

BODIES MARKED BY IMPOSSIBILITY: NEGOTIATING IDENTITIES AS BLACK AND
BROWN QUEER WOMEN AND CREATING A SPACE FOR OPPOSITION

By

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To my family and friends. To all the bold, revolutionary people who inspire me daily. Thank you for your selflessness and perseverance.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>page</u>
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	4
ABSTRACT.....	6
CHAPTER	
1 THE CREATION OF BODIES MARKED BY IMPOSSIBILITY	7
Policing the Private and the Public: The Rise of Queer Shame	11
The Origins and Preservation of Racialized Shaming	15
2 THE GAY RIGHTS MOVEMENT AND THE QUEST FOR RE-COLONIZATION	31
The White, Middle-Class Gay Rights Movement	31
The Neocolonial Effect.....	35
The Unethical State and the Impossibility of Black and Brown Queers	38
3 REDEFINING FEMINISM AND RESISTANCE THROUGH AN OPPOSITIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS.....	42
Creating an Oppositional Consciousness through the Restructuring of Feminism	42
Writing as Resistance and the Introduction of a Politics of Possibility.....	50
My Positionality and Building the Desire to Resist.....	58
LIST OF REFERENCES	61
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH	64

Abstract of Thesis Presented to the Graduate School
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This paper attempts to look at how public law and opinion have, in many ways, made positive identities for queer women of color impossible. Despite the pride that may arise from different facets of identity politics, these identities are fundamentally based on feelings of shame, brought upon by different forms of social control. Thus, these bodies are seen as socially impossible. I want to show how the direction of the mainstream gay rights movement, neocolonialism, and the rise of conservative, moralistic legislation has engendered the death of a stable, positive, and wholly confident identity for queer women of color. I would like to argue that contrary to the mission of their oppressors, these shamed identities also create a space in which women can show genuinely revolutionary forms of resistance, as well as fostering the ability to change the foundations in which we build our theories of behavior and social practice.

CHAPTER 1
THE CREATION OF BODIES MARKED BY IMPOSSIBILITY

It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences.

—Audre Lorde
Our Dead Behind Us: Poems

I am not African. Africa is in me, but I cannot return. I am not taína. Taíno is in me, but there is no way back. I am not European. Europe lives in me, but I have no home there. I am new. History made me. My first language was spanglish. I was born at the crossroads and I am whole.

—Aurora Levins Morales
Child of the Americas

As noted by several feminist scholars, critical legal scholars, and queer theorists, we live in a very particular political moment in which certain bodies are policed and under surveillance in ways which ostensibly advocates for community safety, but in actuality serve as a form of social control. The role of this social control is to mark certain bodies as socially impossible beings. These notions were first explored in this capacity at a roundtable discussion with many academics including feminist scholar Christina Crosby, cultural analysts Lisa Duggan and Tavia Nyong'o, and critical legal and queer scholar Dean Spade. Among several notable points of discussion I was primarily struck by Spade's argument stating:

It is complex work that queer and trans scholars and activists engage in the face of these losses, work that must also occur while we navigate the impact that imprisonment, deportation, unemployment, loss of public benefits, the destruction of public education, and other conditions are having on the day-to-day lives of queer and trans people. Part of that work is to account for how the incorporation and deployment of sexual and gender excesses occurs, to analyze the investments in whiteness and capitalism that already belonged to various gay and lesbian ways of life and to gay and lesbian studies and politics that make them available for such adoptions. Another part is to interrogate our alternatives, to examine how they also produce politics of truth that require standardization, normalization, and the identification of internal enemies. This requires producing methods of self-critique and perpetual reflection best modeled by women of color feminism... When practices of stateness centered on slavery and genocide perpetually emerge as an exile logic that is constitutive of our very psyches, thinking outside it may in fact be impossible. The impossibility of the other politics and ways of knowing we propose, the attempt to hold them lightly yet practice them urgently, is a struggle of this work. There is something about the

practices of marginal queer and trans life that informs this work in all its impurity, something in the grief that has always been central to queer and trans life that is one of its most necessary tools (Crosby et al. 2012, 135-136).

Essentially, what Spade is discussing here is the basis for my work. The current political moment in the United States is one of impossibility, which ultimately leads to exclusion. This impossibility is marked by the history and foundation of our political work. Mainstream progressives argue for a fight towards equality, without taking into account that the origins of our notions of equality and freedom are tainted by our history of slavery, genocide, and violent exclusion. Thus, even politics deemed progressive, or the buzzword used in U.S. politics, liberal, continue to reify these dominant exclusionary practices while appearing to move towards an egalitarian world-view. Innate in this process is the necessity for normalization and demarcating deviant bodies and behaviors. Within social movements, those with the resources denounce the importance of different bodies, whether intentionally or not, because their politics strive for assimilation rather than deconstruction. Thus, this politics of impossibility, automatically creates bodies marked by social impossibility, that require control and repression. This control is primarily exerted among certain bodies. For the scope of this paper, I would like to explore the way this control is issued among the bodies of queer women of color and how this inherently allows these female-identified subjects to build their identities based on shame and impossibility. Rejected by society for being women, queer, and of color, these subjects find themselves in a liminal social location where these women are not supported by the current post-racial discourse, mainstream hegemonic feminism, or the gay rights movement. State-sponsored racism, homophobia, and sexism have become normalized and blended into the American narrative; this enables the impossibility of queer women of color to have a valid space within the dominant discourse and rights movements heralded for making such large strides in equality. But, as Spade

expresses, it is in the grief of deviant bodies where the hope lies. What I seek to do in this paper is find a space in which this impossibility and shame-based identitarian framework gives way to a new form of hope. If we are to achieve this hope, undeniably tied to the possibility of a genuine social, political, and cultural revolution, we must do three things: it is imperative to reconstruct feminism to reflect a truly intersectional approach; allow queer women of color the knowledge of their impossibility, as it paves the way for the development of a truly oppositional consciousness; explore privilege and power within and outside of these subjects in order to build a genuine politics of solidarity and possibility.

A body is deemed socially impossible if it must build its identity within a space that promotes and normalizes state-sponsored¹ sexism, racism, homophobia, classism, and ableism as a method of population control. Critical legal scholar Dean Spade states:

In analyzing purportedly neutral systems to reveal their targeted violence, critics often expose continuities of violence where dominant narratives have declared key historical breaks. National narratives of US history articulate that prior egregious state violences have been resolved, often by civil rights law or other legal reforms. The implication is that any existing differences in living conditions among subpopulations in the United States must be a result of merit or lack thereof. Critics contest this story, arguing that while the operations of systems of meaning and control have changed, and while certain technologies of violence have been altered or replaced, the declared breaks are fictions (Spade 2013, 1043).

As Spade notes, there is a narrative within the dominant discourse that gives the impression that state-sponsored violence against marginalized bodies is a thing of the past. When working within that discourse, equality is defined in legal terms, which ultimately reinforces those ideas of egalitarianism and lends way to belief of meritocracy in order to explain

¹ When I use the term “state-sponsored,” I use it to describe the way laws and policies are enacted by the local and federal government that influence the public sentiment towards certain bodies. Whether explicitly or not, these policies create different levels of oppression and marginalize certain sects of the population. I am looking at the term as used by critical legal scholar Dean Spade, coming out of Foucauldian theories; this will be described in further detail throughout this essay.

differences in power. Analyzing legal reform using a single-axis framework creates a false sense of equality, which continues to be sold as real, tangible, and/or possible. Using an intersectional lens, or multi-axis framework, allows for different discussions of power and structural oppression to remain valuable. Properly adopting intersectionality is the primary way in which we can move away from hegemonic, western, white feminism and begin to reconstruct it to benefit queer women of color.

Having a long history of sodomy laws and other political aggressions to control people's sexuality, the U.S. sexual landscape has always been intrusive. But, the recent emergence of discussions concerning marriage equality has brought sexual concerns to the forefront of public discussion. These discussions have divided public sentiment on whether or not the sexual preferences of our fellow citizens are of public concern, or if it is even something that should be regulated by the state. For some, this time is one to progress and let individuals express their sexuality without negative repercussions. For many, however, the sexual orientation of their peers is of utmost importance. Queer life has been regarded with disgust² for various reasons, such as religion, cultural views, and social sentiment. We have a President ridiculed by the large conservative think tanks that dispense news to the nation because a major component of his reelection platform included civil liberties for queer Americans. States are actively banning gay marriages or even legalizing then revoking the decision, as seen in California. Despite agreeing with Michael Warner that the queer community must move past this heteronormative cross-over ideal of marriage and that "the debate over gay marriage has been regressive," it is the stigma and shaming that derives from these legislative decisions, that I am concerned with (Warner

² I am using disgust, as presented by philosopher Martha Nussbaum, which will be delved into further throughout the essay. She argues that disgust, as an emotion, exhibited by repulsion and impurity, has been used as a moral guide, which in turn is used as a guide for policy and legislation. She argues that using disgust as a guide has marginalized certain groups of people in ways that produce shame-based identities. She speaks particularly of people on the LGBT spectrum.

2001, 117). The sense of shame that stems from state policies and public opinion is often detrimental to the identity-creating process of a queer individual. To make more complex the discourse on queer identity even more, I would like to explore the complex, shame-based identities of queer women of color. In a multifaceted web of oppression, brown and black queers walk through a world in which their sexuality is a perversion, their gender-identity inferior, and their color an enemy of the state. We have reached a point in our politics where the vilification of black and brown are institutionalized, and rarely critiqued by the general public. So what does all of this mean? Why is any of this important? The aim of this essay is to analyze the ways in which policies and public attitudes allow queer women of color to create identities based on shame and internalized disgust. I want to argue that the direction of the gay rights movement, neocolonialism³, and the rise of conservative, moralistic legislation has engendered the impossibility of a stable, positive, and wholly confident identity for queers of color. Furthermore, I would like to show how contrary to the mission of their oppressors, these shamed identities create a space in which people can show genuinely revolutionary forms of resistance as well as foster the ability to change the foundations on which we build our theories of behavior and social practice.

Policing the Private and the Public: The Rise of Queer Shame

Although policies and public opinion incite several different negative emotions within the general population, like guilt, anger, and/or sadness, my primary focus is on shame because of the likelihood of internalization. Nussbaum differentiates guilt and shame as feelings

³ I use the term neocolonialism to describe the way in which social movements who seeks to gain rights within the dominant political and social climate, only seek to assimilate to institutions founded within a history of colonization, dehumanization, and marginalization. Thus, these mainstream social movements act as colonizers that only gain strength through the dehumanization inherent in their neglect of people on the margins of the movement. In this process, people are excluded from the movement based on concerns dealing with race, gender identity, class, sexuality, and bodily ability.

experienced in conjunction with an act, as opposed to the actual individual, respectively. Shame⁴ is related to one's shortcomings. It arises when a person feels they have fallen short of a standard with which they identify. She argues that shame could be a "permanent possibility in our lives, our daily companion...[shame] serves as a highly volatile way in which human beings negotiate some tensions inherent in their humanness...some people, however, are more marked out for shame than others" (Nussbaum 2004, 173-174). What it means to experience shame is significantly different than experiencing any other negative emotion. Shame is directly connected to you as a human being, and your personal traits. Shame comes from a belief that you, as a being, are flawed. Thus, shame has been innate in socially controlling deviant bodies.

The internalization of such an emotion can have dramatic effects on the ability to create a positive identity. The reasoning behind this unsound identity lies in the internalization of the emotion as part of one's daily existence. Between policies, the media, and the general public, as a queer, all I hear is "you are not wanted here" or "you are not normal." These messages get intertwined with how the individual feels about themselves, and this shame slowly becomes a part of their very existence. In a poem concerning queer shame, it is expressed, "[it] enter[s] the bone, settle[s] in, become[s] another circle in a person's character, and [I] felt ashamed" (Orlen 2006, 57). In becoming a part of your character, this negative emotion undeniably becomes a part of your identity.

According to Foucault, we must look at the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in order to grapple with what is happening today. He expresses that it was necessary to

⁴ The discussion of shame and shame-based identities stems from using feelings of disgust as a moral guide. Although it is possible to feel ashamed of certain behaviors not related to your sexual performance, shame brought upon from social, cultural, and political influence in this form seem to have a deeper effect on people because sexual identities, racial identities, and gender identities are often discussed in terms of being deeply embedded in a person's social existence and often dictating the way they live their lives.

“constitute a sexuality that [was] economically useful and politically conservative” and that we have continued to carry this notion to the present. It is from these claims that we see the inception of social control as it is manifested in modernity. The notion of social control based on sexuality is derived from his concept of biopower and biopolitics. He states:

Sexuality, being an eminently corporeal mode of behavior, is a matter for individualizing disciplinary controls that take the form of permanent surveillance...placed both at home and [in public]...sexuality exists at the point where body and population meet. And so it is a matter for discipline, but also a matter for regularization. It is, I think, the privileged position it occupies between organism and population, between body and general phenomena, that explains the extreme emphasis placed upon sexuality (Foucault 2003, 251-52).

Because sexuality belongs to the private and public sphere, it necessitates discipline and regulation, as part of a properly functioning dominant class. Because sexuality and sexual performance is conducted behind closed doors, but also performed in the public sphere through attitudes, ways of dressing and acting, and other discourse analysis, it is in a dangerously liminal position. A sexual act has become more than just a sensory experience or a procreative tool; it is seen as an identity, and as an integral part of human existence. This shift in the role of sexuality is dangerous for various reasons, but primarily because it creates a space in which a minority can come together and fight the powers that have placed them in a place of subordination.

Power is inextricably connected to this ruling of sex; power as both a structure and as an extension of the leaders of our nation. Power’s relationship to the nation and sex is a clear one. It creates a good and a bad, a feeling that it is necessary, if one is to have a moral and orderly populace. Foucault says, “power is essentially what dictates its law to sex. Which means first of all that sex is placed by power in a binary system: licit and illicit, permitted and forbidden” (Foucault 1978, 83). This outdated and unjust mode of regulation has not lost authority in centuries. Discourse, mostly outside of academia is still replete with psychological theories of

sexual deviance, perpetuating the notion that certain types of sexual behavior are wrong. In the most recent election, we had candidates telling the nation that allowing gay marriage would ruin American values. Not only does this rhetoric solidify the binary between good sex and bad sex, but it also brings into question our responsibilities as citizens of the state. This language puts queers into a category deemed “un-American,” creating yet another binary in the realm of civic duty.

Martha Nussbaum looks at the current flow of politics and its effects on the queer community. She seems to think that shame-inducing legislation stem from creating policy based on disgust. She expresses, “disgust, so described, seems pretty nasty, a fundamental refusal of another person’s full humanity. One might therefore think it a bad basis for lawmaking in a democratic society,” (Nussbaum 2010, xiii) but as we glean from reading the text further, this way of thinking still has a great deal of power in creating policies and upholding public opinion. There is something intrinsically frightening about using disgust to judge, police, and discipline people. If we are not looking at them as fully human, or not the *right* type of human, then what are those in power capable of? In a very basic sense, they can deny certain rights.

Foucault’s analysis of biopower, and in particular his example of Nazism as upholding the greatest form of biological disciplinary control, is missing a look at disgust, a key component of dehumanizing behavior (Foucault 2003, 259). Yes, for the survival of the community, one can go through grand measures, but it is only in stripping away people’s humanity that they become nothing more than a number, and the rest is history. Disgust, alongside several fears, helped cradle colonialism; it is what has given birth to modern racism and homophobia. Discourse analysis around disgust has somewhat stopped in academia, because it is thought to be an

obsolete form of thinking, but as we can see all around us, it very much still has an impact within our communities and lived realities.

The Origins and Preservation of Racialized Shaming

This section investigates the origins and preservation of modern racism and state-sponsored racism. Rooted in our colonial history and manifested in our imperial present, racism has gone from being clearly expressed to being normalized, and therefore harder to deem “racism.” As I move through this essay, I would like to show the various ways in which the state has become invested in making sure racial minorities continue to align themselves with the racially dominant class; upholding whiteness as a social, political, and economic model of success. Throughout this progression, I hope to show that we have moved from an overtly racist, apartheid-like system in the United States, legally referred to as *de jure* racism, into a model of racial democracy which masks issues of racial marginalization with a veil of egalitarianism, legally name *de facto* racism.

Modern racism is rooted in a notion of disgust, which allows those with the privilege of exhibiting such an emotion, the power to create an image in which the raced individual is subhuman. The notion of modern racism is intricately woven with the origins of state racism, which saw its birth in the process of colonialism. Foucault states:

We can also understand why racism should have developed in modern societies that function in the biopower mode; we can understand why racism broke out at a number of privileged moments, and why they were precisely the moments when the right to take life was imperative. Racism first develops with colonization, or in other words, with colonizing genocide. If you are functioning in the biopower mode, how can you justify the need to kill people, to kill populations, and to kill civilizations? By using the themes of evolutionism, by appealing to racism (Foucault 2003, 257).

Innate in the dynamics of colonialism, a necessity to regulate, discipline, and ultimately kill, is realized; if not even to physically kill the people, but to kill their culture, language, and

past. The colonial mission is, as described by Foucault, a certain type of genocide, in which those in the position of power fail to see the full humanity in the colonized bodies. There comes a point when the dominant culture can no longer practice humanization, “it is thwarted by injustice, exploitation, oppression, and the violence of the oppressors; it is affirmed by the yearning of the oppressed for freedom and justice, and by their struggle to recover their lost humanity” (Freire 1970, 28). The colonial relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, by virtue of the power dynamics involved, creates the space for complete dehumanization; once this has occurred, reversing the effects and legacies that stem from this severing of genuine care and subjectivity become somewhat impossible. The effects and legacies get engrained into social and political practice to the point of normalization. This normalization leaves little room to refute injustices, as they are seen as fitting in the natural world.

Since most, if not all, colonized bodies have been bodies of color, the link to race is undeniably present. We now have various forms of neocolonialism, in which individuals of color are systematically and institutionally shut out of the public sphere: pushing them into ghettos and jails; making it even harder for them to become full citizens of the nation; creating policies to disadvantage the already disenfranchised voter; running multibillion dollar campaigns telling me that my skin is not white enough, and that I will never be considered to have a universally beautiful face; we have the vilification of brown and the ever-present hate of black surrounding us, every day; we have campaigns pushing for the United States to be a unilingual nation, because of course, English is the only correct way to speak.

People of color are systematically shut out of the public sphere through acts of policing. To better illustrate this, I would like to look at New York’s “Stop and Frisk” policy, which did not even begin to come under fire until the last few years. Under this policy, officers are

instructed to go into suspicious or high risk areas, and stop anyone they feel looks like trouble. In vague language and training, officers are basically instructed to partake in racial profiling, in order to keep neighborhoods safe. “A weapon was found in less than 2% of searches. More than half of all stops were of blacks and a third were of Latinos. Young black and Latino men make up less than 5% of the city's population, but more than 40% of those stopped. More young black males--168,126--were stopped by police last year than live in the city (158,406)” (The Economist 2012, 38). There is such a large disconnect between the amount of bodies of color searched, compared to weapons or drugs seized. Policies like “Stop and Frisk” are neither rare, nor isolated to New York. These practices are being executed all over the United States, more notably in Philadelphia. Critical legal scholar Kimberle W. Crenshaw, also looks at the overpolicing and surveillance of women of color, when discussing the criminalization in female-presenting bodies of color, particularly black girls, which is often erased from the conversation concerning this abuse expressed towards bodies of color. She states, “In California, for example, recent research reveals that while African American females constitute approximately 7.1 percent of California's women, they are more than 70 percent of girls held in some northern California detention centers and more than 50 percent of girls receiving institutional commitments from these jurisdictions”(Crenshaw 2012, 1436). She argues that numbers become even more drastic when we take into account other intersecting identities, like living as trans women, or other populations of women of color. These policies and behaviors serve two functions: to push people of color out of the public sphere, and to instill fear in whites, making them believe that they must protect themselves and their belongings from people of color. By having this functional duality, a binary is created in which certain people are viewed as criminals and others should fear these said “criminals.” Not only does this reify and foster difference

between whites and people of color, but by virtue of this fear, people begin to grasp even harder to whiteness and white privilege. But the fear is not only on the side of the privileged; then, bodies of color do not participate in the public realm as much, for fear of being stopped.

Another major way the state has invested in shutting people of color out of the public sphere is through policing, not of bodies, but of language. Language has been a defining factor in identity formation. For many, holding on to their ancestral language has been the only way to refute dominant American society, which advocates for a monolingual nation. Erasure of language has long been part and parcel of Americanization. The erasure of a non-English language works on two fronts: rejecting such a language as a tool for learning, many students simply cannot understand the material because it is outside of the scope of their language, which ultimately leads them to fail academically; in relation to identity formation, this erasure of language often leads the individual to buy into the hierarchy instilled by the dominant culture which places American, Anglo-English at the top, and native languages at the bottom. This strategy of exclusion and condemnation is what scholars have called subtractive schooling. “This form of schooling has become a major feature of the education of poor and working-class Latino students all over the country. It results in the disdain for what one knows and what one is, influences children’s attitudes toward knowledge...one’s language and knowledge are inadequate because they are not privileged...this mind-set is accepted as ‘natural,’ as just the way things are. It is considered ‘common sense,’ and it easily becomes self-imposed” (Moll and Ruiz 2009, 365). This language hierarchy feeds into a cultural hierarchy, making people essentially hate and shed their heritage and allow them to feel inferior. Looking at a testimony collected by historian Vicki Ruiz, a subject said:

I remember being punished for speaking Spanish. Nos daban unos coscorrones, pero coscorrones, o nos daban unas zuibandas con un board. Tenían un board of

education por hablar español. Yo no entendía lo que me decían, ni jota, ni jota. Pero por eso estoy tan cercana, y mi corazón y mi espíritu al programa bilingüe, porque yo sufrí unas cosas horribles. Yo no fui la única; fueron miles de gente que sufrieron en Arizona, en Colorado, en Nuevo México, en Texas, en California; que nos estereotipaban horribilmente. “Don’t speak that ugly language, you are American now, you Mexican child.” They degraded us horribly, pero uno se hacía valer (Saldivar-Hull 2000, 19).

As expressed briefly above, there are several implications to treating native languages with such disdain and disgust. In a more pragmatic realm, things like this directly affect the academic well-being of students whose first language may not be English. From the very beginning they are either, not given the opportunities to succeed and viewed as incompetent students, or they are thrown into ESOL programs, which are not the most helpful either. Structuring the educational care of immigrant, first and/or second generation students in this way sets them up to fail in ways that are hard to move out of. For example, while the Latina/o student population in the Los Angeles Unified School district is at more than 90%, creating an environment where they are a majority, but are still being treated as a minority, while still over 50% of instructors are white, with minimal to no proficiencies in Spanish. Thus it is no surprise that although they are a majority, they still account for significantly less percentage of graduates that are eligible for college, over their white counterparts. Moll and Ruiz argue that these statistics are indicative of what they call a creation of a “permanent low working-class status” (Moll and Ruiz 2009, 366-367). Most importantly to identity creation, this treatment of native language can be very damaging to the psyche of the people involved. Within this language and cultural hierarchy lies the desire for a rejection of the native culture, as it does nothing but bring trouble in a U.S. setting. People of color learn very quickly that native languages and customs have no place in this country. Some scholars argue that a level of cultural integrity is necessary for the success of students of color. An “element associated with racial and ethnic minority

students' is cultural integrity, which refers to educational practices that engage students' cultural backgrounds" (Museus and Harris 2010, 31). In a study conducted by cultural scholar Donna Deyhle "has shown cultural integrity for academic performance. In her study of Native American children who were secure in their traditional culture and identity—those who refused to accept either assimilation or cultural rejection—were more academically successful in school than their culturally insecure peers. Those students thrived academically while maintaining their identities" (Schiro 2006, 29). What is important to note here is that cultural integrity is linked to self-worth and self-esteem not only as a student, but as a human being. Thus, when integral parts of your identity are valued, you feel like you actually deserve an education and are wanted in that classroom. Studies like the one conducted by Deyhle in 1995, shed light on the need to restructure the way students of color are accepted into academic life.

While there are tangible explanations for the culture of fear directed towards people of color, as expressed above, people of the dominator culture are only interested in the outcomes. It is beneficial to the ruling class to simply say, Latina/o children are failing in our schools; and black and Latino men are criminals, therefore they get stopped more by the police. What needs to be done is a thorough investigation of where these numbers are coming from, but of course, a critical analysis would be to the detriment of white supremacy. There is such an investment in whiteness, that these "failures" produced by people of color are normalized and essentialized; they began to be considered part of the culture, the people. The failure and criminality of people of color is viewed as naturally wrong, while the success and benevolence of whiteness is viewed as naturally good. These examples sit under this umbrella of right and wrong, a binary which most people have accepted and have chosen to move on from, because they have become so naturalized by literature and media. The public discussion of these problems is so minute, that it

is considered an outlier. In this nation, we have several layers of the public sphere, and the most important lies in the hands of those in public office. Their views are often what is adopted by the masses and passed off as the right way to think. When in fact, how right can it be, when most of our elected officials are elderly, white men?

The colonial mindset manifests itself in current policies and punishment. Martha Nussbaum discusses Equal Protections Laws, a clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, which is supposed to ensure that there is no systematic subordination of any minority. She explains how we are still operating under a de facto separate but equal policy, in which the “asymmetry of human opportunity was masked by the appearance of formally similar treatment. Equal protection forbids a majority to give the minority systematic disadvantages...this idea of equal protection...is now weaker; in the area of race-based remedies” (Nussbaum 2010, 43). I believe this weakening of equal protection comes from the already faulty conception of the American Dream. Despite always being sold as something than anyone can achieve, by its very definition, it is an actual impossibility. In order to realize this dream, you have to abide by American values, which are traditionally, heteronormative, sexist, classist, elitist, and imperialist. In this respect, we see an investment to white privilege and the upholding of whiteness⁵ not only on the part of Anglo-Americans, but people of color as well. Implicit in white supremacy is the seductive nature of power and domination. To align yourself with the American Dream is to

⁵ Although scholars of color have long discussed an institutional privilege associated with being white, we first see whiteness discussed conceptually in the 1980s. With the emergence of whiteness studies, which at first glance seems like it would promote white identity, actually it seeks to explore the ways in which whiteness itself serves as a site of power and privilege, which works in systemic ways to oppress bodies that historically and presently deviate from this position of privilege. What is interesting about whiteness is its institutional nature, in which one can uphold whiteness without particularly presenting as ‘white.’ Through discussions of gender, class, sexuality, bodily ability and other intersecting identities, whiteness studies, which should inherently be anti-racist, seeks to look at the ways in which those in marginalized positions buy into narratives that whiteness is a standard in which people should always be reaching for . One of the prominent feminist scholars who first began to investigate whiteness is Peggy McIntosh (Kolchin 2002).

align yourself with imperialist domination; domination internationally and domestically. Within this Dream is a vicious, capitalist appetite that makes use of the world what it wants. It is in this way that we see American companies along the Mexican-American Border crossing over to the Mexican side for cheaper labor and production rates. It is this appetite that allows us to completely decimate entire countries for the sake of oil, or some other precious resource. To align yourself with the American Dream is to commit to upholding whiteness. Investing in this whiteness is what allows people of color to become oppressors themselves. Part of living this dream would require the minorities who support this worldview to push other minorities into marginalization; to dehumanize them. Speaking of dehumanization, Freire states, “the oppressed must not, in seeking to regain their humanity (which is a way to create it), become in turn oppressors” (Freire 1970, 28). Although Freire is speaking specifically about the oppressed oppressing their oppressors, this same idea could be used for people who move out of marginalization for one reason or another, then seek to further oppress those who once were their peers.

Implicit in its definition, the American Dream leaves out a large number of people, mostly including women, and sexual and racial minorities. As expressed above, the responsibility of spreading this faulty dream is not only on the shoulders of those at the top of the chain; it also requires the success of a few minorities here and there. Prosperous blacks, Asians, and Latinos are placed on a peculiar pedestal as a sign for all other minorities; “if they can make it, so can you.” Anyone can pull themselves up by their boot straps and achieve the American Dream, they say, without analyzing their own privileges that may have gotten them there.

In order to further illustrate the notion of re-marginalization committed by people of color, I would like to look at a few theories concerning the concept of the model minority. As

mentioned before, it is not only the job Anglo-Americans see to uphold whiteness, but also of a few minorities, the model minorities. Having had the ability to climb up the social or economic ladder, racial minorities who have entered a new realm of the public sphere are constantly strategically utilized in the hegemonic structure that is white supremacy. These minorities are placed on a pedestal for two reasons: this individual is to serve as a model, which other minorities are to follow and believe they can achieve; most detrimental, this model is often a source of shame for other marginalized people who are made to feel inferior for not attaining the same amount of success. “The model minority concept, [Vijay] Prashad argues, stood alongside competing theories of liberal pluralism and multiculturalism, all designed to manage and incorporate diversity within a nation now clinging to white supremacy” (Garcia 2012, 112). The use of the model minority is imperative for the success of white supremacy, in order to create a space for people to believe that we live in a society that is truly colorblind. Individuals who fall victim to the politics of the model minority uphold whiteness by normalizing racism. Innate in whiteness is a level of power and privilege that can only be maintained through the dissemination of racist knowledge and social practice. Vital to this epistemology and behavior is a belief that we live in a nation that is beyond racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, transphobia and ableism; these systemic forms of oppression become lost in language about “hard work,” “opportunity,” and being “created equal.” The more minorities and women we have sprinkled in prominent positions, racial and gender oppression gets normalized and more difficult to point out. The colorblind ideology is often enmeshed in the rhetoric of minorities who have risen out of the bottom rungs of society. The “emerging colorblind ideology that challenged racial minorities not to make excuses for their problems and to take responsibility for their own lives,” (112) plays into the psyche of other people of color. It is one thing to be told that you should feel

badly about yourself by someone who does not look like you, but to receive that same sort of attack from someone you directly identify with plays an entirely different role.

One of the biggest issues with the use of the model minority is that the agency of the individual involved is completely thwarted. One would like to simply be happy for the person and their social and possibly economic gains, but part of their gains play directly into the growth and preservation of capitalist, imperialist, white supremacy. Difficulties arise in their authority as a person of color to speak for entire groups of marginalized people. To a certain extent, their race does grant them that authority, but feeding into whiteness, professing this colorblind ideology does more harm to the oppressed than good. The model minority “assume[s] [their] right to speak as a [person] of color and for people of color, and reveled in the credibility [they] assumed [their] identity have [them] to address such issues as welfare, immigration, property ownership, and labor...[they] argue that a colorblind American system based on merit...allowed anyone, regardless of race, to succeed” (113). This rhetoric, again, is detrimental to the psyche of the oppressed, which are already socialized to believe that many of their failures are innate in their inability to ascertain whiteness. Now, guilt over the physical barriers double as we begin to think about the individual’s belief in a personal failing; not only does the person feel shame over the color of their skin, the texture of their hair, the shape of their eyes, the unfamiliar accent in their speech, they must now worry that they are not working hard enough to achieve the success of the model minority. It is a shame that becomes engraved in the mind and identity of the person. I will now look at a few examples of minorities that become engulfed by hegemonic whiteness and begin working against their own interests, and the interest of those who were once their peers.

Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas is a glaring example of a successful⁶ person of color who has internalized black shame, and white values; he is a relentless critic of many progressive values, most shockingly including Affirmative Action.⁷ Often used as a token for conservatives, Thomas' ideologies often create another degree of shame within other people of color because he vehemently rejects a policy whose main purpose is to level the inequalities that have long existed between white men and minorities, including women and people of color. Despite white women being the primary benefactors of Affirmative Action, we very rarely see them being a part of the shamed recipients (Wise 1998, 2). Those who are made to feel shamed by an act that is working to level the workforce, educational, and social gaps between white men and other minorities, are always racial minorities.

Believing in this same notion of meritocracy we see solidified within colorblind ideology, Justice Thomas not only shames himself, but other people of color for possibly benefitting from the rewards of Affirmative Action, instead of making it to the top through hard work and perseverance. This way of thinking is harmful for several reasons. For one, it completely undermines the harsh history of inequality experienced by all facets of racial minorities in the United States. From the continued discrimination and lack of representation of most Native American tribes, to Jim Crow, Japanese internment camps during World War II, to the current hyper-racialized and oppressive discourse on Latina/os and immigration reform, the United States has an ever-present history of forgetting about justice, freedom, and equality for

⁶ Here, I am using the word successful in a way that is typically described in a capitalist system. Success in this country is defined by climbing the social and economic ladder. In the tradition of bell hooks, in my personal life, I wish to redefine what we typically mean by success. I am using the word to show that in a traditional, American sense, he would be considered successful.

⁷ This information comes from a critic by professor at Tulane University and MSNBC news host, Melissa Harris-Perry. Video can be found at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/10/14/melissa-harris-perry-clarence-thomas-affirmative-action_n_1965082.html

all. Another reason this behavior is harmful is because it holds meritocracy to be an ideology of truth and an indicator of worth, rather than a social construction enacted to uphold elitism and racism. Justice Thomas fails to take into things like Legacy Rules⁸ and how that puts holes in the belief of a meritocracy. Beliefs like those of Justice Thomas erase all of the structural inequalities faced by people of color, through state-sponsored policy. Most importantly, Justice Thomas' alignment with white supremacist values, have allowed him to internalize racial hate and shame in such a way that he would let other people of color be shamed by his success and their lack thereof. As mentioned above, as the model minority, he in many ways has the authority to speak for other minorities, and if he is using this platform to reify the white, hegemonic agenda, then minorities are not benefitting from the success of this one. Most importantly, this authority is mostly used by society and other power elites to deny the existence of inequality. If there are people of minority status in positions of power, then they are often tokenized and set forth as a reminder that we live in an egalitarian society, and past notions of racism in particular, but the same is seen in reference to sexism.

Another figure I would like to look at is Republican Florida Senator, Marco Rubio. Born of Cuban immigrants who fled the Castro Regime in the late 1950s, Rubio has in many ways become the voice for the Latina/o population in the United States. Having some of the harshest immigration reform ideas, the Republican Party uses Rubio as the token Latino, who will win them the vote of minorities, especially the Latino vote. Most of his major speeches begin with the story of his parents emigrating from Cuba; they started out with nothing, and through hard

⁸ Legacy Rules which have mostly been discussed in terms of admissions to Ivy League schools, but has a much farther reach with small state universities as well as student organizations such as sororities and fraternities. Legacy Rules across the board state that a certain amount of consideration will be given to students whose parents attended that school or were a part of that organization. These rules have long left out a discussion of who has always been permitted to be a part of the higher education system, and how this gives legacies and unfair leverage, especially compared to students of color, since they have historically been denied the opportunity to a higher education.

work and a strong will, they now have it all. Using the public sphere, and a Latino identity, this model minority makes sure to let his public know, that he identifies with their plight, and that he is one of them; a rich man, using his authority as a person of color to advocate for a colorblind society that treats everyone fairly, without exploring his own privilege. Most Cuban immigrants fleeing the Castro Regime, in the first wave, were already people of socioeconomic privilege. Feeding into the Cold War Era in the United States, the U.S. government provided many of these immigrants with a starting point; with housing, food assistance, and educational help, the first wave of Cuban immigrants were the golden children of the American government, as they were fleeing communism, and that was the main objective of the US government, to exert power showing communism as weak. All of these factors play into giving the Cuban American community, particularly those involved with the first wave of immigration, economic, educational, and social leverage.

It is things like this that we would never hear Rubio attributing to his success. As now, the discourse around government assistance automatically devalues any hard work or success. In the current flow of politics, to receive government assistance is to be dependent in a way that takes away any merit. Not only do Rubio's policies devalue and oppress people of his own ethnicity, but of other Latina/os, as he has fully owned his title as the winner of the "Latino Vote," the voice of us all.

The success of bodies of color can be a major source of shame, because of the rhetoric that surrounds it. Athletes, business owners, elected officials, and others in positions of power often neglect their own privilege in the making of this triumph; people of color feed right into this nation's neocolonial agenda, of shaming and erasure. It is in this way that racialized shaming is consumed and ultimately preserved. The idea that we live in a post-racist nation is, in

many ways, tied to the few, but hyper-publicized achievements of those in minority communities. Thus, it becomes easier to overlook the systematic oppression which people of color face; now they can be pawned off as lazy, unmotivated, or faulty as human beings. These projections are internalized by these bodies and the negativity surrounding their race and ethnicity becomes a part of their core identity.

The success of bodies of color created a shift in the overt acts and sentiments of racism that were once the guiding force in this country, to now a muted, faulty, racial democracy. Much like the apartheid system in South Africa, the United States once enforced an “absolute social [and] racial dichotomy” (Marx 1998, 160) that has now been replaced by a system where racism is naturalized and muted, but just as strong. “The absence of official discrimination and complementary reinterpretations of history emerged as the basic blocks for a state-sponsored ideological projection of...[the United States] as a racial democracy” (167). Now that official state policies have been removed which advocated for the legal discrimination of certain minorities, people of color are now in prominent positions of power, and there are laws in the books that are supposed to prohibit most forms of discrimination, people believe that we have now achieved a post-racist, egalitarian, racial democracy. In an age of such equality, to be in an inferior condition is easily cast off as “pathology of normality” (169).

The concept of racial democracy and colorblindness has seen its biggest push after the election of the nation’s first black president. This source of pride and progress is bittersweet as our half-black president and his family is, in many ways, not allowed to display any blackness whatsoever. The president is always photographed doing something typically “all-American,” and patriarchal. He needed to exemplify that perfect patriarch, ruler of this nation and man of the house. “Michelle Obama [is] represented as primarily concerned about her family. After the

election she was increasingly represented as the embodiment of the perfect wife and mother standing just enough behind her man to let the world know that he was in control” (hooks 2009, 47). In order to continue to uphold oppressive, hegemonic structures, a family of color in power must be kept down; in many ways, this idea is exemplified in the gender roles possessed by the Obamas. Progressive advocates for change that has never, in the history of the United States, been fought for on a national level like this, Michelle and Barack cannot seem too revolutionary, or they are not fulfilling their role. The hegemonic power involved in upholding whiteness does not allow for the president or his wife to act in any manner, other than traditional. The policing of genders roles is just one way which the dominant class can use to pull back on the reigns, when a person of color is gaining too much power.

The investment in white supremacy has come across clearly in the constant rejection and attack of President Obama’s policies by the right and conservative media outlets. Aside from his progressive beliefs, there is nothing the president has done, logistically speaking, that is so paradoxical compared to any other ruler, that has deserved him the amount of critique and refutation he has received from conservative politicians and media.

In many ways, the ruling class’ investment in white supremacy is challenging itself. Using the president as an example of how progressive as a whole the nation is, and how we have achieved a colorblind, racial democracy, not needing things like Affirmative Action or Equal Protection Laws, is wholly undermined when most Anglo-Americans are verbal about their disdain for the president having something to do with race. Seen on t-shirts, posters, and banners, ultra-conservatives across the nation have made it quite clear that they were not ready to have a black president. It is moments like this, when I believe there is a rupture in the concept of a racial democracy, allowing for the same language and action that was realized in apartheid-like North

America to resurface. The reemergence of these hateful words and acts, allow for the agenda of white privilege to be challenged. Those t-shirts, banners, radio interviews, etc. are all something concrete things for the American public, and scholars especially to point to and further the discourse on race.

These moments of rupture are incredibly important, once we reach a point where our society is thought to be post-racist, completely colorblind, and socially egalitarian. It is in these moments that the citizens of this nation must question whether or not we are where we are told to believe we are, and where race scholars must reopen the door to studies of race and ethnicity and explore what factors are at play. Although these moments of rupture are few and far between, when they happen, the impact can be strong, particularly when we discuss gender, and other identitarian intersections as well.

CHAPTER 2
THE GAY RIGHTS MOVEMENT AND THE QUEST FOR RE-COLONIZATION

Power is not a matter of one dominant individual or institutions, but instead manifests in interconnected, contradictory sites where regimes of knowledge and practice circulate and take hold. This way of understanding the dispersion of power helps us realize that power is not simply about certain individuals being targeted for death or exclusion by a ruler, but instead about the creation of norms that distribute vulnerability and security.

—Dean Spade

Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, and the Limits of Law

The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.

—Audre Lorde

The Master's Tools will Never Dismantle the Master's House

Wild tongues can't be tamed, they can only be cut out.

—Gloria E. Anzaldúa

Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza

The White, Middle-Class Gay Rights Movement

Identity-politics have often held a very odd position. For many, it has been a source of pride, of coming together in the face of adversity, and knowing that you are not alone. For others, this has been a source of separation, and extreme difference. I have to agree when “Lorde names differences among women, African Americans, lesbians, and other groups as empowering rather than divisive forces and as aspects of identity...she exhorts her readers to recognize how each of them is multifarious and need never choose one aspect of identity at the expense of the others” (Alexander 1994, 695). This notion is very important to me, because I have long had an interest in the others within an already marginalized group. We often hear of an all-encompassing, lofty, “gay rights movement,” which has inadvertently turned into the white, upper-middle class, gay rights movement. As the movement focuses on marriage equality, we are subsequently getting lost in a certain type of ideology and losing sight of what is happening on the ground. Survival, within a society that despises their gender, color and sexuality, leaves transgender women and lesbians of color with very little time to even conceptualize a fight for

marriage equality. For transgender and/or non-binary people, discrimination and erasure within their very own queer communities brings into question exactly who is fighting for what, and for whom. There are poor queers, who are mostly comprised of blacks and Hispanics, whose main objective in life is to move out of their impoverished state. Racial discrimination within the community is also silenced, and many times, completely invisible. Describing her experience at a lesbian bar in New York City, Audre Lorde writes:

I remember how being young and Black and gay and lonely felt...there were no mothers, no sisters, no heroes. We had to do it alone...we would all rather die than discuss the fact that I was Black...since, of course, gay people weren't racist. After all, didn't they know what it was like to be oppressed? I was gay and Black. The latter fact was irrevocable: armor, mantle, and wall. Often, when I had the bad taste to bring that fact up in conversation with other gay girls who were not Black, I would get the feeling that I had in some way breached some sacred bond of gayness, a bond which I always knew was not sufficient for me (Lorde 1982, 176-81).

Just as moving forward with the American dream, to move forward within the larger gay rights movement, one must erase and subdue certain differences, as if being queer means one thing, as if it only has to do with sexuality, as if it does not intersect with any other piece of our identity puzzle. The dynamics of the movement are inherently flawed, as they mirror an already flawed structural framework. The gay rights movement has become obsessed with providing an image that is exactly like the heterosexual paradigm, but with like genitalia. Instead of fighting to rework the very institutions that pushed them into this subordinate role in the first place, the aim of the movement is to “break the mold” by becoming a part of these institutions, instead of actually changing them.

This phenomenon creates an other, within an other. To be black or brown and queer means that you no longer fit in within a community that is supposed to be yours. As I expressed above when speaking about Lorde's experience, there is a silent requirement within the community, that in order to “move forward” and see “real progress,” people must set aside

their differences and be one, solidified, queer existence. The problem with this lies in the voices of the majority silencing the minority.

The tugging and pulling from the queer community and society as a whole leaves queers of color in a perpetually unidentified and/or a negative identified state. When you feel like you cannot be yourself, in a community that advocates just that, you feel ashamed. Because you are not just queer, neither are you just black or brown; your identity has both components messily, tangled together.

Critical legal scholar Dean Spade argues, “starting in the 1980s, the emerging ‘gay and lesbian rights’ organizations...have produced the new agenda that has focused on the needs and concerns of gay and lesbian people with class privilege, often explicitly cutting people of color, immigrants, trans people, people with disabilities, and poor people” (Spade 2010, 63). Since the inception of what would be considered the modern gay rights movement, it has been plagued by an elitism that has pushed queer people of color, especially those who are female-identified, to the outskirts of their own movement. “Sexual minorities and gender-variant individuals from the global South who negotiate but do not wholly capitulate to what Cymene Howe has called the ‘universal queer subject’ discursively fall, in both time and space, outside narrowly Western and Northern middle-class gay constructions of ‘family,’ ‘lesbian,’ ‘gay,’ ‘queer,’ and ‘Gay Rights.’” (Allen 2012, 222-23). As seen throughout most of the history of Gay and Lesbian Liberation, queer women of color have had to forge their own paths to justice because they simply do not fit into the category of queer as defined by white, middle-class, hetero-assimilationist values.

One of the reasons the mainstream gay rights movement falls into these exclusionary politics is because it seeks to work within the dominant discourse, legal system, and

power structures. Spade, along with other critical legal scholars, argue that movements who work within a rights discourse, necessarily require validation from the dominant, hegemonic legal, social, and political structures. He argues that we must seek justice, not fight for rights. Most projects that view their cause as a right are fighting to be a part of the very system that violently and vehemently oppresses them. When looking at activism as seeking justice versus seeking rights, it is clear to see how more privileged subjects within a minority do not see a complete re-working or deconstruction of the state as necessary, much less wanted. Queer activist and novelist Jewelle Gomez asked, “is it any wonder that the gay rights movement leave the black [and most people of color] communit[ies] trembling with fear and anger?” (Gomez 1986, 938). Facing oppression on one front, the faces of the modern gay rights movement do not identify with the perils of most of the queer community because they usually have race, class, and gender privilege. Thus, live with a partial oppositional consciousness that is only keen on issues that affect them; often ignoring queer of color issues, or using them for their own personal gain.

Spade expresses:

The division between the best-funded, most visible strain of lesbian and gay rights activism, on the one hand, and less publicized US queer and trans activism that centers racial and economic justice, on the other hand, offers another example of the divisiveness of rights frameworks. Lesbian and gay rights advocacy has focused on narrow legal reforms such as hate crime laws, military service, same-sex marriage, and laws against employment discrimination. Critical queer and trans activists and scholars have argued that these goals line up with the damaging and disturbing logics of neoliberalism, including the expansion of criminalization and military conquest and the attacks on social welfare that use myths of family values and meritocracy to suggest that people should work hard and, through forming nuclear families, meet the needs unaddressed or exacerbated by capitalism (Spade 2013, 1041).

As expressed above, justice-seeking activism works in different ways, because it does not necessarily entail validation through the current legal or political system; and if not to dismantle and rebuild the structure entirely, at the very least it seeks to explore current categories and

redefine them or replace them.

Rights activism, while working well within the dominant discourse, participates in what in what I call the neocolonial effect. Discussed in further detail in the next section, the neocolonial effect refers to a nuanced form of oppression exhibited in policies, legislation, and social sentiment, which takes force by being ostensibly egalitarian, but in actuality re-colonizes bodies through forms of racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, transphobia, and ableism.

The Neocolonial Effect

As mentioned by Spade, continuing to work within the dominant discourse reinforces myths created to keep certain groups of people at the margins of society. Expanding off of Spade's logic used to differentiate between right-seeking and justice-seeking work, it becomes clear that members of social movements seeking to attain rights within the current system function in a sense as colonizers; as these members fight for equality from a position of power, racialized, feminine, queer and trans bodies are seen as expendable to the movement. It is in viewing them as expendable that reinforces their dehumanized role. Clouded by the desire to assimilate to heterosexist institutions like marriage, conversations are not being had within the mainstream movement that affect the daily lives of queer women of color. The neglect of queer and trans women of color issues reinforce the idea that their lived realities are not worth discussing, their voices are not worth being heard, and their role within the movement is seen as needed minimally, if at all. These acts reinforce behaviors of dehumanization and re-colonization. Bodies seen as deviant through racial, gender, and sexual standards do not fit within the queer mold that members of the mainstream gay rights movement are trying to build. Thus, the role of the neocolonial effect begins to take shape as it reinforces standards set during the colonial period. Queer women of color quickly become outliers, internalizing their status of inferiority.

Maria Lugones, an Argentine feminist scholar relays an image of her first time in the U.S., she states, “I learned that part of racism is the internalization of the propriety of abuse without identification. I learned that I could be seen as a being to be used by white/Anglo men and women without the possibility of identification...they could remain untouched, without any sense of loss” (Lugones 2003, 80). This experience is fundamental in understanding the role that colonialism played in history and that is continuously generated within modern societies. The ability for the one in power to use and use, without remorse, without feeling as though they are disgusting, without feeling as though acting this way towards other human beings makes them any less human. The dominant learn to move forward in this way, intrinsic in their upbringing, generating a cycle of master and slave; this becomes more and more institutionalized to the point where is it simply considered normal, or just the way things are.

What is frightening about these experiences is not whether they are right or wrong, “is its systemic character, its existence as a social practice” (Young 1990, 62). As these behaviors become more inscribed in society’s attitudes, they become harder to object. Within academia, we theorize about these behaviors all the time, and within these walls, there may be a shift from this neocolonial worldview, to a more post-structural, anticolonial approach, but, outside of the comfort of the university, a more nuanced form of colonialism runs rampant in today’s society.

Neocolonialism, which I use here to describe the way certain bodies are systematically marginalized, has transitioned from *de jure* forms of control, seen clearly under colonial rule, to a form that have become socially acceptable among the dominant class and packaged to minorities as normalcy. This detrimental to queer women of color because it goes hand in hand with why they are not seen as a complete being within the community and movement, but also within society as a whole. Part of the colonial project, which is still manifested in the neocolonial

process, is the necessity of dehumanization. Dehumanization plays a key role in only allowing the voices and experiences of those in positions of power. Within the mainstream Gay Rights Movement, this has usually meant white, middle/upper-class, cisgender¹ gays and lesbians are not only the face of the movement, but their concerns are centered, while most other queers are pushed to the margins. The neocolonial perspective only allows for the agenda of the dominant beings, thus racial, gender, and sexual identities that do not fit within the dominant expectation is seen not only as an alternative, but as a deviance and substandard. Thus, the concerns of those on the margins of the movement are not on the list of accepted issues to fight for. Because of this very issue, there seems to be a major split in the gay rights movement between the white, middle-class move towards marriage equality, and the queers of color who fight for basic survival and opportunity.

Creating and propagating certain images of the subordinate class is part and parcel of neocolonialism, which is just an extension of colonial practices. Through popular media, there are primarily two types of queers that make their way on to the big screen or mainstream television shows: the rich, white, sassy gay man and the wild, promiscuous, white bisexual woman. These images not only reify stereotypes within the queer community, but more importantly, leave out issues of marginalized queers. In mainstream media, black lesbian struggling with depression does not exist; the Latina bisexual dealing with financial, cultural, and family situations does not exist; the Arab lesbian, who fights not only for her rights as a queer woman, but is attempting to negotiate her identity within a nation that hates her, does not exist. The absence of these images enables society to believe that these problems just do not exist, that

¹ To be cisgender means that your sex assigned at birth coincides with your chosen gender identity/gender expression.

these people do not exist; “there are no people there,” as Froude famously said.²

The Unethical State and the Impossibility of Black and Brown Queers

It seems as though many policies created by the state are meant to produce shame in its recipients. For queers of color, the oppression through policy is two-fold. Leaders of the several religious communities and the conservative-right create legislation that overwhelmingly harms queers of color more than any other sector within the queer community. Their views are passed off as the correct form of morality, and are widely consumed as such. I agree with Nussbaum when she says, “A decent society, one might think, would treat its citizens with respect for their human dignity, rather than degrading or humiliating them. A decent society would also protect its citizens from at least some types of degradation and humiliation,” (Nussbaum 2004, 223) like those involving their sexual and racial identity. This nation treats its citizens with dignity as long as they are not outside of the realm of what is considered normal, and right.

The state becomes completely unethical when it begins to use shaming tactics on its own citizens to “perform a constructive social function;” this notion falls along the same lines as Foucault’s analysis of society creating a sexuality that is “politically conservative” (Foucault 1978, 37; Nussbaum 2004, 226). The utility a citizen serves is of utmost importance to a state, and in order to keep your populace useful, you must control certain aspects of their being. Race and sexuality, both share a state of being that makes it an issue of both the public and private concern. Race is, as Lorde describes, an “armor” that cannot be removed. It is a dress that finds itself politicized in the private and the public. Finding its origin in colonialism, color is status, color is location, and color is power; while sexuality has found its power within religious fanaticism, which is now passed off as basic human morality.

² James Anthony Froude, author of *The English in the West Indies*, used this phrase to describe his encounter with people in the Caribbean, during colonial times.

Only recently has the “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy of the military been repealed; but even though legally this policy is no longer recognized, it does not mean that the damage and legacy of such an immoral policy does not still have a strong hold within the armed forces; these policies have long affected queer women of color in the military, primarily Black and Latina lesbians. Despite Black lesbians consisting of less than 1% of women in the military, and Latina lesbians only 0.3%, combined, they account for over 4% of the women discharged from the military³. Antigay legislation:

Pose[s] a disproportionate threat to Black and Latino same-sex couple families. This is because Black and Latino same-sex couples are twice as likely as White same-sex couples to be raising children (particularly Black and Latino lesbian couples), and because they earn less and are less likely to own the home they live in. Policies restricting family recognition, whether of partner relationships or parent-child relationships, disproportionately harm Black and Latino same-sex couple families. Black same-sex cohabiting partners are more likely than their White counterparts to hold public sector jobs which may offer domestic partner health insurance; many antigay marriage amendments and laws prevent public sector employers in those states from offering such benefits to gay and lesbian employees. Latino same-sex partners are more likely to be non-US citizens; this means they are disproportionately affected by the Immigration and Naturalization Service’s failure to recognize same-sex couple families (Cahill 2009, 219).

As shown above, the antigay policies that become state law, overwhelmingly damage the lives of people of color, over their white counterparts. They fit perfectly into the overarching cycle of continual disenfranchisement an entire sector of the population. The state’s lack of regard for a portion of its citizens is completely immoral and unscrupulous.

Everything that I have discussed to this point is the background for saying that currently, the ability for a queer person of color to create a positive, stable, and completely confident identity, that is in any way shaped around their racialized bodies or sexuality, has been marked by impossibility. Whether consciously stated, or relatively unaware, there is a deep-rooted shame

³ Cahill, Sean. 2009. The Disproportionate Impact of Anti-Gay Family Policies on Black and Latino Same-Sex Couple Households. *Journal of African American Studies*. Vol. 13: 219-50.

that has become part and parcel to the identity of hyper-raced, queer bodies. The color of our skin, that we wear as a permanent dress has been polluted by the legacy of colonialism, and the normalized social practice that is neocolonialism. Our sex has been studied and deemed abnormal. Creating another binary of what is good and what is bad, but this time with our sexuality. Society tells me I am weird, policies tell me I am not good for the state, and rightwing religious fanatics tell me I am sick and doomed for the fiery underworld. My body is tainted. My body is shameful.

Unlike Nussbaum's view of the role of the state as a vessel to ensure their citizens are viewed as fully human, gleaming with dignity, (Nussbaum 2004, 223) it often takes a role that necessarily entails shaming, as a part of its regulating and disciplining. These actions become part of the overall discourse of what is best for a society, and the tough decisions one must make to keep the nation orderly and morally upright. What is difficult for me to understand is why what is best for a society often comes at the expense of its minorities, and in this case, the minority of a minority. Some think that shame is an "infallible guide to morality and civic order," and it may very well have been a useful mechanism to control society in a different time. But, currently identity is what creates the individual (Tarnopolsky 2010, 469). Looking at Foucault's work, it becomes evident that there have been timeframes in which shaming citizens could have been useful; those ideas arose right on the cusp of widespread enlightenment and declarations for individualism, and philosophers drew clear lines about what it meant to live in a civil, rational societies. We live in a time when attaining a certain degree of individualism is the sign of proper human development. Power, agency, and autonomy are realized through the journey of individualism, as opposed to a more wholesome, communitarian worldview. How can queers of color be whole or fully individual agents in society if they are ashamed of whom they

are? These policies which work to shame and stigmatize its recipients are meant to silence and isolate an entire group of people; this in turn eliminates them from the public sphere, limiting their power and visibility.

CHAPTER 3
REDEFINING FEMINISM AND RESISTANCE THROUGH AN OPPOSITIONAL
CONSCIOUSNESS

The 1970s-80s social movement called U.S. third world feminism functioned as a central locus of possibility, an insurgent social movement that shattered the construction of any one ideology as the single most correct site where truth can be represented. Indeed, without making this kind of metamove, any 'liberation' or social movement eventually becomes destined to repeat the oppressive authoritarianism from which it is attempting to free itself, and become trapped inside a drive for truth that ends only in producing its own brand of dominations.

—Chela Sandoval
Methodology of the Oppressed

The function of art is to do more than tell it like it is—it's to imagine what is possible.
—bell hooks
Outlaw Culture

We are not free human beings...Silence is like starvation. Don't be fooled. It's nothing short of that...
—Cherrie Moraga
La Guerra

Creating an Oppositional Consciousness through the Restructuring of Feminism

Although there have been large successes, in terms of assimilationist civil liberties, for both people of color and for the queer community, there is also a significant and sometimes daunting amount of work to be done. Conservative media still has a stronghold in the thoughts and views of most average Americans, offering a warped view of what racialized and sexual bodies do, and what accepting them can do to our beloved American values. There are still policies that prevent the full growth of these minorities as full citizens of the state, and would allow them to experience the same benefits under the law as their white, heterosexual counterparts.

Even though it seems as though queer women of color are doomed to this shameful existence, I do believe that slowly, we could move towards a place where we literally live in a postcolonial, post-homophobic, post-sexist, and a post-racist world. The unique position occupied by queers of color, by virtue of their identities, opens the door to genuinely

revolutionary forms of resistance, which creates a space for large-scale structural change.

According to Nussbaum, we can reach this type of society through art and media; for social theorist Michael Warner, we can display true resistance as queers by throwing ourselves into the public sphere and promoting our culture. I believe that in conjunction with both creating a sense of normalcy through the arts and achieving visibility through engaging with the public sphere, one can realize change through intellectual revolutions. The intellectual revolution, which I will go into much more depth a little later, in a certain sense, requires the shamed identities of the ultra-marginalized subaltern.

Nussbaum believes that transformation can be seen through the arts, with poets like Walt Whitman, queer films like *Milk* and *Brokeback Mountain*, and challenges to colonial and racial structures in Ralph Ellison's novel *Invisible Man*. To the list I would also add films like Deepa Mehta's *Fire*, which tells the story of a same-sex female relationship in India. Organizations like Third World Newsreel, a site for the creation and dissemination of art and films for people of color by people of color, create a safe space for queers of color to foster their identities and express themselves; and in doing so, reformatting what the masses believe queers of color are like. Nussbaum expresses, "Entertainment makes perception possible: pleasure makes people willing to receive another person's shape into their minds and hearts...this possibility of empathy, in turn, prompts hope. The arts have given many powerful images of gay and lesbian lives, and we have all, straight and gay, been changed by those images" (Nussbaum 2010, 205-06). Consumption of media is instantaneous, and by its very nature (if done well), necessitates empathy. Thus, the arts really could be one of the more important methods used to give the community some humanity.

Warner takes a more hands on approach and says we need to “promote queer sexual culture,” and to move towards a society with “full public resources [that] combats isolation, shame, and stigma rather than sex” (Warner 1999, 218). Instead of sitting idly, we must promote ourselves within the confines of this society. We must view ourselves as whole citizens of this nation and request the same dignity given to the majority: policies that fight shaming, stereotyping, and exclusion from a gay rights movement that is supposed to be all-encompassing for our brothers and sisters.

Ultimately, intellectual movements that challenge the entire structure on which we build all of our theories and social thought would be the only genuine solution to the problem I have presented; but more importantly, an intellectual revolution of these proportions seems to be uniquely available to those in positions of systemic oppression. Particular to the U.S., the shame-based identities of queer women of color could therefore be a starting point for this upheaval. Cultural theorist and Chicana studies professor Chela Sandoval, draws from Foucault’s theory on desire, to create what she calls an oppositional social movement, based off of a new “anti-postmodern, antifascist, and anticolonial oppositional consciousness.” She believes that “desire...drives, focuses, and permeates all human activity. What is required, then, is to reinforce an experience and technology of desire-in-resistance that can permit oppositional actors to move” (Sandoval 2000, 164). We have to create a new frame of consciousness, which opposes the current structures of power that have holds within our world. It is not just about adding minorities to the mix and stirring. We need to `rework all of the foundations in which we currently operate, and in which we regulate and police our citizens and minorities of the world. A component of this new state of consciousness requires bodies to move forth in the direction of resistance, by appealing to desire, in such a way that makes it the driving force behind the power

to oppose. This shift in world-view would “saturate all citizen-subjects with forms of oppositional consciousness that are capable of confronting the most psychically intrusive forms of domination and subordination yet devised” (162).

To Sandoval, we must deconstruct all of the normalized notions we use from day to day, as we move into a globalized world, and only then will it be “possible for citizen-subjects to become activists for a new decolonizing global terrain, a psychic terrain that can unite them with similarly positioned citizen-subjects within and across national borders into a new, post-Western-empire alliances” (183). If and when we reach this point, only then can we respect each other, and view each other’s differences, not as a separatist mechanism, but as partial representations of a whole humanity. Shaming your own people would be completely out of the question, and using minorities, and in particular to this analysis, queers of color, as a means to an end will be viewed as unethical by all, and not just by some.

Vital to the understanding and realization of Sandoval’s ideals is to reject not only neocolonialist, capitalist, practices and patriarchy, but to also reject the white-hegemonic feminism that ostensibly attempts to fix the issues, all the while reifying white, dominant ideology. Influenced by Donna Haraway’s work in “Manifesto for Cyborgs,” Sandoval strives for a new hybrid form of feminism that would be a “breakup of versions of Euro-American feminist humanism in their devastating assumptions of master narratives deeply indebted to racism and colonialism” (166). While feminism is vital to the act of decolonizing and engendering an oppositional consciousness, it is not feminism in the classic, liberal sense. Sandoval, along with Haraway, calls for a more complex form of feminism that allows for the authority of multiple subjectivities and positionalities.

From its entrance into the academy, intersectionality has been received favorably or with much criticism. As it shifted from activism to discipline, many of the major tenants of intersectional thought became commodified and repackaged to fit within the deradicalized academy. As we move from the coining of the term by critical legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, to further development by sociologist Patricia Hill Collins, in the early 1990s, scholars and activists have irresponsibly co-opted the term, erasing its historical, social, and political contexts. This erasure has allowed for intersectionality to be used in ways which do not delve into these contingencies and continue to reify the dominant discourse, without being questioned. Intersectionality has lost its genealogy within several progressive academic and activists circles. Because of this, it is often, that looking at race within these circles has been seen as important but not as critical to any analysis, as gender is, for example. What this does is erase hundreds of years of history which has placed intersectionality outside of feminism and outside of anti-racists work, and sought to critique the ways in which these identities are constantly interlocking and intertwined. Formulating gender and race, among other identity factors, like class, sexuality, disability, nationality, citizenship, family dynamics, etc. in this way, allows for a more thorough critique of both lived experience and structural inequalities.

Aside from understanding these facets of difference as interlocking, and interrogating them in relation to power dynamics within hegemonic structures, the link between connecting this theory to practice is vital to working as an intersectional scholar or activist. First coined by Crenshaw, then further developed by Collins, the aim of intersectionality was to provide, to a certain extent, a new paradigm for research, theory, and lived reality. It created a multiple-axis approach of negotiating identities, as opposed to single-axis frameworks that had thus been the popular mode of doing research. What was different about intersectionality, as opposed to these

single-axis frames or theories of double jeopardy, is that it argues that these identities do not function independently. They are all interlocking and negotiate different power dynamics both in a pragmatic and structural sense. Crenshaw, most notably theorizes the three different aspects of intersectionality: structural, which she relates to theory; political, which focuses on intersectionality as a practice and lived reality; and representational, which relates to visual and cultural representations. Collins further develops a theory of intersectionality by introducing us to the matrix of domination, which rejects the Eurocentric, masculinist endeavor to create categories and dichotomies. For Collins, “replacing additive models of oppression with interlocking ones creates possibilities for new paradigms. The significance of seeing race, class, and gender as interlocking systems of oppression is that such an approach fosters a paradigmatic shift in thinking inclusively about other oppressions, such as age, sexual orientation, religion, and ethnicity” (Collins 1990, 225). What we are getting from both Crenshaw and Collins is that intersectionality, inherently, creates a lens in which all of these identities are weaved together in a way that require an investigation into the power and structural dynamics as well as the lived realities of individuals. In order to do intersectional work, one must reject positivist, dominant methods and always look at power dynamics within and outside of identity groups.

Collins expresses, “intersectional knowledge projects...[view] the task of understanding complex social inequalities as inextricably linked to social justice, or the intersections not just of ideas themselves but of ideas and actions” (Collins 2012, 450). According to Collins, thinking intersectionally necessarily calls us to action; it does not call us in a reformist manner, but one that seeks justice. In many ways, what the study of intersectionality has lost as it has entered the academy is its necessary call for justice. “Intersectionality has taken form not only as an analysis of the multiplicative nature of oppression, but also as a political intervention that deconstructs

social relations and promotes more just alternatives. In this way, from its inception, intersectionality has been a political strategy as much as it has been a theoretical lens” (Luft and Ward 2008, 4). For intersectional scholars and activists, there is a necessity to believe that the personal is the political, and that the link between theory and practice should be strong and unwavering.

Stemming from the work of sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, political scientist and critical race theorist Rose Ernst states, “frames, as an analytical tool, are uniquely compatible with the reality of identity and race politics. As described earlier, the definition of a frame utilized in this project as follows: ‘Frames are set paths for interpreting information.’ Frames operate as filters...” (13). Studying the frames or frameworks within which people practicing intersectionality or using it as a research paradigm, are developing strategies and policies is incredibly helpful, in the sense that it allows for a nuanced discussion of power and privilege. Ernst argues that both women’s organizations and welfare rights organizations working within an intersectional frame are still failing to make significant gains because they are still developing within a frame of colorblind racism. That frame distorts the potential for intra-group success as well as coalition building across groups and movements. Ernst explains:

Frames allow for the deconstruction of this avoidance of race, through silences, key phrases, and stories. More specifically, frames serve four purposes in this book. First, they provide insight into how activists think about race, class, and gender in welfare politics. Second, frames, in turn, provide clues about how their organizations actually behave. Third, they are devices to understand the way in which social movement members do or do not communicate across organizations. Fourth, as noted above, they both reflect and reinforce processes of marginalization pervasive in society at large, which have the ability to undermine the movement’s social change goals. Most important, however, they measure the evasion of issues of power and its intersection with identity (Ernst 2010, 13-4).

No matter how much we place value on doing intersectional work, it seems as though our work is never genuinely intersectional unless we understand the frames with which we are

working. As noted through Ernst's interviews in her book, *The Price of Progressive Politics: The Welfare Rights Movement in an Era of Colorblind Racism*, activists are in fact doing things that would be considered intersectional work, but continuing to work within the colorblind frame, inhibits structural change or lasting community change. Acknowledging the role of colorblindness, and working towards dismantling the ideology is inherently intersectional and should be part and parcel of advocating for an intersectional politics.

What I hope to show in this section is the truly radical nature of intersectional theory and practice. For the most part, it has been accepted into feminism as a watered down, deradicalized call for diversity or multiculturalism. But what feminists who have co-opted this term fail to realize is how damaging it is to use intersectional theory in a way that reifies the dominant, hegemonic discourse, and does not attempt to deconstruct or redefine certain social, cultural, and political categories that have been engrained and normalized in our nation's narrative. Although feminism has long sought to deconstruct certain categories and reject practices, it has always done so centering the white, heterosexual, cisgender experience. In order to move from impossibility to possibility, we must reconstruct feminism to reflect truly intersectional ideals and centers the experience of queer women of color. I am not advocating that queer Black, Latina, Asian, and Indigenous women hold some sort of answer to end oppression, but what is important to note is that centering their experience will allow us to look at structures in power in a different way. It is a partial knowledge that has long been missing from the discourse.

Black Feminist, lesbian organization Combahee River Collective from the 1970s explained in their mission statement, "the most general statement of our politics at the present time would be that we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression, and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and

practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking” (Springer 2005, 117). It is within the tenants of Black Feminism that we must begin to reconstruct or seek to replace mainstream feminism. As feminism created by women of color has long called for that intersectional component, it would create a safer space for queer women of color to feel as though their needs are being advocated for. Queer women of color have long been pushed out of the feminist conversation, enabling yet another level of impossibility. Despite this, more importantly it created a space for the creation of an oppositional, intersectional feminism, which centers the marginalized experience and has the possibility to incite real, structural and social change. It is within this nuanced, complicated feminism that queer women of color find a real space for opposition. As expressed above, it is a feminism that centers racial, economic, and sexual justice, not just gender rights. It is a feminism that seeks to challenge hierarchies and categories, not just seeks the means to fit better within them. For queer women of color, their “queerness negates their full inclusion within their own racial/ethnic community due to homophobia. Moreover, racism within the LGBT movement marginalizes their experiences and perpetually leaves them as outsiders. This marginalization, while painful, also produces dissident knowledge that can challenge and resist normative conceptions of what it means to be [a queer person of color]” (Alimahomed 2010, 152). It is this dissident knowledge that fosters a fully oppositional consciousness, which creates a space to have the conversation about redefining feminism and activism in more intersectional terms.

Writing as Resistance and the Introduction of a Politics of Possibility

The following offers an analysis of how queer women of color have long used different art mediums as revolutionary acts of resistance. As I hope to have shown, the formulation of a wholly oppositional consciousness firmly planted in the notion of decolonization, creates a space

in which queer women of color can oppose different structures of power and oppression. Speaking specifically of Caribbean and Caribbean-American, lesbian writers, academic and activist Myriam J.A. Chancy discusses how within this literature there is a “multilayered, pluralistic revolutionary discourse that could alter the psyches of the populations” discussed in the texts (Chancy 2008, 53). Portrayal of lived reality through literature and poetry is paramount for queer women of color’s spaces for two reasons. First, it nuances notions of resistance. It has us question what counts as resistance? What types of resistance are effective for overall systemic change? Second, in looking at queer women of color’s writings as resistance, we complicate the concept of the public sphere and are then in a place to look at the role and importance of counter publics for the creation of a genuinely transgressive politics. Within this section, I would like to look at two queer women writers in particular: award-winning writer and activist Jewelle Gomez and poet, civil rights activist, and storyteller Audre Lorde. I want to explore the ways in which their writings are a form of resistance against hegemonic conceptions of queer women of color, and also how their writings are part of a counter public that speaks in opposition to the dominant discourse in matters of representation of queer racialized bodies.

I want to begin by reconstructing our current understandings of what counts as resistance, and what types of resistance are able to break down our current systems of power and instill widespread structural change. Within our western conception of resistance, opposition has primarily looked like direct action: marching, protesting, and personally standing up to those with power and authority. Although some people argue that these methods of resistance are effective for overall change, I want to look at the ways direct action is not necessarily the most effective form of resistance. Overpolicing and hypersurveillance of queer and racialized bodies adds a layer of danger to participating in direct action. Police brutality, a reality of these

impossible bodies on daily basis, would only be magnified if they are participating in direct action, and thus seen as overtly agitating the system and stepping outside of their allowed social locations. Speaking specifically of AIDS activism with ACT UP¹ and other groups, sociologist and cultural scholar Brett Stockdill discusses the way activists of color find it difficult to participate in direct action based on this history of being repressed and violently omitted from protest by police and other authority figures; while their white counterparts were not. His interviews indicate that it links directly to collective memories of government attacks on radical antiracist struggles during the civil rights era. He states:

Collective memories have been produced by the extreme deception and violence used by the federal government and other authorities to crush radical movements of the 1960s and 1970s—especially those led by people of color... Violence, intimidation, harassment, and surveillance increased the risks of participation in the organization... Activists' perceptions of a greater possibility of police brutality, arrests, conviction, and longer sentences for people of color are borne out of research on the criminal justice system. These patterns of injustice affected strategic choices and in particular operated as a deterrent to civil disobedience among activists of color (Stockdill 2003, 123-125).

The interviews noted that activists of color were traumatized by Government organizations such as COINTELPRO, an FBI Counter Intelligence Program, which thwarted the Communist Party in the United States and also effectively crushed the Black Panthers by “fabricating evidence used to imprison activists, infiltrating organizations, forging correspondence, conducting surveillance, and killing dozens of radical activists” (123). Thus, I want us to look at other means of resistance that do not put the immediate survival and safety of these bodies into question. One of the means involve story-telling in poetry, novels, and other forms of creative writing. Writing as queer women of color not only allows us to restructure

¹ ACT UP, formed in the late 1980s is an activist and advocacy group that stands for AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power. They seek to bring awareness to issues surrounded the AIDS/HIV affected community and incite policy change. They are most famous for their slogan “silence=death.”

what we deem as effective resistance, but is also an incredibly powerful form of resistance for several reasons.

Looking at Jewelle Gomez's award-winning novel, *The Gilda Stories*, which tells the story of a young, black, lesbian vampire who escapes from slavery in the 1850s and moved through time as a benevolent vampire partaking in several adventures and life changes. Writing stories like this redefine resistance because of its effects. Centering blackness and lesbianism, this text, gives power and voice to bodies that are not granted these possibilities in lived reality. This is important not only because a queer black woman is receiving such acclaim and notoriety for such a revolutionary text, but also because of what the text itself means. It means placing value on a voice that has been silenced for most of western history. It means breaking down notions of what queerness looks like, acts like, and sounds like. It means that dominant narratives of queer bodies are not *the* representation of queerness, but *a* representation. Writing from the margins brings in different voices and partial knowledges, which create more fruitful counter publics. It is these counter publics where resistance takes its strongest form.

I want to argue that queer women of color's writings are a form of resistance that have the potential to create a genuinely transgressive politics because it often takes the form of becoming a counter public. In order to conceptualize this notion of the counter public, I look to the work of critical theorist Nancy Fraser, and her work rethinking Habermas' notion of the public sphere. German sociologist and philosopher Jürgen Habermas describes the public sphere as a "theater in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk. It is the space in which citizens deliberate about their common affairs, hence, an institutionalized arena of discursive interaction" (Fraser 1990, 57). Within his model, the public sphere is one, cohesive space. Fraser goes on to problematize this idea and attempts to argue for

the role and possibilities of counter publics. Living in a world which has structures that create inequalities and oppressions, this idea of one, cohesive counter public is one that is inherently exclusionary and catering to the dominant class. Thus, how do we account for alternative voices that seek to bring in an oppositional consciousness and enable alternative ways to produce these “discursive interactions?” Here is where we must note the need for viewing alternative forms of resistance, not only as small acts of opposition, but as counter publics themselves. As Fraser argues, counter publics serve as sites of conflict which seek to break down hegemonic, dominant ideology. She states, “there were always a plurality of competing publics but the relations between bourgeois publics and other publics were always conflictual...counterpublics contested the exclusionary norms of the bourgeois public, elaborating alternative styles of political behavior and alternative forms of public speech” (61). The importance of counter publics lies not only in their ability to problematize exclusion by the dominant class, but also that it inherently seeks to bring forward forms of behavior and speech that have never been seen as a valid avenue of interaction, especially when enacted by bodies that are deemed socially impossible.

The role of poetry and literature created by queer women of color, despite existing throughout history, was never seen as a valid form of knowledge. Even when writings became queer, that role was often reserved for white, gay males. “Lesbian [or queer women’s] literature never received such consistent endorsement and consolidation from readers in positions of intellectual power. While it may be true that the history of male gay literature is, in large measure, a history of acts of censorship, it is often, also, a record of self-affirming male elites with access to advanced education and the means of cultural production. There is at least as much power as powerlessness to be acknowledged in the history of male gay culture” (Woods 1998, 6). This endorsement of white, gay male poetry and prose, even by the dominant class, is

a privilege that must not be overlooked, and has rarely, if ever, been afforded to queer, female-identified, bodies of color. In many ways, by virtue of their white privilege, these queer men have become canonized by the dominant class, as we see with writers like Walt Whitman and Oscar Wilde.

Writing in this form, while queer, has been deemed a luxury of white men. While writers like Audre Lorde, pushing boundaries of genre and representation by writing about her lived reality as a black lesbian, most notably in her book *Zami: A New Spelling of my Name*, which she describes as a biomythography. Mixing genre, this poetic, occasionally fiction, memoir fills a gap in queer writing. In a short essay, “Poetry is not a Luxury,” Lorde states:

For women, then, poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence...Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought. The farthest horizons of our hopes and fears are cobbled by our poems, carved from the rock experiences of our daily lives...The white fathers told us: I think, therefore I am. The black mother within each of us—the poet—whispers in our dreams; I feel, therefore I can be free. Poetry coins the language to express and charter this revolutionary demand, the implementation of freedom (Lorde 1984, 38).

In the beginning of this essay, she is calling for an appreciation of alternative forms of knowledge; a valuing of partial knowledges. This speaks directly to the pivotal nature of counter publics. Creating conflict between different forms of knowledge, we are forced to question the status quo.

In challenging the status quo, queer writers like Audre Lorde, and those who have followed in her footsteps, are creating a multilayered, pluralistic revolutionary discourse that seeks to break down dominant conceptions of queerness, womaness, and blackness. Inherent in these discussions is a reconceptualization of different power structures bound in categories of gender, race, class, and sexuality. Lorde’s portrayal of queerness works in two ways: first, as discussed above, it challenges notions of queerness within the dominant class, especially

concepts like the universal queer, as discussed in an earlier section of this paper; second, her work challenges flaws of representation in the arts, as she is giving an image of queerness that had not yet been widely discussed. While breaking down dominant ideals of queer bodies, she is also giving an image for queer women of color to see themselves in the arts. I want to be clear here, I am not universalizing her portrayal, as she discussed her life, and her story as a black, Caribbean-American lesbian. Simply what I mean to say here is that Lorde was one of the first queer women of color to put her life experiences into poetry. Widespread within oppositional communities of color, Lorde's work put queerness as experienced in a racialized body at the center, giving other queer women of color the hope of being represented. It is this radical notion of representation that reintroduces a politics of possibility within bodies deemed socially impossible.

A politics of possibility is a politics of radical hope. It is an investment in restoring humanity to bodies deemed impossible, unwanted, unworthy. As discussed in a previous section, queer, female-identified, bodies of color are deemed impossible socially, politically, and culturally. Through popular media, literature, legislation, and policy-making, these bodies are deemed inferior through their representations. Whether presented in an unwanted way, as a monolith, or just absent completely from several forms of media, queer black and brown bodies are not seen as a normal component of society, but as an alternative. The standard for queerness, described in terms of the universal queer, creates a normal type, even within a marginalized community. Thus, within the queer community, we see a large disconnect along racial, class, and gender lines. The politics of possibility is one that believes in practicing solidarity. According to transnational feminist and postcolonial theorist Chandra Mohanty, "solidarity [is] based on mutuality and accountability" (Mohanty 2013, 985). In order to do genuine work of solidarity,

we must all adopt the reconstructed version of feminism that rejects the hegemonic, Eurocentric, white-centered feminism. Just as we saw above in the mission statement produced by the Combahee River Collective, everyone's feminism should be defined by a commitment to end all of the oppressive structures that continue to marginalize queer women of color. If the voices and experiences of those most affected by systemic acts of oppression remain at the center of our analysis and activism, then we will be able to release every woman from the shackles of structural marginalization and in turn have the ability to incite social and political change.

Part of understanding intersectionality is also acknowledging intra-group differences. There is not one definition of what it means to be a queer woman of color, much less creating a monolith of queer Black women, or Latina women. There are class privileges, racial and sexual passing privileges, among other factors that must always be accounted for. But, it is in respecting this difference, and not viewing it as separatist that will allow us to cross boundaries and work in solidarity. It is in constantly examining one's own privilege and power as a possible oppressor that we will be able to work together and create coalitions within movements and bring marginalized voices to the center of the force of resistance. As we have seen this happen time and time again within the mainstream gay rights movement, with the constant rejection of queers of color, transgender women of color, and lesbians of color, we can also see this behavior widespread within the queer of color community. As male privilege, gender and racial passing privilege, and class privilege often go unexamined and create yet another level of marginalization within an already heavily oppressed group. In order to work in genuine solidarity, we must not only work on ally-ship between different groups, but also within these groups as we acknowledge more nuanced forms of difference.

Acknowledging and working between differences is the hope within the role of counter publics. Bringing forth different voices and partial knowledges and deeming them as valuable and worthy is really where the politics of possibility come into play. The work of queer women of color like Audre Lorde and Jewelle Gomez, putting womaness, queerness, and blackness to the center not only paves the way for other people within that identity to write about their lives, but it also instills a hope that these identities are worthy of being represented.

My Positionality and Building the Desire to Resist

As a queer, first-generation Dominican-American, I see shame all around me and within me. By privilege of my education and consciousness raising, I have the ability to be fully aware of the way this nation's rhetoric and practices concerning race, sex, and gender affect my daily life. My existence as an educated, light-skinned, cisgender woman, daughter of immigrants, lower-middle class, queer, and able-bodied, to name a few of my identities, creates an interesting web of oppressions and privileges. I am able to sit here, and write this paper about an internalized sense of shame and disgust that is actively present in my own body and on my own skin, because I have been privileged enough to be able to put academic words to feelings. I am able to critically analyze the ways in which this identity has shaped the way I view the world, from the most basic sense, to more ideological and structural components of our ways of life.

It did not take me very long to understand that I saw myself and others saw me as a shameful being. Early in my life, there was a sense of shame that accompanied having immigrant parents who could barely communicate with your teachers, or that my father had a menial position at a grocery store because of language and cultural barriers. In my adolescence is when I began to see the effects of our nation constructing the notion of brown skin as an enemy. All of a sudden, my skin color and the texture of my hair were matters of concern and ridicule for my peers. For most of my life, I felt as though these views were normal, or "just the way things are."

It was not until reaching college, then particularly in graduate school that I became actively aware of the internalization of the shame that stemmed from these lines of thought. I often stayed out of the sun, in order to keep my skin color as light as possible, and only began to feel comfortable with the tone of my skin when tanning became the cool thing to do in high school. I put the harshest of chemicals in my hair, to make it look like that of my Anglo peers. I felt bad for doing these things, but I had to balance the shame I felt as a Latina woman, with Afro-Caribbean background.

At the end of my adolescence, I encountered a new level of shame, when I came out as queer. Between the disgust from most of my family, the church I then belonged to, and the nation as a whole, I began to feel like even more of a faulty person. My identity both as a queer woman, and as brown-skinned put me in a place of hopelessness.

The ability and privilege to get into higher education did not change the fact that I felt this shame, but quickly helped me realize where this shame was coming from, and why I was feeling it. As a student of philosophy and gender studies, it became part of my education to study the very structures that allow certain social practices to persist through time. It was part of my curriculum to study the theories that paved the way for colonial and imperialist thought. We discussed a form of individualism that gave birth to the crushing form of capitalism Americans are so in love with. I analyzed theories of aesthetics that helped me realize how this idea of a universal image of goodness came into being. All of these components together, gave me a way to view the world not as a place where “things just are the way they are,” but where things are all part of an agenda for power and domination, for an individualism that promotes the survival of the fittest, which continues to be sold as white men and most white women.

This education gave me the ability to have desire-in-resistance. I am able to restructure the entire form of my consciousness, and oppose. Oppose the underlying neocolonialist agenda that guides the dominating class in the creation of this globalized world. Oppose this Anglicized postmodernist approach of viewing the public sphere. Oppose this version of individualism that leaves no room for community, for honest respect. My passion for a subaltern intellectual movement comes from my own life experience, and the importance that education played in actualizing my opposition. We cannot let the state win in diminishing proper critical education, because I oppose, and we need more and more voices to oppose.

There must be a restructuring of every human rights movement into one that seeks justice on multiple fronts, and in which difference is no longer a silenced side-project, but a valued subjectivity. Sandoval lays down the foundations for a certain type of resistance, in which the acceptance and respect of multiple subjectivities are a necessity if we are going to become one decolonized, global community. Her theories not only have the ability to reform social practice and ideology in the United States, but around the world.

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