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ABSTRACT

In this article I engage with the work of Sylvia Wynter, Christina Sharpe, and Kevin Quashie, weaving in my own personal narrative of being presumed nonhuman to detail the everyday struggles Black women academics face. Herein I also illustrate how these struggles become sites of resistance, building, and hope.

Keywords: Academia, Black women, Human, Quiet, Sylvia Wynter, The Wake

Introduction

This article invokes the writings of women of color (WOC) scholars within the anthologies, *Presumed Incompetent* (Gutierrez y Muhs et al., 2018; Flores Niemann et al., 2020). These anthologies detail contributors' experiences with racial microaggressions, marginalization, tokenism and outright hostility within the academy. I argue that being presumed incompetent stems from a much deeper place, rooted in a white supremacist western episteme that constructs WOC, specifically Black women, as nonhuman. To do so, I weave Sylvia Wynter's (2003) theoretical interventions on the genre of the human with my own personal narrative to construct an argument about Black women's humanity. Wynter writes about "a projected Chain of Being comprised of differential/hierarchal degrees of rationality" (p. 300) upon which Black people were "place at the nadir of its Chain of Being; that is, on a rung of the ladder lower than that of all humans" (p. 301). I argue that to be constructed as nonhuman results in Black women's seemingly out-of-place-ness in the academy, a space that not only produces but validates and normalizes these systems of production and knowledge de/construction.

Even when the academy appears to be welcoming to those with marginalized identities, those accepted must be recognizable to "humans" as capable of being deputized, that is, proven. Proof of humanity within academia hinges on acceptance of three forms of knowing: 1) the supremacy of the Eurocentric positivist character of the academy; 2) that any nonhuman ways of knowing or doing, i.e. knowledge or methods articulated outside of a positivist approach, are accorded marginal curricular status; and 3) that diversity work -- the recognition, reception and accommodation of other nonhumans -- is assigned to them as nonhumans. The results of this acceptance, according to Christina Sharpe is that "[d]espite know-

ing otherwise, we [i.e. Black women] are often disciplined into thinking through and along lines that reinscribe our own annihilation, reinforcing and reproducing … our 'narratively condemned status'" (2016, p. 13).

However, recognizing our marginal and regulated status as honorary humans (Wynter, 1994) in the academy, Black women persistently work to actively disrupt their continued regulation "to the confines of particularity" (Sharpe, 2016, p. 19) and develop, according to Johnson and Joseph-Salisbury (2018, p. 151) "a way of knowing about our Blackness beyond that of a racialized spectacle." In this article, I join in this long line of Black feminist disruptions by incorporating my own experiences of being made a gendered and racialized spectacle in the academy. There, my presumption of nonhumanness led to the exploitation of my labor and to allied human and nonhuman protest. I deliberately use my autobiographical example not simply for the sake of telling, but as Saidiya Hartman states in a 2008 interview with Patricia Saunders, to demonstrate how my own experience is a result and an example of social and historical processes (Saunders, 2008, p. 5). My intention in writing this essay is "to tell a story capable of engaging and countering the violence of abstraction" (Hartman, 2008, p. 7). At the place of disruption within the academy, we can also animate a site of personal and collective healing.

Herein, I utilize Sharpe's (2016) wake work and Kevin Quashie's (2012) conceptualization of quiet to help in this process. According to Sharpe, the wake is a place "of deep hurt and of deep knowledge" (p. 27). Acknowledging the wake as a position of deep, but marginalized knowledge requires that we become *undisciplined*, since the activation of such knowledge means that we engage in new ways and modes of being (Sharpe, 2016, p.13). Existing in the wake also requires that we sit with our hurt in undisciplined protest that is

quiet, engaging in "an exquisite balance between what is public and what is intimate" (Quashie, 2012, p.3). Quiet is necessary when dealing with white supremacy, it allows one to take direction from the fullness of one's interior and to affirm one's humanity (2012, p. 6). These modes of doing and being can provide us with ways of countering the "racial calculus and … political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago" (Hartman, 2008, p. 6) to make us -- Black women -- racialized spectacles. These modes therefore allow us the possibility of living in the present (Sharpe, 2016, p. 13) as human. In writing this essay, I accede to Sharpe's and Quashie's admonition of being undisciplined and quiet because I am hurt/ing. This essay is born from that interior place.

Racialization and the history of being rendered nonhuman

To better interrogate how Black women are treated in the academy then, we must start from the concept of "Man" not as simply part of a feminist understanding of gender, but of what Wynter theorizes as genre -- "genre of the human" (2003, p. 269). Wynter argues that while there are indeed several modes of being human, white western, propertied European descended males or "Man", have overrepresented themselves as the definition of normative humanity through a historical constellation of ontological and ideological fiction which constructs all other human genres as deviant (Wynter, 2003), "exploitable nonhumans" (Weheliye, 2014, p. 135), erasing all other genres of being human.

To liberate Black women therefore, Wynter hypothesizes that we need to do more than simply abolish the Western concept of gender. Just addressing gender does nothing to displace the genre of the human to which gender is attached. Therefore, a liberatory fo-

cus needs to be on abolishing once and for all the concept of man, that is the genre of the human (Thomas, 2006; Weheliye, 2014). This need for a complete emancipation from genre was acknowledged in 1977 by the Combahee River Collective in their Black feminist statement when they wrote that to be recognized as human is sufficient.

This western construction of the human is based in histories of colonialism, slavery, segregation and lynching. What Spillers calls "the politics of melanin" or superficial difference remains fundamental to degradation (2003, p. 71). A deliberate "misrecognition of human kinship" between enslaved Black people and their enslavers (Wynter, 1994, p. 69) inevitably fashioned the Black woman as a conduit between these human and nonhuman worlds (Spillers, 2003, p. 155). According to Fannie Barrier Williams, the "whole life and power of slavery depended upon an enforced degradation of everything human in the slaves" (1893). This past construction of Blackness is still very much part of the present, as legal and societal legitimation and entry into spaces once closed off to Blacks, is now based on Black folks accepting these white supremacist constructs of themselves (Weheliye, 2014, p. 77).

Embedded in American culture, the system operates to affect Black women in ways that white feminism has not yet fully addressed because of the focus solely on gender. As such, Black women live in what Sharpe calls "an 'enforced state of breach'" (2016, p. 77), where expressions of spectacular outrage over the experiences of the oppressed occur alongside uncritical examinations of "the historical role of the intellectual" in this oppression (Weheliye, 2014, p. 22). This is particularly true for the academy, where those in positions of power will publicly champion "diversity and inclusion" but fail to interrogate how a culture of exclusion and oppression proliferates their institutions through racially-cod-

ed determinants, such as "good fit". This term, used to describe collegial compatibility, is loaded with racist connotations. According to Ahmed (2012), "[d]iscomfort involves this failure to fit," as "the body that causes … discomfort … is the one who must work hard to make others comfortable" (p. 41). When those who have the power to choose who is a good fit are based on a history of constructed human hierarchy, then to not be a good fit is to be "the nonbeing, the being out of place" (Sharpe, 2016, p. 86). The construct of the nonhuman is therefore upheld when academic institutions try to move from a place of widespread inequity to a place of equity and inclusion without addressing the overarching issue of genre. Without addressing genre, pain and suffering become the metric used to grant the nonhuman access: it becomes identity. This metric measured and regulated through diversity and inclusion initiatives, is used for spectacle (Weheliye, 2014, p. 75). These are all issues that need addressing if we are to adequately deal with how Black people, Black women in particular, are treated in the academy, and to affect change.

Despite the above contradictions however, Black women in academia desire to not only survive but to thrive. According to Spillers, they practice "a degree of courage … that startles the imagination even now" (2003, p. 75). However, even with this courage, Black women in the struggle to fit are often foreclosed from being our authentic selves without fear of backlash or experiencing additional pain. Black people, though it is known we are hurting, are "forced to endure more pain" (Sharpe, 2016, p. 80). In the next section, I use autoethnography to reflect on the conditions of the academy. By revisiting Sharpe's definition of the wake as a place of "continued vulnerability" (p. 16), and "of deep hurt and of deep knowledge" (p. 27), I explore how spectacle is created and sustained in academia, and its connections to anti-Black violence.

In the Wake: A personal narrative of being made a spectacle in academy

The wake is a place of trauma. It is a place premised on a history of Black social and political life and work rendered invisible by plantation logics, but also a place of ongoing disruption (2016, p. 114). My wake, like many other Black women scholars, is the academy.

One of my first jobs in academia was a visiting assistant position in a Women's Studies program at a liberal arts college. I was hired in this program on a one-year contract, renewable for three years. I was hired to fill the visiting position that had become vacant because the previous (white woman) scholar in this position had been hired as a "target of opportunity hire" to fill a tenure track position, which became vacant due to a tenure denial of a woman of color academic. Upon my arrival, I was told that while the program currently only had two tenure lines, the program intended to submit a proposal for a staffing plan to turn the position I held into a tenure track line. The program submitted the proposal and received the tenure-line. After my first year at the college, I was told by the then acting-chair of the program and the dean of the faculty (DOF), both white feminists, that I was definitely a person they would like to keep and have on as tenure track faculty.

Over the next two years, I worked diligently to maintain an impressive track record. I taught three classes a semester, most of these were new courses I developed, and which were consistently full or overenrolled. My teaching evaluations were stellar, and I carried a full advising load for the program and for the Africana studies program, where I was affiliated. In addition, I published multiple book chapters and journal articles and had several publications in press or under review. I also sat on several committees and served as the advisor to several student organizations. Despite all of these, my

presumption as a nonhuman overshadowed my labor and dedication and hastened my eventual departure.

In the spring semester before I departed, my program hired a new chair -- a white woman -- who upon her arrival and meeting with affiliated faculty, announced that she would be conducting a national search for the tenure track position approved in the staffing plan. After she made this announcement, senior faculty of color, including chairs of other programs, attempted to use their power to advocate on my behalf for a target of opportunity hire. Faculty and students also met with the DOF on my behalf, but that December, the program chair, in a one-on-one meeting with me, relayed she was starting the process for a national search for the job which, she in the meeting admitted, I was capable of doing. To make matters worse, she tried to convince me this was actually in my best interest. Being presumed nonhuman, essentially property, I could be discarded even as the Dean of Equity, Inclusion and Diversity (DEID) -- a man of color --defended the college's treatment of me by touting recruitment and retention numbers of WOC comparable to those of peer institutions, and achievements of inclusivity within the student body - some of which were because of my own hard work. The DEID upheld the spectacle of Black and Brown labor to demonstrate how the institution was inclusive, in order to justify their actions against a Black woman.

All the women I mentioned above -- the DOF, the program chair and the woman who was hired as a target of opportunity to replace the WOC who was denied tenure -- identify as feminists. I mention this to draw attention to the uncritical lens which most white feminists tend to employ when it comes to issues of race; a lens which, those of us who do not have the luxury of divorcing gender from our nonhuman construction, find harmful. As Black feminist scholars we cannot afford to focus solely on gender. Our

work is not simply theoretical but a matter of life and death, we cannot get trapped in any presentation of knowledge that is not nuanced and thorough in its critique of social relations and we certainly cannot attend to a feminism that is entrenched within its own sacred categories.

My experience detailed above mirrors that of other WOC. Black feminists Esnard and Cobb-Roberts refer to "questionable institutional practices" as those with "less than transparent practices, [and] … changing requirements, [which] … continue to intensify feelings of injustice, mistrust, and dejection" (2018, p.11). Institutions often promise positions and then renege, asking the faculty member who was promised the position to go through the open search process because of a general "absence of … rules of engagement per se, [which] has dire consequences for the professional trajectories of women of color" (p. 72). The absence of meaningful rules of engagement means that subjective reasons can be advanced to demonstrate why decisions around hiring are made. For example, the white feminists with decision-making power over my position disclosed to others that I was no longer a good fit for the program because I was too personal with my students and that this affected the program's sustainability. To use this as a reason in an academic space where WOC have greater expectations to perform emotional labor (Harley, 2008; Stanley, 2006) was disingenuous. What their comments really meant, according to Ahmed, is that my very presence and the way I did things "caused their discomfort (by not fulfilling an expectation of whiteness)" (2012, p. 41) and that I was not working hard enough to make them feel less uneasy.

As word of my situation spread, students started to mobilize on my behalf. The white feminists responded with what Ahmed refers to as "kinship logic: a way of 'being related' and 'staying related,' a way of keeping certain bodies in place" (2012, p. 38). They granted

interviews to the school newspaper to share their side of the story, sent emails to students to attend a campus meeting about my situation without inviting me, and enlisted the cooperation of the DEID to persuade students that my case was an anomaly even as three other WOC resigned. Simultaneously, these women changed the program's name to reflect intersectionality, making the case that even though the only woman of color was essentially ousted, the name reflected the intersection of gender and sexual identities in the program. My colleagues in the program so misrecognized my humanity that none of them thought that I was worthy of being consulted. I grew enraged as I heard the developments recounted to me second-hand and read comments in the student newspaper.

I was enraged because I was not accorded human dignity and respect, and because I knew that my anger would be racially caricaturized. Black rage is deemed inappropriate because "Black women's anger in the face of routine, everyday injustice is not legitimate" (Cooper, 2018, p. 151). I soon recognized that containing my rage to survive the few months I had remaining on the campus was unhealthy and that those who had the privilege of full emotions were dictating the narrative to a curious campus. I was aware that regardless of what I did or said, I would be caricatured as the angry Black woman, a stereotype that was devised, and is deployed, to delegitimize Black women's audacity to question unequal circumstances as pathological and irrational and to ignore and silence us in the name of maintaining calm and rational conversation (Harris-Perry, 2011, p. 95). Despite knowing this, I had to keep my dignity and channel my legitimate rage at what was happening to me. As Cooper writes, "Black rage says that living without dignity is no life at all. This rage is dangerous because it … can't be forced to accept the daily indignities of racism" (Cooper, 2018, p. 165). Bearing in mind the words of Audre Lorde (1981), that "anger expressed and translated into action in the service of vision and our future is a liberating and

strengthening act of clarification … loaded with information and energy" (p. 127), I refused to accept being treated with indignity and as nonhuman. I refused to accept the supremacy of the academy's Eurocentric positivist character which labels me, my knowledge, and methods as nonhuman. I also refuse to accept that my value is premised on my being and doing diversity work, and I spoke and wrote my rage.

The reaction to my expressed rage was predictable. Upon encountering my Black woman's rage, the white feminists on campus immediately began shedding what Black feminists call white women's tears, an indication that they felt attacked, are unwilling to listen, and feel like they need to defend their actions or have them defended by others – usually men (Cooper, 2018). Lorde described this when she wrote that when WOC make plain their anger generated through contacts with white women, "we are often told that we are 'creating a mood of helplessness,' … or 'standing in the way of trusting communication and action'" (1984, p. 131). I knew that as a Black woman, I would not be given the privilege of having a full range of feelings and emotions. While I was labeled a "drama queen" by a white colleague, student protestors were labeled "unfair" by the DOF, for insisting that she and the program chair resign. This was followed by an email from the DOF to some faculty on the campus dispelling what she referred to as "misinformation" about the situation. By utilizing forums that did not allow either the students or myself to defend our positions, the DOF presented the chair as an innocent victim being persecuted by student rabble-rousers, and made me a liar. These actions are a clear example of how white feminists focused on gender become complicit with white supremacy using the gains and access made available to them through the successes of the feminist movement, to amass resources and power which they deploy to strip Black women of their full humanity.

In the spring of 2018, I was *in the wake*; I was experiencing the nonhumanity that the women of the Combahee River Collective wrote about in 1977. I share my experiences of being in the wake of the academy because understanding how Black women are rendered as nonhuman in the academy as one facet of "the history that hurts" (Harman, 1997, p. 51). Multiple accounts of oppression and domination need to be and are being told. I tell my story as I think about the ways in which Black women have for too long endured harassment in all aspects of our life. In her book *Eloquent Rage* (2018), Brittney Cooper asks us to ponder what it would mean for Black women to move freely and not have to contain their anger in the face of harassment in order to be considered worthy of respect. I think about this and what it would mean if we did not feel pressured to stay silent, evacuate spaces, relinquish what little power we think we have, become even more invisible, or engage in what Cooper calls "a rage-management project" (165)? What would it mean if we did not have to give into this "demand not to be aggressive... as a form of body politics or as a speech politics ... to be careful what you say, how you appear, to maximize the distance between you and their idea of you" (Ahmed, 2012, p. 160)? *What would it mean not to be made into a spectacle?*

Academic processes and the making of the racialized spectacle

As seen from my personal narrative above, to be a Black, non-western woman in academia is to be given an honorary human status that can be eventually taken away despite one's achievements. If according to Wynter, those who "think, write, and prescribe policies" do so using "biocentric paradigms ... elaborated in the very terms of the descriptive statement of the human", then it follows that "non-Western, nonwhite peoples can only, at best, be assimilated as

honorary humans … and, at the worst, must … forcibly be proscribed from human status" (2003, p. 329). In fact, in this place where the nonhuman is made and remade through pedagogy and process, the treatment of the nonhuman is reified in the curriculum, the tenure and promotion process, and even in recent diversity and inclusion initiatives.

In the curriculum for example, Eurocentric knowledges are systematically exalted above stigmatized African and Afro-American ways of knowing. According to Wynter, this clearly has extra-cognitive function that, "by motivating whites (by representing their ancestors as having done everything worthwhile doing), and … demotivating Blacks (by representing theirs as having done nothing), ensured the stable reproduction of the U.S. order that called for the white population group as a whole to be at the apex of the social order, and for the Black population to be at the bottom" (2003, p. 326). This curricular mapping works to develop a consciousness that ensures certain types of behaviors and attitudes (Thomas, 2006) so that even as the academy has pushed for equity and inclusion and has integrated racialized nonhumans and nonhuman ways of knowing through the rise of many interdisciplinary programs and departments, not much has changed.

In the wake of the Black liberation and feminist uprisings of the 60s and 70s and a call for the validation of other ways of knowing in the academy, Black, feminist and other minoritized studies were incorporated into the academic curriculum. The tasks of these new studies should have been to rewrite knowledge, to include these voices into our understanding of social realities (Wynter, 1994, p. 68). However, according to Ferguson (2012), by incorporating interdisciplinary departments and programs, the academy has in fact brought them within its control. The power of European curricular cartographic rules according to Mohanty and Alexander (2010)

re-inscribe the Eurocentric center of the academy when purporting to address the experiences of people of color. This re-inscription treats the experience of Black people "as a kind of raw material. That the history of black people was something you could use as a note of inspiration but it was never anything … you could never use it to explain something in theoretical terms. There was no discourse that it generated, in terms of the mainstream academy that gave it a kind of recognition" (Spillers, et al., 2007, p. 300). Rather, it became spectacle!

With regard to the tenure and promotion process, Black women who undertake most of the academy's service work and produce knowledge based on their particular standpoint are more likely to be stymied by the process that uses metrics based on student course evaluations, and journal rankings – which research has shown are more punitive of non-white, non-male faculty (Esnard and Cobb-Roberts, 2018) -- to legitimate who is worthy of tenure. This process of authenticating one's value is premised on legitimation as seen through the white male "human" gaze to produce a result that in line with the Eurocentric nature of the academy. In fact, Patricia Hill Collins (1998) has written about Black women who are under constant surveillance meant to circumvent any illegitimate behaviors they are automatically presumed to be engaging in and which restrict their movements. She calls this the politics of containment, that is, the processes used to depoliticize Black women's oppression and to dissuade their resistance as a means of keeping them in their place at the bottom while intuitions simultaneously tout racial progress. They are made spectacle!

During my time at this liberal arts institution, there were many instances where despite my work ethic -- working with students, partnering with faculty and staff -- I felt like my scholarly, teaching and service activities were viewed as illicit, and inappropriate, and

that I was being surveilled. For example, just before I left, I was told by colleagues -- some of whom I had never worked with -- that they were informed I was too close to students. Declaring that I get too close to students conjures up some illicit undisciplined behavior when in fact all I was doing was employing a Black feminist praxis, including what Collins refers to as "other mothering" work (2000), based on a care ethic for those marginalized like me. However, this work had caused "a certain level of dissonance with … non-white colleagues, who … reject[ed] the importance of the work based on their perception of …[its] irrelevancy" (Esnard and Cobb-Roberts, 2018). In the process, I became a spectacle!

To cast suspicion over and then ultimately dismiss this way of producing knowledge and working within academia dismissed my humanity, the humanity of students, and attempted to force us into powerless positions. Instead of familiarizing themselves with Black feminist praxis, I was viewed through what others, including liberation and womanist theologians and Black feminists call a "hermeneutic of suspicion," because for Black women in academia, to "be black is to know you are being watched – at all times – anyway" (Baszile, Edwards, and Guillory, 2016; Cooper, 2018 p. 214; Ricoeur, 2008 [1970]). For the work that one performs to be described as *too* anything, implies that it is not normal and that language reinforces a sense of suspicion. The word norm, according to Kirby, draws on a sense of belonging, "a sense that a language of meaning-making through which social behaviors are interpreted is held in common" or shared. But as Kirby argues, "*[s]hared* doesn't mean *same*" (2015, p. 99) and when feminists start from a position that these two terms are interchangeable, to be recognized as normal means we need to *be* and *act* the same because we are similarly gendered, we become closed to difference. Because in academia whiteness is normalized as the standard, Black women are expected to *be*

and *act* the same as white ones, to try not to uphold one's own standards but contort oneself in ways that could easily adopt theirs, otherwise we are treated as spectacles!

The above are examples of how the uncritical inclusion and integration of Blackness into the academy turns Black people into academic spectacles. It is evident that being included without addressing the presumption of nonhumanness is not only ineffective but traumatic. I was essentially included, but being presumed nonhuman meant I could also be excluded at any point. Being presumed nonhuman means then that as Black women our politics cannot be centered on a demand for recognition and inclusion because this "will lead only to a delimited notion of personhood as property … allowing for the continued existence of hierarchical differences between full humans, not-quite-humans, and nonhumans" (Weheliye 2014, p. 81). It also demonstrates that our politics, unlike white feminism, cannot focus solely on gender.

The success of white mainstream feminism has helped some white women gain membership into traditionally white male spaces such as the academy. However, this is at the "cost of the still and/or newly criminalized and disposable populations (women of color)" (Weheliye 2014, p. 81). In my situation, white feminists (and men who supported them) failed to see my humanity.

For a good reason, Black women have historically been critical of the work of white feminists who utilize a pure gender lens to examine their oppression. A good example is found in Audre Lorde's essay "The Uses of Anger" (1981) in which she writes, "[w]hat woman here is so enamored of her own oppression that she cannot see her heelprint upon another woman's face?" (p. 9). Lorde was commenting on the disregard by white feminists for the pain they inflict on WOC while simultaneously appropriating and bastardiz-

ing their knowledges – for example intersectionality (Nash, 2019)[1] – in defense of white women's own fight for gender and sexual equity with white cis-men.

If we are to move forward to a place of real feminist interventions, we need a feminism that can and must acknowledge and address honestly and openly the historical power white women had, and still have, over Black women – specifically in the academic realm. This type of feminism must also address how white women have historically engaged in the politics of vulnerability to enact harm on racialized people. Just think about Emmitt Till and the lynching of Black men in defense of white femininity. Invariably, Black women know, and my case supports, the following utility of "white tears":

> "White girls usually cry white-lady tears after they have done something hella racist and then been called out by the offended party for doing so. To shift blame and claim victimhood, they start to cry. The world falls apart as people rush to their defense. All knowledge of the fact that they are the ones who caused the problem escapes the notice of everyone except the person or people they disrespected" (Cooper, 2018, pp. 172-3).

For Black women rendered nonhuman, our tears have no such impact. As detailed in my experiences above, while the white chair's feminine vulnerability was recognizable, my anger was unpalatable, simultaneously hyperfeminine (drama queen) and lacking all femi-

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[1] Jennifer C. Nash in her 2019 text *Black Feminism Reimagined After Intersectionality* theorizes about the ways in which Black feminims sit uneasily within women's and gender studies. Using the example of how intersectionality has been coopted by the academy and by women's studies, she writes about white women's studies "scholars [who] lay claim to intersectionality, and the idea of virtuous feminist labor that attaches to intersectionality, without *actually* performing the demanding work of intersectional work" (p. 45).

ninity (which evokes protection), I was incapable of feeling hurt. I was the one making a spectacle!

I came into academia understanding that I was an outsider. As a student of Black feminist thought, I live daily what Collins (2000) calls the outsider-within. And as some white academic feminists continue to advocate for equity in women's work and pay, and against sexual harassment in the work place, they simultaneously oppress WOC who usually have less power at these institutions. WOC disproportionately are the ones who do not have tenure; they lack access to the types of social networks that can be mobilized to fight against academic oppression, and can easily be denied access to information technologies and official communication channels necessary to speak back and out against a shared institutional single-sided story seeking to prove that we do not "fit". As outsiders-within, however, we cannot lose sight of validating our own humanity. As Cooper states, we can't let others "become the center of a conversation that *isn't about them* … Black feminism is not a reactionary project … Black feminism is about the world of Black women and girls can build, if all the haters would raise up and let us get to work" (2018, p. 35).

Black women's transgressive politics: Moving toward becoming and being human

The thing about being in the wake is that survival within it provides us with the skills and strength needed to flourish. Once we acknowledge and "declare that we are Black peoples in the wake with no state or nation to protect us, with no citizenship bound to be respected, and to position us in the modalities of Black life lived in, as, under, despite Black death: to think and be and act from there" (Sharpe, 2016, p. 22). In the academic wake, Black women have

learned to become political actors, their own norm creators and community builders. We refuse to replicate, enact or adhere to the disciplinary techniques used by the white supremacist world. This is what Sharpe calls "the praxis of the wake and wake work" that is where and how we make sense of how Blackness exists in this world despite our suffering, paying attention to our present pain while imagining what we shall become; understanding that both our present and our futures are intertwined (Sharpe, 2016, p. 22). Cooper refers to this as "negressive politics … an unapologetic occupying of space, a claiming of visibility, a repositioning of the gaze, and a determination of how one's body gets to be made spectacle" (2017, p. 80). These politics are rooted in Black women's experiences navigating and transgressing hostile publics while making clear where they stand on issues Black women embody – it is intentional and strategic (Cooper, 2017, p. 81). In this vein, I started to define my own position, finding out that there was freedom in responding on my terms, existing on the campus unapologetically regardless of how I was perceived. The potential of the wake shows up as I turned the gaze back on those who sought to silence me, while finding inner solace and reassurance from my community of sister-friends. I demonstrated that I alone had the absolute and complete power over my humanity and that even though the institutional gaze sought to contain me by seeking to punish me through caricature, email threats and surveillance, they also had to acknowledge their lack of complete power over me.

In 2012, Kevin Quashie wrote about the sovereignty of quiet, "an exquisite balance between what is public and what is intimate" (p. 3). According to Quashie, quiet involves reclaiming one's humanity through engaging with the "full range of one's inner life – one's desires, ambitions, hungers, vulnerabilities, fears" (p. 6) not taking our cues from caricatures of blackness and spectacle, exterior

to Black people's understanding of their interior as the source of black human action, but ensuring "that anything we do is shaped by the range of desires and capacities of our inner life" (p. 8). Quashie asks Black people to think about how we can use our raucous interior to "expose life that is not already determined by narratives of the social world" (p. 8) that shape Black people as nonhuman. Being quiet then is different from being silent/ silenced in the face of oppression, it is having a consciousness "not only shaped by struggle but also by revelry, possibility, the wildness of the inner life … a falling into self. [For] [t]he outer world cannot be avoided or ignored, but one does not have to yield to its vagaries" (p. 45). Once we privilege what our interior offers us, not surpassing how we feel for action, we recognize there is something more complicated and richer about us than the ways in which the external world constructs us. To sit with that quiet is to validate our humanity, whether we choose to openly speak back to oppression or not.

Surrendering to my interior meant that the invalidations of my humanity did not control my life at the time and the indignities that came therefrom, I was far more than that. According to Quashie, recognizing the sovereignty of quiet is therefore to expand our idea of freedom, an idea that undoes "the stranglehold that idioms of resistance have on how we think about black humanity … such that the inclination to stand up for yourself is no longer limited to responding to the actions of others; instead, … understanding your heart, your ambition, your vulnerabilities … engaging and living by these. Standing up for yourself is not oppositional, but abundant" (p. 100). It is what Black women refer to as "giving zero fucks." Sitting with my quiet resulted in this essay, laying bare my humanity as a Black woman who possesses valid emotions, it was essential to disruption, a reorientation (Ahmed, 2012, p. 2). Works like this are what Sharpe refers to as "ways of imagining otherwise … to make

Black life visible, if only momentarily, … to hold in and on Black flesh" (Sharpe, 2016, pp. 123 -124). I posit that works like this, that center the interior, are important to a much-needed unraveling of what we consider normal. In writing this essay, I was attentive to what I needed to do for me, it was an act of self-care, not as "*self-indulgence [but] … self-preservation … an act of political warfare*" (1988, 130). Becoming and being through works like this, that privilege emotional interiority is a revolutionary act that allows Black women to defy the notion of the human grounded in the image of Western man.

Black women tiptoeing through the wake also have implications for the contradictions bound up in academic politics of equity and inclusion as it shifts "discourses … that yoke the flesh to political violence in the modus of deviance" to a widening/dismantling of genres of humanity (Weheliye, 2014, p. 137). It also demonstrates to others how intersecting oppressions based on race, gender, class, and sexuality influence how Black women as political actors feel and think (Harris-Perry, 2011, p. 48). Writing my pain has been transformative for me, it has helped me process my feelings about the oppression I faced at the hands of those who I felt knew better -- feminists. It helped me to refine my Black feminist praxis from within and resulted in me producing scholarship that might one day be helpful to others. This act of disruption helped me to be strategic in how I continue to expend my emotional energy because "*not everyone is worth [my] time or [my] rage* … My job as a Black feminist is to love Black women and girls. Period." (Cooper, 2018, p. 35). And it is because I love myself and us that I share my story as a gift that "leaves a series of interconnected relationships in its wake" (Hyde, 2007, p. xx).

There is so much to gain from such an act of inward reflection, of giving from that place and receiving. This includes building com-

munities where Black women thrive, where "we are each other's harvest" (Brooks, 1971) by being honest, with a view to make centering ourselves as Black women normal for us. An agentic building project is revealed then, not as one preoccupied with a politics of resistance, as it is not beholden to any public spectacle.

Conclusion

In 1892, Anna Julia Cooper stated that only the Black woman can say, "When and where I enter in the quiet, undisputed dignity of my womanhood, without violence and without suing or special patronage, then and there the whole race enters with me." This statement still rings true today. Black women are still rendered less than human and as such are not allowed the dignity of full womanhood. As Wynter has noted, the struggle of our millennium is one the overrepresentation of "Man" as the only way to be human "and that of securing the well-being, and therefore the full cognitive and behavioral autonomy of the human species itself/ourselves." (2003, p. 260). This struggle indeed results in several contradictions in our wider society but more specifically in academia, which holds out itself and is held out by society as the place of objective, unbiased, scientific knowledge production. Wynter also states that it "is only when such a category moves out of its negated place therefore, that the grammarians of an order ... can be freed from their system-maintaining 'structural models and prescriptive categories" (1994, p. 67). But how does that happen?

It happens through the proliferation of Black feminist knowledges based on our lived experiences. Analyses of how Black women are not only gendered but racialized "have the potential to disarticulate the human from Man, this metamorphosing humanity into a relational object of knowledge" (Weheliye, 2014, p. 32). Only then

will we be able to live as our full and authentic selves. These types of knowledge allow us to reimagine ourselves, our politics and our spaces, because once we account for how Blackness is integral to the construction of the modern human, we do not have to be beholden to how others construct us and turn us into spectacles. Rather, we can turn our attention to our own inventions (Weheliye, 2014, p. 32). Like Sharpe therefore, I continue to look for, see and imagine the various ways Black women navigate trauma through privileging their interior, that is, how Black women "inhabit it, are inhabited by it … [but also] refuse it" (2016, p. 116). There is no doubt that as Black women we continue even today to experience what it means to live in the wake, "daring to claim or make spaces of something like freedom, we yet reimagine and transform spaces for and practices of an ethics of care (as in repair, maintenance, attention), an ethics of seeing, and of being in the wake as consciousness; as a way of re-membering and observance" (Sharpe, 2016, p. 131). Such reimag-ining also happens when Black women as their full authentic selves – rage and all - bring visibility to themselves on their own terms, embracing and expressing the interiority which originates this rage as there is clarity that comes therefrom. I am not purporting here that rage should be our *only* response to injustices we experience because as Lorde taught us, the creative forces of anger open many other possibilities (1981).

As I prepared to depart from my position at this liberal arts college, I did so by officially announcing my departure on social media. This announcement read in part, "[a]s some of you already know, this semester has been a very difficult one for me. I have been shaken to my core … However, in the midst of everything I have felt so much love and I was reassured that what I do is impactful and important." As I thanked my colleagues and students, I publicly let them know that I appreciated their "fierce … advocacy for me …

and [that] I [would] never be able to show [them] how much I appreciate [their] love and support." My decision to make visible both the love, the pain and the rage caused by the situation, and also my decision to leave on my own terms is part of a Black feminist history that refuses to be made spectacle, that balances the public and the intimate, "naming the embodied and affective sacrifices that shape their advocacy work [and] reflects the way that Back women thinkers in the public sphere … make their pain, their anger, and their contempt for injustice visible and palpable (Cooper, 2018, pp. 146-7). As my public acknowledgments were met with love and validation, I remembered the words of Alexis Pauline Gumbs (2012) that the ancestors are teaching me how to be defiant and alive. This in no way means that I don't still feel pain and hurt and anger about the situation, but that I can use the stuff of this hurt to build and create. Even long after my body forgets this pain and this hurt, there will be traces of its former occupations left behind. For our "bodies can remember these histories, even when we don't" (Ahmed, 2012, p. 170), because we are human. And so while I remember, I do the work of balancing the public and intimate to make visible my humanity, transforming my pain into knowledge.

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