

POLICING *THOSE* “WE ALL LONG FOR”: ON CANADIAN BLACK
MASCULINITIES

By

PHANUEL ANTWI, B.A.

A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Arts

McMaster University

© Copyright by Phaniel Antwi, September 2006

MASTER OF ARTS (2004)
(English)

McMASTER UNIVERSITY
Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: Policing *those* “We All Long For”: On Canadian Black Masculinities

AUTHOR: Phaniel Antwi, B.A. (University of Guelph)

SUPERVISOR: Dr. Daniel Coleman

NUMBER OF PAGES: vii, 148

Abstract

This thesis, with its three chapters covering a range of representations of police brutality, social control and Black masculinities in Canada, interrogates texts from multiple genres. My introductory chapter will contextualize the study within the field of contemporary Black Canadian literary and social texts and provides background, by mapping out, understandings of Blackness in Black Canada. My first chapter engages with national newspapers, the *Globe and Mail* and *The Toronto Star*, to name two, to examine how visual factors such as the juxtaposition of headlines, photo captions, and cutlines, the nature and quality of images, and the position of stories in the paper and on the page provide visual factors that shape media messages, which in turn shape the public understanding about Black men. Continuing my analysis of the “discursive reproduction of racism” (van Dijk 221), chapter two focuses on Dionne Brand’s 2005 novel *What We All Long For* and Austin Clark’s short story “Sometimes A Motherless Child” to address the dehumanizing abuses that encodes the Black male body during episodes of police brutality, and address the attitudes that develop about Black men in the imaginations and consciousness of many Canadians. Shifting from literal and popular texts to film, chapter three frames a reading of Charles Officer’s *Short Hymn, Silent War* to address the trickling effects of gun violence and Black masculinities on African-Canadian women. I introduce the term conjoined subjectivities to suggest that gun violence and Black masculinities do not only affects Black men but Black women as well, thereby highlight the collective damage of these violence on Black communities. With the work done here, it becomes clear to me that more work on Black masculinities needs to be done.

Acknowledgments

This project began a while ago, in a very different form. What has endured throughout the process is my strong desire to theorize Canadian Black masculinities. I must admit this is just the beginning. But even at this beginning stage, a series of conversations with friends and colleagues have helped me explore possible explanations for how mainstream society police Black men. Policing those 'We All Long For': On Canadian Black Masculinities could not have been finished without Daniel Coleman's continued support (in this and so many other ventures), his vision, and his generosity. Through it all he never stopped believing in the project, and his advice was sage, sane, and always reflected with his most endearing quality: a keen perspective about the academy and the work we do in and outside of it. My thanks to Don Goellnicht and Susan Searls-Giroux for their critical insights, for cajoling and, most importantly, challenging me to think assiduously about the relationships between American and Canadian Black masculinities.

I would like to thank the office staff at the department who, throughout the summer, offered encouragement and timely advice, ranging from daily support when writing got tough to reminding me to eat when writing got good. My appreciation for the work you do for all of us.

To the melanin squads in academia: thanks for paving ways which now allow me to pursue the work I do. I cannot thank Karen Espiritu enough for reading the entire manuscript and her gift of time, criticism and encouragement. To my friends outside academia, thank you for your insightful interlocutors in our interactions. You have steeled and sustained me in the face of academia's white-taken-for-granted-privileges.

Many thanks to Bella, for being the best friend anyone can ask for. On many occasions too numerous to account here, your friendship, love and support sustained as well as calmed me in the difficult hours of chapter writing.

And finally, to my family: I remain indebted to you for your unwavering support and the joy you bring me in every exchange, this is dedicated to you, grandpa Lamptey and in memory of grandma Francesca Amina Ajah. With love.

Table of Contents

Preface	1
Introduction	
The Subject of Negotiations: Meditations on Canadian Black Male Subjectivity	4
Chapter I	
“Year of the Gun”: Black Men Seem to Embody the Answers, What Were the Questions?	38
Chapter II	
Rough Play, Wounded Passions: Capturing Episodes of Police Arrest in Austin Clarke’s “Sometimes a Motherless Child” and Dionne Brand’s <i>What We All Long For</i>	70
Chapter III	
Their Forgotten Songs Resound: Screening Effects of Gun Violence and Black Masculinities on Black Women in Charles Officer’s <i>Short Hymn, Silent War</i> (2003)	105
Conclusion	
A Staged Reflection: Phanael Antwi Interviews Himself	134
Works Cited	141

Illustration

Images of “Year of the Gun” victims

Appendix 1 (149)

Preface

A story of yours got this one going
so I'm sending it back now, changed of course
just as each person I love
is a relocation, where I take up
a different place in the world

(Wallace, *The Stubborn Particulars of Grace*)

To this day, I still remember the moment I first stepped on stage decked in a white kente cloth borrowed from my uncle: I was curious to know whether I could elicit catcalls, thunderous applause or finger-snapping-cheers from the audience (as many before me had done) yet I was also anxious to “take up a different place in the world.” The most I could hope for in that heated moment was to send my audience, as I hope to do in this thesis, the triggered stories Eli Bamfo’s inspirational spoken words always beg of me. Here I invoke my epigraph and suggest that the stories from the texts I read got this project going. They triggered some of my own experiences, and these experiences have been included in this project to highlight the symbiotic relations between academic work and my everyday encounterings.

Returning to my time on stage: for the first time, as I began to sling words, hoping to capture my audience’s attention, I witnessed simple alphabets move bodies with a strange disturbing motion: one demanding that I “trust the body which, together with the mind, forms one intelligence” (Philip, “Who’s” 1). The mobility of my words disturbed the caged home of alphabets to release a floating narrative, a dialogue, so to speak. I can still feel the “auchs” emitted by my audience as my words ripped the fabric of their

emotions; I can still see confused faces contemplating the angry political diatribes I spat in the room. In that heated moment I witnessed the growing movements of words dropping from my mouth into their ears. I realized then that the spoken word does not only ignite laughter, but it also educates as it entertains.

I tell you this story—knowing it has changed by my telling you of it—to paint a moment that forced me to question the solitude of generic boundaries and play with multiple reading practices and writing forms. My body was charged but I could not understand what was happening until I accounted for my emotions—that there is a physicality to my mind and that this physicality has a relation to my body. **[the body is not]** Telling you this story is my attempt to explain the methodological approach of my thesis. Since the thesis genre is too restrictive for my project, in order to relocate and re-discover, for myself, a different environment to talk about Canadian Black male subjectivity and masculinity, I have offered personal narratives, which sometimes take the form of poetry and at other times quoted conversations I’ve had with friends. The latter approach has been my attempt to create a community outside the political “we” of Canadian Black men/scholars/meaning-makers. I choose this problematic “we” to acknowledge my white readers’ inability to easily understand the form of theorization on subjectivity I engage in this project, especially since critics in the position to theorize subjectivity are mostly white.

In reworking this process, I align my thesis with a sort of “interfusional” work (244), a discursive term Thomas King uses to signal writings that blend elements of *oral* and written literatures. By adopting this writing strategy, I emphasize the oral character

of the *spoken* words despite the confines of this written thesis, not only to welcome “an oral syntax that defeats readers’ efforts to read the stories silently to themselves, a syntax that encourages readers to read the stories out loud” (King 244), but also to make “efforts to connect in a more intimate way,” with readers, “in much like a prophetic [B]lack preacher soliciting critical response from an open-minded yet suspicious congregation” (West ix). In short, this project is my attempt to generate a framework of reading Black male subjects which is “inclusive, sensitive, and understanding of [B]lack history and culture” (hooks, *Yearning* 227).

Introduction

The Subject of Negotiations: Meditations on Canadian Black Male Subjectivity

I

There is a well-entrenched notion in Western critical theory that Black (male) subjects are simply subjects for theorists to cast against a canvas of white screens: if we come into focus or appear on that canvas, it is as the colonized object of the White gaze—slave, emancipated slave, exotic, trivialized subject, or part of the backdrop representing time and place. In each instance, we are linked with servitude and subordination. In my desire to break the long-standing links between servitude, subordination attached to Black (male) subjects, I deliberately adopt a methodological approach that makes use of materials from multiple genres to challenge the bulk of existing critical work on (Black male) subjectivity. The selection of generic forms I deploy in my thesis functions with an urgent attempt to gather theory's historical failure(s) to account for Black masculinities and to reconstruct and resuscitate a holistic epistemology about Black Canadian male subjectivity. Since I think in poetic form, my prose draws energy from Myriam J. A. Chancy's idea of "poelitics," a concept she uses to describe the "dynamic fusion of poetics and women-centered politics" (xxi) of Afro-Caribbean women's writing in exile. Although my project is on Canadian Black male subjectivity, I draw energy from "women-centered" politics to emphasize the conjoined relations between Black femininities and masculinities, a relationship my last chapter addresses. I particularly gravitate towards Chancy's theory of poelitics to avoid erasure and tune myself to the complex construction of Black masculinity as well as to confront within these

constructions the four distinguishing features of “*alienation, self-definition, recuperation, and return,*” (xxi, emphasis in original) that Chancy argues is part of exile—all of which are sensibilities that inform my writing of this thesis. I have therefore incorporated lines of verse in my prose. The lines of verse are mine unless I cite a different poet. I am not, of course, suggesting a protracted abstinence from prevailing theories of (Black male) subjectivity by introducing my own spoken word pieces and other people’s poetry into my thesis, nor do I introduce these creative-theoretical works simply to liven up my thesis. Instead, I employ these forms to loosen the *absolutist assumptions of theoretical discourse* and to also force a *dialectical thinking* that is fading beyond our hearing. I struggle, therefore, to write this “chapter” because of my attempt to avoid using “white” theories of subjectivity to make sense of Canadian Black male subjects. Henry Louis Gates Jr., in *The Signifying Monkey*, introduces the trope of the Talking Book as “a sign of absence” in early African-American literary theory (137). The Talking Book suggests a text that spoke to the master but remained inaccessible to the slave. My struggle in writing this piece is my attempt to avoid producing, through my reading, Talking Canadian Black male subjects; I want to work against signifying these subjects as “silent second texts” (Gates 86) by simultaneously using *and* charting some distance from African-American and Euro-American theories of Black masculinity. I further want to resist hiding Canadian Black male subjects in what Hamiltonian spoken word artist Klyde Broox refers to as “*mas(k)culinit[ies]*” (92, emphasis mine) and instead attempt to situate my analysis of Canadian Black masculinities outside my inherited Eurocentric knowledge

of analysis and to pursue it instead in the emerging creolized African/Africadian traditions of signification which denote multiple ways of meaning and of being.

I am not interested in reciting the inadequate yet totalizing theories of white Euro-American certainty about the human subject; instead, I struggle to “listen” to the “shadow traipsing” of African-Canadian male subjects “bursting the hemisphere’s seams” (Brand, *No* 141). I struggle to listen to the

sleeping stories we tell the world
as Black men sweat bullets
alone
alone
alone at night.

In listening attentively and closely to the situated and local stories of Black men in Toronto, I hear not sleeping stories but pregnant stories aborting in mid-life because the half-lived lives of Canadian Black men are in the process of turning into narratives that current theories of subjectivity cannot know nor even begin to explain.

II

At the risk of turning this paper into my own memoir, I nonetheless begin with a personal anecdote, my most visible testimony to the power of giving an account of oneself to the state, a rite of passage many mobile subjects undergo. But I shall ask you, the reader, to take an active role: I shall ask you to pretend to be me, although I know the impossibility of fully fulfilling this demand. At the very least, try to imagine your response to the following situations. 2001: You are in Brussels, Belgium. You have just toured Western Europe for a month with a visiting friend from Canada, and you are on your way to Manchester, England, where you are currently studying on an exchange program. At the

airport, upon showing your passport and boarding pass, your passport picture is checked, rechecked, and rejected. You are asked to provide other forms of identification to corroborate the tales your passport does and does not tell. You provide your Canadian driver's license. On it is a picture taken when you were seventeen years old. You are told, "this picture is too old." You move to present your student ID and International Student Identification Card cards. Not good enough. Now you seem to be running out of viable ID/ identities so you move on to both your health insurance and Canadian citizenship cards. Still not good enough. "Well," the woman attending to you says and clears her throat, "do you have any ID with a picture that looks like..." and she points to your hair. Dumbfounded at her soft-spoken suggestion, which regardless how softly-spoken hides hard implications, you ask: "looks like what?" It has not dawned on you that a change in hairstyle warrants a change in ID. Now, you seem to be taking too much time, so you are pulled and led by two security officers into a room at the back of some place where you are searched for God-knows-how-long and for who-knows-what-possessions.

III

Perhaps you might react as I did: you might quickly (but a little fearfully) turn to the security officer and ask for an explanation. Depending on your temperament, you might think *this entire incident* was uncannily odd or disturbingly interesting or downright irritating. But stretch your imagination a little more and consider *how you might* then feel if, in the same room, you encountered hands fondling [you]? heard clothes tossing?

[saw] white gloves being worn?
[heard] toilet flushing, and flushing, and flushing?

IV

Fast forward three months later: you are in Wolverhampton, England, sitting in a park on a Sunday morning, a routine you've adopted for the past five days while you've been visiting your friend, Greg. In your hand are Zadie Smith's then new novel, *Autograph Man*, and a bag of stale bread to feed the ducks in the pond. Before you sat down with a bag of dirty stale bread and your torn copy of Smith's *Man*, on the bench that now houses your butt cheeks, you had heard a police siren that stopped you in your tracks. You had looked around frightfully as you've done ever since you can remember. The sirens had grown louder and you saw two angry cars approaching you. You were now more than scared – you silently and inwardly cried thunderous tears flooding the dry island of your heart¹. You had looked around your surroundings hoping to spot a witness; you saw nobody but you heard everybody's thought: "he did it." "He is guilty." The police cars seemed to be approaching your direction. You had stopped walking to let them pass only for the cars to stop right in front of you. A police officer walked out of the car, grabbed both your hands, letting the book and the bag of stale bread fly into the violent air, slammed your body into the hood of the car and demanded you provide the purse you'd taken. "What purse?" you managed to get out in the suffocating air. "Don't play dumb with us. You know what purse." Apparently they had received a phone call from a

¹ If this sentence reads weirdly, and perhaps over/melodramatically, I'd ask you to further imagine how weird you must have felt in the heated encounter, how gross you must have felt with those hands on you. If you can imagine this, then ask yourself, would you want these sedimented feelings of invasion expressed in beautiful prose?

concerned citizen whose description you fit; more accurately, whose description *fits you*. You expressed your frustration after this whole encounter was over only to be appeased with “I hope you understand, I was just doing my job.” The sad reality is you did understand. Differently though...

V

Remember, you are me in this exercise of the imagination: therefore, you have spent a lot of time and energy over the past four years arguing with or trying to convince friends and colleagues that, whether we like it or not, Canadian Black male subjects are repeatedly linked with criminality, criminality, criminality! Of course this repeated criminalization of Canadian Black (male)ness “is not the kind of symmetry that gives rise to monotony”: it is alive and highly regularized and structured (Senghor qtd. in Fanon 123). You have never denied that dominant representations of Black masculinities also criminalize alternate forms of Black masculinities: you cannot close your eyes (and ears) to how Black queer men are excluded in dominant celebrations of famous and familiar Black masculinities. Now, I do not want to submit a mere anecdote as evidence that all Black male subjects undergo criminalization or that all Black men are even aware of how they and/or their masculinities are criminalized. What I do want to insist on is that the criminalization of Canadian Black (male)ness is a reality that cannot be avoided. This introductory chapter is my attempt to differentiate Canadian Black masculinities from the white theories of subjectivity circulating in popular cultural studies and philosophy and also to understand the forms of difference within Canadian Black male subjects. Since it

cannot simply be assumed that a unitary representation and theorization of the Black male subject is possible, and since I want to move away from the sanitized and sensationalized theories of Black male subjects, I call upon imaginative works such as poetry, spoken word and hip-hop art, and journalistic writings, alongside critical essays on subjectivity, to weave together a creative and theoretical exploration into how everyday practices of being for Black male subjects living in Canada involve a constant negotiation of a “zone of both contact and combat” (Chang 169).² There are a few conceptual questions that both bless and curse my thinking through this chapter: How do Canadian Black male subjects give accounts of themselves to Repressive State Apparatuses, such as the police, if the state does not yet recognize them as complete citizens or subjects? How do the narratives and embodiments of slavery inform Canadian Black masculinities? And, equally, what effects do these narratives of slavery have on or have to do with Black Canadian men? Finally, what (illusory) evaluative scale of subjectivity is used to judge Black male subjects?

VI

Although these conceptual questions guide my thinking, this piece focuses heavily on the mundane and violent practices of surveillance that are imposed upon Black male subjects throughout Canada.³ Are these violent practices “mundane” by nature because they are

² In “Public Enemies: Police Brutality and Black Youth,” Austin Clarke suggests that a “language...full of improvisation” is the “aesthetics” that Canadian Black male subjects use to “ensure victory over” what in this paper I identify as the zone. (The zone, in Austin Clarke’s essay, is “the oppressive system” (333).) Improvisation “prevents their lives from being shortened by” the system and makes “sure that they” do not “accede to complete human degradation” (Clarke ?).

³ As I write this chapter, on April 14, 2006, I think of the young Black man who was killed yesterday, near Bayview and Steeles Aves., by police, for “attempted robbery.” Episodic practices of police killing Black

declared to be so by “particular people”? Who decides who and what is “exceptional”? I am specifically thinking about how reporters showered concern over the “exceptional” murder of Jane Creba, the white woman who was killed in Toronto on Boxing Day 2005, while the other 40-plus (mostly) Black (male) subjects who were also murdered did not warrant the same kind of attention/recognition. I make the argument that the daily negotiated zone of contact and combat navigated by Canadian Black male subjects is a troubled and troubling one, in which Canadians’ sleeping anxieties, what Austin Clarke calls “the immorality of silence” (338), towards the Black male subject awakens.⁴ What does it mean, for instance, for a police officer to routinely stop a Black man and demand that he give an account of himself, give his life-story, because he “fits” a description? It is important to remember that the police’s demand for accountability is not only to collect narratives but also to collect data and submit it to the state for profiling statistics. What narratives of subjectivity become possible for the young “militant” Black man who responds belligerently to this demand, who refuses to narrate his story? Are we to read through his refusal an attempt to refuse interpellation? My thesis explores how a Black man’s desire to hold back an account of himself has the potential to unravel his conferred subjectivity and consequently provide silent forms of subjectivity, forms that Peruvian-Canadian poet, Shane Book, would refer to as the “thin music of shame” (256).

men have become a regular practice, hence, “what is revealed is that, far from being extraordinary, [these] experiences reflect the uneventful and ordinary realities that persistently affect young [B]lack men in urban North America” (Maclear 125). Like many members in many Black Communities in Canada, Devon, a hip-hop artist, also “appeals for justice” (Walcott 41) in his song, *Mr. Metro*, about police racism. Referring to these episodic killings of Torontonians Black subjects, Devon raps: “ease up RCMP; ease up / No OPP; ease up 52; ease up / Peel Region; ease up / don’t shoot the youth” (“*Mr. Metro*”).

⁴ I like the idea of awakening selves because it suggests that we embody multiple subjectivities and “all” we require (not that these requirements are easily secured) is a context for these sedimented subjectivities to be stirred from their sleeping sofas for “new persons” to become possible.

VII

Althusser's germinal essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," with its doctrine of interpellation, a metaphor that symbolically gives an account of the subject, continues to inform contemporary theorists, Butler and Derrida to name two, writing about subjectivity.⁵ In this essay, Althusser holds that "ideology interpellates individuals as Subjects" (128). This ideological composition of the subject moves us away from any exalted understanding of the subject as a free agent to an understanding where we, as individual subjects, are constituted as in-ideology. (It is important to remember that Althusser's subject is a symbolic one while the subject I engage with is physically embodied.) When Kardinal, the Canadian hip-hop artist, rhymes

look out, cameras are watching *you*
they watching *you* from birth
and they be killing *us* softly" ("Powerfully," emphasis mine),

he calls attention to the "pathological" "pre-appoint[ed]" ideological structures that "grip" *all* subjects at birth (Althusser 97), but he also shows how these structures are intensified especially in the continual criminalization of Black male subjects. Kardinal uses the pronouns "you" and "us" to particularize and localize the lines between a universal subject, *you*, and the local Black male subject, *us*. Since Kardinal's "cameras"

⁵ Of course both Butler and Derrida rework Althusser's theory of interpellation. What I am calling attention to is the Western theoretical economy in the academy that only invites and rewards the usage of these capital-T theories, thereby limiting our ability to envision alternate composition and theorization of the subject beyond the confines of Western interpellated imaginations. If we are to learn from Michel Foucault's theorization in *The History of Sexuality*, Volume I, of how the paradox of power works in relation to discourse, especially of how discourse transmits and produces and reinforces power, then, as Foucault explains, "we must make allowance for ... complex and unstable" (101) discourses of subjectivities. Although Butler and Derrida's theories of subjectivity argue for this as well, it should be noted then that my critique is of academia's valorization of "capital-T" theories rather than what people might read as my complete rejection of Butler's and Derrida's theories.

and the “they” become the ideological apparatuses that aim to pre-fix, or in his own words “kill” his subjectivity, he offers accounts of himself before it is demanded. In this way, he can provide a subject position that is not completely pre-determined. Kardinal is aware of being a subject-in-ideology and warns Black men not to delude ourselves by thinking we are “immune”: “don’t think that you’re immune / ‘cause your acquired system is soon to be consumed” (Sweet Marie).

VIII

In the song-poem “the Mask,” the Fugees say “everybody wears da mask,” meaning that they too “walk the streets and camouflage [their] identity.” Here, the Fugees point out the outward protection of camouflaging one’s identity to testify to the convincing power of ideology; but they also vehemently challenge this protective position by asking “how long will this last”? Put crudely: the “*this*,” in their question, offers a critique of the complicitous willingness, by Blacks, to subject ourselves to state ideology. As I understand from Frantz Fanon, “in the white world, the man [sic] of colour encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema. Consciousness of the body is solely a negating activity” (110). What’s at the heart of the Black subject-in-ideology is (1) our identification with colonial-racist images of incompleteness, of lack, of abjection, of excess and (2) our willingness to bear our awareness of existing within heavy demands of a triple interpellation. On this heavy demand Fanon writes:

I was given not one but two, three places...I existed triply: I occupied space. I moved toward the other...and the evanescent other, hostile but not opaque, transparent, not there, disappeared. Nausea...

I was responsible at the same time for my body, for my race, for my ancestors. I subjected myself to an objective examination, I discovered my

blackness, my ethnic characteristics; and I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects, slave-ships, and above all else, above all: “Sho’ good eatin’.”

...What else could it be for me but an amputation, an excision, a hemorrhage that spattered my whole body with black blood? (112)

Kardinal does not want this reduction, this fear of becoming an absence, a common stereotype of Black masculinity, nor does he want to be determined, disassembled, dissected fully by ideology. He wants “to be a man among other men”; he does not want his sons and daughters to come “sprawled out, distorted, re-colored, clad in mourning,” but “to come lithe and young into a world that was ours and to help to build it together” (Fanon 112-13, emphasis mine). As a result he “rip[s] through these lies so [he] can bear sons and daughters” whom ideology “can’t disarm” (Powerfully). Kardinal’s urgency to formulate this precarious discourse of Black Canadian masculinity can be understood in his song “Man By Choice.” In this song, he lets listeners know that he is aware of their “objective examination” of him: how, “walkin’ down Yonge St.” (Man), his “corporal schema crumbles” and in its place “a racial epidermal schema” takes over (Fanon 112); how he moves “from an African, straight to a nigger...walking down Yonge St.”; and how his “exterior is shaded in by [his] melanin.” He continues by rapping how the

stereotype of my type is a felon/ my people cause static cause automatically now a days we fire automatics/ Grammatically adequate my people come equipped/ With enough lyrics to move battleships/ Blood brother ever since the slave ships/ It doesn’t matter who I am when I walk by/ They still see me as a nigga when I walk by/ That’s O.K. – this nigga will play the role and *come again* and take back the Earth another day. (“Man By Choice”)

A critical attendance, by critics, to Kardinal’s lyrics is needed because his lyrics provide an opportunity to read Canadian Black masculinities. Irrespective of Kardinal’s own internal dialogue with ideological and repressive apparatuses and the power they

exercise/wield in repressing with violence, and through physical repression and economic restraint, it is important to remember that, even though “this nigga” chooses “to play the role” in order to “come again and take back the Earth,” until he joins his ancestors, he moves away from the monolithic and stable space in which mainstream society places him. Remember that he is still here, on a battle/slave ship

living as *the* art in your articulations
the blood rushing in flight
to avoid your semantic games
...the guerilla warfare
waged in your semiotics
the prevented pain
walking
to beats of slanted truths.

IX

Black male subjects, like Canadian hip-hop artist Devon Martin, also known as Mr. Metro, acknowledge their imbrications within ideologies, and at the same time—unlike Althusser’s subject—envision agency and resistance. They must do so because, as Robert F. Reid Pharr points out, the Black male subject has “been conceptualized in modern (slave) culture as an inchoate, irrational nonsubject, as the chaos that both defines and threatens the broader logic, individuality, and basic subjectivity” (354). In this framework of nonsubjectivity (which should invoke a continuum of subjects and nonsubjects since we cannot forget the Black bourgeoisie) Black male subjects, Reid-Pharr goes on to say, “become interchangeable, creating among the population a sort of continual restlessness, a terror” (354). Such public restless figuration of Black male subjects as terrorists who fit a single description short-circuits agency and resistance.

How can they assert themselves productively when one Black male subject can easily fit the description of another? The envisioning movement of agency is not to be thought of as “a resistance that is *really* a recuperation of power or a recuperation that is *really* a resistance, it is both at once, and this ambivalence forms the bind of agency” (Butler 13, “Psychic Life”). My problem with prescribing this dosage of agency for the Black male subject is that any negotiation for recuperated agency is broken: he is already predetermined by the complex system of racisms dispersed throughout culture, business, and government and its institutions. The conditions of his contract remain the same in every operation of agency. In *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, José Esteban Muñoz offers a theory of agency through his theory of disidentification, which calls racialized subjects to “work on and against dominant ideology” (11). This strategic process of “working on and against” the hostile cultural structure of identity offers a thin blanket of protection against the cold oppressive system of subjectivity, but it does enable agency.

X

Out of the Blue, a film by Richard Fung, a Trini-Canadian, documents this subject/nonsubject interchangeability of the Black male subject. The film focuses on Julian Dedier, an African Canadian pre-med student who on January 8th 1989 was arrested during church services on false charges of robbery by four police officers⁶. To

⁶ If “the Church” and “the Police” are both machines of ideological interpellation, my question is, why were state authorities, read *white* police officers, able to force their ideologies over religious authorities,

accent the disturbed normalcy of Julian's arrest, Kevin Dedier, Julian's brother, explains how police officers on a normal day followed the bus he was on only to stop the bus and take him off saying he *fits* the description of a criminal. My point here is to argue that although theories of the subject emphasize the common experience of individuals in a society, following Althusser's suggestion that we are all hailed by the voice of the law, these experiences suggest that certain subjects are more often the targets of specific kinds of hailing. As Daniel Coleman has rightly pointed out to me in conversations, it seems clear to me that the policeman's hail can be affirmative to some subjects (Law and order are here: I'm safe) and extremely degrading to others (the cops are here: I'm in shit).

XI

Unlike Black male subjects who are

stared ...down
with widened eyes
I's
trying to make sense
of t/his moving grenade
bound by hoops of steel,

Butler can rework Althusser's interpellation and suggest the possibility of misrecognition of the voice of the law because she does not "live" with, or lives with a different set of "hoops of steel" as a white lesbian academic. So the "hoops" that determine us do not

read *Black pastor*? Is the job of both ideological state apparatus' not to "protect" the subject? May I suggest that the police officers work as both a repressive and ideological state apparatus? May I further suggest that certain apparatuses that carry out ideological interpellations embody explicit, maybe even legalized, excess of ideological force to carry out the States' desires? In the "state of Toronto," as Julian Deidre's arrest demonstrates, the State's desire is to criminalize to clean the city, a process Rinaldo Walcott calls "reverse migration, (deportation) back *home*" (102; emphasis mine), of Black male subjects.

... determine [her]
long before [she] walks
 onto the streets
long before [s]he ventures
 onto the highway.

My point here is that theorists like Butler face different apparatuses of interpellation than Canadian Black men do, and their relative privilege (at least as white, middle-class academics) gives them different possibilities than Black men have.

XII

Butler explains in *The Psychic Life of Power* that “power not only acts on a subject but...enacts a subject into being” (13). In an effort to move beyond the all-encompassing enactment of power, she introduces the term “injurious interpellation” (95) to acknowledge zones of contact and combat where narratives of resistance might be envisioned. She suggests that “the one who is hailed may fail to hear, misread the call, turn the other way, answer to another name, insist on not being addressed in that way” (95). At this junction, I’ll ask you to go back to the exercise at the beginning and re-imagine your encounter with the police. Imagine possible ways to insist on not being addressed in that way. Imagine misreading the siren. Imagine not stopping but running. Butler suggests that the *chance* for *misrecognition* is a site of possible resistance, but I ask what would this resistance look like to you, or what would it look like if performed by subjects already gripped by misrecognition? The fact that racial stereotyping is a misrecognition (on the part of the one doing the interpellating), misrecognizing a misrecognition risks more harm/injury to the interpellated Black male subject. Black Canadian writers such as Dany Laferrier (or Thomas King in the context of First Nations

subjectivity) would suggest that ridiculing the stereotype or the misrecognition is an important kind of resistance. But Laferrier and King's respective works would further suggest that although the political moment of such resistance theoretically produces resistant subjectivities, these moments also have the potential force to (re)-subjugate the resisting Black male subject. In the moment of arrest, any parody or ridicule would only increase the violence by the police against the Black male subject.

XIII

In Fung's *Out of the Blue*, Julian Dedier calmly and methodically offers a moment-to-moment narrative of that bitter out-of-the-blue morning when his guilt was predetermined by an "eyewitness" who identified him as a suspect. Fung shines a critical spotlight on the confessional complex of Black male subjects giving accounts of themselves to the police. This accounting is one that many Black male subjects regard as a rite of coming-to-being. For example, Julian's arrest, because it took place at church, is a prime example of a shaming practice that speaks to the rite of coming-to-being for many Black male subjects. It was in the middle of a sermon that the police officer said to him:

P.O: "You're coming with me right now. Let's go."

Julian: "No I don't think so."

P.O: "I'm a police officer and you are under arrest, let's go."

Julian: "I'd like to see your badge."

P.O: "He wants to see *my* fucking badge."

The above verbal exchange between Julian and the police officer, narrated and reenacted by Julian, highlights the ideological and political implications involved in "self-representational acts" (87). Since Althusser's policeman usually demands subjectivity from the subject, and since usually it's the police officer who demands ID, Julian's

demand for the police officer's "badge" offers a powerful reversal of Althusser's ideological framework; a reversal in which subjects assume or appropriate the role of agency and legitimacy. This reversal is possible only because they are in church, so the eyes of the congregation force the police into an unfamiliar and less powerful role. They must look like the representatives of civility, not just thugs... In Fung's film, Julian's demand to see the police officer's badge of identification/authority allows him to assert his rights as a citizen and to take over the role of he-who-demands-identity. Also, by seeking ID, Julian unsettles/throws into question and doubt the policeman's claim(s) to authority and power. Ajay Heble, in "New Contexts of Canadian Criticism: Democracy, Counterpoint, Responsibility," contends that these confessional acts, when "radicalized"—that is, when accounts are demanded from those who do not expect it—can produce "narratives that construct a story of subjectivity and belonging" (87). Demanding these unwarranted accounts, Heble continues, "ha[s] the power to shape production, maintenance, and transmission of knowledge 'about' both self and other" (87). If this knowledge and production of the other's subjectivity is discursively possible, as Heble suggests, then—the material Black male subject, the self—who is being interpellated by the police officer offers insight into understanding subject-remaking and fashions new subjectivities in the process of interpellation.

XIV

Most theoretical writings and theories of subjectivity produce non-situated and "silent subjects." By "silent subjects" I am thinking of how theories of subjectivity too hastily produce noiseless (read "raceless") abstract subjects who mouth silent screams. This

post-race economy of the subject, achieved through vibrant application of language, produces semantic subjects. The liberal cultural turn towards “colour blindness,” for instance, affects the junction between “race” and “subjectivity” in theoretical work. As a result, although the field of critical race theory also addresses “race” and “subjectivity,” often I find its interpretations of Black male subjects insufficient and shallow. These writings too readily provide theories of subjectivity that do not take into account the complicated yet mundane practices that Canadian Black male subjects have to negotiate. For example, these writings focus on the social constructedness of individuals by failing to explicitly address how society constructs each subject differently. Canadian Black critics/hip-hop artists such as Kardinal, K-OS and K’naan complicate my understanding of the subject by introducing me to theories that “live on the street,” so to speak⁷. Perhaps these artists’ examination of Canadian Black male subjectivities has not been appreciated for its theoretical power because these men gesture with experimental or even experiential prose towards what critical theorists on subjectivity cannot say in language. These Black men rhyme about and debate with themselves to explore the elasticity of their subjectivity. Listening to Kardinal, K-OS or K’naan negotiate the question of Canadian Black male subjectivities, I learn that the subjectivity of Canadian Black men is not merely one of coping with social constructions but also of coping with the *excesses* of social constructions. The myth of Black men’s scandalous subjectivity, the “ghetto delinquency” (A. Clarke 195), is so compelling to these artists that it suffuses their

⁷ I use this phrasing not to idealize the trope of the street, or to reproduce the street as the “authentic” site for theorizing Black male subjectivity or even risk making Black (male) subjects the only informants of Black subjectivity; instead, I use this phrase to suggest the production, maintenance, and transmission of different models of subjectivity that are not acknowledged in academic writings of subjectivity.

musical productions; they give accounts of themselves before they are asked. Kardinal raps this account by saying,

Never lived in the ghetto but suffer the circumstance
circumstantial evidence reveals the nature of my residence
my presence and present is the love and strength of [B]lackness” (“Sweet Marie”).

While Kardinal raps this captive expression of “alreadyness” with optimism, American rapper DMX warns in his classic anthem that if this predetermined demonization and ghettoization of Black men continues, “Y’all Gon’ Make Me Lose My Mind.”

XV

Since, for the most part, Canadian Black male subjects are diasporic subjects with an irritatingly non-unitary diasporic and “polysemous consciousness” (G.E. Clarke, *Odyssey* 188), it makes sense that theories of Canadian Black (male)ness emphasize this quality of plurality, a quality which literary and cultural critic George Elliott Clarke suggests, in his introduction to *Eyeing The North Star*, is constituted by “a fragile coalition of identities” (G.E. Clarke xviii). Interestingly, it is the non-White, the non-“Canadian-Canadian,” to use the term Eva Mackey adopts to describe white Canadians’ articulation of their normativity, who encounters this fragile coalition. I have come to understand that adjectives such as “Ghanaian-,” “Trinidadian-,” “Haitian-,” and “Kenyan-“ contentiously sit beside the noun “-Canadian” not only to challenge Euro-Canadian national narratives but perhaps also to offer “an official interruption of and intervention in that longer evolution process” (Bucknor and Coleman xxii) of white Canadian normativity. These modifiers open the knapsack that holds a series of maps to the door for young generations of African-Canadians thereby highlighting the lack of a master ethnic narrative of

Blackness in Canada. Ironically, the “lack” of such stable Canadian Blackness allows Canadian-born African-Canadians to be fully assimilated and diasporic Black Canadians to simultaneously and to fully participate in the stew of Blackness cooking in Canada. One’s ability, then, “to *read* this” subjectivity and its “dangers is wrapped up with” the “possibilities for *articulating* [one’s] experience” (Compton 30). This articulation of experience aims to particularize and localize African-Canadian Blackness. In the end, Canadian Blackness fashions a shifting grammar of ethnicity. It “incorporate[s] diverse cultural, ideological, and geographic references” of Blackness thereby denoting a “fragile” yet multiple “coalition of identities” as compared to one identity of African-Americanism “steeped in a visceral history” (G.E. Clarke, *Eyeing* xviii).

In Canada, “race” is often discussed within a multicultural model and therefore Blackness is seen as another form of ethnicity. If ethnicity’s difference from race is conflated in Canada, especially because of the multicultural model, then Blackness is not seen as a racialized construct. Such conceptualization does not recognize that Canadian and Blackness is a mixture of ethnicity and “race.” By not explicitly marking this recognition, which I believe would unsettle the fragility of Canadian multiculturalism, the racial tension within Canada is ignored.

In *A Map to the Door of No Return*, Dionne Brand highlights disruptions and displacements for Black subjects in the diaspora. In an interview with Maya Mavjee, Brand explains that in *Maps*, “[she] wanted to challenge the idea of constantly having to fix oneself as a way of finding identity” (2). She further wanted to “disturb the deeply troublesome labels that admit no complexity, no range but which come to represent us in

the world” (2). Brand’s desire to “disturb,” complexify, and offer a range of Canadian Blackness marks a genealogical disjunction and displacement that obscures and unsettles monolithic roots and routes. Although many diasporic subjects experience this sense of displacement and disjunction, it is heightened among the youth of the second and third generation. In these generations,

there is a sense in the mind of *not being here or there, of no way out or in*. As if the door had set up its own reflection. *Caught between the two* we live in the Diaspora, *in the sea in between*. Imagining our ancestors stepping out through these portals one senses people stepping out into nothing: one senses a *surreal space, an inexplicable space*.... Our *inheritance* in the Diaspora *is to live this inexplicable space*. (Brand, *Maps* 20, emphasis mine)

Many young African-Canadian subjects are indeed “caught between the two” worlds of Africa and Canada; to “successfully” negotiate these contact zones, Diana Brydon contends that part of being caught between two worlds “entails working through specific relations to history and place” which includes “ambivalent utopic expectations of Canada” as well as “ambivalent nostalgic longings for Africa” (qtd. in Cuder-Dominguez 71). I take Brydon’s description of Canadian Black ambivalence to be the “not being here or there,” of having “no way out or in”; by not investing in a coherent narrative of Blackness, not being interested in origins, or interested in the long-running narratives of roots and routes, the disjunction and differences in our movements is the hallmark of our Blackness. The result for the African-Canadian male youth is that he inhabits as well as navigates the inherited space in-between a “surreal” and an “inexplicable” space in order to dwell within or negotiate between changing traditions.

Given the variegated composition of the sociology of Blackness in Canada, then, African-Canadianness is intractable not because of its mystery but more because of its

translation; from its many departing flights, both within and outside Canada, Canadian Blackness traffics across a troubled and troubling zone of differences which gives our Blackness an “international” flavour (G.E. Clarke, *Eyeing* xv). Rey Chow reminds us that the “basis” of this translated and translating difference is never “equal” (183), even when a translation is achieved. George Elliot Clarke, for instance, asks: If African-Canadian literature “is heteroglossic, a callaloo of languages (English, French, Spanish, Ge’ez, etc), a medley of accents” (*Eyeing* xv), then why, in this emerging field, are Caribbean notions of Blackness the dominant currency exchanged? The prevalence of Caribbean notions of Blackness ... Knowing that in Canada one is “wary of drawing any defining lines around [B]lackness,” especially since the “concept is too malleable for containment” (G.E. Clarke *Odyssey* 188), it is worth noting that not only do Canadian Black male subjects rewrite the annals of subjecthood heralded by western theorists as their narratives are taken into account, but they also reveal that the continual demand that they give accounts of themselves obscures the vitality of differences in Canadian Black male subjectivity. The continual account demanded of us is predetermined by racism, which demands that this account will always be one and the same, that over and over again this account is over-determined by the assumed linkages between young Black men and criminality. The reality is that the multi-ethnic, international flavour of Canadian Blackness means members of various communities – Ethiopians, Somalis, Haligonians, Barbadians, defy the stereotypes of Toronto-Jamaican gang types that dominate the press. But then what happens to those who are Torontonians-Jamaicans? What I want to emphasize is the extensive criminalization of Black men in mainstream Canadian society.

This criminalization leads to a hierarchy of Canadian Blackness, one in which Torontonians-Jamaicans are on the extreme end and by default, all Black men become to the media Torontonians-Jamaicans.

XVI

Melding cultural-expressive art and critical writings on subjectivity, we might be able to avoid producing misguided and misunderstood Canadian Black male subjects. It seems clear from Dionne Brand's writing, K-OS's music, and Klyde Broox's dub poetry that Black Canadian male subjects have little in common with Althusser's and Butler's theories of subjectivity. These Canadian cultural commentators situate Black men in a complicated and contradictory performance that blends individual and collective desires and drives. Kardinal persuasively and power/fully makes these linkages in his song "Powerfully":

But if we ain't for us, who for us? them? - nah! If it was up to them they would have us ridin' in the back of the bus. In handcuffs and other shackles (yo) check Mr. Bush, Plant cocaine on me and call it operation push. Our Prime Minister is actually second in command. Bending over to the star spangled-politically strangled. So we have to move (yo) through the underground. Encode the funk mode and claim back the sound.

To Kardinal, the Black male subject is uncanny and slippery, he is in-between subject and Other, he is a subject on the very edge of history, experiencing multiple excesses: excessive surveillance, excessive brutality, excessive attention, yet he "want[s] to feel as if history was not destiny," and feel "some relief from the enclosure" (Brand, *Maps* 168) imposed by what I call semantic subjectivity. The subjectivity of these men, then, is "syncretic, always in revision and in a process of becoming" (Walcott 103). Further, it

seems to me that the very histories of these Black men radically oppose any neat and singular account of subjectivity.

XVII

Earlier in this chapter, I called attention to the impossibility of denying that dominant representations of Canadian Black masculinities—by many leaders in Black communities—work to delegitimize alternate forms of Black masculinities such as Black queer subjects. I suggested that these subjects are also excluded from dominant celebrations of Black masculinities within many Black communities and mainstream white culture. What I did not say was that these subjects resist any confining notions of Black masculinities. Having said that, it is important to keep in mind that I am not prescribing a monolithic queer Black masculinity. Gay Black poet Essex Hemphill, advocating for multiplicity in Black masculinities, writes

I am eager to burn
this threadbare masculinity
this perpetual [B]lack suit
I have outgrown (“Heavy Breathing” 8).

Because this outgrown and suited subjectivity straight-jackets Black male subjects to “die twice as fast/ as any other American,” Hemphill is

sick of being an endangered species,
sick of being a goddamn statistic (“Carbon Negro” 138, 139).

His rejection of “*this* threadbare masculinity” not only ruptures the process of Black male subjects coming-to-being, it also tailors a new armour against dominant ideologies and performances of Black male subjectivities. This rupture rejects the phantasmatic pre-

appointed place of subjectivity assigned for Black gay subjects. Hemphill's eagerness to both burn and outgrow *this* singular perpetual Black suit, I think, speaks to the queer Black male subject's disavowed presence in the predetermined discourse of Black masculinities, while at the same time points "to the possibility of escape from this same [B]lack-exclusive system of logic" (Reid-Pharr 369). Heteronormativity and hypermasculinity are part of the Black exclusive systems of logic Reid-Pharr critiques. The increasing turn towards these dominant systems of logic (the model of the Black male body as a site for hype, of more-ness, and overabundance) by cool posing Black men signals that something continues to be out of whack. Although Kobena Mercer persuasively points out that "prevailing definitions of masculinity imply power, control and authority," and that "these attributes have been *historically* denied [B]lack men" (142, emphasis mine), I contend that Black men flex a "cool pose," one that "represents a fundamental structuring of the[ir] psyche" as a way to "communicate power, toughness," that which historically they were denied (Billson and Majors 8). Put differently, the posing and posturing signal "the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other," to become a subject of *difference* that is "almost the same but not quite" (Bhabha 126). The failure of this performance of masculine mimicry, which "is at once resemblance and menace" (127) to prevailing definitions of masculinity, is that it "repeats rather than re-presents" (Bhabha 128) alternate forms of masculinity, explaining, perhaps, why alternate forms of Black masculinities are criminalized or delegitimized by mainstream white culture. Do Black queer male subjects then "thank God," as David Eng does in his essay "The Picking Order," for "being gay" and therefore adopt a supposedly "unattached

[performance of] masculinity” (91)? Are Black queer subjects aware of the “excess” in Black masculine mimicry, by which I mean, the excess of presence encoded through their performances, and thus want something more or something different from their masculinities? In the end, Canadian Black queer subjects, terminally othered in dominant representations of Black masculinities, exceed the limits of their masculine production, “exceed expectations, including the expectation to be exemplary” (Bailey 9)? Although *all* subjectivities exceed the conceptual and discursive limits imposed upon them by normative regimes, what differentiates Canadian Black queer men from these normative regimes are the redoubled alienation of separation from (1) Black politics and Black masculinities and (2) living in a context of white supremacy and the effects of that on the development of one’s consciousness.

XVIII

Hemphill offers the possibility for using new threads to stitch new patterns of masculinities into the already quilted—yet always incomplete/unfinished—black suit that clothes Black male subjects:

Where’s my needle?
Fetch my needle.
I’m going to sew
a prince to my bed.

Stitch by stitch
I shuttle my thread
in and out
and around his head

Over his fingers
down to his toes,
up his crotch,

through his nose.

Be he live
or be he dead
I'll sew his heart
to my bed

Stitch by stitch
I shuttle my thread
in and out
and around his head ("The Tomb of Sorrow" V).

In restitching this already quilted suit of subjection, Hemphill fashions an embodied subjectivity that helps Black queer subjects play with or rendezvous in multiple subject positions. He finds beauty in the hangovers of Black masculinities, even among dead Black men, and "behind flimsy constructions of manhood" while simultaneously mocking them (Hemphill 69). In the spoken word piece "I don't come alone," I think through how individual Black subject positions are inextricable from collective subjectivities and historical, cultural trauma(s):

I, too, am man-hunted
(Like you were)
maybe not with weeping bullets
or donkey tails
But know I weep none-the-less
on borrowed pages

my tears hide in shame
for running
to your six feet chambers
(scorching—ouch—
your dissolving peacefulness)
to seek comfort
from my weeping scars

my shame hides in words
in bones
on skin

in blood
on my tongue
fingertips
lips
hips
thighs
on my body
I carve this shame
my shame
Your shame
Our shame
with a switch
blade
creating tattoos out of them.

XIX

This multithreading of Black male subjectivities interweaves to make one piece of fabric, and perhaps what is important is not the piece of fabric that is created, since on the outside the denotative reading [the insistence on *make-believe* bound to a complex imaginary network] of Black male subjects seems naturalized); instead, we learn that transformation of experiences is a disjointed connection, one that interrogates the seductive neatness of subjectivity to suggest that within one piece of fabric exist multiple threads. Although this metaphor allows for a subject to embody a contradictory and multiple consciousness, it raises an important challenge for Black Canadian politics. There is a danger that the metaphor of one fabric of different threads completely fits multicultural ideology – one nation of many cultures. But even more important, the “one fabric” can easily become recuperated by racist notions that all Blacks are the same (the old suit). Yet Black activism needs “one fabric”

to create solidarity amidst the diversity of Blacks. So here's the challenge I face: how can the one fabric of Blackness be imagined in such a way that it makes solidarity possible but does not become the old Black suit of undifferentiated and stereotypical Blackness?

XX

By way of this introduction, I invoke Marianne Hirsch's term "postmemory," in conjunction with the idea of multiple consciousness, to offer some provisional thoughts on the conceptual questions that frame this piece. "Postmemory" refers to the memories of events sedimented in the children of trauma survivors. Hirsch writes:

Postmemory is a powerful form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through projection, investment, and creation. That is not to say that survivor memory itself is unmediated, but that it is more directly connected to the past. *Postmemory characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are displaced by the stories of the previous generation, shaped by traumatic events that they can neither understand nor re-create.* ("Projected Memory" 8, emphasis added).

I quote Hirsch at length because I believe that narratives of slavery, whether implicit or not, continue to inform Canadian Black (male) subjectivities, especially since the memory of slavery is projected onto or remembered due to the presence and image of — which includes images of the slain—Black men. As the term postmemory points out, it is "neither" relevant nor important whether these subjects "understand" these traumatic experiences; like Morrison's "rememory" (191), these experiences "come back whether we want it to or not" (Morrison 14). If ontologically Black male subjects are tied to the

past and to an ideological structure that tries to determine us, I cannot help but ask: what would an ontologically free Black (male) subject look like?

XXI

Here Fanon offers insight into Black male subjects who paradoxically negotiate the “insides” and “outsides” of ideology. As Lewis Gordon points out, Fanon’s philosophy pertains to the “understanding of the internal dynamics of liberation that are hallmarks of [B]lack thought” and “[B]lack identity” (12). Gordon however goes on to read Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* to show that “every effort to escape [B]lackness fails because ‘escape’ is in itself a failure. For instance, although we articulate meaning and identity through language, *the [B]lack condition is such that change of language does not entail change of being*” (24-5, emphasis mine). If I am to buy the argument Gordon is selling, then, how does Celie, the young Black mother in Alice Walker’s Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *The Color Purple*, see that “only a fool would ... talk in a way that feel[s] peculiar to [their] mind” (183)? Like Celie, other Black subjects are aware of the racism produced and reproduced through language. Therefore, I ask Gordon: if language does not entail change then how can Fanon argue that “mastery of language affords remarkable power”? How can he suggest that “a man who has language consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that language” (18)? Although I do understand and perhaps even agree with Gordon when he points out that the “‘Black condition’ is such that change of language does not entail change of being,” it would be productive to note that the Black condition in Canada is not only skin deep but is also polyphonic voicing, what George Elliott Clarke refers to as “a patchwork quilt of

[individual and collective] voices,” a poelitics with bountiful creative outlets. With a textured disharmony of Blackness in mind, whether it be through learning and unlearning languages or day-to-day poelitics of living, new meanings of Black male subjectivities and consciousness become thinkable.

XXII

Butler points out, very persuasively, in “Conscience Doth Make Subjects of Us All,” that turning toward the voice of the law has two purposes: it hails and also “promises identity” formation (8). This positive anticipation of identity formation is an ironic and twisted turn for Canadian Black male subjects. It is ironic in the sense that Black men are already subject to specific identities: they are feared and labeled, by the general populace, and to a large extent by the state, as a social “other.” Therefore, I wonder how they can or why they should readily “accept guilt” by turning to the law, “to gain a purchase on [an] identity” they already have (Butler 8, 1995)? This precarious citizenship of Canadian Black (male) subjects leads me to make this claim: unlike the “exemplary relational subject” (Chang 173) that is the Afro-American male—who oscillates across the boundaries between national pride and national fear—the Canadian Black male subject, who among all Canadian immigrants embodies a national fear, is not “constituted” in the ideology of citizenship which explains why he can be easily deported because he is not and can not be a “native” of this place.

XXIII

Because I am interested in the pedagogical possibilities that examining Black Canadian masculinities can offer us regarding constructions of gender and race, the three following chapters, with their distinct generic and thematic foci, each foregrounding the social and cultural positions of Black Canadian masculinities, however disjunctive, by interrogating mainstream's coordinated images of Canadian Black men. This coordinated orchestration situates Canadian Black masculinities as being in crisis or crises. My three chapters attest to the fact that such crises in Canadian Black masculinities are hardly "new" or "unique." What we learn is that a number of factors contribute to construct this perception. I begin chapter one with a poem that disavows the oversimplified equation of Black = Man = Criminal and complicates what is commonly perceived as "Black masculinity" by multiplying it and diversifying it so as not to confine it to one or another particular meaning. This instability of representing Black masculinity as interminably diverse is important to me because national newspapers do not account for our multiple and different lived experiences as Black men. The chapter goes on to examine the powerful potent ways in which national newspapers such as *The Toronto Star* and *The Globe and Mail* have linked understandings of criminality to Black masculinities through their proliferation of cultural images of Black men. In chapter two, I focus on Dionne Brand's 2005 novel *What We All Long For* and Austin Clarke's short story, "Sometimes A Motherless Child," to address the dehumanizing abuses that are encoded onto the Black male body during episodes of police brutality. From these two texts, I read four episodes of police arrest and examine the consequences that befall Black men depending on the choice they make on the "hard-soft binarism" of Black masculinities. Finally, in

Chapter three, I shift my attention from literary and popular texts to Charles Officer's 2003 short film, *Short Hymn, Silent War*, and address the term "conjoined subjectivity" to describe the historically gendered relations between Black mothers/women and Black sons/men. In this chapter, I read the effects that gun-related violence and Black masculinities have on Canadian Black women. Throughout my thesis I challenge the fixed ideologies that render Black Canadian men into objects of fear, "permanent" criminals and "natural born" killers.

XXIV

I borrow the words of the Canadian poet, Claire Harris, from her boldly inventive collection of poems *dipped in shadow*. In her conclusion, she demands, just as I do, that we "dream new dreams"; that we "see beyond screens of culture/gender/race" (not reject these categories all together), and that we "change the fictions before the fictions / play us out" (93). It is because mainstream culture enjoys playing out these fictions that we retain the Black male subject "within the national consciousness, always on the brink of renewal, lest we find ourselves entrapped within a logic of subjectivity from which [he] is excluded already" (Reid-Pharr 355). Hence my discomfort with theories that claim universal knowledge about, or try to give an account of all subjects. Even if these fictions do not change, *this* Black male subject wants you to know I am

still here
yes,
alone and unprotected
yet
surviving

the theatrics of
too much attention

for a variety of reasons
I'm here still
living as a monument
so don't fence me in

I will still be here
stubbornly releasing my stories
into places
where memories of me do not enter

swatting poems
from my overdetermined place
swirling lies round thick tongues
and bleeding truths about myself

although exhausted
I'm still here
standing on the
bleeding grounds
where there are no memories of me

I want you to know this:
on the elastic shore of your fiction
I still survive delusional visions of me
while my sleeping selves lie
in the oceans between here and there.

Chapter I

‘Year of the Gun’: Black Men Seem to Embody the Answers, What Were the Questions?

I
for the record, I am not a criminal⁸/ was never a criminal/
I am Black and male
and not your gun-slinging-murderer

I appear knotted
aware
the land releases men like me/ heals men like me

to many I might be nothing
to others I am *everything* (same difference)
from brother to criminal
son to murderer
lover to rapist
I am everywhere/ bordering on the edge waiting waiting to fall

they keep shooting/ I keep smiling

Ghanaian-born-Canadian
I am a proud Black-African
my hyphens remind me
to never forget forget that *this* land is not mine
it belongs not to any of us

let the official stories and memory records record my voice
it will no longer be ignored

knowing me through Other’s voice
is not knowing me
it is eating me
knowing me only when there is crisis
is not knowing me
it is crucifying me

so what do I want?
Justice!
when do I want it?
NOW!

⁸ The line “I am not a criminal” is taken from a headline in *Share*

for the record, I am not a criminal / will never be a criminal
I am Black and male and male and Black
and I am not innocent

II

I come to the title of this chapter from two important experiences in my life as an M.A. student at McMaster University. The first informative experience was organizing and chairing a panel discussion on Black masculinities and gun violence in April of 2006. Taking on the organization of this panel was my attempt to disrupt the silence around gun violence that clouded the safe confines of my department. It was my attempt to disturb the comfortable ease with which many of my colleagues closed themselves off to “the outer world of political turmoil” going on in Toronto. It was my way of reminding my department that the safe place in which “we” comfort ourselves is not a refuge some of “us” can afford. I wanted to remind my colleagues of the *real* social effects that labels such as 2005’s “Year of the Gun” or headlines and images such as the front page of the *Star’s* December 31, 2005 visual have on Black men in Canada (see attached appendix). [As you consume this page of mug shots, think of these questions: Why are all of the men, save a few, pictured unsmiling? I wonder if these photos were chosen by the family to represent their loved ones or picked by the newspaper for maximum effect. In a way, the photo of Jane Creba stands out as an image of innocence in a sea of “threatening” faces. Could this be intentional? Her image is the first that catches the eye as one scans from left to right, is this an attempt to suggest that she was the last victim in 2005? Isn’t it telling that the journalist, Ken Regular, phrases his opening by suggesting Jane Creba’s death is the “watershed” moment. What does this statement reveal about policing Black

masculinities in Canada and to concerned citizens responses to Black male "victims" of gun violence?]. Although I was sick and heavy on medications the Tuesday afternoon of the panel discussion and could not actively engage in conversation with or present my paper to the audience, I remember the painfully honest discussions pertaining to mainstream society's "fear of the Black man," especially those dressed in hip-hop gear. This expressed fear of the Black man remains a flashpoint in my writing about and thinking through media representations of Black Canadian masculinities.

The second experience is an "ordinary" conversation I had with one of my students after delivering a lecture on Stuart Hall's theorization of representation from his book *The Circuit of Culture*. A major premise of British cultural studies is that in order to understand a text, object, or cultural practice, we need to pay attention to five areas of culture and observe the interactions between them: to explore how it is represented, what social identities are associated with it (eg., gender, national identity), how it is produced and consumed [and how production and consumption produce meaning], and how this relates to the regulation of social life (eg. its role in sustaining hegemony). Lecturing to a first year consumer culture class, I offered a reading of *The Toronto Star's* visual representation of the victims of gun violence in 2005 to concretize Hall's theory of production, reproduction and consumption and to highlight how *The Toronto Star* utilized the circuit of meaning-production to criminalize the already slain Black male body. Since I do not separate my personal poetics from the work I do, and since honesty in pedagogy is a cornerstone for my teaching, I injected into my lecture a politic that *articulates* my everyday life – an articulation of Afrocentricity. This Afrocentric politic is not the

“Afrocentric thinking” that Paul Gilroy observes “attempts to construct a sense of Black particularity ‘outside’ of a notion of a national identity” (305), rather it is a politics that actively engages with the complex and disjunctive formation of power relations that historically has rendered me, and others like me, invisible and powerless in academia. With this intertextual play of my politics and Hall’s model of culture, I suggested that *The Toronto Star’s* visual image became an indirect discourse, a trick, that suppressed the rapturous narratives—tales that draw attention to national and systemic abuse which coincidentally and blissfully become buried narratives—that these slain subjects, predominantly Black men, demand of Toronto and instead replaced them with *a* different story. In thinking about the media’s stories of these Black men, we should ask what place is given the slain Black (male) body? “How are they inscribed in the order of power?” (Mbembe 12).

I further highlighted for my students that since I had grown up and worked as a summer counselor in Jamestown, Rexdale, the neighbourhood where Amon Beckles, the 18-year-old Black man who, while attending the funeral of his slain friend, was fatally shot on the steps of a Rexdale church, the loss of these two young men to gun violence has encouraged me to rethink about *who I work for* as a graduate student as well as the usefulness of the work I do here in the university. In an academic space impoverished of such personal narratives, practicing this politic of honesty turned me (and continues to turn me) into a punching bag for students, and in my own classroom professors and colleagues alike, also took free punches at me and my politics. One third-year-student, who felt uncomfortable after the lecture, followed me to the hallway and asked: “Don’t

you think these Black men brought it on themselves? Don't you think the media is just doing their work? Representing what is out there in society? I mean, don't they report what has happened?" To finish off this tirade of private interrogations, this student said, "I guess that is why our parents warn us not to belong to gangs or sell drugs." Reading discontent from my facial reactions, this student went on to say, "I don't mean to suggest that all of them are criminals or anything like that, but newspapers and news coverage report shows that many of them were in gangs." The question for me at that moment, beside my student's unthoughtful thoughts about representations, was not "what do I say to this student?" but more how do these kinds of media coverage reinforce mainstream perceptions of Black Canadian men? How has the media programmed a naturalized linkage between Black men and criminal behaviour(s)? I could not help but wonder, for instance, what comes up for my students when they look at me? Or at this image supposed to represent those that look like me? What do they think of me? What am I to them and for them? On that cold Thursday evening in February, it occurred to me that my students' daily consciousness risks engendering and programming by a practical and personal ideology that short-circuits affective investments, critical thinking, and critical consciousness. It also occurred to me that some of my students heavily rely on media representations to develop this consciousness.

III

To people who have not experienced the sequences discussed above, this exercise of me saying what I am and what I am not may seem uncritically self-indulgent, if not quite annoying. However, for someone with a "second-sight," someone who has acquired a

“sensitivity to **how** [I am] seen through the eyes of white people” (Philip 9, emphasis in original), someone who is subjected to a system of negation, to a nation-state that permanently surveys Black men by making a spectacle of them through racial profiling, for someone who is considered one of the “usual” suspects, for someone who is denied the elusive praxis of “being” again and again, this exercise of spitting these narratives out is much more than narcissistic. For me, it is a necessary liberating exercise that allows me to fashion for myself a Black male subjectivity free from the obsessive and totalizing definitions placed upon me. (And “liberation is nothing more than responsibility, responsibility for setting the tone of one’s own life and standing by it” [Michele Wallace 174].) It is loosening the elastic yet violent confines that representations in mainstream Canadian media projects onto Black men. Representing the unrepresentable me exceeds its immediate means of underwriting the discursive site of cultural knowledge and undermines the notion that the darker your skin the more guilty you become. This discursive moment of “docudramaturgy,” of expressing my experience, allows me to adopt Gayatri Spivak’s revised observation of the subaltern. She writes, “if the subaltern can speak then, thank God, the subaltern is not the subaltern any more” (283). Against this background of discursive liberation, I track the temporary and permanent fissures that allow the flow of mainstream binary worldviews of the lawful and criminal, of the citizen and the foreigner, and the guilty and the innocent. In so doing, I suggest that the oversimplification of these complex categories pathologizes the innocent by policing “innocent criminal” in a *state of crisis*. Through a close reading of the media, I reveal how the ideological positions of national newspapers are in a business of criminalizing

race—Canadian Black (male)ness (I know Canadian Black male is not a race but I call attention to it as such since it is the conflation of Blackness and maleness that creates the species of the criminal, in the discursive “logic” of these newspapers)—and racializing crime.

IV

In the media, the images of Black men are over-developed to fit in small frames that portray us as *objects* of fear. Our images exist in specific constellations, albeit in the multiple media (radio, newspapers, TV, etc.) used in acts of representation. In these constellations, extraordinary events are sensationalized and dramatically repeated to the point of rendering them banal. Flip through a newspaper, or turn on the TV and the images of gun-related crimes spill over the page/screen. These sensational spillages of crime news sell because they offer a blanket of safety to the general populace. The belief becomes: “if I can read or watch “who” is committing these crimes and where these crimes are being committed, then I can avoid these people and places and be safe.”

Although Hall et al. point out that “crime is understood as a permanent and recurrent phenomenon, and hence much of it is surveyed by the media in an equally routinised manner” (67), at the same time, the figurative language (metaphor, repetition, word choice, simile, which function as fissures, in the sense that they disguise narrative gaps) used by the media causes mainstream society to marshal sentiments of fear towards Black men as a result of gun-related crimes. Because the media stresses Black criminality by repetitively circulating negative images of Black men, it reinforces the systems of representations that produce racist stereotypes of Black men. At first glance,

the media's representations of Black men appears, as it did to my student, as just a daily report, a fictive banality, for people who do not know Black men, or rather claim to "know" Black men. For these readers, newspapers become the perfect mirror of an imperfect banality. As bell hooks notes, "issues of context, form, audience experience (all of which inform the construction of images)," especially when it comes to representing Black men in mainstream media, "are usually completely" ignored (72). When these issues of context are acknowledged, as in the case of Michael Jordan or Tiger Woods in the U.S., they complicate this narrative of ignorance. One of such complication is that acknowledging the Jordan's and the Woods serves to particularize a reasonable narrative for Black men: unless you are an athlete—who *only then* receives national glory—or a criminal—which many of us are guilty of before we are proven innocent,—to borrow from Paul Gilroy, "there ain't no [B]lack in the" national landscape.

Because "the way news is selected and presented makes it difficult to uncover the covert messages in the news, [and] the value judgments, repeated themes and exclusions that link, bind and underwrite meaningfulness are inaccessible to the casual daily reader and viewer" (Smolash 26), a careful reader quickly adopts the asymmetrical reflection of media representations.

Each set of images and narratives of Black men in national newspapers begins to look and sound different and yet the same. Since the sound and look of such "public images," as Stuart Hall et. al. suggest, is "at one and the same time graphically compelling," and since these public images "stop short of serious and searching analysis,

they tend to appear in place of analysis – or analysis seems to collapse into the image” of the Black man (118). By reading mainstream reception of the image of the Black man (for instance the image attached as an appendix), I learn that the media’s image is not only defined by style (year book-feel of the serialized image, or the mug-shot effect of collectivizing the dead), subject (why are the majority of these images of Black men), but also by an all-pervasive *value system* that is implicit in the selection of headlines, cut-lines, rhetoric and the images that accompanies each report. (This value system operates in a neoconservative-influenced project that illusively convinces readers that it recognizes multiple perspectives.) [Visiting the “Yonge Street Peace” website, an online memorial blog that began after the shooting of Jane Creba, where “ALL the names and ages of the 52 victims of gunfire in Toronto during 2005” are “made available,” it became clear to me that the arrangement of these photos has nothing to do with the order of occurrence (<http://www.yongestreetpeace.tyo.ca/blog/?p=6>); instead, the order of this arrangement worked, as an attempt, to provoke outrage among mainstream white society towards the perpetrators and in turn everyone that looks like these perpetrators. The arrangement of the photos worked to remind Canadian-Canadians, those who look like Jane, of the precarious nature of gun violence. If there were any pattern of arrangement discernable from this page of mug shots, it is one that explicitly ruptures the politics of representations to offer a visual narrative that compels critical readers to ask, “who gets represented and how are those represented framed?”

Communicating through email correspondence with a representative from the “Photosales department” at the *Toronto Star* about copyright—about how to go about

including this image into my thesis—I learned that these pictures were either individual photos *taken* from “family shots” or “school yearbook photos.” Learning about the sources of these photos, meaning, learning that the context of these photos were *taken out* of the images, the framed mug shot faces of some of these Black men, once representing the bacon of hope, of a future possibility, who now look out from the pages of the *Toronto Star* as images of menace, I was disheartened by how these images conveniently confirm the circulating narratives of Black man as threats and as criminals. Knowing that family members sent some of these pictures and that other images were “taken” from yearbook photos, I am further compelled to ask the obvious: “which of these pictures were those sent by family members and which ones were from yearbook photos? And most importantly, what are the reasons behind the choice, made by the media, over the pictures not “taken” from family members?”].

Given that these media techniques invoke “a cluster of impressions, themes and quasi-explanations” already circulating in the mainstream and result in “orchestrating...a kind of composite description-cum-explanation – the form of a ‘public image’” (Hall et. al. 118), one needs to remember that they “appear in place of analysis.” Such confluences of analysis implicitly construct a reality in which representations of Black men are made to fit into the frames established by the media. This chapter focuses on a tension between the ways Black men function as *objects of white fear* terrifying the imaginations of the wider culture, as is demonstrated through the ready insertion of the Black male into institutional and national narratives of communication. Moreover, I address how newspapers decode Black masculinities, since there already exists a social script of Black

men, in order to intervene and re-encode Black masculinities with new meaning and associations. How do these media networks claim objectivity or make claims to reporting facts as they represent reality or cover a story? And what are the effects of these objective claims? What, for instance, made my student believe she was getting the “facts” about the slain Black men from the news? Why did my student assume that the news informs us of the “pressing issues of the day” (Hall et. al. 62)? Why did my student not assume that any form of representation goes through a process of selection, one that gives partial account of “what happened,” and therefore any representation changes the event it is representing? By juxtaposing “ethnic” focused newspapers such as *Share* with two so-called “national” newspapers, the *Globe and Mail* and the *Toronto Star*, I suggest that visual elements such as headlines, the nature and quality of images, of photo captions, and cutlines, provide visual stimulus that shape media messages as well as encode ideological messages which shape public understanding about Canadian Black (male)ness. Simply put, this chapter offers a reading of the “discursive reproduction of racism” (van Dijk 221) through national journalism. To do this, I contextualize the state of “moral panic” (Hall et. al. vii) Torontonians lived in last year due to the gun-related violence that plagued the city of *Toronto*.⁹ I map out an historical repression of gun violence in *other* non-visible immigrant communities to suggest that the nub of the problem that faces Black communities in Canada is a problem that all communities in Canada face.

⁹ Although many reporters made the claim these incidents of gun violence were affecting the “African-Canadian community,” I refuse to reiterate this racist discourse that racializes crime, and assert instead that these incidents of gun violence affected the whole city.

V

In *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, Law and Order*, the collection of essays that discuss the mugging phenomena in England in the late 1970s, Stuart Hall, C. Critcher, T. Jefferson and J. Clarke offer a groundbreaking analysis that examines the strategies employed by the media to racialize crime. Hall et. al. note the media's capacity to raise public anxiety by amplifying the frenzy over the supposedly "antisocial" behaviour of Black men and thereby causing what they call, after Stanley Cohen, a state of moral panic. It seems to me that Canadian national newspapers in 2005 adopted this strategy of moral panic to indict Black men in Toronto. This is not to mount a defense of Black men's innocence. I have set the record straight in my introduction with the phrase "I am Black and male and I am not innocent," which does the work of complicating binaristic thinking in this matter. Rather, attending to the media's strategy of proliferating moral panic is my attempt to highlight the irredeemable and irreversible signification of fear projected onto young Torontonians Black men.

For me, the phrase "*moral panic*" is particularly useful for describing the racialized fears of white Canadians. It captures the white mainstream realization that any conception of social cohesion is an illusion. By illusion I mean the cultural relativism that is fundamental to Canadian multiculturalism, that all cultural groups in Canada are equal, is debunked¹⁰. An awareness of this illusion often leads to a discourse of loss of control. Often, Black males are strongly linked to this role. Images of us are infused

¹⁰ If ethnicity, as ethnic literature (Kay Anderson 1987) suggests, is based on an internal set of values and not on external ones then other ethnic groups such as Italians, Ukrainians, and Irish (groups that were denied entrance into the domain of whiteness in the past) escape the pervasive paradigm that suggests Black male + youth = criminal in Canada. That we use ethnicity and not race in these debates ignore the relevance of external values in the reality of how visible ethnic groups are treated in wider mainstream culture.

with hysteria about a particular issue like gun-related violence. Moreover, the phrase calls attention to oppositional or resistant politics, in discourses of social propriety, by Black Canadians as a result of mainstream society's inability or unwillingness to allow for social changes. This inability or unwillingness is displaced onto Blacks who are then perceived with fear. Stanley Cohen defines moral panic as

a condition, episode, person or group of persons [that] emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereo-typical fashion by the mass media; *the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to; the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates and becomes more visible. Sometimes the object of the panic is quite novel and at other times it is something which has been in existence long enough, but suddenly appears in the limelight. Sometimes the panic is passed over and is forgotten, except in folklore and collective memory; at other times it has more serious and long-lasting repercussions and might produce such changes as those in legal and social policy or even in the way society conceives itself.* (quoted in Hall et al. 16-17, emphasis added).

Cohen's definition highlights how newspapers orchestrate moral panic. Because newspapers in Canada have always been part of the federal, provincial and municipal "political structures [and processes] of this country" (Smolash 38), with the state benefiting from these political structures, I am not surprised "editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people," the experts in power so to speak, are called to "man the moral barricades" and "pronounce their diagnoses and solutions." Wendy Naava Smolash, in her M.A. thesis, *National Postcolonial: The Representations of the "enemy within" in Canada's National Newspapers*, calls attention to media corporations and their responsibility to the state, and indeed explains how these corporations form part of the government (9). Smolash points out, by quoting Sotirion, how "the Canadian press [has

continued to act] *as an extension of the political system, not as a check on Parliament and the executive*” (44, emphasis added). Since majority of the newspaper’s responsibilities to government corporations bind it into a relationship of power, stories that these newspapers recount follow or reproduce the ideologies of those in power. Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities* notes that print culture, especially the newspaper, is intricately bound up with concepts of national community. Anderson uses the notion of “print capitalism” to stress how the newspapers facilitate the rise of nationalism. To understand the profit motives of print-capitalism, even if this profit is at a high cost to certain citizens, I turn to Daniel Brooks and Guillermo Verdecchia’s play *The Noam Chomsky Lectures*. The play, imparting information about corporate-media interlinkages, highlights Chomsky’s ideas about *thought control* in democratic societies. Brooks and Guillermo follow the impetus of Chomsky’s writings and advocate we resist media’s “manipulation and control” (11). Following Brooks and Guillermo’s play of dissent, Smolash recognizes that none of the daily newspapers in Canada are independently owned and in effect calls attention to the “concentration of [media] ownership” (48), and how this concentration “regulates the content of the press” (50). Therefore, stories narrated by the dominant press reinforce the forms of knowledge that belong to the dominant group rather than “meet the public expectation for a watchdog press” (Smolash 6), a press that will *represent what is out there in society*. National newspapers, then, become ideological state apparatuses; sites where the dominant groups’ interests of conditioning culturally sanctioned attitudes towards Black men are sustained; sites where the reality of experiences, especially those of visible minorities, are formatted to *fit*

established ideologies of those in power. However, when experiences of Black men cannot be formatted to serve the interest of those in power, we become unintelligible and our illegibility serves as a marker or occasion for moral panic for the nation-*state*. To sustain or hold on to mainstream interests (and to sell papers), new ways that employ “something which has been in existence long enough” are called upon to use in the criminalization of those outside the dominant group, particularly Black men.

VI

A quick glance at newscasters or at writers writing for national newspapers, demonstrates how racialized individuals and groups are systemically excluded from the processes that shape the way others see and think about us. When we think about the deeply connected ways in which *what* one says is related to *who* one is, or how *where* one sits in relation to hegemonic ideals affects *how* one represents an event, we become aware of the investments those producing news have in dominant frameworks of analysis. If one ponders after that quick glance, it slowly dawns on one how “**white people** control the production of images of Black peoples” (Philip, “How White” 9, emphasis in original).

Studies conducted by sociologists France Henry and Carol Ford in *Discourses of Domination: Racial Bias in the Canadian English-Language Press* point out the need for alternate press perspectives. Ford and Henry address the media’s tendency (and the implications of this tendency) to represent people of colour, especially Blacks, as criminals. They go on to discuss how these representations are “damaging to [Black men’s] personal identity and to their social status in the community” (164). Looking at national newspapers’ tendency to criminalize a racial group and racialize crime, one

quickly becomes aware that representational media uphold racist purposes when covering news about visible minorities. *Share*, founded in 1978 with the prime objective of providing a means of communication in the Black and West Indian communities in Canada, offers a cultural site for addressing oppositional, resistant or subversive media analysis. *Share* reminds us of the effects that the concentration of media ownership has on representations of Blacks in Canada. In the statement of policy that appears in the editorial/opinion section of every publication of *Share, Canada's Largest Ethnic Newspaper* explicitly illustrates the importance of ownership in the media by reminding readers that

SHARE *depends solely on advertising and the support of its advertisers by the community* and does not *"solicit or accept government grants, private or other investments and is 100 per cent Black and West Indian owned."*

SHARE *is free in order to be unencumbered by the restrictions a paid circulation would present. A good free publication can be placed in more outlets and reach more people than one with a paid circulation.*

SHARE *will not lie for and cover up the faults of wrongdoers in the community, nor apologize for its criticism of such wrongdoers.* (emphasis in April 16, 1992 publication, 7)

In other publications, the policy states

SHARE reflects your feelings, your goals, your ambitions and your success. SHARE speaks about things that YOU care about, things that affect you and your children, and SHARE looks at these things in a positive light so that you can see truly and clearly where our community is going. You read share because share is you.

I quote this statement of policy in its entirety to highlight the oppositional position envisioned by this press and suggest that any serious reading of Canadian media's representations of Black masculinities and communities has to pay particular attention to

Share's representations as well. While going through *Share*'s archive at Toronto's Public Library, I was heartened to find that every issue covered the wrongdoing Black men in the communities as well as highlighted the success of positive Black male role models. Take for example the March 31, 2005 issue that simultaneously offered an editorial critique of gun-related crimes blazing through the community while at the same time covering in the same issue a panel held by the Black Business and Professional Association (BBPA) called "A Celebration of Excellence." What is different with *SHARE*'s narratives of gun-related crimes when compared to stories in the mainstream press is their critical awareness to the differences in Blackness and in Black men. I call attention to this awareness to demonstrate that *Share* offered, during the "Year of the Gun," other images of Black men that reflected the feelings, goals, and ambitions of other Black men besides the negative images and stories offered by mainstream newspapers. This practice emphasizes *Share*'s serious commitment to representing Black Canada and its men, in "a refracted light."¹¹ Since national representations of us in newspapers are busy blocking that light with negative images, news coverage from *Share* and other "ethnic" newspapers such as *Eelam Nation*¹², a newspaper that represents the Tamil Canadian community, becomes an intervention in "discourse...imbued with racial dimensions, the processes by which populations of people are constructed, differentiated,

¹¹ This refraction resists stereotyping Black men as so-and-so and instead aims for diversity of its representations. I would be interested, in the future, to undertake a project that problematizes the criteria by which Black men are also categorized ideologically in *Share*.

¹² In Henry and Ford's analysis of racism in the English-Language Press, they note the appeal *Eelam Nation* sent to the *National Post* against harmful attacks on the Tamil Canadian community. This appeal, according to Henry and Ford, stated that "the *Nation* was amazed by the 'assertions that members of the Tamil community indulge in drug traffic, extortion, organized crime,' and challenged the newspaper to prove its assertions" (Henry and Ford 132). My point here is that *Share* is not the only "ethnic" newspaper that challenges the ideological framework of national newspapers. So ask yourself, "why don't we hear about them?"

‘inferiorized’ and excluded” by the ideological apparatuses of the state (Henry and Tator 11). Similarly, this Black-owned press is not afraid to offer responses to the growing lack of non-white perspectives in the media. As a 2002 editorial headline, “Shame on *The Sun’s* ‘Profiling essential to fighting crime’” demonstrates, *Share* has become the watchdog media that some (Black) people and communities want from a newspaper. In taking this role during the “Year of the Gun,” *Share* becomes the press that resists racialized ideologies as well as challenges the ideological representations of Black people in the Canadian mainstream newspapers.

VIII

If headlines, according to van Dijk, “summarize the most important information of the report. That is, they express the main ‘topic’” (*Racism*, 50), and if ideology, following Stuart Hall’s definition, consists of “mental frameworks – the languages, the concepts, categories, imagery of thought, and the system of representation – which different classes and social groups deploy in order to make sense of, figure out and render intelligible the way society works” (“Problem,” 26), then I juxtapose headlines from *Share* and two national newspapers (*The Globe and Mail* and *The Toronto Star*) and read the rhetorical strategies used by each press to construct the image of the Black man in the crisis of the “Year of the Gun.”

From *Share*:

- “Not a crime to be Black youth in T.O.—Mayor: Racial Profiling Won’t Be Tolerated” (August 25, 2005)
- “More effective policing is not the answer” (November 10, 2005)
- “Gun Violence ‘symptomatic of deep-rooted problems’” (November 24, 2005)
- “Racial-profiling is two-tier justice” (April 28, 2005)

- “Crime down in Jane-Finch area – study” (May 5, 2005) [what interest does the national media have in reporting the results of this study?]

From *The Globe and Mail*

- “Time to Talk About Violence and Culture” (December 29, 2005, editorial)
- “Blowing the Whistle on Gun Murder” (January 3, 2006)
- “Statistics Belie Flood Of Guns From U.S.” (August 25, 2005)

From *The Toronto Star*

- “‘Her life has been transformed into a shooting star that will forever be a light’: Jane Creba, 1990-2005” (December 29, 2005)
- “Board adds monitors to curb violence” (December 22, 2005)
- “Black leaders say it takes a family” (December 2, 2005)
- “Epidemic makes control difficult” (December 31, 2005)
- “AFTER THE CHAOS: Shoppers return to Yonge St. as police search for evidence from Boxing Day mayhem. *Slain teen a top student, athlete*” (December 28, 2005, emphasis added)

The headlines from these three newspapers take one topic and spin two different stories out of them. (Although it seems as though *Globe and Mail* anxiously decontextualizes/delocalizes itself via headlines that generalizes while the *Toronto Star* is very specific, “her life,” “Board,” “Black leaders,” “epidemics and control,” “Yonge St.,” I still maintain that they offer the same story since both newspapers are in the business of criminalizing visible minorities and that the difference between them are false difference, one masqueraded in headlines). Employing van Dijk Teun’s ideas about headlines and Stuart Hall’s definition of ideology, it is safe to suggest that headlines cognitively manipulate *how* and *why* a reader approaches an article. Henry and Tator write: “The information contained in headlines...serves for readers as an overall organizing principle for the representation of the news event in memory. After reading an event [e.g., gun violence] that is described in a particular way, the reader has been programmed to read subsequent reports in these terms” (121).

Returning to the above newspaper headlines, let's read the rhetorical strategies used by them to comply with or resist the discursive reproduction of anti-Black racism. The ideological momentum underpinning these headlines differs. In *The Globe and Mail's* and *The Toronto Star's*, there is an implicit assumption that what is happening or has happened is "new." While phrases such as "time to talk," "blowing the whistle on gun murder," and "epidemic makes control difficult" frame the issue as a new phenomenon, words such as "epidemic," and "control" pathologize the issue. The rhetoric of concern that the other headlines repeat reflects the processes by which these groups are going to be kept under further surveillance. If one remembers George Orwell's classic novel *1984*, one quickly remembers that adding more cameras means losing more rights. Interestingly, many newspapers were not prepared to address rights and citizenship statutes and neither were they prepared to explicitly address the equation of gun-related violence to Black masculinities. This explicit yet false equivocation is not needed since Richard Dyer, in *White*, describes the ways in which bodies presented as racially "dark" in popular representation are associated with ideas of evil, while bodies presented as the implicit "white" norm are fused with constructions of goodness and innocence (Dyer 58). Paul Gilroy, in *Against Race*, also suggests that the notion of race arranges human beings in a hierarchical series of categories, and since the social work of the media already scripts the Black man as the public enemy who has to be feared, criminalized, and kept under surveillance, newspaper representations intrinsically fused Black men into their headlines with the need for what Herman and Chomsky refer to as "overt coercion" (306). Instead, their framed headlines rest on the constitutive gap

between reality and its representation and rely on their assumed audience's desire to anchor themselves in the primordial "us" and "them" dichotomy to trigger the image of the Black man as an *object of fear* or as a criminal. At stake is the risk that readers will take this primordial "us" and "them" dichotomy" as an out to rationalize racism instead of taking the opportunity to challenge the cultural geography of media representations. The strategies used in these headlines then confirm the national newspapers' tendency to criminalize a racial group and racialize crime highlights their racist purposes and points to the invisibility of the questions asked, ideologically and structurally, in 2005. Clearly, the system of power that oppresses and controls also veils power's greatest force—ability to remain invisible and out of the questioner's eyes. The consistency with which racist national newspapers disseminate cultural images of Black men and violence institutionalized why, in the "Year of the Gun," Black men seem to embody the answers.

IX

So why title this chapter "'Year of the Gunfire': Black Men Seem to Embodiment the Answers, but What Were the Questions?" The heretofore unvoiced reason for this title is because although newspapers asked no questions, they provided many answers that circulated public consciousness. These answers were absorbed in pointing fingers at Black men and in doing so forgot to ask to what problem the fingers were trying to point towards. The answers provided by newspapers relied on historical circulation of Anglo-Canadian understandings of "race," Whiteness, and were saturated in historical amnesia that remembered the present to forget the past. Meaning, with the help of newspapers, mainstream Canadians mired the line between mythic past (that "White" Canada is the

safest place to live) and the real past (that “White” Canada committed, and continues to commit or is involved in committing, heinous crimes) and forgot that 1992 was also the “Year of the Gun.”¹³ By forgetting to look into the mirror of Canada’s past, the answers that newspapers produced presumed that gun-related violence only affects one community, one group of people: meaning, it only affects Black men; those victimized (but in some cases *should not have been*); those *outside* Black communities form conglomerate around Black men and rip rewards at their expense.

My title is phrased as a question specifically to call attention to the idea that the problem of gun violence disproportionately affects all age/race/sex groups in the city, not just young Black men. Like Frederick Douglass, who warned that his pronouncements against the myth of the Black rapist was not to be misconstrued as his defense of rape itself, I also warn that my pronouncements against the myth of the Black man as a criminal and a murderer is not a defense of crime or murder because I

do not pretend that [Black Canadian men] are saints and angels. I do not deny that they are capable of committing the crime imputed to them, but utterly deny that they are any more addicted to the commission of that crime than is true of any other variety of the human family.... I am not a defender of any man guilty of this atrocious crime, but a defender of the coloured people as a class (Douglass 63)

especially since we are often disproportionately characterized and demonized by the rhetoric of criminality. Almost a century following Douglass’s statement, mainstream (white) society still fears Black men, the ultimate threat. The difference in fear in the context of 2005 is that the Black man’s potentiality as a rapist has shifted to his potentiality as a killer. Whether portrayed as a rapist or as a murderer, my unrelenting

¹³ Check *Stephen Lewis Report on Racism in Ontario to the Premier – Summer 1992*, or read Austin Clarke’s essay “Public Enemies: Police Violence And Black Youth” also published in 1992.

critique of national newspapers and their representations of Black men is the consistent cultural image of anti- Black-youth that gets circulated. The powerful images of anti-Black-youth circulated in the mainstream press displace the promise of these youth; these images of power “captivate, titillate, and simultaneously horrify” mainstream society to the point that it turns Black men into objects of fear (*Yearning*, hooks 72). Since I am not a defender of any man guilty, this work is my struggle to fight the systems of domination “—so that the racist violence will cease to become an everyday happening” (*Yearning*, hooks 64).

Reading national newspapers, Nourbese Philip—in two essays “How White Is Your White?: On The Lack of Colour in the Bernardo/Homolka Affair” and “‘Urban Terrorism’: blamed in café killing,”—observes the absence in discussions of race in media coverage of crimes committed by white Canadian criminals and murders. Philip observes how newspaper representations of Karla Homolka, Paul Bernardo and Clifford Olsen concentrated on their hard-working family backgrounds and notes how no attempts were made “to paint white society as a silent colluder in some of the most heinous of crimes committed by white Canadian criminals” (“Urban Terrorism” 48). In the Paul Bernardo case, Philip argues that “the **only** time [he] is identified as white is when his desire to be a ‘**white** rap artist’ is reported in *The Toronto Star* and *The Globe and Mail*” (“How White” 10, emphasis in original). Juxtapositioning Bernardo’s whiteness in conjunction with “rap” does not prompt the “appropriation of Black music by white musicians”; instead, it does the work of complicating Bernardo’s whiteness and innocence. We must conclude, as *The Toronto Star* did, that “the guns, the **defiance of**

authority,” and the “rapper image” (Philip, “How White” 10, emphasis in original), the image Bernardo *longed for*, is to be blame for his actions. Policing Blackness becomes necessary in order to control that which *we all long for*—resistance, voice, freedom. “The point here is a simple one: because of the veil of protection that whiteness (and to some degree class) offers its devotees and disciples, Paul Bernardo was able to walk around raping and murdering children and women for much longer than should have been allowed. Contrast this with the passionate enthusiasm, energy, and violence exercised in the policing of Black people” (Philip, “How White” 11).

One never reads headlines such as “White leaders say it takes a family: kids need rules, respect, 2 parents” but one reads such headlines when the problem involves Black youths. In moments of crisis involving incidents such as the white youth who shot his classmates in Tabor, Alberta five years ago, his actions did not stand in for the whole, meaning, that “there is no link made between the deviance of these and many other white criminals and their ethnic origin” (“Urban Terrorism,” Philip 48).

X

What I learned through the selective representational methodology that national newspapers use led me to discuss Achille Mbembe’s term “*necropolitics*.” Mbembe, a Cameroonian postcolonial theorist, uses necropolitics to theorize how nation-states use death, or the threat of death, as a political weapon to manage racial groups in times of crisis. According to Mbembe, necropolitics takes two extreme forms: (1) it establishes “death-worlds” for the production of dead bodies, and (2) nation-states legitimize and use force to politicize the promise of death. Applying Mbembe’s necropolitics to the “Year

of the Gun,” we can gain new insights into the practice of racial profiling. The consensus that racial profiling is widespread and unacceptable has been reached. Note, though, that in attempts to “catch criminals” pre-9/11, racial profiling, which has been the stopping, questioning, and searching of (mostly) visible minorities, continues. What has changed in racial profiling is not the social control of visible minorities but the surveillance practices used in profiling. To law-enforcement officers, the belief is, and continues to be, that because certain racial and ethnic groups are more likely to commit certain types of crimes, “race,” the visible marker of a person, continues to be the central marker employed to identify and profile criminals.

Given that Mbembe’s theory of necropolitics unrelentingly addresses global politics of citizenship and sovereignty through events of war and genocide and therefore recognize the dangers of equating his theory of “death-world” (global) to the current political state of Toronto, I nonetheless localize his theory in order to make it clear that Black men in this city are permanently exposed to the threat of death. In Toronto, the “death-world,” for many Black men, is racial profiling. For some of us, moments of racial profiling become the world in which cultural forces and “special” law-enforcement practices grip us in a perpetual dis-ease state of mind: one that engenders feelings of anxiety, inferiority and vulnerability. In a multicultural state, this “death-world” situates the understanding of “race” in a two-tier system wherein Blackness is not recognized as a racialized concept but only as an ethnicity. The significance being the presumption that “we all the same” which ignores the historical tendency to racialize (while criminalizing) visible ethnic groups.

Perhaps more disturbing, beyond being exposed to the death-world, is the force that the city uses to suspend the law and use violence. Michael Thompson, the Black Toronto city councilor for Scarborough town centre¹⁴, on August 15 of 2005, stated that because of the gun violence and the drug problem, police should be allowed to stop young Black men at random as part of a crackdown on guns. I argue that by making this criminal, racist and violent statement, not only did Thompson position himself as a defender of state-interests, by ventriloquizing the wishes of the nation-state which curb resistance, but he also reinforced public suspicions of Black men as criminals. Although some might argue that without keeping track of how often police arrest Black men (i.e. racial profiling), we will never have data to prove that the police unfairly target and harass Black men, I believe that such agenda is in clear pursuit of an ideological agenda—to restore the illusion of law and order. As a result, Thompson’s racial rhetoric and criminal tactic, disguised through a language of national security, and of national safety, directly jeopardizes the rights, the humanity, and the citizenship of Black male subjects in Toronto.

The necropolitics present in Toronto operates on a different scale from the one discussed by Mbembe. It permeates through, rather than only tramples, over the lives of Canadian Black men that we are seeking to understand. There is, in other words, for Black men in Canada, a systemic (and personal) necropolitics that shadows our daily experience. The systemic and personal, I understand, are not necessarily opposed. They

¹⁴ It is important to note that the district to which Thompson’s jurisdiction extends is the site of Ontario Housing, the public housing projects. This attempt to legislate racial profiling is an on-going institutional oppression of low-income, poverty-stricken communities.

are corollaries that demonstrate how “race has been the ever present shadow in Western political thought and practice, especially when it comes to imagining the inhumanity of, or rule over, foreign peoples” (Mbembe 17).

To practice racial profiling because the city is supposedly in a state of exception relies not only on a tradition of thought which criminalizes racialized groups but clearly demonstrates the illusion that “without history and social context, each encounter between unequal groups becomes a fresh one, where the participants start from zero, as one human being to another, each innocent of the subordination of others” (Razack 8). Mainstream (white) groups are quick to enter the “‘race of innocence,’ a belief that [they] are uninvolved in subordinating others” (Razack 14). In a liberal multicultural-state such as Toronto where multiculturalism delimits as well as rewards certain groups of people, where cultures gather in its urban zones to make contact and combat, where “lives...are doubled, tripled, conjugated” (Brand, *What* 5), where smells of different homelands commingle to disrupt stiff and primordial borders of a stable “us” and “them,” it is disheartening to watch and listen to the media’s repeated race to discourses of innocence when gun-related crimes involving Black men occur. “What innocence?” Austin Clarke asks in his essay *Public Enemies*

In all the years I have lived in this city, I have never considered Toronto to be innocent. Not in its attitude towards [B]lack people. Not in its knowledge that that attitude was racist. Not in the “race relations” discussions and meetings. Not in the meetings we have been having with the politicians since the Sixties, when I marched with others to City Hall, to Queen’s Park, to downtown Loblaws Stores to protest the treatment of [B]lacks in this city and in this country. What does “innocence” mean? It has a connotation of purity of blissful unawareness. It has a connotation of being vulnerable to evil, vile forces. It has the connotation of inciting undeserved abuse; manipulation. (335).

Along with media discourses failing to account for past racial injustices, such as the psychological abuse suffered by Black men such as Julian Dedier in Richard Fung *Out of Blue*, these discourses also fail to acknowledge the unrelenting interlocking relations that bind cultures together in this urban zone. Why can't the media, for instance, realize gun-related crime affects the whole city of Toronto? More to the point, we should learn that unless existing power arrangements of representations in national newspapers are considered in supposed states of exception, meaning unless we acknowledge the topographies of state violence committed against Black men in the city of Toronto, years of the gun will continue as a reminder of power imbalance.

XI

In the context of what journalists are calling “The Year of the Gun,” it is clear that institutional and national modes of communication made erroneous linkages or reinforce erroneous linkages between Blackness, criminality, youth and masculinity. These linkages were not newly invented chains of communication. Far from it. They took advantage of reworking Stuart Hall’s theory of “Encoding/Decoding” by decoding Blackness and masculinity in order to re-encode it with new meaning and associations. In his theorization, Hall is careful to indicate the social position of those involved in mass communication and notes that the dominant ideology of these social groups is typically inscribed as the *preferred reading* in the media text. As a result, in instances such as the “Year of the Gun,” images produced by national newspapers not only penetrate and colonize the collective unconscious by leveling all realities in order to sanitize the dire social climate endured by Black people in Canada but also, the social hysteria

surrounding these images favours the preferred reading of these Black men thereby legitimizing the crimes accused of them. Since overt coercion is not needed, these representational images relied on the remnants of repressed history. They relied on the wounds of the past that have not yet healed, and here I'm talking about the ghosts of Black men "rendered all the more gruesome by their increasing absence of detail" (Michele Wallace 16). Because of the availability of such rich historical memory, when the subject matter of news is represented around "explicit" raced, gendered and classed frameworks, these contents must be understood and experienced to the full extent that they participate in specific meaning production; modes of meaning making that are designed to inculcate and reinforce the relations of the dominant white supremacist ruling class over the suppressed—constituted by women, minorities, and members of the working class. As Jacques Derrida makes it painfully clear to us, we in the West love our binary oppositions. It is what undergirds dominant thinking in the West. Shifting my analysis to two images that capitalized on this powerful yet dangerous thinking pattern, I read the media frenzy that occurred on Boxing Day (the shooting of Jane Creba) and the image of the victims of gun violence as presented by *The Toronto Star*.

It was not until December 26, five days before the year was over, that reporters labeled the onslaught of gun-related violence Toronto's *downfall of innocence*. Statements such as these beg me to ask: what leads a city to ever think it is innocent? Most importantly, what does it take for the same city to lose that perceived innocence? In the multicultural milieu of Toronto, it was not the shooting of Amon Beckles, the eighteen-year old Black youth who was shot at the funeral of his best-friend, Jamal

Hemmings, also a gunfire victim; nor was it Livvette Moore, a Brampton mother of four who found herself caught in crossfire at a Rexdale nightclub, whose death created four “motherless children”; nor was it Champagne Lewis, the Black woman with two children, whose body was found in the park mutilated; it definitely was not the other thirty visible minorities, the majority of them Black men, who left behind loving wives and husbands, others leaving behind children and friends, turning some women into single mothers. The reality that these shootings destroyed families and drained the hopes of the African-Canadian communities did not bring Toronto’s innocence to its knees. It was Jane Creba, the 15-year-old “beautiful blonde girl,” as one headline describes her, the epitome of victimhood, whose death led reporters to claim that Toronto’s innocence has fallen. This trend of claiming innocence, readers of literature can attest to, follows the classic trope of European literature. Jane Creba became the “pure” white female who historically was the figure of innocence. By claiming Paradise is lost, these reports turn the past of Toronto into a Paradise, the past of which is anxiously sanitized. In the context of Toronto, unlike the world Milton created, dark male bodies became the threat to Paradise.

Mainstream viewers’ fear of the dark is manipulated into the fear of Black males. This fear is fortified by the national heritage that encourages and rewards the criminalization of Black men. In the articles on “Year of the Gun,” and also at the panel on “Gun Violence and Black Masculinities” held at McMaster University, it became clear to me that the trope of black night, which is inherently linked with danger, denied value to the Black male bodies that also died of gun-violence and instead only called attention to values attached to white, young, and beautiful, and in this context, female bodies.

What is it about murdered Black men that do not force a mayor to declare the city of Toronto has lost its innocence but forces him to say so only after the death of a white girl? Similarly, what is it about Whiteness that makes a city of people, across all racial and class backgrounds, pour uncontrollable tears over such a murder? Indeed, what is the pricetag on human life? On a Black person's life? On a Black man's life? Who is being called to pay for the dead? Is it not us? Are we not being called to be accountable? And is this how we respond? Do we respond by continuously failing to respond? If I ask too many questions, it is in order to proliferate more questions to the already answered questions as well as to signal to the fact that there is no grief or mourning for some deaths it seems. Also, it calls attention to the fact that the process of grieving seems unjust to me right now to offer answers, and I refuse to offer any!

As a nation we need to wake up and face the sobering choice of committing real resources to the construction and reconstruction of marginal communities living in deadly environments. In closing, I suggest that we each examine the cultural practices, images, and objects with which we engage from a variety of angles. Angles ranging from the production to the consumption, (those legitimately permitted to be consumed) and to our reproductions of these practices, images and objects. If we do not, we become accomplices in how Blackness, and Black men are policed, criminalized, and regulated thereby sustaining and powering the treadmill and becoming the producers that reproduce stereotypical images of Black Canadian men. I am suggesting that unabated racism, which includes unstable personal, neighbourhood, and regional environments, increased poverty, lack of educational and employment opportunities, increased media

policing/emphasis of violence, all lead to why Black men seemed to embody the answer to 2005 “Year of the Gun.”

Instead of equating Black men to “murderers” and to rapists (here I’m thinking of the symbolic rhetoric of rape associated with Jane Creba’s murder), as Canadian national newspapers are apt to do—and I’m thinking of how the mass media have adopted the theme of young Black male violence, the anti-Black youth theme—I suggest we think seriously of a number of key factors that contribute to this “epidemic.” If we examine where these instances of violence take place, and move away from focusing on any one population, no matter how serious its problems, we will start asking broad questions such as (a) what types of urban environments are these young Black men coming from?—**Economically depressed environments.** Put differently, why are certain environments associated with violence?—**Environmental racism.** (b) Does the marginalization of people and land exacerbate violence?—**Yes!** (c) What group is most victimized by homicide?—**Black male Canadians.** Indeed, we ought to cease asking singular questions which lead to narrow answers.

Chapter II

Rough Play, Wounded Passions: Capturing Episodes of Police Arrest in Austin Clarke's "Sometimes a Motherless Child" and Dionne Brand's *What We All Long For*

For many of us in the diaspora, the journey from being *a* regular Black male subject to *the* Black male subject under duress is a short distance. Most times, we do not fully know how or when these distances are closed or crossed. Through the multitude of literary and cultural texts circulating in mainstream consciousness, one quickly becomes aware that the singularity of individual Black men's performed subjectivity easily becomes obscured, thereby allowing the multiple faces that differentiate us never to emerge or forever to be ignored. Because we do not quite know when we will become the suspicious Black (male) subject under the eye of the law, or when we will escape the fish-bowl phenomenon of being watched, many of our movements tend to be calculative and guarded, so guarded that each movement seems strangely immobile. How can they not be, when most of our parents remind us, daily, how dangerous it is "out there" for Black folks?

A memory: "Kwaku Owusu Sekyere," my father calls, signaling for me to listen and listen carefully to what he's about to say, "make sure you get your hair cut today; you don't want *them* to confuse you with *those* people."¹⁵

¹⁵ My dad wanting me to cut my hair, to be distinct from other Black men, is his awareness of an anti-Black youth, specifically Jamaican-youth, sentiment in public discourse. To my dad, cutting my hair means racially disidentifying myself from Jamaican men. To him, this disidentification or self-presentation is necessary since he does not want me to be mistaken for a Jamaican and suffer the blame for the "presumed misdeeds of that group" (Espiritu 20). The paradox in my dad's beliefs are these: on the one hand, practicing this form of disidentified identification resists mainstream white cultural assumption that there is a common Black culture; on the other hand, these beliefs buy into the ideology that Jamaican Black youth are perpetrators of the misdeeds linked to them.

Once a month, while growing up, I heard these loaded words (and still sometimes hear them) from my father. To my dad, cutting my hair involves limiting public suspicions of me as a criminal. To his mind, I believe, the crew-cut is not just a hairstyle, it is also a strategy for ensuring (as much as possible) my safety and survival, a strategy that attempts to set the lingering residues of Negrophobia to rest. My father didn't, and still doesn't, want *them*, the police, to confuse me, a Ghanaian-Canadian, with *those* people; meaning, he doesn't want me to be confused as a Jamaican-Canadian. He wanted this confusion avoided since, on every Sunday morning, he delivered and still delivers to many Canadian houses, via the *Toronto Sun*, news of Jamaican families mourning the loss of their sons. My dad reminds me, through stories from the early and late 90s, of how photographs of Jamaican-Canadian youths populated the front pages of both national and "ethnic" newspapers. The popularity of these photographs affected my dad to the point that he wanted me to assimilate to a "non-threatening" image of Blackness, so to speak, in order to avoid the stereotypical image of the Black man.¹⁶ Little did he know that mainstream society would not allow for my complete assimilation; that I would always be a wannabe-chameleon yet never a chameleon, that I would never be able to disappear in the crowd. My father, however, was not alone in his fear for me. I used to hear parents on my block warn both their sons and myself about "living in this place with all the things happening to [B]lack people, to men and boys like you," (A Clarke 171): *you best not become another statistic: you best be careful*. To be quite honest, although I was careful, the weight of their warnings did not burden me until years later. It wasn't

¹⁶ For accounts of these shootings, again, check Stephen Lewis's report, as well as the short story I read here by Austin Clarke (pages 179, 189).

until I first encountered, for myself, what my dad and these parents have experienced, it wasn't until I had my own stories to recount, it wasn't until I learned that when Black men are talked about there is a hasty conflation or knotting of masculinity and race, it wasn't until all these experiences that I learned my dad's words were not just advice, they were also his reality. A reality that dawned on me in my late teens: I learned then that I was never to other people a man *and* Black, but that I was always to them a "Blackman." I would become to these people a Blackman with no "*and*."

In *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging*, a theoretical text that blends "fragments" (19) of autobiographical accounts, memoir, music, newspaper clippings, and poetry with meticulous care, Dionne Brand triggers and brings back for me chronic teenage angst around racial stress, racial trauma (and parental warnings of racial trauma) when she contends that the Black male subject "is situated as a sign of particular cultural and political meanings in the Diaspora. All of these meanings remain fixed in the ether of history. They leap onto the back of [the] contemporary – they cleave not only to the collective and acquired memories of their descendants but also to the collective and acquired memories of the other. We all enter those bodies" (35). Continuing, she points out, in the same text, that "every space [that Black male subjects] occupy is public space"; meaning that, they are always "on displace" and "never in place" (50-51); the space/place they occupy is predetermined. Put concretely, the Black male subject's subjectivity, in socio-diagnostic terms, is constantly and consistently held in "captivity" by mainstream society (*Maps* 40). The *fact* of his Blackness fixes and reduces him to be-for-others; these constructions of being-for-others, which find

legitimacy in historically constructed facts, take root in the dual process, “the *corporeal schema* and the *historico-racial schema*” (Fanon 111), that Frantz Fanon and others argue forms his subjectivity. This fixed image is perhaps well explained in *Black Skin, White Masks* when Fanon notes that “in the white world the [Black male subject] encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema.” Continuing, Fanon notes that the “consciousness of [his] body is solely a negating activity” (110). In his spoken word piece “The Reinventing Wheel,” Wayne Compton critiques the ideological perspective that fixes and legitimates the Black (male) subject’s nonpresence and nonhumanness. In the section “Moses, says the speaker,” he writes:

I am out of sync
with the attrition. Perpetually
beat juggling history and ethnicity.
From Hegel to turntablism,
revolution to fusion...
Hip hop is [B]lack Canada’s CNN...
Talk stops for no border cop. Black
slang is the new cash crop. (102)

He laments this fixity because although the Black (male) subject’s humanity and presence cleaves, enters, or leaps in to the mainstream consciousness, his slang becomes the new cash crop for mainstream society, or that he is “out of sync with the attrition” attached to him, and he still remains a carelessly read text. To rework this careless reading practice,

Compton’s unidentified speaker asks:

can you take us to the bridge?
Can you hit it and quit? Can you shake your meaning maker
old restless spook? Speak us
out of this mess, this unpassable test, this pattern...
Fix that word because the shit is broke (101-102).

Taking Compton’s “restless spook” and “the shit [that] is broke” to be Black male subjectivity, I see meaning-makers such as Dionne Brand and Austin Clarke respond to Compton’s questions and offer models of Black masculinities that reinvent the dominant image of the Black male subject.

In Austin Clarke’s 1992 short story “Sometimes A Motherless Child” and Dionne Brand’s 2005 novel *What We All Long For*, I listen for the restless spooks and the contesting and renewing movements with which meaning-makers shake up Canadian Black masculinities. I also examine the consequences of the limiting (albeit particular) cultural and political patterns of meanings that these writers attach, or see being attached, to Canadian Black male subjects. The consequences that result from these contested and moving masculinities need to be read because they map out buried strategies of safety and survival that certain Black men adopt in Canada to challenge the illusory meanings attached to their subjectivities.

What We All Long For, a novel set in 2002 in the cosmopolitan city of Toronto, poelitically captures the inter-gender, ethnic, and racial relations within the city among four young Canadian adults (Tuyen, Carla, Jackie, and Oku) of different racial and ethnic backgrounds and their families. With the careful eye of an investigator, Brand depicts the visible and invisible movements of these racialized characters: their joys, sadness and the sets of demands placed on them post 9/11 or those that they place on themselves. Foregrounding the uniqueness of Toronto, *What We All Long For* depicts “the city’s heterogeneity” and its “polyphonic murmuring” (204) through the multiple ethnic neighbourhoods showcased in the novel. In *What We All Long For*, Brand portrays the

experience of alienation and displacement that these characters feel towards the city and most importantly their families. Picking on Brand's characters' refusal to perform a predetermined script of who they should become, Kit Dodson notes "*What We All Long For* represents a generational shift in the politics of being in Canadian space" (1).

In "Sometimes A Motherless Child," Clarke shines a critical spotlight on police brutality towards Black men in the city of Toronto. BJ, a young Canadian Black man of Jamaican decent, and his Italian-Canadian friend, Marco, are policed for driving a white BMW—a car they bought with their winnings from the horse races. (BJ's constant negotiation of his subject positions—as a Black son, who loves learning but skips school, covers his tracks to not worry his mother since she believes that staying out of the streets will safeguard him from police brutality, and as a Black man, with all the racial codes that criminalize him—shows his awareness of the social scripts that predetermine Black men in the city.) The police mistake BJ and Marco as drug dealers—those they're looking for—which leads to them to arrest both young men. BJ's mother's fear—of losing her son to police brutality—becomes a reality when she walks into her driveway and sees her son's body, covered in blood, being carried away by those in *blue*.

I specifically choose to compare these two texts because they both offer a "textured" (Akenson 395) and challenging depiction of Canadian Black masculinities that is worthy of examination. My reading focuses on Oku, the 25-year-old Black man in *What We All Long For*, and BJ, the 18-year-old protagonist from "Sometimes A Motherless Child." Both these characters hold strong beliefs in the ideologies of American Black consciousness. In the introduction to the 2000 special edition of

Canadian Review of American Studies, Richard Almonte, David Chariandy and Jennifer Harris suggest a rethinking of borders and their meanings. Such rethinking of African American and Black Canadian border crossing is necessary, they suggest, because of “increased transnational migration, heightened cultural interaction and the emergence of an electronic culture that subverts existing borders. The result of these phenomena is the emergence of new and challenging ways of conceiving of identity” (Almonte et. al. 121). Oku’s and BJ’s decision to “subvert existing borders” that limit their movement in Toronto grants them safety and survival skills which allow them to “resist the fugues of racial erasure” imposed on them by mainstream Canadian society (“Must,” G. E. Clarke 72, 74). For example, their love of Jazz (especially musicians like Coltrane and Mingus to name but two), and African American political theorists such as Malcolm X speak to their “bold-faced absorption of African-American literary modes and models” (71). Both BJ and Oku feel trapped by the educational system: BJ, who is still in highschool, skips school, while Oku drops out of his graduate program in English at the University of Toronto.

Brand and Clarke painfully highlight, through these “bold-faced absorptions,” the cultural linkages and political parallels between American and Canadian notions of Black masculinities. As I finished reading *What We All Long For* and “Sometimes A Motherless Child,” however, I could not help but ask myself: where are Black Canadian role models? Here George Elliot Clarke’s 1998 essay “Must All Blackness Be American” came to mind. As much as I enjoyed the fluidity of Blackness that Almonte et. al.’s piece and Brand’s and Clarke’s texts all advocate, I am discomforted by their

heavy reliance on an African-American sense of Blackness and masculinity. With the exception of Toronto-specific street names such as Jarvis and Queen, Scarborough, Highway 401, and Richmond Hills, the characterization of Brand's Oku and Clarke's BJ could be anywhere, and are everywhere, in America. This criticism reflects my project's on-going attempt to use *and* then depart from dominant theories and representations of Black masculinities to chart grounds to localize knowledge production in Canada. If we do not, we risk turning representations of African-Canadian notions of masculinities into "appropriations" of Black American masculinities, and into what George Elliot Clarke calls "a version of Edward Said's Orientalism: that is to say, Black America is, for Black Canada, an exotic Other" (G.E. Clarke, "Contesting" 39). I do, however, acknowledge the productive influence that American Black culture has had on young Black men such as Oku and BJ. As Almonte et. al., following Rinaldo Walcott, point out in their introduction, the "creative potential" for a positive explosion within conceptions of Canadian Black masculinities can be manufactured through the "fluidity of borders"; the fluidity helps mark similarities and outline differences, thereby denoting the specificity of Canadian Black masculinities.

Having said that, I would like to point out that the archeological site north of the 49th parallel needs attention so we can dig out the history of political, literary and musical movements in Black Canada. We need to begin demythologizing Black Canadians' sense of inferiority because it is crucial to the survival of a young generation yet-to-come. Meaning-makers should call upon contemporary literary role models such as George Elliot Clarke and Lawrence Hill, or on Jazz musicians such as George Paris

and Oscar Peterson. I am reminded of Cornel West's argument that calls Black Americans to begin deconstructing the "myths" surrounding Black American Culture. This demythologizing is "crucial," he says "because much of [B]lack self-hatred and self-contempt has to do with the refusal of many [B]lack Americans to love their own [B]lack bodies—especially their [B]lack noses, hips, lips and hair" (*Race Matters* 85). I fear that if we do not begin demythologizing, the generation to follow will harbour "the self-hatred" and "self-contempt" that many Black folks here hold towards things Black and Canadian.

Irrespective of the powerful presence of Americana in both texts, both Brand and Clarke offer portrayals of Canadian Black masculinities that are in tension with a city that refuses to accommodate and acknowledge Black men. Although Brand's *What We All Long For* pays close attention to the unrelenting brutality of police violence towards the Black male subject in the scenes I focus on here, note that the novel in its entirety pays closer attention to the "permutations of existence" according to which first generation Canadian diasporic subjects¹⁷, "Italian, Vietnamese, Chinese, Ukrainian, Pakistani,

¹⁷ Brand's and Clarke's texts about the constant "battle" between parents and children, with children wanting to assert their Canadian roots, invite a discursive shift in the way we academics address those "born in [a] city from people born elsewhere" (Brand 20). Such a discursive move will shift the focus of their identities and subjectivities away from migration and towards the idea of citizenship. For example, in *What We All Long For*, Tuyen, Carla, Oku, and Jackie should be referred to as first-generation Canadian-diasporans while their parents are first-generation immigrants. This subtle distinction, although slightly confusing, helps me understand why Clarke's narrator feels the need to inform us that BJ "was a born Canadian" (174) and not offer this information for his Italian friend Marco; or why Brand's narrator informs us that her characters "were born in the city from people born elsewhere" and that "breaking their doorways, [these children] left the sleepwalk of their mothers and fathers and ran across the unobserved borders of the city" (20). The insistence on birthplace in both texts begs for a move from migration to citizenship when referring to people of colour. Although Brand and Clarke do not insist on pinpointing the birthplace of Marco and Reiner, of Italian and German cultural heritage, it is interesting to note their gesture not to homogenize their whiteness. Conversations with Emily Johansen encourage me to make this move because the common usage of first generation immigrants heavily relies on the invocation of "race" and people of colour and allows whitened folks "born from people born elsewhere" not to be included in

Korean and African” Canadians, negotiate on “*Ojibway land*” (4, emphasis added). I emphasize this usually suppressed reference to the land that “has lost its true name” (*Maps*, Brand 219) because as Dilia Narduzzi, a friend of mine doing her PhD. in English, helps me understand, diasporic cultures are mapping a “new” cartography of meaning onto what were once indigenous lands. My concern with these newly “superimposed” maps is that traces of the “old” map are erased. Because of these erasures, I find it misleading to conceptualize the land with the term, “palimpsest.” How can we make this theorization when the paths to the old are unrecoverable? These unrecoverable paths lead to an invasion of memory, one in which “the woman from this land walks as one blindfolded, no promontory or dip of water is recognizable. She has not been careless, no. No, she has tried to remember, she has an inkling, but certain disasters have occurred and the street, the path in her mind, is all rubble, so she asks the driver through lost paths to conduct her through her own country” (Brand, *Maps* 220). This sense of displacement of indigenous people on their land leads Lee Maracle, at the first TransCanada Conference held in Vancouver, British Columbia, to identify diasporic movement as “continual invasion.” This continual invasion of native lands through palimpsestral renaming—another way of describing the process of covering up the shit we destroy with scented treaties—doesn’t mean the shit is over, if anything; it segregates

the dialogue. In his 2006 article “That’s what you want, isn’t it?”: Austin Clarke and the New Politics of Recognition,” African-Canadian scholar of Indo-Trinidadian background David Chariandy suggests that we, as academics, have to “devote much more critical attention to the very *recognitions* of Canada’s racial and ethnically plural citizenry, recognitions which may, at times, end up masking the ongoing (or even mounting) challenges faced by certain vulnerable social groups, including racial minorities who also happen to be women, poor, and/or queer” (142). The discursive shift I identify is one of the challenges Chariandy identifies and speaks to the paradox of “shifting experiences and identifications” of “immigrants and their Canadian-born descendants” (Chariandy 142).

indigenous communities from the land and allows a polyphonic inter- and intra- racial composition of Toronto's population. And even in Toronto, Brand and Clarke are both cognizant about the ways that Canada operates to displace differently racialized people.

Returning to the negotiation that first generational Canadian diasporic subjects make on Ojibway land, Emily Johansen, one of my colleagues, notes this negotiation as "a dialectical process of self-definition," as a "battle." According to Johansen, these battles ensue because "generational shifts force these children to simultaneously fight colonization by the white hegemony and also their parents' desire for them to remain tied to a homeland that they have no physical connection to" (2). Clarke's "Sometimes A Motherless Child," a short story that presents Black women who do not avoid critiquing Black men for playing the new double consciousness game, one that teaches us that playing the "blame" game, assuming victimhood is the very essence of being authentically Black, narrates the horrifying reality of police brutality on first generation Canadian Black men living on Ojibway land and draws attention to the consequences of the violence on friends and family members. Together, both works of fiction shine critical spotlights on representations of Canadian Black masculinities and provide missing accounts to the portrayed images of Black men. These missing and wounding accounts, when the police, in the moment of arrest, ask the Black man to account for himself, then become the memoirs of Black men that never get published.

Because the scenes I read from Brand and Clarke's texts both capture moments of Black men under duress, readers hear accounts of Black men's lives otherwise lodged in memory and forgotten by time. I read these episodes of arrest as moments when Black

men are *expected* to reconstruct and narrate our memoirs. If the memoirist, as I understand, does not wholly tell the truth about an event but rather tells a story about an event, then the narratives both Brand and Clarke offer in their work textures the memoirs of Black masculinities in cosmopolitan Toronto.

In *What We All Long For*, I focus solely on Oku, a first-generation Canadian Black man, and read the two powerful scenes that depict his encounters and interactions with the police. I isolate these two scenes from the novel in order to read alongside and against Clarke's powerful depiction of another first-generation Canadian Black man, BJ, and his tangled dance of negotiation with police officers in "Sometimes A Motherless Child." The characterizations of Oku and BJ offered in Brand's and Clarke's texts both depart from the inadequate inherited forms of Black masculinities circulating in mainstream consciousness, thereby highlighting the limiting "corporeal schema and historico-racial schema" that forms the psychological and subjective processes of Black male subject formation. Although the alternative masculinities performed by these men might not easily yield immediate or necessarily practical models of masculinities for survival and safety—because they are trapped in a discourse of what Fanon calls "objecthood"—they do present alternative images that nevertheless gesture towards revising the inadequate masculinities portrayed within Black Canadian communities.

Because BJ and Oku understand how their gender and race are understood in the performative circuit of cultural productions, they recognize the consequences underlying "hard" masculinity and refuse to tangle themselves in this network. Clarke and, especially Brand, animate their work with Black male characters who slip from these normalized

codes of hardness. BJ and Oku’s refusal of “hard” masculinity becomes for these authors their approach to undermine any stable codes of masculine performative behaviours naturalized in Black politics. A few questions before I continue: what is “hard” masculinity? Why is it called “hard”? And why is there extra pressure on Black men to perform a “hardened”¹⁸ masculinity?

Antony Easthope, reading Leonardo Da Vinci’s “Designs for a Castle,” in *The Castle of the Self*, uses the model of a fortress and informs my understanding of hard masculinity. From this model, hard masculinity is a performance caught “in a ceaseless struggle to keep itself together, to close all gaps, watch every move, meet aggression with aggression” (Easthope 40). Easthope continues:

The purpose of the masculine ego, like that of the castle, is to *master* every threat, and here the male term is particularly appropriate. The castle of the ego is defined by its perimeter and the line drawn between what is inside and what outside. To maintain its identity it must not only repel external attack but also suppress treason within. It will not be surprising [then that in hard masculinity]...the enemy within the masculine individual turns out to be his own femininity (40, emphasis in original)

The ceaseless struggle to keep one’s self together is powerfully portrayed by Jamal in *What We All Long For*. Visiting Jamal in Mimico Detention Centre, Carla witnesses her brother “trying to be someone she could not recognize. She didn’t know why he insisted on speaking in [a Jamaican] accent. Something he’d picked up with his friends on the street. He does it Clara believes, “to assume badness” (30). Black men portraying this badness, “a dangerousness that [is] both routine and petrifying,” and operating only on

¹⁸ The sexual overtones of my phrasing consciously call attention to the hyper-sexualization of the Black male body that circulates in mainstream imagination. “The Negro and Psychopathology,” an essay from Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*, suggests, “In relation to the Negro, everything takes place on the genital level” (157). Over-sexualized representations of Black masculinity doubly pronounce desire and excite fear towards Black men. Kobena Mercer, bell hooks, and others have done some work on this idea.

the senses and in the moment (Brand 28, 32), are regarded as performing “hard” masculinity. Kobena Mercer would suggest that this performance of hard masculinity “occurs when Black men subjectively internalize and incorporate aspects of the dominant definitions of masculinity in order to [counteract] the definitions of dependency and powerlessness which racism and racial oppression enforce” (139). On the one hand, bell hooks would suggest that “hard” masculinity is Black men’s expression of contempt for white men since we envy “their access to patriarchal power” (98). Wesley Crichlow, situating “hard” masculinity in the Black communities, in *Buller Men and Batty Bwoys: Hidden Men in Toronto and Halifax Black Communities* explains that this racialized positioning of the Black male body as a fortress “asserts Black manhood [a]s both macho and largely heterosexist” (130). This assertion of manhood “enacts a structure of dominance that casts as traitors those Black men who are unable to identify with and / or perform within the codes” (129). Continuing, Crichlow suggests that codes of “machismo enforce a form of policing on the performative of the Black male body and does so in ways that construct a normative discourse for all Black men” (130). From these three critics, one can humbly suggest that the extra pressure on Black men to perform a “hardened” masculinity is not solely, as Crichlow rightfully notes, “the Black nation fulfilling a biologically determined, gender-specific, and genetically maintained racial purity[–]one that inscribes the individual Black body with the investments of a nation” (132)—but also a way of responding to the reality of economic and labour struggles, institutionalized practices of oppression such as racism, classism, and homophobia.

The “hard-ass,” confident, and even sexist performances of Black masculinity commonly present in Austin Clarke’s works (“The Man,” *The Question*) is complicated “Sometimes A Motherless Child.” BJ’s masculinity is wrapped in a cloth of tenderness. This tenderness is quickly introduced to readers through BJ’s exchange with Marco, his Italian-Canadian best friend. “They embraced,” we are told,

touching bodies, and slapping each other on the back three times, as if they belonged to an old fraternity of rituals and mystery. They let go of each other, and did it a second time, with their heads touching the other’s shoulders. It was Italian, and it was African, and it was this that joined them in their close friendship for the past nine years. They saw each other every day, either at school or here in BJ’s room. (173)

Perhaps what drew my attention to the embrace between these two seventeen-year-old boys is the “softness” that dwells within their “hard” performances of masculinity: the “slapping” of each other’s back as if to avoid feeling the touch of each other, as if to maintain the manliness or “*Man-thing*” of masculinity (Brand, *What* 46). Clarke’s portrayal goes to great lengths to counter the commonly gendered and stereotypical depictions of male-bonding exchange that usually occurs when men have been drinking. For instance, we are told that their embrace is a ritualistic performance that joins “Italian” and “African” cultures together, rather than the masculine nature of it. Whether the focus is on the embrace’s masculine pose or on the interconnections made possible in the diaspora, it is possible to read, as Daniel Coleman does in *Masculine Migrations: Reading Postcolonial Male in New Canadian Narratives*, that the “shifting referent” (6) or “codes for masculinity” (30) in this story have changed. It is therefore not necessary to know whether BJ’s and Marco’s masculinities are associated with “fraternity” in order to invoke the “hardness” of their masculinity, as Clarke explains in their ritualistic

greetings; rather, it is important to note that the codes for their masculinity have shifted, explaining why their performance of friendship offers an image of Black masculinity that challenges “the bad public hard-ass kind of [B]lack man that everyone appreciates” (Brand, *What* 163-4). Here, I think not only of the ironic nature of this quotation but also of the contested nature of masculinity as theorized by Australian sociologist Robert Connell. Instead of setting “hard” and “soft” masculinities within a fixed binary hermeneutics, always and everywhere the same, it is important to think about Connell’s theory of a hierarchy of masculinities, meaning masculinities are always in contestation with each other. Hence, in the *privacy and safety* of BJ’s room, Black masculinity can be flexed to emphasize the fluidity within which both “soft” and “hard” masculinities are at play.

In *What We All Long For*, Brand depicts variations of this “bad public hard-ass kind of Black man.” We have Derek and Kwesi, the city’s hustlers; then there is Jamal, “the man-child” (49) with his *unsuccessful* carjacking and Fitz and Derek, the fathers of Oku and Jamal, respectively, whose attempts to enact hegemonic masculinities are undermined by their sons¹⁹. All these set Oku’s masculinity in sharp contrast. Oku’s way of life, like BJ’s, also challenges gendered understandings of Black masculinities. Unlike Jamal and Kwesi, who accept the “inevitable” life of the hard-core Black man, Oku

¹⁹ Oku contests his father’s hegemonic masculinity with what Connell describes as “protest masculinity.” For example, when his militant and strident father demands he present his “report card,” Oku meets Fitz with an unexpected confrontation. Oku responds to his father’s demands with, “man, chill. You’re tripping. You must be out of your mind. I’m a grown man. Report card! I don’t have to answer to you!” (186). In situations such as this, Oku attempts to claim his masculine identity through “an active response to the situation”; a response that “looks like a cul-de-sac” (Connell 118). I offer this example to gesture that I am aware of the importance of father-son relations in studies of masculinity, but due to the limited scope of this chapter/project I can only gesture to this instance between Oku and Fitz.

refuses to pigeonhole himself into these invented categories. He adopts and changes masculinities to survive in his environment. The masculine positions he adopts allow him to navigate the moving spectrum of Black masculinities presented in this novel with relative ease. He holds an honest interest in caring about and nurturing people around him. He would often go to his friends' "place and cook elaborate meals from their scanty cupboards" (129). He continuously "checks for" Jamal "up there in the jungle" where they hang out because he is his friend Carla's younger brother (46, 45). He befriends Clifford Hall, the "mad" musician who plays "phantom piano outside the Café" near St. Lawrence market (172), and the old Rasta, the man who "worked the blocks of the city, panhandling" (169). Oku forges a friendship with both men even though he knows "they had gone mad, the worst kind of giving into the system that would be imagined among [B]lack people in the city" (174). In addition, Oku spends time with "his boys" from Eglinton (161), a group "of young...hard core...brothers" (46). These boys hassle him by calling him "a faggot," hoping "one day to wear him down" so that he will "face [what they believe to be] the inevitable" life of a Black man: hustling. Because Oku refuses this "hard" performance of Black masculinity, he is relegated to a "complicitous" or subordinated masculinity, a form of masculinity that blurs, under patriarchal arrangements, the distinctions from femininity (Connell 79). By nurturing and caring about people around them, BJ and Oku's performances of "soft-hard" masculinities offer a guide to envisioning new Black masculinities and suggest that no one person occupies a single position within the hierarchy of masculinity; rather, as BJ and Oku demonstrate, we move between various positions and our masculinities are not eternally fixed.

BJ and Oku's Black masculinities signal a model of Black diasporic masculinities that embrace radical discontinuities within performances of Black manhood. Such performances rupture the overdeveloped stereotypes of Black men (the images of Black men as aggressive, hyper-sexualized, "thugs" or "hoodlums"). In representing BJ and Oku's masculinity in their seemingly idiosyncratic perspective—that is, in deviating from clothing them in these overdeveloped stereotypic clothes that restrict Black men—Brand's and Clarke's representations pay attention to the quilt of complexities that characterize the past and present fabric that clothes Black men's bodies in Toronto. Diasporan theorist Khachig Tölöyan notes that often a "richness" of attention is missing in "work[s] on diasporic identity" (28). In his article, "Rethinking Diaspora(s): Stateless Power in the Transnational Moment," Tölöyan bemoans the "reduction of or an inattention to the complexity of the past and present of diasporic social formations" (28). He continues by claiming that "diasporic identity has become an occasion for celebration [and theorization] of multiplicity and mobility" (28), but that there is not enough "fleshing" or investigation into what he calls the "social...life...that mobilizes dispersion into diaspora" (29). Dionne Brand's and Austin Clarke's mapping of Oku's and BJ's masculinities pays attention to and mobilizes these *social dispersions*. They do not, for instance, accept the monadic conceptions of Black patriarchy or of Black solidarity. (Unlike the accusation reporters make about Black communities—that they are hiding behind "the wall of silence"—both Clarke's and Brand's texts challenge these assertions²⁰. For example, in "Sometimes A Motherless Child," BJ's mother's

²⁰ In the editorial article, "The wall of silence in Toronto's killings," in Toronto's *Globe & Mail*, on Nov 22,

assumption that “a young Black man” was being “bothered” by the cops when she saw the police car is challenged when the face of the detained young man is “white”). Erin Goheen, in her unpublished article, “Representing ‘Refuge’: Finding the Hamilton Somali Diaspora in News Media and Literary Theory,” responds to Tölölyan’s concern by suggesting that “one way to resist this celebratory simplification [of multiplicity and mobility] is to re-“texture...the stories of diaspora” (10).

Brand, in *What We All Long For*, re-textures depictions of Black diasporic masculinities by presenting multiple performances enacted by Black men. Notable in this re-texturing is the “passion play” (Brand 165) that Oku and BJ negotiate, or are expected to negotiate, during their moments of arrest. This game is hyped with contradictions and tension. We are told Oku “simply...gave up his will and surrendered to the stigmata” of his body when he encounters authority figures; similarly, BJ simply “stood silent and calm” and endured harassment from law-enforcement officers. Such tense moments reveal disturbing yet mundane realities for many Black male subjects: the (tension of) sexual violence enacted upon Black bodies by police officers during moments of arrest—a moment of “perverse fondling” that Dionne Brand identifies as a “passion play,” that is “acted out” on the Black male body. This play, Brand informs us, is “played out at its most ecstatic with the cops” (165).

2005, the unidentified author shines a spotlight on the youth violence ravaging members of Toronto’s black community and calls attention to the lack of witnesses coming forward to speak against these actions.

It may appear tremendously striking that Brand uses such explicitly religious terms and imagery, such as “stigmata” and “passion play²¹,” in Oku’s first arrest, especially since these religious images seem to re-inscribe a whole history of religious affliction or run the risk of martyrizing the abuse endured by Black men at the hands of police officers. However, like Toni Morrison, who in *Playing in the Dark* demands the “unspeakable things unspoken” be examined and reinterpreted (11), Brand examines and reinterprets the invisible sexual abuse of Black men by connecting their experiences to the magnificently staged production of the trial, suffering, and death of Jesus Christ. Brand attaches these religious images of pain to Black masculinities and determinedly pronounces the spectacle of Black men’s painful encounters with the police. Can I not also suggest that the passion play that recalls Christ’s sacrificial death is a metaphor of sacrifice for the good of others? I do not mean to suggest that Oku is a saint or Christlike figure; rather, I gesture towards the hope of his metaphorical stigmata re-birth. “No longer,” from this birth, “will the protest against injustice, police brutality, racial discrimination, and plain [B]lack frustration be couched in respectable, conservative duplicity. No longer will the victim be ashamed to voice his resentment of this victimization. And we will no longer find it prudent, as it used to be, to express this resentment in an ambivalent manner” (“Public Enemies,” Clarke 327).

²¹ Passion Play “is a powerful re-enacting of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus performed each Easter” (www.torontopassionplay.com/home.htm). All the websites I visited admittedly boasted of their success called attention to audience participation. Many determinedly pointed out their productions were all outdoors and had a realistic quality to their productions. On the *Canadian Badlands Passion Play* website, they highlight this ritualistic performance of Christ’s life, crucifixion and resurrection as a “top cultural attraction,” as one of the “Top 100 Events in North America,” as “*The Greatest Story Ever Told* in Drumheller, Alberta, Canada (www.canadianpassionplay.com, emphasis added).

I argue, then, that Brand's deliberate use of religious images conveys her attempt to stage the passion of Oku, the greatest story of Black men *never* told. In her production, the play dramatizes the resurgence of police interest in passionately policing Black men, only the police play rough and their passion wounds Black men. For instance, in Clarke's short story, it is BJ rather than Marco who is shot by the police (although Marco gets arrested with him), and in Brand, it is Oku, rather than the other characters, who gets arrested. Although Brand and Clarke explore an inter-racial relation among the younger generation and remain hopeful for the "racial relations" in Canada, they do not possess the same degree of hopefulness with regards to the gendered systems of oppression that disproportionately links, as I have said in previous chapters, Black young men with criminality in the mainstream Canadian press and consciousness.

One forgets, in episodes of racial unrest, the historically over-sexualized fantasy that has turned Black men's bodies into objects of spectacle that need taming. One forgets the perverted sexual mythology by which Whites first reduced Black people to subhumans (Fanon 1956; Gilroy 1988), then conferred upon them a hypersexuality (Julian and Mercer 1998; West 1995) that projects onto Blacks White lust and puritan guilt. One forgets the forced rape of Blacks by Whites. One forgets how Black men have been victimized by White males. But Cornel West does not forget: in *Race Matters*, he writes: "white supremacist ideology is based first and foremost on the degradation of [B]lack bodies in order to control them. One of the best ways to instill fear in people is to terrorize them" (122). Although Cornel West is referring to Black sexuality and the physical attractiveness of the Black body, I introduce this quotation to

highlight the internalized acceptance, if not conviction, by the Black male subject that such “degradation” of his body is natural. In what follows, I offer a reading of Brand’s and Clarke’s texts that highlights the invasion of the Black male body during an arrest scene that (1) conflates violence and sexuality, (2) diverts attention away from the violence of the arrest itself to shed light upon the tableau of arrest-as-molestation, (maybe even rape – since consent to the body-search is not granted) and (3) shows the unfazed reaction, of the Black man to his attacker, thereby implicitly suggesting that arresting a Black man invites him into an “embrace” he naturally and willingly “slid[es]” into (Brand 165).

Before sliding into the twined narratives of the passion play enacted between BJ, Oku and the cops—a mundane play which signals as it highlights the ongoing practices of police brutality on Black men, it is important to mention that each arrest offers a different narrative. In what follows, I discuss the non-sexualized arrest of both BJ and Oku and argue that chronologically, these two moments—Oku’s second and BJ’s first arrest—offer two different sites of *understanding* how Black male subjects are predetermined.

BJ’s first encounter with the cops has become an event he had “almost wiped from his memory” (194). It took place while he was a young child playing in a small neighborhood park. He recalls this memory while pacing in “another cell” of the “same police station”: the one that currently detains him for driving while Black. As BJ “paced up and down, with various thoughts entering his head,” he recalls, as a child, spending “four hours ... locked up, not having had a charge laid against him about the alleged theft

of a kid's bicycle" (194-5). From his recollection we learn that "three other kids," along with him, "were horsing around and pretending to be bagmen" when "one of the other three kids playfully took" a "little kid's" first bicycle. This little kid cries home only to return with his father and to point to BJ and say: "dad; the colored fella is who took my bike" (195). Since the violence of identifying a perpetrator as Black and male swims mainstream media, I am not surprised Austin Clarke condenses a sociological experience into a scene and depicts the ease with which a little white kid sends an innocent Black person into captivity. From this scene, we learn how this little white kid is already aware of the particular cultural and political meanings attached to Black men. Here, it is important to remember the pedagogical ways in which mainstream media teach children about "race" or dominant understandings of "race." The little lie told by this white kid goes beyond the telling of a little lie and goes to suggest that "there are specific societal functions which [Black men are] put to, quite outside of [their] agency" (Brand, *Maps* 37). Although I can perhaps understand the pain of having his bicycle stolen, which might explain the fib this little white kid tells, as a reader I cannot justify how or why the police do not inquire into the pranks of children when they identify "ghetto delinquents" (195).²² In re/presenting why the police would take one little white kid's words over a Black youth; why "two carloads of cops" will attend to "a small neighborhood kid's prank" (195); why law-enforcemtn officers spit racial tirades such as "into the cruiser,

²² As we see the rough frictions that attend Canadian multiculturalism in this scene, perhaps Clarke wants us to understand the unique position that children of first generation immigrants occupy; perhaps he also wants us to understand why the friendship between Marco and BJ is important and why perhaps "their parents never met. And did not know of their sons' deep friendship" (173). We also witness that one of the reasons for inter-ethnic-and-racial battles in Canada is due to unequal distribution of privileges between ethnic and racial groups. For example, a grown-up in Clarke's story vomits insults in "Italian and Greek" (195) against a little Black kid without the cops intervening.

nigger; into the goddamn cruiser, you goddamn nigger, [sic] No, not in the goddamn front seat, in the fucking back, where youse belong,” against a Black kid (195-6), Austin Clarke represents the illogical logic that locates Black men as being “drug dealers” and “armed and dangerous” subjects. (For me to understand this sociological experience that Clarke calls attention to is for me to accept or normalize certain aggression towards Black men; it is for me to acknowledge that Black males are widely feared to be criminals who need excessive force to be held down; that I accept the suspicion when I’m rarely any of that [Clarke 185]; it is also for me to gain control of the reality of how others wish to know and see us.) After four hours of detention, when the cops learn they have made a mistake, instead of apologizing, they justify their treatment of little BJ by situating him as the “West Indian” thief who needs to “mend his thieving ways” (196). “I’m sure,” in the cops’ eyes, BJ-the-kid “looks like one of those drug dealers, and” I’m even more certain they believe he is, they “feel he is, not because he’s...” fill-in-the-blank, but because he’s a Black man. These are words two white women report to the building superintendent after they have observed BJ cleaning *his* BMW in the basement parking lot of his friend. I refer to this moment to suggest that the job of policing the Black (male’s) body begins as a child, as a teenager, and as these two white women demonstrate, continues into adulthood. The surveillance, or rather the racial profiling, of Blackness and Black male subjects becomes a job for all Canadian citizens.

Unlike BJ, Oku’s somewhat non-sexualized passion play occurs during his second arrest. Because Oku by this time is older, 24 years in age, and has experienced police brutality in the past or witnessed many Black men encountering arrests, the moment of

his second arrest becomes an event for which he is prepared. He and his friend Tuyen, the artistic photographer, join a Black anarchist group that goes “to Quebec to demonstrate against globalization” (204). Oku goes to the demonstration knowing “there would be trouble” (205). Oku regards this trouble as his “service to the people” (205). It is his attempt to “tear down all manifestation of a system that keeps its foot at [Black men’s] throat” (Brand, “Dualities” 121). On the one hand, I am fearfully concerned that Black men like Oku who naturalize the “aggressive and perverse embrace” of militancy by joining “[B]lack anarchist” movements (204) communicate their acceptance of, or worse, their expectations of these violent embraces. On the other hand, I am also hopeful because these aggressive embraces, in the case of the Quebec demonstration and scenes like the 1992 Yonge Street Riot, where Black youths like Oku stood up to “send a message to this country about not taking it anymore” (Brand, “Whose Gaze” 121), suggest to me that the fight is not over, that change is to come.

Irrespective of my position on the aggressive embrace, Dionne Brand depicts, through this arrest scene, the violence enacted upon and towards the Black male body. She illustrates the kind of violence that forces Black men like Oku to “surrender to violence, to some bruising” and some fondling. Such illumination forces readers to recognize the victimization and psychic scares that, in the name of correcting “social ills” and making the streets “safer,” many Black men—guilty and innocent—suffer at the hands of cops. At the same time, Brand demonstrates, perhaps too problematically and too quickly, the pleasures involved in this violent normalized and ritualistic play in police arrests. We learn that

Oku got his foot sprained when an undercover dragged him into a van. He was one of the first ones to climb the fence. He made up the opening lines of poems, calling them out to the group he was with. He was enjoying himself, screaming poetry about the downfall of everything. He even enjoyed the arrest. (205)

I want to suggest that such sites of suffering serve as sources for creativity *solely* because the repetitive occurrence of being arrested familiarizes Black men with the police officer's "embrace." They become familiar to the point that, in the heat of the moment, when "the passion play" is being "acted out on [their] body," when it is being "played out at its most ecstatic time with the cops" (165), Oku not only "scream[s] poetry," oozes (brims over) with creativity, and "even enjoy[s] the arrest," but he also attains a state of consciousness that should not be mistaken as enjoyment or pleasure, but as a nauseating miming of creativity. This speechless state of consciousness that gives birth to his creativity, I argue, is the kind of enjoyment or pleasure that relies on the double spin between playing and fighting, between suffering and the ongoing hope of overcoming the present state of violence. It is a creativity of hope.

Oku's first encounter with the police, however, renders him silent; his silence becomes a moment of disgrace that reverberates with a resounding truth about the sexual violation involved in police arrests. At two a.m., on his way home from a party in Toronto, Oku

saw the flashing turning light...swerve into him. He stopped. Two cops came out of the car. He can't remember if they called him, if they told him to stop. His arms rose *easily* as if reaching for an embrace. One cop reached for him. He can't remember what they said or what they wanted. He only remembered that it was like an *accustomed embrace*. He *yielded* his body as if to a lover, and the cop *slid* into his arms. That was the fucked-up thing about being dangerous. It was a surrender to violence, to some bruising, brutal lover... He remembered how *instinctively* his arms opened, how gently, as gently as they would have opened to embrace Jackie. But this was another kind of impeachment. *A perverse fondling.*

Another car sped by, slowed to look and then sped on again. The cops didn't find any thing on him, and *he said nothing to them*, just smiled and shook his head. They asked him his name, he smiled again. Their fondling became rougher. Oku let his body go limp. The cops folded him into their car with a few more shoves. He laughed. He was still high...They couldn't find anything to charge him with and let him go around 6 am. (164-5, italics added).

I quote at length from this scene because it is necessary to illustrate a number of conceptual points: the poetry of keeping quiet “holds the soul together and [stops] Oku” from becoming “homicidal” (169, 165). Oku’s love for jazz, a musical genre that emphasizes self-mastery and control in response to external crisis and that “respects composure and asserts the importance of personal control over a situation” (Imani Perry qtd. in Clarke, “Cool” 12), equips him in this emotionally and psychologically charged situation with the “essential survival mechanism” (Clarke, “Cool” 12) to survive the four hours of detainment in police custody and to “smile” in the face of sexual assault at the hands of the police officers. Instead of Oku “screaming poetry about the downfall of” (205) these practices, as he does in his later arrest when he is much older, in this scene, he *allows* the police to fondle him, because “to engage constantly in these racial plays” of resistance “is a hazard” that “wound[s] the brain,” body and soul (Brand, “Dualities” 172). African-American poet Langston Hughes, in his poem, “Minstrel Man” writes:

Because my mouth
Is wide with laughter
And my throat
Is deep with song,
You do not think I suffer after
I have held my pain
So long?

Because my mouth
Is wide with laughter,
You do not hear

My inner cry?
Because my feet
Are gay with dancing,
You do not know
I die?

Hughes' poem poignantly addresses the asymmetry of perception and performance. If these Black men were to speak openly with words and not with silence would they express how

their mouth still bleeds when it remembers those hands?
their body still limps when it remembers those hands?
their eyes still weep when it remembers those hands?
how their head still aches when it remembers
hands fondling?

how would the protest that swung off their eyes be understood? How would we understand that their smiles are how

they move to the rumbling music of their tears
thinking that if they were to speak of what-was-just-happening,
call this treatment an assault,
say that what is being done to him is wrong
inhuman
no one will listen?

Surrendering, then, to violence by *letting* his body go limp, *might*, one can argue, “codify [his Black] masculinity in a manner that assist[s] survival” (G.E Clarke, “Cool” 12).

Since I will never know the answers to the questions I pose, I hesitate to celebrate this form of resistance because it leaves a wound that perhaps will never heal. Since Black men are routinely being arrested and assaulted by the police, to what extent, I ask, can *we*, and should *we*, continue to let *our* bodies go limp? The widespread humiliation that reduces Oku into a spectacle, links the past to the present and the future; he becomes the “endangered species” (48) that people in cars slow down to take a last “look” at before he

disappears. The word “*shoves*,” in the sentence “the cops folded him into their car with a few more *shoves*,” invokes the myth that led Blacks to be treated and viewed as primitive animals; this reading explains why cars can “slow” and “look” at an endangered Black man without stopping to intervene. Part of the difficulty in addressing this dramatic scene of violence as sexual abuse is the symbolic inversion of the roles of “victim” and “perpetrator” of violence. In the view of mainstream Whites, the police become the victims who have to *deal with* pathological Black subjects, Black males, the perpetrators, who are menaces to society. Because such a victim-perpetrator relationship has already been established, with public sympathy overwhelmingly in favour of the cops for putting their lives in danger, the cops are seen as potential victims of Black suspects or as being potentially victimized by them and thus their actions towards the Black male suspect are not only excused, but these are also legitimized to “beat, crucify, fondle, and shove” the perpetrator (Brand 165). In these circumstances, what evades such analysis of legitimization are the power relations animating the relation between the supposed victim and the alleged perpetrator.

It is this alleged “criminality” that leads to the sexual violence enacted on and endured by BJ. The eighteen-year old BJ, unlike the twenty-four-year old Oku, does not resist in his second arrest nor does he explicitly express the masochistic pleasure that Oku expresses during his play of passion. However, like Oku, BJ complies to the command,

Spread your legs! Spread your legs! Come! Open up! Come! Open up!” [sic]. BJ could feel the dust from the side of the cruiser which needed a wash, going into his nostrils. He could feel the policeman’s stick moving around his legs, round his crotch, up and down, up and down. He could feel the policeman’s hands, tough and personal, strong as ten pieces of bone, feel his thighs, his chest, under his arms, between his legs, and feel his penis and his testicles; and then the

ten pieces of bone spun him round, so that he now faced the policeman. BJ stood *silent* and calm as the policeman did the same thing to Marco. (187, emphasis mine)

BJ submits his body to the cops in an attempt to refuse performing a hard model of Black manhood, to avoid enacting the stereotype expected of him, to resist suffering increased molestation. He submits because to do anything else could send him into a system in which he would have to fight to get out. Nourbese Philip suggests in her essay, “Taming Our Tomorrows” that submitting to the system

is sometimes the wisest and best response in the face of such indignity...To enter the debate on the terms of [the police, those] who are also powerful and well connected to the media and other institutions that shape opinion is, however, a zero-sum game which one will always lose. Those who make the rules can be counted on to shift and change them when the game demands it. (272)

But Black men’s submission to this indignity of invasion maintains the image of the police as protectors of innocence, thereby turning the experience of Black men like Oku and BJ into a living lie. Philip in *Frontiers* also attests that, “the great Canadian void” (what I call a living lie) “either swallows you whole, or you come out the other side the stronger for it” (45). BJ is not lucky to come out from the void the stronger; instead, he is swallowed up and sent to “*the other side*” – that is, the “void” kills him²³. Although George Elliot Clarke identifies this “void” as the “sink-hole of anti-‘Coloured’ racism,” I

²³ The death of BJ explains why I disagree with Clarke when he suggests Marco also experience “the same thing” as BJ. Although there is a similarity, and it is “almost the same, but not quite (not white)” (Bhabha 86), I stand by my argument and argue that Marco’s experience does not undermine my focus on Black men and the embrace of the “pat-down.” I invoke Bhabha’s point of colonial mimicry to highlight the “lack of” menance in Marco’s “pat-down” and to suggest this mimicry is not always subversive for all subjects. When Marco mimics he lives, precisely because he is white. When BJ mimics he dies. The encounter between Black men and cops in moments of arrest is, then, like that between the colonizer and colonized: the violence towards Black men or the colonized is rarely hidden. Thereby instead of showing the limits of colonizer, as Bhabha’s theory suggests through mimicry, I suggest white men’s experience of the embrace of the “pat-down” is not the same and as Black men’s.

also see this void as the “hegemonic dismissal or peremptory annexation” that turns many Black men’s experience into a lie (“Contesting” 44, 28).

The submission of BJ’s and Oku’s Black bodies to the system of white power highlights the fusion of eroticism and aggression, of desire and hatred which Cornel West argues is the “basic ingredient of white racism” (121). Frantz Fanon, in *Black Skin, White Masks*, believes that the Black man in any “white” society is rarely perceived as racially different, yet his “darkness” represents the savagery of the jungle; he becomes an “uncontrollable beast” who embodies an excessive lust for aggression or sexuality. On the putative excessiveness of his sexuality, Fanon writes: “One is no longer aware of the Negro, but only of a penis; the Negro is eclipsed. He is turned into a penis. He is a penis” (170). BJ’s mother believes this perceived excess of sexuality or aggression leads policemen to racially profile Black men in the city. In her view, it is their attempt “to show [Black men] who had power and pull” (190). She always saw the “*police hold his truncheon, as if it was a long penis, in an everlasting erection, as if he was telling the black man, “Mine is bigger and more harder than yours!”*” (191, italics in original). BJ’s mother’s theory conveys a model of competitive masculinity. Ironically, only one of the players in this competition is interested in winning. As a result, although this game of power and play is fatal for BJ, it is important to remember that because he does not perform a “hard” model of Black masculinity or define his potency through his penis, the game of whose “penis is bigger and ... harder” does not render him powerless, since he performs a messy model of Black masculinity, one that ruptures the repetitive and normalized fiction of Black hyper-masculinity.

Through Oku's and BJ's rapturous performances of Black masculinities, overexposed moments of passion play that are now mundane are reinvented, thereby presenting new and radical models of Black masculinities. These overexposed moments of arrest attest to the silent suffering of Black men—both “hard” and “soft” masculine men—irrespective of the public spectacle of them as “hoodlums” and thus tough. This remarkable inclination to conflate “hard” masculinity—irresponsibility and recklessness, according to the media—with unfeeling is challenged in Brand and Clarke's representations of Black men. As a result, characters like Oku and BJ highlight the “shadow traipsing” that mainstream society refuses to see. Rather than read BJ and Oku's silence or embracing of violence solely as acts of passivity, since silence is commonly interpreted as consent, I tease out, from their silence, their rejection of speech. In putting BJ and Oku's silence into sentences, Brand and Clarke peel off the scars of a ritualistic fondling to allow readers to witness buried layers of festering wounds, layers which testify to the abuse that many Black men undergo at the hands of law-enforcement officers. Their tactful negotiation, retreating into non-verbal speech, is common to many survivors of police abuse. Finding ourselves trapped, we dwell in a silence of hope, hoping that our compliance with their treatment will alleviate us from their abusive treatments. In that heated moment of non-verbal speech, these Black men trouble, and perhaps even denounce, the “importance” attached to “the act of enunciation” (Trinh “Not You/Like You”). BJ's and Oku's silence, then, should not be set “in opposition with speech” alone but also be read as their “will not to say” (Trinh “Not You/Like You”) and their will to deny reductive accounts of their memoir by not speaking. Such a

reading situates BJ's and Oku's *will*—and, especially, their practice of not narrating their memoir—as expressions of their agency and autonomy. It might help you understand my reading if you attach BJ's and Oku's behaviour to Trinh Minh-Ha's idea of the “inappropriate other” (“Not You/Like You”), the “other” who refuses the position of otherness. Unlike Trinh's inappropriate other who insists on speaking and acting, Oku and BJ insist on non-speech. What links both subjects together is their refusal to *act out* over-determined expectations of who they should become. Instead, in their own ways, Oku and BJ and Trinh's “inappropriate other” carefully assess their situations and strategically choose appropriate behaviours to facilitate their safety and survival.

As I have tried to make clear in this chapter, the fates of these two men, although similar in many ways, offer only two models from a myriad of Black masculinities. Clarke's model shows adolescence in the midst of struggling for independence and identity, while Brand's model presents a Black man who, through experience, has learned how to strategically navigate the zone of combat and contact with police officers. Irrespective of which model is useful, Brand and Clarke – through Oku and BJ –break open the suffocating performances of Black men and representations of Black masculinities in Canada to articulate secrets that are the hidden truths of many Black men. (Some of these suffocating performances include the silence of arrest-as-molestation.) By examining multiple representations of Black men, especially in Brand's novel, we can develop more flexible models of and engagements with Black masculinities.

Brand's and Clarke's accounts therefore offer narratives that rehabilitate the ancient values of Black masculinities as hard, uncaring, aggressive, womanizers, patriarchal and educate readers about the consequences of fixing Blackness in monocultural stereotypes that delude us into thinking that difference automatically implies an opposition, the utterly singular on each side of a great divide. Rather, they seem to suggest that when we each bring our differences in dealing with each other into our reading of Black masculinities, the multiform nature of the *real* begins to be textured and re-textured. To add my voice to the public dialogue that Brand's and Clarke's texts allow, and to draw from my own imagination, I conclude with my spoken word piece, "Release Him," in solidarity with BJ and Oku's project to forge diasporic Black male subjectivities devoid of the limiting confines of Black masculinities and yet in conjunction with stereotypic trappings of them. These Black masculinities are riddled with contractions and contradictions. Although BJ dies at the hands of the cops, I suggest we release him from the grips of our imagination and allow him to explore his un/raveling self. We also need to release Oku so he can "remain in motion," (as Kit Dobson suggests in his readings of Oku) and not "fall prey to the limited lives offered to him" (10). I therefore suggest we

release Oku
from the spools that reel him out with ease
turning him into a spectacle
for the pleasures of y/our nightmare
release him
not
reLEASE him into an enemy that never was
he's not y/our nigger-ticker-trigger-happy
bloodthirsty insect

nor y/our ...
and even if he were ... - fuck the flashing sirens that whirl my eyes
and release him

he's the ruffle feather in your pillow:
Dreaming
the thread in y/our pants:
Tickling
the tongue down y/our throat:
ShuddeRING
the sexual freedom fighter:
resi-Sting
the words he's been told to hate:
Loving
his Black self in *your* perverse embrace:
Dismantling
the picket terrordome²⁴ of the hood:
schooling
the classes where one develops the taste of
Black as evil
man *always* violent
there and not here
us vs. them
well, well, well listen – and listen well:
Black is not evil
man is not *always* violent
Black men are not *always* criminal,
we care, love and understand
we are them as u are us

y/our nightmare might keep us in places
where *fusion* of useful lies
turn us into cinemas of denial,
juMblEs us up in myths outside our desires,
this Black man says no more, no more!
He rejects this nightmare! and
(just when you think your project is done, you bloodthirsty insect!)
screams out LOUD: release us!
Help me scream no more:
“NO MORE!

²⁴ Word taken from Public Enemy's "Welcome to the Terrordome," a record that critic Vernon Reid suggests "defend[s] [it]self." The record, he goes on to say "was in reaction to things that were being said about them [the band members] that the public didn't even know" (Tate 114).

Chapter III

Their Forgotten Songs Resound: Screening Effects of Gun Violence and Black Masculinities on Black Women in Charles Officer's *Short Hymn, Silent War* (2003)

I

Their story began a long time ago...

So long it stretches back to the days of slavery. before the castled misunderstanding that currently stands between Black mothers/women²⁵ and Black men and sons.

It began like this:

“When I was young, my mother use to tell me, not a day will pass that God didn’t smile down at *all* his children. She said one day *we* will all meet at the same place, that it would be a long walk, a good walk, a peaceful walk,” thus says Officer’s narrator in his film *Short Hymn Silent War* (SHSW) in the opening scene. He continues, “She told me, that all your armour will fall to your feet and keep falling because the heavens didn’t have floors. And the light, she said the light, is the most beautiful light in this place” (Officer). But until that day comes, my own mother would remind me, if she were to hear this story, the “we” in Charles Officer’s unidentified narrator’s story does not and will not always include me.

When *I* was young, in my teen years, my mother used to say, and continues to say to me,

²⁵ I use the compound phrase Black mothers/women since I do not know any Black woman who has not mothered or cared for or worried about a Black man before and to remind myself that mothers do not cease from being women after giving birth. To explain why I conflate the terms Black mothers and women, I turn to a paragraph from James Baldwin’s last published work, *The Evidence of Things Not Seen*. Baldwin, speaking of a “peculiar disease to the Black community called ‘sorriness,’” writes:

It is a disease that attacks Black males. It is transmitted by Mama, whose – and it is not hard to see why – is to protect the Black male from the devastation that threatens him the moment he declares himself a man. All of our mothers, and all of our women, live this small, doom-laden bell in the skull, silent, waiting or resounding, every hour of every day. Mama lays this burden on Sister, from whom she expects (or indicates she expects) far more than she expects from Brother. (19)

wise one,
taken too soon from the land of your people,
wise up!
on this land
where you are seen as a Black boy,
where everything will happen to you,
never forget, as you enjoy the sunrise and sunsets,
the lavender trees covering native lands,
that you want to become
(and I will make sure
you grow up to become) a responsible Black man.
So *please* walk with care,
play with care
love with care.

These descriptive and almost prophetic words, given to us by both our mothers, frame the beginning of Charles Officer's²⁶ film and my response to it. These words significantly highlight the conjoined (if not symbiotic) subjectivities between Black mothers/women and men. Conjoined here suggests a subjectivity where you don't just add on to something (that would be repressing that something) but that that something remains independent while co-existing and co-depending, whether antagonistically or harmoniously. These stories from two Black mothers act as guidance to Black sons living in a white supremacist and white-normative society, a society that targets them for destruction, a society that attacks (and steals?) all things Black. In the face of these attacks, remembering the words of our mothers is key to our survival.

²⁶ Charles Officer, born and raised in Toronto, is an emerging filmmaker and actor who respectively studied Visual Art and theatre at Cambridge University in the UK and at the Neighborhood Playhouse School of Theatre in New York City. He also graduated from the Ontario College of Art + Design (OCAD). Besides *Silent Hymn Short War*, Officer has also directed three other films: *Hotel Babylon* (2005), *Pop Song* (2003), and *When Morning Comes* (2000). Besides Officer's unique cinematic storytelling, attentively narrating emotions through multiple mediums (poetry, music, theatre), what attracts me to the bulk of his production is his unrelenting commitment to address complex issues facing many African-Canadian communities.

II

I write this chapter against the backdrop of “The Year of the Gun.” As chapter one demonstrates, 2005 witnessed TV news, newspapers, and webcam news offering tabloid/tableau narratives of Black masculinities and made or reinforced linkages between Blackness, criminality, youth, and masculinity. Had reporters rewound the news outlets to two years before “The Year of the Gun” and listened to the songs of Charles Officer’s 2003 film *Short Hymn, Silent War*—a film that offers a timely yet complex narrative of gun violence and Black Canadian masculinities, they would have avoided the moral panic that spread among Torontonians. Officer’s *Silent Hymn, Short War* addresses Black women’s intervention in Black masculinities and shows the mutual effects that Black men and women have on each other, a topic that has received little critical attention. Rewind further back to Austin Clarke’s 1992 essay, “Public Enemies: Police Violence and Black Youth,” or to his short story, “Sometimes A Motherless Child,” also published in the same year, and you will learn that 2005 was not the only “Year of the Gun.” In 2005, before this absurd declaration was made, Dionne Brand, in *What We All Long For*, also highlighted the blazing effects of gun violence and Black masculinity and in so doing she remarkably identified the burden that Black women—with their Black sons—shoulder in instances of gun violence. Although this chapter focuses primarily on Officer’s film to draw attention to the precarious position of Black women in dealing with Black-on-Black crime, particularly the fear that they will lose their sons, I occasionally draw from Brand’s and Clarke’s texts to demonstrate the similarity of Black mothers’/women’s fear for Black men in the diaspora.

III

Short Hymn, Silent War is a poetic 19-minute film that articulates the painful effects of gun violence in Toronto on Black Canadian women. This award-winning film²⁷ persuasively notes the feelings of entrapment and despair that Black women undergo when Black men encounter the law. Set around an accidental shooting (instigated by an undercover cop) in an apartment hallway, the film tells the story of Mother Mary Edwards, the mother of Samuel, the murdered Black man; Ruth, the now-widowed and single mother; Hannah, the sister of Peter, the Black youth who shoots Samuel; and Grandmother Grace, the surrogate mother to both Peter and Hannah. The film traces the losses experienced by these women and ultimately makes visible their previously invisible burden of mothering Black men. By not focusing on the “facts” of Black crime, as reporters do, but on the *effects* and *affects* these crimes have on a community, Officer moves away from the narratives offered through the mainstream media so he can powerfully (re)present Black-on-Black violence without reducing the complexity of this topic to journalistic frenzy. For example, Officer, through the character of Hannah, provides the viewing audience with Peter’s narrative. Hannah tells us

he wanted to have the world’s loudest symphony orchestra
with speakers positioned in the four corners of the earth
he’d have them play and play
until the people stopped fighting
ten battle fields
until dust enters (Officer)²⁸

²⁷ *Short Hymn, Silent War* was nominated for the Genie awards in 2002. The film won both the Special Jury Citation Award for Best Canadian Short Film at the 2002 Toronto International Film Festival and the Best Direction and Screenwriting by the Black Film and Video Network.

²⁸ Since I did not have access to a transcript of this film, I cite quotations from the film as poem (with the exception of the introduction) because of the poetic nature of the film’s dialogue.

Hannah's account of her brother's dream becomes Officer's attempt to intervene in and overturn the twisted logic and power relations of representation of criminalized Black men in public discourse. He overlays a "simple" and well known story of Black men and crime with affective meaning and sets up a narrative that powerfully compels his audience's attention. The result is a beautifully shot visual and musical drama that weaves the thoughts, hopes, and memories of four African-Canadian women. Officer's intervention complicates the mediations in representation to lay out a few important points: (1) he shows how these Black women's lives are altered when gun violence claims the lives of two young Black men; (2) he undermines the normalized film fabric of narrating Black-on-Black crime and offers a site upon which to examine the widely accepted myths which imbue Canadian consciousness, in particular, that Black men kill other Black men; (3) he debunks the all-male purview of these myths, thereby showing the effects of gun violence on Black women; and most important, (4) he removes the blocks that prevent viewers from witnessing the effects of gun violence between Black masculinities on Black women. Adopting a non-linear narrative sequence, one that perhaps mimics a participant's disjointed or disordered memory of events, the filmic vocabulary—that is, the multiple cinematic/narrative mediums ranging from poetry, music, to theatre, used to direct the characters, actions, plot, and themes in *Short Hymn Silent War*—rather significantly complements Officer's representation of the psychological effects that gun violence and Black masculinity have on Black women.

IV

African-American critic and writer James Baldwin in *The Evidence of Things Not Seen*²⁹ makes it clear that “Mama loves her son and raises her daughter.” By saying that “all of our mothers, and all of our women” live to “protect the Black male from the devastation that threatens him the moment he declares himself a man,” Baldwin is calling attention to the “silent, waiting [and] resounding” suffering of Black mothers/women (19). To address this under theorized evidence of suffering that links Black men and sons to the mother figure by using the term “conjoined subjectivity,” I will begin by laying out some existing work on gender relations between Black women and men as well as explaining the term “conjoined” before moving on to demonstrate how Charles Officer’s film allows us to depart, or take a different path from, reified Black gendered subjectivities that insist on individuality as opposed to conjoined subjectivities.

Although slave histories give accounts of how theories of inferiority and immorality were attached to Black people in order to legitimate our enslavement, Michele Wallace re-examines these histories in *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*. She eye-openly traces—from slavery to Black liberation movements in the 50’s and 60’s—how the “superwoman” syndrome hides the *blues* of Black women. Wallace determinedly argues that “it was slavery that [produced] the myth of the superwoman” (130). According to Wallace’s study, “a network of lies developed...after the constitutional ban on slave importation, which took effect in 1808” (137), as a strategy to align Black mothers/women with “mythical strengths” (155). One of these

²⁹ This book investigates the Atlanta child murders of the early 1980s involving a Black man, Wayne Williams.

networks of lies reinforced “the notion of the [B]lack man as the sexual victim of ‘matriarchal’ tyranny” (13). Because Black women were not submissive, worked most frequently, and did not rely on Black men to provide for them, they did not fit comfortably into the hegemonic definition of a woman. The image that emerges from this figure of the matriarch was not just an image of a strong Black woman, but “a ‘strong [B]lack woman’ [who] precluded the existence of a strong [B]lack man, or indeed, any [B]lack ‘man’ at all” (Wallace 31). Deploying this form of strategic marginalization against Black mothers/women was necessary because Black mothers/women increasingly “endangered the prevailing notion of women as weak and helpless, and thus the whole system of oppression of women” (150). They worked and still work, wore and continue to wear the “pants” in many Black households. Having sharpened their tongues on the blade of oppression, they fought back. As a result, what better way to keep them in check, working them for little or no monetary compensation, than to label them to be “emotionally callous...physically invulnerable...sexually promiscuous” (Wallace 138)?

Completely mirroring the image of Black mothers/women with the term “superwoman” was and still is a lucrative business of white (as viciously deployed in the 1965 Moynihan Report) and Black patriarchy. This trope of the superwoman corresponds, of course, to the complete exclusion of Black mothers/women in social relations. Black cultural theorists such as bell hooks, Wesley Crichtlow, and Kobena Mercer have all pointed out that the driving force behind the civil rights movement was not equality between genders but a kind of superiority, “a romantic manifestation of Black manhood, the Black macho” (Wallace 35, 36). Black men wanting to raise their

status in White America during the civil rights movement established a normative model of patriarchal Black masculinity and reinforced some of the historical tensions between them and Black women. As bell hooks writes, “the black power movement has, since the 1960s, worked overtime to let sisters know that they should assume a subordinate role to lay the groundwork for an emergent black patriarchy that would elevate the status of black males” (“Reconstructing” 79). Wallace suggests that “Black Macho allowed for only the most primitive notion of women—women as possessions, women as the spoils of war, leaving black women with no resale values. As a possession, the [B]lack woman was a symbol of defeat, and therefore of little use to the revolution except as the performer of drudgery (not unlike her role in slavery)” (68). The argument of Black gendered subjectivity that I am trying to engage with is that the “superwoman” figure of slave history—the mother who endured and provided hope when dignity was under attack on all sides—was resented or seen as smothering to the agency of Black men, who compensated for their emasculation under slavery by over-hyping their masculinity (over-performing phallogentrism) during the civil rights movement and thus consigning the superwoman to the margins of the political and social.

V

I attach the term “conjoined” to “subjectivity” to address the physical (umbilical code), emotional (love) and the symbolic jointure that ties Black mothers/women to Black sons’ life. I focus on the mutual inter- or co-dependency—both literal and symbolic—of communion or conjoinedness, that bell hooks suggests is and has been a “valuable” resource to the “collective ... survival” of Black people, especially during times of crisis

(*Yearning* 206). Conjoined subjectivity then emphasizes patterns of co-dependency that strengthen Black mothers'/women's capacity to validate their sons and men. The theory of conjoined subjectivity also calls attention to the communal ethics of co-dependency, the bond of mutual interdependency, that is necessary for surviving in this kind of "crabs-in-the-bucket" capitalistic white supremacist society.

African-American critic Cathy J. Cohen's invocation of Michael Dawson's idea of linked fate—"the struggles of other [B]lack people are purported to represent what can happen to any of us" (Cohen xi)—in *The Boundaries of Blackness: AIDS and the Breakdown of Black Politics*, describes the historical struggle that I suggest. This "shared consciousness," Cohen suggests, "comes[s] to serve as crucial, if not essential, resources in efforts at group mobilization" (10).

VI

In noting the degree to which conjoined subjectivity highlights the point of connection between Black mothers/women and men, it is important to remember the disheartening fact that most injustices experienced by either Black mothers/women or Black men are never independent, always interactive. Moreover, it is also important to remember that this interaction of experience is rarely a reciprocal exchange. Black mothers/women carry the brunt of woes inherent in conjoined subjectivity. Since I will address this unequal emotional and psychological burden in Officer's film later in this chapter, let me provisionally call attention to how this subjectivity departs from the independent and individualistic vision of being and articulate a Black-on-Black co-dependency which has been, historically speaking, and continues to be crucial to us surviving the oppressive

blows of white supremacist conditioning. This model of co-dependency offers a subjectivity antithetical to Western traditions of autonomy. The practice of self-support, of independence, which has become an entrenched fallacy of high demand in capitalist societies' envisioning of the self, fails to explain the irrecoverable and unrepresentable loss of communion, a loss Officer's film visually articulates. I do not mean to say that conjoined subjectivity is about smothering the other with uncritical compassion; rather, I wish to suggest that anxiety towards conjoinedness, which leads to painful separation, calls to attention our valorized and fetishized sense of independence.

For example, the Black son/man who does not fit the existing constructs of manly embodiment—meaning a Black man or boy who maintains a loving and close relationship with his mother, who resists this separation—is accused of not severing the ties to his mother's apron and becomes labeled a "mama's boy." In these instances, feminizing masculinity expresses the anxiety towards co-dependency. Connecting the concept of "mama's boy" and perhaps even "mothafucka"³⁰ to the model of "hard" and "soft" masculinities laid out in my previous chapter, let me provisionally suggest that there is a misguided idea that promises to transform Black men into "real" men if they confront *the man*, in this case shoot a police officer (as Officer's Peter tries to do). The

³⁰ The phrases "mama's boy" along with the epithet "mothafucka" both register the anxiety of separation. Both concepts invoke men's familial bonds with the mother figure. While one suggests a regression to the womb, so to speak, and the other, also a regression, but instead of the returning to the womb, the "mothafucka," taken literally, *violates* the taboos of incest (a form of regression) and goes for the "pussy"—after all Black women are "really *more* of a woman... [They] are "the embodiment of Mother Earth, the quintessential mother with infinite sexual, life-giving, and nurturing reserves. In other words, she is a superwoman" (Wallace 107). I am aware "mama's boy" and "mothafucka" lend themselves to psychoanalysis. However, since psychoanalysis, as a reading tool, is insufficient by itself for reading Black subjects, I need more time to think through these concepts rather than "superficially impose" (hooks, *Yearning* 227) strands of psychoanalysis on to my readings of Black Canadian male subjects—and I will do this work after completing this thesis.

misguided promise of keepin' it real, of performing hard masculinities, is then an ideology that traps some of us within ourselves. Having internalized this bequeathed promise, we forget to remember the conjoined subjectivity we share with Black mothers/women.

VII

Before focusing analysis on Officer's film, it is important to call attention to how Officer's line of theorizing gun violence and Canadian Black masculinities capitalizes on a specific Canadian register of Blackness, which does the work of pursuing, what George Elliot Clarke labels in his essay "Contesting a Model of Blackness," "a modal [B]lackness" (43). In this essay, Clarke traces the relations between African-American playwright Ntozake Shange's *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/ When the Rainbow is Enuf* (1977) and Ahdri Zhina Mandiela's play *Dark Diaspora ... in Dub* (1991). Mandiela's play, according to Clarke, illustrates how African-Canadian cultural producers interact with (and differ from) African-American models. Clarke points out that although Mandiela's play "pays Shange the outright compliment of echoing" (52) *For Colored Girls's* themes and structures, Mandiela's Jamaican language and dub tradition makes her depart from Shange. To indicate this departure, Clarke notes that Mandiela's language differs most radically from Shange's because she "resists realism" (55) and uses "abstract slogans" rather than "personalized depictions of pain and oppression" (55).

Like Mandiela, who says her "Mother tongue, being Jamaican, gives [her] a definite perspective on language" (qtd. in Clarke, "Contesting" 53), Officer's training at

the Neighborhood Playhouse School of Theatre in New York City and his studies at both the Visual Art at Cambridge University and OCAD run alongside, in this production, to give his film a definite, however ignored, perspective on the relationship between Black mothers/women and Black men. This perspective signals his departure from African-American filmmakers, such as John Singleton, who also address gun-related violence and Black masculinities. Watching *Short Hymn, Silent War* I could not help but be reminded of Singleton's *Boyz N the Hood* (1991) since both films address similar themes: (1) both are concerned with constructions of Black masculinities; and (2) both films address Black-on-Black gun-related violence within Black communities. What differentiates Officer's work from Singleton's is that rather than produce the masculinized blueprint representation of the "hood films," Officer's filmic formula adopts a more "intellectual" or "academic" approach in his representations—George Elliot Clarke identifies this form of representation as the Canadian abstract poetic *mélange* of Black identity ("Contesting" 56).

For example, the expressive styles used in the two films differ. While Singleton's adopts the Black vernacular "stylin'," which focuses attention on the performer rather than what they say, Officer's film stages a poetic play: a filmic-play that ungrounds the ground of realism—those representations that assume a fixed position on the subject of gun violence and Black masculinities. With a script "more symbolic, more poetic," Officer insists that we "decipher the images to really understand what is being said" (Instell qtd. in Clarke 56). The violence committed is no longer then informed by the subject's desire but has to be situated in context. Such textured and animated

representation of Canadian Black (male)ness and gun-related violence practices what Houston Baker Jr. called “mastery of form” and “deformation of mastery” (qtd. in Clarke, “Contesting” 61). This poetic style of representation is not only characteristic of the ongoing questioning of a stable African-Canadian identity and reality, a condition Clarke refers to as African Canadianité (46), it also conforms to Clarke’s assertion that the violence that African-Canadians deal with is more internal (rather than external as it is down South) and thus has “a kind of slow madness” to it (Instell qtd. in Clarke 56).

VIII

Breaking the linear framework of temporality over the course of 19 minutes—that is, no longer being tied to a representational continuity of a beginning, middle and an ending—Charles Officer’s film denies viewing audiences the “comfort[able] illusion that one knows where one goes” (Trinh, “Woman” 1), and also explicitly questions the conventional boundaries of narration, of history, and of memory, to disturb the framework used to address gun violence in the film world. From this perspective, Officer seems to be suggesting that the power of representation exceeds the power of narration. The aesthetics and politics of Officer’s representation, one can suggest, “goes beyond the opaque surfaces to narrate the complicated stories” (Hirsch 7) edging outside conventional representations of Black-on-Black violence. This representational practice of anachrony explains the ease with which Officer’s film oscillates between, or rather, extends well into the past, the present and the future, thereby undercutting the chronological confinements of gun violence that cage mainstream imagination. Officer’s technique of moving through time and space, of highlighting the importance of non-

audible speech as well as speech (since we learn of his characters' inner monologues through voice-overs), of fantasy and reality, is then not his attempt to confuse or mystify his audience but to resist realism and emphasize the dual presences and absences present in all representations. A testament to this technique is the circular movement, or rather the circular form of story telling he courts when narrating the traumatic experiences of the four African-Canadian women around Peter and Samuel's encounter. Such a break with the binary discussions between absence and presence, visibility and invisibility, speech and non-speech, objective and subjective, is what Officer achieves in making visible what has kept Black women's psychological trauma invisible.

IX

Given the fact that *Short Hymn, Silent War* thrives on visual and narrative discontinuities that elicit a feeling of instability, it comes as a surprise that there is a stability and constancy to Officer's representation of Black women's grief in this film. Their mourning, melancholy, and disgust towards gun violence remain a constant thread that stitches the many fragmented scenes together. These messy emotions—grief, despair, yearning, desire—all emphatically document the messy conjoined subjectivity between Black mothers/women and Black sons as well as with one another. As viewers, we witness the burden and blessing, the delight and disaster of Black mothers/women knowing Black men. These messy emotions inhabit the film's fabric and convey a continual sense of melancholy. This festering melancholic feeling is maintained through the music that holds viewers captive.

Because the hymn of violence towards Black men is well-known and well-liked, the songs that narrate the effects of gun-violence on Black women seem new and thus are ignored. We do not hear Black mothers'/women's hymns because they are the "melody-less" and "unseen performances." When seen they become "interrupted solos," or songs "with no singers lyrics" (Shange, *For Colored Girls*, qt. in Wallace 171). *Short Hymn, Silent War* offers melodic and an uninterrupted hymns that move Black Canadian women's songs away from the captivity of *the* Black woman's creativity (the superwoman who can bear/bare everything), into a complicated world that simultaneously shows her strength, in times of chaos, but also her weakness, as a result of gun-related violence by and on African Canadian men. (Wallace rightfully notes that, in the Black woman's "real" life, "creativity and violence simply could not thrive in each other's company" (42).) My reading of these hymns are that Black sons in Toronto are mothered to be murdered (through police brutality); are mothered so they can murder each other (due to intra-racialized tensions and economic deprivations); and are mothered to be accused of murdering due to years of racism. These murders allow us to glimpse the lasting effects of gun violence on the conjoined subjectivity between Canadian Black mothers/women and their sons.

X

One significant effect of violence on Black women comes across through the perpetual state of melancholy that clings to these women. This tedium—a symptom of grief—is

rooted in the sorrowful song³¹ that anchors the film's melancholic mood. I use the term melancholic instead of mournful to describe the mood of the film since melancholy entails "an ambivalent incorporation of the object as a strategy for keeping one's argument with it going and results in a sense of inner desolation, an incapacity to form new attachments, and a self-beratement whose unconscious target is the internalized object" (Forster 134).

Defining melancholia for the racialized subject, Chinese-American theorist Anne Anlin Cheng identifies the deeply "convoluted, ongoing, generative, and at times self-contradicting negotiation with pain" (15) that chronically haunts racialized subjects. For Cheng, this racial pain, what she terms "racial melancholia," is "the internalization of discipline and rejection – and the installation of a scripted context of perception" (17). In the racially melancholic context of the film, one can say melancholia is welcomed only for it to manifest itself as "racial grief" (Cheng 23). Here the racial grief (sadness) expressed by these Black women is "a kind of ambulatory despair" (Cheng 24). Reading this painful experience of racialized grief as "internal," "generative," "disciplined," "contradictory" explains the four women's inability "to form new attachments" with each other and helps us understand their sense of "inner desolation" and "self-beratement." In the context of *Short Hymn Silent War*, these characteristics, conjointly, highlight the strategies Black mothers/women adopt to survive; it also speaks to the physical separation of Black women/mothers conjoined relations with Black men/sons.

³¹ I refer to this song as Mary O'Brien since the production credits does not mention its title. This should not be confused with Samuel's mother. I use her full name, Mother Mary Edwards, with each reference I make to her.

In order to hold onto the perpetual intimacy and the ritualistic (or repetitious) embodiment with their internalized lost object—the object that makes melancholy a powerful emotion—these grieving Black mothers/women refuse to acknowledge the connection that already binds them. Surely, the internalized lost object in this film is the lost of Black men/sons. Yet, this internalized lost object is also the *fear* that these Black mothers/women hold for Black sons. They cannot let go easily because they have internalized this fear so often they no longer know how to let go. Because they are potentially trapped in their compulsion to repeatedly and melancholically hold onto their lost object, however introjectedly, these four Black mothers/women develop a disciplined self-denigration towards that lost object. For these women, losing Black sons and brothers and lovers and grandsons continue to take hold over them because, as Cheng points out, the common response to racial melancholia is self-denigration—yearning and mourning becomes its manifestation. Equally manifested to viewers is the conjoined (incorporated) denigration expressed towards themselves (as mothers, wives, sisters, and grandmothers) and Black men/sons. Although these four Black women communicate their inability or unwillingness to accept their “loss,” their refusal to let go—which comes across through flashbacks—foreclose for viewers “the subjectivity of [their] melancholic object” (Cheng 13), Black men/sons, and gives us the opportunity to be aware that Black men’s safety is “a *never possible* perfection” (Cheng 18, emphasis mine). Perhaps these four African-Canadian women no longer know how to let go because they are motivated by a desire to see what Cheng calls the “racialized other”; the other who is “both a melancholic object and a melancholic subject, both the one lost and the one losing” (17).

Telling, then, are these Black mothers’/women’s refusal to form new attachments in the cold courthouse scene. Sitting on a bench in the court’s hallway, the four Black women find themselves separated by wide distance. At one point, these women are physically blocked by the presence of a White male police officer. The symbolic nature of this blocking is not to attest to Officer’s training in theatre but highlights a breakage in Black collective conjoinedness. What would it mean for me to suggest that Peter and Samuel’s separation from Black women allows the possibility of a bridge to span the gap separating these four Black women who were once strangers? Does the physical distance between these Black women at the courthouse signal the physical separation from their sons? Is this symbolic of their resistance to bridge the gap or heal from the painful wound that separation creates?

X

I focus on the effects that gun violence and Black masculinities have on Black mothers/women mothering because motherhood does not figure in Black politics the same way it does in other forms of identity politics. bell hooks writes that although motherhood is a locus of “white, middle class, college-educated, women’s oppression” (133), this is not true for Black women/mothers. She continues:

[B]lack women voiced their views on motherhood, it would not have been named a serious obstacle to our freedom as women. Racism, availability of jobs, lack of skills or education...would have been at the top of the list—but not motherhood (133).

Although it is important to remember that the rhythm of the sorrowful hymn, “Mary O’Brien,” adds an aesthetic, political, and spiritual dimension to the film, it restricts

Black women to the discourse of superwoman-ness.

oh Mary-O'Brien, Mary don't cry, oh Mary don't shed no tear no more. Mary-O'Brien, Mary don't cry, oh Mary don't shed no tear no, no more. I know you have trails, and tribulations, but don't shed no tears no more. One day it will be brighter, and you'll find salvation, so Mary, don't shed no tears no more.
(emphasis added)

Masked in religious tone and expression, the words and music of this song do not describe characteristics unique to Canadian Black (woman)ness; instead, they are characteristic of the woes of African diasporic women generally. The attitude is always the same: Mary O'Brien is asked to shed no more tears. She is asked to exercise patience and wait for "one day," for a "brighter" day, for "salvation." She is asked to defer her hymn of grief for the future. She is asked to stifle her tears, and although not mentioned, she is also asked to be a superwoman. Consider how Maxine Tyne, an Africadian poet, represents the Black woman in her poem "Black Teacher: To This World, To My Students."

there stands the image of Black woman

Mother
Proud
Strong
Fighting
Caring

reaching out for the future
grasping it defiantly for her children
defying and denying the ravages of
time's artful and awesome challenges of her Black strength (44)

Although these characteristics of Black womanhood as proud mother, as teacher, as lover, as helper, as nurturer, as revolutionist, and as fighter, are all positive in its representation, the poem's quickness to celebrate Black women as strong individuals overshadows and perhaps *defies* and *denies* the complex and unique position in which

Black mothers/women find themselves. The fact that some of them find themselves de-centered, devalued, and disempowered in this patriarchal society needs to be acknowledged. Such poetic assertions of strength neglect to acknowledge that the *nightmare and fear* that many Black mothers/women hold for every Black man “last forever” (Officer). Literary works such as these do not call attention to

Black mothers’
pain of seeing
black boyz shipped to places they fear to visit
places they know will treat them like dogs
like criminals.

Neither the song nor Tynes’s poem acknowledges the nightmare that plagues mothers of Black sons, wives of Black men and sisters of Black men: that Black men will have an altercation with the police—worse: that they will be involved or get accused of being involved in gun violence or drug trafficking. BJ’s mother, from Austin Clarke’s “Sometimes A Motherless Child,” calls attention to this nightmare by asking Mr. Petrochuck, her landlord, to “check on” BJ and make sure he does not “skip school” (170). Her nightmare, which came in the form of a warning to her son was this: “living in this place with all the things happen[ing] to [B]lack people, to men and boys like” (171) you best wise up and not become another statistic, (a warning that I am sure you remember me receiving from my parents, too). Because violence, “the actuality or the threat of death or serious injury from assault, has constituted an ever-present reality in practically [all B]lack communit[ies] and for practically every [B]lack person’s life” (Shapiro xii), BJ’s mother’s warning is urgent. Also, I advocate that we bring into dialogue these (clichéd) celebrations of Black women’s strength alongside the unsung

terrifying experiences of grief and loss that many Black mothers, women, sisters, friends, and activists experience so that we can listen to the bittersweet songs that these dialogues communicate. How might these positionings operate as conjoined subjectivities that are not necessarily oppositional? And what is at stake in these different claims for Black women?

XI

Unlike Mary O'Brien's stifled tears, which symbolize the Black woman's silent struggle,

Officer's Mother Mary Edwards cries her tears and shows her "trials and tribulations."

Her tears on screen accentuate Black mothers/women's struggle in raising a child,

particularly a Black son, in the diaspora. Teaching, by telling, us to

wipe our tears,
wash our face,
our ears,
our hair (Officer)

not only signals the lessons that our mothers teach us, but speaks to the normally

unrewarded duties of domestic labour. Mother Mary Edward's hymn of grief challenges

the oppressive paradigm of sexism, racism, and classism. She also challenges the system

that requires her to

cook
clean
iron
and admit to no one her troubles.
feel shame for explaining.

Although I am tempted to suggest that she does not show her tears to ask for help but to conclude that all that is written about her is inaccurate and stereotypical, I am reminded that her tears are private at the level of the narrative (alone in her bedroom) and that they are made public by Officer and his camera. On this point, I am again reminded that the co-dependency between Black mothers/women and Black men offers “that space of recognition and understanding, where we know one another so well, our histories, that we can take the bits and pieces, the fragments of who we are, and put them back together, remember them” (hooks, *Yearning* 214). In this reciprocal conjoined relationship, neither femininity nor masculinity is disenfranchised or is made to tag *along* for the ride in the economy of subjectivity. Rather, out of this space of recognition and understanding comes a reconstruction site for Black femininities and masculinities, one that wants nothing to do with refurbishing assumptions of (Black) patriarchal manhood but more to do with the collective mingling of feminine *and* masculine imagination to create “healthy” relationships. What these “healthy” relations entail is the promise of taking care of each other. Thus, although it is Officer and his camera that shows Mother Mary Edward’s tears, a Black male filmmaker takes care of a Black mother and reminds us that it is still her dried tears that leave a mark that exposes the blanks and silences that remain after mothered Black men are murdered by gun violence.

XII

Returning to the sorrowful hymn, let’s focus on the provocative title of Officer’s film. In a few words, the title – *Short Hymn, Silent War* – communicates a powerful and destructive truth, albeit secretly. We do not see the title until a few minutes into the film.

The title appears on screen after hearing Samuel recount the lessons his mother has taught him. This layering in narration, of hearing the Black son recount his mother's lessons rather than hearing her do so herself, constitutes Officer's coupled approach to highlight the bond between African-Canadian men and women as well as the precarious position of invisibility and silence in which these women find themselves. It is after seeing an army of Black men walk freely through the promised land that we see the title; but we see just that: the title. Beneath the title, we see the hands, not the face, of a Black mother/woman, we see hands in labour, taking care of her son, but we do not see her. We hear about her but do not see her. We learn later whose hands those were: those of Mother Mary Edwards³². Officer reminds the viewing audience, through the mobility of Mother Mary Edward's hands, that there is a rhythmic movement in Black women's silence. These movements are precise even if they are short and sometimes go unnoticed. For example, in the courthouse scene, Grandmother Grace and Hannah both divert their eyes to the floor when Mother Mary looks their way. This move, which marks and frames the relationship between these women, communicates Grandmother Grace's and Hannah's hymn of shame for Peter's action. Further, it highlights the rich hymn of silence that

³² One dimension that is quite striking in *Short Hymn, Silent War* is the attention the camera focuses on the joined hands of Black mothers/women and Black sons/men. For me, the hand becomes an emblem of the interconnections between Black mothers/women and their sons. I can't help but read onto the hands a tight bond, one so tight it's unbreakable and yet so tight that it contrains. For example, Mother Mary Edward slaps Peter in the courthouse as well as takes care of Samuel in the opening scene; Grandmother Grace prays with fistled hands as well as holds the hands with the two boys who played cops and thieves and prays with them; Hannah tightly holds Peter's dream book in her hands and narrates his dreams to us; Ruth holds her baby and receives a hand from Mother Mary Edward; Peter's hands kill; Samuel's hands love. Perhaps, in each case, Officer wants us to be aware of the multiplied mediated process of narration, or of the many hands that sustain a community. Most importantly, though, we witness that there is labour in conjoined subjectivities.

Black women have learned and thus are now able to detect the unedited or mediated songs of grief that they don't often talk about.

Like the names of the five characters, the title, has a religious undertone/subtext. If, as I understand, a hymn is a song that praises the Creator, a song that introduces a history as well as highlights the importance of that history, then Officer's *Short Hymn, Silent War* introduces the silent histories around Black Canadian mothers/women's relationship with Black men at the same time that it offers praise to these women for their labour of love: that of continuously supporting Black men. Although Officer does not explicitly ask, "why this war?" he nevertheless addresses its effects.

XIII

One effect of Black mothers'/women's unheard song is finally heard in the powerful courthouse scene of *Short Hymn, Silent War*. This scene brings together, for the first time, the four women affected by this accidental shooting. In the same space, Ruth and Mother Mary, the widow and mother of the murdered Samuel, get a chance to face Peter, the young Black man who committed the murder. As Peter is being walked to the courthouse by a white police officer to hear judgment of his fate, Mother Mary Edwards confronts Peter in a lucid fantasy scene. In this fantasy scene, she stands as opposed to the previous scene where she falls into a chair when she learns of Samuel's death. The effect of this juxtaposition is to show the control she has on her own projective experience. Mother Mary Edwards walks up to Peter, and without saying a word, slaps him, and proceeds to hold him in a tight embrace (for twenty seconds). Still embracing

him, she begins to cry. Without reducing this powerful moment of contestation in the film to an echo of the stereotypical representation of the super Black woman, one might argue that *Short Hymn, Silent War* is inlaid with an image of the paradoxical state of love-hate in Black women for Black men. This paradox is heightened by Officer's deliberate cultivation of *absented fathers*. (Questions worth thinking about are why Mother Mary Edwards' performance takes place in a fantasy world—is not the fantasy a way of drawing a distance between her emotional impulses of mixed anger and compassion and her public performance, since she doesn't really engage with Peter? If so, why is it (important) that the audience sees her performance and the characters in the film don't?)

For the duration of the embrace, one cannot help but bear witness to the intimate combination of criticism and affection with which Mother Mary Edwards envelopes Peter. By reading from Officer's scenes of the boys playing shoot-em-up in the living room into Mother Mary Edwards' embrace, one can argue Officer "conjoins" these two scenes in order for viewers to critique Peter for "singing songs of the gun" (Broox 89), for allowing himself to become "an endangered species" (Brand, *What* 48), and becoming another statistic. The grief-stricken hug, although it is in a fantasy world, suggests that she situates Black-on-Black crime and the shooting of her son in a complex set of historical and mythic power relations. She understands how the lives of many Black children are determined by ghetto crime or violence and unemployment.

Although Mother Mary Edwards' imagined embrace of Peter falls in line with the extraordinary strengths that supposedly enable Black women to withstand extreme amounts of depression, grief, and pain, it is important not to forget how these same tropes

of strength, which have become the *duty* that weakens Black women, also speak of a silence that traps Black mothers/women. Neither can we forget how Mother Mary Edward's resounding fear and sorrow are delayed another day. Through tears she asks, "how can it be another day?" She further asks, "what kind of birth is this?" a birth that dies before its time. We cannot forget that she dwells in a "quiet[ness];" she tells us this quietness "lasts forever" (Officer). And most definitely, we cannot forget the painful process of a parent mourning for a child. I conclude that in losing their sons Black women/mothers like Mother Mary Edwards, Grandmother Grace also lose part of themselves.

XIV

To address the effects that gun violence (in this film) and Black masculinities have on Black Canadian women, it is important to examine, even provisionally, the recurrent construction of Black women as creators and protectors of (the health of) Black communities and masculinities and to show how these narrative tropes of Black female strength not only situate Black Women as Great Mothers, or in Michele Wallace's words "superwomen," (which then allow mainstream society to continually ignore the pleas of Black mothers), but also help critics understand the conjoined subjectivity between Black mothers/women and Black men/sons.

Since Canadian culture at best is indifferent to Black (male) subjects, and at worst criminalizes us, especially Black sons, Black mothers struggle to teach us to keep our "feet on ground/ heart in hand" (Arden). They do not buy into hard masculinities and continue to protect, preserve and empower us, irrespective of the racist and oppressive

environment that attempts to condition us to repress ourselves. For example, meditating on how to become a good man (father), Samuel says

teach me
teach me not to raise my fist in anger
not to be cold
not to be hard
teach me to melt into my joys
my sorrows
to show my weakness and my kindness
teach me to love
teach me to be a man (Officer)

Samuel's meditation allows him to "embrac[e] a consciousness that is simultaneously Afrocentric and feminist" (Collins 26). He embraces both his "soft" and "hard" sense of masculinities. Extending the embrace of "soft" and "hold" sense of masculinities to other men in the film, Officer also paints Peter with a similar stroke of this pro-Afro-feminist consciousness. For example, we witness Peter shed tears for making Samuel's body *dance* to his "gunsong," to the "gunmusic" that brings upon his "sudden-death sentence" (Broox 90, 91). Although one might say Peter cries only because he knows his gunmusic brings Samuel's sudden-death sentence, I suggest that a careful reading demonstrates something else. As we watch, in slow motion, the orange-uniformed-Peter walk from jail to the courtroom to receive his sentence, we hear him tell us in a voice-over:

It makes no difference
It feels less and less
Nobody to see
Nowhere to go
Everything is a big nothing
I'll be stronger than the rest (Officer)

Just when viewers think he has no remorse for shooting Samuel, our minds are changed when in an audible-speech in the courthouse he whispers "grandma," and on the cover of

the book that contained his dream he has written, “For my mothers, let us breathe life into our brilliance so you can give birth to our strength.”

Unlike films such as *Shaft* (1971/2002), or *Boyz N the Hood* that portray the rigid norms of gender identification inherited from European constructions, patriarchal performances of “hard” masculinity, where concepts of masculinity invoke aggression, strength, sexual conquest, and sexism, and femininity is associated with being passive, having feelings, and being submissive, the Black mothers/women in this movie desire that their sons embody gender qualities that are more of a synthesis or somewhere in the middle of the traditional dichotomization between masculinity and femininity. Samuel’s soliloquy removes the mask of Black machismo, or as Kyldé Broox suggests, “mas(k)culinities,” to demonstrate the process of transformation that Black men mothered by pro-feminist mothers adopt. We learn that these sons “develop new interpretations of familiar” (Collins 27) masculine traits and become critical resisters of patriarchal ideals of masculinities. Black mothers/women, like Mother Mary and Grandmother Grace, encourage, in their mothering of Black sons, a synthesis of masculine and feminine experience, thereby cultivating in the young Black men a pro-feminist approach to masculinity.

XV

Undertaking this exploratory reading of the m/othering and murdering of Black sons, it quickly became clear to me that there is a lack of critical and discursive language with which to discuss the joined relations between Black mother/woman-son/men in both (Black) feminist writings and gender studies. This neglected and unexplored topic has

denied us a lot of insight into Black mothers' role(s) in the development of Black men and masculinities. Further explorations into these anxiously occluded Black mother-son relationships, I believe, will offer possibilities for understanding the conjoined subjectivities as well as the gendered multi-generational relations between Black femininities and masculinities. If "film," according to Trinh Minh-Ha, "is time and if time is a fiction—a fictional field that can be acted on, but one that is also hosting us and changing us as we inhabit it" ("Cyborg" 28), then more time (and work) is required in this area of study.

Conclusion

A Staged Reflection: Phanael Antwi Interviews Himself

Before we even settle down and talk with each other, I have to ask this question.

Hmm hmm. Go ahead.

Thanks! With the exception of your last chapter, which calls attention to the effects of gun violence by Black masculinities on Black women, much of what you have talked about in your thesis focuses on white dominant culture's criminalization of Black masculinities. I'm asking, why is the study of Black femininities important to the study of Black masculinities?

Very important, I'd say. And thanks for asking—you seem to have picked up on the significant role that Black women have on Black men. For me, it is so important to the point that any correspondence theory of Black masculinities has to call into question Black femininities. If such a study doesn't do this, then normative Black masculinities will mask the conjoined subjectivities between Black mothers/women and Black men. We've already learned from Charles Officer's *Short Hymn, Silent War* that this masquerade highlights the unsung song of Black mothers/women and their burden of knowing the Black man. (Although I did not address this in my thesis, Dionne Brand's *What We All Long For* also addresses the conjoined subjectivities between Black mothers/women and sons/men. I'm specifically thinking about Carla's relations with Jamal, her brother and the relationship between Oku and his mother, Clara) Not to blab on further, but how can any serious study of gender focus only on masculinities? No longer can we isolate Black masculinities and identify them in opposition to dominant cultures. Many theorists consciously attempt to question or problematize the intra-oppositions within Black politics, so why don't we apply this approach to the study of Black masculinities?

Why end this project with an interview?

I can't think of a better way to reflect on the questions I've been working through with other writers and performers than to try and think through these questions with myself. If conclusions are about reflections then I'm learning that my thesis barely scratches the surface of the critical studying of Black Canadian masculinities. Instead, my investigations has offered new beginnings to multiple and divergent paths. As a result, my thesis remains a project with no end in sight. For instance, this project has called my attention to the Caribbean-centric inflection of Blackness in Canada, and I'm now excited to think about what "African-African" embodiments of what Blackness means in Canada. Further, and to return to your first burning question, I intend to focus my doctoral dissertation on exploring how African-Canadian women writers offer perspectives that complicate the straightforward and celebratory literary and dramatic depictions of Black

men. In addition, it's become exceedingly (maybe even glaringly) clear to me that the political stance of my trying to use only African Canadian theory for this project is at least not yet possible. Hold on, I find your question misleading – why ask me why I'm interviewing myself? And oh, did I even answer it? Let me in turn ask you, what better way to “end” this solitary meditation of writing about this particular topic, in the space that I write from, other than to hold a critical conversation with myself?

Are you saying you call on yourself to give an account of yourself in order to highlight your immediate investment to your area of study? If so, then let me ask, “what’s in this project for you?” While you’re at it, can you explain what the difference is with the account you give here to those that national newspapers call on Black men to give of themselves.

It's you interviewing yourself so why don't you answer your own questions? While you're at it can you say a bit more about African-Canadian theories on masculinities? Or say a bit about the theories you came across while working on this project?

What theories? If they are there, please do call my attention to them. African-Canadian theory in itself is... it's... is... there. Dionne Brand, George Elliot Clarke, Rinaldo Walcott, Wesley Crichtlow, Cecil Foster, Nourbese Philip, are contemporary theorists who have brought much needed attention to concerns in Black Canada. Being their children and having been nourished by them, I am sure as we stand on their shoulders to narrativize, in public, the injustices of the past to understand Canada's celebrated multicultural historiography, meaning as we go through the process of producing new theories, the difficult pauses between my is... and it's... will be filled with powerful articulation of Canadian Black masculinities.

Why is the study of Canadian Black masculinities important?

Let me ask you: how many books have you seen on Canadian Black Masculinities? Ok, so there is Crichtlow's, Gamal's, and maybe Coleman's (but even that, as his title suggests, his focus is on Migrant Masculinities). On the other hand, ask yourself, how many books are there on African-American Masculinities?

Countless.

That's what I thought.

And why is that?

Slavery, what else! There's this belief among many Canadian-Canadians that because Canada was a haven for slaves the concerns of Black America are not that of Black Canada—which I don't disagree with. My beef with this line of thinking is the quick disavowal of slavish state in which many Black men in Canada, today, still find

themselves. That this disavowal does not acknowledge how Black (male) bodies are consumed—and easily digested—regardless of space/place, time, who. Particularly though, this continual disavowal speaks to Canada’s ambiguous historical relation to slavery: tolerating it quietly at home and disapproving of it in America. Although my project has been on Canadian Black masculinities, some of the experiences I account of myself, in this thesis, did not all occur in Canadian borders or on Canadian soil. My point is, the particularities of Canadian Black masculinities, that is, the way that certain Black men see themselves and how others in Canada see them are heavily connected to the past—of slavery, one the present can’t put to right—and the present—the technologies that allows for trans-mobility of people and resources.

Why don’t you conjoin this slavery-free idea of Canadian imagination with the Canadian model of multiculturalism?

I don’t understand your question, are you suggesting that multiculturalism as a policy is an obstacle to theorizing Canadian Black masculinities?

Well..., I wouldn’t put it that way but, why not? Canadian academics are not immune to Canadian understanding of Blackness. You can’t forget that, to many Canadians, Blackness is only a matter of ethnicity. Many don’t see it as being a combination of “race” and ethnicity, or neglect to acknowledge how ethnicity is raced. Also, I don’t think Canadian Black masculinities, as a topic, holds the melancholic currency to compel the work of academic mourning—theorization. Just as western theories of subjectivity can’t account for the particular of Black Canadian male subjectivity, the absence of theorizing Canadian Black masculinity in Canadian academia, I think, is symptomatic of multiculturalism. As a result, my focus on Canadian Black masculinities has been to examine the interplay between race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, as well as to shake the strange trees of academia that avoids the strange fruits hanging on them and suggest we can no longer avoid these fruits.

Can you focus for a minute on what you have learned about Canadian Black masculinities and the crises that surround its construction?

How can one “focus” on a supposed crisis? And if I could, tell me, where do I begin? Everything I’ve learned this year especially is accompanied by utter anguish and sadness, and it is this: that the (Canadian) national allegory and literary imaginary are connected across time and space. (I’ll explain this in a second.) I also learned I will forever remain a “nigger.” A plain old dirty Nigger. Hmm. What happened to Canadian politeness? At the very least grant me the title “mister.”

If you did not expect to hear this, why don’t we try this exercise again, the one where you pretend to be me – you should be getting good at this game by now (I’m afraid you’ll probably play me better than I play myself) – and imagine your reaction to the following situation.

It's July 28 2006, a Sunday evening and you find yourself in Guelph, Ontario. Keep in mind you've spent five years of your life living in this predominantly white progressive town – and oh, don't forget, you are Black. On this particularly warm late Sunday evening (around lets say 1 am) you are strolling down Macdonald street enjoying the company of two of your white friends when you hear this:

"nigger!"

you keep walking, hoping and thinking to yourself, "I did not hear that."

"i'm talking to you NIGGER!"

now you slow your pace, but you keep walking, because the heaviness of the words are sinking into your skin, its tearing your flesh, and you want to be anywhere but where you are.

"yeah, that's right, walk away you dirty NIGGER"

now you STOP. But you know you have to keep walking. You have to walk away. Your two white friends encourage you to walk away. So you walk away.

*you have never wanted to fight as much as you did upon hearing those words. although you know your friends did the right thing by convincing you to walk away you still can't help but feel anger towards them. If what they did was the *right* thing, then what was the *loving* thing to do for yourself?*

Now let me tell you how I felt:

I'm pissed off at myself for grieving with tearless cries

(so as not to feel weak in-front of another white man)

and now that I'm crying tears held back

I feel more weaker

I know I'm supposed to feel stronger for walking away but I don't! I only feel pain -- and my head hurts. my heart hurts. everything in me hurts.

I feel knotted yet I keep snapping

And I don't know how to fix you.

I am ready to rip and tear through this city

roaring as the bogeyman that they see

And yet I don't know how to fix myself.

Pardon me ...I can't keep speaking

It hurts too much for me to remember

Was this the crisis you wanted a minute to focus on? Why don't you ask me another question.

While in circumstances like this, words of support are often not enough, I just want to express that I stand in solidarity with you. This incidence, "the hellish horror of being called 'out of [your] name'" (Angelou 106) somehow someway leads into my next

question: why, in the face of these painful realities, do you write on or even study Canadian Black masculinities?

Hmm, hmm, hmm, hmm – I’ve been asking myself this same question over and over these passed few days. Being in the university, where I am “never sure always sure that [I am] not in control” (Brand, *What* 28), where I have traditionally been denied access, it is still sometimes easy, especially when socializing with progressive white folks, to forget that these dull and brutish racist behaviours still exist and continue to exist. Do I run away from these racial epithets? (*some days, hell yeah!*) But not all the time! Do I laugh at them? *Some days, that’s all I can do.* Do I fight them? Well, sometimes... *But only sometimes, because fighting it solo, every time, becomes tiring.*

So I guess I do it because it has to be done – especially now. If experience shapes perception, then I need to be here using my oral and written voice to challenge the ease with which colleagues slay identity politics, and in its place advocate an “infinite multiplicity of possible identities.” Challenging their assassination does not equate to my accepting easy and/or unproblematized conceptions of identity politics. Rather, it is to call attention to the fact that identity politics have real and dangerous consequences. It is not just about essentializing oneself. It is very difficult to enjoy this infinite multiplicity of possibilities if one has no access to these possibilities. So please, Kwaku, don’t hear me as saying that there is no movement in the reserved possibilities allocated for us, for Blackness, for Black men. As I say in chapter two, our movements are so small it is barely visible.

I know without doubt that defending myself in the “Guelph incident” would have produced extreme consequences. (I most likely would have been sent to jail.) Nevertheless, instead of losing a week of writing time, I would have felt the satisfaction (however illusionary) that this bigot won’t reduce another Black man-woman to the trauma of a six-letter-word. I learned from this experience that “hard” masculinity indeed has benefits. In performing a “soft” sensibility of masculinity by walking away, I’m still dealing with the emotional labour of that encounter.

It sounds as if you want to give up on your studies?

Not exactly, but would you blame me?

Not really!

How do I try teasing out any coherent and legible complexities of Blackness or toy with critical race theory in any “sensible” or “rational” way when I’m encountering blatantly racist behaviours such as this on the streets?

What a lesson to learn as you near finishing your M.A. thesis.

Indeed! What a lesson. To learn that racist patriarchal ideologies of Black masculinities still haunt my performances of masculinities, hmm, what a lesson! To learn that I can't easily disinherit these ideologies, Ay Ay Ay, what a lesson indeed!

Do you remember how grandmama explained my internalization of sadness and anger while we were growing up? How she used to say to you, when I was playing tough, 'you've got to let it out Kwaku, or you're not loving yourself.' Well, what do you think she would say to me now?

I don't know what she would say to you Kwaku. But I would give anything for her to explain to me how to keep loving myself, how to keep moving forward when I'm called a "dirty nigger."

But that's why you have to continue on with this path. You can't tell me this "Guelph incident" hasn't clarified a few kinks in your thinking?

Ha-ha-ha, are you asking whether I've gone through a journey of self-discovery?

Yes.

I can only hear you asking this question. And I guess you can only hear me answering it. I will say, painfully but very much so. I hold on to bell hooks' advice: that as Black people, we *should* not "hold on to the idea that the trauma of racist domination is really the loss of [B]lack manhood" (*Yearning* 60). So I'm painfully recovering, because as long as I hold on to this idea of "losing" something, I invest in the racist (and patriarchal) narratives that perpetuate the idea that *all* Black men are aggressive, eager to use violence to express our rage and sadness.

In going through this recovery, what have you learned?

You don't give up do you? I've painfully learned, yet again, that whiteness only shields whiteness. Whiteness only cares for itself. It only protects its kind. Blackness, on the other hand, is a permanent and visible tattoo that nothing—including time—can get rid of. *You're probably thinking "explain," I wont!* On a different hand, I'm learning a lot about joy (I know this might sound masochistic). I mean, if this field of discipline is going to be where I work, meaning if my work continues to interrogate questions around and about race, gender, sexuality and their complexly interconnected relations, then I can't crumble each time I encounter such blatantly gendered racism. I have to find a way to triumph and maybe even turn this hatred into some kind of love, if not towards this person, at least towards myself. I'm not saying that I have done that yet, but it is a strategy I have to learn quickly in order to survive the plantation that academia at times threatens to become or be for me. However, it is painful to completely subscribe to this strategy of hope. I can't help but ask myself whether "this strategy of coping allows these forms of racism off the hook too easily? And doesn't this reinscribe notions of

racialized martyrdom/piety? I know and agree it's necessary to channel these experiences into affirmation of the importance of the work I do, but in what way does the above strategy threaten to reinscribe racial and gendered hierarchies?"

Plus, you can't forget what happened in Guelph was "outside" the academy...So how does the "plantation" reference complicate the experience and your painful negotiation of it?

My Struggle with academia

That's your purpose?

Yes and no. No need to be negative. Have you forgotten that we are needed everywhere?

Don't worry, I haven't forgotten Jason's words, I'll stay strong in that tough world of the academy. We need me there too, as we need you in dance, in activism, and city planning, in community development ... fuck, we need us everywhere!

Works Cited

- Arden, Jann. "Good Mother." *Living under June*. Toronto: A & M Records, 1994.
- Akenson, Donald. "The Historiography of English Speaking Canada and the Concept of Diaspora: A Special Appreciation." In *The Canadian Historical Review*, 766:3 (1995), 377-409.
- Almonte, Richard, Chariandy, David and Harris Jennifer. "Introduction." *Canadian Review of American Studies*. 30:2 (2000): 123-149.
- Althusser, Louis. "Ideology and Ideological state apparatuses." Reprinted in *Lenin and philosophy and other essays by Louis Althusser*, Trans. Ben Brewster. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971. 97-123.
- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 1983.
- Angelou, Maya. *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings*. Random House, 1970.
- Bailey, Cameron. "Introduction." *Like Mangoes in July*. Ed. Helen Lee and Kerri Sakamoto. Toronto: Insomniac Press, 2002. 8-9.
- Bannerji, Himani. "On the Dark Side of the Nation: Politics of Multiculturalism and the State of 'Canada'." *Literary Pluralities*. Ed. Christl Verduyn. Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1998. 125-151.
- Baldwin, James. *The Evidence of Things Not Seen*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1986.
- Bhabha, Homi. K. "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse." *October* 28 (Spring 1984): 125-33.
- Billson, J. and Majors, Richard G. *Cool Pose: The Dilemmas of Black Manhood in America*. New York: Lexington Books, 1992.
- Book, Shane. "Offering." *Bluesprint: Black British Columbian Literature and Orature*. Ed. Wayde Compton. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2001. 256-7.
- Brand, Dionne. *What We All Long For*. Toronto: A.A. Knopf Canada, 2005.
- . *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging*. Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 2001.

- . "Whose Gaze, and Who Speaks for Whom." *Bread Out of Stone*. Toronto: Vintage Canada Edition, 1998. 111-133.
- . "Dualities." *Bread Out of Stone*. Toronto: Vintage Canada Edition, 1998. 172-179.
- . *No Language is Neutral*. Toronto: Coach House, 1990.
- Broox, Klyde. *My Best Friend Is White*. Toronto: McGilligan Books, 2005.
- Bucknor, Michael A and Coleman, Daniel. "Introduction: Rooting and Routing Caribbean-Canadian Writing." *Journal of West Indian Literature*. 14: 1&2. (Nov. 2005): i-lxiii.
- Butler, Judith. *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*. Stanford: University Press, 1997.
- . "Conscience Doth Make Subjects of Us All." *Yale French Studies* 88 (1995): 6-26.
- Chancy, Myriam J. A. *Searching for Safe Spaces: Afro-Caribbean Women Writers in Exile*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997.
- Chang, Elaine. "Run through the Borders: Feminism, Postmodernism, and Runaway Subjectivity." *Border Theory: The Limits of Cultural Politics*. Ed. Scott Michaelsen and David E. Johnson. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1997. 169-94.
- Chariandy, David. "'That's what you want, isn't it?': Austin Clarke and the New Politics of Recognition." *Journal of West Indian Literature*. 14: 1&2. (Nov. 2005).
- Cheng, Anne Anlin. *The Melancholy of Race*. New York: Oxford UP, 2001.
- Chow, Rey. *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography and Contemporary Chinese Cinema*. New York: Columbia UP, 1995.
- Clarke, Austin. "Public Enemies: Police Violence and Black Youth." In *The Austin Clarke Reader*. Ed. Barry Callaghan. Toronto: Exile Edition Limited, 1996. 325-344.
- . "Sometimes A Motherless Child." *The Austin Clarke Reader*. Ed. Barry Callaghan. Toronto: Exile Edition, 1996. 167-199.
- Clarke, G.E. "Contesting a Model Blackness: A Meditation on African-Canadian African Americanism, or the Structures of African-Canadianite." *Odysseys Home*:

- Mapping African-Canadian Literature*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002. 27-70.
- . "Cool Politics: Styles of Honours in Malcolm X and Miles Davis." *Jouvert: A Journal of Post-Colonial Studies*. 1.2 (1998) <http://social.chass.ncsu.edu/jouvert>
- . Ed. *Eyeing The North Star; Directions in African-Canadian Literature*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1997.
- . "Must All Blackness Be American? Locating Canada in Borden's 'Tightrope Time' or Nationalizing Gilroy's 'The Black Atlantic.'" *Odysseys Home: Mapping African-Canadian Literature*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002. 71-85.
- . "Treason of the Black Intellectuals?" *Odysseys Home: Mapping African-Canadian Literature*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002. 182-210.
- Cohen, Cathy J. *The Boundaries of Blackness: AIDS and the Breakdown of Black Politics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997.
- Coleman, Daniel. *Masculine Migrations: Reading the Postcolonial Male in "New Canadian" Narratives*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998.
- Collins, Patricia, Hill. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge, 1990.
- Compton, Wade. *The Reinventing Wheel*. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2005.
- . "Introduction." *Bluesprint: Black British Columbian Literature and Orature*. Ed. Wade Compton. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2001. 17-40.
- Connell, Robert. *Masculinities*. Australia: Allen & Unwin, 1995.
- Crichlow, Wesley. *Buller Men and Batty Bwoys: Hidden Men in Toronto and Halifax Black Communities*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003.
- Cuder-Domínguez, Pilar. "African-Canadian Writing and the Narration(s) of Slavery." *Essays on Canadian Writing* 79 (2003): 55-75.
- Dobson, Kit. "'Struggle Work': Urban and Global Citizenship in Dionne Brand's *What We All Long For*." Unpublished paper heard at ACCUTE 2006.
- Douglass, Frederick. "*The Meaning of the 4th of July for the Negro*." Spoken Word by Fred Morsel, January 1993. 48 minutes.

- Dyer, Richard. *White*. London: Routledge, 1997.
- Easthope, Antony. *What a Man's Gotta Do: The Masculine Myth in Popular Culture*. London: Paladin Grafton Books, 1986.
- Eng, David. "The Pecking Order." *Like Mangoes in July*. Ed. Helen Lee and Kerri Sakamoto. Toronto: Insomniac Press, 2002. 90-91.
- Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Trans. Charles Lam Markmann. New York: Groves Press, 1967.
- Forster, Greg. "Against Melancholia: Contemporary Mourning Theory, Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, and the Politics of Unfinished Grief." *A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*. 14.2 (2003): 134-170.
- Fung, Richard. *Out of Blue*. 1991. 28mins.
- Gates, Henry Louis, Jr. *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.
- Gilroy, Paul. *Against Racae*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000.
- Goheen, Erin. "Representing 'Refuge': Finding the Hamilton Somali Diaspora in News Media and Literary Theory." Unpublished article.
- Gordon, Lewis. "African-American Philosophy, Race, and the Geography of Reason." *Not Only the Master's Tools*. Eds. Lewis R. Gordon and Jane Anna Gordon. London: Paradigm Publishers, 2006. 3-50.
- Hall, Stuart, Criccher, Chas, Jefferson, Tony, Clarke, John and Roberts, Brain. *Policing The Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order*. New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, Inc, 1978.
- Hall, Stuart. "The Problem of Ideology: Marxism without Guarantees." *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*. Ed. Stuart Hall, D. Morley, and Quan-Hsing Chen. London: Routledge, 1996. 25-47.
- . "Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation." *Exiles: Essays on Caribbean Cinema*. Edited by Mbye Cham. New Jersey: African World Press, 1992. 220-236.
- . "Encoding/decoding." *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-79*. London: Hutchinson, 1980. 128-38.

- Heble, Ajay. "New Contexts of Canadian Criticism: Democracy, Counterpoint, Responsibility." In *New Contexts of Canadian Criticism*. Eds. Ajah Heble, Donna P. Pennee and Tim R. Struthers. Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 1997. 78-97.
- Hemphill, Essex. "Carbon Negro." *Ceremonies: Prose and Poetry*. San Francisco, California: Cleis Press Inc., 1992. 136-137.
- . "The Tomb of Sorrow." *Ceremonies: Prose and Poetry*. San Francisco, California: Cleis Press Inc., 1992. 88-100.
- . "Loyalty." *Ceremonies: Prose and Poetry*. San Francisco, California: Cleis Press Inc., 1992. 69-71.
- Henry, Frances, and Carol Tator. *Discourses of Domination: Racial Bias in the English Canadian Press*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002.
- Herman, Edwards S. and Noam, Chomsky. *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. New York: Pantheon, 1988.
- Hirsch, Marianne. *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory*. Harvard UP: 1997.
- . "Projected Memory: Holocaust Photographs in Personal and Public Fantasy," in *Acts of Memory*, ed. Mieke Bal, Jonathan Crewe, Leo Spitzer. Hanover: University Press of New England, 1999. 3-23.
- hooks, bell. *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity*. New York: Routledge, 2004.
- . "Reconstructing Black Masculinity." *The Masculine Masquerade: Masculinity and Representation*. Eds. Andrew Perchuk and Helaine Posner. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1995. 69-88.
- . *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*. Toronto: Between the Lines, 1990.
- . "Revolutionary parenting." In *Feminist Theory: From margin to center*. Boston: South End, 1984.
- Hughes, Langston. "The Minstrel Man." *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf Inc., 1994.
- Johansen, Emily. "Streets are the dwelling place of the collective" Public Space and Cosmopolitan Identity in *What We All Long For*." Unpublished paper heard at CACLASLS 2006.

- King, Thomas. "Godzilla Vs. Post-Colonial." In *New Contexts of Canadian Criticism*. Eds. Ajah Heble, Donna P. Pennee and Tim R. Struthers. Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 1997.
- Martin, Devon. "Mr. Metro." (Independent Release) 1990.
- Mavjee, Maya. "Opening the Door: An Interview With Dionne Brand." *Read Magazine* <<http://www.randomhouse.ca/libaccess.lib.mcmaster.ca/readmag/page28.htm>> (accessed June 2, 2006).
- Mbembe, Achille. "Necropolitics." *Public Culture* 15 (1): 11-40.
- Morrison, Toni. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. Cambridge, Mass.:Harvard University Press, 1992.
- Maclear, Kyo. "From the Seminal to the Sublime: A Richard Fung Videography." Ed. Helen Lee and Kerri Sakamoto.
- Mercer, Kobena. *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies*. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Muñoz, José Esteban. *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.
- Officer, Charles. *Short Hymn, Silent War*. 2003. 19 minutes.
- Offishall, Kardinal. "Powerfully." *Firestater Vol.1: Quest for Fire*. Toronto: Universal Music Canada, 2001.
- . "Sweet Marie." *Firestater Vol.1: Quest for Fire*. Toronto: Universal Music Canada, 2001.
- . "Man By Choice." *Firestater Vol.1: Quest for Fire*. Toronto: Universal Music Canada, 2001.
- Pharr-Reid, Robert. "Tearing the Goat's Flesh: Homosexuality, Abjection, and the Production of a Late-Twentieth-Century Black Masculinity." In *Novel Gazing: Queer Readings in Fiction*, edited by Eve K. Sedgwick. Duke: University Press, 1997.
- Philip, M. Nourbese. "Who's Listening? Artist, Audience and Language." In *New Contexts of Canadian Criticism*. Eds. Ajah Heble, Donna P. Pennee and Tim R. Struthers. Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 1997. 1-14.

- . "Black Armed and Dangerous." *Drumvaces*, Fall-Winter (1993-4).
- . *Frontiers: Essays and Writings on Racism and Culture, 1982-1992*. Stratford, ON: Mercury, 1992.
- . "How White is Your White?: On The Lack of Colour in the Bernardo/Homolka Affair." *Border/Lines* 38/39 (1995): 6-13.
- . "Taming Our Tomorrows." *New Contexts of Canadian Criticism*. Eds. Ajah Heble, Donna P. Pennee and Tim R. Struthers. Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 1997.
- . "'Urban Terrorism?: blamed in café killing.'" *Border/Lines* 34/35 (1994): 46-52.
- Razack, Sherene. *Looking White People in the Eyes: Gender, Race and Culture in Courtrooms and Classrooms*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998.
- Shapiro, Herbert. *White Violence and Black Response: From Reconstruction to Montgomery*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988.
- Smolash, Naava Wendy. *National Postcolonial: Representations of the "Enemy Within" in Canada's National Newspapers*. M.A. thesis, The University of Guelph, 2004.
- Spivak, Gayatri, Charkravarty. "The New Historicism: Political Commitment and the Postmodern Critic." *The New Historicism*. Ed. H. Aram Veesser. New York: Routledge, 1989: 277-92.
- Tate, Greg. "'Steely Dan: Understood as the Redemption of the White Negro': A conversation between Greg Tate and Vernon Reid." *Everything But the Burden: What White People are Taking from Black Culture*. Ed. Greg Tate. New York: Harlem Moon, 2003
- Tölölyan Khachig. "Rethinking Diaspora(s): Stateless Power in the Transnational Moment." *Diaspora*, Vol. 5, No 1: 3-34.
- Trinh, Minh-Ha. "The Cyborg's Hand: Care or Control? With Valentina Vitali." *The Digital Film Event*. New York: Routledge, 2005.
- . "Not You/Like You: Post-Colonial Women and the Interlocking Questions of Identity and Difference."
http://humwww.ucsc.edu/CultStudies/PUBS/Inscriptions/vol_3-4/v3-4top.html,
(accessed on June 15, 2006.)

---. *Woman, Native, Other: Writing, Postcoloniality and Feminism*. University of Indiana Press, 1989.

Tyne, Maxine. *Borrowed Beauty*. Porters Lake, NS: Pottersfield, 1987.

van Dyke, Teun. "Discourse Analysis: Its Development and Application to the Structure of News." *Canadian Journal of Communication* 33.2 (1983): 20-45.

---. "How 'They' Hit the Headlines: *Ethnic Minorities in the Press*." *Discourse and Discrimination*. Ed. Geneva Smitherman-Donaldson and Teun A. van Dijk. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988.

---. *Racism and the Press*. New York: Routledge, 1991.

Walcott, Rinaldo. *Black Like Who? Writing Black Canada*. 2nd Edition. Toronto: Insomiac Press, 2003.

Walker, Alice. *The Color Purple*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1982.


Wallace, Bronwen. *The Stubborn Particulars of Grace*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1987.

Wallace, Michele. *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*. New York: Dial, 1990.


West, Cornel. *Beyond Eurocentrism and Multiculturalism: Volume Two. Prophetic Reflections: Notes on Race and Power in America*. Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press, 1993.

---. West, Cornel. *Race Matters*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1993.


McMASTER UNIVERSITY




JANE CREBA




CORDELL SKINNER




SULHI R. FATILA-HZADEN-RABTI




CORLY DELLON JOHN




AMON BECKLES




HASLEY MCLEAN




SWANE GARFIELD JAMES




DONNELL JEFFREY RAWLIDGE




JOSEPH COLIN SANTOS



JOSEPH WESTLEY JONES



MURUKA




NATHANIEL DANIEL LESLIE


2005: YEAR OF THE GUN

IS THIS THE END?


Fifty-two men and women across the city have died by gunfire this year. The last fatality, 15-year-old Jane Creba on Boxing Day, may prove to be a watershed moment for Toronto. The rallying cry for action has never been louder, writes Linda Diebel. A18




NOHMI E. MOLINA




DELOY GEORGE DARING




OMAR MCLEOD




JOSEPH AHMED QIAO




JASON THOMAS JOSEPH




WILL KIM




JASON HUATTIELE




TATE BEST




SARFARAZ



AL MOHAMMAD ALI



CHARLENE LITTLE



DARREN MUIRHEAD