" and she is "all the more threatening once responsibility for the destruction of the 'American Way of Life' is attributed to" her (339). Within this "demonic" narrative the welfare mother becomes an "agent of destruction, the creator of the pathological, black, urban, poor family from which all ills flow" (Lubiano 339). Thus the Jezebel stereotype underwriting the Welfare Queen stereotype

amalgamate to target poor black women as responsible for the deterioration of American social and moral fabric. The bare facts about Hester's life reinforce these stereotypes of Welfare Queen and Jezebel: she is an unwed mother of five children all of whose fathers are unknown.

Furthermore, she has no skill set or employment prospects. However, Parks seeks not just to merely revise these stereotypes; she requires us to look how these stereotypes obliterate people's reality, and by doing so create absented presences out of real people. Firstly, the bare facts of Hester's life do not encapsulate her reality, the surface does not reveal Hester's depths and secondly, buried beneath the stereotypes is the archetypal victim of the system, abused and exploited by upstanding professionals such as her social worker, doctor, and priest, but who is made to bear the burden of guilt alone. Everyone else is protected by their upstanding and respectable social and professional personas, only Hester is victimised and stigmatised by her social status as a poor black mother who is a welfare recipient.

As a government support system, welfare is based on fixed categories and formulas. The fluidity that characterizes Hester makes her an anomaly in the welfare system. In Scene 4 the welfare representative, Hester's case worker who is appropriately named Welfare, meets Hester and talks of the difficulties she has had in trying to rehabilitate Hester and her children. The welfare representative speaks as a collective "we" is indicative of weight of the system behind her. Reminiscent of the morality plays where the characters' names were generic allegorical representations for vices or virtues, Anne Barton observes in "morality drama, names sum up the true nature of their bearers ... identity of name with nature [is] a cardinal rule of morality play nomenclature" (45). Similarly, Welfare is as much an individual character as she is the embodiment of the "true nature" of the system she is named after. As a personification of the system her exasperation at being unable to fix Hester into the system is the exasperation of the

system whose formulaic solutions are rendered ineffective by Hester's evasive tactics: "We at the Welfare are at the end of our rope with you. We put you in a job and you quit. We put you in a shelter and you walk. We put you in a school and you walk out. ... We sew safety nets, rub harder, good strong safety nets and you slip through the weave" (*In* 45). Here Parks uses the rope, net, and weave as apt metaphors to characterize how the welfare system, rather than helping people, is working to bind people into recognizable categories fixed in the system. Parks asks us to consider what happens to people who fail to mold into the set formula of job, shelter, and education to be successfully rehabilitated? The "rope" and "weave" thus are interesting ways of envisioning the mechanisms through which the welfare system seeks to restore the poor and jobless back into the social fabric. With Hester, Parks looks at those people who "slip through the weave", who slip away, and thus, are set adrift. Parks wants us to question if such people are they set free? Or do they just become more vulnerable to exploitation? Parks further raises the possibility of when the rope become a noose and the weave a trap? When does the welfare system, which is representing white middle class values, become a vehicle for perpetuating systematic and institutional racism? Parks highlights how the welfare system judges and indicts poor black women whose lives do not reflect the white middle class moral constraints and thus as a system is unfit to rehabilitate poor black women.

Parks looks at the welfare system as a system that maintains the class divide rather than obliterating it because the "balance of the system depends on a well-drawn boundary line and all parties respecting that boundary" (*In* 50). Hester's case worker Welfare assures her that although she is "a Black woman too just like you", yet this racial identification is nullified for Welfare by class difference (*In* 50). Welfare draws a clear line of division "between our kind and their kind": Welfare is a respectable married woman with a husband and children, an affluent lifestyle, and a

demanding job, whereas Hester is poor, unmarried, and unemployed with whom Welfare has "absolutely nothing in common" (*In* 52). This distinction of classes at the expense of racial solidarity that Welfare draws upon has a long intra-racial history. For some black people their economic advancement to a middle class status required adoption of white values and mannerisms, and a distancing of themselves away from the black poor working class. Race relations specialist Shelby Steele shows that the black middle class has "always defined its class identity by means of positive images gleaned from middle- and upper-class white society and by means of negative images of lower class blacks" (99). When Welfare designates herself as "our kind" she is basing this distinction on "positive images" associated with middle and upper white class that her lifestyle reflects. Hester, in Welfare's view, is clearly reflecting "negative images" of poor blacks, thus is separate from Welfare's "kind". Welfare performs her middle class status against Hester's "kind", and the success of her middle class performance depends on maintaining clear class distinctions. V. A. Young looks at this race and class distinction as a "psychological dilemma" facing middle class black people (16). V. A. Young argues that this dilemma entails that for black middle class people their "class status is linked to a white racial identity, and their racial identity is linked to a lower-class status" (16). In such a situation reconciliation is not possible. One has to privilege one world at the expense of the other, by identifying either with the "white racial world" or the black "lower-class" world, but one can never imbibe both worlds. Welfare has clearly chosen class status over racial solidarity, and for her class performance to succeed the "well-drawn boundary line" between middle and lower-class blacks has to be maintained and respected.

Ironically, Welfare reserves the right to cross this boundary line, but Hester can never be allowed to do so. Parks uses the confession repeatedly in the play to highlight episodes of sexual

exploitation of Hester from another character's perspective. The confessions work retrospectively to unravel and destabilize the stereotypical prejudices of the chorus that "THINGS ARE BAD LIKE THEY ARE/ CAUSE OF/ GIRLS LIKE HER" (*In* 9). Welfare inviting Hester for a premeditated threesome with her husband uses her position as Hester's case worker to sexually coerce Hester. Hester, according to Welfare, was "surprised but consented" when faced with this proposition (*In* 51). In the end how much of a choice did Hester have, considering Welfare's position and power over her? Hester goes along with it, even when it gets rough and Welfare slaps her. Hence, Welfare's abuse of power is compounded by more abuse. Repeatedly, the confessions reveal how Hester is perceived as a hypersexual being with whom Welfare "crossed the line" as she is "swept away" (*In* 51). It is an experience that made Welfare's "skin shiver" at "[t]he thrill of it" (*In* 51). With Hester the upstanding individuals can have illicit sexual pleasures before returning to their normal respected positions in society.

It was my first threesome

it wont happen again.

And I should emphasize that

she is a low-class person.

What I mean by that is we have absolutely nothing in common.

As her caseworker I realize that maintenance of the system depends

on a well-drawn boundary line

and all parties respecting that boundary. (*In* 52)

For Welfare this sexual encounter is reduced in the confession as an aberration. The confession thus repeats the Western discourse where African American women were being perceived as hypersexual, wild, and primitive: "[w]hether depicted as 'freaks' of nature or as being the essence

of nature itself, savage, untamed sexuality characterizes Western representations of women and men of African descent" (Collins, *Black Sexual Politics* 27). Such discourses disguised the Western predisposition to exploit, and thus were a mechanism or a convenient narrative, to accommodate and camouflage the white exploitative system. When Welfare's husband suggests that Welfare "[b]ring one of those gals home from work" to add "a little spice" to their marriage, and "Hester, she came to tea" (with tea as the civilized pretext to lure her), Welfare is equally guilty for buying into and perpetuating the Western mechanisms of sexual exploitation of black women (*In* 51). While emulating white middle class values, it seems that Welfare and her husband are not above using the same racist mindset that whites used to exploit black women. They now practise on a poor black woman of their own race the same sexual abuses that historically white people had perpetrated on black women with exemption is a moment of sheer tragedy. In Welfare's case maintaining the "well-drawn boundary line" between middle and low black classes requires a distinct effort to uplift oneself, to project a positive race self-projections and image, to nullify the racial stereotyping or identification through policing this class boundary line. Thus the existence of poor black women like Hester, with her five children by different unknown men, work against general race efforts of uplifting and reinforcing racial stereotypes that "BAD NEWS IN HER BLOOD" (*In* 10-11). This hyperawareness of distinction and hypervigilance of the boundary line by Welfare points to an anxiety where class distinctions can easily evaporate and these racial stereotypes can become applicable to all.

Sexual exploitation is not the exclusive prerogative of men, neither is heterosexual exploitation the only way in which Hester gets exploited. Hester's streetwise white friend Amiga Gringa constantly uses Hester; for example, she would sell a watch or a cloth for Hester and eat up the profits along with Hester's food, while Hester would starve. These forms of using become

more exploitative and damaging when Amiga seeks to turn Hester into a sexual commodity. Parks again uses the confession mode to reveal how Amiga uses Hester by applying stereotypes of hypersexuality of black women to Hester. Amiga does this first by involving Hester in a live sex show, and later exploiting Hester into making lesbian pornography as "Girl on girl action is a very lucrative business" (*In* 58). Amiga reads lesbian come-on signals and lesbian desire from Hester and presumes a reciprocal sexual desire between them where there is none: "Her looking at me with those eyes of hers./ You looking like you want it Hester./ Shoot, Miga, she says thats just the way I look she says" (*In* 59). For Hester, it is "just the way I look", which is perceived by Amiga as "looking like you want it". This is similar to how Baartman is assigned meanings quite different from her reality; Hester, too, is seen to be projecting a lesbian sexual desire where there is none. Contrarily, it is Amiga who is projecting onto Hester her own sexual desires. Literary and cultural historian Sander L. Gilman in "Black Bodies, White Bodies" highlights that the "white society sexualize their world by projecting onto black bodies a narrative of sexualization disassociated from whiteness"; this is a narrative of "deviant sexuality" which is separate from white desires (209). Here Amiga is casting onto Hester a "narrative of sexualization" which is based on Amiga's rather than Hester's desires. This allows Amiga to make a profit off of Hester's presumed hypersexuality ("looking like you want it") by providing a live sex show to an audience that is predisposed to expect such hypersexuality from black women:

It took a little cajoling to get her to do it with me

for an invited audience.

For a dime a look.

Over at my place.

Every cent was profit and overhead to speak of.

The guys in the neighborhood got their pleasure
and we was our own boss so we didn't have to pay no joker off the top. [...]
She made sounds like an animal.
One day some of the guys took advantage.
Ah, what do you expect in a society based on Capitalism. (*In 59*)

Hester's performance fits into this narrative of wild, uninhibited, and "deviant sexuality" attributed to black women, where she "made sounds like an animal" during the live sex show. Just like Welfare before, Amiga gets Hester to fulfill Amiga's sexual desires after a little "cajoling" and Amiga is able to benefit economically as "every cent was profit". Hester, is an embodiment of other character's clichéd views of black women. She is made to re-live the history of sexual and economic exploitation of her people during slavery in the present moment.

In one line Amiga points to a possible gang rape episode in which the invited audience "took advantage" of the situation to do more than just "look". Amiga shrugs off this experience as of no consequence and that it is to be expected in a "society based on Capitalism". As the chief architect of this capitalist enterprise Amiga seems disconnected from the fallout of creating a sexual demand, where presumably both Hester and she had to bear the brunt of supplying the sexual needs of the consumers. Although there are no more references to this episode of gang rape in the play, and Hester herself never refers to it, this episode cannot be written off as easily as Amiga does. It points to a legal narrative where women are differentiated on moral basis as "rapable" and "unrapable", (I would argue, as racially "rapable" and "unrapable" as well). Scholar, lawyer, and activist Catherine A. MacKinnon in "Rape: On Coercion and Consent" looks at rape laws that divide women into "parallel provinces", where "[v]irtuous women, like young girls, are unconsenting, virginal, rapable. Unvirtuous women, like wives, and prostitutes,

are consenting, whores, unrapable" (46). Where consent is always presumed for certain women because they are characterized as "unrapable", rape as a violent crime disappears. While the goal is not to become "rapable" but to gain a legal recognition wherein victims of sexual violence, irrespective of their race, class, or sexual orientation are recognised as victims, as opposed to being regarded as perpetually consenting. With such a self-serving and faulty logic characterising the presumption of consent it makes some women, like Hester, vulnerable and easy targets for sexual exploitation. Legal recourse is never an option for them.

Viewing black woman as "consenting", "whores", and "unrapable" has a long history that dates back to slavery. A case in point is provided by historian Philip A. Bruce's study of freed black men, *The Plantation Negro As A Free Man* (1889). Bruce erroneously attributed the much feared black man's propensity to rape white women as a result of the nature of black women. For Bruce, it was the "wantonness of the women of [black man's] own race", and the "[t]he rape of a negress by a male of her own color is almost unheard of, a fact that is a strong proof of the sexual laxness of the plantation women as a class" that was responsible for black men's sexual inclinations (84-85). Thus attacking the character of black women "as a class" was a convenient narrative for the facilitation of "plantation women[s]" sexual exploitation by their white masters and to blame black women for white man's fears of freed black men. Philip also erases the possibility of rape of black women as a violence that is "almost unheard of". Has this mindset really changed? Clark and Lewis in *Rape: The Price of Coercive Sexuality* state baldly that there are some "women who 'can't be raped'" because it is the character of the victim that decides if a rape offence, once reported will be passed on in the judicial system. They identify women who are "idle", that is unemployed, and on welfare, as one such category of "not the sort of women that society believes *can* be raped" (92; emphasis in original). Hester is presumed to be one such

woman by Welfare, Welfare's husband, Amiga, and by the men who gang raped her: an "idle" woman on welfare she is an "unvirtuous", "consenting", and "unrapable". Therefore Hester is "fair game" for everyone.

Yet Hester constantly surprises Amiga with her life choices. For Amiga, having a baby is a way of making profit: "Do you have any idea how much cash I'll get for the fruit of my white womb?! /Grow it./ Birth it./ Sell it" (In 58). She is unable to understand Hester's maternal instinct, her choosing to keep her five children, making a home for them, raising them even to the extent of starving herself: "Funny how a woman like Hester/ driving her life all over the road/ most often chooses to walk the straight and narrow" (58). Amiga's revelations in her confession redress and rework the stereotypes that Hester is "SHIFTLESS/ HOPELESS/ BAD NEWS/ BURDEN TO SOCIETY/ HUSSY/ SLUT" that the chorus had introduced at the beginning of the play (*In* 10). In addition, Amiga also points out that despite poor life choices Hester "chooses to walk the straight and narrow" path in life. Thus, there is a moral code and a maternal instinct that Hester adheres to, that contradicts the social dictates that mark Hester as an unfit and irresponsible unwed mother of five children. Here matrimony is projected as the foundation of respectability, a hearkening back to white middle class bourgeois mentality. Hester has not taken the easy route of aborting her children, or a profitable one, that Amiga has in choosing to sell her children.

Like black women's sexuality, black motherhood has also been overwhelmingly attacked in dominant discourses. Where slavery denied African American people the chance to maintain familial bonds, black family units after slavery suffered institutional and systematic racism, wherein unemployment and poverty had detrimental impact resulting in many single parent black households. Subsequently, it was the black mothers who were held responsible for emasculating

the black men, and raising children in an unnatural environment -- unnatural that is, when measured against a white patriarchal framework that promoted family values through marriage and through the father as the head of the family unit. The unwed or single mother becomes an easy person to target and judge. Assistant secretary of Labor, David P. Moynihan, in his racist and controversial report, *The Negro Family* (1965), while investigating the causes of black poverty chose to identify the black single parent family unit as the root cause and source of weakness in black communities. For Moynihan, the matriarchal structure of black families was responsible for the diminishing role of black male family members such as husbands and fathers as it hindered them from taking ownership of their duties as parents and providers. Moynihan's indictment of the black family structure, of black mothers in particular, was another racist attempt to exonerate the government institutions from acknowledging their racist policies that denied equal opportunities to the black community. By shifting blame firmly onto black mothers as agents of destruction, this political re-fashioning ensured that black mothers were made into convenient scapegoats. In the report Moynihan contends, "[i]n essence, the Negro community has been forced into a matriarchal structure which, because it is so out of line with the rest of American society, seriously retards the progress of the group as a whole" (29). A family where the mother singlehandedly holds the family together is considered an unnatural structure because it is in binary opposition to white middle class patriarchal family structure. Hester's family structure is judged and deemed unfit in the play as it is "so out of line with the rest of American society". As social approval and endorsement is based on white patriarchal family structure Hester will never be granted social approval and will remain unfit and undeserving to be a mother. Hester, like poor single black mothers with their strength of character, their grit and determination who are targeted in this report, does not make the sensible and practical choice of

abortion or adoption in the play. Slowly but surely Hester is rendered absent as the victim of rape, as the sexually exploited woman, or the starving mother. Her only reality is of an unfit black single mother as highlighted by the stereotype of Welfare Queen. Contrary aspects of Hester's reality are obliterated against her sexually suspect reality of mother of five children by five different men. Within dominant discourses like Bruce and Moynihan's accounts there is no room to accommodate "a woman like Hester" who "chooses to walk the straight and narrow" path (58). She must disappear!

When such a sexually suspect reality is racially attributed, as in Hester's case, it has led to the medical abuse of black women's bodies. It is estimated in the 1950's and 60's about 100,000-150,000 African American women and minors were the victim of state and federal sponsored forced and coerced involuntary sterilization. The government used the welfare system to exercise control over unsuspecting poor black people by treating welfare funding as a bargaining chip. The threats of withholding welfare funding were used to force poor black women to go through the medical sterilization procedures. This was an obscene misuse of state and federal power. These involuntary sterilizations fall in line with the historical control of black women's reproductive rights dating back to slavery. Under slavery black women had no sexual or reproductive rights, and they were "bred" by their white masters, after the Second World War the same "playing-god" mindset prevailed. It was now decided that black women were too fertile and too much of a burden on the welfare system. Steps had to be taken to counter this threatening fertility which was no longer serving white purposes by increasing the labor force in the South. This led to federal and state sponsored program of involuntary sterilization of poor black women and minors. As a result, the "demonization of black parents, particularly mothers, as medically and behaviorally unfit" ensued (Washington 191). Social Justice advocate Dorothy E. Roberts

details how such a "systematic, institutionalized denial of reproductive freedom has uniquely marked Black women's history in America" (389).

From the days of slavery medical experimentation has been a dark chapter in this history of oppression of black people. A case in point the "father of modern gynecology", Dr. J. Marion Sims' misuse of dozens of black enslaved women, (three enslaved women have been named in his autobiography, Lucy, Anarcha, and Betsey) as unanesthetized experimental subjects from 1845-49. Medical ethicist Harriet A. Washington describes his experiments as a "violent struggle" between the slaves and surgeons, where each "naked, unanesthetized slave woman had to be forcibly restrained by other physicians through her shrieks of agony as Sims determinedly sliced, then sutured her genitalia" (2). Even after slavery ended, black women's bodies were still targeted where the application of theories of Eugenics was used by the government to undertake involuntary sterilization of black women. Washington elaborates how "eugenics undergirded medicosocial movements that placed the sexual behavior and reproduction of blacks under strict scrutiny and disproportionately forced them into sterility" (191-92). Under the Eugenics program, hysterectomies was performed on minors, some as young as Minnie Lee Relf who was 12 and her sister Mary Alice who was 14 without their mother's consent in Alabama in 1973 in a federally funded health clinics (Flavin 36-37). Washington writes that by 1983 even though the black comprised 12% of the population, 43% of women sterilized were black (203). These government practices where perceptions of black women as sexually irresponsible and parentally unfit led to government's policing of black women's bodies through involuntary sterilization and hysterectomy procedures that have been termed as a twentieth century "medical apartheid" by Washington.

Parks' revives this governmental medical injustice against black women when Hester becomes the victim of involuntary sterilization. Hester's body is invaded, altered and robbed to satisfy all concerned parties, so that her fertile womb will no longer be a burden on the welfare system. This medical rape is committed on her body by the Doctor with his "Spay" sandwich board. He, like Welfare, has not been above sexually exploiting Hester while maintaining a superior status, "They wouldnt really fit in with us./ Theres such a gulf between us" (*In* 38). The Doctor's sexual exploitation of Hester when she "came for a check up and you said you was lonesome" follows a similar pattern where Welfare invited Hester to tea (*In* 36). Just like Welfare made Hester wash her hands, the Doctor "wouldn't touch her without gloves on" at first, reinforcing the idea that Hester has some communicable disease or is unclean for these "clean" middle class people. Yet, just as that fear did not stop Welfare, it does not stop the Doctor from sexually exploiting Hester. He boasts of one episode "in that alley there,/ she was/ phenomenal" (*In* 39). His confession, like Welfare's, shows that he too will indulge once, just to experience the hypersexuality that Hester seemingly projects before donning the respectable professional garb. Hester having kids by different men who have not married her makes her fair game for sexual predators. One can see how the "spay" Doctor too buys into the myth of wild sexuality attributed to black women:

I was
lonesome and
she gave herself to me in a way that I had never experienced
even with women I've paid [...]
And she was very giving very motherly very obliging very understanding
very phenomenal. (*In* 39)

It is ironic that the Doctor is able to gauge Hester's maternal side in this encounter where she is "very giving, very motherly". Hester's victimization is even worse than the women the Doctor has paid. Hester is always short-changed in these sexual encounters.

Parks use of the term "spay" is especially potent as in that derogatory term converge multiple violation and humiliations of medical and scientific practices enforced on black women. The equation of black women with breeding animals as "bitches" who need to be "spayed" allows the dominant race to not only exercise control over their reproductive abilities, but to continue to reduce black women to the sub-human level. A racist mindset that equates black mothers with "bitches" and their children with "litter" is revealed by the founder of Children Requiring a Caring Kommunity, Barbara Harris' racist remarks: "We don't allow dogs to breed. We spay them. We neuter them. We try to keep them from having unwanted puppies, and yet these women are literally having litters of children" (qtd in Washington 189). Hester becomes a victim of this process of demonization with her "litters of children". With a fine irony a reversal has now taken place, from enslaved black women being used in breeding farms where slave owners would promise them freedom in return for bearing as many as 15 babies for economic profits (a case in point is the slave Betsy Calcote who was promised freedom and got it when she had ten babies for her master), to a twentieth century state funded denial of black women's reproductive rights through involuntary sterilization: black women as mothers continue to be controlled and policed by white society (Schwatz 17).

Just as Hester has no say in what happens to her, Toni Morrison's Cee is hired by Dr. Beauregard as an assistant but is used as a guinea pig. His experiments on her reproductive organs render her infertile and nearly kill her. Playing god with black women's bodies is a form of medical rape: it is invading and taking without permission what the doctor in *In the Blood* or

Dr. Beauregard in *Home* have no ethical or moral right to take. The Doctor's sexual exploitation is compounded by the medical rape of Hester's unsuspecting body. This is similar to Baron Docteur's scientific exploitation of Venus Hottentot's body discussed earlier in this chapter. Both medical violations set the course for racist discourse underwriting the "medical apartheid" committed on black women. Letitia Guran comparing Hester La Negrita with Hawthorne's Hester Prynne in "Suzan-Lori Parks: Rearticulating the Laws of Race and Gender," shows how society's policing its untouchables has evolved into something much more sinister "from branding to maiming" the society's "unlawful" subjects (80). It is decided for Hester that because she has "5 healthy children, it'll be for the best, considering" (*In* 38) so that there will be "No more mistakes" on her part (*In* 87). Thus the dominant culture polices, controls, and authoritatively decides to scalpel out Hester's inalienable right over her reproductive organs.

Towards the end of the play the dominant social fabric represented by the chorus circle Hester like a lynch mob:

JUST PLAIN STUPID IF YOU ASK ME AIN'T NO SMART

WOMAN GOT ALL THEM BASTARDS

AND NOT A PENNY TO HER NAME

SOMETHINGS GOTTA BE DONE

CAUSE I'LL BE DAMNED IF SHE GONNA LIVE OFF ME. (*In* 87)

Hester is "spayed" so there are "[n]o worries no troubles no trails no tribulations no more mistakes", a sentiment repeated by Welfare at the end of the play (*In* 69). At no point in the play does Hester give her consent or even consider hysterectomy as an option. Rather when she is threatened by Welfare with hysterectomy she threatens back: "(Don't *make* me hurt you)" (*In* 47). Dorothy E. Roberts asserts that by "denying a woman the right to bear children - or

punishing her for exercising that right - deprives her of a basic part of her humanity" (402). By performing the hysterectomy without Hester's consent it is not just robbing Hester of her womb, rather it is raping her womb by "depriving her of a basic part of her humanity". This act only seeks to rectify what is seen as a "mistake" by the dominant social voices where "5 bastards is not good. 5 bastards is bad" (*In* 47). Hester does not have much to claim materially but she can claim motherhood, a maternal instinct recognized by Amiga and the Doctor in the play. She has tried to make ends meet, although the ends keep getting further apart. She has made a home for her children, starved herself but provided them with food, taught them manners and moral values, yet the system deems her a "bad" mother because of the number of her children and her lack of marital status. Thus she is robbed of her one identity that she has a full right to claim while everyone rests easy with the assurance that a possible threat to the system has been productively contained.

Consequentially, the process of ghosting Hester's unacceptable and unappetising presence when seen only through the Welfare Queen or Jezebel lens is completed. Hester's problematic presence has been successfully absented. What remains after this robbery? An absented "seething presence"! (Gordon 8)

Only in America

Aishah Rahman in her play *Only in America*, which was written in response to the Anita Hill's very public absenting during the Senate hearings shows the process of ghosting of the victim of sexual violence through language and narrative. When the Presidential Supreme Court nominee Justice Clarence Thomas was accused of sexual harassment by a former employee Law Prof. Anita Hill, the ensuing investigative Senate hearings brought the issue of sexual harassment into the public eye like never before. What was remarkable about the Hill-Thomas Senate

hearings was that when a black woman finally spoke out about sexual harassment she was heard and misheard, believed, and disbelieved. Even though Professor Hill by speaking out raises this issue to the national level, yet Professor Hill's very clear and audible voice is deliberately muffled under the Republican Senators and some media representations of her. Rahman says of Professor Hill's experience in her telephone interview with Anna Deavere Smith in 1994 that "[t]he louder you speak, the less you are heard" (255). Professor Hill's experience mirrors Baartman's: though Professor Hill herself is hypervisible her reality, too, becomes invisible during the hearings. Unfortunately for Professor Hill, while Thomas claimed "high-tech lynching for uppity black" victim status, there was no more room for the actual victim in the hearings (*Hearings* 118)³. And as it happens in rape trials it is the victim/claimant who is put on trial with the presumption of guilt instead of innocence.

Anita Hill was an honours student, a Yale Law graduate, a professional lawyer, and a law professor at University of Oklahoma. Such an accomplished black woman as Professor Hill was an unknown territory for the all-white, all-male Senate committee and the American public. With such impressive credentials she could not be dismissed easily, nor could the Senate committee easily place her in the stereotypes (not for want of trying) that were available and recognizable to categorize black women in general. Historian Nell Irvin Painter acknowledges that "Mammy, welfare cheat, Jezebel, period. These were the roles available to Anita Hill. Hill chose not to make herself into symbol America would recognise" (210). Professor Hill was not a placid Mammy, a domineering Sapphire, an emasculating Matriarch, a lazy Welfare Queen, or a promiscuous Jezebel. The stereotypes that were so easily to applied to Baartman and Hester in order to absent their reality, were unsuited to the highly accomplished law professor. Nevertheless Professor Hill disappeared, not into the stereotypes used historically and culturally

to dislocate black women from their actual reality, but in the dark hole or an empty space outside these narrow stereotypes where any other reality of black women is made to disappear. For Painter, Professor Hill disappeared because her very impressive credentials made her "doubly hard to see" (210). At the time of Professor Hill's testimony she did not write in a new reality for black women: however, the "Anita Hill Effect" following the Senate hearings (as discussed in the previous chapter) did change how sexual harassment is perceived today.

When Professor Hill disappears as a victim of sexual harassment from sight, what is left behind is a problematic black woman whose very hypervisibility, like Baartman's hypervisibility, makes it easy to graft onto her various digestible possibilities. The Republican Senators constructed possible and probable realities for Professor Hill in order to "understand" her better through their line of questioning. Nellie Y. McKay sums up the Republican Senator's white world view appropriately that "these men could find no reference point for her, and therefore she had no believability for them. That is why some had to make her over for themselves, imposing on her other images more comfortable for them" (285). Their intentions were to discredit Professor Hill by projecting onto her a number of possible roles. When Professor Hill was asked if she was a "zealotting civil rights believer", a "scorned woman" or if she had a "martyr complex" by Senator Heflin, while she refuted each charge, nevertheless the very questions introduced into the public discussions possible lens, narratives and images through which to consider or "understand" Professor Hill (*Hearings* 66).

Additionally, Hill's claims of harassment were also represented as fictionalized claims. Professor Hill recalls one of the most bizarre conversations that stood out to her was Justice Thomas telling her of pubic hair on his coke can. Senator Hatch attributed this comment to *The Exorcist*, and read out the passage during the hearings, the implication being that Professor Hill's

harassment claims were borrowed material. Therefore, "by casting her as someone who made up her life from novels", Professor Hill's suffering was erased to be replaced with the narrative of storytelling or telling tales (Darwin 202). As if this was not enough, Senator Specter in his questioning Justice Thomas about this episode, without proving that Professor Hill had lied claimed that she had done so: "it is my legal judgement having had some experience in perjury prosecutions, that the testimony of Professor Hill in the morning was flat-out perjury" (*Hearings* 183). This narrative of storytelling was further elaborated by bringing in conspiracy theories that "some interest group" had gotten Professor Hill to bring this sexual harassment story to life. Senator Specter repeatedly asked Judge Thomas to clarify whether Professor Hill's allegations were the work of "A group [that] got Professor Hill to say or make up a story?", or "Are you saying a group concocted a story with Professor Hill" (*Hearings* 207). Thus phrases like "flat-out perjury", "make up a story", and "concocted a story" introduce into the legal and political discourse elements of disbelief and make-believe. With such rhetorical and linguistic tactics Professor Hill's actual words signalling her verbal sexual abuse were problematised by the white male Republican Senators as fiction.

Furthermore, Professor Hill was depicted as a delusional woman who suffered from fantasies; the latter forming the possible reason why she pursued Justice Thomas from one job to the next, and why she telephoned him eleven times while she worked for him. Professor Hill contradicted this narrative being spun by Senator Specter: she was "not given to fantasy. This is not something that I would have come forward with, if I were not absolutely sure about what it is I am saying" (*Hearings* 62). And lastly, Senator Hatch by calling attention to a personal knowledge of Justice Thomas' character, acted as a character witness for Justice Thomas throwing away the facade of neutrality: "Now I've known you almost eleven years. And the

person that the good professor described is not the person I've known" (*Hearings* 139). Within all these frames Professor Hill, the clear image of grace under pressure, was repeatedly re-framed to become a fractured mirror. Or as Kimberlé Crenshaw writes, the proceedings created "displacing narratives" which "cast the complainant in one of several roles, including the whore, the tease, the vengeful liar, the mentally or emotionally unstable. ... Once these ideologically informed character assignments are made, 'the story' tells itself" ("Whose Story is it" 409). Thus, the Senate hearings problematised Professor Hill's clear image into refracted and distorted images for public consumption, and introduced into discourse hazy lens with which to see her.

Rahman's play dramatically presents this process of the dissipating of the clear image. In Act 1 Cassandra's dream is a precursor to her actual absencing in Act 2. Lilli, Cassandra's speech therapist translates Cassandra's dream for us. While driving up the highway Cassandra hits a man. During this dream "[t]he louder [Cassandra] scream the more invisible [she] become[s]" (*Only* 8). At this point in the play the audience has not met Oral, Cassandra's boss and does not know what terrors are being revealed in this dream. Screaming out and not being seen or heard is the essence of the fear revealed. This fear that most victims of sexual violence grapple with, of being unseen, of their cries for help being muffled, or worse unheard. The nightmare is an apt representation of what happened to Professor Hill during the Senate hearings. Here Cassandra's scream is representative of Professor Hill's speaking out and being unheard in the Senate hearings. Being considered a "zealot", a "martyr", "a scorned woman", a "perjurer", were all labels jostling together in the public imagination. With her image distorted Professor Hill's testimony, like Cassandra's screaming, made her "more invisible". At the end of this conversation Lilli tells Cassandra that "Your nightmares need your voice, your words. Not mine" (*Only* 11). Irrespective of what the consequences of speaking out are, one's experiences cannot

be relayed by anyone else. No matter how long it will take to speak out one's nightmares (in Professor Hill's case it was a period of ten years), they have to be in "your voice, your words". Yet finding this voice in the face of invisibility can be excruciating.

In Act 2 this fear of invisibility experienced in the nightmare is experienced in life. By this point in the play Cassandra has experienced Oral's verbal sexual assault and his threats of her being jobless if she leaves, and she has been reduced to an entrapped bird-like defenceless creature. Cassandra's physical transformation into an entrapped bird is reflective of being mentally and psychologically caged. Cassandra tries to catch the attention of the Scat Woman who comes to clean Cassandra's office; however, she is invisible to the Scat Woman. When Oral asks Scat Woman if she sees or hears someone wanting her help, Scat Woman's answer is no. When Scat Woman is asked this question the stage directions indicate that Cassandra is "*(frantically appealing to SCATWOMAN tugging and pulling at her body)*" (*Only 28*). Scat Woman by ignoring Cassandra's pleas, the "*tugging and pulling*" on her body, effectively renders Cassandra an absent presence and virtually enacts Cassandra's nightmare. Furthermore, this scene elaborates the dilemmas of reporting workplace sexual harassment wherein the power dynamics ensure victims' silence, or rendering them effectively silent if they do speak out, by the refusal of others to be a witness to the abuse. Either case ensures that the victim of sexual harassment remains invisible. This narrative of unbelievability extends to the office as well, where people fearing for their jobs will turn a blind eye. As Oral explains the workplace power dynamics to Cassandra, "My girls are loyal team players and wouldn't even listen to you. Nobody will listen to you. Ms. Jackson" (*Only 22*). Oral's position as the boss clearly reflects how his power over the women working for him, who would fear their job security and would be unwilling to be witnesses to Cassandra's victimization, thereby providing Oral with a security

blanket to continue his assault. Thus, the lack of witnesses or people refusing to bear witness (like Scat woman) renders the abuse and the victim invisible.

Baartman, Hester La Negrita and Cassandra are all women who experience in different ways the sexual abuse of their bodies. Yet a constant is how Parks and Rahman draw attention through their protagonists to the processes of how black women have been made to disappear in Western discourses, be it within misleading frames of Hottentot iconology, Welfare Queen stereotype, or the "scorned" woman cliché. Like Ralph Ellison's "invisible man", these women "of substance, flesh and bone, fibre and liquids" are rendered invisible "simply because people refuse to see" them (3). All three plays allow us to see how black women who suffer physical, mental, or medical violence on their bodies and psyches disappear from view, and how the reality of their rapes haunt. Yet these plays formulate a "rebellious, [and] oppositional gaze" wherein the myths, the stereotypes, and the simulated images of black women are challenged to declare in bell hooks' words "Not only will I stare. I want my look to change reality" ("Oppositional Gaze" 94).

Chapter Four: Child Abuse and Adolescent Sexual Violence Begets Violence: Cycles of Intergenerational Violence and Manifestations of Internalised Racism

I don't believe children become violent in a vacuum

Kia Corthron, "The Last Word is Hope"⁸

The creative and performative endeavor of African American women playwrights to halt the processes of disappearing, absenting, and silencing of victims of sexual violence analysed in the previous chapter allows the narratives of rape to emerge from the beneath the burden of guilt, fear, and shame. Playwrights and performers, Dael Orlandersmith and Kia Corthron, extend this creative practise by looking at the more vulnerable victims of sexual violence, that is black children and young adolescents who are inclined even more than adult victims of rape to carry the albatross of shame and silence. Both dramatists engage with intergenerational cycles of violence that manifests itself on the micro level, within families and within home, in many forms such as, verbal, physical, sexual, and psychological violence. However, these instances of violence do not occur within a "vacuum", but rather the abuses within micro-environments are shaped by or are a result of constant engagement with the socio-cultural milieu of systemic racism in the macro-environments. Orlandersmith and Corthron's plays show the impact of systemic racism and poverty at the macro-level initiates cycles and patterns of violence that manifest at the micro-level in violence and abuse of black children and adolescents. Patricia Hill Collins in her article "The Tie That Binds" shows how "violent acts and verbal violence" become invisible. For Collins "systemic violence has become so routinized against less powerful groups that its everyday nature ironically fosters both its invisibility and acceptance" (924). Collins locates black women in the sphere of "less powerful groups" who are the recipients of "violent

⁸ Patraaka, Vicki. "Robbie McCauley: Obsessing in Public. An Interview". *The Drama Review (TDR)* vol. 37, no. 2, 1993, p 54.

acts and verbal violence". I contend that Orlandersmith and Corthron's plays ask us to extend the sphere of less powerful groups to include black children and young adolescents as more vulnerable victims of intra-group racial violence. Kia Corthron (while discussing sexual violence against children in her play *Breath, Boom* in an interview "The Last Word is Hope" with Lenora Inez Brown) connects the dots between child abuse, youth street gangs, and street violence. Corthron asks us as critical readers to be cognizant of the violent realities in the micro and macro-environments, which become "routinized" and "invisible", so it seems as if the street and gang violence occurs in a "vacuum". Emerging from within this nothingness, this blank space of the supposed "vacuum" that encapsulates the macro and micro-environment, are intergenerational cycles of violence which robs black children of their innocence.

Orlandersmith and Corthron present struggling black family relationships and dynamics, with absentee or abusive fathers and step fathers, and alcoholic or substance abusing mothers. Within such families mothers are seen struggling and surviving in environments of systemic racism, and are unable to provide a safe environment for their children to grow up in.

Orlandersmith writes of a constant in her theatrical oeuvre in *The New York Times* as "[t]here is a theme throughout the work I write, about childhood and the sins of the father, and the sins of the mother" (5, E5). This chapter examines these "sins", especially when these "sins" encapsulate children growing up amidst abuse and violence. Centered on parental neglect and abuse, Orlandersmith in *Beauty's Daughter* (1995) and *Monster* (1996), and Corthron in *Breath, Boom* (2000) locate children and adolescent vulnerability to sexual violence as a key concern. They draw our attention to the conventionally (mis)perceived as the safest of environments, that is the home, which becomes *unheimlich*, uncanny, unfamiliar, strange, and dangerous for children and young adults when they are sexually abused.

Beauty's Daughter, Monster, and Breath, Boom together draw attention to how children become survivors of sexual violence by inflicting violence. Set against the backdrop of Harlem, Diane, Teresa, and Prix are three young adolescent women in *Beauty's Daughter, Monster, and Breath, Boom* respectively, who grow up negotiating the threatening micro and macro-environments. These negotiations are impacted by race politics that shapes black children's experiences of abuse. Orlandersmith and Corthron's focus on child sexual abuse and violence against the backdrop of systemic racism, internalised racism, and everyday intra-group racism. This poisonous environment of racism is exacerbated by systems of domination in macro-environments where unemployment, underemployment, and poverty prevail, and impact black community leading to domestic abuse, substance and alcohol abuse in the micro-environment. Diane, Teresa, and Prix as victims of sexual violence endure and survive by perpetrating violence on others. Thus in these plays it is violence that begets violence and the vicious cycle of generational violence continues.

In this chapter I examine how Orlandersmith's plays continue to extend existing scripts of sexual violence, as discussed in previous chapters by African American playwrights, by looking at the perpetrators of violence. There are two episodes of sexual violence discussed in this chapter: the first is sexual abuse of Diane by her mother Beauty when she is thirteen-years-old, and the second is Teresa's rape by her neighbour's son Winfred where he seeks to redress misperceived racial rejection and to reassert his black masculinity through sexual violence. Especially pertinent to my discussion is the ways in which Orlandersmith's treatment of the perpetrators of violence create tension as these abusers are not straightforward villains we can condemn. Rather, Orlandersmith asks of us to acknowledge the racist system that makes these abusers, and the vicious cycles of violence in which both the abusers and their victims get

caught. In *Beauty's Daughter* Orlandersmith extends the profile of the perpetrators who are usually the male family members responsible for the sexual abuse of children, by looking at the mother figure more closely. Beauty and Diane's mother-daughter relationship is a complicated one, where the distance between the mother and the daughter is shown through poetry and through Beauty's verbally abusive monologue. Beauty's role, as the inadvertent sexual victimizer of her daughter, is a shadowy one in mother-daughter relationships that Orlandersmith brings to critical attention of the audience. In her next play *Monster*, Orlandersmith uncovers internalised racism's hidden wounds through various characters, but it is Winfred whose monologue reveals how misperceived racial slights and racial rejections by Teresa lead him to use rape as the means to assert his black masculinity. I argue that the toxic impact of living in a racist society means Winfred as a young black adolescent struggles with definitions of masculinity that are either predicated on models in white patriarchy or hypersexual masculine stereotypes for black men. These definitions leave few avenues for him to negotiate or assert his masculinity on models other than the domination/submission framework. Orlandersmith's attention to the perpetrators of violence deliberately engages with the stereotypes wherein black mothers and black men have historically been misrepresented. This is not to reinforce such stereotypes but to show the need, first, to acknowledge the violence being perpetrated on young adolescents like Diane and Teresa, and, second, to acknowledge that the perpetrators exist in a racist environment wherein they themselves have been victimized. It is only by addressing both aspects that the victims and perpetrators of violence (who themselves carry wounds of racism) can be fairly dealt with.

Beauty's Daughter is a solo performance piece, first performed by Orlandersmith herself when the play premiered Off-Broadway at American Place Theatre in 1995. The play is centered on Diane the titular daughter in *Beauty's Daughter*, touching her life at significant points from

puberty at age 13 to age 30. The play consists of six characters: Diane herself, and five other characters, including her childhood friend Papo, her motherly neighbour Mary Askew, her verbally abusive mother Beauty, and her friend Arlene. All leave a significant impact on Diane's life. The plot of the play moves in a meandering fashion, between Dublin and Harlem, between past and present, interweaving between monologues dedicated to each character and poetry, that Wilborn Hampton described in his theatre review in *The New York Times*, as "a bit blurred at times") (no pg). Additionally, in *Beauty's Daughter* it is through poetry that the language of violence that children like Papo and Diane learn in their homes and on the streets is revealed through the violence committed in language. I build an argument that Orlandersmith's use of the medium of language, especially poetry, works to create an overwhelming atmosphere of violence where the inadvertent sexual abuse of the daughter by her drunk mother is perceived as rape. The sexual episode between Diane and her inebriated mother Beauty, while not literally violent is perceived by the young adolescent as a sexual assault. Resultantly, Diane experiences pain, depression, violent anger, and suicidal ideation all emotions that have been experienced by victims of an actual rape (Resick and Schnicke 7). Thus the medium of poetry metonymically shows the overwhelming environment of violence -- verbal, physical, domestic, emotional, and street violence in *Beauty's Daughter* -- that Diane survives.

From Diane's experience of sexual abuse in *Beauty's Daughter*, I next discuss Teresa's rape in *Monster*. *Monster*, like *Beauty's Daughter*, was first performed by Orlandersmith herself when the play premiered at the New York Theatre Workshop in 1996. The play begins and ends on Teresa's monologues which reveal her emotional and psychological journey in the aftermath of rape. These two monologues end on the same note, of Teresa needing to move on by selling her inherited childhood home, the traumatic site of her rape: "I have to sell the house and go/

sell, burn this house/ burn down the voices/ It's time to go/ It's my time" (*Monster* 69). Between these two monologues, Orlandersmith presents monologues by Teresa's mother Beula, her grandmother Sophia, and her great-grandmother Christine (although not in this order) to show generations of familial physical and verbal violence resulting from racism and internalised racism in Teresa's family. These inter-generational familial experiences of racism are further intensified with Winfred's monologue which showcase how a black adolescent experiences and internalises racism that finally culminates into rape. This rape, although an intra-group sexual violence, is I will argue a traumatising racist-based incident where race and misperceived racism are central factors.

Teresa's rape is not only a matter of domination and crime of opportunity (although it is both), but for Winfred, her neighbor's son, it is rooted in the politics of race pigmentocracy, in particular how hues of skin color dictate perceptions and actions within race. In *Monster* the perception of a skin color hierarchy within black race creates friction in adolescent intra-group race relations. Teresa's choices of simple things, whether of clothes, makeup, or of music, are perceived as statements of defiance for her African American community, and her rape becomes a form of redress and control. When the adolescent groups on her street wrongly connect her choices to her lighter skin color and actions by which Teresa is assumed to be dissociating herself from her race, it results in the most violent response: her misconstrued defiance will be curtailed with rape. I examine what purpose is served dramatically by Orlandersmith's decision to provide the rapist Winfred with his own monologue. With Winfred, Orlandersmith negotiates and engages with the larger scripts where a black teenager raping a black girl would be easy to demonize as a "monster". I contend, however, that Orlandersmith deliberately evokes tropes that have been used to pathologize black men as "beasts" and rapists in historical rape narratives to

highlight how the impact of systemic and everyday racism impact identity formation, creating cycles of violence. One result is that, Winfred, as a young black adolescent negotiating his gender and racial identity, does so by violent means. Thus an important Critical Race Theory issue that Orlandersmith tackles is how race, racism, and racialization have now come to "infect common interactions, even among people arguably of the 'same race'" (Schur 297). Winfred, Teresa, and in fact, other young black adolescents that Orlandersmith introduces in her play, are all "infect[ed]" by issues of race. Winfred and Teresa, the former a rapist and the latter a victim of rape, are both victims of racism that is now experienced and perpetrated in intra-group interactions. And lastly, I assert that Orlandersmith's depiction of the scene of sexual violence allows her to invest more into the role of the audience. No longer can the audience be allowed to merely watch and be entertained. Orlandersmith seeks to make witnesses of her audience, where watching scenes of sexual violence from both the rapist and the victim's perspective in a theatrical performance, will elicit a more vested response from the audience, since the act of violence usually occurs in isolated and out of sight places.

What happens in the aftermath of sexual abuse? *Breath, Boom* which premiered at Playwright's Horizon Studio Theatre in 2001, is a play where Corthron looks at the long term impact of child sexual abuse. Through the play's protagonist Prix, a cold and ruthless gang leader at sixteen years, Corthron examines how and why physical violence, delinquency, street and gang violence become a way of life and of survival for young black adolescents. The play begins on a sharp note of violence where a gang member, Comet, looking to leave the gang is beaten up at Prix's command. The play follows Prix's devolving life into crime from the age of sixteen to when she is thirty-years-old, from serving jail time to being on parole, from being a gang leader inflicting violence to being the recipient of gang violence as she gets older. While the play

focuses mainly on young adolescents involved in street and gang related crimes, it is scenes with Prix's mother and her mother's long term abusive boyfriend, Jerome that draw attention to Prix's traumatic childhood. As a play centered on the theme of adolescent gang violence, Corthron intends to show that the root violence is hidden from view. Corthron thus draws connections between Prix's street violence activities and how it originates from Prix's victimization as a child who suffered sexual abuse due to her mother's neglect. In her interview with Lenora I. Brown, Corthron mentions the cycles of violence in which children are inadvertently caught and which they in turn sustain and perpetuate:

I don't believe that children become violent in a vacuum ... many are quick to judge young people and youth violence, and want to try kids who get into trouble as adults.

Nobody is looking at the root of the problem to see where that violence comes from ... the violence committed by adults against young people is exponentially greater than the other way around. (54)

The entire play's focus is on Prix as the leader of a teenage street gang of girls, someone feared for her ruthlessness and violence. Yet the catalyst for Prix's ruthlessness and cold-blooded violence is dealt with very briefly in a few short episodes in the play. Corthron's play *Breath, Boom* dramatically looks "at the root of the problem", that is the "the crime committed by adults against young people". While street and gang violence remain the overt thematic content of the play, I examine the long term effects of sexual abuse, its psychological impact, where the abuser remains and keeps returning as a lingering hauntological manifestation of sexual trauma for Prix. Thus the layout of the play is reflective of the imbalance pointed out by Corthron, where the "root of the problem" that is sexual abuse of children although "exponentially greater" remains largely undealt with, and its results (that is street violence, delinquency, and drug dealing) are the

play's main focus. For healing to occur an exorcism of the ghosts of one's brutal past is needed. For Prix, her mother's negligence is as much a crime as Jerome's sexual abuse. Prix's relationship with her mother is fraught throughout the play. To recover from the past, familial relationships need to be mended. Corthron also draws attention to the role of familial relations in recovery from childhood trauma and the central role of forgiveness for a positive future.

Beauty's Daughter

Orlandersmith creates a lyrical world in *Beauty's Daughter*, a world of music and poetry, but it is also a world of abuse and violence. It is a world wherein the language of violence of the streets and within abusive homes is shown through the power of language of poetry. Orlandersmith uses multiple language mediums to convey how language functions to reveal violence against children as in the play the seven poems are interspersed with dramatic monologues by various people who are a part of Diane's life. The poetry is visceral, brutal, honest, painful, and yet beautiful, just like the glimpses Orlandersmith gives of black childhood and adolescence in East Harlem through Diane and her childhood friend Papo's experiences of violence. *Beauty's Daughter* shows domestic and physical abuse, alcohol and substance abuse, verbal and sexual abuse - are all forms of violence impacting children. As the play progresses the images of violence intensify with each poem heightening the effects that violence and violent environments have that is indicative of characters' devolving lives and psyches into violence. Moreover, as each poem looks at different people in Diane's life it creates an overarching hostile environment of violence and abuse that is impacting lives of vulnerable children and adolescents struggling to survive this environment.

The first poem in *Beauty's Daughter* is titled "Papo's Move", and it shows a disturbing picture of the childhood of Diane's Puerto Rican friend, Papo. Orlandersmith presents a child

growing up in an environment of physical violence where he "bops &/ drops to the side/ both to be cool & to avoid his father's blows" (*Beauty* 6). Papo has also been a witness to his mother's domestic abuse as a battered wife; that abuse is revealed by the repeated childlike refrain "& Mommy got a black eye/ & Mommy, she got a black eye again" (*Beauty* 7). Yet living on the Lower East Side and stepping out of the house is equally dangerous for Papo; just walking down the street means speaking and understanding the street language and negotiating street gangs' lingo in order to survive:

& When Latin boys don't get shot
they get lost
Goin' Down
Goin' down the block
Goin' down the block
again (*Beauty* 7)

"Papo's Move" reveals that the streets offer another kind of danger where just "Goin' down the block" means going down a dangerous road where your choices are either getting shot or getting lost. On the streets any kind of survival translates into an act of losing oneself. Papo reveals in his monologue that he has a future where he can go to college, get an education, and leave this life behind. Yet, as he tells Diane in his monologue, he chooses to stay as he is bound to this life by familial ties:

Yo, I can't turn my back on my family like that. (*Pause*) Yo, no matter how bad they are, they're still my blood _ you don't turn your back on your own, man. ... The last time he beat her, man, he kicked her like she was a dog. I grabbed that motherfucker and said, "Hit her again, and I'll ram my shank up your ass". (*Beauty* 11-12)

Unlike Diane who calls him a "punk" for his inability to leave his family and make it out on his own, Papo chooses not to abandon his family even if it means "get[ting] lost". So Papo, "*this* little boy" who has "merengue", "Salsa Shoes", and "Mambo Blues" in his soul, can only survive and be a source of survival for his vulnerable family, by meeting the physical violence of his father with threats of physical violence embedded in verbal violence (*Beauty* 7). The music and poetry in his soul is replaced by the harsh and mean sounding words such as "grabbed", "hit", "ram", "shank", and abusive language like "motherfucker" and "ass". The transformation of language shows the transformation that occurs in Papo himself as he acquires the tools to survive the environment of violence. Through Papo's experiences, Orlandersmith highlights how vulnerable children "get lost" when they grow up witnessing domestic violence and experiencing physical abuse in their homes. The National Survey of Adolescents titled "Prevalence and Consequences of Child Victimization" conducted in 1996 by Kilpatrick and Saunders provided data that adolescents of Latino descent (in this case of Puerto Rican descent) had a higher statistics of witnessing violence, in addition to experiencing physically abusive punishments, physical assault and sexual violence, than non-Latino white adolescents (Kilpatrick and Saunder 25). This statistical reality that does not alter according to the "The Victimization of Children and Youth: A Comprehensive National Survey" conducted in 2002 and 2003 by David Finkelhor and his team who concluded that Latino children had 1.1% greater odds of witnessing domestic violence than non-Latino white children (Finkelhor et al. 16). Such experiences enhances the chances of Latino children experiencing PTSD up to four times higher than white adolescents (Kilpatrick et al. 2003, 696). The statistical data in National surveys showing the impact of violence on adolescents, in particular on Latino adolescents, corroborates the point that Orlandersmith makes about the consequences of Papo's decision of choosing to stay in the

violent environment to be his mother's and his family's protector: Papo's survival is only possible by learning the language of violence. Learning this language means losing oneself, in essence by "get[ting] lost".

Papo's story of familial and domestic abuse is not an isolated one in the play. The theme of abusive husbands is repeated in a later poem, "Mother Mary's Chair" where domestic violence and marital rape are combined: "the whippings women get irate no-/ good husbands/ Who beat the gowns off their wedding wives" (*Beauty* 20). Orlandersmith's poetry, "Papo's Move" and "Mother Mary's Chair", collectively become a meter indicating that this is not one household or one family where domestic and physical abuse occurs. In *Beauty's Daughter* the images of violence in poetry perform a function that is similar to what performance art critic Jill MacDougall, while examining Abla Farhoud's play *When I was Grown Up*, credits as the potential of how one's individual experience can "metonymically" refer to, but "can never grasp, an entire culture" (147). Likewise, Orlandersmith's poetry offers the audience individual glimpses of violence "metonymically". It is from these poetry references that we can infer an "entire culture" of violence in which physical and domestic violence against women and children are a part of a larger social problem. As the play proceeds these forms of violence further manifest as child maltreatment as Orlandersmith discloses Diane's adolescent experience of sexual abuse and verbal violence.

The mother as a perpetrator of child or adolescent sexual violence is a rare figure in society and in literature, yet it is the very rarity of this figure that Orlandersmith chooses to examine through her character, Beauty. In African American women's literature more broadly, novels such as Sapphire's *Push* (1996), Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970), and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982) draw attention to black children's sexual abuse by their

fathers. In *Push* the sixteen year old protagonist Claireece Precious Jones has two children, both the result of rape by her father, in *The Bluest Eyes* the protagonist Pecola Breedlove is raped twice by her abusive and drunk father Cholly, and in *The Color Purple* the protagonist Celie Harris, like Precious, is raped by her father and bears two children born as a result of sexual violence. The depiction and theme of sexual assault of black girls and children by their fathers has led to these books receiving a harsh reception: both *The Bluest Eye* and *The Color Purple* have been legally challenged, the former for inappropriate "pornographic content", and the latter novel for inappropriate language, explicit sex scenes, and negative presentation of black men.

Despite the public push back against these, abuse by father or male relatives is also reported in national surveys. Based on a nationwide survey of 462 sexual assault cases, Kilpatrick and Saunders in their 1996 National Survey of Adolescents provide the following profile of perpetrators of sexual violence against children: fathers (1.3%), stepfathers (3.2%), brothers or stepbrothers (1.4%), sisters or stepsisters (0.4%), grandparents (2.8%), other adult relatives (6.5%), neighbors (5.8%), coworkers (1.1 %), and other adults (4.5%) (Kilpatrick and Saunders, 20). Their findings do not identify the mother as a potential sexual threat to children. *Beauty's Daughter* raises the question for the audience how far this lack of statistical data correspond to either the lack of abuse by the mother figure, the lack of evidence of such abuse, or the rarity of such assaults? In *Understanding Child Abuse and Neglect*, the National Research Council shows that a large majority of adult offenders in reported child sexual abuse cases are male figures; however, the council also identifies a lack of research into female offenders as an "unexplored pathway in examining the dynamics and origins of child sexual abuse" (113). It is this "unexplored pathway" that Orlandersmith fearlessly chooses to walk on. Beauty's abusive behavior when under alcoholic influence--be it verbal abuse as revealed in Beauty's monologue,

or sexual abuse as revealed in Diane's last monologue--has long term consequences for Diane. Orlandersmith's portrayal of Beauty as a mother who inadvertently sexually abuses her daughter while inebriated shows that while instances where such abuse occurs may be infrequent, the rarity of the occurrence is not a reason to remain silent about the abuse.

In *Beauty's Daughter* Orlandersmith's portrayal of Beauty as an abusive parent needs to be seen against the historical background wherein black mothers have been racially targeted as unfit and have been institutionally discriminated against. It is important to understand that Orlandersmith's intention is not to add to the stereotypes as it is not easy to fit Beauty into any of the debilitating stereotypes with which black mothers were targeted. Just as African American women have had to combat stereotypes related to their sexuality and womanhood, as discussed in the previous two chapters, there have been equally debilitating stereotypes surrounding black motherhood. Collins in *Black Feminist Thought* identifies three stereotypes, mammy, matriarch, and Welfare queen, as narratives that "aims to shape Black women's behavior as mothers" (72). The earliest asexual Mammy figure--the faithful and obedient servant raising the white man's family at the expense of her own--is the "dominant group's perception of the ideal Black female relationship to elite White male power" (Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* 71). It is "ideal" because in this mammy figure a black woman's "sexuality and fertility are severed", by denying the simultaneous existence of both sexuality and maternity as natural aspects for a black woman (Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* 72). The second controlling image of black women is the matriarch. Here the "bad" black mother is held responsible as she has created a deformed family unit by ousting the male as the head of the family. The matriarch stereotype blames the single black mother for black economic subordination because she did not "model appropriate gender behavior" (Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* 75). This "appropriate" behavior has been based on

the white patriarchal framework as favored in the Moynihan report, *The Negro Family* (discussed in last chapter). Rather than appreciating the strength of character it takes for single black mothers to hold the family unit together in poverty and extremely adverse conditions, the black matriarch is held responsible for forming an unnatural family unit. The third debilitating stereotype is the Welfare mother who is too lazy and too fertile, and thus she is responsible for her own poverty and considered to be a burden on the state. This stereotype was discussed in the last chapter where Hester La Negrita's reality as a mother is submerged beneath her welfare status, so that all that is visible to the Chorus (representing society) is that she is a "BURDEN TO SOCIETY" (*In* 10). Collins points out that the stigmatizing of black mothers deliberately draws attention away from the structural sources of poverty and unemployment. As evidenced in the Moynihan report, black mothers in these stereotypes function as the convenient scapegoat where the victims are made liable for their victimization. Taken together these negative stereotypes police black women's ability to be mothers against a backdrop of exploitation, oppression, and poverty. These stereotypes have been a murderous attempt at M/Othering black women. Against this background how does Orlandersmith want us to understand her portrayal of Beauty as a far-from-ideal mother who is a verbally and sexually abusive parent, while being mindful of the historical, cultural, and racist stereotyping of black women as mothers? Orlandersmith demands more of us in our assessment of Beauty as a mother than merely dismissing or seeing Beauty against racist stereotypes in which Beauty may easily be implicated. Beauty, as a bitter, verbally abusive, and alcoholic parent presents a challenge to the audience as she requires a more nuanced understanding from the audience to see the race challenges she faces and to see how her racial experiences may be responsible for the abusive parent that she eventually becomes.

Orlandersmith introduces Beauty's character first through references about her, by what her daughter Diane discloses in poems "Thirteen N' Bleeding" and "Poem", and by what Beauty's neighbour Mary Askew says in her dramatic monologue. "Thirteen 'N' Bleeding" is a poem of a burgeoning thirteen-year-old girl suddenly experiencing the world differently. The poem elaborates Diane's new desires, of wanting to explore both herself and the world, of wanting to shoot dice or play stickball with boys, of wearing daring clothes like leather jackets with one earring; in short of being a "Reinvented female" (*Beauty* 13). Diana views the transition from child to girl as a chance to be "[r]einvented", but this reinvention also places new restrictions and boundaries on Diane. Now she is cautioned about her behavior, that she's "gotta watch" herself and how she interacts with boys. Yet Diane does not have any positive parental influences at home to guide her through this transition from child to girl. On the contrary, even at the age of thirteen Diane expresses contempt and bitterness when she sees her mother in an "inebriated spent" state (*Beauty* 14). She is sickened when she looks at her mother as the woman she is "supposed to/ Emulate". Knowing that as a child Diane had

sucked

Milk from those defeated

Breasts or

Whispered childhood secrets

In those withered ears and

I don't want to have babies (*Beauty* 14)

leads her to reject the idea of motherhood. The contempt in Diane's tone is compounded by the crone-like images of "defeated/[b]reasts" and "withered ears". These images begin to create a far from ideal picture of a mother-daughter relationship. By the end of the poem Diane's excitement,

giddiness, and anticipation of growing into womanhood, of "[r]einventing" herself fades. This transformation occurs with the realization that embracing womanhood also means potentially embracing motherhood, and that is a role Diane firmly rejects. "Thirteen 'N' Bleeding" shows how violence permeates language where blood, a life-giving fluid, becomes "[r]ed gore" for Diane. Consequently, the image of blood in conjunction with motherhood as gore evokes images of carnage rather than life. Blood as gore becomes a pertinent metaphor indicating Diane's changing perceptions. It also signifies that some children, like Diane perceive their childhood in terms of carnage or battles that they are surviving as they grow into adolescence. Additionally, Mary Askew, their neighbor, who has acted as a maternal figure for Diane reveals in her dramatic monologue that Diane had confided in her that she "hate peoples _ Peoples always want something from you. Wanna suck you dry" (*Beauty* 23). Taken in conjunction with the images of "defeated/ breasts" and "withered ears" that Diane had used for her mother, Diane's distrust of relationships and people is shown in the play through images of dryness. For Diane, relationships are not mutually fulfilling, but are perceived as exploitative as she has no faith in people or in love. These images of dryness makes us question how much of this unhealthy view of relationships has been shaped by Beauty.

In the next poem simply titled "Poem", Diane addresses her dead father Arthur (who is not her biological father) but is revealed in the poem as a steady and stable figure. In "Poem" Diane reveals how Beauty's career dreams had ended with motherhood, yet even childbirth did not halt Beauty's fast lifestyle. Beauty's professional and sexual lifestyle continued after giving birth to Diane:

grit your teeth when you watched your wife rub asses with
nameless men who got their kicks from aging party girls

Too jaded for even a B movie screen did you really
think when I came crashing
through the embryonic fluid and blood that it would put
an end to her shake dance (*Beauty* 18-19)

This is a far from flattering picture where Beauty's "shake dance" lifestyle continued even after Diane is born. Orlandersmith adds to this perception of the daughter by providing an outsider's perspective on the mother-daughter relationship through Mary Askew. Mary's monologue reveals that Beauty had a detrimental effect on Diane: "Lawd, dat girl is somethin', really somethin'. Just as sweet as she can be. Dat momma o' her makes me sick.", "Old drunken, prissy bitch_ how Diane was born to her I'll never know", "cause that goddamn Beauty (beat) _ 'scuse me Lawd_ did a job on that chile" (*Beauty* 22-23). Diane's poems and Mary's monologue collectively create an unfavorable impression of Beauty as a mother before the audience meets her.

Unfortunately, Beauty's own monologue does not redress the unfavorable impression of her as a mother. Beauty's monologue creates an image of a woman who is obsessed with beautiful and expensive things. She constantly berates her daughter and does not understand why Diane has no interest in Beauty's material possessions that are "worth money, real money", as opposed to the sentimental value Diane attaches to the "ole-timey records and bullshit and bummy dresses _ damn bag lady dresses" left to Diane by Mary Askew (*Beauty* 31). Beauty feels that she "gave birth to an ingrateful child who's too ignorant to know what good quality is and bad quality is (beat) Not to mention selfish!" (*Beauty* 31) For Beauty, motherhood represents the great sacrifice of her career as a dancing girl and her life in the exciting limelight. She feels her daughter Diane is not sufficiently grateful or appreciative of the sacrifice that Beauty had made

for her. Beauty routinely refers to Diane as a force of destruction whose birth ruined Beauty's life:

You ruined me ! ... They had to give me a cesarean (*shows scar*) Feel it. I want you to know how they cut me. How they ruined my body. You stole from me. I was a dancer. I was pretty. My body was gorgeous! And you say I caused you damage? Hell! Bitch, you robbed me! (*pause*) That's right, I'm calling you a bitch. A fat bull dyke lookin' bitch!

(*Beauty 33*)

Beauty is consumed with the need to see herself as a victim who was "ruined" by childbirth and whose career was "stole[n]" from her by her own daughter. She is not willing to listen or to take any parental responsibility for the "damage" she has done to her daughter. Beauty's defence against Diane's accusations of poor parenting results in more verbal abuse and derogatory name calling. Not only is Beauty offensive, but phrases like "fat bull dyke lookin' bitch" are intended to lower self-esteem with fat shaming and sexual orientation slurs. She openly belittles Diana by throwing what she perceives to be Diane's failures in her face: "At least I tried to make somethin' of my life. See you dropped out of college and you know what that makes you? A failure"

(*Beauty 32*). For Beauty, criticisms of her as a mother by her daughter Diane do not lead to self-reflection: "So you want to bring up how 'mean' I was. You know what I say to that? I say, 'Bull!

I got mine!' I did right by you and I think you are crazy" (*Beauty 34*). Throughout Beauty's dramatic monologue she attempts to gain Diane's attention by hurling verbal abuse at her.

Orlandersmith raises the possibility that Beauty's cruel digs, her demeaning taunts, and abusive name calling might be a camouflage for a lonely mother's desperate need to make a connection with her daughter, or a desire to repair a fractured mother-daughter relationship? Beauty herself does not reveal any such aims in her attempts to get a rise out of her daughter. Rather, the very

repetition of her belittling taunts and abusive name calling indicate a long pattern of verbal abuse when she is under the influence of alcohol.

Raising Diane alone admittedly would have been very difficult for Beauty. Repeatedly, in the monologue Beauty refers to her husband's death and how hard it was for Beauty to raise Diane alone. Beauty constantly reminds Diane to be grateful because Beauty had "spoiled" her, and Diane "had it easy" in life because of Beauty's sacrifices (*Beauty* 33). She tells Diane of the hard and "dangerous" life she had as a black dancer and stripper, because as a light-skinned black person she would have "gotten kicked dead in the ass and everything" if it was revealed that she was "passing" (*Beauty* 33). These risks are not discussed but Orlandersmith here revives the racism and discrimination associated with historical phenomenon of racial passing in America. Director of African American Studies at Stanford University Allyson Hobbs, in *A Chosen Exile*, considers "[r]acial passing [as] an exile, sometimes chosen, sometimes not" (4). Irrespective of the element of choice, the act of passing by denying one's race, as Hobbs points was a "risky business" that testifies to the "enduring problem of race in American society" (5). Thus systemic racism remains part and parcel of survival irrespective of what shade of black one is. Unfortunately, Orlandersmith does not reveal Beauty's struggles so that the audience can form a connection with her and come to an understanding of Beauty as she is now: an old alcoholic woman who is obsessed with material things. What is it that Orlandersmith, as a black artist, depicting Beauty as a far from ideal black mother asking us to see? Does Orlandersmith's depiction of Beauty as a verbally abusive and alcoholic mother unwittingly add to a long line of negative depictions of black motherhood in the dominant discourses? This is not Orlandersmith's intention, nor should the audience co-relate a critical view of Beauty as a mother with the history of racist stereotyping of black mothers. Rather, the audience needs to question how far did the

environment of systemic racism--evident in the phenomenon of racial passing where Beauty had worked as a light-skinned woman by denying her racial heritage--impact her relationship with her daughter. Although it is not revealed directly in the play, the audience also needs to question when and how systemic racism created and sustained conditions of misery and oppression in which child abuse itself became systemic. Orlandersmith compels and directs us to see what the impact of Beauty's verbal abuse has been on her daughter, Diane. She is a child who is raised in and survives this vicious environment of verbal abuse; the long term impact of these childhood experiences becomes evident in the images of withering, decay, and dryness that affect Diane's perceptions of love and of relationships.

Following Beauty's tirade against Diane is the last poem in the play, "Rat Dreams Descent into Hell _ 1994". This poem is a culmination of violence where Diane's "descent into Hell" consist of nightmares of sexual assault. The poem also shows Diane's descent into depression and suicidal tendencies. Her nightmare is indicative of Diane's subconscious fears where

Rat crawl Rasta men invades

My bed in a dream

... Balso Snell type nightmares

Part my legs with the

Hush consent of the urban

Bushman (*Beauty* 35)

Although the play so far has given no indication of Diane experiencing sexual violence, yet the poetry in the play collectively presents images of violence committed on women and children. The images of violence in poetry are no longer singularities, but instead have to be seen as

mutually contingent, the many as part of a whole, reflective of the culture of violence that children and adolescents like Diane and Papo are exposed to and which they experience. Orlandersmith's poetry exemplifies the violence revealed through language as the series of images build into a poetic crescendo that results in Diane's "descent into Hell", that is, into a nightmarish subconscious sexual assault. Orlandersmith makes us question who are the real "rats", "Rasta men", or the "urban Bushman" in Diane's past, that are now "invad[ing]" her subconscious present. The play up until this point has presented no person in Diane's life who she fears: where, then, is this subconscious fear originating from that is manifesting itself in her dreams? What is the root cause of the trauma underlying Diane's nightmares of rape, her depression, and her suicidal inclinations? Are these nightmares where "When I sleep, I scream/ Myself awake", emotional and mental health issues indicative of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder? (*Beauty* 36) The poem "Rat Dreams Descent into Hell _ 1994" is a clue for the audience where Orlandersmith raises questions and possibilities of a possible root cause, a violence, or a traumatic event, but provide us with no answers.

Diane's last monologue shows how Diane interprets any unwanted sexual come on by a woman as rape. Diane narrates that when her friend Arlene expressed a desire for her by running her hands up and down Diane's thigh that Diane felt violated and betrayed. Diane's reaction to Arlene's sexual overture is extreme as she does not dismiss it simply as an unwanted proposition. Orlandersmith shows that Diane's immediate reactions are a betrayal of trust followed by extreme rage,

she's supposed to be my friend. I think she is trying to rape me ...

I wanted to ram my fist in

hurt her

draw blood

draw blood of this sincere rapist. (*Beauty* 38)

So what makes Diane react to same sex desire with such anger and revulsion? Earlier in the play Anthony's monologue reveals how Diane reacts aggressively to his clumsy proposition, but eventually they connect and spend an entire evening discussing jazz. Thus, Diane capably handles situations of unwanted sexual propositions. One cannot even connect Diane's anger to homophobia as indicated by Beauty's homophobic slurs "fat bull dyke lookin' bitch" as this incident occurs in a lesbian bar where both Arlene and Diane are discussing Diane's love life (*Beauty* 33). To associate Diane's anger as a reaction to the infringement of the boundary of friendship seems an exaggeration. Or is it? At this point in the play this violent reaction ("want to ram my fist in/ hurt her/ draw blood") seems excessive to Arlene's sexual proposition. A simple rejection to the proposition would have sufficed. But considering Diane's nightmare of "Rat crawl Rasta men invade[ing]/ My bed", as an audience we suspect that there is more underlying the rage that follows Arlene's sexual invitation.

Orlandersmith does not draw out the mystery. This episode acts as a traumatic stressor as the very next paragraph involuntarily recalls a flashback memory. As a teenager Diane's mother, Beauty had sexually abused her young daughter in an inebriated state:

Suddenly I'm in bed with my mother, I'm thirteen years old and still made to sleep with her, her body is a flabby, blubbery mess and she reeks of Scotch. Suddenly tits are on top of my chest, she wants me to hug her. I refuse. She punches, and kicks me and rolls over.

Eventually, I hear her snoring. (*Beauty* 38)

Her mother's unexpected invasion of Diane's space in bed is a violation of Diane's vulnerable sexuality at the age of thirteen. This violation of space is further compounded because it is a

violation of her trust. Invasion of Diane's private space renders the room and the bed as *unheimlich* an unsafe yet strangely familiar space. While Beauty falls into a drunken stupor, this episode marks Diane for life. The resurfacing of this flashback resurfaced memory following Arlene's proposition, raises another possibility that when Arlene touches Diane, Diane experiences dissociation that often attends Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. This betrayal of her trust by Arlene triggers the memory of the root cause of Diane's sexual trauma so that Diane re-experiences the betrayal caused by her mother's sexual abuse when she was under the influence of alcohol. Orlandersmith here reverses the more traditional narrative of sexual abuse of children and adolescents by presenting the mother figure as the inadvertent violator of her child's innocence. There might not have been any intended sexual violence by Beauty, but this experience is sexual abuse. Valerie Jackson, in *Racism and Child Protection*, clarifies one of the myths related to black children experiencing sexual abuse is that "[s]exual abuse is not always about penetration. The emotional scars from any form of abuse, whatever its severity, have long-term healing problems" (13). Thus what happens one time, one night, without any sexual violence is also child abuse. Professor of Gender Studies Kristin Bumiller makes a similar point in her article "Rape as a Legal Symbol," in which she writes that the "language of rape is about emotional truths ... a nonlegal conception of rape that describes women's feelings of violation and is not bound by the nature of the act (thus not limited to sexual penetration)" (82). Orlandersmith shows that the sexual abuse experienced by Diane, as indicated in her monologue and as hinted at in the poem "Rat Dreams Descent into Hell _ 1994," results in "long term healing problems" evident in her nightmares, depression, and suicide attempts. Diane's "emotional truth" is embedded in the unhealed wound left by her drunken mother's accidental sexual abuse. It is this adolescent unhealed wound inflicted by Beauty's inadvertent sexual abuse

that Arlene's sexual proposition unintentionally revives and exposes for the audience.

When Orlandersmith's looks at the "the sins of the mother" it is not with the aim to perpetuate or repeat the erroneous history of portraying black parents, fathers or mothers, as inherently lacking. Orlandersmith's main goal is to fearlessly speak up for the abused child. In her article "Black Mothers' Emotional and Behavioral Responses to the Sexual Abuse of Their Children," Professor of Social Work, Claudia Bernard looks at how racial concerns impact black mothers' responses to the knowledge of sexual abuse of their children. She asserts that although "it is necessary to challenge harmful stereotypes surrounding perceptions of Black families, it is also important not to present Black families as harmonious and conflict-free, because this not only colludes with abusers but also serves to silence children" (83). Bernard makes a case for black mothers who have felt the racial and communal burden to be silent about sexual abuse of their children by male members of the family. I assert that Bernard's argument is equally applicable to instances, however rare or underreported they are, where the mother intentionally, or as in Beauty's case unintentionally, commits the sexual abuse. Through *Beauty's Daughter* Orlandersmith emphasizes that silence about the abuser, irrespective of the gender or racial identity of the abusive parent, is a "collu[sion] with the abusers". For the healthy recovery of the child this silence needs to be broken.

Addressing the issue of sexual abuse by a parent figure is especially important for the silenced children. For children to heal from the abuse their abuser needs to be identified, and the abuse needs to be addressed. Diane's anger when Arlene expresses desire for her is a resurgence of the anger she felt when her mother had crossed the boundary lines of trust. Yet, Diane is unable to act on this rage and commit violence, both in the past against her mother, and in the present against Arlene who she considers her "sincere rapist". In the resurfaced memory of

Beauty's sexual abuse Diane remembers that "I raise the scissors above [Beauty] but I can't do it. I can't kill her. Like I can't rape Arlene" (*Beauty* 38). Based on her adolescent experience of sexual violation, the act of rape for Diane is equated with unwanted sexual advances from a woman, especially a woman with whom Diane has a relationship of trust. Thus the greatest tragedy for Diane is how the mere introduction of sexual overtone in woman-to-woman relations makes Diane equate the breaking of her trust as a form of rape. This equation of female desire with sexual violence and with betrayal of trust is Diane's inheritance from her mother.

Diane's contemplation of suicide, of calling help lines in attempts to be dissuaded from suicide attempts, or of playing ineffectually with the knife in "Rat Dreams Descent into Hell _ 1994" reveals her to be suffering from possible long-term effects of her mother's sexual abuse. Not being able to

Put a knife thru my
Gut infuriates me and
I pick up the phone
Instead
And a black girl's volunteer
Voice tries to keep me
Alive (*Beauty* 35)

Diane chooses phallic weapons, a knife or a pair of scissors, to punish her violators but is unable to wield it against her mother, her friend, or even herself, be it in a fit of rage or in a state of depression. In their article "Assessment of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder with African Americans," Emily Malcoun, Monnica T. Williams and Leyla BahojbNouri stress the importance of cultural considerations for African American people, especially the need to know about

trauma histories in order to properly diagnose PTSD (163). Diane's trauma history is revealed in her resurfaced memory following Arlene's sexual proposition. This trauma history works retrospectively in the play to make the audience understand Diane's depression, suicidal or self-destructive tendencies, and rage as long term effects of sexual abuse and child maltreatment that need proper treatment. Calling help lines are only a temporary stop-gap and not a permanent solution. David A. Brent and J. John Mann in "Familial Factors in Adolescent Suicidal Behavior" identify the closeness of the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim as a "strong association between sexual abuse and suicide attempts in young adult women" (106). However, Brent and Mann identify the father, the stepfather, or other male members of the family as likely perpetrators of sexual abuse. Orlandersmith widens the profile of the perpetrators of sexual violence against children and adolescents by examining how, on uncommon occasions, a mother can also play a pivotal role in child sexual abuse.

With *Beauty*, Orlandersmith engages with the narrative maintained in literature of the problematic mother figure. From Euripedes' *Medea* (431 BC), in which the mother, Medea, commits infanticide in a fit of jealousy to teach Jason a lesson for abandoning her, to, more recently, Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), in which the mother, Sethe, possesses a destructive protective instinct, and would take an axe to her children rather than have her "beautiful magical best thing" destroyed and dirtied by slavery -- the mother as a problematic figure lingers (296). Both Morrison and Orlandersmith show the catastrophic impact of racism on black families. But the impact registers in two different ways. Whereas Morrison shows the mother's protective instinct carried to an extreme as infanticide, for Orlandersmith the mother, who is socially and culturally perceived as the nurturing and non-threatening parent figure, becomes a sexual violator of her child's innocence. Orlandersmith is asking her audiences to examine how the long

term impact of the macro environment impacts black mothers, how it undermines their roles and responsibilities as the traditional primary care givers of their children. *Beauty's Daughter* also stresses the need for accountability, irrespective of the gender identity of the abusive parent, be it mother or father. With *Beauty's Daughter* Orlandersmith asserts that for the healthy recovery of the abused child or adolescent "the sins" of the mother need to be addressed openly.

Monster

Orlandersmith's theatrical engagement with the language of violence continues in her next play *Monster*, which deals with young black adolescents caught in cycles of violence. Centered on the life of Teresa, the play's fifteen-year-old protagonist, the play begins with her disintegrating emotional and psychological life. Teresa carries and suffers the burden of the abuse and violence experienced by her mother and grandmother, that they inflict on one another and unwittingly on Teresa as well. Growing up with her vitriolic grandmother and alcoholic mother Teresa's home apartment has been a site of emotional and verbal violence. In the play the "hidden injuries" and hidden wounds of white domination and supremacy when they manifest as internalised racism invade and impact familial ties in Teresa's home across generations (Pyke 551). These racial conflicts within the apartment are compounded for Teresa by growing up in Harlem where the intra-group race politics of how to be black intensifies. Harlem, which has culturally and creatively been a site of black identity and pride, through state and institutional neglect has now become an ambivalent site. In the play this ambivalence becomes evident when Harlem still projects a black identity for the street youth, but it is a racial identification that Teresa seeks to escape from by going to Greenwich Village. She has been relatively protected from the physical violence on the streets, yet the street violence in Harlem invades her home, her room, and her body. I examine Teresa's rape as intra-group violence where Teresa's body

becomes the site wherein Winfred's black masculinity is violently established. Winfred does this to redress what he misconstrues as Teresa's betrayal and denial of her black race affiliation.

Teresa is her Nana Sophia's "bright yellow girl ... bright, like the Sun" (*Monster* 47). Teresa will go far by following her grandmother Sophia's advice, by reading and doing well in school. However, this well meaning advice eventually reveals internalised white supremacy, where Teresa's success is also dependent on her ability to "talk properly" by "listening to how the white people talk", like her grandmother had done. Nana is not merely advocating code-switching in order to be successful. Nana's advice reveals the "racial mountain" that Langston Hughes had identified decades ago as "this urge within race towards whiteness", and how it continues to impact familial intra-race relations. Nana's instructions "urg[ing]" Teresa towards "whiteness" is what Hughes had recognised as the urge towards "Nordic manners. Nordic faces. Nordic hair. Nordic art" (56). Creating such a desire in minds of minorities ensures that oppressive systems of white privilege and domination continue. Karen D. Pyke in her article "What is Internalized Racial Oppression and Why Don't We Study it?" reveals that the "existence among people of color of internalized racism (i.e., internalized White supremacy), ... reveal White domination in our society, for every mechanism of internalized racial oppression contributes to the system of White privilege" (566). Nana's endorsement of and encouragement towards how "white people" talk as *the* model behavior to emulate and as *the* recipe for success, reveal the subjugation of Sophia's mind to white domination that she is perpetuating at home by advocating that Teresa should believe in it as well.

Sophia's internalization of white supremacy is further revealed when she insists that Teresa will not get involved with "dark skinned men who are evil, [and] ignorant", and that she is to "marry a light skinned man" in order to be successful (*Monster* 46-47). This attribution of

dark color to an "evil, [and] ignorant" nature shows internalised racism manifesting as "individual inculcation of the racist stereotypes, values, images, and ideologies perpetuated by the White dominant society about one's racial group" (Pyke 553). Orlandersmith shows how growing up with a physically abusive father and with her mother attributing the cause of this abuse to skin color is responsible for Sophia's internalised racism. This physical abuse is revealed in Sophia's own mother Christine's monologue. Christine's monologue begins with the sound of "*Sophia getting whipped*" and Christine is begging her husband to stop "beatin' my baby. You stop. You stop it, hear? (*Monster* 66) Sophia's mother explains to her daughter that Sophia's father's violence is rooted in her being "da lightest of all da chillin" (*Monster* 66). Her being the "lightest" was the trigger for the physical violence as it reminded Sophia's father that his own father who had been white had rejected him: "his own daddy was white and don' want him" (*Monster* 66). Sophia's father's violence against the "lightest" of his children is rooted in a generational cycle of racial violence where racism and white supremacy are made manifest in and over the lives of people of color. Orlandersmith shows how Sophia's father by singling out Sophia for physical abuse out of all of his children because of her light skin color repeats the rejection that he himself had experienced at the hands of his own white father. Consequently, Sophia's experiences of parental physical abuse make her project and co-relate her father's physical violence with the color of his skin.

Orlandersmith reveals how racism infiltrates and impacts families over generations. As a survivor of parental physical abuse Sophia has internalised racism that has created a sense of disconnect with her people and her race. Thompson and Neville in their article "Racism, Mental Health and Mental Health Practise," argue that people of color "succumb" to internalized racism when they "perceive the structure of rewards that affirms the status quo as valuable" (191).

Internalized racism, Thompson and Neville contend, helps to "maintain the fiction of White superiority and inferiority of people of color, and consequently justify a system of racial stratification" (193). Orlandersmith shows how Sophia, too, has "succumbed" to this "fiction" where she believes that by emulating the speech patterns and life styles of white people will result in a "structure of rewards". She has learnt to connect the physical abuse she experienced as a child with her father's color, to equate negativity with black color, and to believe in racist stereotypes about black people: "he would beat, beat, beat me like the nigger savage he was till I bled" (*Monster* 47). Orlandersmith relates how Sophia too is at pains to perpetuate such "a system of racial stratification" within her own family and create a distance from her own race by projecting onto her dark skinned father and her race the same "racist stereotypes, values, images and ideologies perpetuated by the white dominant society" (Pyke 553). According to these racist stereotypes for Sophia her father was a "nigger savage" and black people are "evil [and] ignorant".

In the play Sophia constantly puts down Teresa's mother Beula for having married "the darkest, crustiest, no account one she could find" (*Monster* 47). If the ideas of color hierarchy that Sophia is seen influencing Teresa with are evidence, it is safe to assume that Beula also grew up with the same pressures, and her choosing the "darkest, crustiest" man as her husband was probably a form of rebellion against her own mother. According to Sophia, Teresa's father had played no role in her upbringing because he was "[i]ll equipped" and "inferior" (*Monster* 47). Eventually, Teresa's mother Beula is ruined and becomes an alcoholic just like Sophia's father. Orlandersmith shows how for Sophia her daughter's failed relationship and resulting alcohol addiction become race-related evidence of race inferiority. This is classic white racist stereotyping that Sophia has internalized, where results and effects of structural and institutional

racism that has deliberately kept a race "[i]ll equipped" and "inferior" by denying them equal work and educational opportunities, are attributed to race rather than to the exploitative and oppressive systems that maintain white supremacy. Teresa grows up listening to her Nana, Sophia's "raging / snarling / voice" (*Monster* 45). She leaves her home to "block out my grandmother's and my mother's "machete" voices screaming through at each other" (*Monster* 48). Orlandersmith's play reveals how these "raging", "snarling", "screaming", and "machete" voices of grandmother and mother conflicts create a home environment that is less of a home and more of an explosive site of racial conflicts. Teresa escapes the "machete" voices by leaving her home and escaping into the world of rock music in Greenwich Village.

This internalized racism as manifested by Nana's disassociation with black color in favor of lighter skin tone has a long theatrical history. As early as 1925 Zora Neal Hurston's play *Color Struck* presented the protagonist John favoring the light skinned Effie over his dark skinned girlfriend Emma. A theme repeated in Eulalie Spence's *Undertow* (1927) where the husband Dan seeks to leave his vitriolic wife Hattie for an old light skinned flame Clem. Adrienne Kennedy's one act play *Funnyhouse of a Negro* (1964) is situated in the protagonist Sarah's mind where Sarah's multiple selves gnaw at her. Within the play the obsession with light color and straight hair becomes key issues which are fractioning Sarah's mental health. Orlandersmith is adding to this long theatrical tradition as she shows how obsession with the pigment of skin tone is still a central factor impacting intra-group race relations. However, Orlandersmith draws attention to the more violent consequences of systemic and everyday racism wherein intra-group sexual violence become a means to establish race significance.

Stepping out of the house to escape her home does not necessarily mean that Teresa can step away from being racially perceived, or in Teresa's particular situation, misperceived.

Monster shows how for Teresa stepping out of her apartment building is akin to preparing for battle, as walking in Harlem for an adolescent teenager requires negotiating an unsafe terrain. On the streets of Harlem Lee, Brother, Walter, Peaches, and Tootie wait around the corner for the "White Girl" (*Monster* 46). Teresa's preference for learning, for listening to hard rock music, and for going to Greenwich Village is misperceived by the neighbourhood street youth as a betrayal of her race, and thus she is continually targeted and harassed:

they figure if you're black/ you shouldn't read/ they figure I'm black/ kick back/ stay
back/ back in the ghetto/ where you belong/ they say that/ they say not to read/ or hear/
see colors/ see/ hear/ music/ different kinds of music/ to wanna live elsewhere/
somewhere/ somehow/ good well n' fine/ it means to be white/ not black 'n' proud/ black
'n' proud/ in the ghetto. (*Monster* 50)

Here Orlandersmith invokes the rich historical significance of the 1960's Civil Rights movement of what it means to be "black 'n' proud". Martin Luther King in his speech sought to re-write the dictionary meanings associated with color in order "to get the language right," which regarded black as "degrading and low and sinister" and white as "always something pure high" (King *Youtube*). He did this by affirmatively stating in his speech that "Yes I am Black and I am proud of it. I am Black and beautiful" (King *Youtube*). Yet being "black 'n' proud" for these young people in the play means to "stay back/ back in the ghetto/ where you belong" (*Monster* 50). They identify their black racial identity with staying in Harlem and any desire to "wanna live elsewhere/ somewhere... good well n' fine" is interpreted by them as a desire "to be white" (*Monster* 50). Black feminist scholar Valerie Smith points out that this "concern for what it means to be Black when one also enjoys educational, economic, or cultural privilege has recurred in debates about race and identity throughout the twentieth century" within black

communities (64). Historically, the contention of how to progress and what progress of a few people would mean for the majority of black people can be seen in the Booker T. Washington's vocational training for all versus W. E. B. Du Bois's select and exceptional "talented tenth" debates. When the black middle class's success is maintained at times by distancing itself from the black lower working classes (as was seen in the previous chapter by Welfare who maintained a clear boundary line between "our kind" and "their kind"), this distancing from one's roots can signal a denial of one's roots. Bill Cosby with his "pound cake" speech that justifies police killing in 2004 and Justice Clarence Thomas' speech characterising his sister as a Welfare Queen stereotype in 1980 are just two glaring examples of how distancing and/or denial of one's working class roots by some successful black individuals has led to this perception (as indicated by Teresa's monologue) that success for black people means a desire "to be white" (*Monster* 50). This is a perception that Vershawn A. Young discusses in his essay "Performing Citizenship". For Young "the historical longing of some middle-class African Americans to be racially distinguished from the lower class is no longer a yearning but is perceived as fact" (3). Although distancing is not always a denial of one's racial background, as critics such as Smith and Young point out, it is "perceived" as such. For the street youth any attempt by Teresa at uplifting herself, whether it is through education, through wanting a better life, or through desiring to live elsewhere other than in a "ghetto", is perceived as a betrayal of one's race which they co-relate to her lighter skin tone. For them her actions reveal her desire "to be white". Young fifteen-year-old Teresa, who is negotiating the ideals propounded by her grandmother that are rooted in negation of her race as well as the perceptions outside the home where leaving or doing anything different is equated with betrayal of race, is faced with a quagmire of non-belonging. Orlandersmith's protagonist, as a black-white biracial person, becomes a contested site of intra-group race politics

where her family and her street community project onto her their ideas of how to be "Black", and where Teresa's own choices mark her as a "White girl," who is a misfit, a wannabe, or worse, a race traitor.

For urban geographer Neil Smith, Harlem has many faces in the American imaginary: "the public representation of Harlem are manifold, intense, resonant, and highly imbricated with definitions of black identities. There is the Harlem of Harlem Renaissance ... or the Harlem of the 1960's -- Malcolm X, Black Power, the Black Panthers. But there is also Harlem the ghetto ... Harlem the landscape of physical dilapidation, landlord criminality, social deprivation, street crime, police brutality, drugs. Harlem as haven, Harlem as hell" (140-42). Harlem's historical significance notwithstanding, when stepping out onto the streets Orlandersmith's young protagonist is engaged in surviving "Harlem the ghetto" where she has to negotiate unsafe streets:

they don't want to let me pass/ but I keep my hand on my shank/ If you're on 122nd Street and Madison Avenue trying to find your own, and you know it's not there/ where a game of hopscotch means dodging used syringes/ you learn to cut/ you better learn to cut someone deep ... I brace myself for the long walk from 122nd Street to the subway contemplating ways to kill everyone/ kill myself/ chanting a genocide/ suicide mantra.

(*Monster* 49)

Walking the street means Teresa has to "brace" herself as if undertaking an arduous and dangerous journey, where she has to "keep [her] hand on [her] shank" to indicate that she has a concealed weapon in order to ward off potential threats, and where the threat of drugs or disease looms as a "game of hopscotch means dodging used syringes". Like Papo in *Beauty's Daughter* whose survival depended on "get[ting] lost", Teresa too has learned how to survive on the

streets. Learning the language of violence requires "learn[ing] to cut ... to cut someone deep" if need be (*Monster* 49). Leaving her house to "block" off the voices and "brac[ing]" to enter the dangerous streets means there is peace neither within nor without for Teresa. Orlandersmith portrays Teresa's non-belonging as an identity that is in conflict, in search, or in a transition. However, when her non-belonging is misperceived as rejection of black race rape becomes the retributive means to punish her.

How does Orlandersmith want us to understand Teresa's choices: her preferences for rock music, gothic clothing and make up, and going to the Greenwich Village? Teresa herself does not reflect on her choices. Winfred, Teresa's rapist, relates in his monologue that "Niggas 'round the way hated her 'cause she listened to rock and all that shit, and dressed different from them" (*Monster* 62). For her black community her choices incite hate because she acts "different from them," which they conceive as her attempts to act white. Orlandersmith makes us consider the possibility that maybe her choices are reflective of Teresa's internalised racism like her grandmother's, that maybe Teresa following her grandmother's advice by striving to claim an identity deemed closer to white than black. Or are Teresa's choices merely a form of teenage rebellion, a phase that she will eventually grow out of? It is important to realize that Teresa's choices are a rejection of her grandmother's advice as well because rock music and Goth dressing and make up are not representative of the middle class white values that her grandmother had been endorsing. Rather, both rock music and Goth aesthetics imply a rebellious streak whereby these forms of self-expression culturally positioned themselves against the dominant middle class frameworks, values, and aesthetics. Thus, Teresa's choices can be read as a deliberate defiance of the traditional expectations of race, gender, and middle class decorum that are being placed on her by her family and community.

Going to Greenwich Village to listen to rock music provides Teresa a chance to explore an identity that is cut loose from the constraints of racial identification. It is a freedom from the racial burden of stereotyping that her Nana and street gangs in Harlem had been imposing on her. In downtown East Village, Teresa is "lookin' for home/ lookin' for family" (*Monster* 49). Teresa, by choosing rock music over black forms of music, is deliberately choosing to "look" elsewhere to belong and elsewhere to be. Irrespective of how Teresa chooses to self-identify herself, as black or as a black-white biracial person, she cannot cut loose the restraints of racial identification in a world that is so seamlessly shaped by race ideology and politics. Ethnic and race relations scholar Nikki Khanna explains that the "one drop rule affects how black-white biracial's physical appearances are *perceived* by others"; physical appearance "continues to influence racial identity today" where a bi-racial person is "frequently raced as *black*" (47). Orlandersmith shows how Teresa's choices elicit the judgement and "hate" of her family, in particular her mother Beula, and her age community represented by Winfred, Lee, Brother, Walter, Peaches, and Tootie. Her search for an identity, of "lookin' for home/ lookin' for family" away from Harlem in East Village create perceptions of defiance and race rejection, of betrayal against both gender conformity and race loyalty. Orlandersmith reveals how Teresa's rape by Winfred becomes a means of brutally neutralising, controlling, and re-dressing misperceptions of betrayal and/or denial of race that has been communally read into Teresa's actions.

Winfred opportunistically invades Teresa's apartment one night when he finds her door left open by accident. The rape scene reveals how Winfred performs his black masculinity and sexual identity against the backdrop of black music. There is hard rock music playing in Teresa's room while she sleeps. He has to change the music and put on Rhythm and Blues before he can perform the rape act: "I goes to the record player and takes that white rock shit off 'cause I can't

get hard to that shit and put some Marvin Gaye and my dick is on the bone" (*Monster* 63). Music is an important metaphor in *Monster* as Winfred's use of black music in the rape scene directly links music to sexual violence. While Winfred does not pause to consider the implications of the presence of Marvin Gaye's music in Teresa's room, it does hint at wider race affiliations than he gives Teresa credit for. Orlandersmith shows that Winfred, by changing the music record from hard rock to Motown music on which he can get erect and perform sexually, makes black music for Winfred not just a means of establishing or expressing black identity, but a means for asserting and maintaining his black masculinity by violent means. Thus, in this rape scene black music, especially Gaye's romantic music that communicates sex is transformed by the perpetrator. This is a distortion of the vital role that black music has played in establishing and expressing black identity historically and culturally in the twentieth century. Starting their historical analysis with the New Negro movement that helped define black artistic expression in early twentieth century, Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison emphasise the role of black "music - - popular and serious, sacred and secular-- as the basic subsoil of black culture and black identity" (94). However, in *Monster* Orlandersmith reveals Winfred misuses romantic music by Gaye as an accompaniment, or rather as a catalyst, to commit sexual violence with the intention of establishing his black masculine and sexual identity during the rape scene. Winfred wants to teach Teresa that he "ain't no white boy", or "no pink or some high yella nigga he'ah either", but "a man's dick in yo' ass. A real nigga dick, bitch" (*Monster* 64). Consequently, Winfred's violent actions show how black music, the "basic subsoil", is misused by Winfred to germinate a perilous black identity that is predicated on sexual domination. V. Young in his essay, "Compulsory Homosexuality and Black Masculine Performance" identifies the pressures on black men to perform heterosexual black masculinity where it is "white men [who] set the

standard for mainstream middle-class masculinity" (9). Within this socio-cultural paradigm V. Young asserts that "one way to understand black hypermasculinity or exaggerated displays of manliness is as a response to the threat of losing their manhood in a society that privileges the whiteness of masculinity" (9). Winfred's "exaggerated display of manliness" by performing his masculinity through rape is to teach Teresa a violent lesson for asserting independence in refusing him that he felt had threatened his black masculinity. She needs a brutal reminder that he is no "white", "pink", or "high yella nigga" but is a "man", a "real nigga" who is violating her. As this performance of Winfred's masculinity is violently stage managed against Winfred's misinterpretation of black music it is imperative to be mindful of how music can influence impressionable youth, and how it is perceived and emulated in identity formation for young adults.

By giving the rapist a monologue Orlandersmith allows us a glimpse into what motivates Winfred to commit sexual violence. The monologue does not provide any background information or life experiences which might lead us to sympathetically understand what motivates Winfred to act so brutally. Rather, it provides insight into how Winfred as a teenage black boy, living in poor urban community, is himself in the process of negotiating and mediating race and gender stereotyping in a racist society. Winfred's grasp of reality is unsound as in his monologue he misleads himself into believing that a relationship exists with Teresa. Consequently, he initially misleads the audience as well. It is later in Teresa's monologue which clarifies for us that the relationship exists only in Winfred's mind. He believes that she is his "girl", that she reads poetry to him through the shared bedroom wall between their apartments, and that she is constantly making overtures to him, "ever since we wuz kids she wuz writin' poetry and stuff to me, thru the wall" (*Monster* 62). Teresa is raped by Winfred when he

perceives her to be rejecting him on racial basis because he believes she wants to be "white". Thus, he projects onto Teresa the very misconceptions he had claimed earlier in his monologue to "protect" her from where he "would look after dem, you know, 'cause it's rough" (*Monster* 62). As he tells Teresa during the rape act, "You gonna 'member me, bitch. Yeah, you an' all this white shit. I'm too low for you to talk to, huh, bitch? Yeah, I got me a white bitch wid a nigga ass in Harlem" (*Monster* 64). For Winfred the rape is a means of reminding Teresa of her black race identity that Winfred misunderstands her to have forgotten with "all this white shit". Her simple act of saying "no" when Winfred had asked her out on a date was a hostile act, as it was interpreted by Winfred not as a simple rejection of him, but a rejection of Winfred as a black man by a "White girl" (*Monster* 46).

Is Winfred overreacting here as rape is an extreme measure to a simple date request rejection. Orlandersmith wants us to be aware that Winfred's reactions are of a black youth surviving in an oppressive racist environment. Byrant-Davis and Ocampo, in their article "The Trauma of Racism: Implication for Counselling, Research, and Education," provide a framework to assist researchers and counsellors to be aware of traumatising racist incidents. They identify how ethnic minorities are accused of being oversensitive to racism. They highlight how such accusations do not take into account "the pervasive, covert, ambiguous, and unnamed institutional and cultural events against which the overt incidents are framed" (575). Living in a world where race is a key element used to judge and treat people, it impacts one's sense of self. When Winfred's own insecurities resurface in the face of Teresa saying "no", he is not overreacting or being oversensitive. Rather Orlandersmith wants us to be cognizant that Winfred's reaction needs to be understood against the background of "pervasive, covert, ambiguous, and unnamed institutional and cultural events" which lead him to equate Teresa's

finding him "too low for [her] to talk to" because he is black and he thinks she considers herself to be white. The poisonous impact of racism is seen here impacting Winfred's self-worth where he is mediating the racist world view (that he feels Teresa is projecting onto him) with a private view of himself. Orlandersmith's main contention is that Winfred's misinterpretation of Teresa saying "no" is not an overreaction. Rather, Winfred's act of rape in order to assert his black masculine identity needs to be understood as a reaction against accumulated experiences impacting one's self worth and identity against this racial milieu.

Here it is important to note even Teresa's mother, Beula, had misunderstood Teresa's decision of saying no to Winfred asking her out on a date and misperceived it as a superior act:

Look at you, dressed up like some old bull dyke. You disgust me. You really do.

Nobody's good enough for you, right? You so above it all, right? Winfred asked you out.

... That's all, but no. He doesn't 'share your interests.' You mean he ain't like them freaks you hang with in that ole friggen village. (*Monster* 52)

Consequently, even the mother equates Teresa's need for escape or distance as a rejection of Winfred because "[n]obody's good enough" for her. The perception of this rejection as a rejection of one's race, to be more precise equating Teresa's perceived superiority (as she is so "above it all") with Teresa's lighter skin color, by both Teresa's mother and by Winfred shows that the source of this anger is not just Teresa and her choices. Orlandersmith raises the possibility that this anger (expressed by Beula in sexual orientation slurs like "old bull dyke" and by Winfred through sexual violence) is the result of accumulative rejections experienced by black people in a racialized society.

For Winfred, Teresa with her lighter skin tone and her life choices, becomes the symbol of this racialized society and its rejections, of white supremacy, and of a perceived betrayal from

within the ranks. Scholar of children literature Suriyan Panlay, in *Racism in Contemporary African American Children's and Young Adult Literature*, discusses how historically lighter skinned black people were given special privileges that led to "formation of a color hierarchy [as] favoring African American with lighter color" and "visibly creat[ed] frictions within the black community" (25-26). As an adolescent Teresa has had to negotiate perspectives regarding the color of skin, the shade of the color of skin, and attendant behavior while growing up in Harlem. Feminist author Alice Walker termed negotiating such perspectives as politics of "colorism", that is the "prejudicial or preferential treatment of same-race people based on their color" (290). Orlandersmith locates how this politics attending the pigment of skin color is played out among intra-group race relations within Teresa's family and on the streets of Harlem. These "frictions" arising out of the "color hierarchy" are made visible through Beula's verbal abuse and Winfred's rape where Teresa is misperceived to be claiming special privileges by asserting her right to choose who she dates, what she wears, and where she goes.

It is through Winfred's crime of sexual violence that Orlandersmith shows us the consequences of trauma of racism, systemic and everyday racism, internalised racism and how it impacts intra-group settings. Teresa's rape, that is the rape of a "white bitch" by a "real nigga", is sexual violence wherein race plays a critical role and racial misperceptions are a root cause. Bryant-Davis and Ocampo in their article "Racist Incident-Based Trauma" postulate their Racist Incident and Rape Parallel Theory. According to this theory they contend that both racist incidents and rape are forms of violence that are "motivated by the drive for power" as both forms of violence perpetuate debilitating myths about the victim (487). Additionally, they contend that both racist incidents and rape produce similar traumatic effects in the victims. Therefore "Rape is also sometimes itself a racist incident" when a person's race or racism is the

root cause of rape (491). In the play *Orlandersmith* shows us that when rape is used to redress misperceived racist slights, then sexual violence becomes a "racist incident", but this racist episode is within intra-group context. It is by understanding Winfred's convoluted reasoning on what he seeks to achieve during Teresa's rape that makes her rape a "racist incident". Teresa is being sexually punished because her rapist perceives her rejection of him to be a rejection of their race. Thus, her rape is intra-group sexual violence where racial violence is turning in on itself. It is motivated by a "drive for power", that is regaining power that is thought to be lost because of Winfred's misperceived racial rejection by one's own. Rape produces a sense of potency and agency in Winfred and propels Winfred to be an active agent in control of the "white bitch" with her "white shit". For Winfred rape becomes the brutal means of rectifying what he understands to be a racist dismissal of him.

However, *Orlandersmith* raising awareness of the existence of a racist cultural milieu against which to read Winfred's actions does not minimize his crime of rape. By using sexual violence as a means to assert his black masculinity, *Orlandersmith* shows how Winfred's actions revive black stereotypes of hypersexuality and sexual aggression that are culturally and historically attributed to black men. In her study of sexual violence *Against Our Will*, Susan Brownmiller identifies how the "mystified spectre of Black man as rapist" is resurrected in the present context to which "the black man in name of his manhood now contributes" by rape (281). Brownmiller argues that rape "must be understood as a control mechanism against freedom, mobility, aspirations, of all women, black and white" (281). Winfred's conception of his male identity as a black man is perilous. In order to show Teresa that he is a "real" black man and not a "white", "pink", or "yella nigga" he chooses to commit rape "in the name of his manhood". Teresa's life choices inherent in her clothing, music, in going to Greenwich Village, and in

saying "no" to Winfred asking her out, in short in her asserting her "freedom, mobility, aspirations" elicits rape as a form of a violent control mechanism. Orlandersmith shows the poisonous impact of living in a society that is seeped with white supremacy and white domination impacts intra-racial relations: the ingestion of the poison of racism erupts in sexual violence within black adolescent community in the play.

During the rape act Winfred bizarrely asks if Teresa will have his baby. This question reminds the audience of Winfred's unsound reality in which he believes he has a secret relationship with Teresa. Is he perceiving the act of rape as consensual sex? Does he believe that he and Teresa are in a normal relationship that would result in both of them becoming parents? However, a traditional patriarchal reading of this question suggests that a desire for a child can be another avenue for Winfred to assert his masculinity and identity. Here Orlandersmith introduces the idea of the black fatherhood as another opportunity through which black masculine identity is created. Teresa's rejection of this idea during her rape (because "I'm thinking, I'm only fifteen. I don't want a baby. I'm thinking God doesn't like me. God doesn't know I'm here ") is another rejection of Winfred now in the role of a perspective father (*Monster* 64-65). Teresa, even in the middle of sexual violence, retains the right to say no to Winfred, but as Teresa's monologue shows she is saying no because she is only fifteen-years-old. However, this rejection for Winfred as both a black man worthy of dating and as a potential black father further fuels his anger. Teresa's ability to say no to having a baby during the rape shows that the lessons of submission and conformity that Winfred is seeking to teach her through sexual violence have not been fully learnt.

Winfred's final act of contempt for Teresa is peeing all over her bedroom floor after the rape. Teresa's lesson in degradation and submission continues even after rape as she has to literally crawl through his urine on the floor to get to her mother in the next room for help:

I fall off the bed, belly crawl, belly crawl, through in his urine, my face wet with his urine it lands on my tongue, I'm belly crawling, belly crawling, I belly crawl to Beula's door she screams how she wants to die, she wants to die. (*Monster* 65)

Can this final act of humiliation, making the victim of sexual violence "belly crawl", "face wet" in his urine, be read as more than humiliation? Is Winfred scent-marking the room as his territory? Kimberlé Crenshaw acknowledges that "representation of Black violence--whether statistical or fictional--are often written into a larger script that consistently portrays Black and other minority communities as pathologically violent" because of the "absence of other narrative and images" ("Mapping the Margins" 1256). Winfred's actions are a form of claiming Teresa: first, her body through rape, and then her room as his territory. Orlandersmith's portrayal of the rape scene engages with the "larger script[s]" where Winfred's actions holds the danger of reviving dominant discourses where black men are portrayed as "pathologically violent". However, Orlandersmith's aim is not to reinforce these ideas, but to acknowledge the "absence of other narrative and images" with which to discuss intra-race sexual violence. By addressing this issue there is danger that intra-group sexual violence will either be swallowed up by the "larger scripts" that work to sustain narratives of black men as "pathologically violent", or instances of intra-group sexual violence will be silenced so that they are *not* swallowed up by the "larger scripts". Either possibility erases the issue of sexual violence experienced by black women. Focus has to be not only on Winfred who pees to show his contempt and to mark his territory, but also on Teresa who has to "belly crawl" to get help. When crime itself gets twisted or

distorted, when both perpetrator and victim are caught into a "larger script" then the former is pathologized and the latter is absented. Orlandersmith's play is a counter narrative to "larger script[s]" that conveniently pathologize black men as mythical beasts and seek to write into existence the experiential realities of black young adults who are experiencing or perpetrating sexual violence, to write into existence their "hidden injuries" and psychological wounds.

By providing the audience with Winfred's perspective we get to know of the "hidden injuries" of racism constraining African American male adolescents. We see how they have to negotiate gender and race perceptions and stereotypes. Orlandersmith shows Teresa as the means through which Winfred is creating and maintaining an enviable status amongst his peers. One way for Winfred to assert his status among the other teenage boys is by boasting and claiming a relationship with Teresa: "Niggas wanted to get next to her, man -- see, dat's what it wuz. An' they wuz jealous, 'specially when I tole 'em how she would talk to me through the walls" (*Monster* 62). The group mentality is evident here as Winfred gains or maintains a "macho" status within the street groups by boasting of a relationship with the elusive, prized object of desire by the others. In addition, he adds a mystique to the prized object of desire, where he and Teresa connect and bond with one another by communicating in a secret language: "See me and Tee, see das what I call her, Tee, right? We close. We have our own thing. Y' all wouldn't understand it. It was like a made up language, the way she talks to me, an' me listenin" (*Monster* 62). Teresa's rejection of Winfred is also a reality check where his claims to a "made up language" in which Teresa and Winfred do "our own thing" is rendered hollow as this language and this bond exist only in Winfred's mind. And to acknowledge this would have him lose face among the "Niggas". Orlandersmith demonstrates that it is a tragedy that Winfred can only negotiate these constraining perceptions and assert a sense of masculine or machismo self by

resorting to sexual violence. Orlandersmith here confronts the destructive and misleading cultural construct where the use of violence or domination for achieving manhood is at times erroneously associated with ideas of violence being courageous or reckless. Geoffrey Canada, President of the Harlem's Children Zone, in his book *Reach Up for Manhood* discusses such cultural ideas where the "image of male as strong is mixed with the image of male as violent. Male as virile gets confused with male as promiscuous. Male as adventurous equals male as reckless ... Boys find themselves pulled and tugged by forces beyond their control as they make the confusing and sometimes perilous trip to manhood" (xiii). Orlandersmith shows how Winfred is negotiating and asserting his sense of black manhood by being "pulled and tugged" by confusing cultural conceptions of manhood. Winfred's "trip to manhood" can be both "confusing" and "perilous" as his assertion of his manhood is "mixed up with the image of male as violent" and "male as reckless". Winfred's recourse violence to assert his threatened masculinity is not asserting himself in terms of "intellectual maturity" or "social standing" rather as Thomas Curry points out it is a "racialised masculinity" defined by the dominant society in terms of savagery (131). Consequently, a further danger underlying Winfred's sexual violence is that it can reinforce racial perceptions of the black male as lustful inherent in the discourse and the myth of the black rapist. The assertion of masculinity when performed through sexual domination revives the historical burden and reinforces "the stigma of criminality that plagues Black males throughout their lives" (Curry131).

The myth of the black rapist was established during the Reconstruction time period to establish and perpetuate the rape-lynching discourse and thereby keep the African American race in a state of fear. Cultural studies scholar Sabine Sielke in her article, "Seduced and Enslaved " has observed the ramifications of this racist discourse for black women who have been held

hostage against speaking out against intra-group sexual violence. She states that black feminism had been absent or marginal to the dominant anti-rape movement because "(explicit or implicit) critique of (black) machismo appeared to reinforce the so-called 'myth of the black rapist'" (Sielke 319). Consequently, black women suffering sexual violence at the hands of black men asserting their "(black) machismo" were socially and culturally constrained against speaking out for the fear of endorsing, sustaining, or perpetuating the "myth of the black rapist". Collins looks at the "unfortunate current reality" that black men have "internalized the controlling images of the sex/gender hierarchy" and condone either black women's rape by other black men or their own behavior as rapists (*Black Feminist Thought* 179). Winfred's monologue reflects these "internalized controlling images of the sex/gender hierarchy" where he, while negotiating and maintaining his black masculinity defines it in terms of sexual prowess. If need be, it is a sexual prowess that will be brutally enforced, in the face of rejection, especially if that rejection comes from a "white bitch wid a nigga ass in Harlem" (*Monster* 64). If as bell hooks says the "subordination of the female was necessary for the healthy achievement of manhood" in such a culture the sex and gender social hierarchy which places black women at the very bottom of the social ladder will allow such black masculine behavior to maintain this hierarchal structure, if need be through rape (*Ain't* 183).

Orlandersmith makes us question whether a "healthy achievement of manhood" is possible if black men's conceptions of their masculinity, sexuality, and identity is not created in reaction to erroneous perceptions imposed on them by white society. Is a healthy masculinity possible without treating the bodies of black women as accessible terrain as has been the case historically? Winfred's struggle to achieve an affirmative and pride-inducing sense of black manhood can never be possible through sexual violence. From slavery wherein black enslaved

men were made studs, to the fatal narrative of the "myth of Black rapist" during Jim Crow, to the reinforcement of this myth in the 1960's in Eldridge Cleaver's gleeful confession of being a rapist by presenting himself as the personification of a "sexual fiend" and "sexual predation", black masculinity has been held prisoner to white fears of black men's sexual potency. In *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity* bell hooks examines how black men's assertion of black masculinity has been in reaction to white supremacist patriarchy which often results in dysfunctional sexual acting out. hooks advocates the need for a "healthy erotic black agency ... [which] must envision together a new kind of sex, a non-patriarchal sexual identity ... [which] must envision a liberatory sexuality that refuses to ground sexual acts in narratives of domination and submission" (83). She further calls for "therapeutic sites for sexual healing [that] will allow black men to speak a sexual longing that is not informed by sexual violence ... imposed by whiteness or hypermasculine mask imposed by blackness" (83). This is a journey that is required to move from "reacting" to "resisting" black sexual identities that are predicated either on white fears or on black "hypermasculine mask[s]". Within this context it is essential to recognise that Winfred is a victim of the ideological frameworks of white racism, white supremacy, and white patriarchy that lead him to equate Teresa's rejection as a racist rejection. By focusing on the perpetrator, Orlandersmith actually draws into focus the white racist system that creates definitions of black masculinity that require Winfred to aggressively and violently don the "hypermasculine mask" in order feel worthy as a black man. Within such a racially charged milieu, as hooks advocates, sexual healing require definitions of black masculinity to be redefined in terms of a "non-patriarchal sexual identity". Such a sexual identity would not frame "sexual acts in narratives of domination and submission", but in mutual consent and pleasure. By presenting Winfred's dilemma of achieving black masculine and sexual identity Orlandersmith

advocates the imperative need for alternative avenues for asserting black masculinity, as expostulated by hooks as a possible option, to be explored.

Orlandersmith's performative portrayal of the actual rape act first from Winfred's perspective and then Teresa's is graphic, detailed, and disturbing. Usually rape scenes in plays are recollected or related later on, like in Shange's *for colored girls who have considered suicide when the rainbow is enuf*; or it is shown expressionistically, as in Tennessee Williams' *A Street Car Named Desire*, where Blanche DuBois' rape by her brother-in-law Stanley Kowalski is depicted by flaring Chinese lanterns. Rape is an act of sexual violence that is usually hidden from view occurring in private, secluded and isolated spaces. Orlandersmith's performance portrayal of the actual act, first from the rapist's deluded perspective in Winfred's monologue, and then from the victim's where Teresa is suffering during the violent act, is painful for the audience members; they are made to watch, to sit through, and to squirm in their seats, as they endure first Winfred's enactment and then Teresa's suffering the sexual violence. The audience cannot remain distanced or detached from the painful reality of the rape act. Orlandersmith's depiction of the violent sexual act requires more of its audience than usual performances that audiences experience in theatre. With this direct portrayal the end goal is not the traditional theatrical experience of cathartic pity or fear. It requires the audience to see, feel, and live the experiential reality of both the victim and the victimizer. These two monologues show Winfred and Teresa suffering different forms of racist violence in the multifaceted black experiential reality. Teresa's experience of sexual violence, the violation, the pain, and the suffering is at a visceral level making the audience unwittingly and unexpectedly witnesses to the rape act. Performance Studies scholar Diana Taylor, in her article "Staging Social Memory," creates a link between witnessing and theatre. She says, "witnessing is transferable-- the Theatre, like the

testimony, like the photograph, film or report, can make witnesses of others" (57). As rape is a hidden and silenced act then Orlandersmith's engagement with sexual violence in this play lays it open and bare, for the audience to be a witness to the acts of violence. Contemporary Performance Studies scholar Ramón Rivera-Servera co-relates witnessing in performance by an audience as an "intersubjective negotiation" where the "audience is positioned in community, left to act, perhaps to aide ... Witnessing leaves the audience with a sense of responsibility to the real" (10). Thus watching a performance renews this "sense of responsibility" for the audience by making the rape act more "real". This is not just raising consciousness about sexual violence. This is a call for the black community to be more invested, more involved when confronted with the "real" sexual violence that black women have experienced, so one is compelled "to act" and "perhaps to aid".

Teresa's sexual trauma is further compounded by the insensitive handling by medical personal when she is taken to the hospital. Her medical examination post rape is another violent assault. The doctor, the white nurse, and the attendants confirms the distrust that black victims of rape have of the system and institutions that are unsupportive. Following Teresa's rape she reacts with defensive aggression when the male doctor tries to examine her:

I'm on a table, my legs are bound in stirrups. ... A male Jamaican doctor demands, yells, screams that I "open my legs, stop being foolish" he says, I unbind my legs, punch him, punch him, he screams like a punk, ... then a nurse, a white nurse, pink lips, uneven pink lips on pasty skin gonna try and jump and stop me, ... I twist her arm back. I'll take you down, bitch ... Security guards come, warn me "Someone will give you a hypo," they say, "Be cool," they say". (*Monster* 65-66)

With a doctor demanding, yelling, and screaming, a nurse trying to physically restrain her, Teresa's defensive reaction as a result of her recent sexual assault is incomprehensible to the medical personal whose medical training should have prepared them to handle traumatized victims more sensitively. Their treatment further traumatises the victim of sexual assault. Such an insensitive handling of victim of rape, especially when the victim is from a poor, urban minority group also contributes to the silence that victims of sexual violence maintain when faced with facets of institutional racism while seeking professional help in the aftermath of sexual violence.

In the last monologue the cycle of intergenerational abuse starting from Sophia physical abuse comes full circle with Teresa caught in the vicious circle. When Teresa sees another voiceless and helpless victim on the street, a toddler being physically and verbally abused by his drunk mother, a rage erupts within her. Teresa can no longer be a bystander and move on just as the other people go about their business on the street. She is compelled to intervene, but the protective instinct soon turns into a murderous rage:

and my blood rises / rises to my head / expands to my fists / I'm on her / punching / stomping this / bitch/ I'm mad/ Marsha / mad / Satanic / glad / I'm killing / her / killing her/ ... I'm animal / pure animal / I don't care anything / anyone/ dog eat dog / ... cut their throats / before they cut yours/ go for yours. (*Monster* 68)

This primal rage, this return to pure animal instinct of "dog eat dog", "cut their throats ... [before they] go for yours," reflect the brutal life lessons she has been taught: to survive violence she has to be "pure animal". She can no longer be like the small voiceless boy crying, with no one to hear or see his agony. Rather, she has to be like the mother inflicting violence:

I know why / I recognise myself / I beat her / 'cause I can see me/ beating the boy / I saw

myself slapping/ the boy/ the boy with the huge eyes/ and/ no voice/ she is/ me/ the woman/ the bitch/ she is/ me hitting the boy/ ... I knew I was no longer human/ in that moment/ no longer human. (*Monster* 68)

The transformation in Teresa from the girl wanting to protect an innocent child to the mother "beating", "slapping", and inflicting pain is insightful. In that moment Teresa is no longer the victim; she becomes a powerful agent who can herself inflict pain. The lines between the victim and the victimizer blur for Teresa. Thus, instinct for preservation and protection evoked by her abusive mother are replaced by a victimizer's fury. As a victim of rape such anger and aggression are a natural aftermath as much as guilt, shame, or self-loathing is. Theatre Studies scholar Davida Bloom, while examining female characters in theatre who have been raped, looks at how the expression of rage post-rape creates an out of control monstrous figure in theatre. For Bloom, rage "when manifested, it is so extreme that it results in the portrayal of a monstrous woman" (10). Bloom shows that such characterizations of rage "like sexuality and violence, are gendered in our society" (10). Monstrous rage experienced by a victim of sexual violence is characterized as unfeminine and unnatural as the socio-cultural approved response to rape is submissiveness, or preferably silence. However, black victims of rape have to negotiate the additional burden of racial misperceptions where their rage, rather than being acknowledged as legitimate expressions arising out of the trauma of sexual violence, are attributed to their race. Byrant-Davis and Ocampo look at how survivors of rape and racist incidents feel legitimate anger but when this anger is expressed it is turned against the survivor in a racist society: the "problem of racism thus transforms into the survivor's alleged anger problem" ("Racist Incident-Based Trauma" 491). Anger, a valid form of expression of one's pain and suffering, is thus socially and culturally denied to black victims of rape and made out to be their "alleged anger problem". It is another

form of silencing, once again denying the survivors of sexual violence a voice, a mode of expression, or an emotional outlet in the aftermath of sexual violence. Thus, the absencing of black victims of rape in discourse continues.

Orlandersmith raises the possibility for us that Teresa sees herself in that helpless child who she starts to defend. The child's helplessness is a mirror for Teresa's own helplessness growing up in a verbally abusive family, and then being raped in her own room while her mother is passed out drunk in the next room. Teresa's rage, loss of control, and the subsequent violent episode when she sees a small child being slapped and called a "little motherfucker", a "no good motherfucker like your father" by his drunken mother set off emotional responses that parallel her own helplessness and victimization (*Monster* 67). Thus, Orlandersmith makes us wonder if Teresa is only punching the little boy's mother but maybe her own victimizers as well! For Orlandersmith Teresa's loss of control and aggression are not unnatural post-rape expressions of trauma but natural reactions. Rape councillor Matt Atkinson explains the expression of rage after rape in neurobiological terms. He contends that the rage is a "trigger", that is sensory information that causes a "strong emotional and/or physical response that you associate with the rape itself" (47). Atkinson associates these triggers with post-traumatic stress disorder. He identifies responses such as rage, anxiety, panic attacks, and sadness as responses that are triggered by a structure called *amygdala* in the brain. The amygdala is a bundle of nerves that processes memories of emotional reactions thereby enhancing one's ability to learn and recognize danger and respond accordingly. For Teresa then, her rage where her "blood rises/ rises to [her] brain" leading her to "punching", "stomping", and "killing" can be regarded as emotional reactions in response to the child's situation which Teresa recognizes from her own experiences and responds to. Letting the rage out is an important step in regaining control of one's own agential power that

was lost or had been forcibly taken from Teresa during rape. In that moment Teresa is no longer the helpless victim. Orlandersmith shows how confronting the mother, first by standing up for the victim, then becoming the victimizer herself, allows Teresa to regain power, control, and dominance in a situation that had been forcibly taken from her during rape.

It is through Teresa's transition from victim, defender, to perpetrator of violence that Orlandersmith opens up the possibility that it is one's own experiences of suffering violence that creates "monsters" in society. In a racist society both Teresa and Winfred experience racism and racist violence, but they experience it differently. They both survive the emotional scars and psychological wounds of racist violence by perpetrating more violence. Who is to blame for these cycles of violence: is it the victims of racism who perpetrate violence, or the racist society wherein violence continues to take place? Has this been Orlandersmith's contention in *Monster* all along to make us ask: "So, who is the real 'monster' in the play?"

Breath, Boom

Where Orlandersmith's play looks at rage and violence as symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, as responses triggered when episodes resurrect memories or emotions associated with rape, for Corthron violence is a long term strategy for survival. The very first scene of *Breath, Boom* establishes Prix, the young but old beyond her years, sixteen-year-old protagonist as a ruthless adolescent gang leader. With one look from her, another gang member Comet is "pounce[d]" on, and Prix's gang are "beating the crap out of her: no mercy", until Comet is nearly unconscious (*Breath* 55). Throughout the play Prix's reputation as an ice cold ruthless operator, as the "O. G! Original gangsta!", is emphasised as the tales of her inflicting violence make her a person feared (*Breath* 59).

Scene 2 is instrumental in revealing what has made Prix into this ruthless, cold, and violent person at such a young age. The scene is set in Prix's bedroom which is first invaded by sounds of laughter and then violence "*brief struggle with furniture banging ... arguing, screaming*" (*Breath 57*). The audience learns that it is Prix's mother and her long-term boyfriend, Jerome. Throughout this exchange Prix quietly works on her pen lights as the "*battle rages on*" outside her bedroom (*Breath 57*). Where Teresa in *Monster* would escape the verbal violence by immersing herself in Rock music in the Village, Prix escapes in the world of fireworks to retain her sanity. When her mother comes into Prix's room to hide in the closet, Jerome picks the lock and enters their apartment. Thinking Prix's mother has escaped down the fire escape and he is alone with Prix, Jerome propositions her:

Jerome : Wonder what we do 'til your mama get back.

Jerome touches Prix sensuously. At the first contact, Prix slams him against the closet door, surprising him, hurting him; takes a razor blade from her mouth and holds it against his throat.

Prix: I ain't five no more.

Prix goes back to sit with her pipe cleaners, her back to Jerome. Stunned, he moves towards the door and exits. (Breath 57)

This revelation that Jerome, with whom Prix's mother had a relationship for over fourteen year, had sexually abused her daughter Prix when she was a vulnerable five-year-old child, is shocking for the mother hiding in the closet. The mother's "*quiet weeping from inside*" does not elicit any sympathy from Prix. This is not a moment when mother and daughter come together and heal the wounds that Jerome's abuse had inflicted. Instead, Prix reveals how she holds her mother accountable for this abuse: "If you weren't always playin' Helen Keller, bitch, you mighta

knowed a long time ago" (57). There is no indication in the play how long the sexual abuse lasted or when it ended, only when it began. Prix is unforgiving and feels her mother had been neglectful who should have known what was going on if she had been less self-involved. No longer a child needing her mother's protection but still only sixteen, Prix has had to learn to defend herself and to survive on the streets and in her own home. Taking the razor blade from her mouth as she threatens Jerome, then after making the threat going back to her chair and sitting with her back to him, is an indication of Prix's confidence and power. Her body language tells him and the audience that she is not a vulnerable teenage girl to be taken advantage of. Rather her violence is leashed in and can be unleashed unexpectedly anytime. Rachel Calam and Cristina Franchi, while identifying patterns of behavior that an abused child adopts, look at aggression as a coping mechanism. They reveal that some children "have come to view aggression as their only outlet and have learnt a negative mode of coping with their situation" (*Child Abuse* 7). Corroborating Corthron's view that children are neither predisposed to violence, nor do "children become violent in a vacuum", the negative coping mechanisms emerge out of child abuse. Inflicting violence has become a survival mechanism for Prix, her "only outlet" as it creates fear and in that fear lies her power. This fear protects Prix from being a victim again. Jerome can still physically overpower a sixteen-year-old girl and rape her, but as this brief episode with her abuser shows, Prix "negative mode of coping" enables her to put her childhood rapist in his place with only the threat of violence.

Even though Jerome dies early on in the play, killed by Prix's mother after she discovers his abuse of Prix, Corthron makes him a constant presence in Prix's life. She calls this decision a "perverse" one in her interview with Inez Brown, as the person Prix "hated the most should return to be her conscience ... as she is struggling with whether to continue as a gang member"

(54). But I argue that Jerome is more than Prix's "conscience". He is present in Prix's mind, and manifest on the stage later on as a hauntological presence for as long as Prix is working out the negative impact of his sexual abuse on her. Jerome haunts Prix while Prix works through her subsequent violent decisions that she makes to cope with and survive the aftermath of the sexual assault. Her healing lies in exorcising the ghost of Jerome and the legacy of sexual violence. In Act 1, Scene 4 while Prix is in juvenile jail, sharing a cell with Cat, Jerome appears as a ghostly manifestation for the first time. While Cat is speaking Prix takes Cat's hair band and "*effortlessly strangles Jerome to death*" (*Breath* 60). Is this a fantasy for the young woman who has earned the title "Original Gangsta" (*Breath* 60) with "ice" (*Breath* 65) in her veins, who never took revenge while Jerome was alive? Thoughts and fantasies of "strangl[ing]" her abuser are not enough. By Act 2, Scene 1 Prix is out of jail; she is twenty four years old and Jerome as a haunting entity is no longer as "*effortlessly*" disposed off. The majority of the conversation in the scene is of Jerome unsuccessfully asserting his role as a father figure in Prix's life, as "all the Daddy [she] had" (*Breath* 63). The tenor of the conversation, the repeated times Prix checks Jerome's attempts to present himself as her "common law father", shows how much of a hold Jerome still has on Prix's emotional and psychological health (*Breath* 63). She has not yet been able to exorcise the ghost of "all the daddy she had" in Jerome (*Breath* 63). In Act 2, Scene 1 she gives him "*a cupcake with a candle which is obviously a stick of dynamite*" (*Breath* 64). Another fantasy where he blows up is shown by the "*sudden reflection of various colored lights/fireworks come from Jerome's direction. Prix notices without expression*" (*Breath* 64). This is her second imaginative attempt in the play to kill the ghost haunting her. However, sexual trauma needs proper working through in order for the ghosts that manifest as evidence of trauma.

In the last scene of the play, as Prix stands with her mother to see the fireworks on the Empire State Building her mother asks Prix if she still thinks of him. At first Prix does not understand who her mother refers to. This indicates that Jerome is no longer such an overwhelming presence haunting Prix: "No. No, useta. Useta think about him all the time. Not lately. No in years" (*Breath* 70). As Prix has moved on from the violent life of a street banger, a violent life that channeled her anger and aggression resulting from childhood sexual abuse, she has also let go of the negative hold manifested through the ghostly figure of Jerome. As she has healed emotionally, she is no longer obsessively focused on Jerome: "Useta think about him all the time." She is no longer angry with herself and the world--or even with her mother for allowing the abuse to take place because of her negligence.

Healing comes with forgiveness and as the last scene reveals Prix is ready to forgive her mother. Throughout the play in every scene with her mother, Prix's body language has been positioned away from her mother. This is indicative of the physical and emotional distance between them. In Act 1, Scene 2 when the mother enters Prix's bedroom after her fight with Jerome, repeated stage directions Corthron shows that Prix does not look up once as they converse. Later on, when Prix's Probation Officer makes her visit her mother in jail, she "*turns her body to the side, away from Mother. She does not look at her*" (*Breath* 58). Act 2, Scene 2 reveals that Prix has not seen her mother for twelve years. Even when Prix's mother visits Prix in jail, waits for hours to see Prix, Prix does not come to see her. Only in the last scene Corthron introduce the possibility of a reconciliation between the mother and the daughter as Prix looks at her mother for the first time in the play "*really seeing her*" (*Breath* 70). In fact, the mother notices the change in Prix: "Seems you different all growed up, seems you ain't s' mad no more" (*Breath* 70). As she has let go of her anger, hurt, and blame, Prix can now see people for who

they are. Her anger is no longer blinding her to the possibility of renewing the broken relationship with her mother.

In a play that shows young lives dominated and destroyed by street violence, physical and sexual violence, where juvenile delinquency transforms adolescents into criminals, there is still hope. Corthron locates this in the very ending of the play when Prix agrees to make a firework for her mother, of sharing a part of herself by sharing her childhood passion. Fireworks represent "magic" for Corthron and she was giving "a part of myself" to Prix's character. This was Corthron's way of giving magic in "lives that don't have much magic" (Brown, "Last Word" 54). Magic is not just make believe, but a means of opening up a world of possibilities. It is a way of opening doors, of providing resilience and sustenance to the heart when all other doors remain closed. Thus the magic in fireworks heals the spirit, body, and relationships, brings joy and wonder to Prix. Despite all the pain Prix had experienced, and which she had inflicted in turn, the ability to still find magic, herein lies the hope of surviving sexual abuse and having fulfilling passions and relationships.

Orlandersmith and Corthron present messages of resilience and hope through their feisty and fierce young women in a world where violence begets violence. Diane, Teresa, and Prix survive their past, making them stronger and providing possibilities of a hopeful future. *Beauty's Daughter* ends with Diane visiting Papo where "her mood is melancholic but hopeful" (*Beauty* 40). She promises to be there for Papo, "I'm right here, Bro, I'm right here. I promise you, I won't / do the slide" (*Beauty* 42)". Thus in the end she will support her adolescent friend and not let him down as she had done before. *Monster* ends with Teresa's monologue, where after contemplating suicide like her friend Marsha, she takes ownership of her life as it is now her time. Like Diane, she too acknowledges letting down a friend in her time of need, by being

consumed with her own survival. Making amends is necessary to let go of the guilt:

Marsha/ I really want to tell you, Marsha/ that I thought you were a beautiful beautiful
black black girl/ but I was trying to keep myself for myself/ I was only fifteen ...I've got
to find my way back now I've got to I can't do it your way I can't/ it's my time, Marsha,
my time. (*Monster* 69)

This is Teresa's time to live, to survive, and to have a future. She will do so by selling her
childhood home, the nexus of her past trauma holding her back, the site of her sexual assault, and
move on. *Breath, Boom* ends with Prix finding magic in her passion for fireworks again.

Something she had held onto during her adolescence, but given up as an adult: "Do I look like I
got time to fool around with arts and craft? Grown woman" (*Breath* 70). Thus the ending of all
three plays show that it is possible to break the cycles of intergenerational violence that had
gripped these young survivors, and of the promise of a life beyond sexual violence.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

There is no agony like bearing an untold story inside of you

Maya Angelou

African American theatre and performance has continually evolved as African American artists continue to define for themselves and for their community what function black theatre serves. bell hooks has traced that during slavery black performance was a way of survival and of resistance for the black community ("Performance Practise" 210). August Wilson, in his address to Theatre Communications Group Conference, further qualified that the slave performance during the days of slavery had two strains, one was a performance at the master's behest to please and entertain the master, and the other was freely created in the slave quarters: "art that is conceived and designed to entertain white society, and art that feeds the spirit and celebrates the life of black American by designing its strategies for survival and prosperity" (Wilson, "The Ground"496). For Wilson, it is the latter art tradition that he identifies as the "hallowed" ground made fertile by "warriors on the cultural battlefield that affirmed their self-worth" (496). Thus, while slavery sought to divest enslaved people of all sense of self-worth it was their free expression in the "cultural battlefield" of black performance wherein they exerted a sense of agency. Frederick Douglass explicated how slaves would "compose and sing as they went along ... they would sing, as a chorus, to words which to many would seem unmeaning jargon, but which nevertheless, were full of meaning to themselves" (36). Contemporary African American playwrights follow in the tradition of their ancestors, as identified by hooks and Wilson, a tradition where their plays work as "strategies for survival" and of resistance by writing into narratives and discourse the experiences and survivorship of black victims of sexual violence. This research has been committed to examining the courageous efforts of African American playwrights and performers to explicate the reality, the pain, and the trauma of black victims.

The narratives of rape and the voice of black victims of rape that contemporary African American playwrights draw attention to have historically, like slave songs, been easy to dismiss as "unmeaning jargon". Nevertheless, the experiences of actual victims of sexual violence like Misty DeBerry and Anita Hill, as well as the characters' experiences are "full of meaning", and cannot, rather *will* not be easily dismissed.

Harlem Renaissance saw the emergence of black drama against the debilitating background of Blackface minstrelsy tradition: a theatrical phenomenon which gained popularity by misrepresenting black people. W. E. B. Du Bois defined the "New Negro" aesthetic against this overwhelming background of caricatured distortions inherent in the Blackface minstrelsy. He argued for the "real Negro theatre" wherein the reality of black people would emerge. This theatre would be "*About us*", "*By us*", "*For us*", and "*Near us*" (Du Bois 135). This spirit of the Harlem Renaissance to foreground black people's reality is evident in contemporary theatrical impulses which undertake a re-evaluation and overhauling of the dominant theatrical representations and tastes by foregrounding black plays "*[a]bout us*". However, it is important to acknowledge, as this research has done, that contemporary African American women's theatre also re-defines who "*us*" is in their representations of sexual crimes perpetrated on the black women, both historically and presently. They present plays "*[a]bout us*" where they courageously engage with the reality of sexual violence within intra-group context and identify black perpetrators within the narratives of rape. This accountability necessitates acknowledging painful realities of intra-group race and gender relations: on the one hand it requires us to acknowledge black women as victims of rape, but also to look at the ambivalences surrounding the victims. Characters such as Baartman, Hester, and Prix actions problematise their straightforward status as victims and require us to comprehend their complex and fluid realities.

On the other hand this research has argued how these plays foreground the perpetrators of violence when these perpetrators are one's own people such as Darren, Winfred, and Beauty, and also to understand that these perpetrators of sexual violence are themselves victims who carry hidden injuries and wounds of systematic and everyday racism. Addressing the complicated reality of black women and men in rape narratives contemporary black theatre illustrates how neither the victim of rape nor the victimizer's "truth" is easily accessible. Through characters like Hester, Beauty, Teresa, and Prix the lines between victim and victimizer, between the receiver and perpetrator of violence, are blurred. Contemporary African American women's theatre and performance focuses unflinchingly on the silences embedded within sexual violence conceptual frameworks and narratives, as they seek to widen this framework, they work to highlight the ambivalent realities within their own communities that problematise straightforward narrations and representations of victims and victimizers.

As African American Theatre evolves into performance, the role of black playwright performers such as Robbie McCauley and Dael Orlandersmith who portray black experiences of sexual violence through their performance invests the narratives of sexual violence with deeper significance than acting has done traditionally. For Harry Elam a black performer is marked and read by the audience as black, however the black performer introduces a "the productive ambivalence" where she or he "as real person, as theatrical representation, as sociocultural construction - explore, expose and even explode definitions of blackness" (14). For a black performer this "the productive ambivalence" allows endless possibilities of expressing and performing black experiences. Therefore what McCauley and Orlandersmith achieve through their performances is opening up future possibilities of what African American plays can convey and how the performer's black body becomes the site wherein tough realities are being raised.

Within the context of sexual violence African American plays through their performances question what it means to be a "real", a "theatrical representation", or a "sociocultural construction" of a black woman and a black man, of a black victim and victimizer, and of black sexuality, femininity and masculinity. This research has shown how race and gender constructions are all "explore[d], expose[d], and even explode[d]" through dynamics of black performance. This research has demonstrated how black playwrights and performers are bringing into focus what it means to be black, especially how characters negotiate their identity as black people within the context of sexual violence, how understandings of racialised identities get tested when the violence is inflicted from within one's race or within one's family. I have illustrated how questioning intra-group norms of pressuring victims to maintain silence has been paramount for playwrights. Thus, within the African American contemporary theatrical canon black performance continues to examine how black identities are still inflected, implicated, and influenced by the wound: the wound left on the body, mind, psyche, and on language by the crime of sexual violence.

One of the central areas this thesis engages with is that contemporary African American Theatre and performance allows rape narratives to be re-written and revised not only to change perceptions of rape; but also allow black performances to heal wounds of silence, wounds of absencing and ghosting the victim, of intergenerational wounds, and wounds of language, all offshoots of the central wound itself: the wounds of rape. Theatre and healing have a long history dating back to Greek Theatre Epidaurus that was built next to the shrine and spa of Asklepios, the son of Apollo and god of healing, Epidaurus was considered a "monument to the relationship between theatre, religion and healing"; although how much the "events of the Theatre, being part of the temple of Asklepios, were influenced by therapeutic activities" remains unknown

(Pensalfini 176). Examples of healing in a ritual communal activity is evidenced in Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) where the ghost of Beloved is exorcised and in Shange's *for colored girls* (1975) where all characters come together in the end as spiritual uplifting. This research has revealed how contemporary black women's theatre and performance as a canon works to heal and to cure theatrically by talking, introducing into conversation, discussion, and debates the silent and silenced realities, repressed memories and narratives of sexual violence. By addressing each repressed memory and narrative, suppressed history, ghosted victim, and ignored victimizer, the act of healing ensues. Only when the wound, past or present, is acknowledged can healing begin. As contemporary theatre transmogrifies into performance art, and acting transforms into performance the possibilities of engaging anew with trauma of sexual violence are endless. As McCauley's social experiment *Sally's Rape* showed engaging in painful conversations allows for a revisionist re-visiting of the past, most importantly this re-visiting is not only on the stage but is with the audience. Performance opens new sources of engaging with both the initial wound of sexual violence and the subsequent wounding caused by the of lack of acknowledgement or belief in the wound of sexual violence. Contemporary black women's theatre and performance in the millennium by breaking silence, like the actual breaking of silence of victims like Anita Hill and Misty DeBerry, initiates the process of talking through this most silenced of crimes.

In 2018 history repeats itself -- as another Supreme Court Justice, Judge Kavanaugh is ushered into the highest seat of judicial power amidst sexual misconduct allegations by Dr. Ford -- the urge to remain silent for victims would now be paramount. Yet as Maya Angelou elucidates "[t]here is no agony like bearing an untold story inside of you", remaining silent and suffering silently cannot and must not be the answer.

In 2019 the stereotypes of who is a legitimate or credible victim of sexual violence still haunts Black communities. Actor Terry Crews finally talks about being sexually assaulted at a party in 2016, he is victimised by members of his own community on Twitter because he does not fit into the stereotype of a helpless victim. Speaking about one's sexual assault is still a risk that victims take, and as evidenced by the reactions to Crews' revelation the "second assault" is still in effect. Future research into sexual violence has to address the need to break stereotypes impacting black men, to examine the silences maintained by black men who have been victims of sexual violence, and to write in the reality of black men beyond the myths of sexual predation and stereotypes of hypersexual masculinity as sexual victims.

For black victims of sexual violence the struggle for justice, for voice, and for belief continues ...

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