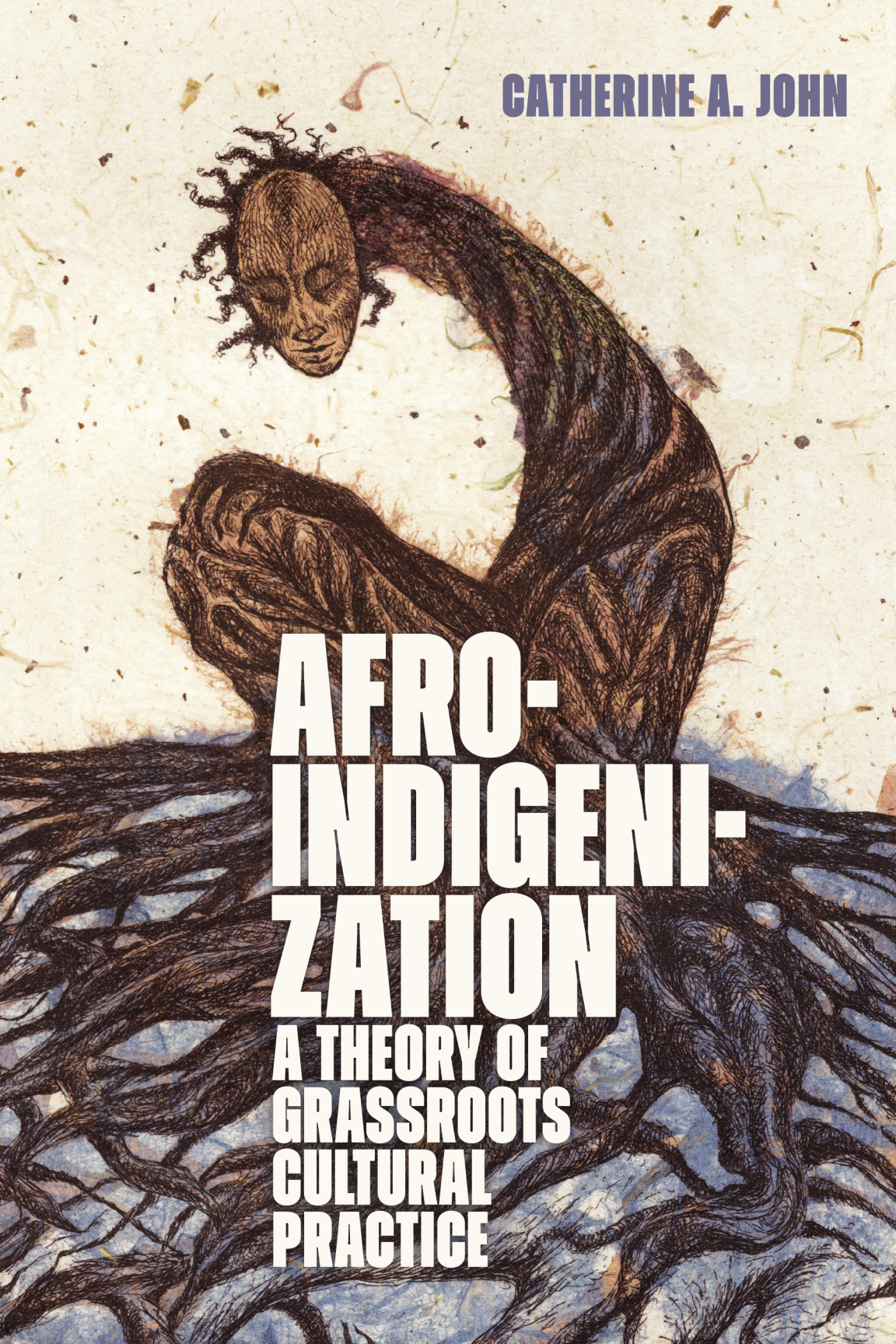




CATHERINE A. JOHN

AFRO- INDIGENI- ZATION

A THEORY OF
GRASSROOTS
CULTURAL
PRACTICE

AFROINDIGENIZATION

The Religious Cultures of African and African Diaspora People

Series editors:

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AFROINDIGENIZATION

**A THEORY OF
GRASSROOTS CULTURAL
PRACTICE**

CATHERINE A. JOHN

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TO
FAY MONICA
THANKS FOR BELIEVING THIS WAS POSSIBLE

TO
**VÈVÈ CLARK, AUDRE LORDE, GLORIA NAYLOR,
OCTAVIA BUTLER, AND TONI CADE BAMBARA**
THANKS FOR YOUR HELP

TO
ABOUBACAR SIDICK
THANKS FOR YOUR "SOUL MATE" LOVE AND GROUNDINGS

TO
JULIA ERICA
THANKS FOR BEING MY TWIN

TO
FITZ ALLEN
THANKS FOR HAVING MY BACK FROM THE OTHER SIDE

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Introduction

KRIK: Afroindigenization and *Marasa* Consciousness

Throughout the *Afrospora*, there are storytelling traditions.¹ The stories told in the chapters that follow are a weaving of voices that are not mine alone (KRIK).² They are my publicly shared theoretical testament, honoring the people and experiences that have shaped my insights. The KRAK—my afterword—incorporates another Afro-Caribbean storytelling response, one that suggests that the teller has interpreted rather than added to the story being told. Throughout this book, my periodic personal tone is meant to emphasize that we, the descendants of enslaved Africans who are also scholars, are not separate from the theories we devise. I also wanted to break away from a disempowering aspect of the language endemic to the European philosophical project. Many of us imbibed these modes of expression as graduate students, and while the theories may have empowered us, the vocabulary and terminology became a part of the alienation we were trying to interrogate. I wanted to push back against an entrapment that many of us, as scholars of color, did not have the language to fully articulate. A secondary concern was making the book more readable for nonacademics.

Why this book and why now? At a moment that is chronologically after the pinnacle of the Black Lives Matter movement's impact, and during a period of national and political reaction to "things Black," *Afroindigenization*

offers a deeper understanding of the *cultural* perspectives of the descendants of enslaved Africans, one that is a comprehensive disrupting of the notion that enslavement and oppression are the sole forces propelling our vibrational power. There is much more here. Ours is the sonic fuel that outsiders both desire and disdain without having a full understanding of the potency we mobilize or why there is such a hunger for the cultural expression we generate. The beauty and profanity of our dynamism have had worldwide impact, directly and indirectly generating millions of multinational corporate dollars. This book's core concepts, *Afroindigenization* and *marasa* consciousness, help explain the complexity of this African diaspora cultural mystique from the inside out. I attempt to add clarity to *how* the forms of internal power that are our driving juice are also a kind of foundation that supersedes centuries of degradation.

But I must begin, and I begin in the tradition of "Afrosporic" respect, with a short praise song for Fay John, my mother. In the summer of 2010, Fay was battling colon cancer. We drove from her home in Palm Bay, Florida, to Tampa to meet with doctors and explore experimental treatments. As we drove, we talked as we usually did about all manner of things. I had been going back and forth between a few different book ideas for several years and I asked Mummy which of them she thought I should pursue. She said, "I think the world needs this one" when I described the book that has materialized here. I drove her to the home of one of her friends. We spent the evening playing a game of scrabble. It began simply enough but inevitably and deceptively transitioned into a competition since Mummy hated losing at anything. Mummy passed away that October. She had a master's degree in botany from McGill University. In the 1970s she headed up the science department at Sam Sharpe Teacher's College in Granville, Jamaica. Sam Sharpe, now a Jamaican national hero, led a rebellion of the enslaved on the island.

This book commemorates one of my mother's favorite sayings, bequeathed to her by Simon Clarke, the founding headmaster of Sam Sharpe College. Quoting Clarke, Fay often said, "There is no such thing as disappointment, just developmental opportunities." As Black persons educated during the era of Jamaican independence, US civil rights, and Black Power, my mother and Simon Clarke came from people whose pride and hope were contagious. Not everyone was like them. But no matter what happened, they always got up in the morning.

Inspired by these thoughts, this book makes two primary claims. First, we, the descendants of formerly enslaved Africans dispersed throughout

the Afrospora, embody and manifest a type of displaced Africanized indigeneity. Our ancestors were indigenous to continental African places at one point or another. They were people with distinct histories, mythologies, stories of origin, and culturally specific ways of being. I say “displaced indigeneity” to make it clear that I am referring to histories that are distinct from those of First Nations peoples indigenous to the Americas or continental Africans who were not removed by the transatlantic trade. The late Trevor Purcell, cultural anthropologist and former chair of Africana studies at the University of South Florida, spoke to me once about the importance of “indigenous knowledge.” He was referring here to knowledge coming from the African and African diaspora grassroots, informing our ways of knowing and understanding the realities we were bound to negotiate.

Our displaced Africanized indigeneity is a result of a violent rupture characterized by the Middle Passage—a rupture that we did not have the ability to avoid—and I am suggesting that our displacement, because of the violence with which it occurred, rather than erasing our indigenous understandings of ourselves, drove our knowledge underground, deep into what Elizabeth Alexander refers to as “the black interior.” Second, the displacement from cultural roots forced into being processes of psycho-spiritual recuperation in our efforts to avoid or recover from physical and emotional trauma. I refer to this process, which is the primary occupation of this text, as *afroindigenization*. The twin process associated with it—*marasa* consciousness—refers to the reconciliation or coexistence of contradictions.

Afroindigenization and *marasa* are grassroots theories of consciousness. They emerge, even if they are disguised, where the most oppressed and segregated segments of Afrospora societies exist—where the largest indigenous derivatives are maintained. Afroindigenization is a way of theorizing the notions of internal power at the heart of the cultural practices enacted by the descendants of Africans enslaved in the Americas. The term *afroindigenize* is a verb and *afroindigenization* is a noun. The concept requires us to comprehend how we took power from within ourselves and used it to manipulate spaces and places externally. A deeper understanding of how this manipulation of energy was possible will help explain the international fascination among both hegemonic and oppressed peoples across the world with Afrospora cultures emanating from North, South, Central America, and the Caribbean. Afroindigenization is a description of the means by which those of us who were externally de-indigenized drew on the remnants of our “displaced indigeneities” and re-indigenized ourselves in a manner of speaking.

Our re-indigenization has taken sacred and profane forms. It has also often been an intuitive rather than fully conscious process.

My project is an attempt to demonstrate through a series of examples what afroindigenization looks like when enacted. Methodologically the book is excessively diverse, bringing together critical analyses, folktales, interviews, biographies, hip-hop lyrics, dance practices, literary analyses, and assessments of gender identity. This heterogeneity was necessary in order to explain the mythological, experiential, lyrical, embodied, and intellectual forms that afroindigenization and *marasa* consciousness take on. These concepts crosscut Western disciplinary boundaries, linking not just writing and oral culture but also song and folklore, the visible and invisible realms—in short, any cultural expression that gives diaspora persons the space to interpret their lived experiences.

The mermaid stories in Woodside, Jamaica, in the first chapter, highlight the ways folklore in the Afro-Caribbean setting doubles as submerged forms of power connected to non-Western ways of being that are nevertheless embedded within Christian frameworks. The hip-hop Krump dancing and the poetic lyrics addressed in chapter 2 expose the through line of spirit, once again with possession and mountings manifesting in secular space yet serving a sacred purpose for disenfranchised youth. The oral artistry of the MCs, also analyzed in this chapter, demonstrates the contradictory *marasa*-like nature of Black life. The third chapter, focused on constructions of the feminine, is attuned to the ways in which Black female power in the Afrospora has as part of its underbelly a spiritual dynamism mirroring earlier, continental African modalities. Finally, the young male debaters whose stories claim the final chapter demonstrate the power of *marasa* energy in terms of their ability to reroute negative aspects of their lived experience while also afroindigenizing the denigration associated with the N-word into a powerful tool used to win debates. The diversity of the material referenced in the various chapters indicates “spirit” as the ever-present variable. While a range of other examples could have been chosen, I hope these particular choices are a representative sample of afroindigenization-in-practice.

The afroindigenization concept is an attempt to give deeper substance to Zora Neale Hurston’s statement that “the [person] in the gutter is the God-maker, [they] are the creator of everything that lasts.”³ It is less a way of describing how the power is harnessed and then released and more a way of depicting the uses and manifestations of internalized power, once it has been generated, through a variety of modes. One example includes creolized languages in the Afrospora. African American Vernacular English (AAVE)

and Jamaican Patwa have been creatively used by the grassroots populace in both national contexts to create musical art and influence the tone, style, and speech patterns of a wide cross-section of the global community. The reengineering of the “master’s tongue” into one’s own tonal terrain is an instance of afroindigenization-in-action. The harnessing of internal power has been more than a survival tool for the clan; it has also transformed the alien world in which the clan finds itself.

Marasa consciousness, drawn from the scholarship of the late, great VèVè Clark, describes a *third principle*, which moves beyond the binary, creating a space in which sameness and difference coexist and contradictory impulses are sometimes reconciled. *Marasa* consciousness is the intuitive strategy by which the internalization of power is made possible. It is power in its rawest form; it is what would be referred to by those who participated in the ring shout in the eighteenth century as the “turn loose.” As Michael Gomez states, “To get in the spirit required turning loose, and black folk could only do that within the security and familiarity of the shout.”⁴ The harnessing of internal power usually involves an ability to reconcile sameness and difference in a functionally resourceful fashion, one that opens the way for the group or individual to transform stagnancy or negativity into something else. We are claiming here that these spirit-based skills, in conscious and suppressed ways, were passed on as strategies of survival. As Clark herself states, “The consciousness accompanying the revision in which many of us participate has no name.”⁵

Clark draws from Haitian Vodou beliefs, referencing the divine twins and the child born immediately after them as collectively symbolizing a third principle, referred to as the *marasa trois*. Within the context of ceremony, the third principle is instrumental in deconstructing the binary and opening the way for change. Clark interprets *marasa* as part of a Haitian Vodun-embodied praxis representing cosmological ways of understanding reality, which through ritualized movement allows a shift in the balance of energy to occur. Clark conceptually draws on the *marasa trois* to create an interpretive theoretical tool made applicable to the literatures of the African diaspora. Her work is the project’s backbone since the *marasa trois* symbolizes the coexistence of sameness and difference that when transformed into sources of internal power are a key component of the process of afroindigenization. While Clark draws specifically on the *marasa trois* for inspiration, she appears to have identified a pattern that mirrors the structure of consciousness that is present in many African diaspora situations.

Clark draws on the work of Houston Baker, who in turn reexamines the ideological binary between Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois. From

Baker's analysis, two discursive strategies emerge: "the mastery of form" and "the deformation of mastery." What interests Clark is the binary represented by Washington's and Du Bois's legacies, which as she notes "is a residual construction surviving from the master-slave heritage." For Clark, a third principle exists, one she calls "*the reformation of form*." She sees the third principle as triangulating the two strategies mentioned by Baker while also revising the duality of Du Bois's notion of double consciousness. Clark elaborates, "It may well be that peasants engaged in Vodoun ceremonies in Haiti and its diaspora have provided a figure and frame through which African diaspora criticism might establish a theory of comparative literature based on the vernacular."⁶ In other words, Clark suggests, if Du Boisian double consciousness articulated the duality of a material world in which "Blackness" and "Americanness" occupied distinct spheres of meaning, then the third principle, the reformation of form, emanates from the unseen realm yet has an energetic function that allows for the coexistence of sameness and difference to occur. As a result of this third factor, surviving divisive crises becomes possible.

Clark's reference to and her privileging of "a vernacular approach to literary theory" mentions the early work of Henry Louis Gates Jr.⁷ Gates references Esu Elegbara, the deity in Yorùbá cosmology responsible for delivering the offerings made by supplicants to the appropriate entities.⁸ Gates's use of Elegbara to ground his theories is read by Clark as a "vernacular approach," one that interprets the literature by writers in the Afrospora using traditions indigenized by their ancestors. Clark's use of the symbol of the *marasa* coming out of the Haitian Vodou peasant context is therefore meant to function in a similar way as Gates's theoretical use of Esu Elegbara.

Tracing the genealogy through folkloric tale as well as its role in ceremonial situations, the *marasa*, as described by Clark, represent the divine twins in the Vodun pantheon. In a ceremony that opens the way between the material and the spiritual realms, the *marasa* appear after Papa Legba (at the crossroads), Loko (butterfly of wisdom), and Ayizan (the divinity of "Earth" as well as the keeper of goods and markets). The *marasa* function within Clark's argument as both literal and figurative symbols, capable of transforming binaries and dualities into three-dimensional space, visually represented by a spiral. Within both Vodun cosmology and lived reality, according to Clark, the child born sequentially after the twins, referred to as *dossu* (male) and *dossa* (female), completes the unit in both the physical and the spiritual realm. The *marasa trois* are represented by ground drawings (referred to as *vèvè*) within the context of Vodou ceremonies.

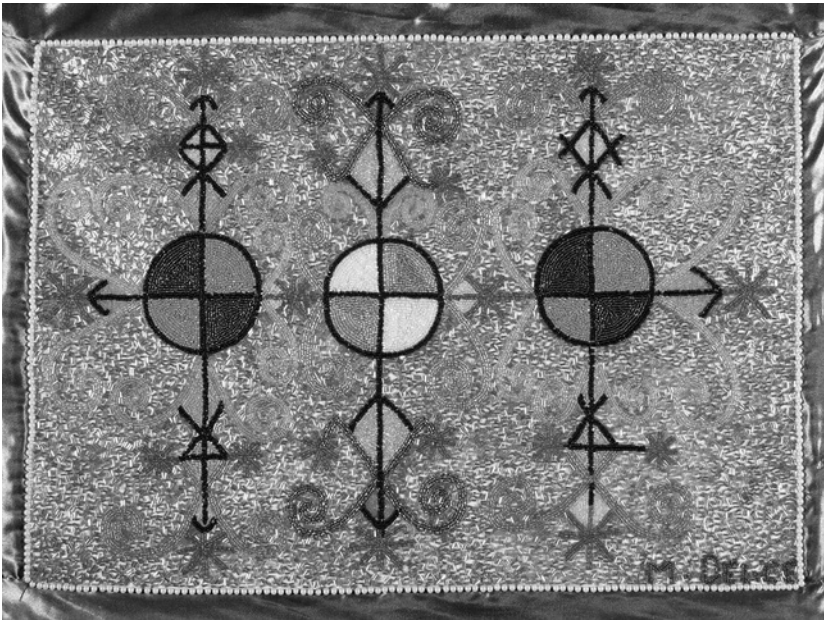


Figure I.1. *Marasa trois*, artistic rendition by Mireille Delice.

The symbol of the *marasa trois* (created by Mireille Delice), similar to the original figure displayed in Clark's article, is an intriguing representation of a "changing same" phenomenon, one in which unity and difference coexist. The visual has three joined images that contain three adjacent crosses, each surrounded by a circle, with one horizontal line running through all three circles. Three vertical lines also run through all three circles and are parallel to each other. The designs at the top and the bottom of each of the three circles are similar but not uniform; they are asymmetrical yet unified. Of the significance of the *marasa* as useful for understanding African diaspora culture, Clark states:

Marasa Consciousness invites us to imagine beyond the binary. The ability to do so depends largely on our capacities to read the sign as a cyclical, spiral relationship. On the surface, *marasa* seems to be binary. My research of Haitian peasant lore and ritual has revealed that the tension between oppositions leads to another norm of creativity—to interaction or deconstruction, as it were. . . . Representations of the *marasa* in the form of vèvè assume uniformity at the horizontal and vertical crossroads, thereby ensuring a stable field of interaction with the Lwa; improvisation on the grounded form, left and right, top and bottom, encourage originality.⁹

Clark's *marasa* concept is mirrored by the work of a range of scholars describing a variety of Africana cultural locations and situations in which sameness and difference coexist. I argue here for *marasa*'s function as an umbrella term capturing the invisible third-dimensional movement that various scholars are reaching toward with their theories. One such moment occurs when Achille Mbembe describes "European thought [as] . . . tend[ing] to conceive of identity less in terms of mutual belonging (cobelonging) to a common world than in terms of a relation between similar beings—of being itself emerging and manifesting itself in its own state, or its own mirror."¹⁰ Mbembe contrasts the European approach he describes with what he calls "re-creation" and "desiccation," which he sees as intertwined African American strategies of survival. He elaborates, "African American history is not so much about social death as it is about the permanent generation, re-creation and re-signification of life flows in the face of the forces of capture and desiccation. Of course, the two poles of re-creation and desiccation are inseparable."¹¹ Here is an active example of sameness and difference theoretically coexisting. What we are attempting to explain with the assistance of Clark's theories is *how* "re-creation" can occur in the face of "desiccation"—which here represents both destruction and the ability to energetically recuperate.

Like Mbembe, Amiri Baraka's construct of the "changing same" extends the conversation regarding "re-creation," using Black music as his subject. Baraka locates the coexistence of unity and difference in certain African American musicians' abilities to create discordant harmony emanating from a place of spirit.¹² Baraka references the Black Church roots of particular artists, arguing that when they move away from "the practical God, as practical, [they] seek the mystical God both emotionally and intellectually." He further posits, "John Coltrane, Albert Ayler, Sun-Ra [and] Pharoah Sanders . . . [are] God-seekers . . . since God is, indeed, energy. To play strong forever would be the cry and the worshipful purpose of life."¹³ For Baraka, the mystical God replaces the practical God within secular African American musical traditions, thus demonstrating a diversion from Western faith-based frameworks toward modalities influenced by non-Western knowledge systems. Here, the sonic *reconciliation* of the oppositional lines of discord/harmony or unity/difference requires *the sacrifice of energy* in order to deconstruct the binary making a shift possible: "To play strong forever would be the cry and the worshipful purpose of life." His description of a type of embodied experience, with spirit as the vehicle, illustrates what is visually depicted in the *marasa trois vèvè*.¹⁴ What is at stake here is an enacted coexistence of binary energies, without the imperative to choose one or the other. Baraka describes

an embodied mode of being that at least temporarily requires relinquishing the mastery of the rational mind.

Delving further into Black musical structures at the level of sound, style, content, and meaning, Baraka's "changing same" metaphor exposes the simultaneity of dissonance and symmetry when he notes, "The Daddy Grace band on 125th Street and 8th Avenue in Harlem, in the Grace Temple, is a brass band, with somewhat the same instrumentation as a European brass choir, but at the lips of Daddy's summoners, the band is 'free' and makes sounds to tear down the walls of anywhere."¹⁵ The concurrence of order and chaos is intimated once again. On one hand, the brass band instrumentation harkens back to Baker's "mastery of form"; on the other hand, the ability to "tear down the walls of anywhere" signifies the "deformation mastery." The movement between both continuums is the *marasa trois* incarnate.

Moving in tandem with Baraka's formulations is Hurston's conception of "asymmetry"—articulated as both a practice and a central organizing principle of rural Black southern culture.¹⁶ Referring to the aesthetics of dancing, aspects of poetry, and dominant decorative design choices in many of the homes she visited during three years of field work, Hurston characterizes "asymmetry," stating that "the presence of rhythm and lack of symmetry are paradoxical but there they are. Both are present to a marked degree. There is always rhythm, but it is the rhythm of segments. Each unit has a rhythm of its own, but when the whole is assembled it is lacking in symmetry."¹⁷ Hurston's seemingly simple observation used to describe a characteristic of African American culture is more crucial than her folksy parlance makes apparent. Similar to the *marasa trois*, Hurston suggests an intuitively functional approach to cultural expressivity, one that lays the foundation for the dynamic emerging in the music referenced by Baraka as well as the movement between re-creation and desiccation identified by Mbembe. Baraka's "changing same" as it refers to the disunified "God" within Black music and Clark's *marasa trois* are both suggestive of a capacity within Afrospora cultures for reconciling seemingly disparate energies. In each instance there is an emphasis on difference and unity coexisting.

The cutting and mixing of DJs are brought into the conversation by the work of Alexander Weheliye and Adam Banks. Weheliye refers to "mixing tactics . . . [that] provide ways to noisily bring together competing and complementary beats without sublating their tensions."¹⁸ The competing and complementary beats coexisting are reminiscent of Hurston's asymmetry. In concert with Weheliye, rhetorician Adam Banks could be seen as using a kind of asymmetrical pedagogy of his own when he observes, "I

use the theoretical or conceptual work that the mix, remix, and mixtape do as lenses or ways to contextualize my study of a wide range of black multimedia rhetorical practices. So the chapters here cohere and yet they don't; they flow and yet they cut to other tracks, other conversations, looping in other voices in what might seem to be idiosyncratic ways."¹⁹ Banks interprets the African American cultural phenomenon of the DJ, using the then emerging notion of "digital media" and inflecting it through an ancient West African cultural figure—the griot, who is seen as a poetic historian or storyteller. Banks staged the text using the notion of the DJ as a technological master, a contemporary griot, bringing the West African concept to life in a new way, by musically narrating and preserving the lived and felt histories of the Black Atlantic "tribesmen and women." Banks's chapters—"Scratch," "Groove," "Mix," "Remix," "Mixtape," and "Fade"—are structured according to the logic of the DJ's rhetorical relationship to his audience. Since the DJ, like the griot, preacher, or storyteller, only exists in relation to interaction with an audience, each chapter concludes with a section called the "Shoutout," which highlights for Banks's reading audience a range of actual projects using technology to expand the access of everyday people to sites of knowledge previously inaccessible. Making meaning out of the cohering and noncohering of chapters following the logic of the DJ's cutting and mixing is a demonstration of a third principle in action in an aspect of African diaspora scholarship. His use of the "shoutout" as part of the structure is also symbolically suggestive of a modernized transformation of the energy of the ring shout—with the DJ reaching out to his or her audience virtually but still being able, through technological means, to move the spirit of the listener.

Caribbean linguist Maureen Warner-Lewis closes the loop between African continental and Afrospora forms, noting, "The interplay and complementarity of oppositional forces is fundamental to traditional African perspectives on existence; linked to this is a consciousness of 'the *processual* nature of being' . . . so that oppositions do not necessarily hold between divergent essences, but interact along a continuum of approximations which eventually intersect."²⁰ Warner-Lewis's insight, which emphasizes interaction along a continuum, harkens back to the "spiralist agenda" Clark attributes to the *marasa trois*. Religious studies scholar Dianne Stewart's work can be seen as afroindigenizing the scholarship on Black Christianity in the case of Jamaica—reading it against the grain and diversifying and complexifying the way notions of agency and resistance are interpreted and understood. Tying these strands together, Stewart observes, "Religious studies as well as Black and Caribbean studies scholars have emphasized [the] soul force as the connecting thread

between African religions and African protests against enslavement in the Americas and the Caribbean.”²¹ My study contributes to this body of scholarship, showing how the “soul-force” connection between religiosity and protest that was functional during African enslavement in the Americas is an enduring characteristic, still thriving within grassroots spaces among us. The chapters in the book are demonstrative examples of this in a variety of ways.

In the opening to *The Black Shoals*, Tiffany Lethabo-King describes a new kind of knowing—an encounter, initiated by an Anishinaabe woman’s story, one that made Lethabo-King “know something new.”²² As a result, a portal opened, one in which the intersectional synergies between Native genocide and Black enslavement were revealed as interlocking spaces between two cultural traumas that do not operate in a framework with clear and finite boundaries and edges. The mutual experience of violence (Native genocide and African diaspora enslavement) is her text’s connective tissue. The primary message emerges from Lethabo-King leaning into an experience of spiritual “unmooring” that made accountability to others, beyond one’s Black ancestors, an imperative. The *shoal* referenced in the book’s title is an attempt to find a concept capable of bridging the divide segregating Black and Native studies in the North American academy. Lethabo-King’s work expands on the terrain established by scholars such as Tiya Miles, Mark Anderson, Juliet Hooker, Celia Naylor, and Fay Yarbrough, among others, whose scholarship explores the relationship between Blackness and First Nations Indigeneity in the Americas as it relates to inclusion within or exclusion from Indigenous nations based on issues of blood, family, and lineage. Further, the important writings of these scholars also explore the challenges to the colonial nation-state’s recognition of subjects with both Black and Native status without one identity eclipsing the other.²³

My text’s central concepts of afroindigenization and *marasa* consciousness benefit greatly from the work of these scholars yet move more deeply into the indigeneity represented by enslaved and displaced Africans. Here, indigeneity and indigenization as it relates to Black people who are the descendants of enslaved African chattel slavery in the Americas are the focus. What I propose is not a theory of indigeneity rooted exclusively or primarily within the identities of First Nations peoples in the Americas, nor is this project situated in opposition to such theories. Rather, afroindigenization is a theory of indigeneity as a submerged cultural consciousness that took on a different form, *of necessity*. These submerged indigenous ways of being are functional—meaning they fuel energy and action in a practical sense—although they are not always part of the cognitive consciousness of the descendants of enslaved Africans. *How do we describe what we have not been cognizant of retaining but*

that is nevertheless dynamically alive and engaged with our being? My work here is a complexifying of our understanding of the enslaved Black subject as a cultural being. Although the trauma of slavery is central to our identities and is explored in the groundbreaking work of a range of scholars, *Afroindigenization* expands the public understanding of the complexity of the cultural foundations upon which enslaved Africans who were brought to the Americas stand. The theoretical labor that I do here identifies and explains *why* as well as *how* these submerged forms of indigeneity function at specific sites and in definitive moments in African diaspora spaces. Afroindigenization is a theory of movement that encompasses survival and transformation as joint action.

As a result of the transatlantic rupture, we lost concrete access to the knowledge of the ethnic nations that our ancestors by and large originated from, and because our indigenous roots were materially misremembered or erased, we were often treated as if we *never had any*. The anti-Blackness endemic to chattel slavery in the Americas as well as the literal fact of our being property shed light on why we were not just excluded from the category “human” but often also marginalized and entirely displaced from notions of “culture” and “indigeneity.” Despite these displacements, the cultural products we have engineered in the Afrospace cannot be seen as exclusively resulting from our oppression. And maybe our displacement is the source of our obsession with either finding roots or insisting they don’t matter. As Ifi Amadiume notes, “Much has been written in denunciation of studies focusing on origins. Yet for colonized people, historical depth and continuity on which a non-colonial status and identity depends is an imperative.”²⁴ In our manner of expressing ourselves through our diverse forms of music, our varied spiritual modes of expression, our twisting of the colonizer’s language using the remnants of mother tongues, our approaches to food preparation, the cultural practices we produced and reengineered bespeak a displaced and denied Afro-diasporized pan-indigeneity, a concept that will be discussed in more depth further on. We reproduced artistic forms and expressed philosophical world senses that were distinct and unique and at the same time similar to those of our ancestors and other Indigenous people in various parts of the Americas.

The book’s first claim—the existence of a displaced Africanized indigeneity—runs counter to the dominant historical assumption of our indigeneity as erased, nonexistent, or fragmented beyond any viable recognition and coherence. I argue instead for an understanding of indigeneity as submerged and repressed but still *functional*; in other words, while conscious memories of rites and rituals may have been lost, the energy and

know-how that practically fuel action remain. This could be seen as akin to a person knowing a dance or singing a song that they don't remember learning. The book's second claim highlights what our displacement forced into being: afroindigenization—a process of psycho-spiritual recuperation from trauma, which is also an attempt to name and speak of strategies of survival that have been un-visible in plain sight.²⁵

My work here expands the terrain within which we understand what constitutes indigeneity. The notion of a submerged yet *functioning and functional* identity is a twist on the assumptions that often inhere regarding our condition. What this book contributes is a deeper understanding of *how* diasporic Blackness relates to concepts of indigeneity, but on its own terms. Conceptually, afroindigenization is distinct from processes such as creolization and hybridity in the sense that these theories privilege formations emerging from contact with dominant European forms rather than varied indigenous sensibilities.²⁶ Furthermore, afroindigenization still has an intimately intuitive relationship to notions of the sacred, even when it is made manifest within the context of secular and profane spaces and places.

THE MODERN PROJECT AND ANTI-INDIGENOUS STRUCTURES OF CONSCIOUSNESS

The theoretical contributions of Sylvia Wynter's "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom" establish a frame for understanding the cognitive dissonance impacting scholars of color who draw from Indigenous modes of understanding that are at odds with Western canonical thought. Her project runs interference between the universe of enslaved Africans and European philosophy's ways of hearing. She explains how colonial notions of "the Other" as a "savage sinner" shifted from being the main way of viewing indigenous peoples and was replaced by alternate ways of seeing these "un-subjectivities" during a period of Renaissance secular humanism and the rise of Western political states. In a European pre-Renaissance moment, Wynter describes the heavens as the absolute other of the "earth," which was stigmatized and imagined to be made of "vile and base matter," "fixed and unmoving," and thus "the abode of a post-Adamic 'fallen' mankind," all of which "verif[ied] . . . medieval Latin-Christian Europe's . . . theocentric [notion] of [the] human as sinful by nature." Following from this, she argues that "Evolution/Natural Selection together with its imagined entity of 'Race'" became the new "extra human agency onto which our authorship [was] projected," replacing the "ostensible extra human agency of supernatural imaginary beings."²⁷

Wynter uses the “Big Bang” metaphor to describe the process by which the West and its intellectuals “were to initiate the first gradual de-supernaturalizing of our modes of being human, by means of its/their re-invention of the theocentric ‘descriptive statement’ Christian as that of man in two forms.”²⁸ Two forms of secularization of meaning attached to Western Man with a capital M came into existence in a way akin to the Big Bang. Man 1 emerges with Renaissance secular humanism and Man 2 with the rise of the modern political nation-state—one being a rational continuity of the other. Both, however, are a rejection of what dominated prior to the fifteenth century, when the elite clergy were subjects more worthy of salvation than the Black/Brown, sinner/savage. In later incarnations of secular “Man,” while “salvation” is rejected as the framework for judging worthiness, the “coloniality of being” is reintroduced via the split between rational and sensory nature. The advent and birth of the physical and biological sciences are thus also tied to a colonial and hierarchical reimagining that “thereby [makes] possible both the conceptualizability of natural causality, and of nature as *an autonomously functioning force, in its own right, governed by its own laws* (i.e., *cursus solitus naturae*).”²⁹

In other words, the Big Bang de-supernaturalization Wynter refers to, rather than being an outcome of objective, rational, and superior scientific logic, is in fact a Western project delegitimizing earlier non-Western forms of knowledge and making current ones invisible, thus reinforcing colonially inscribed hierarchies. Wynter substantiates these distinctions when she declares: “It was this construct that would enable the now globally expanding West to replace the earlier mortal/immortal, natural/supernatural, human/ancestors, the gods/God distinction as the one on whose basis all human groups had millennially ‘grounded’ their descriptive statement/prescriptive statement of what it is to be human, and to reground its secularizing own on a newly projected human/subhuman distinction instead.”³⁰ Because of the de-supernaturalization of Western institutional knowledge and its replacement by the physical and biological sciences, any formulations engaging what prevailing academic discourse deems a “supernatural” or “non-rational” world order cannot escape delegitimization. The only recourse subsequently available to non-Western scholars presenting ideas in Western contexts is a kind of partial validation, which acknowledges indigenous thought only if expressed through dominant Western philosophical traditions. Wynter states: “The West would therefore remain unable, from then on, to conceive of an Other to what it calls human—an Other, therefore, to its correlated postulates of power, truth, freedom. All other modes of being human would instead have to

be seen *not as the alternative modes of being human* that they are “out there,” but adaptively as *the lack* of the West’s ontologically absolute self-description.”³¹

Overall, Wynter’s argument helps explain why approaches to Indigeneity rooted in non-Western notions of reality are often deemed “static,” “essentializing,” and “anti-modern” instead of being understood as “alternative modes of being human.” Her analysis reveals that what is genuinely at stake is the absence of a framework for reckoning with formulations fundamentally disrupting Western science’s rational claims. This schema successfully makes its own dominance invisible, and in its wake, any discourses of “the spirit” in such a de-supernaturalized universe run into a wall of hierarchical logic disguised as rational truth. As M. Jacqui Alexander argues in *Pedagogies of Crossing*, “there is a tacit understanding that no self-respecting postmodernist would want to align herself (at least in public) with a category such as the spiritual, which appears so fixed, so unchanging, so redolent of tradition. Many, I suspect, have been forced into a spiritual closet.”³² It is my hope that Wynter’s discourse can help us consider the theory of afroindigenization within the register of an “alternate mode,” one that will expand rather than limit future conceptualizations of “the human.”

One of the challenges of New World Blackness is its trapped-ness between identity formations indigenous to the ancestors of the collective (structures that are often officially unknown or unnamed, even if they still have a practical in-group function) and the pressures of Western modernity (specific assumptions about time, space, and the “de-supernaturalization” of reality)—with neither sphere being fully adequate to address the parameters of the conglomerate experience. The duality described is loosely akin to Du Bois’s formulation of “double consciousness.”³³ Modernity here is represented by Western industrialization on one hand and a set of hierarchical assumptions and beliefs à la Wynter’s theories of Man 1 and Man 2 about what counts as credible knowledge on the other.

If we consider the descendants of enslaved Africans as having displaced and submerged indigeneities, ones we used consciously or intuitively to self-create within the contexts we found ourselves, it is important to remember that our relationship to this modernity was often a violent one. Hortense Spillers reminds us of this violence by quoting from William Goodell’s 1853 text, *The American Slave Code in Theory and Practice Shown by Its Statutes, Judicial Decisions, and Illustrative Facts*: “Assortments of diseased, damaged and disabled Negroes, deemed incurable and otherwise worthless are *bought up*, it seems . . . by medical institutions, to be experimented and operated upon, for purposes of . . . medical science.”³⁴ Interpreting Angela Davis’s

assessment of slavery and womanhood addressed in *Women, Race, and Class*, Spillers, demonstrating that the “un-gendering” of the African female in a dehumanizing way was also part of the institution of slavery, elaborates further: “A female body strung from a tree limb, or bleeding from the breast on any given day of field work because the ‘overseer,’ standing the length of a whip, has popped her flesh open, adds a lexical and living dimension to the narratives of women in culture and society.”³⁵ The materiality of our continued outsider position within the United States after slavery is further articulated by Saidiya Hartman’s description of the restrictive and provisional citizenship that operated under constant state scrutiny.³⁶

Spillers makes two more noteworthy observations. For the enslaved African, “the *loss of indigenous name/land provides a metaphor of displacement* for other human and cultural features and relations.”³⁷ She additionally declares:

In the context of the United States, we could not say that the enslaved offspring was “orphaned,” but the child does become, under the press of patronymic, patrifocal, patrilineal and patriarchal order, the man/woman on the boundary, whose human and familial status, by the very nature of the case, had yet to be defined. I would call this enforced state of breach another instance of vestibular cultural formation where “kinship” loses meaning, *since it can be invaded at any given and arbitrary moment by the property relations*. I certainly do not mean to say that African peoples in the New World did not maintain the powerful ties of sympathy that bind blood relations, in a network of feeling. . . . It is precisely *that* relationship—not customarily recognized by the code of slavery—that historians have long identified as the inviolable “Black family” . . . suggest[ing] that this structure remains one of the supreme social achievements . . . under conditions of enslavement. . . . It must be conceded that African Americans, under the press of a hostile and compulsory patriarchal order, *bound and determined to destroy them*, or to preserve them only in the service and at the behest of the “master” class, exercised a degree of courage and *will to survive* that startles the imagination even now.³⁸

Spillers shrewdly accomplishes several things here: She highlights the loss of indigenous land and name as heralding the displacement of humanity and culture for the enslaved African. The offspring of the enslaved during slavery were neither orphaned in the traditional sense nor describable by conventional notions of kinship since purported kinship could be “*invaded at any given and arbitrary moment by the property relations*.” In other words, the business of “breeding” slaves without respect for bloodline as well as the erratic

and capricious sale of mothers and fathers away from children, in addition to the slave master's selling off as property some of his own biological relations who were illicitly fathered with enslaved Black women, meant *kinship*, as we traditionally understand it in the West, was not functional for the enslaved transatlantic subject. Second, Spillers points out that what is often referred to as "the Black Family" in the United States, according to historians and sociologists, from the period of enslavement and afterward, is already an aberration. The very thing slavery refused to acknowledge and sought to destroy among Black enslaved peoples— notions of "sympathy," "networks of feeling," and a sense of "continuity" (the emotional ties that are assumed to hold families together beyond blood relations)—was in fact, in the absence of normative notions of kinship, *the defining characteristic* of the emerging Black family; and its continued existence, in the face of destruction, dehumanization, and violence, was seen by researchers as exercising "a degree of courage and *will to survive* that startles the imagination even now." How was this possible? Spillers does not tell us. That is not the goal of her essay. However, the ability to survive under these conditions was neither a function of the absence of culture nor the presence of oppression. We are left to reach for answers toward the "indigeneities" enslaved Africans brought with them through the Middle Passage.

DISPLACED AFRICANIZED INDIGENEITY

In 2007 I visited with Michael Witter, an economics professor at the University of the West Indies in Jamaica. We talked informally for a couple of days about the political history of the island from the colonial era and later. At one point he looked at me and said I had features that reminded him of the Garifuna people. He did not know my father was from St. Vincent, one of the Garifuna points of origin. Yet mysteries connected to my father's paternal lineage make definitive answers to elements of my ancestry difficult to ascertain. My mother is from Jamaica, and my father is from St. Vincent and the Grenadines. My great-great-grandparents on the matrilineal side of my mother's line, Isabel Byfield and Charles Needham Grant, were both freed from enslavement by the Emancipation Proclamation in Jamaica. Also freed at that time was Princess Stevens, the grandmother of my maternal grandfather, Cyril George Bailey. On my father's maternal side, his grandfather, Urias Charles, married to Amelia Adams Charles, was the descendant of Hue and Eunis Charles, enslaved persons who lived through the period of British emancipation on the island of St. Vincent. The legacy of slavery, with all

its discontents, is still closer than many of us imagine. The descendants of enslaved Africans were not seen as indigenous people, particularly in North American discursive framings of indigeneity. In these contexts, whiteness traveled while Blackness did not. To be white and indigenous meant occupying the category of indigeneity without question, while being Black and indigenous was a nonstarter. Blackness in the US “one-drop-rule” landscape subsumed all other ethnic possibilities due to the stain of enslavement and inferiority. The work of Tiya Miles as well as conceptions of Blackness and indigeneity within the Oklahoma landscape elucidate these points further.

In “Uncle Tom Was an Indian: Tracing the Red in Black Slavery,” Miles argues that once the enslavement of Africans became the dominant form of slavery, the realities of people who could claim kinship ties in both Native American and African American arenas became invisible and simply functioned as part of an unacknowledged Black discourse. Miles’s work disrupts the de-indigenization from First Nations “Indianness” of subjects with dual heritage who were categorized exclusively as Black. She juxtaposes the stereotype of “Uncle Tom” from Harriet Beecher Stowe’s novel with formerly enslaved woman Cora Gillam’s Uncle Tom, who was “half-Indian” and who “made both White and Black people . . . afraid of him.”³⁹ Miles also cites ads from enslaved runaways featured in the *Maryland Gazette* and the *Virginia Gazette* between 1746 and 1776. The language of these ads subsumed people who were evidently fusions of African and Indian ancestry to Blackness exclusively. One of the strategies used was to refer to such persons as “mulattoes” (of African descent), thus relegating the phenotype associated with their appearance to a false claim that the individual was aiming to “pass” as “Indian” and escape enslavement. What Miles does effectively is highlight the erasure of Indian indigeneity as it relates to people who were a fusion of Indian and African backgrounds and ancestry. Here, “Indigeneity” is implicitly defined as “Indian.” Some key quotations that support this are the following:

A tall thin Mulatto slave, looks very much like an Indian, and will endeavor to pass as such when it suits him.⁴⁰

A Mulatto slave named David, about twenty-two years of age, five Feet eight or nine Inches high, a cunning artful Fellow with a sly Look, slim made, a little knock-kneed, says he is of the Indian breed.⁴¹

A negro man of the name Tom, about 5 feet 6 inches tall, of a yellowish complexion, much the appearance of an Indian. . . . His hair is of a

different kind from that of a Negro's, rather more of the Indian's but partaking of both.⁴²

Miles uses these ads to demonstrate the refusal on the part of slave owners to acknowledge "the right of Black Indians to be Indian by reducing Indianness to a list of 'traits' such as hair, attitude, skin color, and known relatives."⁴³ What the ads also make clear, however, is that contrary to what Miles argues earlier in the article ("empire as a way of life did not discriminate between Black and Red people"), by the middle of the eighteenth century, there was a determined effort to separate these categories of humanity, however arbitrary the strategy.⁴⁴ Miles's goal in this carefully articulated work is to bring discussions of "Black Indians" into the conversations about Indian indigeneity, on one hand, while having it complicate discussions of US Blackness, on the other—particularly in instances in which significant portions of the US African American population have Indian ancestry. Of interest here, however, is thinking through the relevance of the category "indigenous" for Black populations outside of and beyond their contact with "Indianness."

Oklahoma scholar Clara Sue Kidwell's characterization of elements of Choctaw involvement in nineteenth-century slave practices bespeaks the increasing divisions between Blackness and indigeneity in the state. While Kidwell's text overall delves into the complexities of Choctaw history, one particular incident suggests that by the nineteenth century, factions of the Choctaw Nation in Oklahoma ascribed to notions of race-based hierarchies dictated by the mores of the dominant society. Describing a struggle between the Harkinses, a Choctaw family, and their enslaved African property, Kidwell asserts:

On December 28, 1858, Richard Harkins, brother of George Harkins, was ostensibly drowned trying to ford the Little River. . . . There was suspicion, however, that he [was] . . . murdered by one of his slaves, a man named Prince. Confronted with the crime, Prince . . . accused a slave named Lucy. . . . The two were seized and tortured until Prince led his accusers to the place where Harkins' body was submerged. . . . He then escaped his captors, threw himself into the river, and drowned. Lucy, who consistently protested her innocence, was seized by a "lawless mob" and burned alive in the presence of her mistress, Richard Harkins' widow, Lavinia. Crucial to the situation was the fact that both mistress and slave were members of the Stockbridge Mission church and that Mrs. Harkins, although she was present at the burning and probably instigated it . . . was continued in good standing in the church.⁴⁵

That the Choctaw and Chickasaw practiced forms of slavery more brutal than the Cherokee, Creek, or Seminole was a widely accepted belief among some descendants of the Black freedmen and freedwomen in Oklahoma. Dr. Dorscine Spigner-Littles, a member of two Oklahoma-based freedmen associations—"The Freedmen of the Five Civilized Tribes" and "The Freedmen of the Chickasaw and Choctaw Nations"—attests to these differing perceptions of the experience of Indian enslavement as part of the handed-down oral history from ancestors to descendants of the freed people. Littles's testimony is further supported by another local elder and freedman descendant, Kirbie Greene.⁴⁶ These various examples demonstrate the extent to which Blackness and Indigeneity, as the work of Kidwell and Miles and the oral testimonies of Spigner-Littles and Greene attest, function referentially as opposites. To be "Black" was to be something other than "Indigenous." But another African-influenced submerged indigeneity coexists for those who are presumed to simply be "black slaves."

While the complexity of Black and Indigenous relationships is demonstrated by Mark Anderson's research and study with the Garifuna, Dianne Stewart's work among Kumina populations in Jamaica assists us in ascertaining indigenous relevance of populations not categorized as such. Anderson struggles with defining the Garifuna as more indigenous and rooted in traditions as opposed to being Black products of industrialized modernity—which is one of the dominant perceptions of the group. He states at the outset: "The earliest reference to the word 'indigenous' recorded in the *Oxford English Dictionary* juxtaposes indigeneity with blackness. . . . Perhaps it is no small irony that an early use of 'indigenous' in English marked a clear distinction between proper natives and enslaved Africans in the Americas."⁴⁷ Anderson mentions Nancie L. Gonzalez's five decades of research expertise on the Garifuna, noting her view of their cultural identities as products of "modernity and its exclusions rather than traditions."⁴⁸ Anderson briefly outlines Garifuna history, describing them as a fusion of the Callinago (or Caribs) who conducted raids on European settlements and "African slaves who came to the island [of St. Vincent] via shipwrecks [and] maroonage."⁴⁹ He further notes Callinago as an indigenous word the Spanish corrupted and the English used as the derivative source for the terms *Carib*, *Caribbean*, and *Cannibal*. Being cultural and biological fusions of the Caribs and enslaved Africans, the Garifuna were also referred to as "Black Caribs." Anderson notes: "[They] were deported . . . to Central America in 1797 [when] colonial officials and planters successfully lobbied the British imperial government to remove the 'Black Caribs,' portraying them as Africans who had usurped the customs

and identity of 'pure' Indians, labeled 'Red Caribs' or 'Yellow Caribs.' They thus used blackness as a weapon to deny Garifuna native status on the island (of St. Vincent)."⁵⁰

Since their arrival in Honduras, Anderson observes, they "have been interpellated by others as racially Black and subject to forms of oppression based on their perceived racial and cultural difference from whites and the majority population, today known as *mestizos*." Activists position the Garifuna as "a people of African descent with the juridical status of indigenous." Of key interest for Anderson is the way in which Garifuna men gravitate toward African American styles and modes of identification and being. He describes them as having "intense interest in symbols and commodities associated with 'Black Americans.'" He "investigate[s] the local meanings of 'Black America' and the ways in which Garifuna . . . appropriate styles and brands from elsewhere to fashion public identities as assertively Black and cosmopolitan in everyday struggles for status and respect."⁵¹ It is our hope that the concept of afroindigenization can be used to further highlight the complexity of identities such as the Garifuna, in which forms of African indigeneity have been central from the beginning.

By contrast, in *Three Eyes for the Journey: African Dimensions of the Jamaican Religious Experience*, Dianne Stewart's zeroing in on traditions characteristic of Kumina practitioners in the Black Jamaican landscape highlights practices that bear a striking resemblance to continental African cultural and spiritual systems. Kumina is an African-derived religious practice in eastern and western Jamaica. Stewart presents clear evidence of knowledge and understanding among Kumina folk that exceed the boundaries of enslavement and make a case for the function and presence of a displaced indigeneity. Stewart's dual analysis, first highlighting matriarchal structures and then signaling African indigenous approaches to culture and ritual among Kumina practitioners, speaks to this displaced indigeneity.

Stewart describes the matrifocal role played by Kumina queens (spiritual leaders) within the context of medicinal plants being gathered for healing ceremonies. Stewart notes: "Because women are the keepers of the Kumina culture and of its esoteric meaning and religious rituals, Kumina queens are rendered unwavering respect within their communities for their multiple roles as psychologist, doctor, priest, and judge. One must demonstrate a peculiar sensibility pertaining to both the visible and the invisible world domains to ascend to the rank of Kumina queen."⁵² Stewart further refers to Kumina healers' collecting of medicinal herbs as a religious activity, observing:

My most surprising discovery . . . was that collecting medicinal plants is a *religious* activity of supplication, libation, and absolute reverence for the natural elements in creation. . . . On the day before the Kumina [ceremony], I witnessed six members . . . gather leaves from a wide assortment of plants, trees, and bushes. . . . [There was a] formulaic prayer and libation offered by every collector before picking each plant. . . . After the prayer, a libation of white rum is always poured onto the root of the plant. . . . Practitioners gave two reasons for doing this: the first was that rum has medicinal properties that, along with the prayer, help to wake up the sleeping plants; and second, rum is the sacrifice that must be offered to the Ancestors who might be buried directly below.⁵³

The works of Stewart and historian Michael Gomez shed light on how afroindigenized notions of identity heavily shaped by the African background determined collective cultural ways of being for the descendants of enslaved Africans in the United States and Jamaica, respectively. Gomez exquisitely documents the processes by which enslaved Africans in an early era in the United States shifted from continental African understandings of who they were to a more cohesive sense of collective identity through a set of frameworks born out of shared oppression and necessity as well as overlapping cultural investments, despite the reality of linguistic and ethnic differences.⁵⁴ He builds on the signature work of historian Sterling Stuckey, particularly with regard to theories about the ring shout and other practices functioning as trans-ethnic rituals binding varied elements of the enslaved population together. The ring shout, which is understood to be a cornerstone in the development of the Black Church in the United States, bears similarities to the Black family of Spillers's descriptive. It functioned as the release space for the reservoirs of feeling and preservation, connected to the submerged and displaced indigeneities the enslaved African had to call forth from within. This interior, spiritual, collective self-knowledge—pulled from the inside out—was a necessity since both the external society and the archival records were not sources of either safety or accuracy. The internal power associated with afroindigenization emerges from these reservoirs of feeling.

Stewart lays one of the cornerstones for understanding the descendants of enslaved Africans as manifesting both displaced and submerged African indigeneities. She exposes the ways in which the Christian faith is unique among faith practices in terms of its privileging of Christian truth as the only means to salvation. Stewart cites Cameroonian theologian Englebert Mveng's conception of "anthropological poverty" as helping explain the

dangers of Western Christianity for the African. Mveng's concept describes Western Christianity's projection of a "despoiled" notion of the human onto Africa—one that goes far beyond economic poverty to include identity, history, language, culture, faith, and ethnic roots as areas of *impoverishment* rather than areas capable of creating the internal resources necessary for psycho-spiritual health. If all that is Africa represents impoverishment rather than wealth, then it is something to be ashamed of, escaped, and feared rather than celebrated. Stewart uses Mveng's theory as the frame to set up "the manifestations of anthropological poverty in Jamaican religious experience," one in which the type of Westernized Christianity transmitted to Black Jamaicans has as a prerequisite cultural, spiritual, social, ethnic, and metaphysical rejection of Africa.⁵⁵ Embracing "anthropological poverty" is identified by Stewart as a prime requirement for enslaved and formerly enslaved Africans, who must reject *all* attachments to African indigenous culture as proof of their conversion to Western Christianity.⁵⁶ Western Christianity here insidiously elevates and conflates a Eurocentric worldview with the opportunity for salvation. The dehumanized conditions under which we were transported to the Americas via the Middle Passage further reinforce these assumptions: "*Not early descent into madness. Naked travail among filth and rats.*"⁵⁷ Like the violence of the journey, the Christianity extended to the enslaved early on was uncompromising.

Stewart's main point is *not* to show how Afro-Jamaican religions became Christian but instead to show "how they survived the anti-Africanness in Christianities from slavery up to the current time."⁵⁸ In so doing, she demonstrates indigenous continuities when she sets up the ideology of the dominant African-derived religions in Jamaica: Revival Zion, Rastafari, and Kumina. Obeah and Myal are established as pre-emancipation practices setting the foundation for the African derivatives to follow. The Native Baptist faith, imported to Jamaica through the missionary proselytizing of African Americans George Liele, among others, brought a kind of Africanized Christianity into contact with Obeah and Myal, which in turn influenced Revival Zion and Rastafari in different ways.

Revival Zion exercises a distinctly African form of religion while using Christianity as a kind of exterior structure. Rastafari, on the other hand, thoroughly Africanizes the Christian message in favor of a "suffering" Black population. Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie is conceived of as a Black Christ with genealogical relations to the biblical Solomon and Sheba as well as the Old Testament's King David. Rastafari's revolutionary imperative is captured by the concept "Nyabinghi," translated by some as "death to Black

and white oppressors.”⁵⁹ Within Rastafari, Africa and specifically Ethiopia are envisioned as both symbolic and literal homeland. However, despite an embrace of herbal medicine, Rastafari categorically reject trance possession, divination, and blood sacrifice, all of which are central to Zion Revival and Kumina. Nevertheless, Stewart gives Rastafari credit for having the most politically oppositional ideology to European Christ-consciousness, the most radical socioeconomic critique of colonial society, and through the union of reggae music and its religious perspective, it has had the most anti-imperialist worldwide influence.

While there is substantial overlap between Zion Revival and Kumina, Stewart’s work makes it clear that Kumina is the most rooted of the African continental practices that traveled to Jamaica since Kumina practitioners were not technically enslaved Africans but Africans who were indentured on plantations after emancipation, having been transported from West and Central Africa. Still, current-day Kumina practitioners identify with the descendants of enslaved Africans on the island, seeing themselves as having undergone similar struggles.

Describing the fashion in which these African indigeneities survived, Stewart draws on Leonard Barrett’s “soul-force” as well as her own “theory of masquerading.” Stewart quotes Barrett, stating, “Soul signifies the moral and emotional fiber of Black people that enables them to see their dilemmas clearly and at the same time encourages and sustains them in their struggles. ‘Force’ connotes strength, power, intense effort and a will to live. The combined words—‘soul-force’—describe the racial inheritance of the New World African.”⁶⁰

Drawing on notions of continental African masquerade that represent the costumed person’s temporary loss of their “identity [to] . . . become an incarnated Ancestor,” Stewart states, “The institution of masquerading provided enslaved Africans in Jamaica with an aesthetic mode of concealment and protection that allowed them to preserve Obeah, Myal, and other African-derived religious traditions in variegated forms masked as Christian traditions.”⁶¹ While the argument Stewart puts forth has been made about Vodou, Santeria, and Candomblé in relation to Catholicism in Haiti, Cuba, and Brazil, respectively, it has not been made with equal consistency about African interfaces with Christianity in English-speaking regions of the Americas. As a strategy of concealment, masquerading allowed groups who “self-consciously identif[ed] as Christian” to acquire a kind of “immunity from external attack and censorship” and preserve an internal “sustaining impact” without fear of retribution and demonization.⁶² Her position opens the door

to a range of reinterpretations of the Black Church in the United States and other forms of Christian practice in non-Western cultures historically and currently.

SUBMERGED INDIGENITIES OF THE SPIRIT

Pulling from the title of Michael Gomez's *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, what would it mean if transatlantic enslaved Africans were seen as "exchanging their country marks" (losing their nation-specific ethnicities) but not losing their indigeneity since the loss wasn't really a choice? While famine, economic instability, and desire may have shaped European immigrant choices to leave the conditions in their homelands to come to America and self-invent, upon arrival, the construct of whiteness increasingly framed what it meant to be "American" (without a hyphen). Influencing the degree of assimilation they had access to, attachment to a previous ethnicity became a choice. The enslaved African, on the other hand, had to hold onto whatever cultural self-definition was available, consciously or intuitively, since the categories "human," "citizen," "settler," and "native" were unavailable. Furthermore, being seen as property meant that the physical and spiritual survival of self and offspring was a grave matter of identity. Indigeneity, in the dominant society, was publicly and partially understood in relation to a connection to land, and "we" (our enslaved ancestors) had no automatic claims or rights to land in the hemisphere. As a collective we were aggressively de-indigenized, politically, historically, territorially, and discursively. Some of us internalized the deculturation as an inferiority complex linked to the loss of home, family, traditions, and philosophical world-sense. These experiences were further buttressed by both the forces of "anthropological poverty" and a kinship rejection handed down from some of our continental African brethren and sistren, themselves affected by colonization and elitism. Many such persons viewed us as without culture and indigeneity and not "of" them. Our internalized deculturation and de-indigenization were further extended by deliberate, state-sanctioned decentering and open assault on the knowledge, practices, and beliefs of our ancestors. The assumptions of connectedness to land, traditions, and nationhood that established the foundation for First Nations Indigeneity in the Americas were at odds with the calculated severing of such a tie, synchronized with the dominion over and ownership of the body, which was the enslaved African's diasporic legacy. I am not suggesting, however, that for peoples indigenous to the Americas, the relationship to territory has been a simple affair. First Nations Indigeneity in the Americas is

rife with the complexities of land theft, industrialization, and the rise of “free market” and “global” economies, which have come at the expense of *any* Indigenous group’s claim to spaces and places the powerful desired, while culturally specific First Nations approaches to governance, spirituality, and family were consistently under attack.

One of the primary distinctions being highlighted is that contemporary Afrospora populations, who are descended from enslaved Africans and who now exist within predominantly white nation-states (populations such as African Americans, UK Black people, Afro-Canadians, Afro-Germans, and Afro-Italians), manifest a submerged sense of displaced afroindigenous ethnicity. What is being alluded to is not a pure or singular ethnic reality but one that is necessarily hybrid, reflecting the complexity of the histories of arrival and movement. As scholars of Blackness have effectively argued, predominantly white nation-states tend to absorb and commodify or marginalize and deny the distinctness of the cultural expression (or Africanity) associated with Black populations internal to the state. Furthermore, within non-Black nation-states, these populations are faced with the insidious conjunction of malignment and misunderstanding coexisting alongside histories of desire, love, and theft.⁶³

Yet in predominantly African-descended and Latinx nation-states throughout the Caribbean, Central, and South America, the juxtaposition of Blackness and indigeneity in relation to the descendants of enslaved Africans on one hand and First Nations Native populations on the other presents complexities worthy of reference. Juliet Hooker’s essay “Indigenous Inclusion / Black Exclusion: Race, Ethnicity and Multicultural Citizenship in Latin America,” in its very title, isolates an issue at the vexed heart of the matter vis-à-vis African diaspora populations who are the descendants of enslaved Africans in predominantly white or predominantly non-Black nation-states: “What needs to be explained in order to understand the gap in the collective rights won by indigenous [versus] Afro-Latin populations then, *is not* why Blacks have not mobilized as such in favor of collective rights, but what conditions have facilitated the greater politicization of ethnicity [in relation to Indian indigeneity rather] than race [the language linked to Afro-Latinx peoples] under multicultural citizenship regimes.”⁶⁴

Hooker’s work exposes the misrecognition of the deeply cultural structure of Black identity in the Americas as an international problem. Discourses of “race” have historically replaced recognition of ethnicity as it relates to Black populations, specifically in relation to how these groups are perceived externally by others and sometimes internally by themselves. In an undergraduate

class I once led, an African American student had an eye-opening response to the question “What does ethnicity mean to you?” She said, “I don’t know what ethnicity means to me. All I know is my mother is a Black woman, and her mother was a Black woman, and her mother was a Black woman.”⁶⁵

The term *Black*, for Black people living within predominantly white nation-state spaces, has historically taken on the weight of ethnicity in the absence of access to a territory of one’s own. For non-Black outsiders to the group, “Blackness” may function primarily as a racial category, often associated with negative social constructions of difference while also being reductively reduced to skin color alone. In-group, however, the “Black” signifier in the United States may consciously and more importantly subconsciously function as a catch-all for group notions of beauty, trauma, strength, oppression, speech patterns, music and dance traditions, state violence, a culturally specific sense of humor, philosophical ways of seeing the world, and modes of survival by any means necessary. To say one is “a Black person” is to implicitly allude to all these things. Coexisting under the rubric of the single racial signifier “Black” is a sense of “pan-*ethnicity*” or submerged cultural identities. These truths are subconscious, implied, and understood for those claiming Blackness as an in-group identity. These truths remain the case even if these realities are denied or misconceived by others in the nation at large, external to the group.

Shifting to the Caribbean and specifically to Guyana, Shona Jackson’s highlighting of the tensions between Afro- and Indo-Guyanese in contrast with Native Indigenous populations engages notions of indigeneity in distinctly different ways than the afroindigenization concept put forth here. Jackson juxtaposes the situation of four groups: Black people, descended from enslaved Africans who were exploited for their labor; South Asian people, descended from indentured persons exploited for their labor; Europeans who re-created the labor landscape for the purposes of their own individual and collective benefit; and Indigenous people whose claims to the land space now known as Guyana predate the arrival of all three of the previous groups. The Black Afro-Guyanese descendants of enslaved Africans as well as the South Asian Indo-Guyanese descendants of indentured laborers inadvertently stepped into a “settler colonial” framework premised on European notions of the state, thus perpetuating the marginalization, destabilization, and appropriation of land and resources of the First Nations people indigenous to the region.⁶⁶ The particularity of these regional differences in a Caribbean context, despite the similarities based on the plantation economy of old, is key. While the uneasy coexistence of the African, South Asian, and First

Nations presence in Guyana is distinct from territories such as Barbados, Antigua, Jamaica, or Haiti, it is also different from aspects of the situation in neighboring Surinam, where, similar to the Garifuna in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, a long-term alliance and fusion emerged between the maroon populations of formerly enslaved Africans who escaped the plantation and First Nations peoples in the region, resulting in groups (formerly referred to as “Bush Negroes”) now known as the Saramaka, Paramaka, Ndyuka-Aukan, Kwinti, Aluku, Boni, and Matawai.⁶⁷

Unlike the previous references to First Nations people in the United States, Jackson uses the term *indigeneity* to talk about two types of “Creole” notions of belonging. Creole here refers to Afro- and Indo-Guyanese. In the first type of belonging, the physical territory is now identified as the asset of the new Creoles. The second type of belonging, one that stabilizes the claim to the physical territory, is premised on political and material rights linked to African and South Asian exploited labor and the wealth generated by the plantation economies that formed the modern Guyanese nation-state. In other words, Afro- and Indo-Guyanese are seen as being able to lay claim to these territories based on their labor being the primary resources previously exploited to develop the nation. Jackson’s position is that Creole settlers—of African and South Asian descent—despite being transported to the Americas by force and coercion, are implicated in a construction of identity and nation statehood connecting *citizenship* and *rights* to the exploitation of their labor. In so doing, they marginalize the primacy of an older ancestral, spiritual, environmental, and tribal relationship to territory and space on the part of First Nations peoples such as the Wai Wai, Taino, Caribs, Machusi, Patamona, Lokono, Kalina, Wapishana, Pemon, Akawaio, and Warao. The new Creoles have therefore made of themselves unintentional bedfellows with a notion of “the state,” perpetuating rather than liberating the territory’s Indigenous people. Jackson cites Bonita Laurence and Enakshi Dua, who challenge Paul Gilroy’s claims of modernity beginning with chattel slavery, arguing instead in favor of genocide and the colonization of Indigenous people as the “real” beginning. Jackson asserts, however, that “it is not a matter of either blacks *or* Indigenous Peoples, but it is the relationship into which they are placed under colonialism that is definitive for Caribbean modernity.”⁶⁸

Jackson’s work dialogues with Erna Brodber’s position on the political destiny of the descendants of enslaved Africans in the Caribbean. For Brodber, the vast majority of the enslaved and their descendants in places such as Haiti, Jamaica, and the United States were by and large outsiders to the political and cultural systems of the nations they occupied, with limited

access to social mobility—the access decreasing as the skin tone darkened. Furthermore, the system was not set up for the Black majority to even see themselves as a “group” with collective interests (something ironically adding more fuel to the fire of Hooker’s analysis). If or when they did, the forces and obstacles to their freedom were large, with the Haitian Revolution being the most dominant example of mass resistance.⁶⁹ While Jackson speaks specifically of Guyana, Brodber’s argument forces a more nuanced reading, of both the distinctions within the Caribbean terrain as well as the status and reach of Black people’s power with regard to economic, political, and cultural self-determination, within the context of nation-states they did not design—despite token, neocolonial or neoliberal, Black leadership. Furthermore, Creole power, while complicit in state violence, is like the buffer-class bourgeoisie described by Frantz Fanon.⁷⁰ They are limited in their ability to either uplift the Black and Brown masses in their countries or break free from the stranglehold of International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank debt. But Jackson’s analysis does highlight a crucial political reality: The de-indigenization of Black populations has made us vulnerable to colonial and neocolonial models of governance.

Tiffany Lethabo-King’s work also converses with Jackson’s position, maintaining that while these sagas, Black and Native, are not interchangeable and emanate from distinct experiences, with “instantiations of Black fungibility and Native genocide, the violence moves as one.”⁷¹ Lethabo-King’s frame, more Afrospora than specific to one region, lives in the space of the haunting terror shaping the psyches of those emanating from experiences of genocide and enslavement. Geographically partial to North America, her narratives of Black citizenship and national power are not identical to those emanating from predominantly Black nation-states. In other words, what Blackness means in terms of power and ethnic identity, in predominantly white or predominantly non-Black territories, is a distinct kettle of fish, despite certain continuities of shared experience. While Jackson uses the term *indigeneity* to describe Black claims to land and identity in the Caribbean region effacing or usurping prior claims of First Nations people, Lethabo-King is not defining or redefining indigeneity in her argument; instead, she shrewdly refuses and complexifies the assumed boundaries between Black and Native studies, particularly in North American discourses of race and subjectivity.

To reiterate, my focus here is not to contest the interrelatedness of New World Blackness and First Nations Indigeneity as explored in the work of the scholars cited. Instead, the prime directive is to define, clarify, investigate, and further explore the pan-indigenized and pan-ethnicized identities of

the descendants of enslaved Africans on their own terms. Rather than being nonexistent until exposure to or encounters with First Nations peoples, these pan-indigenized ways of being are part of the structure of Black identities despite being submerged and/or repressed. They are attached to generationally inherited and collectively amalgamated ethnic identities, ones that are used in conscious and subconscious ways to navigate physical and psycho-spiritual survival of the violence of everyday life. In every instance, the sign of submerged and indigenized consciousness is the artistic expression of what Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston would refer to as “the folks lowest down.”⁷²

For Afrospora populations in predominantly Black nation-states like Jamaica and Haiti, national cultural identity is overdetermined, in both overt and submerged ways, by the amalgamated indigenized ethnicities enslaved Africans brought with them, alongside, in lesser ways, the ethnicities of First Nations peoples, South Asian indentured laborers, Middle Eastern immigrants, and European colonial settlers. *Afroindigenization* makes a crucial contribution to the conversation by suggesting that “modern” Black identities, far from being exclusively (even if complex) racial subjects, have a practically functioning, even if submerged and displaced, African pan-indigeneity as the underside to their drum. Despite being suppressed, these indigenities bequeath the internal power and fuel for cultural expression among the descendants of enslaved Africans, also indirectly influencing those who are impacted by us.

A displaced Afro-diasporized pan-indigeneity is a distinct facet of the identity of the descendants of enslaved Africans, one complementing and adding layers to what is articulated in the work of Lethabo-King, Jackson, Hooker, and Brodber, among others. Here, indigeneity refers to a functioning yet repressed and inherited culturo-spiritual way of being. Its purpose is to impart the tools for understanding how to survive in the world in which the enslaved and their descendants found themselves. The sign and substance of our Afro-diasporized pan-indigeneity is not the nation-state, nor is it the labor on behalf of the state for which the Black subject is exploited. It is instead the cultural creativity of the collective and any form of expression characterized by what Kamau Brathwaite refers to as the “immanence within” or internal resources.⁷³ *Afroindigenization* is therefore a way of describing the mode and manner by which the internalization of power, described by Brathwaite, becomes enacted as cultural practice. We “afroindigenized” our realities in conscious and subconscious ways. At the heart of both afroindigenization and *marasa* consciousness are implied forms of

spiritual engagement, which are further contextualized and expanded upon when placed within the context of scholarly interventions addressing African and African diaspora religious and spiritual ways of knowing.

I return to the provocative complexity of Lethabo-King's work and the notion of the "shoal," which carves out an interstitial space between land and sea, between the rootedness of land historically associated with indigeneity and the rootlessness of the ocean associated with those transported through the Middle Passage. Lethabo-King states: "At its surface, the shoal functions as a space of liminality, indeterminacy, and location of suture between two hermeneutical frames that have conventionally been understood as sealed off from each other. I offer the space of the shoal as simultaneously land and sea to fracture this notion that Black diaspora studies is overdetermined by rootlessness and only metaphorized by water and to disrupt the idea that Indigenous studies is solely rooted and fixed in imaginaries of land as territory."⁷⁴

Lethabo-King's refusal of duality is mirrored and expanded upon by Ras Michael Brown's contrasting of Western Christian concepts of metaphysics with the relationship between the seen and the unseen in precolonial Kongo culture:

A western Christian conception of "religion" as essentially metaphysical and separate from other core spheres of experience assigns the beings and forces of the land of the dead to the realm of the "supernatural." In this conception, the idea of the supernatural does more than provide a cognate for the "spiritual"; it poses a fundamental divide between the physical, natural and the invisible, spiritual domains. *Kongo cultures, however, acknowledge no such duality.* Instead, the world consists of the visible and the invisible intertwined in the same space. The land of the living and the land of the dead do not represent two separate worlds. . . . This one space, the natural world, encompasses both the visible and invisible, the physical and the spiritual.⁷⁵

The refusal of duality described by Brown as a feature of traditional Kongo cultures, the relevance of which is explored in his own assessment of the African diaspora culture in the South Carolina Lowcountry, is conceptually useful here. Afroindigenization as a practice can be seen as the internalization of a nondualistic and intertwined visible and invisible reality. In other words, if the invisible realm is intertwined with the ability to move spiritual energy, then one facet of the survival instinct in the descendants of enslaved Africans was to take invisible energy, consciously or not, and deploy it in

ways allowing the living to emotionally and psychologically survive challenges in the societies and environments in which they found themselves.

Brown goes further. Within West and Central African indigenous knowledge systems, he maintains, “it becomes possible to see a river as a natural physical body of water that does what all rivers do and to perceive that same river as a ‘supernatural’ path to the land of the dead where the normal dimensions of the visible realm give way to other understandings of time, space and power.”⁷⁶ While Lethabo-King’s notion of the shoal is powerful, Brown’s analysis expands on conceptions of bodies of water as representing physical and spiritual power. His observations support Lethabo-King’s critique of the legacy of enslaved Africans as solely a people displaced by the Middle Passage into transatlantic rootlessness—adrift without land claims, living a permanent second-class existence trapped between white imperialist citizenship and state-sanctioned notions of First Nations Indigeneity. In Brown’s formulations, however, water is not simply a physical element representing oceanic death and the loss of home; it is also a spiritual element symbolizing *a form of internal rootedness* traveling with those who physically survived the Middle Passage, *bolstered by the energy of those who didn’t*. The sign and substance of the internal rootedness are the internalization of power—afroindigenization. Our power is made manifest in diasporic forms of spirit-moving and life-sustaining cultural expression. Spirit-based practices that reignite the sacred are the healing response to trauma. The theoretical work by a range of religious studies scholars points to the mobilization of what I call “the Black sacred” as the generating source of the internal power used in the process of afroindigenization.

In her work, LeRhonda Manigault-Bryant notes that the Black body is “the link between the human and spiritual worlds, for without the body the spirit has nothing to possess.”⁷⁷ This key observation supports an understanding of the body as a divine *vehicle*, a suppressed but functional aspect of African diaspora consciousness, one made manifest in the ways we use our bodies as part of our everyday cultural expressivity—which is distinct from how our bodies have been used by institutions and those with power over us without our permission. Manigault-Bryant assesses the role of the spirit-body connection in the documentary *Rize* (also analyzed in this book), citing the role of the body’s use in the film as an active example of a suppressed yet divinely functional collective understanding of the body’s power. Her analysis helps expand the parameters of the Black sacred in the project by referencing how the young Krumpers in *Rize* shift the energy from the physical spaces of temple and church to secular spaces. The movement from sacred to secular

space is an example of the transformative power linked to the afroindigenizing impulse. Manigault-Bryant's attention to the key role Black women play as spiritual vessels within possession ceremonies is also a valuable insight. It reinforces a metaphysical and spiritual connection to the female body in particular—on both the continent and in the diaspora. The connection between the female body and spiritual power is further explored in this book's third chapter with regard to gender identity, motherhood, and work.

Darnell Moore's interrogation of the body as a conflicted site of both degradation and transcendence expands on Manigault-Bryant's highlighting of the body as a space where the spiritual and the physical intersect. Moore describes the Black body as "thrashed . . . lynched . . . sexually assaulted . . . held captive . . . murdered . . . cursed . . . and publicly satirized. . . . It is that landscape that still smells of war and terror even as it exists in its beauty."⁷⁸ Moore pushes back against the undertheorization of the trauma experienced by the Black body on the part of theologians who favor emphasizing resilience and transcendence. He critiques the focus on recovering the Black body as a site of pleasure and rejuvenation while ignoring the coexistence of pain, terror, and trauma. Drawing on Edward Phillip Antonio's notion of a "negative erotics" (where "pleasure/sensation/eros" coexist with "pain/terror/trauma"), Moore suggests holding the legacies of pain and transcendence in productive tension.⁷⁹ His reading of the Black body as both a nexus of trauma as well as a portal of hope for the future is magnificently articulated when, despite all, he notes the body is still "the ritual space in which the divine is manifest."⁸⁰ His work adds the nuance of making it clear how internal power and notions of the sacred, at the heart of the afroindigenizing impulse, do not mean transcendence and overcoming are the only modes through which internal potency is expressed.

If afroindigenization is a generationally handed down, functional and functioning yet submerged ability to deploy, in resilient ways, the internalization of our spiritual roots, then Clark's *marasa* consciousness addresses the coexistence of sameness and difference as a principle guiding the structure of our submerged collective psyches. The *marasa* characteristic representing the movement of three is made manifest in both our scholarship and our embodied grassroots practices. Moore's insistence on highlighting both pain and resilience within the context of possession reminds us of *marasa* energy, while also resonating with Brown's theories about the intersectional nature of the invisible and visible realms. If the pain and the resilience must coexist, then it is an implied third term that makes the reconciliation or coexistence possible, while opening the way for the energetic spiraling that makes

psycho-spiritual survival conceivable. Moore's notions can also be applied to the attempts on the parts of the Krumpers in *Rize* who work between trauma and resilience, while also speaking to the rhetorical implications of Kanye West's "feeling" in Common's 2005 song "The Corner."⁸¹ West, rapping about the contradictions of life interlaced with death, states, "I wish that I could give you this feeling / I wish that I could give you this feeling / On the corner, niggas robbin', killin' / *dyin'* just to make a *living*."

Stewart's work on concepts drawn from African feminists and womanist theologians helps lay the foundation for the project's gendered turn, linking female power as it is specifically expressed through mothering to the afroindigenization impulse and the plurality of the *marasa*. For my purposes, mothering as a symbolic construct with a grounding in the realm of the unseen is part of the larger afroindigenizing framework; it implicitly links sources of internal power, drawn on for psycho-spiritual survival to the realm of spirit. Stewart's specific concern is the absence of internal power and the presence of its opposite, "anthropological poverty," in the lives of Africana women and girls, wherever they are in the world. Similar to Manigault-Bryant, Stewart connects femininity and "the Black sacred" to notions of afroindigenization, providing insight into the structure of female power and motherhood drawn from the work of continental African scholars Ifi Amadiume and Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí, whose work is also discussed at length in the third chapter. Stewart uses their theories to unearth and decenter Western gendered essentialist epistemological paradigms.

The inclusion of continental theorizations of gendered plenitude functions as the other side of Western frameworks of "lack."⁸² The link between institutions of mothering as they relate to gender and internal sources of power (as opposed to "lack") in West and Central African contexts is the connection to the afroindigenizing impulse in the Afrospora. Motherhood is power in these frameworks—power extending far beyond biology. Furthermore, female power does not always manifest as benevolence. The *marasa* principle helps us understand the logic of female potency in such spaces. *Marasa* consciousness-in-action is the submerged sign and substance of contradictory power dynamics coexisting as part of our afroindigenized realities. In other words, sameness and difference coexisting, turning loose, and/or letting go are all grounded in spiritual energy and understanding. Ultimately, it is a *marasa* framing of duality that creates the ground for a spiraling solution to the crises related to gendered disempowerment in the diaspora. Religious studies scholars, when situated alongside theorists of indigeneity and Blackness, make clear that the "Black sacred" or spirit-based modes of

understanding Black reality are *the* central functional piece of both afroindigenization and *marasa* consciousness, which are functionally submerged theories of the spirit operating in diverse spheres in the Afrospora.

We, the descendants of enslaved Africans, indigenized the landscapes within which we found ourselves, infusing them with our beliefs, even though we did not own the land. Even in contemporary hip-hop culture there has been an afroindigenization of social space on the part of the most oppressed, who “rep” their “hoods” as if they were nations. Our experiences of displacement and our approach to re-creating a sense of collective culture have led to the creation of informal institutions, built primarily with ancestral spiritual traditions handed down in a variety of internal and external forms. These institutions became the cornerstone of our individual and collective self-affirmation.⁸³ The dynamic aspects of the cultural products we created have attracted the attention and desires of outsiders to our experiential matrix. Seeing ourselves as a people with an Afro-diasporized pan-indigeneity is a move toward disrupting the history of anti-Blackness. Within such a framework, Blackness and indigeneity become negotiations between varying degrees of displacement within the European colonial project.

While the KRIK and KRAK structure is drawn from Caribbean storytelling traditions and serves as the referential frame for the introduction and the afterword, I hope the following chapters function as the story itself, impacting different audiences in distinct ways. Chapter 1, “Mermaids in Woodside, Jamaica: Submerged Consciousness,” is the mythological manifestation of the book’s idea. Relying on Sylvia Wynter’s early work allows me to imagine and understand how indigenized structures of consciousness functioned despite repression, with references to “mermaids” and “Myal” spiritual practices framing the modern-day mermaid lore encountered in the rural Jamaican village of Woodside.

A demonstration of the relationship between experiential and lyrical knowledge and the concept of afroindigenization is made in chapter 2, “Mountings in *Rize*: Becoming the Horse and the Turn Loose in Hip-Hop.” The Krumpers’ explanations in *Rize* for *why* they “Krump” is one of the best examples of afroindigenization-in-action. The links between the idea of the “turn loose” as expressed by participants in the ring shouts of the nineteenth century and the “turning loose” required for the Krumpers to “cross over” and recover from the stresses of everyday life are uncanny and are demonstrated here.

In chapter 3, “*Ìyá* but Not Western Woman: A Grassroots Formulation of the Afrospora Feminine,” the relationship between female gender identity

and afroindigenization is explored. African diaspora female behavior seeming outlandish or inconsequential in Western spaces reappears as repressed or submerged afroindigenized gendered ways of being. The chapter therefore explores the connections between culture and gender in the Afrospora, juxtaposing them with West and Central African historic formulations of these categories, while also paying particular attention to how the culture/gender nexus connects to embodied notions of motherhood and work.

Chapter 4, “Enter the Dragons of Debate: Rashid Campbell and George Lee’s 2014 Run,” centralizes the biographies and unconventional debating techniques of George Lee and Rashid Campbell, two Black male debaters who “almost got away with it.” The chapter highlights their clever deployment of the controversies related to the N-word as strategies for exposing the objectification of Black humanity while winning debates in the process. Using their lived experiences as unconventional sources of evidence, in conjunction with citing hip-hop artists as philosophers of culture, Campbell and Lee not only won debates but also participated in the afroindigenizing of the National Debate Tournament itself. Their rize was an example of both resilience and the internalization and use of power. The stories of their lives, narrated in their own words, bring biography into the contours of the frame, diversifying the use of voice in the project and expanding the parameters of the scholarly and the artistic within the context of afroindigenization as project and praxis. “KRAK: Jack Mandora Mi Nuh Choose None,” the project’s closing moment, is a brief and personal reflection on the larger significance of these philosophies of the grassroots traced throughout the book.

Afroindigenization contributes to what David Scott refers to as the meta-dimension of the archive. Insisting on the archive as linguistic and discursive, Scott situates the meta-dimension in the ways the archaeologist (and critic) bring meaning to a collection by understanding the context of the recovered material and necessarily creating both an interpretation and an opening up of a world that participates in the “construction of . . . an *institution of memory* [or] an *idiom of remembering*.”⁸⁴ *Afroindigenization: A Theory of Grassroots Cultural Practice* contributes to the “archaeology of Black memory.”⁸⁵ It aspires to be a resilient countermemory response coexisting in a *marasa*-like way with the realities of Black fungibility. The transformation of consciousness at the heart of our most persistent collective resilience sets the stage in a pioneering way for paradigms that, if taken seriously, could be the psychic salvation of the societies of the future.

Mermaids in Woodside, Jamaica

Submerged Consciousness

One day in December 2012, while I was visiting my husband's extended family in Guinea, Conakry, we attended a rehearsal of the professional African dance troupe Ballet Sourakhata. It was held in an abandoned warehouse with a red dirt floor close to Madina Maketi, the large outdoor market. The performance had a storytelling motif enacted through dance. The story was about a community-fed spirit who in response protected the village's crops. Over time, the villagers stopped honoring the spirit, famine hit the community, and people suffered. The community decided to feed the spirit once again and dance, sing, and give it energy. The spirit was happy. Harvest crops returned and the villagers continued to celebrate and rejoice. I was moved to tears for reasons I could not articulate, by the energy, story, and percussion accompanying the dance performance. There was something about the expressivity of it all that was alive and dynamic. I remember wondering if village communities really offered food to these ancient spirits, would folklore become reality once more? Would unexpected shifts occur in the perception and manifestation of the feasible? It was a fleeting idea, inspired less by rational thought than by feeling. For me it tapped into a kind of submerged consciousness.

In her essay on Floridian communities, Zora Neale Hurston notes that "folklore is the boiled-down juice of human living"; it "is the art of the people

before they find out that there is any such thing as art, and they make it out of whatever they find at hand.”¹ The description of folklore as a “boiled-down juice” suggests that in some inextricable way it is part of the marrow and lifeblood or core and crux of meaning-making about our circumstances. In a comparable move, Sylvia Wynter meditates on the presence of the transported African as an enslaved person in the Jamaican landscape, one for whom the earth was the literal source of food, feeding the body while symbolically through folklore this same earth had been “people[ed] with gods and spirits . . . demons and duppies, with all the rich panoply of [the enslaved African’s] imagination.”² In other words, the diasporic African’s peopling of the landscape with their folklore transplanted their worldview, which functioned, consciously or not, as part of the psycho-spiritual vista of survival—a kind of “boiled-down juice of human living.” But it is a further one-line reference from Wynter’s article that interests me and expands on Hurston’s ideas in a different direction. Wynter observes, “Folklore was the cultural guerilla resistance against the market economy.”³ The market economy within the context of Wynter’s essay was, among other things, the trade in people. Added to Hurston’s earlier statement, Wynter’s last comment suggests an implied relationship among folklore, the landscape, and environmental territory, one that functions as a form of protection for the psyche, helping maintain sanity and well-being in the face of outside attacks on the body and the mind.

This chapter, therefore, is a meditation on how folkloric knowledge functions as a kind of submerged consciousness. “Mermaids in Woodside, Jamaica: Submerged Consciousness” is the mythological manifestation of *Afroindigenization*, defined here as structures of dynamism spiritually garnered from the societal contexts out of which enslaved Africans were extracted and transformed into sources of internal power. Drawing on stories about mermaids and water spirits emerging from a rural village in Woodside, Jamaica, in the parish of St. Mary, juxtaposed with the analyses of a range of Africana scholars, I analyze these tales and make links between the notion of afroindigenization and the idea of submerged consciousness. My use in this chapter of two distinct types of creative voice intertwines the personal story with the story of the collective, taking the reader into the world of Woodside in two ways: through nonfiction prose describing the place and its appeal to outsiders as well as through a form of mythological storytelling. We will enter the world of water spirits as the stories were reported to me. I hope to show how the folkloric imagination, coming from the grassroots, is a kind of map of our submerged consciousness and as such moves beyond the parameters

of folklore into what I describe as “living lore”—a space between the seen and unseen realms grounding our collective Afrospora psyches in inarticulable ways.

WELCOME TO WOODSIDE: THE PLACE AND SPACE

An August 13, 2019, article in *Jamaica Loop News* announced Dr. Erna Brodber and Woodside Village the winners of the Carib Cement Company’s \$5 million “Build Your Community” competition. The money was granted to construct the ancestral gardens in the village space known as Daddy Rock—a project spearheaded and pioneered by years of work on the part of Brodber. The article described Woodside as “once home to the Tainos . . . [and also a place where the] footprints of [this] indigenous group are still evident.” As a result, Woodside was “declared a national heritage site in 2015.” The article went on to note the village was “also [previously] the home of a large coffee plantation, which was owned by a slave master[,] and . . . Daddy Rock, [an area] where slaves used to gather to host their religious ceremonies and discussions.”⁴

I met Erna Brodber in 2000 when I went home to Jamaica for a family reunion. My friend Sharon Chacko and her husband, historian Swithin Wilmot, drove my sister and me to Woodside, where I had the opportunity to interview Brodber. I had been deeply influenced by her novel *Louisiana*, her text *Perceptions of Caribbean Women: Towards a Documentation of Stereotypes*, and her keynote plenary talk “Re-Engineering Black Space,” given in 1996 at a conference in Kingston honoring scholar and dancer Rex Nettleford. Brodber prophetically pronounced that she saw us working together in the future. The following summer, without premeditation, I called and offered to come and help with the Emancipation Summer School she had created to teach village children their history. I spent three months in 2001 residing with community elders Roy and Pearl Crossman, working at the summer school, and helping with various community projects, including the village’s emancipation jubilee.⁵

The August 1 Emancipation Day celebration involved a reenactment of activities that the newly freed people on the former Neilson coffee estate participated in on the eve of their freedom. Brodber’s research was the foundation for these endeavors being reintroduced and incorporated into the community’s collective memory and living reality. The Emancipation Day activities included a march around the former estate, an ecumenical service in the open air at the top of a hill where the first church was said to have been constructed, a vigil with drumming and dancing on the evening of July 31,

and a free-will feast following the march. Brodber added an annual lecture down at the sacred site of Daddy Rock as well as a reenactment performance play.

The play, written by Brodber, drew on the lives of the ancestors of actual Woodside residents—people whose activities her research had unearthed. The performance involved the descendants enacting their ancestors' reactions to Queen Victoria's Emancipation Proclamation. How would their ancestors have reacted to being technically freed but then required to fulfill a few more years of indentured apprenticeship before receiving what was referred to as "full free"? What would they have thought of a "full free" that came without reparations of any kind for land, education for their children, or a way to make a living beyond labor on the estate? What of their inability to forget traumas like rape on slave ships or sadistic punishments like being rolled in molasses and placed in ants' nests? These facts, referenced in the reenactment, were some of the evidence Brodber's research exposed about slavery in Jamaica in general and aspects of life in Woodside in particular. The whole emancipation reenactment was powerful for outsiders who sometimes had small parts in the play as well as village residents who were a part of the embodied ritual, often playing roles related to their own direct ancestors.

In the following year, 2002, I brought the original "Woodside Four"—African American students Amber Jackson, David Surratt, Christopher Lester, and Stephanie Brown—for a month-long African diaspora course practicum. They taught summer school, participated in the emancipation celebration, learned techniques of oral history collection from Brodber, aided in the making of local drums, studied Jamaican folk rhythms, visited historical sites both in the community and in other parts of the island, lived with village residents in their homes, and shared aspects of their own African American cultural traditions with community members. I returned every summer between 2001 and 2006, working in a similar way with Brodber, while also helping her organize the *black space* seminars and symposiums, which usually happened in the days and weeks preceding the emancipation celebration. *Black space* was Brodber's attempt to bring the descendants of enslaved Africans from the Afrospace together to discuss issues hanging in the balance. She often said, "Black people need a private space to work out their differences."

As I have noted elsewhere about her work, "Because of our history, particularly in Caribbean circles, [Brodber] argues that when [non-Black] outsiders are included [in our discussions], the desire to accommodate their needs can shift the focus away from honest self-examination of the residual

pain and trauma experienced by the Black self.”⁶ I returned in the summers of 2008, 2012, and 2015 to help with both emancipation and b l a c k s p a c e, and in 2016, I brought a group of eleven people, including seven undergraduates and four faculty, for a week in Woodside as part of a month-long study abroad program. In 2018, I was one of two consultants hired to help with the production of a documentary on Brodber’s life and work. I assisted the filmmaker in crafting and shaping the story. Ultimately, over the course of a sixteen-year-period, I brought more than forty-one people to Woodside. Why did they come and why did some continue to return on their own? What was the draw?

For many of us, particularly those who lived in North America, the path to success meant either pretending the slave past had not affected us or maintaining we had “overcome” whatever trauma existed. The proof was our college degrees, our overall material status, our sexy bodies, our small businesses, our rich celebrities and entertainers, our successful athletes, and our domination of popular culture. But what had really happened was our actual choosing to forget or being forced to forget the legacy of slavery as well as the fact that the task of emancipation was for us incomplete as well. And why wouldn’t we forget? Before the recognition of Juneteenth, there was no national public holiday to celebrate emancipation as there was for independence or even Martin Luther King Jr.’s birthday. There was no national monument to slavery. Reconstruction had been a failure, and subsequent backlash against us controlling our political destiny was an ongoing battle. Furthermore, the South had not let go of its nostalgic view of slavery, and the kinds of reenactments we were subject to were not the kind we saw in Woodside but rather white southern stagings of Civil War battles and a romanticizing of the country’s colonial past.

Many of us had inadvertently bought into a notion of our oppression as our problem. I’ve often thought that, during the period of slavery, contrary to our retroactive understanding, many of the enslaved probably viewed their freedom as their responsibility—meaning if they wanted to be free it was their responsibility to buy themselves out of slavery. The inverse was also probably a widely held belief; that is, those who could not procure their own freedom did not deserve to be free. Not all of us were revolutionaries and abolitionists, certainly not then and definitely not now. There are still many among us who believe the fiction “If we cannot find a way to advance ourselves economically then we don’t deserve advancement.”

The emancipation reenactment, Brodber’s b l a c k s p a c e seminars, the creation of a monument at Daddy Rock, and the various communal

rituals and activities were meant, according to Brodber, to “teach people who were not readers” about their history. I came to realize these same rituals had the power to help those of us Black people who were formally educated—who were coming from outside the community and the country—to unlearn some of our own miseducation and feed our hunger for a connection to and understanding of ourselves and the experiences of our own enslaved ancestors. We had few rituals of these sorts in North America. Our power and status, on one hand, and our social and economic challenges and marginalization, on the other, alienated us from examining our grassroots cultural needs. We had conferences; we had Black churches and historically Black colleges; we had alcohol and drug addiction; we had Black television shows and movies; we had functional and dysfunctional family dynamics; we had circles of Black friends; we had craziness and creativity. We also had sports, and our haven has been and continues to be Black music. But many of us did not know what we were missing until we came to Woodside. Some of us had knowledge of Juneteenth but it was not celebrated consistently, and there are few if any enterprising researchers reconstructing reenactment rituals concretely rooted in land and local spaces specific to our lived ancestral experiences, similar to what Brodber had accomplished in Woodside.

We could talk generally about our Blackness but did not know many of the particulars of our particularity. Even today we have very few known statistics about ourselves not produced by the dominant societies we live in. We also had another problem: our proximity to whiteness. Those of us who were privileged enough to “succeed” by the standards of the societies we lived in were often de facto hostages to those social mores. The perceptions others held of us shaped how we saw ourselves. And whenever we dared to create our own fleeting or temporary Black spaces, instead of being perceived of as spaces of liberation, so designed to help us complete the task of our own emancipation, they were seen as threatening, exclusionary, and racist. The dominant society’s racial and cultural literacy about our reality was so low, even Black students sitting together in a high school cafeteria was misinterpreted as racial segregation rather than cultural, social, and psycho-spiritual need.

Simply being in the Woodside *environment* also had a powerful effect on many of us outsiders. For me, as a Jamaican but an outsider to Woodside, the effect of the monuments, the sacred sites, and the two-day ritual reenactment of the village’s emancipation celebration was inseparable from the effect of the physical environment itself. Black and white visitors to Woodside appeared to have two distinct experiences. The village had few streetlights at night, no

industrial sounds, forest and hills for miles, sparse populations of people, and mountainous terrain. The feet are the primary mode of transportation; small village shops exist but there are no 7-Elevens. There are bugs, bugs, and more bugs. It takes an hour and a half to drive to the beach. Children and adults carry water back and forth in the mornings to complete basic chores. It is a community of small farmers, rivers, unfamiliar energy, caves, and Jamaican Patwa.

For white visitors, it was often a somewhat exotic adventure into Black space, one far removed from the mundane realities of their daily lives. They could empathize and in instances throw themselves into the experience wholeheartedly since it had no apparent bearing on their lived reality elsewhere. For Black visitors, the place functioned as either a disruption or a rebirth. As a disruption, it was a conjuring or rude awakening, akin to a bucket of cold water being thrown on the naked soul, taking the form of a sudden descent into the world of chronic complaining, misery, resentment, fear, and depression as well as a desperate desire to leave the environment. For these persons, Woodside seemed to bring them face to face with all they had previously repressed or tried to avoid—anxieties hidden deep within the self and not encountered for years: Self-worth issues. Feelings of inferiority about one's Blackness, masked by status or success or just chatter in the brain. Something about the energy in the Woodside environment appeared to force these hidden spiritual truths out into the open with all their naked force. My sister and I always joked that you never knew who would get struck with the spirit of disruption. But it was not something to laugh about because the next person smitten might be you. For others, Woodside functioned as a place of rebirth. Following are excerpts from testimonies of visitors to the community over the years.

Nnamdi Lumumba (Black male, 2015)—My family's stay in Woodside during our summer 2015 trip was inspiring and humbling. We were housed with a generous and gracious family, the Whytes, who lived in a home they built themselves. We were able to learn about the history of the community from our hosts. We stayed with them during a long drought and learned how much water we waste in our normal day-to-day lives. We experienced the politeness and welcoming vibe of many of the community members as we walked to the village shops or participated in the many cultural events. Our stay in Woodside helped us to understand the communal spirit and resourcefulness of the Jamaican people in ways we would have never learned in the city, and definitely not at a resort.

Kirsten Edwards (Black female, 2016)—Visiting Woodside was a deeply spiritual experience. The energy is palpable and almost “thick.” I felt more in touch with my center in Woodside. It was a truly transformational time in my life.

Andrew LeGrand (Black male, 2005)—Woodside was a cultural and spiritual revelation. Being able to connect with others from the diaspora, and listen to and learn from their lived experiences, brought me closer to an understanding of who we are as a people and, consequently, who I am as a person. The experience was the perfect capstone to everything that I learned as an African and African American studies major, but it was more impactful than any book I ever read or college course I ever took. It truly had a lasting impression on my life, by shaping and helping me broaden my worldview.

Shane McClendon (white male, 2016)—I feel like Woodside was a great experience because of how different it was from the culture I’m used to. It was so relaxed, and I felt like it was just a really happy environment. It made me realize that we don’t need things like internet, smartphones, and TV nearly as much as we think we do. The people there were probably happier and kinder than people in America who have all that stuff and more.

Jaden Edwards (Black female, 2016)—Prior to traveling to Woodside, Jamaica, I was afraid because I did not know what the village would have in store. Throughout the duration of my stay with Ms. Cherry and the lectures from Dr. Brodber, I began to further understand how important the Black woman is to the family. I am personally changed by my stay in Woodside because I have come to know that independence, especially as a Black woman, shows strength and the ability to overcome any obstacles. Watching Ms. Cherry do everything by herself was comparable to my mother, who raised me alone, and it helped me to see that Black women, no matter where they come from, share some of the same values and traits which I hope to see in myself one day.

Carey Flack (Black female, 2016)—Spending time in Woodside was the most unforgettable aspect of being in Jamaica. When I was there, the world seemed to slow down for a moment. I felt connected to the ancestors, to myself, and to my *asé* or spiritual energy. My writer’s block lifted completely, and I churned out my first book. And the connections I made shifted my idea of Blackness. I felt rooted, loved, and inspired.

Rashid Campbell (Black male, 2012)—The Woodside experience affected me in a bunch of ways—none of them being a negative effect no matter how the lesson was created. For example, I had some nasty mosquito bites on my legs that I recovered from during the trip, but this only made me feel more strong, and more genuinely attached to a real Jamaican experience. The first thing I remember from my experience is getting off the plane, eventually getting through customs, and while waiting for my luggage to arrive getting incredibly emotional to the point where people were staring at me. I became emotional because I started to think about my cousins and my friends and family that live in Oakland who will never get to experience leaving the country. All the things which I had essentially taken for granted were privileges in this part of Jamaica. [One night I walked back] to my host's house . . . by myself. Although [it was] only a five- to seven-minute walk, I have never in my life until then walked that long in the pitch-black dark by myself, [with only the] fireflies or “peeni wallis” guiding me to where I was going. Woodside was a big test of how Americanized I was. The trip in itself was one big life lesson.

Aisha Finch (Black female, 2006, 2011, 2015, 2019, 2022)—Woodside is quite simply a blessed place. A holy place. There is a spirit there that I have not encountered anywhere else, one that speaks powerfully to anyone who spends time there. In a sense, Woodside has become a second home for me, even though I have only been there five times, and my ancestral roots are in the US South. But it often feels like I might have lived there in another lifetime. It is difficult to capture what I feel in Woodside, how the place makes me *feel*. The most I can say is that it heals and rejuvenates me every time I go. It also gives me great pleasure to reconnect with people in the community whom I have met on previous trips, some of whom are at very different places in their lives since the first time I met them. Woodside, and the Emancipation Day celebration in particular, always give me something different every time I go. It is always something unexpected, and something precious, and I am never the same person when I return.⁷

These testimonies are just a small cross-section of commentary from some of the people who visited Woodside. Another aspect of my experience in the community involved the mermaid and water spirit stories I heard there. When I first encountered these tales, I was confused because I did not grow up with mermaid lore as a part of my own Jamaican experience. I hope to show, however, that the folkloric imagination, coming from the grassroots, acts as an example of interior configurations of Black subjectivity and

submerged spiritual consciousness. I am speaking here about a construction of identity from inside the collective rather than one produced by how we are seen and understood from the outside. These mermaid stories, which are twentieth- and twenty-first-century rather than antebellum tales, are a kind of map of our submerged collective consciousness. Before moving on to the village's water spirit tales, I provide a discussion of the work and words of Africana scholars on the subject.

DIASPORIC MERMAIDS: SIMBI AND THE SOUTH CAROLINA LOWCOUNTRY

Wynter describes the mythological peopling of the Jamaican landscape by enslaved Africans as a form of indigenization. The "agent and product . . . [of] . . . indigenization was Jamaican folklore, folksong, folk-tales and folk dance."⁸ Wynter's notion of indigenization is a compelling and important aspect of our study since it suggests that the transposing of mythology/folklore is intertwined with the transplanting of the dual reality of spirits from the unseen realm. As previously noted in a quotation by Wynter, "with gods and spirits . . . demons and duppies," enslaved Africans indigenized the spaces they occupied. In Woodside, Jamaica, African indigenizing of the landscape happens with and alongside First Nations Taino mythologies and practices. In the US context, the Afrosporic nature of enslaved African water spirit lore shows up in Ras Michael Brown's work on the South Carolina Lowcountry. Brown, quoting from a story about a mermaid collected in the nineteenth century from Araminta Tucker, substantiates the peopling of the landscape in the Afro-Carolinian context, paralleling Wynter's descriptions of early Jamaica. Tucker, described as a "respected Negro nurse of Charleston" by collector John Bennett, characterizes the tale as a "mermaid history." As the story goes, a mermaid is trapped in a drugstore by the owner, Dr. Trott, with the result of the entrapment being endless rain. "It rain daily, until they ain' no dryness anywhere left"; it rained until the mermaid was sent back to the ocean, according to Tucker. In another tale reported from the Lowcountry, the "river mermaid [is] a surrogate mother for a girl whose mother had died and whose father neglected her. Unfortunately, the girl's father shot the mermaid, and the girl drowned attempting to reunite with her slain guardian."⁹

Brown reads both tales historically, politically, and folklorically. Politically, he notes two different accounts of Tucker's mermaid story. While she describes it as a history, one that ends with the release of the mermaid and the termination of the days of rain, the white townspeople who also have a

version of the tale describe it as “the mermaid riot.” In their version, a large unruly crowd of Black people gathered outside the drugstore, demanding the release of the mermaid. But when police and a few designated Black residents went in to investigate, there was nothing there and the crowd subsequently dispersed. Addressing the choice on the part of John Bennett, the collector of the story, to refer to the incident as a “riot” rather than a “history,” Brown states, “As such, we can see that not only was the incident itself about political power, but so were the retellings.”¹⁰

Brown reads the story about the father who shot the mermaid as linking the political and the folkloric. The fable harkens back to tales from the Kongo “about children killed by their fathers who regained life, prosperity, and the unity of their families through the care and support provided by the *simbi* (water spirits).” Brown notes, however, that the tragedy of the ending is “unique to the Lowcountry narrative” and suggests that the “mermaid represents a once-powerful spirit who could not rectify the suffering and oppression of one of her spiritual children.” He further asserts, “It is hard not to see the violence and agony of enslavement woven into the fear of the *simbi* leaving.”¹¹

There is a third tale, about a hurricane, retroactively referred to as the “Flagg Storm,” in which disregard for the warning to release an entrapped mermaid is linked to the resulting death of Arthur Flagg and his whole family along with their Black servants. Brown cites Bennett, who notes that across class lines, Black residents of Charleston believed “the forcible detention of a mermaid upon land produced torrents of rain only to be ended by the mermaid’s return to the sea.”¹² Brown ends the chapter by making links between calamities and natural disasters and the power of land and water spirits, according to the beliefs of former enslaved Africans from the South Carolina Lowcountry.

Brown’s analysis of folklore in the Lowcountry is supported by Michael Gomez’s overlapping research in the region.¹³ Gomez makes real Brown’s link between the folklore of the K-Angola region and the South Carolina Lowcountry by documenting the importation of the enslaved from Africa to North America by century, decade, and region. Gomez reports that in Louisiana and South Carolina, the importation of enslaved Africans from the Kongo and Angola was significant. In the eighteenth century, he notes, “That [K]ongoleses far outnumbered Angolans in Louisiana is supported by Midlo Hall, who found that during the Spanish period some 91.1 percent of those who came from West Central Africa to Louisiana were from [K]ongo, whereas 9.5 percent were from Angola.”¹⁴ In 1730s South Carolina, “[W. Robert] Higgins has written that Angolans in particular were the third

most preferred group of Africans in South Carolina . . . [but] . . . although the foregoing references specifically mention Angolans, [John] Thornton contends that West Central Africans in South Carolina prior to 1739 were in fact [K]ongolese.”¹⁵

A good portion of Brown’s chapter, and the text as a whole, makes a distinction between the European representation and folkloric understanding of mermaids and these tales emanating from the Lowcountry, which he sees as more in line with *simbi* water and land spirits emanating from West and Central Africa and the Kongo region in particular. He cites a variety of sources that make clear that since the middle of the twentieth century, even in parts of West and Central Africa, there has been a shift toward using terms like *mermaid* and *la siren* to refer to the land and water spirits previously defined as *simbi*.¹⁶ He extensively traces the genealogy of *simbi* land and water spirit origin stories from the regions of Angola and the Kongo and then shifts to reference variations of these beliefs that survived and fused with Yorùbá and Fon understandings of deities in places across the Atlantic such as Brazil, Haiti, and Cuba. In terms of the distinction between these understandings and the European mermaid, Brown reports: “Yet it becomes clear that the identification as a mermaid in name and likeness represented an aspect of these spirits acquired in the Atlantic context, *but not a fundamental transformation of the spirits*. Ultimately, an African-Atlantic mermaid remained essentially a female water spirit, who may or may not have had attributes similar to a European-Atlantic mermaid but who nevertheless embodied the core characteristics widely associated with female water spirits in several parts of West and Central Africa and the diaspora.”¹⁷

In other words, water spirits, as they were understood in West and Central African worlds, informed the logic of the descendants of the enslaved when they used the term *mermaid* in diaspora spaces and places. It was the African cosmological water spirit understanding rather than exclusively European notions of what mermaids were that shaped thought in the Afrospace. The references to mermaids by the descendants of the enslaved are therefore crosscut with an African continental pan-indigeneity. Brown also notes that the veneration associated with the *simbi* and similar nature spirits was lost or suppressed in the Lowcountry by the time that tales by Tucker and others were recorded. But, he argues, the knowledge about the functionality of the *simbi* lasted longer than the rituals of respect. Gomez’s discussion of water and land spirit lore in Louisiana furthers Brown’s position: “As was true of the Bambara and, for that matter, most other groups, the world of the African-based community was dense with spirits. Tom Pimpton of

Louisiana, a 'spirit controller,' explained that 'there's land spirits and there's water spirits, and you gotta know how to talk to both kinds. The land spirits is bad and the water spirits is good. They got seven kinds of land spirits; that's part of the trouble.'"¹⁸ Pimpton's observations indicate literacy about esoteric spiritual matters in the African American diaspora, even if the dominant society and many internal to the group had limited frames of reference for understanding or respecting such knowledge. Furthermore, the specificity with which water and land spirits are described puts historically prevalent notions of "Black superstitions" in perspective. Instead of simply being a "primitive" and "underdeveloped" aspect of culture, one that Western modernity would attempt to stamp out, African American spiritual understanding can be seen as a trace consciousness, linking us to aspects of a repressed continental indigeneity.

The tales from the South Carolina Lowcountry examined by Brown center around the symbolic aspects of mermaid captivity and death. The mermaid death in the tale where she is shot by the father is seen as representing the water spirit's loss of power to protect those it previously kept safe. The mermaid's captivity, on the other hand, is symbolic of African enslavement functioning as a violation of an ethical world order, one that has natural disasters as the consequence. Brown adds, "In the end, the Lowcountry mermaid stories served the purpose of interpreting natural disasters as signs of spiritual distress instigated by a society's violation of the moral codes enforced by nature spirits."¹⁹

In the final instance, the distinction Brown makes between the European conception of mermaids as mythical figures who take the form of beautiful, usually white, part-female, part-fish beings and the African-Atlantic notion of *simbi*, which African diaspora descendants refer to as mermaids, is significant. Facts related to water spirits such as the *simbi* help explain why references to mermaids arise in places such as rural Jamaica, despite exposure to European folklore being limited. Second, the Afrosporic understanding of *simbi* is another strategy for tracking the pan-indigeneity emanating from African culture and surfacing in the Afrospora. Third, for the purposes of this book, these mermaid/*simbi* distinctions and accounts lay a foundation for understanding how ways of seeing emerging from the Afrospora are examples of knowledge the enslaved both maintained and transformed. This African and Afrospora *changing same* approach to consciousness is an example of the process of afroindigenization-in-action—taking the more ancient *simbi* or a comparable nature spirit, grafting it onto the mythological structure of a Western mermaid but interpreting it in a way that is philosophically similar

to one's ancestors, while serving the purpose of the circumstances one finds oneself enmeshed within in the present.

Although the concept of the mermaid as a seductress and sea being is popularized and understood, the notion of water deities and divinities or land and nature spirits is not part of the structure of consciousness in the dominant society. However, what we could call a *simbi* worldview is still part of the acknowledged, repressed, and submerged consciousness of Africana ethnic groups and nations as well as other non-Western peoples. A more precise understanding of *simbi* may therefore be in order. Within the continental Yorùbá traditions, Yemaya and Òsun are the most prominent of the female *orisa* associated with water.²⁰ Beyoncé Knowles's 2016 visual album *Lemonade* is cited by Africana scholars as intentionally alluding to Òsun, particularly in the visual sequence that is the backdrop to the song "Hold Up," in which she is dressed in a flowing yellow dress—a color often linked to representations of the deity.²¹ In the Afrospora, these divinities are also venerated in the Candomblé and Santería systems associated with Brazil and Cuba, respectively. In the Rada/Fon Haitian Vodun world, the *lwa* are the equivalent of the *orisa*, and the feminine water deity Erzulie has three dominant manifestations: La Siren, Danto, and Freda.

Maureen Warner-Lewis makes a distinction between Kongo religious structures and Yorùbá and Rada/Fon practices.²² The Kongo practices, similar to all the others, ascribe to a relational balance between creative and destructive forces. These practices are nevertheless perceived historically by diasporic members of the Yorùbá and Rada/Fon systems as more secretive and more invested in the manipulation of spiritual power than the veneration of deities. Quoting Lydia Cabrera and Guérin Montilus, Warner-Lewis asserts:

Central African religious practice has been perceived to be closer to magic than some other African-derived religious traditions in the Caribbean. For example, the following distinction, made in Cuba, is also made in Trinidad: while the Yoruba deities cannot be commanded, the dead and the spirits manipulated by the *palero* or *mayombero* are ordered and obey. . . . A major difference between Yoruba or Rada (Fon) religion and "[K]ongo" religion lay in a greater preoccupation, in the latter, with the hermetic practice of manipulative religion and the avenues available for its realization. Because of this secrecy, and the possibility of harnessing manipulative power for destructive and vengeful purposes, in Haiti the "*lwa* [K]ongo ['Kongo' deities] are thought to be cruel and malevolent."²³

My purpose here is not to attach malevolence or benevolence to either of the knowledge systems referenced but rather to note how the works of Warner-Lewis and Brown highlight the ways in which the Afrospora formulations of these structures are fusions and in some instances reinventions of a range of spiritual practices and beliefs, mirroring the ways scholars such as Sterling Stuckey and Michael Gomez describe the trans-ethnic creation of the ring shout—itself a structure that lays the heterogeneous foundation for the Black church. The spiritual fusion of Yorùbá, Rada (Fon), and Kongo knowledge systems in the Afrospora is made clear since although the Yorùbá-inherited systems gained more visibility and dominance in places such as Brazil, Cuba, and Trinidad, in all these locations Kongo systems of spiritual understanding also intermingled and coexisted.²⁴ In Haiti, the Rada (Fon) and Kongo deities share the landscape, while in Jamaica, the spiritual vista is quite heterogeneous. But Warner-Lewis's, Gomez's, and Brown's research give us a lens through which to suggestively interpret aspects of the Jamaican spiritual landscape.

Returning to Brown's theories about Kongo nature spirits, unlike the *orisa* or the *lwa*, which are seen as potent overarching deities with a power akin to the forces of nature, *simbi* are described otherwise. Brown pushes back against an implicit construction of them as lesser deities, suggesting instead that although they function differently, they are equally essential in the systems and contexts in which they appear. When Brown describes them as nature spirits of place, the power of his reading lies in the ways in which an environmentally interpretive landscape is opened up in the wake. *Simbi* are ancestors who over long stretches of time literally transform into aspects of the geological environment that are imbued with forms of power activated by those who are knowledgeable. A key observation is made by Warner-Lewis about the nature of *simbi*. Warner-Lewis, quoting Wyatt MacGaffey, describes the stone as representative of immortality and "a pebble as a water spirit." She also quotes Robert Farris Thompson and describes *simbi* as ancestors who become a part of the world of the physically dead, live a long time, "shed their skin," and are renewed "five or six times" over a long period. "They [eventually] become water *simbi* and go to live in pools, wherever there are very hard rocks, they settle with those who have previously become *bisimbi*."²⁵ A reference to the importance of stones as specific to the Jamaican context is also taken up in Dianne Stewart's scholarship when she cites practices associated with Revival Zion communities in the 1950s. Quoting directly from an article by George Simpson, Stewart notes, "Stones, similar in size and shape . . . are found in the homes, yards and churches of nearly all

revivalist leaders. The most knowledgeable revivalists disagree on whether the ceremonial stones have spirits in them, but even those who say the stones do not contain spirits believe that spirit rules all the stones. In any event, the stones ‘carry’ power.”²⁶

Brown, also quoting Wyatt MacGaffey, describes *simbi* as usually occupying “pools (of springs and waterfalls), rivers, streams, rocks, stones, forests, and mountains.” In addition to being nature spirits, some scholars also suggest that “terms such as ‘local’ or ‘territorial’ spirits . . . function as more accurate descriptors.”²⁷ Brown begins his book by telling the story of a local *simbi* whose presence and significance are linked to a specific location in a consequential way. Dr. Henry Ravenel decides to build a wall around a limestone spring on the Poshee plantation in the early nineteenth century. “Within and around this fountain resided a water spirit known as a ‘cym-bee.’” A local elder “of African and Native descent” advised against the wall construction but Ravenel proceeded. Not immediately but “a century later” the spring and many other territories were affected by “the floodwaters” emerging after “the damming of the Cooper River.” Brown further notes, “like many other limestone springs in the area, it had a deep opening and on occasion expelled considerable amounts of water. Because of this, people had taken to calling it a fountain following the terminology of the time.”²⁸

There is a geographic linking of *simbi* not just to water, rivers, and rocks but specifically to limestone. Of note also is the direct environmental contrast between the indigenous elder’s advice to Ravenel not to build the wall that “the elder contended would offend the spirit” and the title of one of Edmund Ravenel’s essays, “The Limestone Springs of St. John’s, Berkeley, and their probable Availability for increasing the quantity of Fresh Water in Cooper River.”²⁹ One interpretation emphasizes the importance of having spiritual respect for an environment, not in an aesthetic or preservationist way but in terms of understanding the existence and relevance of unseen forces to the material realm, while the other approach to the limestone spring privileges exploiting the water resource for the benefit of the human realm and the plantation system.

Having created a context for understanding aspects of West and Central African beliefs in nature spirits, I shift now to the space of Woodside, also described by residents as a limestone area, rife with water spirit lore. Using a voice indigenous to us as Jamaicans, one mirroring the range and variety of mermaid stories shared with me over time, I will take the reader into the world I occupied in Woodside, St. Mary, for six consecutive summers and then visited intermittently for six more summers.

MERMAIDS IN WOODSIDE: SUBMERGED CONSCIOUSNESS

Imagine green and quiet . . . in the midst of bamboos that speak . . . along roads of broken asphalt, deep corners and trees that hide the light. Think of limestone and stalagmite in the darkness and pools of still spring water and rivers and carvings in the rock. Think of crevices and duppy. You know that name, duppy? In the summer of 2001, they told me, “The duppies no so plentiful anymore . . . too much electric lights!” In 2002, David Surratt, an African American student from Oklahoma, said that his watch stopped working when he and Chris Lester got lost in Drylan on their way to Miss Lixie’s property; a Rasta man materialized out of nowhere, pointing them in the right direction. His watch reset to August 1, Emancipation Day in Jamaica. Imagine Drylan—not dry land but Drylan—a place deep in the forested underbrush with a carving they used to call One Bubby Susan pushing out of the exterior cave rock face surrounded by moss and mosquitoes. The Taino from Puerto Rico came and told us that the one breast we called a “bubby” was NOT knocked off by a little boy who had died shortly after—which was the village version of the story. But One Bubby Susan was in fact an always one-breasted representation of Atabay, the mother of Yocahu, chief god of the Taino. Miss Lorna said she dreamt that little men spirits like what the Irish call leprechauns or the Dagara call Kontomblé lived down there. Miss Lorna was a teacher from the Rock Spring community—she taught the kindergarten group when I organized the summer school for Miss Lixie every year between 2001 and 2006. It was Miss Lorna I heard warn the children during our outing to Two Sister Sinkhole and Doghole not to go near the edge by saying, “Remember what happened to Horatio?!” He drowned in another river they called Johnson Deep. But it was Miss Pearl who told me that there was a mermaid who lived in the stream that bubbled up to the surface of the road in lower Rock Spring district. She and Mas’ Roy said her name, the mermaid’s name, was Miss Claire. “When Mas’ Roy cow los’ di mermaid dream me an same place she seh di cow deh, a right deh so we fine ’im.” And there were other tales about a man who lived in the community in the 1940s named Endris Lord, who some say was of Taino lineage, who could heal people with water, a power he received from the mermaid. You see this is a community, set in a limestone region of the island of wood and water we call Xamayca—the Taino name and meaning of the word *Jamaica*. Woodside is that limestone community, made popular to the outside world by the work of scholar, historian, sociologist, and fiction writer Erna Brodber, who we call Miss Lixie. Other than Atabay deep in Drylan, there is the sacred site

known as Daddy Rock, an external cave area with more crevices; a place a former resident, also of Taino lineage and related to Endris Lord, said was once considered sacred; a place where you had to take off your shoes and bow before entering. The same woman, Miss Lixie told me, revealed that her family in general and her mother in particular had the task of feeding the mermaid. Miss Lixie says Daddy Rock was where “the slaves would hide and do their business”—their planning of rebellion business, or any business not sanctioned by the Nielson coffee estate, owned by one William John Neilson and his family prior to the Emancipation Proclamation. This is a community of rivers and caves—the caves some say were escape routes for slaves. Deep inside the caves, they say, there’s a place called “Confusion Chamber.” White archaeologists came to the community in the 1990s on an exploration mission; they were accompanied by local young men as guides. *Mi hear seh* a pure bat and *masquito een deh!* Miss Pearl said that the mermaid lives in the caves and the crayfish are her children. Danny went into the caves to get *janga*, local crayfish, to sell. He was wearing a light on his head and one on his arm; he had to swim under water to enter the cave and then upstream the length of two buildings before reaching water he could stand in. The lights he carried were the only lights illuminating the powerful dark silence, with only the running water and the screeching of bats as the sounds inside. He talked about the unsettling stillness and the energy of the river water inside the caves, the force of which almost carried him to his death when he ventured off the path to explore. I asked him what he thought of the river maid beliefs. He said that they made sense to him; having been inside the caves alone he understood the energy in there to be alive. The rivers in the community are called Johnson Deep, Peggy, Dam Head, and Roomanhall—which is really room and hall because of its shape like a room and a hall. Then there are sinkholes connected to the caves—the most famous of which is Two Sister Sinkhole. And then there’s Doghole, the opening and cave mouth. When my sister Julia did community interviews for her film project on Woodside’s emancipation celebration in 2003, Miss Cherry Riley told us a story about a little boy who drowned at Peggy. Peggy was named after a woman who was killed by her man in the river. Danny told Julia on camera that the villagers say Peggy takes a life every seven years, he laughed nervously, saying he didn’t know if it was true. But then he became serious and said he knew of one life that was lost. In Miss Cherry’s story she said there was a little boy who was coming home from school. She said, “[He] must have been hot or something,” and so he stopped to bathe in river Peggy. “*Dem seh river maid is dere.*” She spoke of village rumors that a mermaid lived in Peggy. The boy

was sucked under the water by a spinning hole and drowned. A healer woman in the area predicted that his body would rise from the water in three days at ten o'clock in the morning. "Dem seh crowd was at Peggy. Crowd! Because everybody wanted to know if it was true. At ten o'clock you see him coming out of the water, coming, coming, coming as if someting was pushin' him. Den when him nearly reach! Him go so." After describing the crowd gathered at Peggy to witness the truth or falsity of the local prediction, Miss Cherry describes the boy's body as coming out of the water as if propelled by an invisible force and then collapsing right before reaching the crowded river's edge. My friend Chichi calls the mermaids Myamaids. My friend Greg says in the adjacent community of Guy's Hill they also use the phrase Myamaid. In 2001 they were repaving the road through Rock Spring. There was a bulldozer and many men. They would dig, and pickaxe and shift the earth around. The bulldozer broke that day, and the men began to complain about too much going wrong. The point where the equipment was breaking down was the same point where Miss Pearl dreamed a mermaid told her to leave the water supply for her (the mermaid) and her children in 1969 and since then Miss Pearl seh she never go back deh so fi get water. Miss Pearl was convinced it was the mermaid's doing—the road problems, that is. The men came by in the morning and purchased a bottle of rum. Mas' Roy said they were going to drink some and pour some for the mermaid. Miss Pearl said no blood was spilled. So the men asked where they could get a chicken. I asked about the chicken and they said if blood was spilled it satisfied the mermaid. Miss Pearl said that when some bridge was being built in the community, back in the day, a lot of blood was spilled; even cows were killed. Miss Lixie seems to remember that event as well. She said, when she was a child, there was a mermaid that lived in Bramber, a waterway in Woodside. She says the community cooked a feast for her before they built the bridge over the waterway.³⁰ This would have been in the 1940s, the same time that the healer Endris Lord was around. I have a picture of a mermaid on the cover of my book *Clear Word and Third Sight*. The artwork is called *Mermaid* and was created by Jamaican artist Gilda Sharpe Etteh as part of her *Creation* series. Gilda was a friend of my parents. She said when she was a little girl, her father's East Indian relatives from St. Mary would come to them in St. Catherine for New Year's and they built a house with some clay figures inside and they would sing and chant and eat. And then, they would all chant "Ashé-Ushé Ashé-Ushé Ashé-Ushé" and the whole community would take the house down to the river and give it to the mermaid. These were the Taylors descended from the Tardines on Gilda's father's side. And the last story. Little

Shango Edwards was the youngest child of Trevor and Lilith Edwards, a Rasta couple in the community. He played Quamin, the little boy in the emancipation reenactment Miss Lixie led each year.³¹ His father, Trevor, has passed on. Gavin told me I should ask Shango about his father and Keba's encounter with the mermaid. Shango said that Keba and Trevor went to the river in Drylan by the cave opening we call Doghole late at night. Keba went in and saw a golden table and a comb. He took the comb. He showed it to Trevor. The mermaid dream both of them and told them to return it. Keba went to return it. He decided to wait to see what she looked like. He saw her but she say he shouldn't talk about it. So he never talk about it. Trevor also saw the mermaid by one of the rivers in Drylan early one morning. He said her back was turned but she was very beautiful. She did not see him. Shango asked me if I believe they are real. It was a serious question. I answered by talking about his own name, Shango, as a powerful *orisa* in the Yorùbá tradition. I spoke of river spirits and water spirits in the Yorùbá tradition as real things. He said of the mermaid, "I believe they are real, but they only show themselves to certain persons."³²

THE AFROINDIGENIZING OF MYTHOLOGY

To speak of the world described is to speak of submerged consciousness, a world of relationality. I was born and raised in urban middle- to upper-middle-class Jamaica of the 1970s, and even there, the access I had to the relationality I was introduced to in Woodside was limited. If I use the analytical voice I learned in the academy to analyze the mermaid tales I was introduced to, then a variety of interpretations are possible: What Ras Michael Brown refers to as *simbi* in the South Carolina Lowcountry seems similar in function to the water spirits that exist in Woodside. Brown describes *simbi* as "markers of beginnings and of the deep past. [They] . . . anchor[ed] communities of the living . . . [helping them reestablish] . . . connections between the land of the living and the land of the dead, bring children into this new world, grow food for their families [, and] struggle with the countless assaults on their humanity."³³ In Woodside, as well as in Gilda Sharpe Etteh's family mermaid story, there were four instances in which the mermaid was offered food by or on behalf of the community. The offerings of food make it clear the village mermaid operates outside European folklore and suggest, as Brown argues, a more grounded relationship to the natural environment on the part of the descendants of enslaved Africans in St. Mary, Jamaica, in relation to the world they found themselves in.

If I draw on the shared Afrospora knowledge I have access to as a member of Afro-Caribbean communities, then my Haitian friend Marie Casimir's statements are instructive. Marie said of la siren: "She only reveals herself to certain people, she forbids them to disclose what they see, the number seven is important to her, she also bequeaths consciousness and power in ways that cannot be grasped by Western assumptions about how knowledge is acquired."³⁴ With Marie's information, the village stories about the River Peggy taking a life every seven years seem significant; so does Keba's encounter with the mermaid reported to me by Shango, in which he, Keba, was forbidden to speak of it or share anything in depth. Marie's information also contextualizes the acquisition of the knowledge and power to heal with water bequeathed to Endres Lord, who lived in Woodside in the 1940s according to Roy and Pearl Crossman.

According to Erna Brodber, Woodside was a Convince area that may have also been home to a mermaid cult at one time. Her theories were built on the research done by Martha Beckwith in St. Mary in the 1920s. Convince, Bongo, Kumina, Zion Revival, and Myal were among the Africanized religious practices emerging over time in Jamaica specifically. The local "myamaid" references suggest Woodside once had a Myal presence. Sylvia Wynter states at one point, "We suggest then that Myalism was to pre-emancipation Jamaica what Voodoo was to Haiti."³⁵ The proposition here is that Myal was a dominant spiritual structure then, one drawing on forms of power to aid with resistance to the institution of slavery. Warner-Lewis cites a genealogy of Myal linking it to the Kongo, Christianity, and *simbi*: "**Mayaal** may be considered a transatlantic echo of the Antonine movement, insofar as it manifested an amalgamation of religious observances in Jamaica which contained, in varying proportions, elements of both African and Christian religious concepts and practice."³⁶ Linking the origins of the Antonine movement to the Kongo in the eighteenth century, Warner-Lewis cites Dona Beatrice Kimpa Vita, a Kongo woman who in 1702 claimed "to be the reincarnation of St. Anthony."³⁷ Gomez, citing John Thornton, situates the long reach of Christianity there as well.³⁸ Dona Vita's movement, although independent of papal control and of the Catholic brotherhoods in the kingdom, was linked to an early strain of Catholicism indigenized in the Kongo. Warner-Lewis further expounds: "*Her religious ideology linked the operation of a simbi cult with 'the Kongoized message of the Christian priests' . . . She herself was burnt at the stake for heresy in 1706.*"³⁹ While the when and how of the rootedness of Christianity in the Kongo may be hard to ascertain, the coexistence of Christianity, Myal, and a mermaid cult were

all still present in early twentieth-century Woodside, according to Brodber and Martha Beckwith.⁴⁰

The word *mayaal*, according to Warner-Lewis, “signif[ies] an intense state of spiritual possession.” Warner-Lewis goes on to discuss *mayaal* as a state of being versus *Myal*, the religious practice that in conjunction with Convince or Bongo and Kumina were all African-Jamaican religious practices with West and Central African roots, if not Kongo roots specifically. Warner-Lewis advances the notion of Bongo as the informal priestly order of Convince: “Convince, also called Bongo, is now a little known and sporadically practiced religion, carried out by individual ‘Bongo men,’ with a handful of adepts. . . . The ghosts welcomed into Convince ceremonies are of persons who practiced magical rituals in their lifetime. These, like the others, are expected to teach the living Bongo man ‘spiritual secrets, protect him, bring him good fortune, and assist him in performing magic (Obeah).’”⁴¹ Further illustrating what some describe as the actions of a “**bongo maayaal** spirit,” Warner-Lewis declares, “Also characteristic are ‘back bending, rolling over in a succession of somersaults and climbing high coconut trees.’”⁴² The last description by Warner-Lewis is almost identical to one Roy Crossman in Woodside described to me personally. He chronicled a ceremony in which the Bongo men had food laid out on banana leaves and one of them climbed a coconut tree backward, feet first.

If the use of the term *Myamaid* in Woodside smacks of links to Kongo-influenced folk religions like *Myal*, Convince, or Bongo, then the far reach of what is suggested becomes apparent as we further consider the case of Woodside. Wynter also links *Myal* to mermaids when she observes, “The dance of the ribba mumma seems to have been linked to the *Myal* cult.” Quoting John Taylor’s seventeenth-century journal, she asserts that in 1680 in Jamaica, four revolts had taken place within the span of a few years.⁴³ The fear of the use of funerals as a site to plan revolts was so extreme that in Haiti police decree “forbade funerals and also the water-mumma dance.” The dance had the purpose of putting the *Myal* leader into a trance in which he would receive “instructions from his god . . . [and] having the power and force of a god’s backing, helped to make revolt against many times, impossible odds, seem more feasible.”⁴⁴

Wynter tells us that in Jamaica in particular, “the spirit known as ‘Ribba Mumma’ was supposed to: *Inhabit every fountainhead of an inexhaustible and considerable stream of water* [on the island]. The slaves in times of drought, used to persuade their master to sacrifice an ox at the fountainhead of the water turning the mill. The water spirit was supposed to

materialize like a mermaid at noon combing her long black hair. Fish from such were held to be her children and were never eaten. But above all: *'Myal songs and dances were done for her.'*⁴⁵ Wynter's description here is almost identical to what was described as happening at various moments in communities like Woodside. Pearl Crossman, Erna Brodber, and the woman whose family had the responsibility of feeding the mermaid all speak of food offerings being made consistently or periodically to the river spirits in the village.

CONCLUSION

When I asked Miss Pearl what mermaids were, she said they were "fallen angels." There was no other category within the Judeo-Christian religious system she was familiar with to account for these beings or the way they functioned. But those of us whose ancestors were brought to the Americas were bequeathed ways of knowing, as part of our collective memory, originating in another place. Ras Michael Brown gives us a useful frame of reference for understanding how, from a Western perspective, even the use of the term *religion* to describe the spiritual knowledge systems emanating from the Kongo can function as a kind of misnomer.

The implication of a hierarchy of spirits likely derives from the initial attempts of European missionaries to comprehend local African spiritual cultures. Certainly, West-Central Africans at home and in diaspora held ideas about the great spirit Nzambi Mpungu, who exists everywhere and ultimately animates everything. These ideas allowed Africans to engage in "god talk" with missionaries. We should hesitate, however, to presume certain relationships of this spirit to other spirits simply because the translation "god" appealed to the sensibilities and agendas of missionaries. The body of assumptions about monotheistic divinity inherent in Abrahamic theologies did not matter in West-Central African spiritual cultures. Nzambi Mpungu did not exist in the same hierarchy-based universe as the omniscient, omnipotent god of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. A hierarchy may be intellectualized in some effort to impose "order" on spirits, but this does not correspond with the ways that people in West-Central Africa have lived their spiritual cultures. . . . Complicating the matter further have been the preconceptions of many scholars about what constitutes "religion." Further, the use of [the term] "religion" usually introduces a "general template of Judeo-Christian forms and evaluations" as the basis

for a supposedly neutral framework of analysis, even in cases when scholars intend to avoid such a bias.⁴⁶

Brown's observations here are key. The decentralization of the Godhead may help explain why Africans and Afrosporans, once they were exposed to Western religions by choice or coercion, embraced practices centralizing an omnipotent deity at the top of the hierarchy while still holding on to beliefs that *coexisted in ways that were inarticulable and oftentimes invisible nevertheless*. The coexistence, conscious or not, brings to mind VèVè Clark's concept of *marasa* consciousness, in which sameness and difference continue side by side. The enslaved Africans transported to the land space of Jamaica became the island's dominant population beginning in the early seventeenth century. The genocidal violence of the Spanish and the British in tandem with the colonial history they wrote of the island rendered invisible the Taino presence as well as other First Nations peoples in terms of who future Jamaicans would be presumed to be. Now, Brodber tells us, there has been a reemergence in Woodside of people who report direct descent from the Taino and the stories and cultural practices have been passed down in their families, despite the enforced repression. Recently in Jamaica there was a crowning of a Kasiki in St. Mary, Kasiki Kalaan Nibronix—a term used to describe a chief within the Taino tradition.⁴⁷

In terms of the genealogy of mermaid lore, from the context of the enslaved Africans who found their way to Woodside, a few varied connections can be clearly articulated. As Michael Gomez mentions, the majority of the Africans imported to South Carolina in the early eighteenth century came from the Kongo region. Ras Michael Brown's deep structure analysis of *simbi* water and land spirit mythology in the South Carolina Lowcountry links these beliefs to the Kongo region as well. These observations seem crucial when added to Erna Brodber's recent research documenting how slave owners from South Carolina carried enslaved people back and forth to the area known as Palmetto Grove, a plantation adjacent to Woodside.⁴⁸ In addition, Maureen Warner-Lewis's studies of Jamaican folk religions such as Convince, Bongo, and Myal root their origins within the context of seventeenth-century Kongo spiritual knowledge systems, thus validating the connection to the Kongo, from the standpoint of enslaved Africans in Jamaica.

Furthermore, in terms of Myal, we have American anthropologist Martha Beckwith's research in Jamaica in the 1920s that located a Myal man in Woodside, St. Mary, remarking, "Old Fifee Bogle was one. He lived in

St. Mary, at Woodside.”⁴⁹ Linking Myal yet again to mermaids, Beckwith notes, “I have never heard of Mermaids being employed by Obeah Men in Jamaica, although Banbury says the Myal Men used to perform the myal dance at the pools where they lived and take them offerings of food. He says the fish of the place where they lived were sacred.”⁵⁰ Beckwith’s commentary makes a variety of useful connections. Myal is linked as it was by Wynter’s and Warner-Lewis’s research to the veneration of water spirits and it is also located in Woodside. These varying sources of information gathered from historians, anthropologists, linguists, and literary scholars over a hundred-year period help root the mermaid lore coming out of Woodside within an enslaved African context, while the emerging oral histories from deceased and living residents and their descendants also make links to the history of the Taino as the original residents of the island. The fusion of these cultural narratives is another manifestation of afroindigenization in process.

If we return to the relationship to the land the enslaved developed, described by Wynter as a cultural history—not in “writing but of those ‘homunculi’ who humanize the landscape by peopling it with gods and spirits, with demons and duppies, with all the rich panoply of man’s imagination”—and if we add Brown’s notions of the *simbi* as nature spirits of place, sometimes found near springs and rivers as well as in limestone areas, then we have an initial context for understanding the mermaid lore emerging from Woodside as a manifestation of the relationship to the physical land and environs Wynter describes.⁵¹

At the end of *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, Gomez writes about two trajectories of African American selfhood emerging from the antebellum era: The first, coming from the elite, was invested in exterior notions of identity and assimilation into the body politic. The second, emanating from the grass-roots, understood the problem of American racism as being fundamentally about “the rejection of Africa as an equal.”⁵² As Wynter observes, “Increasingly, as Jamaica became more Christianized and monotheistic, the African gods were exiled—along with the culture in which they were involved. By 1825 . . . to rise on the social scale, one danced the quadrille—but turned one’s back on the shay-shay. One claimed all that was Europe and denied Africa. Africa would *not* be denied. . . . The African gods were too pervasive, too tangled with the unconscious roots of our being. *They were the roots.*”⁵³

Wynter’s final statement returns us to ideas of afroindigenization as well as notions of submerged consciousness as an aspect of the collective interiority of Black subjectivity, particularly among grassroots populations. Gomez and Stuckey repeatedly remind us in their early work that the influence of

the African background has been radically underestimated. Much of what I encountered in Woodside was not classifiable as folklore and was distinct from the “Ribba Mumma,” “Anancy,” and “Rolling Calf” folktales abounding in the Jamaican cultural context.⁵⁴ In the world of Woodside, what we encounter is a kind of *living lore* rather than folklore, which may very well be a kind of *guerrilla resistance to the market economy*. The submerged consciousness alluded to here is not literal, material resistance to economic and social conditions, but it is a kind of psycho-spiritual protection, a form of instinctual development of internal resources that are equally as important. To reference the concept of *marasa* once more, this consciousness coexists as the hidden and submerged side of the public Western self.

The fact that Woodside has a carving in the rock, now known as “Atabay,” is a key aspect toward understanding the afroindigenization process happening there. It stands to reason that although Woodsidians previously had no indigenous name for Atabay and were unaware of her deified significance, the site had nevertheless functioned as *de facto* sacred in the community historically. She was originally named “One Bubby Susan” by the descendants of enslaved Africans living there, and even the story of a boy dying after “hitting off one of her breasts” suggests spiritual power was historically associated with the place and the energy there. The sacred energy surrounding the site is further sanctioned by the dreams of one of the residents about little male spirits inhabiting the area where Atabay is located. Some folks schooled in the Dagara shamanic tradition who have come to the community and visited the site even considered the area around Atabay as a type of spiritual portal to another dimension.⁵⁵

If Brown is right, the nature spirit energy associated with the Atabay was recognized by the African-descended Woodside residents as a form of *simbi*. It was their own consciousness about these forms of energy, a consciousness ancestrally inherited, that made them capable of the kind of awareness resulting in the naming, fear, and reverence for the area. Black Woodside residents’ recognition of Atabay beforehand as One Bubby Susan is the definition of submerged consciousness. In other words, while a spiritual awareness is part of Woodside residents’ collective understanding of their natural habitat, it is at the same time a buried form of consciousness, one operating more intuitively than by design, and the mermaid stories are also part of this hidden awareness. Despite more recent interest in Taino knowledge, historically, there has been no caravan of Kongo or Taino priests arriving in the community, explaining the sacred nature of the waterways in the area and how they were tied to rituals of belief in the past. Yet the understanding

of these waterways as still having a living energy has been an active aspect of the village lore, one that rather than simply being a part of local or national folklore functions to remind the listener, here in Woodside, that there is still a belief in the sacred elements of nature. The understanding of nature as having sacred sites is further validated because many of these stories are not voluntarily shared for outside consumption. These submerged sacred understandings, however, occur side by side with Westernized modernity's encroachment into the physical environment as well as into the minds and psyches of Woodside residents. The encroachment suggests that polluting a river with waste and garbage is not a problem and clearing land that may once have served a sacred purpose to build a McDonald's restaurant would be seen as progress. All these assumptions and understandings of the environment tensely coexist with residents' constant struggle to economically survive.

Yet African diaspora outsiders to the community, like me, still find themselves impacted by the natural environment here, in ways hard to articulate without recourse to the sacred. To revisit Aisha Finch's commentary, "Woodside is quite simply a blessed place. A holy place. There is a spirit there that I have not encountered anywhere else, one that speaks powerfully to anyone who spends time there." Each of the visitors came over a thirteen-year period, some for lengths of time varying from a week to closer to a month. Yet they all describe Woodside, without prompting, as a spiritual place, one that also made them feel more connected to themselves. For some of us who are members of the Afrospora but who did not grow up in such a place, the energetic environment nevertheless taps into our own submerged consciousness and sensibilities, making us dimly aware of aspects of ourselves we are not fully cognizant of since the dominant societies we occupy frequently have no interest or awareness in relating to the natural environment in these ways.

And now, how to go? If I use the folk-conscious intuitive voice awakened by my encounters in Woodside as my interpretive tool, then I find myself quoting Hurston: "Way over there, where the sun rises a day ahead of time, they say that Heaven arms with love and laughter those it does not wish to see destroyed. He who carries his heart in his sword must perish, so says the ultimate law. . . . He who wins from within is in the 'Be' class. . . . Be here when the ruthless man comes, and be here when he is gone. Moreover, John knew that it is written where it cannot be erased, that nothing shall live on human flesh and prosper."⁵⁶

2

Mountings in *Rize*

Becoming the Horse and the Turn Loose in Hip-Hop

If you can lift people's spirits and they can lift yours, you can survive.

—BOBBY WOMACK

Hip-hop-influenced Clowning and Krumping dance expressionism is the subject of David LaChapelle's 2004 Oscar-short-listed documentary *Rize*. There is a moment in the documentary when the young Krumper Daisy goes into a trance in the middle of a Krump session.¹ Offscreen but within ear-shot, LaChapelle's camera crew asks two young male Krumpers what happened. One of them picks up Daisy in her collapsed state and carries her off camera. The other, Baby Tight Eyez, a teenaged Krumper, responds: "She's been struck; that's what we've all been waiting on." A corroborating voice in the background adds, "She has reached!" For all the community commentators interviewed, Daisy's sudden collapse, rather than being the product of heatstroke or exhaustion, was actually the main goal of the Krump session. The very next scene in the documentary shifts to Baby Tight Eyez playing an organ at his church and explaining how while he "Krumps," although he is moving his body to the secular hip-hop music that is the foundation of the practice, in his mind he is reflecting on the words of a religious song taught to him by his grandfather, "Lord Lift Me Up and Let Me Stand." There is no further discussion in the documentary of what happened to Daisy. Viewers are left to draw their own conclusions despite the suggestive editorial "cut" to Baby Tight Eyez in church.

While the previous chapter explored the notion of submerged consciousness in relation to mermaid lore in Woodside, Jamaica, this chapter proposes to do a deep dive into the world of Krumping as depicted in *Rize*; the hip-hop lyricism of Common, Kanye West, and Big K.R.I.T.; and August Wilson's play *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*. In *Rize*, the secular and profane world of early 2000s South Central Los Angeles is revealed to be an environment in which submerged consciousness—as it relates to the process of afroindigenization as internal power—is deeply present, despite the urban habitat being far from rural and folkloric space.² I will investigate the extent to which Krumping is depicted as an experiential ritual in LaChapelle's documentary. The premise here is to explore the degree to which Afrospora cultural production originating during crises not only has a healing imperative but may unknowingly mirror afroindigenous structures of knowledge and in the process give the larger society models for doing what VèVè Clark describes as “imagin[ing] beyond the binary.”³ This chapter will therefore read the moment of spirit-based visitation experienced by Daisy in *Rize* through the lens of Clark's notion of *marasa* consciousness with an eye toward examining how her experience deconstructs “either/or” binaries and points toward alternate ways of thinking through modern deadlocks and stalemates. The idea of “mountings”—historically a reference to spiritually embodied “visitations” or “possessions” within non-Western ceremonial contexts—will be pondered in relation to submerged consciousness and the theory of afroindigenization. The mounted person is often referred to as a “horse” since they are being proverbially “ridden” by the spirits who enter the ritual space.⁴ I will explore what it means to have a “mounting” occur in secular, urban, non-church-related spaces.

Here, and throughout the book, I track and trace the ways in which Africans enslaved in the Americas passed on to their descendants disembodied strategies of survival that relied on the internalization and transformation of spiritual power otherwise referred to as afroindigenization. What is referred to as the internalization of spiritual power occurs through a revisionary process that Clark describes as *marasa* consciousness, which spirals out from binary and oppositional relationality to reveal a “third principle.” If afroindigenization generally describes the less than conscious transfer and internalization of power from one Afrospora generation to the next, then Clark's notion of *marasa* consciousness helps explain what Amiri Baraka would refer to as “the changing same,” indicating situations in which sameness and difference coexist. These are spaces in which contradictory energies are wrestled with if not reconciled. Hip-hop lyrical

culture presents one such space of exploration. Drawing on the work of scholars who theorize the “transfers of power” from one realm to another, this chapter also sets up and describes these transfers and transformations from and between various geographical, historical, and generational spaces. The engaged theories assist in establishing a framework for demonstrating how Clark’s *marasa* principle is alive in the symbolic spaces created by the Krumpers in *Rize*, the lyricism of the hip-hop landscape, and the work of August Wilson. All are arenas in which sameness, difference, and contradiction coexist or shift toward the spiraling modality Clark describes as *marasa* consciousness.

Alessandra Benedicty-Kokken, in her research on the notion of “spirit possession” in Vodou and Haitian thought, draws heavily on the work of Haitian scholars to argue for an interpretation of the phenomenon “as one of the privileged spaces through which the victims of trauma, individual [and] collective . . . find a way to process suffering.”⁵ Haitian scholar Patrick Bellegarde Smith argues, “Vodun is a coherent and comprehensive system and worldview in which . . . everything is sacred and . . . overarching belief in the sanctity of life [exists], not so much for the *thing* as for the *spirit* of the thing.”⁶ Between 1947 and 1952, avant-garde filmmaker Maya Deren, influenced by her research and association with African American dancer Katherine Dunham, traveled to Haiti to study and document the ceremonies and rituals associated with Haitian Vodou. She made several trips, ultimately resulting in the posthumous release of the 1954 documentary *Divine Horseman: The Living Gods of Haiti*. Deren’s mid-twentieth-century footage of “mountings” by the Petro and Rada deities within Haitian Vodou ceremonies depicts Afrospora religious situations in which visitations by an outside force, usually imagined to be either fictional or demonic by a Western viewer, are portrayed as a normative and desirable part of ritual and ceremony in Vodou social and cultural space. While the authenticity of the mountings and depictions in the ceremonies captured by Deren, a white American outsider with a camera, is open to speculation, ritual footage is rare, since historically these ceremonies were not open to the public.⁷

In Haitian Vodou ceremonies, the moment in which the various deities referred to as the “lwa” occupy the bodies of their chosen hosts and “ride” them, often without their conscious knowledge, is depicted in Deren’s film as serving a higher purpose for both the individual and the community. As Haitian scholar Guérin Montilus argues, “The Vodun ceremony is effective because it provides the faithful with a structure for self—and collective expression.”⁸ The deity riding the host is identifiable to the priests and other

initiates by the specific movements of the “mounted” individual. For devout Christians, Old Testament prophets and Catholic saints may function as philosophical and symbolic guides influencing devotees by example. Within the context of Vodou ceremonial space, on the other hand, “mountings” by the lwa are embodied, experiential, temporary displacements of rational consciousness and aspects of the personality representing the person’s life force—instigated by the interaction of the singing, dancing, and drumming. The ideal outcome is one in which transformation occurs for all who are present. While visitations or “possessions” are often linked in Hollywood cinema to dark sorcery or the fantastic, what happens to the Krumper Daisy in *Rize* is more akin to the mountings in Vodou ceremonies as described by Montilus, Benedicty-Kokken, and Bellegarde Smith. Before delving into *Rize*, however, deeper contextualization and historicization of afroindigenization as a phenomenon are paramount.

AFROINDIGENIZATION AS HISTORICAL PROCESS

In many ways, Michael Gomez’s signature publication, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South*, can be seen as a continuation of the main thesis in historian Sterling Stuckey’s *Slave Culture*, published a decade prior. The title of Gomez’s text bespeaks the issue both scholars seek to address: How, why, and in what ways did African American identity become a distinctly coherent “ethnicity” despite the diversity of indigenous groups, cultural beliefs, and linguistic backgrounds from which enslaved Africans, transported to the territory now known as the United States, emanated? As I argue at the close of the previous chapter, Gomez’s final thesis highlights two trajectories of African American identity emerging at the end of the antebellum period. One, rooted in Black elite aspirations, sees the primary goal as assimilation into the American polity; the problem preventing the achievement of this goal was white socioeconomic and cultural exclusion rooted in the legacy of slavery and Jim Crow. For those in the second trajectory, emanating from “the majority . . . African-based community,” Gomez never explicitly states what he sees as their collective goal. The inferred goal, however, is simply a desire for the freedom to be themselves and to construct their community based on the indigenous values and cultural world-sense of their ancestors. The problem occluding the implied second goal is stated explicitly by Gomez as a deep-seated form of “racism . . . otherwise known as . . . the fundamental and unequivocal rejection of Africa as an equal.”⁹

Gomez's text painstakingly charts the emergence and divergence of these two trajectories during colonial and antebellum America, thus laying a foundation for understanding the complexity of African American cultural identities. But it is within the culture-making machinations of the latter demographic, "the majority . . . African-based community," where our interests lie. The "fundamental and unequivocal rejection of Africa as an equal" meant that historically, any cultural identity formations heavily informed by the African background would be a submerged rather than acknowledged part of the psyche of the descendants of Africans enslaved in the diaspora. Furthermore, such knowledge, when handed down generationally, would not, as a rule, emanate from the official, colonial, dominant, or postcolonial societal institutions such as those structuring education, religion, politics, and health. As such, they may or may not be "conscious" for the embodyers themselves. From the outset, therefore, I maintain that a chief aspect of the afroindigenization process involves the grassroots embodyers of the most vibrant aspects of generationally inherited indigenous Africanity, performing and using knowledge they are not fully conscious of carrying.

Across the sea, while examining the situation of cultural emergence in Jamaica, Sylvia Wynter argues that enslaved Africans indigenized the (New World) landscape with their indigenous cosmology, which demonstrates how the afroindigenization process occurs in another location by exploring at length the syncretic spiritual beliefs and cultural practices the enslaved brought with them—mores that she argues laid the foundation for modern Jamaican culture. Wynter addresses the relationship to the land inhering in these earlier worldviews by tracing enslaved African, seemingly secular celebrations at Christmastime to sacredly sourced ancestral masquerades in West Africa, connected to both harvest and secret societies.

In Jamaica both before and after enslavement, masquerade celebrations (which may have seemed like relatively frivolous entertainment to the colonial masters) were shrouded in secrecy, with beliefs in ancestral spirit energy whose veneration sustained the living by, among other things, reminding the participants of the sacredness of the land, even in the face of dispossession from their actual homelands. This was Jonkonnu; similar manifestations were also documented by Stuckey in North Carolina. Wynter charts the decline of the frequency and significance of these celebrations as the influence of Christianity increased in early nineteenth-century Jamaica. Yet, she maintains, the sacred/secular spirit of Jonkonnu haunts modern Jamaican culture in ways that are inarticulable at any conscious collective level, but they are *functional*, nevertheless. Drawing on the notion of the African gods

as not simply tangled within our unconscious roots but *being the roots* is a provocative way of suggesting that we, the descendants of enslaved Africans in the Afrospora, lost our nation-specific country marks but maintained our indigeneity without necessarily being aware of what we maintained. Here is a provocative note on which to consider Stuckey's references to Jonkonnu in the United States. In his text's first chapter, he makes a fleeting and seemingly insignificant observation when he states, "Nearly forty thousand [Africans] were brought into South Carolina alone between 1800 and 1807."¹⁰ The noteworthiness of Stuckey's statement seems important when juxtaposed with Wynter's delineation, in Jamaica, of the continuation of continental African rituals and traditions. Gomez, going back a decade, states, "By 1790, the African-based population had increased to about 757,000. . . . Although the African-born population declined precipitously after 1810, it represented a significant proportion of the black community before then; much of the remaining African-based population was only one or two generations removed from African soil. It is therefore important to argue that in examining the development of African American culture and society, there is more to gain by adopting a premise of proximity rather than distance."¹¹

Gomez's, Wynter's, and Stuckey's research, among others, emphatically makes it clear that the African background was a dominant part of enslaved realities during and immediately after slavery. Their collective research pushes back against the popular notion of the enslaved (due to their lack of political and economic power within the new world contexts in which they found themselves as well as the aggressive nature of the enslavement they faced) as abandoning or rapidly losing their ancestral sensibilities. While studies like Saidiya Hartman's *Scenes of Subjection* make it abundantly clear how violent the cultures were in which the enslaved found themselves and how nonexistent their agency was in the official society, Gomez's notion of there being "more to gain by adopting a premise of proximity [to the African background] rather than distance" takes us further in terms of understanding both the traumatized psyche and the coping mechanisms that *made psycho-spiritual survival under extreme conditions possible*.

In the current era, assumptions about modern political nation-state boundaries are often anachronistically projected backward, making people speak of African American, Haitian, Cuban, and Jamaican enslaved populations as if they were cultural products of those new nations. But as Gomez's research reminds us, various ethnic nation groups from West and Central Africa were dispersed throughout North and South America as well as the regional Caribbean. Two examples of these dispersals are, first, his references

to African populations who were initially transported to Barbados, St. Kitts and Nevis, Jamaica, the Bahamas, Bermuda, and Antigua before becoming the primary source of South Carolina's early slave population during the colonial era. Second, the Bight of Benin (an area encompassing the nation-states now referred to as Togo, Ghana, Benin, and Southern Nigeria) had a cultural impact, "especially in New Orleans and the lower Mississippi, [which was] disproportionately enormous."¹²

These factual truths make it more likely than not that similar cultural formations would emerge where similar ethnic populations were dispersed. My goal here is to demonstrate how Gomez's, Stuckey's, and Wynter's research on discrete formations such as the ring shout and Jonkonnu as well as the appropriation of Christianity was foundational to both the New World identities the enslaved created while also making it clear how the process of shifting from older forms to newer ones became a continual aspect of both identity formation and psycho-spiritual survival historically. What is revealed is how enslaved populations and their descendants continuously used the tools at their disposal as bases of internalized power—power often resulting in artistically functional cultural products.

JONKONNU IN TWO PLACES

Wynter discusses the significance of the connection to the land in harvest- and Christmastime celebrations in Jamaica, in ways supported by Stuckey's assessments of similar festivities in the United States:

At harvest time in Virginia and elsewhere, dances were held outdoors to climax the planting season, an expression of the slaves' gratefulness to forces bigger than man, to *the ancestral spirits* for the fertility of the soil and the renewal of the life process. Such celebrations were frequent on the plantations of the South. One survivor of slavery recalled, "Everybody bring some uh duh fus crops. We all gi tanks fuh duh crop and we dance and sing."¹³

Citing a 1926 article by Dougald MacMillan, Stuckey describes a Jonkonnu celebration in North Carolina during slavery referred to as "John Kunering," in which "they were dressed in 'tatters,' strips of cloth of gay colors sewn to their usual garments and producing an effect of exotic grotesquerie."¹⁴ Quoting from Edward Warren in 1885, Stuckey elaborates, "Another half a dozen important performers were active, 'each arrayed fantastically in ribbons, rags, and feathers, and bearing between them several so-called musical

instruments or “gumba boxes” which consist of wooden frames covered over with tanned sheep-skins,’ African-made instruments in North America.”¹⁵ Wynter, paraphrasing Sir Hans Sloane, observes: “The Jonkonnu or John Canoe festival had its beginning in a cultural process that Sloane witnessed and described in the seventeenth century. Today the Jonkonnu is still celebrated in the country parts of Jamaica. The celebrations steadily decrease in effectiveness and meaning.” Quoting Sloane directly, Wynter further states: *“They have likewise in their dances Rattles ty’d to their legs and wrists and in their hands with which they make noise. . . . Their dances consist in great activity and strength of Body and keeping time, if it can be. They very often tie Cows’ Tails to their Rumps and add such others to their bodies in several places as gives them a very extraordinary appearance.”*¹⁶

Extremely similar processes appeared to be taking place in parts of Jamaica and the Southern United States simultaneously. Jonkonnu, wherever it arose, seems to have been a blended form of ancestral masquerade and harvest celebration, which Wynter, citing Orlando Patterson, argues was transported from Yorùbá or Ibo nations of people in southern Nigeria, or the Ga from Dahomey.¹⁷ Stuckey’s main goal in his text is to explain how a sense of African American cultural unity was achieved despite the range of ethnic backgrounds from which the enslaved Africans emanated. He ties African American cultural foundations to the sacred practice of the ring shout (which varied throughout the South and North), Bakongo-Angola spiritual traditions, and the secular John Kunerling celebration emerging from harvest and ancestral secret societies often performed at Christmas.¹⁸ Wynter further notes, “The aspect of Jonkonnu that is most to our purpose is the connection that [anthropologist Martha] Beckwith established between the Jonkonnu houseboat mask . . . and Myal ceremonies in St. Elizabeth; [as well as] between the Jonkonnu songs . . . and drum rhythms and the Myal songs . . . and drum rhythms.”¹⁹ In the Jamaica of Wynter’s parlance, Jonkonnu was the celebration coming directly from the continent; Myal, in her essay, is spoken of as an afroindigenized spiritual practice rooted on the island. John Kunerling in the US world Stuckey describes is similar in function and manifestation to Jamaican Jonkonnu celebrations, while the ring shout and some of the Bakongo and Angolan traditions in the United States are similar to Myal in the Jamaican context.

Why should we care if similar practices cropped up during the period of enslavement on plantations in Jamaica and the United States? It suggests that a comparable process of indigenization was part of the basis for the sacred and secular culture emerging among enslaved Africans transported

to various parts of the Afrospora. Such information, when remarked upon at all, is usually presumed to have little contemporary meaning. Additionally, the manifestations of these pan-Africanized practices in slave society in the United States lay the infrastructure for thinking about what might have been passed on at a deep structural level in terms of collective, even if subconscious, cultural patterns and practices. When Zora Neale Hurston in the early twentieth century describes “that man in the gutter [as] the god-maker, the creator of everything that lasts,” the works of Stuckey, Gomez, and Wynter, among others, help establish the contours for understanding the complexity of what emerges from varied grassroots contexts, powerfully suggesting, at its root, that the most complex aspects of our unacknowledged Africanity may in fact inform more contemporary aspects of Black culture, broadly speaking.²⁰ As Stuckey notes in the preface to his text, “Much of this book is a study in irony because the depths of African culture in America have been greatly underestimated.”²¹

THE AFRICAN PAN-INDIGENIZED INTERFACE WITH CHRISTIANITY

Christianity has functioned as a complex exterior garment cloaking the African gods that Sylvia Wynter describes as being at the roots of the identity formation of the descendants of enslaved Africans; they are our pan-indigenized interior potency—the fuel of our survival in the New World.²² Both Stuckey’s and Wynter’s analyses of Jonkunnu as well as practices such as Myal in Jamaica and the ring shout in the United States indicate Christian beliefs were incorporated into the worldview of enslaved Africans in both places over time. Yet Christianity also functioned to disguise the extent to which an African “world-sense” (i.e., interpretations, understandings, symbolism, and outlook) or a “theory of masquerading,” according to Dianne Stewart, was also functional among people who were still very much governed by value systems originating outside the West. As Stuckey maintains:

In . . . most “Christian” ceremonies on slave plantations, Christianity provided a protective exterior beneath which more complex, less familiar (to outsiders) religious principles and practices were operative. The very features of Christianity peculiar to slaves were often outward manifestations of deeper African religious concerns, products of a religious outlook toward which the master class might otherwise be hostile. By operating under cover of Christianity, vital aspects of Africanity, which some

considered eccentric in movement sound and symbolism, could more easily be practiced openly. Slaves therefore had readily available the prospect of practicing, without being scorned, essential features of African faith together with those of the new faith.²³

Having established the African background as more rather than less significant for the enslaved population and their descendants in North America, Gomez extends even further our understanding of the complexity of the relationship between Christianity and West and Central African culture and spirituality during both colonial and antebellum periods. In his chapter "Turning Down the Pot: Christianity and the African-Based Community," Gomez uses historical data to demonstrate the limited nature of Christianization on enslaved Africans throughout the entire colonial period as well as a significant portion of the early to mid-nineteenth century. In addition, he maintains that Christianity as a formally practiced faith was not even largely exercised by the majority of European settlers during the colonial period: "[Luther P.] Jackson reminds us that only a small percentage of whites in any of the colonies were members of a church; not more than one out of twenty were members in 1700, a proportion that did not appreciably change until the 1730s. Further, not only was there a shortage of ministers and missionaries, but those who were stationed in North America were notoriously decadent, many being alcoholics and/or 'living in sin' with one or more African or Native American woman. Many Anglican clergymen were themselves slaveholders."²⁴ Extending his argument to address the state of the Christianization of the enslaved, Gomez quotes the clergy in Wilmington Parish, Virginia, who claim, "The Negroes who are slaves to the whites cannot, I think, be said to be of any Religion for there is no law of the Colony obliging their Masters or Owners to instruct them in the principles of Christianity."²⁵ In the meantime, Gomez points out, "African religion served as a major reservoir of support for insurrection throughout the New World . . . from South Carolina to Jamaica, from Louisiana to Haiti and Brazil."²⁶

On the part of the slaveocracy, there was antagonism to the Christianization of the enslaved if it did not serve their interests. Any recognition of African religions as being deployed in service of rebellion would conceivably influence the planter class's openness to exposing the enslaved to Christian doctrine. But it was not until the Christian revivals between 1740 and 1790 that Presbyterians, Methodists, and Baptists converted significant proportions of Africans. These sects attracted more of the enslaved than other denominations since their doctrines were more interpretively open to questions

of racial equality and because they allowed Africans “to enter the revivalist experience on their own terms.”²⁷ However, the question concerning how Christianity has historically been deployed toward revolutionary ends is still a rich subject for exploration in the *Afrospora*.²⁸ I now return to the present to ponder how the relevance and influence of the Africanity of the deep past of enslaved Africans relate to both Christianity and the twenty-first-century phenomenon of “Krumping” as depicted in the documentary *Rize*.

KRUMPING AS SUBMERGED CONSCIOUSNESS

David LaChapelle’s *Rize* opens with visual shots of the riots in Watts, California, in 1965. The footage then shifts from Watts to South Central Los Angeles in 1992 during the Rodney King rebellion. There is an aerial view of the devastation, showing whole blocks of burned-out buildings while the voice of Krumper Lil’ C functions as the soundtrack to the images, stating: “This our neighborhood. This is where we grew up. We were all kids back then when this happened. But we managed to grow from these ashes. And this is where we still live.” LaChapelle’s camera shifts next to a Krump session in an urban LA neighborhood in 2002. In the documentary, Clowning and Krumping are depicted as collectively created recreational, dance-expression-based group phenomena, which grew into local movements offering an alternative to gang life as well as an outlet for stress release from violence, drugs, poverty, and their impact on individuals and families. In a sense these movements were visceral and spirited responses to the forces that hit Black urban communities after 1968.²⁹ The Clowning movement began in 1992 with Thomas Johnson, aka Tommy the Clown, an ex-drug dealer who after incarceration decided to change his life. He developed Clowning (a fast-paced and erratic style of movements emerging from popular street dances) in the wake of the Rodney King rebellion. He transformed into Tommy the “Hip Hop Dancing Clown,” a lucrative alter ego who performed at local birthday parties, incorporating Clowning into a mode of entertainment. The Clowning concept took flight and subsequently a range of competing clown groups were created in the process.

At the outset of the documentary, a statement is presented to the viewer that reads: “The footage in this film has not been sped up in any way.” This announcement is designed for the spectator who is an outsider to the Clowning and Krumping culture and is meant to situate as authentic the dancing that is about to follow. It becomes immediately clear why such a declaration is necessary since in the film’s opening segments, the speed and angularity of

the dance movements captured on film defy what the eye might believe to be credible. In *Rize*, the young interviewees disclose that the advent of the crack epidemic resulted in many of their parents and immediate relatives becoming addicts who subsequently abandoned their families and were often incarcerated. The pace and speed of the dancing mirror the frantic, fragmented realities these youth face each day while also reflecting the literal acceleration of the body's heart rate caused by addiction.

Despite the seemingly spasmodic nature of the Clowning dance movements, Hurston's early twentieth-century statements (previously referenced) about "angularity" and "asymmetry" being prevalent characteristics of southern African American culture seem relevant here: "Anyone watching Negro dancers will be struck by the same phenomenon. Every posture is another angle. . . . It is the lack of symmetry which makes Negro dancing so difficult for white dancers to learn. The abrupt and unexpected changes. The presence of rhythm and the lack of symmetry are paradoxical, but there they are. Both are present to a marked degree. There is always rhythm, but it is the rhythm of segments. Each unit has a rhythm of its own, but when the whole is assembled it is lacking in symmetry."³⁰ While Hurston's racialized phraseology reflects the discourse of her era, the portrait of the characteristics themselves resonates almost a century later with the movements of the documentary subjects in *Rize*.

LaChapelle's visual narrative ideologically situates hip-hop-influenced Clowning and Krumping within a forty-year trajectory of Black urban poverty and violence within South Central Los Angeles specifically. These dance-inspired movements are established within this continuum of resistance and rebellion. Yet as with hip-hop itself, the rage and anger that might generally manifest as physical violence are transferred to the arena of functional artistic expression. Krumper Lil' C verbalizes this shift when he states, "It's like getting your anger out, except on the dance floor." In the music video that closes the documentary, LaChapelle interactively mixes sound editing, Krumping visual effects, and Oakland lyricist Flii Stylz's passionate rapping of the title song, "Rise." These all work interchangeably, having a probable effect on the psyche of the listener/viewer. Krumper Miss Prissy spins in slow motion, with auburn hair extensions lifting as she falls back into a crowd and struggles to rise. LaChapelle's camera speed returns to normal with another shot of her Krumping in the foreground and tearing off a green shirt to reveal her bra, while three male Krumpers *wild out* in the background. Clowneer Termite, another of the documentary's subjects, speaking of the art form, notes, "You have to love doing it. You cannot just say I'm a do it because I

know how to dance. It's like something you have to have love for." Of interest here is the way Krumping re-creates and transfers to a secular context the energy *Africana* scholars often describe as originating in sacred spaces.

Krumping spun off from Clowning and created rivalries and divisions within the Clowning community. Krumping is a frenetic variation on the original style. One distinct difference between the two seems to be that while Clowning functions as both entertainment and competition, Krumping, from its portrait in the documentary, serves primarily as an in-group ritual that relieves tension. Krumpers meet outdoors and use Krump sessions as a release from the stresses in their lives and as a competitive outlet to sharpen their artistry and skill. The Krumpers, unlike the Clowns, speak of their art form with reverence. The Krumper Dragon tells the filmmakers at the outset, "Well, if you're drowning and there's nothing around for help but a board floating, well you're gonna reach out for that board, and this was our board. And from this board we floated abroad and we built us a big ship. And we're gonna sail into the dance world, the art world, and we're gonna take it by storm. Because this is our belief. This is not a trend. Let me repeat, this is not a trend."³¹ He further maintains, "When you know that there's a Krump session, me, myself, and I know a lot of people will stop whatever is going on, if there's a gathering. Because . . . there is a spirit in the midst of Krumpness, there's a spirit that's there. A lot of people think, you know, oh they're just a bunch of rowdy, you know just ghetto, just heathens and thugs. No! What we are, are oppressed."

The crucial nature of Dragon's statements should not be underestimated. He describes the art form's utility as a survival mechanism for its creators. He directly and incisively interrupts the imagined vilification of the group as "ghetto, just heathens and thugs" on the part of naive viewers, making it clear instead that oppression rather than pathology is at the root of the Krumpers' collective condition and their subsequent rituals of healing. He also, curiously and intriguingly, declares Krump gatherings as sacred spaces. "There is a spirit in the midst of Krumpness." He gives this as the reason why he and others would stop whatever they are doing to attend. His rhetoric moves back and forth between notions of oppression and the presence of spirituality in a way that is worth further pondering. There is a suggestion in his statement of a relationship between the tension induced by oppression and the necessity of psycho-spiritual release. The link between tension and release highlights an intuitive interaction at the psycho-spiritual level, even as consciously articulated relationships and understandings remain repressed. There is thus the suggestion of a kind of submerged consciousness, and this point is worthy of

return. Furthermore, these instances function as a concrete demonstration of a kind of displaced pan-indigenized Africanity, since, as we shall see, this spiritual instinct mimics ancestral indigenous modes of release.

About thirty minutes into the film, LaChapelle, in a somewhat controversial move, crosscuts footage from an indigenous, unspecified, African ethnic group with his own footage from a Krump session. Where the continental footage is taken from is never stated.³² What is suggested, however, is that there are similarities between the cultural practices of the people depicted and those of the Krumpers, including the use of face paint as a part of the Krumping ritual. Whether or not the suggested similarities across transnational and transtemporal spaces suggested by LaChapelle are valid, Krumping clearly functions as a communal ritual for its participants, and the face paint, according to testimony by the documentary's subjects, allows the Krumpers to express themselves freely. Krumper Dragon opines, "If you know someone's looking at you, some people can't dance if they have someone looking at them. But if you know that there's a mask sort of covering your face then you feel that it's just you by yourself and that your identity is hidden, and you can dance as freely as you want to." The use of the paint is suggestive of the role of the mask in societies where masquerade has meaning.³³ As Stewart states, "Masquerading is an aesthetic cultural mode or disposition of religious significance that ensures the protection and preservation of African people's most treasured, authoritative ancestral institutions."³⁴ For the Krumpers, the face paint is a type of mask, one that allows them to forget the outside world and focus fully on physically expelling and releasing whatever is bottled up inside.

It is at the end of the scene with the visual crosscut interspersing the indigenous African ethnic footage with a Krump session when young Daisy goes into a trance and collapses in the middle of the session. Daisy enters a trance not within the context of a Sanctified or Pentecostal church or a formal Vodou or diasporic African religious ritual space but *outside* while transferring all her pathos into this improvisational expression that requires a projection of energy from the inside outward, in a way that suggests "the immanence within" that Kamau Brathwaite refers to as "total expression."³⁵ What is the significance of what happened to Daisy? The Krumpers make it seem as if Daisy's experience is a rite of passage that they each look forward to and anticipate. Because of where this happens and who the subjects of the documentary are, poor Black kids from a disenfranchised neighborhood, without this visual text, the prospect of pondering the larger significance of this incident may have been impossible. Daisy's moment in *Rize*

is an interesting place to ponder the idea of moving beyond the binary as suggested by Clark; Daisy's trance can be seen as an instance of *marasa* consciousness made manifest. Clark's text, in juxtaposition with this incident in *Rize*, takes us a "piece of the way" toward comprehending and pondering the emergence of a third principle, one that may have larger implications both practically and philosophically.³⁶

The *marasa trois* representing twins and the child born after twins in a symbolic trio are at the heart of Clark's theory of *marasa* consciousness.³⁷ Clark notes, "*Marasa* denotes movement and change and may serve as a metaphor representing the profound differences in environment, social organization and language encountered by slaves in the Americas."³⁸ For Clark, *marasa* is a metaphor for change, one allowing the community drawing on the symbol to reckon with and psycho-spiritually reconcile internally, shifts happening externally that one may have limited ability to control. Like other deities in the Vodou tradition, the *marasa trois* is symbolized by a ground drawing referred to as a *vèvè* (see figure I.1). The ground drawings suggest the coexistence of opposition, interaction, and transformation simultaneously. Clark argues that while there is "uniformity at the horizontal and vertical crossroads," the top and the bottom as well as the left and the right aspects of the drawing "encourage originality."³⁹

Asymmetrical distinctiveness and differences of design exist side by side with similarities of pattern. Figuratively, the coinciding of patterned affinity and asymmetrical contrast could be seen as a metaphor for the conjunctive synchronicity of community and individuality coexisting and interacting.⁴⁰ The *Iwa* (or deities) function as the energetic force field, the foundation for the originality described and also the source of the shifts that make interactions between oppositions occur and create space for resulting transformations. The *vèvè* of the *marasa trois* is therefore symbolic of the energetic shifts occurring in these types of sacred spaces. As Clark elaborates, "The sign itself lures a viewer into interpretation limited only and obviously by the reader's degree of literacy."⁴¹ This observation, akin to a math equation, suggests that literacy determines comprehension. A frame of reference for actively imagining what is being described rhetorically must exist. Clark further observes, "*Marasa* consciousness invites us to imagine beyond the binary. The capacity to do so depends largely on our capacities to read the sign as a cyclical, spiral relationship. On the surface *marasa* appears to be binary."⁴² But binary isn't. What we have here is something that functions differently from how it appears, with the ability "to read the sign" depending on what Clark calls its "'spiralist' agenda."⁴³

Linking *marasa* consciousness to Gomez's interpretation of the ring shout in antebellum and colonial America gives us further tools for assessing the situation in *Rize*. Focusing on the shout as a key Afrospora ritual that situates and congeals African American identity, Gomez remarks, "Because of the ubiquity of the ring ceremony throughout west and west central Africa, native Africans from all walks of life could immediately identify with it. . . . The beauty of it is that the ceremony conveyed different meanings to the assorted groups, but its form was universal as opposed to exclusionary. Everyone could participate, free to enjoy their own interpretations."⁴⁴ Leaning further into his analysis of the ring shout's unifying function, Gomez opines:

It was within such contexts as the ring ceremony that Senegambians and Sierra Leonians compared notes concerning their vision of divinity. The embrace of the shout allowed the Igbo, the Akan, and the Mende to understand just how much they had in common with respect to their veneration of the ancestors and their connection to the land. The Akan distinction between the *ntoro* (spirit) and the *kra* (soul) would have found resonance in the Bambara division of *ni* (soul) and *dya* (double). Lesser deities, such as the *agbara* of the Igbo and the *abosom* of the Akan would have found reciprocity, while these same two groups merged with the Bambara and Sierra Leonians in their belief in reincarnation. The shout brought them together, transcending cultural barriers and hastening the creation of a pan-African cultural matrix with numerous points of intersection.⁴⁵

The ring shout here demonstrates the shift from diverse and distinct African ethnicities coexisting alongside one another toward the formation of a collective sense of African American identity with "race" functioning as a unifying signifier, and "the Africanization of the Christian faith, not its imposition by external forces, that accounts for its success in the African American community."⁴⁶ Gomez's work on the ring shout helps us understand some of the building blocks that have been the structural, if hidden, foundation shaping complex aspects of African American identities. What he describes as "Africanization" is distinct from yet intertwined with what I am calling "afroindigenization." With afroindigenization we are attempting to further understand the intricacies of the interiority that the enslaved and their descendants developed. In other words, they remade the faith practices available to them in ways that fit their needs; they indigenized these practices within the context of their cultural understanding. Pulling intuitively from generationally handed-down sources of restitutive knowledge, which the presence of oppression made necessary, the enslaved and their descendants

drew on these tools to generate internal sources of power as needed for specific situations.

Gomez quotes Emily Dixon and Minerva Grubbs, ring shout participants born in the early nineteenth century. Dixon states: "On Sundays us would get tergether in de woods an' have worship. Us could go to de white folks' church but us wanted to go whar we could sing all de way through an' hum 'long an' shout, yo' all know, just turn loose lak." Grubbs adds: "You see, de white folks don't git in de spirit, dey don't shout, pray, hum and sing all through the services lak us do." Gomez continues, "To get in the spirit required turning loose, and black folk could only do that within the security and familiarity of the shout."⁴⁷ The ring shout created an environment in which the passion of *turning loose* and letting go could be fully indulged in a cathartic release that would have been universally uniting given the common experiences of oppression suffered by the masses. Furthermore, Gomez argues, "the emphasis on the experiential, so prominent in the shout, was carried over into the baptismal ceremony; indeed, rites associated with baptism could be understood as a continuation of the shout."⁴⁸

Once the Black church is established as an institution functioning inside a building as opposed to the outdoor space originally associated with the ring shout, Stuckey maintains, the explicit inclusion of the counterclockwise stomp dance is translated into other aspects of expressivity: "Though the preacher's message was ostensibly Christian, his performance style . . . was African, the rhythms of his delivery stirring some to jump and clap their hands and others to shriek in a voice 'impossible to be expressed in letters.' . . . It is evident . . . that, while a hymn was being sung, rhythms of the ring shout, which were the rhythms of the spirituals, were being applied as the Africans took possession of the hymn."⁴⁹ If energy is neither created nor destroyed, then there is a transfer of vital power that is documented by both Stuckey and Gomez, with "emphasis on the experiential." Gomez views the embodied aspects of baptismal ceremonies as a continuation of the energy generated in the ritual space of the shout; this complements Stuckey's observations about the potency of the physical stomp of the shout being *shifted to other realms of fluency*—key among them the use of voice in the singing of songs. This mobile dynamism as a transfer of vital power is worth noting in relation to the spirit energy that enters "the gathering space" as described by the Krumpers.

What is significant about what Stuckey and Gomez capture is the notion that even when the consciousness of a ritual or practice connected to the enslaved African background was lost, expressive aspects of the earlier forms

were deposited in the vibrancy that was handed down. Without these explications, theorizations of Black Atlantic forms are primarily attributed to spontaneous and miraculous inventiveness seemingly arising without antecedent. The notion of “turning loose” central to the shout becomes a functional part of Black church rituals of expressivity, according to Stuckey’s description. Moreover, this business of “turning loose” emphasized in the shout is integrally connected to gaining and generating internal power on the part of the subject or participant in such an activity. A contradictory duality is therefore exposed: Letting go internally and giving in to the emotion (within an organized *spiritual* space) generates a visceral puissance that rejuvenates rather than depletes the individual capable of doing so or “going there.” The specific surrender to this energetic contradiction leads to the release of internal power. This energy became a central feature of African American culture itself (moving from sacred to secular space), with *culture* in this sense being implicitly defined as the ability *to move the spirit* rather than as a particular custom, institution, or collective set of achievements. At the grassroots level, “culture” gets implicitly defined “as the thing that keeps you alive”—it is an internal thing.⁵⁰ The vehicle has been the song, the shout, the dance, and the ecstasy of release that are linked even now with the sonic power of the sound of the music that has emerged from the children of enslaved Africans in the Afrospora.⁵¹

The powerful feeling transmitted to both audience and listener-participant when Aretha sang, when Prince screamed, when James Brown shouted and danced, or when Bob Marley wailed are all part of what I call the afroindigenization of energy, transformed and handed down—shifted from its initial structure to serve a new purpose; salvaging the psyche even as the body died, capturing, in the process, *the changing same* of Baraka’s coinage; the energetic reality that lays the foundation for an afroindigenizing impulse, splintered from previous systems of expression, but *passed on nevertheless*. Its maintenance and transfer *are not* simply a product of individual vocal and artistic genius but are a drive generated from both ancestral and collective space. Our Afrosporic embodied expressivity is also made manifest in a subtler form, simply as “style.” The tools used have changed form. However, the purpose of using what is at our disposal *to move the spirit* so as to recover from the traumas of twenty-first-century life remain the same, a changing same. The complex deployment of these energetic transfers seems particularly relevant to the moment in *Rize* to which I now return.

Daisy’s trance as an event within the Krump session combines the notion of “turning loose” central to the ring shout and the “‘spiralist’ agenda” that transforms the binary in Clark’s notion of *marasa* consciousness. The

“turning loose” is the momentary overcoming of the binary. As Clark states, “In Vodoun, the philosophical and environmental contrasts embedded in the *marasa* sign and the belief system it represents are danced into another realm of discourse during Vodoun ceremonies.”⁵² As claimed earlier, the Krumpers not only report that “there is a spirit in the midst of Krumpness” but they explicitly link it to a release from the oppression they deal with in daily life. Daisy’s trance was said to be a rite of passage that they were all waiting for—which suggests that it was a transformative experience that everyone desired. When Daisy collapses, the unnamed Krumper in the background screams out, “She has reached!” Krumping is represented in the documentary as an intentional form of “letting go” of the outside self-consciousness and stress and releasing what is inside, both emotionally and creatively. The physically expressive release of the internalized negativity allows the Krumpers to “dance into another realm of discourse” their anxieties and tension. This is a literal shifting of energetic stagnancy into something productive and life-sustaining—the reconciling of a seeming contradiction.

The connection to the church context is crucial here. Krumper Miss Prissy tells the filmmakers that Dragon suggested that her Krumping would improve if she went back to church. Dragon’s mother explicitly links the two arenas when she says that she “gets Krump for Christ.” There is also a connection here to Baby Tight Eyez’s statement about meditating on the words of the hymn his grandfather taught him, “Lord Lift Me Up and Let Me Stand,” while he is Krumping to secular rap songs. The transfer of energy back and forth between officially sacred and seemingly secular arenas unravels the distinction between the two within this grassroots situation. Daisy’s Krumping into a trance within the drug-ridden environs of South Central Los Angeles demonstrates that energy and understanding connected to notions of “the sacred” are transferred to the “profanely secular” world they occupy, while still serving an unfleshly purpose. In this space, the sacred is the “turn loose” vivacity that has the capacity to transform pain and spread feelings of generosity. Krumper Miss Prissy notes at one point that they all are “just some gutter kids.” This seems directly related to the notion of there being “a spirit in the midst of Krumpness.” For the participants, the sanctifying of the spiritual energy within the ritual field of a Krump gathering ultimately works against the degradation of “those from the gutter,” bestowing a sense of honor and value onto a societally discarded people. In a way the afroindigenization of energy that occurs in *Rize* becomes the full manifestation of what Hurston may have meant when she declared “the [person] in the gutter as the god-maker [and] the creator of everything that lasts.”

BECOMING THE HORSE

There is a literary representation of both the ring shout and a “mounting” in August Wilson’s *Joe Turner’s Come and Gone*. The play theorizes the ways self-affirmation and self-doubt function as part of the collective psyche of African Americans emerging from the experience of enslavement. There is a scene in the play in which the characters, residents of a boarding house, decide to do a dance called “Juba.” The stage directions explicitly state it should be modeled on the ring shout. With this move, Wilson chooses to deliberately symbolize and represent aspects of African American cultural and spiritual consciousness. The play is set in Pittsburgh in 1911 and openly references the recent nature of emancipation from slavery. The ring-shout-Juba dance functions as a temporary moment of unity for the characters despite their varied experiences and interpretations of everyday life. In a traditional ring shout, the singing and dancing as well as the call and response in the circle can be seen as opening the door between the ancestors and the living. As Baraka observes, “The call and response form of Africa (lead and chorus) has never left us, as a mode of (musical) expression. It has come down both as vocal and instrumental form.”⁵³ Stuckey asserts that the maintenance of generational continuity is central to existence in the African worldview, determining right action and behavior.

The notion of continuity that Stuckey references is juxtaposed with the reality of discontinuity in the play in terms of people coming and going and constantly searching for loved ones. The African diaspora subject’s ability to make sense of his or her life represents a kind of breach of this previous custom. Two central characters in Wilson’s play represent these contradictions: Bynum Walker and Herald Loomis. Bynum Walker, a free former slave from the South and a conjure man, states throughout the play that his purpose is to “bind people together with song,” as his name Bynum, or “bind-them,” suggests. Herald Loomis, on the other hand, moves with his daughter from place to place while constantly searching for his wife and the mother of his child, someone he separated from some time before. He is generally a pessimistic character who has lost faith in both the future and faith-based notions of salvation. In the Juba scene, the energy opened up by the dancing and singing momentarily possesses Herald Loomis, who before being taken over by it lashes out and satirizes the concept of the “Holy Ghost.” Once “mounted,” however, he has a vision. In this scene, central to the play, Bynum and Loomis interact, with their dialogue symbolic of the larger issues being wrestled with in the text.

BYNUM: What you done seen, Herald Loomis?

LOOMIS: (*Flat on his back.*) I done seen bones rise up out the water. Rise up and walk across the water. Bones walking on top of the water.

BYNUM: (*Bends over him.*) Tell me about them bones, Herald Loomis. Tell me what you seen.

LOOMIS: (*Kneels, cowering, terror-struck by his vision.*) I come to this place . . . to this water that was bigger than the whole world. And I looked out . . . (*Rises, still kneeling, looks out and reaches for vision down-stage. Bynum looks out.*) and I seen these bones rise up out the water. Rise up and begin to walk on top of it.

BYNUM: Wasn't nothing but bones and they walking on top of the water.

LOOMIS: Walking without sinking down. Walking on top of the water.

BYNUM: Just marching in a line.

LOOMIS: A whole heap of them. They come up out the water and started marching.

BYNUM: Wasn't nothing but bones and they walking on top of the water.

LOOMIS: One after the other. They just come up out the water and start to walking . . .

(*BREAK*)

LOOMIS: They just walking across the water . . . and then . . . they sunk down.

BYNUM: The bones sunk into the water. They all sunk down.

LOOMIS: All at one time! They just all fell in the water at one time.

BYNUM: Sunk down like anybody else.

LOOMIS: When they sink down they made a big splash and this here wave come up.

BYNUM: A big wave, Herald Loomis. A big wave washed over the land.

LOOMIS: It washed them out of the water and up on the land. Only . . . only . . .

BYNUM: Only they ain't bones no more.

LOOMIS: They got flesh on them! Just like you and me!

BYNUM: Everywhere you look the waves is washing them up on the land right on top of one another.

LOOMIS: They black. Just like you and me. Ain't no difference.

BYNUM: Then what happened, Herald Loomis?

LOOMIS: They ain't moved or nothing. They just laying there.

BYNUM: You just laying there. (*Gestures and Loomis falls suddenly onto his back.*) What you waiting on, Herald Loomis?

LOOMIS: I'm laying there . . . waiting.

BYNUM: What you waiting on, Herald Loomis?

LOOMIS: I'm waiting on the breath to get into my body.

BYNUM: The breath coming into you, Herald Loomis. What you gonna do now?

LOOMIS: (*Discovering*) The wind's blowing the breath into my body. I can feel it. I'm starting to breathe again.

BYNUM: What you gonna do, Herald Loomis?

LOOMIS: I'm gonna stand up. I got to stand up. I can't lay here no more. All the breath coming into my body and (*Rolls over onto his stomach.*) I got to stand up.

BYNUM: (*Throws his hands up overhead as Loomis scrambles up on all fours.*) Everybody's standing up at the same time.

LOOMIS: (*Collapses, shakes.*) The ground's starting to shake. (*He grabs hold of the bench.*) There's a great shaking. (*He claws at the floor, arms open wide, trying to keep the ground together under him.*) The world's busting half in two. (*He flips over onto his back, looks up, sees the sky above him, tries to shield himself from it.*) The sky's splitting open. I got to stand up. (*Turns over, attempts to stand up, but his feet slide out from under him.*) My legs . . . my legs won't stand up!

BYNUM: (*Points ahead of Loomis.*) Everybody's standing and walking towards the road. What you gonna do, Herald Loomis?

LOOMIS: (*Looks to Bynum.*) My legs won't stand up . . .

(*Bynum sags, defeated, against the kitchen table. He sits and looks up.*

LIGHTS: fade to black.)⁵⁴

In this scene at the end of act 1, Bynum is trying to help Loomis interpret the vision he has while in a state of trance. Versions of the play vary, with the stage directions attributing more agency to Bynum in the Samuel French publication than the one published by Plume. The Plume edition simply emphasizes the conversation, while the Samuel French stage directions (included here) suggest that Bynum is spiritually influencing Loomis in some way. In the early portions of the dialogue in the scene, Loomis describes a vision he has had of bones rising up from, walking on, and then sinking into the water and finally taking on flesh once they've reached the shore. The scene's dialogue bears striking similarities to Ezekiel 37:1–28, referred to as "The Vision of Dry Bones"—a scripture frequently referenced in Black sermonic traditions.⁵⁵ In Oscar Micheaux's 1925 silent film *Body and Soul*, the script at one point states, "And then came the day of days, for on this Sunday, Reverend Jenkins [played by Paul Robeson] had promised to preach

that sermon which is every Black preacher's ambition—"Dry Bones—in the Valley." In Charles Burnett's 1990 film *To Sleep with Anger*, the main character, Harry (played by Danny Glover), states, "I came upon the valley of dry bones and the serpent said make this your home." This biblical passage, in which the dead arise and acquire flesh and breath, symbolizes the ability to overcome seemingly insurmountable odds with spiritual aid as agent. For the great-grandchildren of the Middle Passage, references to rising from the sea would resonate with the ordeal, death, and upheaval of slavery as well as the miraculous event of both surviving trauma and rebuilding a life afterward.

In this scene in Wilson's play, Bynum is unsuccessful in his efforts at aiding Loomis. But what happens is still interesting. Standing up seems symbolic of holding on to a connection both to the self and to others. It also seems linked to helping Loomis's spirit heal from wounds that have become roadblocks, preventing him from moving forward with his life. Bynum's interaction with Loomis is a struggle over the spirit, which manifests as a fight about the body. Unlike Daisy in *Rize*, Loomis does not willingly "become the horse." He collapses at the end but never really submits to the energy that has gotten ahold of him. In fact, he struggles against it, going so far as to deny (at a later point in the play) that the "Holy Ghost" exists, by implication denying the existence of any other power that claims to be capable of deconstructing the force that has him in its miser's grip. Bynum seems to want Loomis to comprehend that the spirit can live on even if the body dies. If Loomis can grasp this, then he may be able to stand up and hold on to his own spirit. His ability to put his own life back together depends on his willingness to come to terms in a productive way with his past, and "turning loose" or letting go is the key. While the end of Wilson's play suggests an eventual "binding" of the soul of Herald Loomis, in this scene, unlike in *Rize*, the "mounting" is unsuccessful. This moment in the play returns us theoretically to both the concept of *marasa* consciousness and the ring shout notion of "turning loose." The deconstruction of the binary with the assistance of a spirit-based third principle is symbolized by resistance, on one hand, and letting go, on the other. It is in the letting go that the ethos of transformation can rise, an ethos that embodies the cyclical and spiraling energy that is neither destroyed nor created but that can entrap or free a given subject based on his, her, or their internal inclination. Resistance, as demonstrated by Herald Loomis initially, may lead to defeat and a kind of madness. Letting go of the will to rational consciousness and control, on the other hand, cedes the ground and opens the door to the energetic forces of

trust and humility, either or both of which are necessary to break the stalemate between oppositional and dueling sides.

From an outsider's perspective, the energetic reality portrayed in *Rize* also appears to influence social consciousness. In a general education course I taught in 2015, one that compared Western and non-Western cultural forms, I showed clips from *Rize*. I wanted to juxtapose the way that ritual, healing, and community emerged and interactively functioned for the Krumpers in ways that resonated with other representations of non-Western culture studied in the course. We watched the moment in the documentary where Daisy got "struck" and speculated about what happened to her. There was an intellectual struggle that emerged in which three students from different backgrounds responded to the moment in the film and its meaning. In a written commentary near the end of the course, one of these students, a white male, wrote:

While watching the film *Rize* in class I felt something, something dear, personal, and strange. I didn't know it the first time around, and still don't know how to talk about it, but I'll try my best. In seeing the dancers move about, in hearing them discuss what it was they were doing, I saw qualities of creative collaboration that I know to also be present in jazz—some structure, much improvisation. I thought at first that was why I enjoyed the clips so much, because it reminded me of my love of jazz, but that wasn't quite it. . . . Upon watching the clips a second time I recognized something more fleshly, or perhaps less fleshly. I saw community working, I felt more than I saw, and that must have been spirit. There exists in the clips a sort of underlying vibration, something not easily spoken or written about, but something I think fundamental within humanity. I am an atheist however I now have an appreciation for spirit, the unseen fibers that connect us, the power in self that allows one dancer to hang on the shirt or neck of another, the power that allows violent looking movements to in reality create peace in a space of little opportunity. In the space between the dancers, I was certain I could sense a deeper connection than I'm used to experiencing. This connection was not only a connection between the dancers, it was not simply talent and great effort on display, it was *reverence* for the moment, for the ground they stood on, for what the movement of their bodies represented. I'm still not certain how to approach this feeling or newfound "spirit," but something tells me I'll find out more about it as I converse and act a part in what I now see as community; a world of flesh, words, and ideas all bound by something more,

something that looks a lot like spirit, and feels like that which one cannot articulate without missing the point entirely.⁵⁶

Logan White-Mulcare's commentary on *Rize* suggests that ways of understanding, opened up by the Krumping ritual, had an impact on his own definitions of the sacred. He uses the language of "reverence" to describe what he saw and the language of "spirit" to recount what he felt. Both things remained in a kind of *marasa* contention with his intellectual and personal position as an atheist. His response, although atypical, opens a door to thinking through how the notion of submerged consciousness, despite its function here in ways that are specific to the descendants of diasporic enslaved Africans, may tap into an equally if not more repressed space for others who have also lost connections with notions of cultural collectivity for very different reasons.

DEATH MADE LIFE: LYRICAL DUALITIES

As I shift my discussion to the world of hip-hop lyricism, I return once more to VèVè Clark's *marasa* theorizing: "Those of us accustomed to the Hegelian dialectic would seek in comparable environments resolution of seemingly irreconcilable differences: slave-master, patriarchy-matriarchy, rural-urban, and the like when the *marasa* sign, like others produced in agrarian societies, has another, more 'spiralist' agenda in mind."⁵⁷ Gomez gives examples of the ways enslaved Africans adapted and indigenized the Christian doctrine to suit their purposes, allowing them and their descendants to negotiate the brutality of the outside world while feeding their humanity. The energy associated with the ring shout is an example of *marasa* consciousness since the binary horror of being subjected to external physical and psychological violence could be released and transformed into vitality rather than leaving the soul in despair and abjection. In some small way, the modern secular equivalent could be seen as the concert or the house party, where, at least for Black participants, there is space to dance, shout, or sing as a form of release from modern tensions. But here what will be explored is how the lyrical power of three hip-hop emcees (MCs) functions as examples of both afroindigenization and *marasa* consciousness.

Lonnie "Common" Rashid Lynn Jr.'s 2005 song "The Corner" functions as a kind of urban Black male manifesto that implicitly addresses the tensions and contradictions of a "death made life" ethos, one in which the physical and psychological pain *has to* become life sustaining to veer away from destruction.

Memories on corners with the foes & the moes
 Walk to the store for the rose
 Talking straightforward to “whores”
 Got uncles that smoke it some put blow up they nose
 To cope with they lows, the wind is cold & it blows
 In they socks & they souls, holding they rolls
 Corners leave souls opened & closed hoping for more
 With nowhere to go rolling in droves
 They shoot the wrong way cause they ain’t knowing they goal
 The streets ain’t safe cause they ain’t knowing the code
 By the fours I was told either focus or fold
 Got cousins with flows hope they open some doors
 So we can cop clothes & roll in a Rolls
 Now I roll in a “Olds” with windows that don’t roll
 Down the roads where cars get broke in & stole
 These are the stories told by Stony & Cottage Grove
 The world is cold, the block is hot as a stove
 On the corners.⁵⁸

Joining forces with the Last Poets and Kanye West, Common opens with a verse humanizing the pain, grief, and desolation made manifest on street corners throughout cities every day in America.⁵⁹ Ending every sentence of the first verse with a word that has one or more *o*’s, he creates a brilliant flow that makes it seem as if the ideas and sentiments being expressed are unending and roll continuously into each other: “In they socks & they souls, holding they rolls / Corners leave souls opened & closed hoping for more / With nowhere to go rolling in droves.”

The life experienced by various Black males on street corners throughout America is depicted in all its soulful and contradictory complexity. The first verse paints a picture of gang and street life exposed and reinterpreted as ordinary Black male reality in which death, love, loss, entrapment, hopes, dreams, and violent and unexpected endings all coexist. The opening reference to the “foes” and the “moes” (translated by one hip-hop lyrics website as “fours” and “moors”) is taken by some as an allusion to two of Chicago’s most powerful street gangs, the Folk Nation (or fours) and a subsidiary of their rivals the People Nation. The People Nation (an alliance of gangs) featured, among others, the Blackstone Rangers, who under the leadership of Jeff Fort split into a faction naming itself “El Rukn Tribe of the Moorish Science Temple of America” (the moors).⁶⁰

Smoking and sniffing drugs are described as outlets for “cop[ing] with lows.” “The wind is cold & it blows” is a nice metaphorical allusion to Chicago as “the windy city,” a place where the “cold” referenced in the verse is not just physical but spiritual. Common’s reference in the next two lines to souls as “open & closed hoping for more” suggests the possibility of death and spiritual entrapment—as well as life (before and after death), in which the energy of hope and desire of those passed on before and those hoping to survive the present lingers and is made manifest on *the corner*: “I wish I could give you this feeling / I wish I could give you this feeling / On the corner Niggas rob and kill, dying just to make a living.” Kanye West’s passionately sung chorus adds an edgy layer to both the song’s sound and the philosophical ethos of “death made life” at the heart of the song’s impulse. The idea of robbing, killing, and dying in order to make a “living” is not just the substance of West’s hook but is also at the heart of the allusions and metaphors that we chase throughout the song as a whole. From the Last Poets references to the corners as “our magic, our music, our politics . . . / Power to the People / Black Power / Black is beautiful” to Common’s reference in the second verse to “G[angsta]’s with three strikes, seeds that need light / The corner [as a place] where struggle and greed fight,” the highs and the lows of the good and the bad almost merge in the philosophical renderings of the song into a third principle, similar to Clark’s notion of *marasa* consciousness, one in which the good *cannot* be separated from the bad but must perforce live together and yield something else.

The consistency of Common’s flow continues in this second verse, with each word that ends each line containing the vowel *i* or the letter *y*. West’s production of the song is stabilized by a background sample of about five seconds from the Temptations’ 1972 hit “What It Is” and what appears to be a sample of sped-up vocals from the Temprees’ 1973 “You Make the Sunshine.” The repetition of those five seconds of staccato-like sound from “What It Is” regularizes the song’s tempo with its recurrence. Additionally, the varying rhythms of Common’s flow, West’s hook, and the Last Poets’ spoken-word sermons at the end of each verse function in ways as manifestations of life, death, and the union of both made into a third principle. Common’s flow is the lifelike literal and metaphorical description of the lifestyles on “the corners” of America, while West’s hook is the description of the death that is indulged, even as it emerges from a desire to “have a life.” The Last Poets, particularly with the final verse, represent that third uniting principle when their contribution elevates the discourse about “the corner”—seen by many outside the situation as solely a place of desperation,

denigration, and decay—to one of majestic and institutionalized greatness, on par with natural wonders, spiritual temples, and the highest human principles of freedom, peace, and love. The Last Poets symbolically have the last words in the song when they state, “The corner was our Rock of Gibraltar, Our Stonehenge / Our Taj Mahal, our monument / Our Testimonial to freedom, to peace and to love / down on the corner.” While many may simply see Black males on street corners as proof of idle nonproductiveness and the failings of the community if not also the nation-state, for the Last Poets, this is simply the outside view. The insider interpretation, like the concept of afroindigenization itself, requires an understanding of the generationally inherited world-sense of the “brothers” on the corner, one that leaves the door open for pondering how such complex art can emanate from a place of seeming desolation.

The visuals of the video that accompany the song are also worthy of brief mention. Common raps most of his verses on a street corner, with brief shots of him in an Oldsmobile and then in a snow-covered park and finally huddling by a trash can fire on a corner—a scene of the plight of the homeless seeking warmth at night that would resonate with anyone from an urban setting. West shows up only as a shadowy figure whose voice is heard during the singing of the first hook, whose face is hidden but who is seen singing the hook at the end of the second verse, and whose full head appears during the singing of the final hook after the third verse. The Last Poets spit their lyrics while standing with Common around the fire-burning trash can. In an enigmatic and suggestive move, the video’s visuals end with Common walking out into the snow-filled park, which could also be a frozen lake, while the words *THE BEGINNING* as opposed to *THE END* flit across the screen. Ending the video with these words suggests rebirth rather than death and adds to the energetic impulse within the song itself, to break away from stagnant paralyzing energy toward another register.

This “death made life” ethos is also apparent in West’s “Crack Music” from his second album, *Late Registration*. West twists notions of materialism and violence in interesting directions in this song, shifting the devastation associated with crack cocaine in symbolic lyrical ways. Opening the song by asking “How we stop The Black Panthers” and answering “Ronald Reagan cooked up an answer,” West suggests that radical resistance has to be stopped “by any means necessary.” West’s notion of stopping Black progress directly implicates Reagan twice, first as governor of California during the period when the Black Panthers rose to power in the late 1960s. At that time, his pro-establishment policies resulted in “Bloody Thursday” when California

Highway Patrol officers violently subdued the People's Park protests at UC Berkeley in May 1969.⁶¹ Second, Reagan as president functions for West and hip-hop scholars as the architect of modern urban decay, one whose policies further disenfranchised inner-city neighborhoods and communities while drugs entered through the back door, wreaking havoc and creating devastation.⁶²

West mentions early spoken-word poet and musician Gil Scott-Heron, whose "revolution would not be televised," while he and others from the sixties wasted away as a result of the drug bullets of heroin and crack that further destabilized Black mass movements.⁶³ Shifting to focus categorically on crack cocaine and its ramifications, West chants:

Crack raised the murder rate in DC and Maryland
We invested in that, it's like we got Merrill-lynched
And we been hanging from the same tree ever since
Sometimes I feel the music is the only medicine.

While West's lyrics conjure up for the knowledgeable listener the widely discussed and documented view that crack cocaine was introduced into urban Los Angeles with deliberate disregard for the effect it could or would have on the predominantly Black population there, he lyrically addresses the way the drug functioned as both moneymaker for those abandoned by the legal economy as well as body destroyer for those who overdosed and died of addiction. "Shorty come and see his momma straight overdosin' . . . / God, how could you let this happen?"

The victimization of those who sell is referenced by the clever notion of being "Merrill-lynched"—West's language could be seen as suggesting that this newly acquired Black wealth was a threat to the system and needed to be stopped. Similar to old-school lynching, Black wealth rather than white rape was the real reason for death at the hands of a mob or the Klan.⁶⁴ In the modern era, the Rockefeller drug laws have a similar resonance since differential sentencing gives more prison time to predominantly Black offenders who sell crack than to white offenders who sell larger quantities of cocaine.⁶⁵ To the extent that crack functioned as an illegal underground economy that created moderate to significant sources of wealth for young Black people, mostly male, the notion of Black wealth as a threat to the state in some way is resurrected.⁶⁶

At the end of the second verse, after referring to "Shorty . . . see[ing] his momma straight overdosin'," West states, "And this is the soundtrack / This the type of music you make when you 'round that / That's that crack music,

nigga / That real black music, nigga.” Shifting the terms to refer to the music “as the only medicine,” West uses the drug metaphor to suggest that the music, like the drugs, can also be “cooked, cut, measured, bagged and sold.” It’s a vicious metaphor and one that he takes seriously for the rest of the song, turning money and metaphorical drug music into a weapon against the children of those who used drugs as a weapon against the Black community. At the end of the first verse, conjuring up drug metaphors once more, West refers to the fact that those who purchase the music cannot distinguish symbolically good from bad music, but they “fiend” for it nevertheless.

The song ends with a kind of monologue-like “Outro” that is modeled on the Lord’s Prayer and is chanted by Chicago spoken-word artist Malik Yusef. “Our father, give us this day our daily bread / Before the feds give us these days and take our daily bread.” Here, spiritual suppositions are invoked with “daily bread,” suggesting a right to wealth “by any means necessary” within the space of a ruthless market economy. The desire for money and food coexists with a need for the Lord’s protection from the violence of the prison-industrial complex that lies in wait, referenced by “feds giv[ing] us these days” [in the penitentiary] and hoping to interrupt the source of the “daily bread.” While the poetic prayer is an appeal, the wish for atonement for crimes done in the past is converted into a sermon for the masses: “And to atone I throw a lil’ somethin’-somethin’ on the pulpit / We took that shit, measured it and then cooked that shit / And what we gave back was crack music.”

The atonement is the message to his audience of listeners explaining the depth of how this “crack music” strategically functions in society. It was “measured and cooked” in the same way that the drugs that devastated the community were designed to addict and destroy. The crack music is addictive even if the message is destructive. The last seven bars of the song lay out a devastating revenge plot: “And now we ooze it through they nooks and crannies / So our mommas ain’t got to be they cooks and nannies.” Jumping from the illegal drug world to the legal “crack music” world, the former victims now have some control and skin in the game, addicting the children of those who controlled them to *their* music while getting their own “mommas” out from under their previous roles as servants to the master class. As Notorious B.I.G. says in “Things Done Changed,”

If I wasn’t in the rap game
I’d probably have a key knee deep in the crack game
Because the streets is a short stop

Either you slingin' crack rock or you got a wicked jump shot
It's hard being young from the slums
Eating five cents gums, not knowin' where your meal's coming
from.⁶⁷

West makes it clear that the objectified occasionally have the power to use their objectification as a kind of weapon.

And we gon' repo everything they ever took from Granny
Now the former slaves trade hooks for Grammys
This dark diction has become America's addiction
Those who ain't even black use it
We gon' keep baggin up this here crack music.

And so the word becomes flesh and revenge fantasy at its finest. Death is made life; hip-hop as the manifestation of social life within the context of social death is given voice here.⁶⁸ Hurston's god-making men in the gutter are the Last Poets, at the end of Common's corner, with West chanting "I wish I could give you this feeling / I wish I could give you this feeling"—that feeling is an understanding; a connection and identification with the plights being described as well as the will and ability to overcome by any means possible or necessary.

While both Common and West came out of the Chicago hip-hop scene, also sharing the lived realities of having mothers with doctorates who were educators, Southern rapper Big K.R.I.T., born Justin Lewis Scott in Meridian, Mississippi, is a self-identified country boy who proudly represents the deep and dirty South. If the hip-hop that emanated from the Bronx emerged from the street gangs who were the underclass alongside working- and lower-middle-class youth, then Southern hip-hoppers represent the regionally specific struggles of their set. Big K.R.I.T. in this sense could be seen as a countrified Mississippi version of Notorious B.I.G. The "K.R.I.T." in his moniker means "King Remembered in Time" and hints at an aspect of his lyricism that is a throwback to the golden era of hip-hop when Afrocentric themes dominated, suggesting connections to a royal and ancient continental African past. Unlike other rappers whose aliases suggest wealth, braggadocio, or the energy of the outlaw, "King Remembered in Time" conjures up one who has something worth saying. The title of the album that got him national attention, *K.R.I.T. Was Here*, has a similar resonance. One could continuously interpret his stage name within the context of the album title as *The king [who] was here will be remembered in a time* when his words become necessary.

In the brief song “Viktorious” from this album, K.R.I.T. openly expresses his feelings about the place Mississippi has in hip-hop. He states: “You can’t tell me Mississippi had a run / not like Texas, not like Florida, not like Memphis, not like Louisiana, not like Atlanta / Alabama did they thing, c’mon shawty / It all boils down to we got something to say, you feel me?”⁶⁹ Categorically stating that Mississippi, at that time, had never been allowed significant space on hip-hop’s national map, K.R.I.T. speculates about whether this lack of attention to him specifically is a result of his “country” vibe or a perception of him as too intellectual in relation to his Southern compadres whose “bubble gum” and “trap music” rapping about cars, drugs, and parties dominated the commercial scene.⁷⁰ In any case, K.R.I.T.’s commentary draws attention to the importance of geographic and social space within hip-hop culture as it relates to region. It is a well-known fact that the culture of different neighborhoods and cities is a central part of the representation specific to hip-hop. On almost every artist’s album, there are songs that consistently reference the ‘hoods they came from with both pride and social critique. These various regional cultures shape both the style and the message of the form and content, as in K.R.I.T.’s “Viktorious”:

Texas had ‘em swangin’ down
 Rich Boy threw some D’s on it, Alabama certified
 Florida been outta there (Louisiana keep it trill)
 Lil Wayne do his thang (Boosie Boy crazy where I live)
 Memphis-Ten, Yo Gotti, Three 6, Ball and MJ
 Atlanta still the Mecca, artists blowing out’cha everyday
 Tell ‘em that for years, they avoided us, ignoring us
 My story will be glorious
 Viktorious.

Quickly referencing Alabama rapper Rich Boy and his song “Throw Some D’s” as well as rappers Lil Wayne and Boosie Boy from New Orleans and Baton Rouge, respectively, K.R.I.T. “shouts out” Memphis, Tennessee, as producing acts such as Yo Gotti, Three 6 Mafia, and the hip-hop duo 8Ball & MJG. He gives all-around “props” to Atlanta as the Southern hip-hop mecca that has continuously produced artists, too many to mention. Besides the content, K.R.I.T.’s regional flavor is most evident in the form and style of his emcee strategy.

There appears to be no rhyme scheme of any substance at all in the brief nine bars cited here. Unlike Common’s rhyming strategy, which is evident from merely looking at the verses of the lyrics in “The Corner,” it is only

upon listening to K.R.I.T.'s combination of chant-singing at a speed-defying logic combined with the clever manipulation of his Southern cadence that the sophistication of his asymmetrical rhyming is revealed—and rhyme it does. Hurston's "Negro characteristics" are the philosophical gift that keep on giving, demonstrating how "the presence of rhythm but the absence of symmetry" that characterized African American popular dance culture in the early twentieth century still has relevance when applied to twenty-first-century hip-hop verse, particularly that of the Southern variety.

The "pimp" and the "whore" have a central place in K.R.I.T.'s musical oeuvre, and without an understanding of the social location from which he speaks, these references (for outsiders to Black Southern culture) are liable to be boiled down to examples of misogyny and violence. His 2014 album, *Cadillactica*, in many ways a clever concept album, tells the story of a young man who travels through space and time and finds the planet "Cadillactica," in which the car and specifically the Cadillac (a central and idealized feature of Southern commercial hip-hop), with its big bass subwoofers, can attract the attention of proverbial "bitches and ho's." On the distant planet of Cadillactica, these things are depicted as the pinnacle of existence.

The song "Cadillactica" itself, the fourth track on the album, celebrates this lifestyle, with the chorus stating,

Cadillac lac lac lac, Cadillac lac lac lac
Cadillac lac lac lac, Cadillac lac lac lac, lac
Fuck yo' whip, nigga!
Cadillac lac lac lac, Cadillac lac lac lac
Cadillac lac lac lac, Cadillac lac lac lac, lac
I took yo' bitch, nigga!e

The proverbial world of the planet Cadillactica exists at a lower frequency in which base desires and gritty struggles to survive shape and determine the value systems of those living there; the world described in the song bears a striking resemblance to real-life aspects of the Black South. With this album, K.R.I.T. achieves a kind of Southern "around the way" afro-futurist venture. The creation of the planet Cadillactica is attributed at the album's outset to both the procreative forces of a male and a female deity as well as a sonic big bang, represented by the 808 drum machines used in hip-hop and celebrated by K.R.I.T., who is famous for producing his own beats.

This is a self-reflective album in many ways, and K.R.I.T.'s intellectual brand is made apparent in terms of his K.R.I.T.-ical assessment of the

everyday life as a participant-observer. The skit at the end of the song “Cadillactica” is indicative of this approach.

YOUNG KRIZZLE: Hold up, Nigga, I think I’m gonna hit this spot real quick called *More Grease Than Beef*, Nigga, see what they hitting on round this bitch.

FRIEND: I heard they got some fry biscuits too, though.

YOUNG KRIZZLE: Yeah, they be givin’ them hoes away, I don’t want no givin’ away biscuit.

WORKER: Yeah, man, welcome to *More Grease Than Beef*, what can I get for you, man?

YOUNG KRIZZLE: I want a Number 1, my Nigga, but uh. . . I don’t see what it is on the menu, run that shit down for a player real quick.

WORKER: Oh, you want the Number 1? Sheeeet! Well, the Number 1 come with two sides. Sheeeet! You can get some poverty and some famine, and bruh if you don’t want that famine you can always get some low self-esteem; or a biscuit.

YOUNG KRIZZLE: Naw, I’m good on that, my Nigga, I’m good.

WORKER: Say, I know you want to take some food home to your Baby Mama. You can go on and get her the Plan B meal. It come with a free DNA test, two Bitch Ass Niggas. Sheeeet! Or you can get a biscuit. The best part of all this is it’s already prepared for you, bruh, this shit been sitting here all day, waiting on you.

KRIZZLE AND FRIEND: Hell Naw!

KRIZZLE: What happen to the Soul Food?

The song “Cadillactica” celebrates the car, competition with other men over material status, and the objectification and “theft” of another man’s “woman.” The skit that follows, on the other hand, puns on the notion of the fast-food restaurant, already stereotyped as a place where the food is not healthy. Here the restaurant is a metaphor for gritty Black Southern life at the bottom, one that has preprepared lifestyle choices that consist of poverty, famine, sex with prostitutes, low self-esteem, DNA tests for baby mothers (who are clearly imagined to be untrustworthy), and “bitch ass niggas,” code for equally unreliable and “trifling” male compadres. The lifestyles, like the fast food, are not only preprepared and hazardous to one’s health but suggest cycles of entrapment that are hard to escape. The skit is followed by the song “Soul Food,” which uses food once more as a metaphor for a life-sustaining rather than a death-enticing ethos. K.R.I.T. states at one point in this song, “Some greens just can’t be cleaned and you can’t wash

out the taste / of rotten roots / salted looks and herbs if it ain't made with love then it ain't fit to serve, I heard."

On yet another register of K.R.I.T.-ical analysis, the simultaneously celebrated and critiqued notion of the "pimp" and the "ho" are squarely addressed in the lyrics of "Children of the World" from K.R.I.T.'s first album.

Yeah, cause we just (children of the world)
And they wonder why we bang
'Cause police do the same, that's the only rival gang

The song opens with the listener being reminded of the social and political hierarchies of K.R.I.T.'s world. The violence associated with so-called gang bangers is described as the other side of police warfare, also described as a gang, one presumably participating in legally sanctioned killing. K.R.I.T. proceeds from there to talk about the ways in which the education he received was not set up to solve the problems of those in his condition.

What good is a degree when there's no jobs to apply?
And fast food won't do 'cause you overqualified
I'm feeling like hustling
Tired of the food stamps and budgeting . . .
All else fails, I'm in a casket like fuck it then
Either get rich or die poor
Nigga fell short and got jammed up, but he tried though
I'm pretty sure my first words were "survival"
Looking for the answers to my problems in the Bible

Here, K.R.I.T.'s commentary on the dead-end nature of degrees without access to jobs that pay a living wage shapes the impulse to turn to the life of the streets and "hustle," risking death in places where a "Nigga fell short . . . but he tried though," calling to mind Dead Prez's critique of the public school system when they rap, "the schools ain't teaching us nothin' . . . / but how to be slaves and hard workers for white people / to build up they shit, make they businesses successful while it's exploitin' us."⁷¹ K.R.I.T. shifts from the dead-end economic options to a view of women, relationships, and what counts as success:

My past relationships got me like "What up, ho?"
I'm just bitter, I ain't asking what you fuck for
That's disrespectful, I admit
I was just saying, if you wonder why I call you "bitch"

'Cause we just (children of the world)
Guess I look up to the pimps
I'm not saying it wasn't wrong, but they had the freshest fits
The cars and the broads and the kicks
Is something to strive for when you ain't never had shit

The narrator's girl left and he was too broke to care; his previous relationships embittered him, predisposing him to the disrespecting utterances "bitch and ho" as a way of avenging his hurt. Furthermore, the pimps represented success; they were the ones with the money, the women, and the cars. It was "something to strive for when you ain't never had shit." K.R.I.T. continues:

I'm feeling like what the fuck,
They want my soul like my ancestors' ain't enough
If I can't trust my own government, who can I trust?
If I abuse myself daily, who can I love?

The social and political critique in K.R.I.T.'s "Children of the World" is substantial. Hints of references to the enslavement of Africans are made when he states, "They want my soul like my ancestors' ain't enough." The exploitation of the Black body for somebody else's profit is implied, while the personal and the political are linked with the notion of not being able to trust one's government. The contextualization of the relationship to women is further elucidated with the phrase "If I abuse myself daily, who can I love?" The absence of self-love as playing a role in the antagonisms between Black people, with that absence being exaggerated if not produced by social and political pressures outside, is an honest and significant observation. While the landscape is obviously more complicated than indicated here, and the question of personal accountability for one's choices and decisions doesn't leave the building, the honesty with which K.R.I.T. addresses some of these issues is not only useful in terms of understanding his utterance but further contextualizes these gendered politics in hip-hop as a whole.

CONCLUSION: TAKING A STAND

Hip-hop gives a late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century populace an understanding of the conditions being lived through by those who are the children of those born during the civil rights and Black Power movements and moments. Hip-hop explains the pain of the crack baby as well as the

decline and destruction of the Black family and community as drugs infiltrated them between the 1960s and the 1990s. Hip-hop is the cry of those who felt abandoned by a rapidly deteriorating public school system. It is the revenge fantasy of those who achieved some of the wealth associated with the American dream by unconventional means. It is the raw expression of uncensored Black female sexuality. It is the staccato boom of the vocal aesthetic associated with rapping and spoken-word poetry, one that gives voice to the rage of those who experienced firsthand the wrath of the dominant society's multipronged forces of oppression. The method and the vehicle of this epistemological expression have been the sound of the emcee, the scratching and mixing as well as the technological innovation of the DJ, the rebelliously artistic destruction of public property represented by graffiti, the art of breakdancing that evolved into other forms of dance, and the often forgotten fifth principle of hip-hop culture—knowledge of self. The commercialization of hip-hop validated its reach as an art form that could move the spirit of outsiders to the culture while also becoming a tool that could be exploited for corporate gain—enriching executives and advertising companies more than the individual artists themselves or the Black and Brown communities from which the culture and the artists emerged. In terms of scope, it has become an international phenomenon, with texts being published on East African, Korean, Palestinian, French, German, and Senegalese hip-hop.

Enslaved Africans from whatever contexts during the slave period frequently used the tools at their disposal as weapons of resistance. Whereas the Christian doctrine was imagined by both slaveholding and abolition-minded white people as a tool of submission or civilization and uplift, it was often used by the enslaved as a weapon to resist oppression, humanize themselves, and fight for freedom. This was true of both enslaved and free Black people. Michael Gomez gives substantial examples of how much aspects of Christianity were adapted to suit the Africanity of the enslaved rather than the other way around. These are examples of the internalization of power that I have referred to as afroindigenization. The descendants of these earlier generations used the tools at their disposal. In the case of hip-hop, the tools were beats, rhymes, the spoken word, and the turntable. They indigenized them in relation to their own cultural worldview, transforming them into internal power bases that could be used as experiential forms of “turning loose,” and in this sense, they created alternate registers to salvage their psyches from binary death.

If as Gomez's, Stuckey's, and Wynter's research demonstrates, the African background was more dominant than much of contemporary scholarship

emphasizes, then the present new world order is explained. Gomez's delineation of the two trajectories of African American identity (assimilation vs. Africana expressive freedom) lay a path for understanding how mainstream institutions of knowledge, in collaboration with a Black elite rejection of the African legacy, have shaped the historical perception of the enslaved Africans' (and their descendants') background by assuming it to be proportionately less than it was. Yet "Africa would *not* be denied. . . . The African gods were too pervasive, too tangled with the unconscious roots of our being. *They were the roots.*"⁷² The return of the African repressed shows up in the Black cultural formations of music, dance, spiritual resilience, language, style, food culture, and humor, with these grassroots modes of expression being ever-present without their dominance being publicly acknowledged; and even as they are exploited, they continue to *rize*. Yet since afroindigenization is the internalization of power that has been quietly handed down through a variety of registers and *marasa* consciousness represents the third principle coexistence of sameness and difference in a way that shifts the binary, then the interaction between the lyrics, use of voice, production, rhythm, rhyme schemes, and pathos of these artists is a *turn loose* manifestation of these two ways of making sense of lived reality. Esu Elegbara as the deity of duality lives in the breaks.

Daisy's being "struck" in *Rize* and Herald Loomis's moment of possession in *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* both represent communal crises, personified by individuals, that initially resolve themselves in oppositional ways. In *Rize* we see Daisy fully succumb to the "turn loose" power in a ritual space created by the Krumpers, one in which Dragon links the "spirit in the midst of Krumpness" to the realities of their lived experiences of oppression. Where this "spirit" comes from is left unspecified, even though Dragon suggests that Miss Prissy's Krumping will improve if she goes back to church while Baby Tight Eyez Krumps to the hymn "Lord Lift Me Up and Let Me Stand." Baby Tight Eyez's reference to "standing" and Daisy's submission to the spirit energy in the Krump space, which results in a form of symbolic "*Rize-ing*" or standing, are in contrast with Loomis's inability to "stand" at the end of act 1 in Wilson's play. "Standing" in all three contexts is symbolic of overcoming tribulation with and through embodied spiritual assistance. Loomis has conflated his pessimism about the existence of a Christian Holy Ghost with the nonexistence of spiritual power of any kind. Bynum, as the conjure man in the play, can be interpreted as trying to push Loomis *not to* throw the baby out with the proverbial bathwater.

VèVè Clark's notion of *marasa* consciousness gives us an embodied theoretical understanding of what makes transformation possible for Daisy, while

a form of binary stagnation continues to have a stranglehold on Loomis: “*Marasa* consciousness invites us to imagine beyond the binary.”⁷³ But doing so requires displacing conceptions of reality that are embedded in patterns of resistance. The move beyond both the binary and Manichean logic depends on the ethos of a third principle and the transformation associated with it, one requiring the functional poetics of the “turn loose” as an embodied form of “letting go.” The prerequisite is trusting the unknown and entering the ritual, rhetorical, or symbolic space in good faith without manipulation and hidden intent or fear and self-doubt. Here, Daisy represents the spirit of submission, while Loomis, in the Juba scene, is still fixed in a self-defeating resistant posture. In relation to notions of submerged consciousness as part of an afro-indigenizing impulse, *Rize* shows how young, disenfranchised Black people re-created and repurposed their own identities, drawing from what they had within themselves and using it as a strategy for offsetting the substantial history of being dishonored. *We used what we had inside ourselves and we drew from what we didn’t know was there.* Letting go of rationally rigid internal investments was central to releasing what was oppressive and submerged.

In the prologue to Saidiya Hartman’s *Lose Your Mother*, terms such as shame, melancholia, loss, forgotten, “the expendable and the defeated,” and “lives undone and obliterated” metaphorically pave the textual beginnings. She writes, “Alongside the terrible things one had survived was also the shame of having survived it.”⁷⁴ The title’s “mother loss” directive is open code for continental Africa and “her” relationship to the children of the Middle Passage and the Afrospora. Supporting the suggestiveness of the title is a photograph of Elmina castle, one of the preeminent slave dungeons on the coast of Ghana where many of the captured were interned before the grueling trip across the Atlantic to the Americas. As in her earlier text *Scenes of Subjection*, Hartman makes the dishonor associated with the enslaved Black subject palpable. Hers is a process of shedding light on both the Afrosporic disconnection from Africa and the objectification and annihilation of ancestry enacted by the Western enslavers: “The archive dictates what can be said about the past and the kinds of stories that can be told about the persons cataloged, embalmed, and sealed away in box files and folios. To read the archive is to enter a mortuary; it permits one final viewing and allows for a last glimpse of persons about to disappear into the slave hold.”⁷⁵ *Lose Your Mother* is another kind of attempt to give a type of honor to those who did not survive, those who did not make it across the ocean to the auction block, those who were not from royal lineage, those who were considered disposable by both “skin folk” and traders.

In a kind of “spiralist” continuum with Hartman’s ideological project, poet Maya Angelou, in a latter-day interview with Oprah Winfrey, shares how during moments of crises she envisions her ancestors standing before her. She perceives them as witnesses to her own life choices. At those moments, while thinking of these ancestors, she says to herself, “You are the reason I stood on the auction block.” She sees them as having survived the brutality and humiliation of the Middle Passage referenced by Hartman so that we, their descendants, could rise. Of the status thus bequeathed, Angelou observes, “Your crown has been paid for. Put it on your head and wear it.” The crown here represents a state of inner dignity achieved by the fashion in which suffering is overcome. And with this Afrosporic minted nobility, when facing new challenges Angelou adds, “I come as one, but I stand as ten thousand.”⁷⁶ Both Angelou’s and Hartman’s ponderings are like opposing ends of the *marasa trois*; one speaks of those who didn’t make it, while the other speaks of those who did. The “turn loose” hangs in the balance waiting for Clark’s “‘spiralist’ agenda” to activate and subsequently transform this existential contradiction—freeing those of us who are/were the proverbial shipmates and descendants of these twin legacies.

The notions of “shame” and “expendability” versus “standing” through the humiliation of the auction block, when jointly considered, exemplify the type of duality that Clark describes as “being danced into another realm of discourse” with “the tension between oppositions leading to another norm of creativity—to interaction or deconstruction as it were.”⁷⁷ Prior to the emergence of Hartman’s work, poet Elizabeth Alexander puts forth her conception of our Black interiority in her own collection, noting, “What unites these essays is an idea, a metaphor . . . that is, black life and creativity behind the public face of stereotype and limited imagination. The black interior is a metaphysical space beyond the black public everyday toward power and wild imagination that black people ourselves know we possess but need to be reminded of.”⁷⁸ Caught betwixt and between the birthrights described by Hartman and Angelou, Alexander’s notion of “the black interior” is representative of the submerged consciousness of the subjects of *Rize* as well as the other “norm of creativity” produced by the symbolic interaction between the dark and the light of the Afrosporic past. The Krumpers in *Rize* can be seen as manifesting the link between the discarded realities gestured toward in Hartman’s *Lose Your Mother* and the proverbial crowns of Angelou’s envisioning.

And in a final move, I turn to Audre Lorde, who in *Our Dead Behind Us* situates the narrator’s love affair with a South African woman warrior within

the context of the death of the woman's daughter because of state violence: "We were two Black women touching our flame / and we left our dead behind us / I hovered you rose the last ritual of healing."⁷⁹ In the poem, the narrator's compromised solidarity, one in which she can offer only material things (a plane ticket for her friend to visit a resort town) but cannot do what is most desired—"Someday you will come to *my* country / and we will fight side by side?"—stages the contradictions referenced here, yet again. The poem's title, "Sisters in Arms," puns on the dual notion of "arms" as both vessels of loving hugs and weapons of destruction. In concert with the imagery here, in the verse cited, fire, death, rising, and healing cohabit the poetic space. It is as if we have always had to coexist with or attempt to resolve irreconcilable contradictions. Deculturation and objectification made us hold more firmly to what was psycho-spiritually inside ourselves since the societally violent external world was orchestrating our demise. It stands to reason therefore that during the hardest of times, "the immanence within" will rize, reminding us that although we are collectively the descendants of the discarded, the traumatized, and the forgotten, we still came to these shores with our own notions of the sacred.⁸⁰

While the awareness of ritual practices from earlier generations may have been lost, the significance of the embodied elements of expressivity that have been handed down should not be underestimated. As the research of Stuckey and Gomez makes clear, the expressionism from one realm was transferred into other arenas in ways that still have a kind of functional power. Furthermore, the scholarly emphasis on the experiential aspects of spiritual reality in Afrospora religious spaces during the period of enslavement is important. The embodied, tactile aspects of our inherited sacred sensibilities have not left us, and it seems crucially linked to notions of "turning loose" and "letting go." The visceral ability to "turn loose" is paramount to the maintenance of internal psycho-spiritual sanity, when external control of one's environment is beyond reach. Such an ability is central to the artistic sensibility in the Afrospora. The impulses to "turn loose" and "let go" are yet another way to describe the submerged consciousness at stake for the subjects of *Rize*.

Becoming "the horse," if it is metaphorically understood to be a moment of willingly giving up one's rational consciousness and individualized sense of being in control, is representative of a radical form of internal freedom. The suggestion is then that holding on too tightly to the idea of something in a resistant way, rather than securing the energetic plane, reinforces binary polarization, making deconstruction and interaction unlikely. The afroindigenizing ability to "turn loose" and "let go," even if submerged, seems of

import in relation to society at large. Maybe dominant social and political structures can take a page from the grassroots in terms of reimagining solutions to various impasses. The gridlock in which we find ourselves in current moments may be as much a matter of the heart as it is of the head. If so, while formal tools of negotiation and concrete political resistance are obviously necessary, without a proverbial “turn loose” to transform binary stalemate, nothing will rize.

3

Iyá but Not Western Woman

A Grassroots Formulation of the Afrospora Feminine

America needs a homegirl intervention in the worst way.

—BRITTNEY COOPER

The term “gender” is a highly contested concept when applied to Africa. “Gender” has become the main focus of Western feminist discourse during the second wave of feminism. Like other systems of thought it has been exported to the South as a concept, an analytical tool and as a policy initiative. The domination of Western concepts and terminologies has become apparent in the term “gender.” It is well established in development circles of the United Nations which in turn influences the agenda and budget of national governments and academic research.

—FILOMINA CHIOMA STEADY, “AN INVESTIGATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR GENDER RESEARCH IN AFRICA IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM”

Denise Ferreira da Silva, drawing on Derridean deconstruction and Black feminist discourse, provocatively argues that the Black female subject’s “no-thingness” can symbolically and equationally “hack” the notion of the subject altogether. Drawing on famous statements by Sojourner Truth and Audre Lorde, Ferreira da Silva posits Black feminism as practicing a double refusal: a refusal to comply and a refusal to disappear.¹ She reads Black feminism through her concept of the “patriarch form”—the name she gives “to this figuring of authority as decision and determination. [I]t is the mode for the subject that judges, the Hegelian subject that recognizes and the scientific subject of knowledge that measures and classifies.”² Assessing symbolic aspects of Western patriarchy through the philosophical lens of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, noting how “integral [patriarchal signs are] to modern [Western] representation,” Ferreira da Silva maintains that “hacking/attacking the patriarch form” will expose how power functions. Relying on Hortense Spillers to situate her analysis of the symbolic function of Black womanhood within the patriarchal order, Ferreira da Silva draws her

argument to a close by declaring, “If she [the Black woman] is *nothing* by [this] I mean she is everything and anything.”³

Ferreira da Silva’s work is of value here in several ways. First, her notion of Black feminist discourse as refusing to either comply or disappear is another way of describing what in the Black US context is referred to as “attitude” or “sass” and in the Black Jamaican context as “she plenty-plenty” or “she ’nuff”—all of which are ways to characterize what is perceived of as “excessive” Black female behavior.⁴ This refusal to either comply or disappear is also characteristic of a Black female rebellious response to the oppression of everyday life in the “free market” and the “free zone.”⁵ As Brittney Cooper states, “When it comes to Black women, sometimes Americans don’t recognize that sass is simply a more palatable form of rage. . . . I am fat, Black and Southern. But this is not a sassy Black girl’s tale. Black women turn to sass when rage is too risky—because we have jobs to keep, families to feed and bills to pay.”⁶ Second, with the idea of “hacking the subject,” Ferreira da Silva afroindigenizes Derridean deconstruction; her “hacking” is a Black female theoretical performance of a kind of insurgent “sass.” I also choose to place her notion of the double refusal to comply and disappear within a *marasa* conceptual framework. *Marasa* here, as before in this book, refers to the coexistence of sameness and difference and/or the reconciling of contradictory energies. Third, the Afrospora feminine, explored in this chapter, includes the rebellious Black female insurgency, previously referenced, while also extending and elaborating on Ferreira da Silva’s notions of Black women’s symbolic resistance. In other words, *why* have Black women (as discursively represented) refused to comply or disappear? And *where* has that ability come from since oppression in and of itself does not give one the tools to push back? My answer is that the Lockean and Hobbesian world order that lays the foundation for “the patriarch form” explains the negation but not the energetic interior. For this information, we need to look elsewhere.

Drawing on the work of various continental and Afrospora scholars, this chapter is an initial attempt to speculate about the sources of resistant power, coded as both Black and female, by using culturally specific epistemological schema as a vehicle. In concert with Ferreira da Silva’s framework, I argue that Black women in the Afrospora simultaneously function as “Super Woman” and “The Not Woman That Is,” and I maintain that these truths appear contradictory because the Western frame does not have the syllabic intelligence to make sense of her/us. I introduce a third triangulating *marasa* frame to this conversation, “The Shifting Ground of the Afrospora Feminine,” which demonstrates how, in functional even if subconscious ways, Black female

gendered spaces in the diaspora have afroindigenized both European and continental African female gendered modes of behavior. This chapter will therefore interrogate the “Super” as a way of situating the “Not Woman That Is,” ending with a formulation of “The Shifting Ground.” En route to doing so, comparative constructions of motherhood and power both in West Africa and in the Afrospora, perceptions of the Black female body at “work,” and inverted cultural understandings of female gender roles will be explored. But I turn now to the largest category in this frame—the realm of continental West African motherhood.

SUPER WOMAN (FOR REAL)

Distance from the African continent did not signal a break with the long meta-tradition of mothering in Africa with its matricentric consciousness and social ethics. Rather, Africa’s “matri-archive” diffused that heritage throughout the Americas and the Caribbean.

—Dianne Stewart, *Obeah, Orisa, and Religious Identity in Trinidad*

To explore the question of motherhood as it relates to constructions of the feminine in the Afrospora, I will not start with slavery or Europe but instead with continental compositions of the category. The work of Ifi Amadiume, Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí, Emmanuel Akyeampong, and Pashington Obeng, respectively, addresses conceptions of matriarchy in continental West Africa. This includes the notion of òyá and matripotency among the Yorùbá, the matricentric tripartite of mother/daughter/son among the Igbo, and the concept of the Queen Mother and matrilineal power among the Asante. Additionally, in the work of Oyèwùmí, I briefly examine Yorùbá impressions of witches, witchcraft, and negative power in terms of their links to the feminine. What emerges in kaleidoscopic fashion are notions of female dynamism that are exponentially more elaborate and efficacious than either modern-day or historical understandings of the terms *mother* and *woman* that emerge from Western Europe. There are three crucial points that surface as central to my exploration of specific West African constructions of female identity:

- 1 Continental West and Central African institutions of motherhood have no Western equivalent.
- 2 Western patriarchy emerges from cultural conditions distinctly different from those in continental Africa.
- 3 As a result of the first two things, the logic of gender in West and Central Africa is a nontransparent discourse when engaged through Western sensibilities.

The writings of Nigerian scholar Ifi Amadiume have made a respectful contribution to the insightful scholarship on African women, work that I maintain has significant relevance for the Afrospace.⁷ In her work theorizing matriarchy in Africa, Amadiume's stated goals are twofold: to address "matriarchy, not as a totalitarian system . . . but as a structural system in juxtaposition with another . . . in a social structure." She also "throw[s] into doubt certain established Eurocentric certainties about the origins and social character of kinship."⁸ While there is a grudging recognition on the part of earlier European scholars that the mother giving birth to a child would naturally result in maternal rights preceding the development of agnation—descent traced through the father—attention to any kind of maternal rights is usually followed by the pejorative assumption that paternal rights inaugurated the beginning of evolved "culture" and "civilization" and represented a logical epitome. Drawing on Adam Kuper's summary of nineteenth-century European theorists of kinship, Amadiume effectively demonstrates that Henry Maine's Indo-European-derived patriarchal theory (known as the German model) and the alliance theory that emerged from the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss collectively came to represent a kind of evolutionary and universal truth, one in which Western societies implicitly represented the epitome of civilization and progress.⁹ However, since West African systems—with their matricentric collectivist focus via property rights, lineage, clan structure, and the production of children—were neither significantly included nor substantially understood, what was essentially a Euro-civilization-specific (German/alliance theory) model comes to represent universal truths, thus making other histories and herstories invisible and purportedly fictional.

As a counterbalance, Amadiume cites the interventionist theories of Cheikh Anta Diop, the useful scholarship of Friedrich Engels, and the work of anthropologist Wendy James as well as some of her own earlier research to argue that the "alliance theory" and the "German model" both lay the foundation for an evolutionary understanding of matriarchal societies as both *primitive* and *previous* to industrially advanced Western patriarchy. Amadiume maintains that continental African matriarchal and matrilineal cultures, instead of being earlier, lesser evolved versions of Western patriarchy, are in fact foundational to many continental African societies, and over time rather than disappearing completely, as Engels suggests happens in Europe, these dual matriarchal and patriarchal systems continue to coexist in differing ways in various continental African places and spaces. Her reference to the structure of the Nnobi village among the Igbo of Nigeria is particularly compelling.¹⁰

Amadiume explains, “In contrast to African socio-political systems, even under colonial pressures of change, in Indo-European societies there was an absence of a *matrius* opposite a *patrius* in the juridical role. This to me explains the source of the Patriarchal Theory.”¹¹ At the heart of her argument is the suggestion that matriarchal power was not visible to European anthropologists because they were looking for it, if it existed, to present itself as “total rule” and dominance. Furthermore, given the structure of their own societies, their eyes could not “see” and their senses could not interpret what did not exist in their own cultural and national situations. What is essentially being stated is that a Western patriarchal, societal model, based on the presumed absence of equivalent matriarchal or feminine capability, was universalized while making it seem as if this “lack” of balanced gendered power was globally ubiquitous and was a form of progress and development. In fact, the patriarchal theory was instead a European-civilization-specific circumstantial reality, one in which the societal focus came to rest entirely on male lines of descent, the rise of individualism, private property, women as objects of exchange, the nuclear family, and a universalizing of the incest taboo.¹²

Amadiume then summarizes and juxtaposes Diop’s ideological critique of Western patriarchy with Engels’s materialist one. She suggests that despite their differences, both theorists arrive at a similar conclusion—this being the eclipse of any semblance of female power in Europe. With Engels, what is highlighted are the ways in which patriarchy and capitalism unite to objectify the feminine and subsume a previous order in which women had more power. In the process, “industrial production” becomes the “valued public and power domain” while “labor in the family was considered domestic,” “valueless,” and “private.” Engels’s descriptions about the relationship between the feminine and the public and private domains laid the foundation for European feminists to argue that the “universal subordination of women” was directly related “to her domestic role.”¹³ For Diop, on the other hand, “the Aryan Greek and Roman cultures of Europe” are characterized as “idealizing the patriarchal family, war, violence, crime and conquests [as well as] guilt, original sin, pessimism and individualism.”¹⁴ By contrast, Amadiume suggests that matrilineal culture implies a matriarchal reality, one that is characterized by:

- lineage traced through the mother
- the matriarchal tripartite (or matricentric unit) of mother-daughter-son operating as “an autonomous production unit,” and as such it would necessarily shape rules, regulations, and the ideology of the society at large

- rituals related to fertility, birth, and the rearing of children as resting within the domain of female power
- land and agricultural production as exclusively organized through the matricentric unit

Amadiume seeks to embrace a kind of kaleidoscopic complexity in terms of how she both explains complex clanic structures, misunderstood in the West, while also imagining other ways to interpret bodies of data. Amadiume further notes that within a matricentric structure, one that sometimes included “the widely practiced woman-to-woman marriage,” incest taboo, or no incest taboo, children came from “daughters/sisters remaining at home.” In some instances, men provided “agricultural labor” in exchange for “sexual access to a woman’s daughters.” But even in this instance, Amadiume states that “children would still come from daughters/sisters who remained with their mothers.” In each of these contexts, she maintains, “neither exchange nor ownership need take place” and the “matricentric structure” did not “need to be dismantled for the purpose of reproduction.”¹⁵ In other words, the patriarchal nuclear family as we’ve come to know it within the context of Western modernity was neither necessary for the production of African children, which is obvious, nor was it a prerequisite for the development of African clans/societies/governments—which is less obvious in our current moment.

Amadiume is clearly suggesting that where there is matriliney there is matriarchy. However, if matriarchy is defined as some type of “total female rule” as opposed to different male and female coexisting cohesive systems, then it will remain invisible to the Western eye. Drawing on the work of Wendy James, she highlights James’s uses of the term *matrifocality*, which James defines as “an indigenous view of the moral primacy of biological motherhood in the definition of social relations.” Amadiume is critical of the fact that James sees this as a “moral” construct and not an ideological and production-oriented societal institution. Amadiume states that James cannot see that matrifocality “is a cultural construct even if the metaphor used derives from the female reproductive role.” If taken seriously as a *cultural construct*, it not only “throw[s] into question the derogatory dismissal of [maternally linked] ideas by second wave European feminists” who viewed the literal link to reproduction as “essentialist and limiting to women’s choices,” but if it is recognized as a *cultural construct* the ideological message suggesting “a collectivism of love, nurturance and protection derived from womb symbolism” becomes not a moral metaphor but a suggestive foundation for a just society. James, however, does

make the key observation that “patrilineages are artificial constructs built up from the fragments of many natural matrilinees.”¹⁶

The Westerner has no real way of comprehending the matricentric unit—a mother-daughter-son configuration working collectively and strategically not just to get tasks done but to organize and sustain ongoing production necessary for the flourishing of the population. Such a production structure would necessarily incorporate relationships between the material and spiritual worlds. Amadiume sees the root flaw, in terms of Western understanding, as a very narrow definition of reproduction coming from Europe, in a perception that women and marriage are “mechanism[s] of physical and social reproduction [for] the group. Woman in this formulation starts off as an object in a patriarchal exchange. . . . She is not seen in her autonomous status as mother.” Thus, as an object of exchange, she does not have the freedom to govern herself and control her own affairs.¹⁷ What is also suggested by Amadiume, although not explicitly stated, is a very different conceptual understanding of marriage itself. One of the things made clear by her work and the work of other scholars with regard to continental notions of motherhood is it being an institution that increases the power of the woman, even in African patriarchal societies. In the West, even in a contemporary moment, it is deceptively the opposite. Women’s power and influence in the public domain are modeled on male power and are in direct contradiction to the still private domain of being mothers. Professional women *still have to choose* where they will place their energies. Many describe the guilt associated with deprioritizing childcare in order to maintain employment or advance their careers. There is no better indication of the patriarchal difference between the societies described by Amadiume and those in the West than the grudging concessions or the total lack thereof that are granted to mothers, children, and parents for childcare in the Western professional world. The challenges facing professional women balancing parenthood, childcare, and work have intensified in the masculine, patriarchal, technological age rather than decreased. On the other hand, Amadiume’s description of life among the Nnobi is a world apart from anything that is familiar in the global, cosmopolitan world order.

Is it possible that this is a more progressive model of civilization than the current order? If the land is usufruct (i.e., collectively farmed even if it customarily belongs to a particular family) and all can partake as needed, and if exchange and ownership of a *wife or partner* are not presumed or required, then can we draw on the antecedents of these models to imagine a way out of current colonial patriarchal downward spirals and anthropocenic decay?

The question precedes the answer. Amadiume's work is both a sophisticated critique of colonial patriarchy as both civilizational destiny and ultimate progress as well as grounds for reinterpreting misunderstood African continental matricentric data. I turn now to case studies emerging from the Asante and the Yorùbá, to color and give three-dimensionality to these queries regarding motherhood on the continent.

Amadiume's work nicely establishes a framework for shifting to the ideas of Emmanuel Akyeampong and Pashington Obeng with regard to matriarchal structures within Asante society historically, ideas that extend the argument that African institutions of motherhood have no Western equivalent.¹⁸ In an essay originally presented at a 1995 Walter Rodney conference in Boston, Akyeampong and Obeng speculate about the structure of Asante society over time, with primary emphasis on overt and hidden manifestations of female power. Kumase was the name given to the Asante kingdom composed of a range of Akan groups who migrated and eventually merged in the forested region where the empire took root. Of significance is the way the society had many of the matriarchal features described by Amadiume. Matriarchal power was evidenced in a variety of ways, primarily in the societal role of Queen Mother, which was a key political position. In the public imagination, it was in fact a function, senior to the state's chief. The Queen Mother was also often described as "a co-ruler with the king in all state affairs." A king's failure could be blamed on the lack of a queen mother's good counsel.¹⁹

A key Asante proverb sets the groundwork for an understanding of this matricentric societal design, particularly as it relates to the symbolic power of the mother: "Obaa na owoo ohene" (It is the woman who gave birth to the king). The importance of motherhood as the implied source of societal wealth is thus emphasized. Further solidifying the empire's matrilineal function is an additional proverb, "If the wives of the sons are faithless, the blood of the family is entirely lost in the offspring, but should the daughters deceive their husbands, it is preserved." This second proverb suggests that lineage is preserved by women who have daughters who also in turn become mothers. Thus, an Asante daughter cheating on her husband may be immoral but does not prevent the continuation of the lineage. An Asante son's wife's infidelity, however (as someone who has married into the family), means that the lineage was not transferred as her husband may have thought. While Akyeampong and Obeng emphasize the greater complexity linked to lineage than these proverbs suggest, for purposes of this analysis, they emphasize the degree of esteem and implied power aligned with the feminine in this cultural frame of reference. Akyeampong and Obeng elaborate, "The viability of

an Asante village was established by 'a core of women . . . who have children there, and whose daughters there give birth to other daughters who will continue the matrilineage.'²⁰ This statement is almost a direct parallel to Amadiume's statement that in the matricentric societal structure in which women were neither exchanged nor owned, "children would . . . come from daughters/sisters who remained with their mothers."

Akyeampong and Obeng move on to address how the spiritual aspects of female power are further emphasized by the society's views surrounding women of menstruating age and the potency of menstrual blood itself. They explain that premenopausal women, although restricted from certain areas and roles in society, were ironically still central to successful warfare and played a spiritual role. "If Onyame (the Supreme Being) had granted women the capacity to bear life, that same gift made them the best defenders of life. And this was probably the origins of mmomomme, that distinctly female form of spiritual warfare. When Asante troops were at war, Asante women in the villages would perform daily ritual chants until troops returned, processing in partial nudity from one end of the village to the other. This ritual protected the soldiers at war."²¹

Additionally, menstrual blood itself is accepted as sitting on the fence between something that can contaminate or neutralize power while also being spiritually efficacious. Akyeampong and Obeng note, "Childbearing women were circumscribed with menstrual taboos involving Asante gods, which ensured military victories. . . . The presence of menstrual women contaminated these shrines. But menstrual blood was also spiritually powerful because it was fertility fluid. In fact, the greatest Asante shrine, the Golden Stool, was periodically contaminated with menstrual blood to sharpen its power."²² The choice of the word *contaminate* may be imprecise here. While it effectively suggests that menstrual blood is unhygienic in the wrong context—something that would make sense to the Western psyche—the idea that it is also seen as a source of sacred power is at odds with the notion of contamination per se. A better description may be "dangerously potent" since this more accurately captures the suggestion that the menstrual blood has the power to both enhance the capacity of the Golden Stool shrine and serve as the "fertility fluid" necessary for the creation of life. On the other hand, it was still a force that could neutralize the power of the Asante gods.²³ After passing the age of menstruation, in some instances elder female power transitioned away from functions specific to the feminine. Elder women, so endowed, would accede to a kind of masculine social power that included performing in ways traditionally associated with male behavior, such as cutting their hair short,

wearing male stylized clothes, drinking alcohol, and pouring libation. The Queen Mother was often a senior woman who was postmenopausal.²⁴

Akyeampong and Obeng's work provides entry into the Yorùbá world described by Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí. The idea that continental West and Central African institutions of motherhood have no Western equivalent is most dramatically brought to fruition in Oyěwùmí's recent work.²⁵ In *What Gender Is Motherhood*, Oyěwùmí quotes from the *Oseetura*, a series of Yorùbá sacred verses highlighting the significance of the deity Òsun.

We give knowledge to the female, our Ìyá who incarnate knowledge
We call Osun Knowledge, our Ìyá who incarnate knowledge
Let us submit to Ìyá
It is Ìyá who gave birth to us
Before we became human beings
Let us submit to Ìyá
The Female gave birth to the sovereign
Before the sovereign became a God.²⁶

The final lines of the poetic description, "The Female gave birth to the sovereign / Before the sovereign became a God," bear a stunning similarity to the Asante proverb "It is the woman who gave birth to the king." The *Oseetura* is treated by some as the seventeenth *odù* of the Ifá corpus. *Odùs*, simply put, are poetic chants with accompanying handed-down oral stories that are foundational to Ifá divination. The chants poetically describe historical situations that the knowledgeable diviner draws upon to assist the client. Engaging *odù* implicitly implies engaging multiple senses. Considered the central body of sacred knowledge within Yorùbá traditions of divination, the *odùs* are central to the spiritual and cultural principles in Yorùbá society. Oyěwùmí uses interpretations of the *Oseetura* as a point of departure for analyzing the genealogy of Western gender bias as it has been introduced over time by varying scholarly approaches to the Ifá corpus. In the book's second chapter, "(Re)casting the Yorùbá World," Oyěwùmí analyzes two varying interpretations of the *Oseetura*: by art historian Rowland Abiodun and comparative religion scholar David Ogungbile.²⁷ Oyěwùmí insists that assumptions of Western gendered meaning are introduced in different ways by both scholars in terms of how they translate, use, and deploy the categories "man" and "woman" in their interpretations of the *Oseetura*.

Oyěwùmí persuasively maintains that the deity Òsun, within the context of the *Oseetura*, does not emerge from a system in which gender as we understand it in the West is king. The term *gender* itself, while used in academic

discourse to imply more neutrality than the categories “man” and “woman,” for Oyèwùmí still connotes a world in which male dominance and female subordination are the societal rule, and the changing of language has not eliminated this culturally inherent, implicit, hierarchical bias. In the Yorùbá frame of reference, on the other hand, Oyèwùmí declares that the Yorùbá divinity Òsun, rather than being representative of Western notions of “woman” as implicitly subordinate to male dominance or being a product of a society in which gender balance and complementarity are the norm, is in fact representative of “Ìyá,” which Oyèwùmí translates as “procreator” rather than simply “mother.” As such, from Oyèwùmí’s perspective, Òsun represents a “matripotent principle”—one that symbolically combines the power of divination, procreation, motherhood, and *asé* (power). Through Oyèwùmí’s interpretive lens, Òsun stands alone in many ways and has no male equivalent in terms of the nature and variety of her power.²⁸

In her book’s introduction, Oyèwùmí contextualizes the difference between this text and her earlier work *The Invention of Women* not just by arguing that the construct “woman” (in its Western valence) isn’t indigenous to the Yorùbá historically but by showing in her current study what exactly was displaced by the introduction of Western gender norms: “I name the exact nature of the shift as a move away from the indigenous seniority-based matripotent ethos to a male-dominant, gender-based one. In this study, I am concerned with the intersections of power, gender, history and knowledge making, and the role of intellectuals in the process.”²⁹ Supporting this thought, Oyèwùmí notes, “There is no question that scholarly interpretations of Oseetura clearly recognize Òsun as *Ìyá*, and correctly so . . . [since] . . . this identity is foundational to the God’s exercise of power and authority.”³⁰ Oyèwùmí suggests that *Ìyá* translates as procreator and is symbolically an anatomical female (which she abbreviates throughout as “anafemale”) but is *not* a woman; she is translating *woman* here to be a term implicitly burdened with Western-specific baggage of male dominance, female inferiority, and gendered hierarchy.

Oyèwùmí tells us the translation of *Ìyá* as mother can only be understood in a Western epistemological frame through the lens of gendered hierarchies in which woman/female equals anatomical body that is implicitly “subordinated,” “inferior,” “weak,” “powerless,” and “socially marginalized.”³¹ Oyèwùmí is not so much refusing what she calls the anafemale link to female reality in Yorùbá society as she is refusing the social-cultural baggage implicitly presumed to be connected to the anafemale body and identity in the West. There are some tricky seeming contradictions here that may be difficult for the Western-trained mind to both accept and understand. Òsun

is often imagined by Oyèwùmí and the Yorùbá tradition as female energy incarnate and is often visually represented in an anafemale body, but this divine energy is also understood to inhabit both human anafemales and anamales who are spiritually initiated to the Òsun priestly order. According to Oyèwùmí, the term *Ìyá* exists beyond the Western notion of mother as a vessel that carries the child, or mother as nurturer. I summarize here five of the characteristics linked to *Ìyá* in her text.

- 1 The role of *Ìyá* crosses planes—it is part of the realm of the unborn, the living, and the dead.
- 2 *Ìyá* is central to the creation and recitation of Oriki—which are praise names that reinforce lineage, purpose, and connectedness to a larger destiny.
- 3 The term *Ìyá* has no male equivalent.
- 4 There are several commonly used names that support the power of *Ìyá* within Yorùbá culture and society.
- 5 *Ìyá* conceptually is seen as part of an art-creating process, one in which children are the ultimate form of societal beauty.³²

In the final section of the third chapter, on matripotency, Oyèwùmí has a section subtitled “*Ìyàmi: Misrecognition, Demonization and Modernity.*” Here, Oyèwùmí specifically explores the distortions, misinterpretations, and confections of the term *àjé* with female gender identity as well as with witches, witchcraft, and negativity in ways that implicitly disparage, demean, and vilify the feminine. She states, “The identity, role, and function of *àjé* in Ifá and Yorùbá society is at best poorly understood by many scholars who have written about it. At worst many analyses of *àjé* betray antifemale stances, and their writings express the dominance of Christian and European values held to heart by scholar-interpreters of the Yorùbá world.”³³

Oyèwùmí attributes the initial antifemale shift to the popularity of D. O. Fagunwa’s 1940s fiction. His writings widely influenced Yorùbá society but were filtered through his own evangelical Christian missionary influence, which in turn was supported by his 1916 entry into the establishment, St. Andrew’s in Oyo state, Nigeria, “an institution founded to produce evangelists who would spread Christianity.”³⁴ The implication is that Western Christianized gendered assumptions about women infiltrated Yorùbá-language texts, thus naturalizing these imported gendered understandings. An example of the Christian influence is demonstrated when Oyèwùmí further makes distinctions between Yorùbá names that have a Christian emphasis versus Yorùbá names that have more traditional spiritual inference. She notes, for

instance, D. O. Fagunwa changing his name from “Orowole,” which is a reference to traditional spirits that are part of the Yorùbá cosmos, to “Olorunfemi,” which can be translated in a Christian sense into “the God of the Bible loves me, or heaven loves me.”³⁵ The challenges began with Samuel Ajayi Crowther’s translation of the King James Bible into the Yorùbá language. The Yorùbá spiritual entities Olorun and Olodumare were translated as Almighty God, while the entity Esu was translated as the devil. The result of this in contemporary Yorùbá culture is the existence of two understandings of Olodumare, Olorun, and Esu. A Yorùbá Christian invocation of these deities is implicitly a reference to a Christian God and devil. For traditional practitioners of Yorùbá religion, the invoking of these entities signifies something else. While “Olorunfemi” translates as “the God of the Bible, or heaven loves me,” Fagunwa’s original name, “Orowole,” implicitly references “Oro,” a non-Christianized entity that is part of the Yorùbá pantheon.³⁶

Oyěwùmí draws from the significantly influential scholarship of Wande Abimbola to query how *ajé* comes to be conflated with witches, birds, and bloodsuckers, all of whom are gendered female.³⁷ His interpretations of certain *odùs* categorize the *ajé* as “female” and refer to them as *eníyán* (witch-human), *eleye* (witch that can transform into a bird), and *ajogun* (the negative supernatural forces that are purveyors of death, diseases, destruction, and loss in the Yorùbá corpus).³⁸ Oyěwùmí examines two interpretations of a particular *odù* by Abimbola—one that conflates humans and witches—with the crux of the conflict revolving around the word *eníyan*, which means humans when spelled and pronounced as *èniyàn* (with grave accents), and witches when spelled and pronounced as *eníyán* (with acute accents). Oyěwùmí takes issue with Abimbola’s interpretation of the verses he cites—arguing with her own rereading that what he assumes to be fundamental about the *ajé* as both implicitly female and implicitly wicked is a bias that is not inherent to the text but is introduced by his own analysis and translation of certain terms that were not gendered as specifically female in the original. Furthermore, she addresses the assumption of evil that is attached to the actions of the *ajé* in the sections of the quoted *odù*.³⁹ Other than reinterpreting the verses herself, Oyěwùmí explains that in “Yoruba traditions and social practices *ajé* encompasses both anamales and anafemales.” She further notes that Abimbola doesn’t reference any *odù* that “celebrate the beneficence of the *ajé* in Yorùbá culture.” On the other hand, she states, “As we know from Oseetura, Òsun, Iyanla, the primordial *Ìyá* is the iconic *ajé*: she is worshiped for her *ajé* powers, to give children to her devotees, and to provide the resources to nurture them. Òsun is the divine *ajé*.”⁴⁰

Oyèwùmí acknowledges that Abimbola is not alone; his interpretation and the understanding of *ajé* as more negative than positive is now deeply rooted in “contemporary popular discourse.” Oyèwùmí attributes this in part to the fact that “some of the *odù* were produced only after large numbers of Yorùbá had imbibed Christian and Islamic ideas demonizing indigenous religion and spiritual forces. Female personages bore the brunt of this because unlike in Òrìsà worship, the Abrahamic religions that have become the dominant religions among Yorùbá had little or no esteemed place for women, especially in leadership roles.”⁴¹ *Ajé* is not interchangeable with negative, dominant Western associations with the term *witch*. Oyèwùmí explains: “In interviews I conducted in Ogbomoso, one diviner told me that *ajé* is not a gender-specific term and *ajé* actually denotes a gifted person, a person of extraordinary talent and powers. The word *ajé* literally means one who is efficacious, the verb *jé* speaks to efficacy and the ability to be effective and make things happen.”⁴²

Oyèwùmí’s elaboration on the institution of Ìyá disrupts interpretations of gender that implicitly privilege male power, even modern assessments that change the appearance of imbalance by shifting language and roles and rearticulating male power as human power. Instead, she demonstrates the enormous and frequently benevolent institutionalized power associated conceptually, culturally, socially, and spiritually with the feminine in the Yorùbá context. Feminine power in the Yorùbá world reveals Western conceptions of the feminine are barely one-tenth of the continental equivalent. Furthermore, in all the scholarly elaborations by Amadiume, Akyeampong, Obeng, and Oyèwùmí, the discussions of matriarchy, matriliney, motherhood, and the feminine in Yorùbá, Asante, and Igbo societies are all undergirded by spiritual power. This shows up in a variety of ways, including the divinity Òsun and her link to matripotency, to the goddess Idemili venerated by the Nnobi according to Amadiume, to the literal spiritual power associated with menstrual blood among both the Asante and the Yorùbá, to the notion of Ìyá as both mother and procreator. The range of these examples is a critical departure from secular understandings of motherhood and the power of the feminine in the West. While Oyèwùmí’s text works hard to refuse a kind of gender truth as a foundational cultural narrative in Yorùbá society, the totalizing aspects of Western influences have restructured understandings of Yorùbá civilization in such a way that any attempt to comprehend the structure of feminine power may seem like a defensive reaction even if, in actuality, it is a restoration of knowledge. This is a useful place from which to shift to both Western and Afrospora views of Black women as the “not woman that is.”

THE NOT WOMAN THAT IS

Zora Neale Hurston once referred to Black women as “the mule of the world,” and with this phraseology she named the burden of “work” as an aspect of Black female reality endemic to both the African continent and the Afrospora. Whether being forced to work and not benefiting from her own labor or overseeing the matricentric production unit for the benefit of her family, in both the continent and the Afrospora, work and the Black female body are intricately intertwined. In self-described “rebel-instigator” Pauli Murray’s memoir *Song in a Weary Throat*, her description of her mother is instructive. “My mother, Agnes, who was my grandparents’ fifth child, was born on Christmas night in 1878 at the farm near Chapel Hill [North Carolina] that my grandmother had inherited from her aunt and former owner, Mary Ruffin Smith. Everyone loved ‘Aggie’ for her beauty and winsome ways. Like her sisters, she grew up learning to drive and ride horses, plow fields, sow and harvest crops, trade cows and pigs at market, pitch hay and toss bricks, as well as to cook, sew and keep a spotless house.”⁴³ Murray’s description of her mother shifts us to the space of the multiple pressures and expectations of Black women in the Afrospora, during the varying periods of emancipation that followed the close of the transatlantic slave trade. Haitian revolutionary independence occurred in 1804, followed by emancipation from slavery in the Dominican Republic in 1822, the British Caribbean in 1838, the United States in 1865, Puerto Rico in 1873, Cuba in 1886, and varying dates throughout Central and South America, with Brazil being one of the last countries to end slavery in the Americas in 1888. In all these spaces and places, Black women were central to both public and private societal production. Jamaican writer Erna Brodber, while speaking to me on one of my trips to her village of Woodside, described the Black womanhood that characterized her generation and social class when she remarked, “You had to be able to go from the piano to the floor.” That Black women had to move between and among a variety of roles and boundaries that would be less fluid for white women of middle- to upper-middle-class socialization was implied. On the other hand, the description that Murray gives of her mother growing up in the 1890s, closer to when my own grandmother was born in Jamaica, is more strictly work-centric. The wide variety of tasks represented are not only diverse but also cross the divide of public and private forms of labor. Additionally, as is shown by Murray’s mother, women’s work fell betwixt and between what conventionally functioned as male versus female forms of labor in the West.

On the opening track of Lil' Kim's 1996 debut album, *Hard Core*, the first song, "Big Momma Thang," openly refers to a range of sexual acts as activities that she "no longer fears" but rather participates in from a place of power and control rather than submission and intimidation.⁴⁴ Operating with full knowledge that for the young girl in the streets the hustle for survival often included prostitution, instead of shamefully avoiding explicitly sexual lyrics and scenarios or couching them within the context of a romance narrative, Kim chooses alternately "Big Mama" and "Gangsta Bitch" personas, ones in which her proverbial power and authority are sharp and aggressive while also portrayed as overwhelmingly desirable to men. Her lyrical and visual performances shift the power dynamic away from apology about inadequacy toward the aptitude for survival "by any means necessary" practiced by women at the bottom of the social ladder. As she says in the song "Custom Made" from her second album, *The Notorious K.I.M.*, "To all my bitches in the strip club, shaking they ass / I ain't mad do your thing mammy / get that cash."⁴⁵

In "Big Momma Thang," Lil' Kim unites the concept of "Big Mama" (often the eldest and most powerful matriarch in the Afrospora family) with the explicitly sexual power between the sheets. The artist's fictional world is a mirror of Black real life in which the most familiar female incarnation of power is maternal. Attacking the Black mother is universally a cause for fights as Stefflon Don reminds us in her track "16 Shots" when she states, "No gyal cyaan tell mi bought my madda!"⁴⁶ The Black mother's potency, as hip-hop activist Sister Souljah reminds, is often unquestioned: "In the projects, somebody can call your mother a one-legged whore who does nasty tricks for men for five dollars and she will still be the most important and influential person in your childhood."⁴⁷ It is a Big Mama thing. As West African scholar Filomina Chioma Steady notes, "The importance of motherhood and the valuation of the childbearing capacity of African women is probably the most fundamental difference between the African woman and her Western counterpart in their common struggle to end discrimination against women. For African women, the role of mother is often central and has intrinsic value."⁴⁸ While Steady's comments may seem like a basic observation if assessed alone, the significance increases when placed in the matripotent context that Amadiume, Oyèwùmí, and Akyeampong and Obeng attribute to continental African motherhood. Furthermore, as Dianne Stewart argues, "Distance from the African continent did not signal a break with the long meta-tradition of mothering in Africa with its matricentric consciousness and social ethics. Rather, Africa's 'matri-archive' diffused that heritage throughout the Americas and the Caribbean."⁴⁹

The figure of Big Mama in the *Afrospora* is a stark departure from notions of motherhood and femininity that dominate European and Euro-American hegemonic contexts. French poststructuralist Jacques Lacan centrally identifies “the phallus, the not all and God” as shaping the Western world order linguistically, with “woman” functioning as “absence” in ways that are extensions of the work of Sigmund Freud and the patriarchal order described by Henry Maine’s German model and Claude Lévi-Strauss’s alliance theory.⁵⁰ Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* represents not just the potential absence and degradation of women’s rights in a future society but the patriarchal order’s view of the feminine as inherently subordinate, inferior, weaker, and less valuable than the masculine. In Atwood’s world, the ability to bear and carry children, while necessary for the survival of the species, becomes a controlled and oppressive burden that any woman desirous of freedom would rather escape. In fact, the pejorative assumptions about the feminine as inferior are so deeply embedded in Western European philosophical traditions that to presume that a woman is reducible to “the biological function” of mothering and its female cousin, housework, is tantamount to insult, as the work of Betty Friedan and second wave feminists suggests. In this world, the biggest assault on the person of the professionally ambitious woman is to suggest that her destiny is to be “barefoot and pregnant.” Pregnancy is the sign of entrapment and limitation that stands in the way of forward professional advancement into the world of official power, a space that is coded as masculine. As Francesca Sawaya argues, the professional and the domestic become opposed to each other, even as they are necessarily interdependent realms.⁵¹ And as Amadiume notes about Western society (as previously mentioned), industrial production was the valued and public domain of power, while domestic labor in the family was domestic, private, and without value.⁵² These assumptions bespeak the pejorative place that women as mothers have been ontologically assigned in hegemonic, Western capitalist, patriarchal contexts, despite the romanticization of motherhood in the political world of the far right, as well as the genuine appreciation of mothers in the everyday lives of the majority worldwide.

Within second and third wave feminism, the question of the mother is a vexed one. The idea of maternity as a trap preventing “equality” and professional advancement coexists with historic calls by earlier activists like Selma James for housework to be seen as legitimate labor for which women should be paid and compensated by the state. But the Western, patriarchal state as described by both Western and African scholars, unlike many precolonial West and Central African villages and empires, was not set up on a model in which

“a *matrius* opposite a *patrius* [existed] in the juridical role.”⁵³ Motherhood and housewifery viewed from a materialist feminist perspective is a resource that has been exploited within the capitalist hierarchy, implicitly necessary but undervalued, even while capitalism’s survival is dependent on it. As Katrin Bennhold observes, “This is so despite the fact that from Norway to the United States, economists put the value of [women’s] unpaid work ahead of that of the manufacturing sector.”⁵⁴ The noblest value that has emerged historically within the context of Western capitalist societies is the notion of paying women within the household for their labor *rather than* reimagining and reconfiguring this order to be one in which the ability to mother or parent, biologically or culturally, restructures in a humane way how we understand labor, production, and our relationships to each other in the society at large.

While the United States stands out as the only industrialized country with no national maternity leave policy, significant subsidies exist in most of the industrialized world not just for maternity leave but also for childcare to assist when parents work outside the home. Despite this, however, the term *housewife* carries the burden in many Westernized countries of being either a frivolous, elite position supported by the breadwinner’s money or an unpaid and undervalued laborer, one that is often conflated with a sense of feminine inferiority that can only be erased by the total deconstruction of traditional Western gendered categories. In Norway, “the Housewives’ Association changed its name to the Women and Family Association as its membership plummeted to 5,000 from 60,000. ‘The reference to housewife was just too embarrassing,’ said the feminist economist Charlotte Koren of the Norwegian Institute of Social Research, a former member and mother of two.”⁵⁵ The chronic undervaluing of both motherhood and domestic labor in hegemonic contexts represents a deeply rooted metaphysical crisis surrounding the notion of the feminine. The contemporary Western-specific assumption of traditional gendered categories as having a socially constructed coherence that is both hierarchical and unnecessary, and which move toward a desirable fluidity only once it is unmoored from biological assumptions—carries with it the implication that gender and hierarchy function similarly across cultures. As the research of Oyěwùmí and Amadiume makes clear, these truths are not ubiquitous. With Western culture as the point of departure, progressive solutions are imagined in terms of destabilizing the binary coherence of the old order of language as a route to transforming thinking. However, far from being universal and transcultural, the assumptions linked to the feminine historically have markedly different manifestations in various civilizational contexts.

Sierra Leonean scholar and social anthropologist Filomina Steady observes, "It is customary for women in Africa to make an economic contribution to the family or household. Implicit in this self-reliant ideology is the reliance of others on women."⁵⁶ While it is an obvious fact that in all societies, not just African societies, there is necessarily a reliance on women, Steady's statement is meant to emphasize this reliance as an accepted feature in cross-continental African cultures, a feature that acknowledges interdependent gendered realities as the norm. This interdependent gendered reality is implicitly juxtaposed with more hegemonic patriarchal assumptions that women are simply dependent helpers in need of guidance and control. As Sheryl Sandberg writes about her mother, "Education for girls, however, was less important both financially, since they were unlikely to contribute to the family's income, and culturally, since boys were expected to study the Torah while girls were expected to run a proper home. . . . It was thought to be a sign of weakness if a husband needed his wife's help to support their family, so my mother became a stay-at-home parent and an active volunteer. The centuries-old division of labor stood."⁵⁷

In the continental African context, as Steady observes concerning African women's relationships to the communal and familial economy, rather than being about a mere "division of labor," women are instead foundational to the survival of the clan: "A United Nations Economic Commission for Africa study estimated that women comprise 60 to 80 percent of the labor force in African agriculture. . . . Traditionally, in Africa, both male and female labor was necessary in food production. Communal ownership of the means of production assures the woman a certain degree of control over her labor and some decision-making power relative to her labor input. The sexual division of labor was essentially along parallel rather than hierarchical lines, thereby giving, in general terms, equal value to male and female labor."⁵⁸ In Steady's postulation, as is supported by Amadiume, Akyeampong, and Obeng, work historically, in the African women's context (at periods earlier than colonial and "free market" moments), was a foundational aspect of their power, as opposed to being a tool that ensured their exploitation or inferiority. Steady's evidence about agricultural labor being classically done by women links their efficacy to them being primary food providers. She further notes that at times they withheld this food as a way of retaining control in certain situations.⁵⁹

By providing food that was a product of her labor, food that often came from land that she farmed and in some instances owned, the notion of African female capacity and influence linked to "work" destabilizes more

hegemonic notions pejoratively linking domestic labor implicitly to femaleness, dependency, and inferiority. In other words, the concept of the domestic, which as an adjective is defined as “the running of a home or to family relations” and as a noun refers to “a person who is paid to help with menial tasks such as cleaning,” appears to have limited applicability to the situation of African women in ancient, historical, precolonial, and even certain contemporary moments. As Amadiume reminds us, “in the African data, the matricentric unit is an autonomous production unit; it is also an ideological unit.”⁶⁰ Furthermore, the power of the woman as head of the market as represented by characters such as Iyaloja in the work of Wole Soyinka depicts this as frequently if not exclusively female.⁶¹ As it is in Soyinka’s play, in some instances in Nigerian and Jamaican everyday life, men risk ridicule by entering the space of the open-air market, a space that is often imagined to jeopardize their masculinity in some way. It has been said that no politician can win the Nigerian national election without the support of the woman who is head of the market. The point being made here is not to romanticize this gendered positionality, nor to support the exclusion of masculinity from this space, but rather to point out, yet again, that the assumption of the linkage of female gender to inferior societal positions of power is not universal in its logic.⁶² Therefore, a fair assessment of the cultural logic undergirding Afrospora notions of the feminine requires reflection on how constructions of “motherhood” and “work” have been implicitly influenced by continental paradigms even if not recognized or acknowledged by researchers and even the female actors themselves. The functional yet subconscious nature of inherited continental African gendered behavior as part of the Afrospora woman’s “psychic landscape” is the gendered manifestation of afroindigenization in action.⁶³

These differing constructions of “femaleness” and “work” lay the foundation for pondering not just the oppositional value associated with female labor in hegemonic versus continental African societies historically, they also open the door to considering how Afrospora models of femininity both overlap with and depart from this complex gendered landscape in ways that at first sight may appear insignificant. As Sojourner Truth is frequently cited as asserting in nineteenth-century America: “I have plowed, and planted, and gathered into barns and no man could head me—and aren’t I a woman? I can work as much and eat as much as a man (when I could get it) and bear de lash as well, and aren’t I a woman? I have borne thirteen children and seen ‘em mos’ all sold off into slavery, and when I cried out with a mother’s grief, none but Jesus heard—and aren’t I a woman?”⁶⁴ The work of Angela Davis and historian Jacqueline Jones, among others, suggests that Truth’s situation was the

norm rather than the mere exception. While Truth as an enslaved woman did not benefit from the fruits of her own labor, her labor, thus described as indistinguishable from a man's, suggests a "de-gendering" or "not woman-ing" according to both European and American female gendered categories of that day.⁶⁵ This taxing, agricultural labor that was primarily viewed as masculine work in the West, work that was seen as de-feminizing "the softer sex" who were ideally supposed to occupy the more genteel domestic domain, was in much of the continental African context considered a *normal and desirable aspect of femininity*. Yet as actress Lupita Nyong'o as Patsey in *12 Years a Slave* (dir. Steve McQueen) demonstrates, the Black woman's ability to successfully do hard physical work on the plantation, a highly prized trait that she brought from the continent, was a tremendously exploited commodity in the Americas. Truth's reference to bearing children while bearing the lash and working as hard as a man in the field fuses the physical laboring strength of the African woman with the "mule of the world" exploitation of her in the Afrospora.

The destabilization of elite and hegemonic Western notions of the feminine in favor of something akin to the continental reality is anticipated and theoretically addressed by Black women writers and scholars in the Afrospora. Audre Lorde, in the opening of *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, confesses in her prologue, "I have always wanted to be both man and woman, to incorporate *the strongest and richest* parts of my mother and father within/into me—to share valleys and mountains upon my body the way the earth does in hills and peaks."⁶⁶ In an interesting move, Lorde, who throughout her body of work embraces rather than rejects the category "woman," nevertheless destabilizes the narrow parameters of a hegemonic predominantly Western and genteel notion of the feminine, with her desire to claim for her female sense of self the strongest and richest parts of her mother and father. What is at stake here are struggles over what constitutes "the feminine" for Black women in the Afrospora.

Hard work as a desirable characteristic of the Black feminine is referenced by Toni Cade Bambara's description of Zora Neale Hurston. Bambara pays tribute to Hurston's drive, opining, "Now there was a woman who worked. Waitress, manicurist, librettist, lecturer, secretary/companion, producer, scenarist, domestic, novelist, drama coach, file clerk, storyteller, travelogist, playwright, cook. Fun loving and bodacious, Zora was not playing. *I mean to wrassle me up a future*, she said in the teeth of hard times, *or die trying*."⁶⁷ With this description of Hurston, Bambara captures her admiration for Hurston's resilience while also describing how Black women in capitalist economies

were historically underpaid and worked twice as hard with thrice as many official and unofficial jobs in order to economically survive while fulfilling a portion of their dreams for themselves and their families. Their continental “work ethic,” generationally handed down, has assisted in their survival and the survival of their households, but it has often come at the cost of the premature sacrifice of their bodies, as a result of the simultaneous exploitation of and undervaluing of their labor.⁶⁸

In her 1970 essay “On the Issue of Roles,” Bambara writes, “I have always . . . opposed the stereotypic definitions of ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine,’ not only because I thought it was a lot of merchandising nonsense, but rather because I always found the either/or implicit in those definitions antithetical to what I was all about.”⁶⁹ Anticipating twenty-first-century critiques of gender while suggesting that, in the interest of a common struggle for liberation, Black people abandon traditional gender roles in favor of whatever is practical, Bambara does not have as a goal that Black women simply seek power and position in the patriarchal world order of capitalist America. Rather, her refusal to submit to what she describes as the “stereotypic definitions of masculine and feminine” could easily be a description of the roles occupied by Truth and reflective of the female “de-gendering” by Western standards, alluded to by Davis. In other words, it is implicitly a hegemonic, predominantly Western and elite notion of the feminine that has no space for women who work physically as hard as men that is being critiqued. Rather than being a totalizing rejection of the notion of the feminine, however, this could be perceived of as an expansion of the category.

With regard to how Black women’s labor on the African continent has historically been perceived in Western contexts, the impact of colonialism and neocolonialism on the majority of African societies is cited by Steady as accounting for the shifts that give the appearance to the outsider that African women have been historically, universally, and continually oppressed by patriarchal authority in ways that modern researchers may assume to have always been true. Steady also suggests a relationship between modern starvation in Africa and the capitalist restructuring of labor according to the hierarchies of the West. Here, male and female labor was/is used to farm plantations that feed the empire rather than to farm the communal lands that sustain the family and the community.

Steady maintains that in Africa, patriarchal societies often had matrilineal structural aspects because “even in these societies there [was] often a paradox: male dominance on the one hand conflict[ed] with the structural significance of women as mothers on the other.”⁷⁰ As mentioned previously,

Steady, Amadiume, and Oyèwùmí view the substantial significance of the mother and her role in the material and ideological formations of various societies as the primary difference between the African and Western woman's fight against discrimination and oppression. Steady's research places the significance of "Big Mama" as well as the notion of the hardworking Black woman in the Afrospora in context, making these cultural practices seem like central aspects of Black femininity that are continental cultural orientations and dispositions rather than simply by-products of the destruction of the Black family under slavery and the forced emergence of female single-parent households.

Framing the intersectionality of work, land, and children as mapping the contours of the feminine in the cross-cultural continental African context, Steady maintains: "Women's roles as child-bearers and food-producers are often associated with fertility of the land, and this is implicit in much of the ritual. This life-giving quality endows women not only with much prestige but equates them with the life-giving force itself."⁷¹ In this notion of the feminine, women's labor, children, and the connection to the land ground matriarchal notions of power. Her reference to the spiritual link between Black women's labor and the fertility of the land is supported by Amadiume and Oyèwùmí's reference to the power associated with the Nnobi and Yorùbá deities Idemili and Òsun, respectively. Work here functions as a proud feature of the African feminine since it is the triangular link to children, land, and spirituality, which grants prestige to the woman both in the family and in the society. What is being charted here are not the contours of an ideal or perfect model but rather the dominant trends and patterns of female gender identity as it has been made manifest in precolonial Africa. Within the contemporary landscape, Steady argues that many African women still hold "effective power," which she juxtaposes with "formal power." Formal power is largely aligned with official political power and is a world that is dominated by African men. Yet it is rendered symbolic rather than functional, in many ways, since the seat of economic power, which controls politics, is often guarded by a wealthy elite or foreign and/or former colonial interests. In terms of the survival of the family on an everyday basis, the African woman's role continues to be central, essential, and an example of what Steady describes as "effective power."

African women's effective power can also be seen as having efficacy in the Afrospora in both Caribbean and African America spaces in which the Black woman's "hustle" is central to feeding the family. Even if she is on welfare, she is the *de facto* head of household, and the "burden" of making sure

the family survives is often primarily on her shoulders. While some women in these situations may have degrees of structural, financial, and emotional support from the “baby-fathers,” these men may frequently be unemployed or underemployed. Hence, the single Black mother is almost universally praised by her children for ensuring their success and survival, acts that pave the way to her own future status as “Big Mama.” The linking of “Big Mama” status to power in the Afrospora is further emphasized by Stewart’s concept of “motherness” in her analysis of the women who were spiritually powerful within the cultural and political context historically in Trinidad. Stewart emphasizes a focus “on *mothers* and *mothering* and, only by extension, on women and gender.” She “specifically identifies *motherness* as a tradition that simultaneously disrupts and qualifies black *otherness* in the modern world. That is, motherness is a mode of attending to black captives and reorienting their sense of becoming and belonging in the midst of captivity.”⁷²

Beyond work, there is yet another distinction between hegemonic and ancient African notions of the feminine. Within the context of the West African systems of knowledge emanating from the Yorùbá, the Ibo, the Asante, the Susu, the Dagara, and the Nsundi Koongo, among others, the dynamism of the woman as mother is deeply connected to a notion of feminine energy as powerful, cosmic, and primordial.⁷³ In myths, origin stories, and rituals that deal with creative power and the notion of the divine, the feminine is a central part of the cosmological worldview, one that is at odds with the masculine trinity of “the Father, Son and Holy Ghost.” As Lorde’s poetic “A Woman Speaks” gives voice:

I do not dwell
within my birth nor my divinities
who am ageless and half-grown
and still seeking
my sisters
witches in Dahomey
wear me inside their coiled cloths
as our mother did
mourning.

I have been woman
for a long time
beware my smile
I am treacherous with old magic
and the noon’s fury

with all your wide futures
promised
I am
woman
and not white.⁷⁴

Lorde, both in this poem and in *The Black Unicorn* collection, draws on West African spiritual traditions and mythology to establish a cosmic, vibrational frequency for understanding Black femininity as ancient rage and power incarnate. The potentiality of the womb, in this cosmic universe, far from being a mere biological organ or harness that enslaves “the handmaid” of Atwood’s imagination is linked instead to its function as symbolic vessel and portal to the spirit world. Both Sojourner Truth and Sister Souljah in various utterances link womb power to a divine source. Truth’s reported speech at the 1851 Women’s Rights Convention roars and rips patriarchal Christian assumptions apart when she thunders, “Whar did your Christ come from? From God and a woman. . . . Man, where is your part?”⁷⁵ Her thoughts connect Sister Souljah speaking 150 years later at Calvin Butts’s Abyssinian Baptist Church in New York in the 1990s, inveigling, “The oldest bones known to mankind are the bones of the African woman. We are the mothers of civilization, and we are the original cradle rockers. Which means that we put the maternalistic vibration [into] the entire universe. Because nothing is here that did not come through us.”⁷⁶

Adding to this Afrospora archive is poet Lucille Clifton’s depiction of her mother:

Mama moved among the days
like a dreamwalker in a field;
seemed like what she touched was hers
seemed like what touched her couldn’t hold,
she got us almost through the high grass
then seemed like she turned around and ran
right back in
right back on in.⁷⁷

Here, the portrait of the maternal figure suggests the contradictory pulls affecting the Black mother in the Afrospora. On one hand, “mama” has a power akin to that indicated by Lorde, Steady, and African mythology, one that is sourced by mystical and divine energy, “a dreamwalker” who can move through time and influence what surrounds her. On the other hand, “she got

us almost through the high grass” before running “right back on in” suggests being pulled back in or overtaken by energies or forces beyond her control. For the Black woman in the *Afrospora* who is the product of a lineage that survived the transatlantic slave trade, uneasy juxtapositions coexist.

Michelle Cliff ponders the legacy of her homeland of Jamaica in maternal terms: “I bear in mind that you with all your cruelties are the source of me, and like even the most angry mother draw me back.”⁷⁸ The island as mother-rage and potency functions here as an incarnation of cosmic Black female power in ways that call to mind Sister Souljah’s opening of her collection *No Disrespect*: “Even for children who grow to hate their mothers, their hatred will be the strongest love they know. In the projects, rather than right being right and wrong being wrong, momma is right and whatever she says is wrong is wrong. . . . But aren’t all mothers everywhere the central figure in the eyes of a child? Mostly the answer is yes. But for children in the projects the answer is even more so.”⁷⁹ Beginning by referencing the awe-inspiring power of the Black woman as mother in the eyes of her child, Sister Souljah captures the duality suggested by the depictions of Cliff and Clifton, mothers whose potency is uncontainable and seemingly sourced from another world. Adding to both the real and the fictional repertoire, we meet Sapphira Wade. She is the enslaved foremother of the characters in Gloria Naylor’s island community of Willow Springs. The main character, Mama Day, is a true proverbial “Big Mama” with mystical powers inherited from her great-grandmother Sapphira, a slave woman shaping the destiny of her heirs in life and death.

Willow springs. Everybody knows but nobody talks about the legend of Sapphira Wade. A true conjure woman: satin black, biscuit cream, red as Georgia clay: depending upon which of us takes a mind to her. She could walk through a lightning storm without being touched; grab a bolt of lightning in the palm of her hand; use the heat of lightning to start the kindling going under her medicine pot: depending upon which of us takes a mind to her. She turned the moon into salve, the stars into swaddling cloth, and healed the wounds of every creature walking up on two or down on four. It ain’t about right or wrong, truth or lies; it’s about a slave woman who brought a whole new meaning to both them words.⁸⁰

Here again, the mother is represented as a near divinity who doesn’t answer to worldly notions of right and wrong. Even in slavery, the conjure woman Sapphira Wade is imagined as having powers akin to those alluded to in the West African cosmological world of Lorde’s poetry. These poetic and literary

representations by Afrospora writers, influenced in part by stories passed down orally, support the notion that the Black woman in the Afrospora was heir to constructions of womanhood that were as far as imaginably possible from the image of the damsel in distress. And these mothers dominate the fiction as they do real life.

In Paule Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, Barbadian daughter Selina only ever refers to her mama as "the mother." Her languaging not only suggests a formal mother/daughter relationship but alludes to the power and authority of the maternal figure. "The mother was the only one who had not succumbed to the day's torpor. . . . The mother was silent and Selina made the tea and brought it to the table."⁸¹ Antiguan writer Jamaica Kincaid's famous short story "Girl" is one long sentence that is a series of commands from a mother to a daughter about how to comport herself in various situations. Here the mother's voice overwhelms the narrative, with the daughter timidly intervening only twice. Even Lorde's description of her own mother in *Zami* highlights her potency: "What else did Linda know? She knew how to look into people's faces and tell what they were going to do before they did it. . . . She knew how to prevent infection in an open cut or wound."⁸² Here again the mother's abilities are described as extending beyond the ordinary. Yet with all the mothers mentioned, the common trope is power.

These depictions and representations are deeply striking in light of the destructive realities of the transatlantic slave trade. Spillers's celebrated essay "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book" accentuates yet again the centrality of the mother and her capacity in the African diaspora. The essay's title takes seriously a vernacular phrase with a long history. Here again, the maternal claim on parental rights is in the foreground and implicitly dominates. Spillers's essay goes a piece of the way in terms of depicting the range of feminine types characterizing the contours of an "Afrospora feminine" while laying a foundation for understanding the nature of the violence that our foremothers traveled through: "Let's face it. I am a marked woman, but not everybody knows my name. 'Peaches' and 'Brown Sugar,' 'Sapphire' and 'Earth Mother,' 'Auntie,' 'Granny,' God's 'Holy Fool,' and 'Miss Ebony First,' or 'Black Woman at the Podium': I describe a locus of confounded identities, a meeting ground of investments and privations in the national treasury of rhetorical wealth. My country needs me, and if I were not here, I would have to be invented."⁸³ At least three of the markings Spillers identifies, "Earth Mother," "Granny," and "Auntie," have maternal connotations, while at least one, "Brown Sugar," alludes to sexual pleasure. God's "Holy Fool," "Sapphire," and "Black Woman at the Podium" suggest, respectively, a devout

spiritualist, a dominating and possibly mean-spirited woman, and someone with respected authority. Thus, the confounded nexus of Afrospora feminine identities includes the maternal, the spiritual, the sexual, the exploited, and the overworked as well as the demanding and the authoritative. Yet in the antebellum world of the United States and beyond, in which the Black “female” was implicitly denied access to the category “woman” and was categorized as “breeder” and not mother, the survival or reemergence of mothering skills seems to be part of what Spillers describes as a “will to survive that startles the imagination even now.”⁸⁴

Using, as a point of departure, Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s stunning 1965 report that laid at the feet of Black women the blame for the seeming dysfunctionality of Black men within the context of white patriarchy (the Sapphire-like “ball breaker” and castrating female who yells, demands, chops, and crushes), Spillers addresses how the “white” and “Negro family” in Moynihan’s report are “actants . . . generated with neither past nor future, as tribal currents moving out of time” without slavery as a referent. She paraphrases and samples Moynihan thus: “Moynihan’s ‘tangle of pathology’ provides the descriptive strategy for the work’s fourth chapter, which suggests that ‘underachievement’ in black males of the lower classes is primarily the fault of black females, who achieve out of all proportion, both to their numbers in the community and to the paradigmatic example before the nation: ‘Ours is a society which presumes male leadership in private and public affairs. . . . A sub-culture, such as that of the Negro American, in which this is not the pattern, is placed at a distinct disadvantage.’”⁸⁵ Spillers manages to unearth a set of oppressive paradigms that we are still trying to dig ourselves out from under. Not only is Black female cultural resilience demonized, but the dominant society’s complicity in the traumatic past of slavery can never be publicly acknowledged. Thus, what would in a fair world be a miraculous set of Black female survival traits worthy of study are characterized instead as “lack” and dismissed or ignored whenever they don’t fit into dominant gender paradigms. Worse yet, these characteristics and traits are imagined to be deficits that have disadvantaged Black men and implicitly the Black familial order as a whole. This is a substantial inversion of the universe described by Amadiume.

Delving into the slave past to further situate Moynihan’s hypocrisy, Spillers, citing segments of Gomes Eannes De Azurara’s fifteenth-century Portuguese encounters along the West African coast, asserts that by the period of his writing, the notions of “pagan” and “ugly” as well as “faithless” and “ugly” are already conflated with Blackness. Once the transatlantic trade is in full effect, the distinction that Spillers makes between the “body” and “flesh” helps

lay bare the degree of misrepresentation and objectification that is waiting in the wings for the enslaved at the hands of those with the power to both materially exploit as well as *categorize and classify* the slave's condition. Here, the "body" represents "the human" as understood within Western discourse—a subject endowed with a humanity worthy of respect. What she describes as "high crimes against the *flesh*" refers to "the person of African females and African males [who] registered the wounding," which entailed "seared, divided, ripped-apartness, riveted to the ship's hole, fallen, or escaped overboard."⁸⁶ Contrary to Haile Gerima's filmic elevation of the spirit of the enslaved African, "Spirit of the dead rise up! Come out, you African spirits and claim your story," Spillers exposes "William Goodell's contemporaneous study of North American slave codes [as] giv[ing] precise expression to the tortures and instruments of captivity."⁸⁷ Goodell describes a whip "used with such dexterity and severity as not only to lacerate the skin, but to tear out small portions of the flesh at almost every stake."⁸⁸

Spillers notes that "the anatomical specifications of rupture, of altered tissue, take on the objective description of laboratory prose—eyes beaten out, arms back, skulls branded, a left jaw, a right ankle punctured; teeth missing, as the calculated work of iron, whips, chains, knives, the canine patrol, the bullet."⁸⁹ But what is essentially her point is that these are not acts that are attributed to the human will of torturers. This disembodiment of the Black body is an unacknowledged act of "American grammar," something so intertwined within the collective denied unconscious that, like lynchings, the grotesque is rendered normative and "unspeakably unspoken."⁹⁰ This is an act of extreme de-gendering with regard to the Black *flesh's* relationship to Western-influenced gendered constructions. What Spillers's essay suggests, therefore, is that once the *flesh* of the "Black" male or female is conjured up in modern times, the "political non-conscience" of the dominant society does not have to consider the Black body's humanity—it becomes and is implicitly understood to be disembodied *flesh*. More to the point, anytime there is a description of a traumatized Black body, there is an unconscious reenacting of this rhetorical violence that presumes the Black "us" to be objects rather than subjects. Black death can then become the normative backdrop to Western everyday life and as such is not only unremarkable but might even provide some comfort to the heirs of Manifest Destiny that the raced, gendered, and sexualized hierarchies are in solid place.

Further exploring how this disruption of "body," "flesh," "de-gendering" and "non-humanity" affects the notion of "kin" and "kinship," at a most radical point in her article Spillers maintains:

[Claude] Meillassoux argues that “slavery creates an economic and social agent whose virtue lies in being outside the kinship system.” Because the Atlantic trade involved heterogeneous social and ethnic formations in an explicit power relationship, we certainly cannot mean “kinship system” in precisely the same way that Meillassoux observes at work within the intricate calculus of descent among West African societies. However, the idea becomes useful as a point of contemplation when we try to sharpen our sense of the African female’s reproductive uses within the diasporic enterprise of enslavement and the genetic reproduction [as opposed to parenting] of the enslaved. In effect, under conditions of captivity, the offspring of the female does not “belong” to the Mother, nor is s/he “related” to the “owner,” though the latter “possesses” it, and in the African-American instance, often fathered it, *and*, as often, without whatever benefit of patrimony. . . . I would call the enforced state of breach another instance of vestibular cultural formation where “kinship” loses meaning *since it can be invaded at any given and arbitrary moment by the property relations*.⁹¹

This far-reaching aspect of Spillers’s argument is a destabilizing critique of notions of “kinship,” “de-gendering,” and “un-mothering” in relation to the enslaved female in the Afrospora. Grounded in both historical research and literary analysis, Spillers’s essay is an inverse reading of the Moynihan Report. She notes, “This stunning reversal of the castration thematic . . . becomes an aspect of African American female misnaming.”⁹² Arguing that Moynihan’s “Negro Family borrows its narrative energies from the grid of associations” that fuel the nicknames assigned to Black women, her essay challenges what knowledge beyond this “American grammatical” stereotype the reader has of Black people.

The de-gendering and un-mothering of Black “women” advanced by the transatlantic slave trade further deconstructs the relationship between these “not-women” and the domestic realm of the Euro-feminine, since the enslaved as shipped *cargo* were without acknowledged personhood and were often field laborers without regard for gender distinctions. With regard to diasporic enslavement and the de-gendering of the feminine, Hartman’s argument that the rape of the slave woman was considered a legal impossibility correlates to Spillers’s statements that the human cargo on the ships were considered by their capturers “neither female, nor male [since] both subjects [were] taken into account as *quantities*.”⁹³ On the other hand, this de-gendering is accompanied by an un-mothering since female slaves were breeders without maternal rights.⁹⁴

In tandem with this, the centrality of the mother to the development of kin ties, as a culturally informed sense of closeness, is made clear by Spillers's analysis of Frederick Douglass's non-bonds with his biological brothers and sisters after he is separated from his mother at an early age. Douglass, as quoted by Spillers, describes the result of the separation as two-fold in that it "hinder[ed] the development of the child's affections towards its mother" and in relation to his siblings, "the early separation of us from our mother had well nigh blotted the fact of our relationship [to each other] from our memories." Spillers continues, "What could this mean? The *physical* proximity of the siblings survives the mother's death. They grasp their connection in the physical sense, but Douglass appears to mean a *psychological* bonding whose success mandates the *mother's* presence."⁹⁵ The suggestion here is that children born of the mother *under the conditions of slavery* would have no sibling relationship if the mother is removed. A further implication—bringing us back to the title of Spillers's article, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe"—is that the mother's link is automatic and requires disruption to sever or destabilize it. The father's link, on the other hand, has to be cultivated, particularly if he is neither married to nor living with the mother.

Arguing in the third section of her essay that traditional notions of kinship in either the continental African sense or the European sense fall apart under American slavery, Spillers purports, "If as Meillassoux contends femininity loses its sacredness in slavery, then so does motherhood as female blood-rite/right." Here she asks a key question: "Is the genetic reproduction of the [female] slave and the recognition of the rights of the slave to . . . her offspring a check on the *profitability* of slavery?"⁹⁶ The answer is clearly yes. This is the case since the enslaved woman who has the right to determine the destiny of her offspring necessarily needs to be "free" to do so. Following Spillers's line of thought, then, for the Afrospora female postslavery coming forward into more modern times, a psychosomatic response to the condition of historically *not* being able to determine the destiny of one's offspring could be imagined as this: When you finally control your body—have children. In a strange twist of psychological exchanges, children (for the Afrospora female) may now represent the mother's freedom. For Black women after slavery, the act of having children (separate and apart from the viability of the relationship with the biological father) may function as a psycho-cultural restoration of a feminine sacredness that was historically lost.⁹⁷

The possibilities suggested by the conclusion of Spillers's article are in many ways still unexplored terrain: "It seems clear, however. That 'Family,' as we practice and understand it 'in the West'—the *vertical* transfer of a

bloodline, of a patronymic, of titles and entitlements, of real estate and the prerogatives of 'cold cash,' from *fathers* to *sons* and in the supposedly free exchange of affectional ties between a male and a female of *his* choice—becomes the mythically revered privilege of a free and freed community.”⁹⁸

Spillers's theoretical and figurative framing of African American chattel slavery and its chaos lays an interesting foundation for thinking about the construction of the Afrospora feminine as having unexpected if disrupted parallels with the notion of the feminine emerging from continental West Africa. While the “*vertical* transfer of a bloodline, of a patronymic, of titles and entitlements, of . . . cold cash, from *fathers* to *sons*” explains feminine subordination and disenfranchisement in the West, this contrasts with two distinctly *horizontal* frames. One referenced by Steady speaks of “autonomy and cooperation” rather than “competition and opposition” as a better paradigm for examining sex roles in Africa, in light of female labor and power and the high regard for maternity there. The second frame is referenced by Spillers when she observes that “captive persons were *forced* into patterns of *dispersal*, beginning with the Trade itself, into the *horizontal* relatedness of language groups, discourse formations, bloodlines, names and properties by the legal arrangement of enslavement.”⁹⁹ Here an equality born out of the oppression of shared back-breaking labor “horizontal-izes” relations between Black men and women under slavery. These emerging horizontal patterns from both tradition and enslavement shape the legacy of Afrospora femininity; one of these birthrights is psychologically hidden but generationally transmitted, while the other is a consciously understood disenfranchisement.

THE SHIFTING GROUND OF THE AFROSPORA FEMININE

Spillers closes her piece by reinforcing the radical departure from normative gendered paradigms that Black diasporic femininity represents to her. “In this play of paradox, only the female stands *in the flesh*, mother and mother-dispossessed. This problematizing of gender places her, in my view, *out[side] of the traditional symbolics of female gender*, and it is our task to make a place *for this different social subject*. In doing so we are less interested in joining the ranks of gendered femaleness than gaining the *insurgent* ground as female social subject. . . . ‘Sapphire’ might rewrite after all a radically different text for a female empowerment.”¹⁰⁰

When Spillers describes the contradiction in which the Black female under conditions of slavery is “both mother and mother-dispossessed,” she suggests, although we are well beyond the antebellum era, as Moynihan’s

report written 102 years after emancipation makes clear, that the “American grammar” inaugurated during slavery was maintained. It precipitated a series of paradoxes in which “mother” and “mother-dispossessed,” “woman” and “not-woman,” become part of the shifting ground of the Black feminine. As such, this new she is outside “the traditional symbolics of female gender” and is a socially “insurgent” subject with monstrously powerful potential. Spillers inverts the Moynihanian “absence” as “insurgent power” in relation to traditional notions of the feminine, in a similar way as she demonstrates that the Black family is an anomaly in relation to traditional notions of kinship. The Black female subject, although seemingly absent from the symbolic Western frame, is insurgently present in opposite ways, in the worlds of Moynihan and Spillers.¹⁰¹ As Ferreira da Silva argues, *we* Black women refuse to either comply with or disappear from the dominant society. In fact, if the attitudinal excess demonstrated and magnified by Black female artists is any indication, our net-zero contribution to the cultural economy may be more fundamental and valuable than was previously imagined.

What is essential to note here is that the power associated with the Black feminine comes at least in part from our refusal to comply with or disappear from hegemonic society, and ironically these refusals become characteristics that the mainstream finds alluring even in the face of the continued degradation and devaluing of actual Black women’s lives. When Lil’ Kim changed the game in the late 1990s, her performance in videos such as “Crush on You” and “No Matter What People Say” was an example and extension of the power of Black feminine erotic energy. On the other hand, when she left the stage, she became just another Black girl struggling for a positive sense of self in a world overdetermined by Western notions of the feminine.

Lil’ Kim actively represents the duality of erotic resilience coexisting with what Merle Hodge identified as the “crippling mystique of femininity.”¹⁰² Her embodied attitudinally sourced resilience is not only at odds with the crippling mystique leading to her skin lightening and plastic surgery, *but it may not be experienced as a contradiction.*¹⁰³ While on stage or at the microphone, Kim’s afroindigenizing of the erotic allowed her to take the demonized parts of “Black girl life in the streets” and turn sexual oppression into sexual power. A negative attitude and exploited status became a source of energetic fuel, internally reconstructed and “projected” outward. She harnessed the hurt, anger, and rage related to being seen as “that bitch” and transformed a demonized sexuality into “the power of the erotic,” all while redefining and setting new standards for the dominant society’s notions of what counted as sexy. At the same time, a Euro-influenced standard that equated lighter

skin and a straighter nose with increased beauty was accepted as a desirable goal. This Euro-influenced beauty standard coexisted with her performative afroindigenization of gendered disrespect, resignifying weakness as strength while drawing on the “attitude” of Black girls from the “hood” and affirming their erotic expressivity.

Some seven years earlier, setting the stage for Lil’ Kim, Lady Saw (a.k.a. Marion Hall) was the reigning Raga queen of the Jamaican dancehall scene with songs such as “Life Without Dick,” “Name Nuh Stand Fi Sex,” and “Good Wuk.” The Afrosporic femininity that Saw represents is amply demonstrated in the triangulated complexity of her persona vis-à-vis the song “99 Ways” from the album of the same name.¹⁰⁴ Saw celebrates the ninety-nine ways to have sex outside of anal penetration. Her critique of anal sex, which is conflated with male-on-male sex in a derogatory way by the reference in the song to “batty-man bay,” is not only pervasive within dancehall culture of that era but is also a controversial feature of the folk mores in both urban and rural Jamaica. By contrast, in the United States, on Lil’ Kim’s debut album, *Hard Core*, anal sex is celebrated in the opening verse of the first song, “Big Momma Thang.” Yet the attitudinal power of Saw’s voice in the acapella version of “99 Ways” is undeniable, while the lyrical commentary is layered.

Her live commentary, interspersed with the singing, speaks openly about what she and a certain cross-section of Jamaican women will and won’t tolerate from men in bed. Anal sex is off the menu, both because it’s a taboo even if homophobic reaction to gay male sex and because it is perceived of as linked to male desires, generated by the US “cable system” that “fuck up we Jamaicans” by creating situations in which female sexual exploitation in service of male desire replaces sex-positive feminine strength and reciprocity.¹⁰⁵ Saw’s interspersed live commentary also takes a backhand slap at oral sex, while openly celebrating “raw fuck and good satisfaction.” This “good wuk” is a highly prized feature in Jamaican song lyrics across gender lines, with a celebration of tireless athletic grinding as the epitome of good sex. As early as 1969, Marcia Griffiths and her group the Soul Sisters recorded “Wreck a Buddy.” The lyrics state, “I want a man to wreck ’im buddy / a big strong man to wreck ’im buddy / And if he’s ugly I don’t mind / He has a dick and I want to grind.”¹⁰⁶

The richly raw power with which Lady Saw’s voice invokes a feminine erotic attitude of the highest order is at odds with what some may see as the conservativeness associated with the resistance to and critique of anal sex.¹⁰⁷ There is here, however, a triangulated identity structure that twins with that of Lil’ Kim in terms of the underside of the Afrospora feminine. On one side

of this tripartite is the attitudinal eros that brings Saw's voice and energetic persona to life. Her feminine sex-positive lyrics accompanied by her husky, hardcore vocal style inaugurated an era in which she showed the world, as Ellen Scott said, "that the corner woman have something fi seh."¹⁰⁸ On the second side of this identity triangle is the twin modality of Saw as outspoken female artist making philosophical commentary on broader societal values relevant to both male and female dynamics and larger political issues. This is demonstrated in songs such as "What Is Slackness."¹⁰⁹ At the base of the triangle, however, is Marion Hall, the minister who replaces Saw permanently in 2015, when she gets baptized and undergoes Christian conversion. Hall renounces all that she did and said as the groundbreaking artist Lady Saw. The goal here is not to criticize Saw's conversion but to highlight, similar to Lil' Kim, how the identity as Minister Marion Hall lives in the realm of a Western Christian ethos that cannot coexist with either sexually explicit speech or erotic misbehavior. The doubleness of the Afrospora feminine in this instance is therefore laid bare.¹¹⁰ Saw's libidinal economy, prior to her return to Christianity, is expressive of an Afrospora erotics akin to Lil' Kim. So, too, Saw's return to Christianity twins with Lil' Kim's plastic surgery as a manifestation of the other side of the duality, one that is compliant with Euro-gendered behavior in the sense that the Afro-erotic order, previously embodied, is now considered taboo and problematic.

How is the insurgency that Spillers identifies, tweaks, and links to our understanding of motherhood, dispossession, and reinvented kinship relevant to the afroindigenized erotic rebelliousness that Black female artists, the world over, harness and display? Being outside the symbolic female order in terms of gender identity and kin formation, in addition to having to fight for everything, becomes part of Black female rebellious erotic expression. The insurgent urge could be seen as having a directive that says, "I'll fuck who I want, and feel what I want, and if I can't do that literally, I will release it in other culturally expressive ways." As Beyoncé said in her 2023 concert film *Renaissance*, "I am not responsible for who I become when I perform. I let all that is repressed out on the stage." In keeping with this line of thinking, what if, following from Spillers, we read Black female attitude and excess as symbolic possibility? What are the contours of the shifting interiority of this Afrospora feminine?

My attempt to diagram the shifting ground of the Afrospora feminine is represented by a trapezoidal formation. I argue that the complexity of the cultural terrain of Afrospora femininity in the West has been radically underestimated and misunderstood—even by some of us who are products of

UN-VISIBILITY/SHADOW (PATRIARCH FORM) - 1



INDIGENOUS ENERGY - 4

Figure 3.1. The shifting ground of the Afrospora feminine.

this reality. The energetic sourcing of these identities functions as submerged rather than intentional consciousness. The top side of the structure, which I designate as region 1, represents Black female desire as un-visible within the Western imaginary as delineated by the work of Wynter.¹¹¹ The term *un-visible*, coined by Wynter scholar Katherine McKittrick, refers to being unseen as opposed to being literally invisible within the Western, masculinized, corporate, and institutional terrain.¹¹² The shadow form mentioned in region 1 refers to the pressures forcing Black women to imitate elite white European behavior generally and white European feminine behavior in particular. My definition of imitation extends to the symbolic modeling of speech, expression, and intellect, not just physical features, as the unwritten rules of getting into the club. It is only within the context of entertainment that other sides of our identities outside region 1 are admired.

The sides of the trapezoid, regions 2 and 3, represent what Ferreira da Silva describes as the double refusal: the resistance to either complying with or disappearing from the dominant society, with insurgent attitude being the fuel for this, as articulated by Spillers. The insurgent ground symbolizes Black female rebellion, attitude, and cultural expression. It is an enactment of the double refusal. The actions in regions 2 and 3 that simmer beneath the surface of region 1 suggest the fermentation of revolt that, like double consciousness or diversionary forms of mimicry, are not always apparent to the apparatus of power. Region 4, the structure's base, is characterized by indigenous energy. This region is the foundation of the identity structure, that is, its most powerful force, while also being the most submerged aspect. It is not equally present in all Black female contexts, but it represents the energetic density of the identity structure overall. This density is signified by *any Black*

feminine spiritual intensity that cannot be reduced to being sourced by Ferreira da Silva's patriarch form. To comprehend this in substance, we are forced to acknowledge the cultural hybridity of Afrospora female identity—that it has aspects that are not reducible to the Western experience.

The attitude and “plenty plenty-ness” of the Afrospora female subject in the diaspora is a noncompliant energy that shifts between un-visibility and a disruptive power that can be deployed for either creative or destructive purposes. By identifying the four regions of the trapezoid as a way of understanding the complexity of the Afrospora feminine and reading against the grain of negative portrayals, we can hopefully see modes of femininity that are distinct and connected to our ancestral African identities, no matter how submerged.

KIN-CLUSIONS AND INVERTED GENDERED FEELINGS IN THE AFROSPORA

I return to Ifi Amadiume's work and her own discussions of kinship:

It seems to me that the main problem in [European] theories of kinship is the construction of woman as an object to be moved or owned. If kinship is determined through the one constant and certain person—the mother [*mama's baby, papa's maybe*]*—and if we remove the concept of movement and ownership and focus on the African concept of collectivism and usufruct access to land, we are back to the basic matriarchal tripartite structure or what I might call the matriarchal triangle consisting of mother, daughter and son. These kinship terms should be seen as classifications in a grouped collective sense and not in the European individualistic sense.*¹¹³

In this excerpt, Amadiume critiques earlier European notions of kin that not only focus on patrilineal descent but also have individualism, property, ownership, and movement of women in equations of exchange as a given. Quoting Diop, Amadiume notes, “Kinship, filiation, inheritance, all derive essentially from the privileged social situation of the spouse who remains in his or her clan and therefore hosts the other.”¹¹⁴ After slavery, and within the context of disenfranchised Black family units in the United States, Carol Stack's work is suggestive in terms of the ironic similarity between her data and that of Amadiume, despite starkly different circumstances.¹¹⁵ Stack argues that a matriarchal notion of the Black household as it relates to the struggling poor in urban Black communities is an inadequate assessment of the reality.¹¹⁶ Matriarchy here is clearly referenced in the ways that Moynihan

meant it. While the article concedes that Black women in poor urban communities may generally have more economic power and authority than Black men, it is described as a kind of grassroots matrilineal rather than matriarchal structure in which interdependent kinship networks between biological mothers and fathers, boyfriends, sisters, grandmothers, cousins, husbands, ex-husbands, and ex-boyfriends interactively provide a shifting body of support that makes survival possible.

Since the woman bears the children and has access to welfare, even if she has no employment, her economic situation is often more stable than the man who may be unemployed or underemployed. Stack uses case study data to demonstrate that the average Black family in these circumstances over the course of a twenty-year period could involve a three-generation household (mostly charted through the mother's line), which may include a daughter, mother, grandmother, grandmother's recent husband, mother's sister, the sister's boyfriend, and the mother's brother. This kinship network may shift and change in minor or major ways every three months to a year, with some of the players remaining the same while new players in the form of girlfriends, baby fathers, and the like come in and out of the network. Stack argues that these kinship networks are interdependent and in many ways long-term, despite the fact that arguments, breakups, and changing economic realities create frequent reassemblies of the cast of characters and give the illusion of things being temporary. Furthermore, she argues that mothers with children who have access to welfare as well as short- and long-term economic and domestic assistance from the baby fathers or their families have more authority in the household.

Marriage and the resulting nuclear family, while sometimes desired, are a threat to the larger kinship network's survival and are often intentionally or unintentionally sabotaged by family members who see these types of nuclear family relationships as taking resources away from the collective. Stack further argues, however, that it is a misnomer to see fathers, even if unemployed, as unimportant or nonessential to the kinship network. They are necessary because there is still love and pride in children who result even from a temporary union, and the biological father is seen as a permanent part of the kinship network in terms of his role as nurturer and supporter in addition to the support that may be provided by his female family members such as a mother, aunts, sisters, and the like. Stack states, "In this view, the basis of familial structure and cooperation is not the nuclear family of the middle class, but an extended cluster of kinsmen related chiefly through children

but also through marriage and friendship, who align to provide domestic functions.”¹¹⁷

Stack has an expressed investment in refuting the matriarchal reading of the Black US family destructively put forth by Moynihan’s misuse of the concept. His report implies a meaning akin to top-down, total rule and power. Moynihan’s implied misuse of the matriarchy concept makes it clear why Amadiume’s work is necessary. Stack’s description of the negotiation between male and female dynamics within urban Black families resembles Amadiume’s notion of coexisting male and female structures in her African data as well as Steady’s idea that “autonomy and cooperation” are a better frame than “competition and opposition” for understanding African male- and female-gendered interactions. Stack’s essay is useful in a variety of ways. First, it outlines a paradigm for understanding the patterns of Afrospora familial reality in the face of economic disadvantage. Although her data are more than fifty years old, the family realities delineated in many contemporary contexts attest to the continuation of the conditions described. Suggested similarities with the present relate to Stack’s deft delineation of extended kinship networks that are organized differently from the traditional extended biological family. What may seem like utter chaos and confusion for one who is only familiar with the nuclear model is made coherent by Stack’s data. Furthermore, the threat that domestic marriage and the nuclear family pose to the kinship network is deeply significant. Stack’s theories here expose the extent to which economic self-sufficiency determines the viability of love relationships and coupledness modeled on Western notions of marriage and cohabitation.

Spillers, in her analysis of the breakdown of both continental African and European notions of kinship in the African American space, quotes Meillassoux to force a distinction between what he originally describes in terms of the logic of West African kinship systems and the circumstance of enslaved Black bodies in which “‘kinship’ loses meaning *since it can be invaded at any given and arbitrary moment by the property relations*.”¹¹⁸ Spillers then notes the astonishing reemergence of an “African American family” that defies logic, conceding that “under the press of a hostile and compulsory patriarchal order, bound and determined to destroy them, or to preserve them only in the service and at the behest of the “master” class, [African Americans] exercised a degree of courage and will to survive that startles the imagination even now.”¹¹⁹ How was this possible, particularly given historical circumstances? To some extent, it becomes apparent that the African American family that reconstitutes itself outside conventional European or intricate

African kinship structures can do so because of the implicit ways in which the notion of “kin” on the continent often had a spiritual dimension—one demonstrated well by Oyěwùmí’s elaboration on the matripotent institution of Ìyá. Said another way, one of the reasons African American kinship networks may have been able to reemerge without the benefit of strict and clear lines of biological descent is *because* of the spiritual foundation associated with these familial institutions in terms of the deep-structure fabric of the societies from which Africans were pulled and transported. Subconsciously, people may have held on to the spiritual meaning of family, particularly as they were dehumanized, and poured that understanding into the spiritual practices they could still access.

Emerging into societies in which European patriarchy was not organized to accommodate or understand either the “Afrospora feminine” or the “Afrospora masculine” created a situation in which Black male and female “gender trouble” became destiny. At the heart of these misunderstandings is the aforementioned Black woman’s relationship to work. At a key moment in her essay, Steady observes: “For the black woman, the issue is not increasing participation in the labor force, for *she is already overburdened with participation*. Unlike the typical white middle-class housewife, the black woman had to work outside the home for the survival of herself and her family. While white middle-class women complain about the oppression of affluence, the majority of black women struggle against the oppression of poverty.”¹²⁰

One of the consequences of this overwork was that for many Black men and women, the traditional public/private gendered paradigms were either “horizontal” or inverted. The mainstream gender split in which the woman stayed home while the man made the wages applied to very few struggling Black women historically. With regard to “horizontality,” as Trinidadian scholar Merle Hodge noted forty-six years earlier, “the Black woman has had a *de facto* ‘equality’ thrust upon her—the equality of cattle in a herd. . . . The women worked equally hard out in the fields with the men, were equally subject to torture and brutality. The black woman in the Caribbean has never been a delicate flower locked away in a glass case and ‘protected’ from responsibility.”¹²¹ Furthermore, as Sister Souljah clarifies, even when the Black woman was living in the projects on public assistance or was unemployed, it was she who the child depended on to eke out a living by any means possible. On the other hand, in terms of the inversion of roles, Hodge notes that during slavery “[Black] manhood was reduced to his brawn for the labor he could do for his master and to his reproductive function. . . . [His] owner performed the function of provider. . . . The

children's mothers or female child-rearers were responsible for the upbringing of the race. . . . And it is this concentration of moral authority in the person of the woman that has influenced relations between men and women of African descent."¹²²

One of the effects of moral authority, being Black and female within the context of societies that were white and patriarchal, was the uneasy coexistence of respect for Black women as mothers with resentment of Black women as equals in interpersonal relationships across gendered lines. As Hodge further notes, "The black man in the Caribbean is capable of deep respect for his mother and for older women in general. The worst insult in our language is to curse a man's mother. An 'obscenity' flung in the heat of quarrel is, quite simply, 'you mother!' Authority is female; a man will have instinctive qualms about disrespecting his mother or, by extension, her contemporaries, but he will take his revenge on the black female by seeking to degrade women within reach of his disrespect."¹²³ Writing at the same moment in the United States, Toni Cade Bambara comments, "Mamma tells junior his father was a no-good bum and then proceeds to groom him to be just like his daddy, an abuser of young girls but faithful of course to Mamma. Mamma tells daughter that men ain't no damn good and raises such suspicions and fears and paranoia in her heart that she is nasty as hell to the men she meets and elicits equally lousy behavior."¹²⁴

For the Black woman in Bambara's scenario, fear and resentment may shape interactions with Black men, particularly if she has seen or experienced abuse in her family or simply been schooled to expect the worst. This imbalanced production of sons and daughters both raised with respect for "Mamma" but sexual suspicion of each other helps explain to a large degree the competitive and tension-ridden gendered behavior performed between Black men and women within hip-hop and everyday grassroots culture. As Lil' Kim states in the back-and-forth exchange between herself and a male speaker in the opening sections of her song "Suck My Dick":

(MALE): Come here bitch!

(KIM): Nigga, fuck you!

(MALE): No, fuck you bitch!

(KIM): Who you talking to?

(MALE): Why you actin' like a bitch?

(KIM): Cause y'all niggas ain't shit and if I was a dude I'd tell y'all to suck my dick."¹²⁵

An equivalent sentiment is expressed in the lyrics shared between Jamaican artists Lady Saw and Red Rat on Saw's song "Woman Sneaking."

(RAT): Woman sneaking!

(SAW): But Rat, man stay so too.

(RAT): You cyaan blame every man fi wah one man do you!

(SAW): Man deceiving!

(RAT): Saw, den a weh ooman do?!

(SAW): We nuh do half di tings like oonoo.

(RAT): Lie!¹²⁶

The hunger to have value according to the dominant society's paradigms of femininity may make these same young women excessively accommodat-ing in their relationships with Black men, sometimes as an unconscious over-compensation for the Black female strength that is demonized by the society at large or misunderstood even in their own communities.

The chronic overwork of many Black women has yet another conse-quence: a deep susceptibility to what Hodge describes as "a crippling mys-tique of femininity pervad[ing] our society through the agenda of the mass media, affecting the self-image and aspirations of thousands of Caribbean women."¹²⁷ The role that mass media and now social media have played in transforming the values of young women and men away from the mores of their cultural ancestry and toward dominant notions of femininity and masculinity mass-marketed for profit cannot be underestimated. If, as was stated earlier, work and overwork in the diaspora are one of the root causes of Black women's exploitation rather than the foundation for their value, then an overcompensation for this exploitation has been their indulgence in the fantasy "of the crippling mystique of [hegemonic] femininity." This entails fetishizing luxury, frailty, and housewifery since it represents the opportunity "not to work." If work, during and after slavery, according to the dominant paradigms of "Western femininity," rendered Black women "genderless" and "not women," then the Euro-gendered feminine is seen in ways as a privilege, one in which performing the behavior associated with this category of womanhood becomes a sign of status as well as proof of honorary membership in the club. If, for the elite Western woman histori-cally, not being allowed to work functioned as a sign of her lack of value in a masculine Western-defined society, one in which work equals power, then for the overworked, working-class Black woman, not having to work and being taken care of may at least in part function as proof of her heretofore denied femininity.

Ferreira da Silva's notion of the Black feminist double-refusal to either comply with or disappear from the hegemonic order is akin to a return of an interesting repressed. The refusal can be seen as an Afrospora manifestation of a matriarchal system that was disregarded, denied, and suppressed but that resurfaces in a twisted way despite the negation ascribed to Black woman as non-woman in Western contexts. Spillers's work here is an ironic counter-reading of the Moynihan Report, one that destabilizes his homicidal patriarchy, revealing in reverse a type of Black female power base akin to what was lost. The power of the Black woman in the Afrospora is not accidental. The twinning of theoretical texts that emerge from both the continent and those in the Afrospora is akin to an archaeological dig that gradually reveals a set of images long hidden beneath anafemales used as "drug mules," referred to as "black bitches," "heifers," "mammies," and "hoes," all of whom have survived this degradation and humiliation while still managing to become *Ìyás*, mothers, and aunties with the power to keep the "Afrospora tribes alive."

The internalization of spiritual power as a submerged part of the potency of the mother and the Afrospora feminine links afroindigenization to Stewart's notion of *motherness*—which stands in here for the ability to spiritually rehabilitate, rejuvenate, support, and empower the collective. In this sense, as many of these scholars suggest, "motherness," "matricentricity," or "mother-nity" need not be limited to the anafemale body, an excellent example of which are the male mothers as represented in the "houses" in Jennie Livingston's 1990 documentary *Paris Is Burning*. In addition to the internalization of power, inherent to the notion of *Ìyá* and/or mother on the continent and in the Afrospora, is the mother as *still* sacred, even within the profanity of diasporic violence. The mother is also a demonstration of the *marasa* principle in which sameness and difference, pain and resilience, dishonor and love are simultaneously present, without one having the power to completely extinguish the other.

Enter the Dragons of Debate

Rashid Campbell and George Lee's 2014 Run

The Yorùbá concept Ìwàpèlé roughly translates as “character is gently/good” and/or “good existence is gentle,” with *iwà* meaning both “character” and “to exist.” The idea is that any being that exists must of necessity exhibit character. In more colloquial terms, however, Ìwàpèlé has been translated to mean “good character.”¹ It coexists in this conceptual universe with the notion of “free will,” which is marked by junctions in the road that represent choices to be made throughout the course of one’s life. The individual who consistently makes choices that reflect the highest levels of integrity is seen as living a life characterized by Ìwàpèlé. This chapter is a theoretical and testimonial exploration of how the “junctions in the road” in the life experiences of Rashid Campbell and George Lee eventually led to their impact on the world of college debate in a way that cleared a path for others to follow. The choices they made and the challenges they faced can be understood as laying a foundation for the “good character” exhibited in their honest and bold contribution to the arena of debate. Additionally, their stories demonstrate the extent to which they had to harness and transform energy associated with negative situations into internal sources of power to fuel their collective and individual success, in both debate and their everyday lives. Their stories

respectively and collectively are tangible demonstrations of afroindigenization and *marasa* consciousness.

In the spring of 2014, Rashid Campbell and George Lee, two Black students from the University of Oklahoma, were among the top college debaters in the country. At the prestigious 68th Annual National Debate Tournament (NDT), having defeated Harvard and other highly ranked teams in the preliminary rounds, the duo became the first undefeated African American number one seed to accomplish that feat in the history of that tournament. At the NDT championship, however, they were eliminated in the semifinal round, losing to Georgetown in a 3–2 deciding vote, deemed controversial since they had previously beaten the same team against whom they were now losing.² Despite this loss, Campbell went on to receive the speaker of the year award, having amassed more individual points than anyone in the history of the tournament. He became the first African American male to receive the award as well as the first student in OU's history to be distinguished in this manner. Less than a year later, the university was in the news again for quite the opposite reasons when white male students from the Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity were caught on camera singing a song that paired the fraternity's exclusionary recruitment practices with lynching. The fallout from the fraternity scandal served to emphasize the alienating environment that students from marginalized backgrounds faced on predominantly white college campuses throughout the country.

Campbell and Lee were brilliant students who were not from the Black middle class. They were anomalies, not just at OU but also in the debate world. Their success hinged on their unique introduction and use of the lyrical philosophies of hip-hop artists as both evidence and authority to support and sustain sophisticated arguments on the range of topics put forth in both the NDT and the Cross Examination Debate Association (CEDA). There was also controversy surrounding their use of the N-word in strategic and subversive ways, as a part of their engagement with the topics in debate addressing violence, imperialism, and injustice. Additionally, the duo was part of a growing contingent of debaters who used discourses of Afro-pessimism and varied theories about race, language, and culture to critically situate their arguments. A unique aspect of their strategy involved their use of "experience as a form of evidence," drawing specifically from their own lived experiences and the worldviews they had developed during their childhood and adolescence. While other debaters used classical European philosophy, government policy, and contemporary literary and social theories to ground their arguments, it was Campbell and Lee's sophisticated understanding of

hip-hop culture, their own lived experiences, and a philosophically grounded interpretation of the meanings and uses of the N-word that in the final instance gave them the edge that laid the unlikely foundation for their success in this arena.

To understand both the effect and the affect of OU debaters Rashid Campbell and George Lee, you had to see them in action. At the 2014 NDT, they emerged as the number one seed after eight preliminary rounds, defeating in the process the number one team in the country at the time, Northwestern University's Alex Miles and Arjun Vellayappan. During this round, Miles sported traditional debate attire, a light blue long-sleeve shirt rolled up to the elbows with dark blue dress pants. His partner, Vellayappan, wore a dark blue dress shirt, buttoned and cuffed, a striped tie, and black dress pants with a belt at the waist. They both wore their hair short, in the close-cropped style associated with professional Western business attire. Campbell and Lee, on the other hand, were in full Afrocentric garb. Campbell wore a Kente cloth dashiki with white embroidery on the chest and black jeans, while Lee sported a custom-made black T-shirt emblazoned with an image of an Egyptian pharaoh and Kente cloth pants that matched Campbell's shirt. They both wore their hair in Rastafari-style locks pulled away from their faces, with Campbell's locks falling to the middle of his back.³ Their affect matched their impacts, since what they brought to the debate world was not just argumentation with a Black urban style and an Afrocentric twist but more importantly the introduction of a hip-hop flow in terms of both form and content as part of the official process of constructing the 1AC and the 1NC, the opening speeches in each debate. Campbell and Lee also walked into those debate rounds not as assimilated Black subjects of the college experience but as themselves: East Oakland, California, and Bryan, Texas; West Coast and dirty South hip-hop heads; urban vernacular and spoken-word aficionados—all those things combined.

With this as a backdrop, it is important to understand that over the course of their time as successful debate partners, they contributed significantly to the changing face of college debate, while their style and argumentation were embroiled in some of the racial and cultural controversies that emerged. Urban debaters had become an increasing presence on the national scene. Some of their approaches were seen as nontraditional in relation to the more conventional style of policy debate, based almost exclusively on “hard evidence” drawn from a range of government documents, historical essays, in-depth news articles, and the like. Nontraditional debaters introduced into the discursive terrain arguments about anti-Blackness, heteronormativity,

Afro-pessimism, and Afro-futurism as well as feminist and Marxist approaches and impacts. Campbell and Lee were nontraditional debaters who introduced hip-hop rappers as authors, arguing that they should be treated with the same credibility as theoreticians of the written word. They refused to be contained by the structure of the debate resolutions, often making macro arguments that attacked the main ideological position being espoused, deconstructing the implications from that perspective, and dismantling the premises and hypotheses of their more traditional debate opponents. Their signature tactic, particularly during the cross-examination segment of a debate, was bringing in the “real-life stuff.” By drawing on their lived experience as evidence and using the vernacular everyday knowledge of the grassroots, they were able to tip the scales in their favor and come out winning rounds and tournaments.

The backlash against these styles of debate was significant. Accusations of race bias entered the rhetorical Twitter feeds and social media domain. Additionally, there was the controversial development, during Campbell and Lee’s era, of the Policy Research League, which was a covert spin-off of the National Debate Tournament. The Policy Research League was viewed by Black urban debaters as a reactionary organization, created to undermine the style and substance of what they had introduced to the debate world. In both macro and micro ways, these events could be read as part of the discursive terrain of the ideology of anti-Blackness that Campbell and Lee, among others, effectively mobilized arguments against during their period of success. Campbell and Lee’s life stories lay the foundation for understanding how they became these great debaters. But in order to understand their lives fully, their testimonies need to be heard.

My head to the sky, my feet on the ground
My fingers to the judge, if the money don’t move.
—Lil Wayne (Rashid Campbell’s signature quotation)

Rashid Campbell, who arrived at the University of Oklahoma in the fall of 2010, had a grandmother, referred to as his “Nondy,” who had been a member of the Oakland branch of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense. Former OU student Jason Quaynor told me that a young man from Oakland who was at OU on a debate scholarship had started something similar called the Black Juice Movement (BJM), which was mobilizing Black students on campus like never before. Conceptually, BJM was a fusion of OU’s Black Students Association (BSA) and Know Thyself, a defunct student organization that focused on issues of cultural awareness as it related

to African American history. Quaynor described Campbell, a mere freshman at the time, as calling meetings in which sixty to seventy Black students of African, African American, and Afro-Caribbean descent showed up at the drop of a hat. These sessions held once or twice a week would last for three to four hours, with Campbell doing extended in-depth workshops on cultural self-esteem and self-love as a counter to internalized self-hatred. The BJM emerged from conversations that happened between Campbell, Quaynor, and other Black students about the state of the social and political consciousness of the Black student body at the university. Taking a negative concept and turning it into something positive, the “juice” idea was a duality. It was influenced, on one hand, by the 1992 film *Juice*, directed by Ernest Dickerson and starring Tupac Shakur as a character who spirals out of control, becoming a menace to his friends and a personification of the social evils besetting young Black men in impoverished urban settings. On the other hand, juice was also energy and nourishment. The BJM idea was to take the seemingly negative, oppressive experiences that students had both on college campuses and in everyday life and transform them into something positive, a shift in perception that was empowering.

Rashid Campbell was born on May 11, 1992, in Oakland, California, to Jumia McKinney, who met his father at fifteen, got pregnant at sixteen, and had him at seventeen. McKinney spent her childhood moving back and forth between Oakland and Las Vegas, Nevada. Campbell’s maternal grandmother and great-grandmother were from Bakersfield, California. Campbell says his grandmother left Bakersfield “to avoid calamity and craziness.”⁴ As the story goes, his great-grandmother’s father, while living in the South, got into a deadly altercation with a Klan member and escaped to Palmdale, then a country town, outside Bakersfield. He captured the land, set up shop, built his own house, and remained there for the rest of his life. Campbell describes this story as the sole paternal tale in his family lineage. His biological father was rumored to have been from Oakland and Sacramento. But the paternal lineage on his father’s side and even the paternal lineage of his mother and grandmother were absences in his familial narrative.

Campbell describes himself as having a happy childhood, one in which happiness was defined as not having to worry about adult problems. His life and upbringing were surrounded, controlled, mediated, and facilitated by women—so much so, in fact, that when he was finally exposed to the man who functioned as a stepfather, his mother’s most significant relationship, Campbell remembers wanting to be around him simply to study and emulate behavior that he had not had the opportunity to observe up close. As

he grew from boyhood to manhood, however, his maleness became a threat to his mother and grandmother, since it implicitly symbolized the history of abandonment by men in his family's past. Campbell's particular narrative about being raised in a family of women is suggestive in terms of its relevance to the shaping of his own identity as well as the light it sheds on the challenges potentially faced by single Black mothers who are parenting sons in a Western patriarchal society. He describes his grandmother as taking on the role of protector, traditionally assigned to men, explaining, "My grandmother put a field of protection around me that I really didn't understand." He was never allowed to spend the night at the homes of his friends, and he was even "protected" from seeing his biological father. He understood later that what his grandmother did for him was something that many "other kids weren't getting." He further elaborates:

So, if there was any like mass protector over me, it was my grandmother. Now, the family dynamics of not having men around kind of installed that a little bit more. It blends right into her hardcore protection, right, because a lot of the things she was protecting me from were "those bad men." For instance, one of the things I didn't know until I got older was, allegedly, my biological father was trying to be a part of my life, for a second, when I was young. But what happened was . . . the life he was leading wasn't a good life at all, right? Things like prison . . . drugs, all the ills of the world, right? My grandmother prevented him from being around me because of the things he . . . indulged in. And this is one of the reasons . . . why he would say, "I was prevented from being around you." Instead of "I just didn't want to . . ." My mother *and* my grandmother had not had fathers [in their lives.] They [were from] a long line of [women who were] distrustful of men in general. [They] just [didn't] believe that men are positive things inside . . . family and [the view was that] inevitably [they will] bring some type of negative. So, in place of that, my grandmother became a father of sorts.

The notion of his grandmother as a "father figure" who played the roles of both nurturer and protector functions as a kind of grassroots matriarchy. This influenced in significant and positive ways Campbell's relationship to women generally. However, the suspicion of men that was the other side of this coin eventually bore its own bitter fruit, necessarily affecting the grandmother-mother-son dynamic.

When asked about the beliefs, hopes, and dreams of the women who raised him, Campbell described his grandmother, his "Nondy," as having a

belief in a God or a higher spiritual power that was not religious. Her hope was to do “something that would make the whole Black community prosper” and her dream was “to be financially stable while helping her people.” When describing his mother’s belief system, on the other hand, he states that she “believed in Jesus Christ. Her dream was to be rich, and her hope was for all of her struggles and problems to be gone!” Campbell remembers being heavily influenced by the worldview of his Nondy, Makeda Shabaka. There was a huge map of Africa in the house that functioned as a constant frame of reference. Additionally, he watched videos with her, went to talks, listened to music, overheard conversations about the state of things, and was essentially inculcated from a fairly young age into being a Black “prime mover” of sorts. Yet the world of the streets was all around him. When asked to describe his Nondy’s worldview as well as those of the people who surrounded him, Campbell reports:

Now everybody that I grew up around, if there had to be one definition of the way they saw the world . . . they saw it in a revolutionary context. [They saw the world through a] Black revolutionary, anti-capitalist, obviously left-wing but also critical of the left, post-Black Panther mindset, right? And the reason I say that is because, no matter what was going on in the area in terms of negativity, killings, drugs, whatever, there was always a high level, not even a mild level, a high level of consciousness about everything that was going on. . . . Which is funny [because] they still indulge[d] in those things. . . . But the reason I point that out is that when I [would] go to different states and different areas [where] people are engaging in certain “hood politics,” criminal activity, some of which they’re just born into, really, a lot of that [was] done without a consciousness of where it [was] coming from or an understanding of the reasons why they [were] even in that position. This [was] the total opposite of [my family in] Oakland.

When asked where this “high level of consciousness” came from, Campbell described it as a product of his grandmother and her generation participating in the struggles of the late 1960s and early 1970s, becoming Black Panther Party activists as well as being a part of a range of movements and organizations emerging at that time with strong critiques of the hegemonic order and investments in transformative shifts. This social and political mindset and cultural approach to life prevailed in his grandmother’s household even as the political climate of the nation shifted significantly to the right during the 1980s, 1990s, and beyond. Campbell continues:

I don't believe that [Nondy] was a leading member of the Black Panther Party but . . . I think . . . she was a lobbyist of sorts, right? She was an activist individually . . . not only giving out information, supporting events that they threw, helping with kids, getting other people involved . . . [but] she was critical of everything. Any Black person at that time [in that area] was doing things for the community. So a lot of her friends would gather around and go to like different lectures, they would talk about Stokely [Carmichael], they would [attend talks by] Ivan Van Sertima. From the perspective of my Nondy . . . she wouldn't want to say she was [a blind follower] of anybody, right? She was against the system in every way. She was with the Nation of Islam at one time; she was with the Black Panthers at one time . . . this was all a part of who she was. The reason why, if I had to simplify, I would [privilege] the Panther[s] is because that was . . . what was most relevant to our community. That was the time when free breakfast programs . . . just came out. That was the time when police abuse and the right to bear arms, all those things were being challenged.

Campbell's Nondy took an interest in his informal education. When he was eight, she enrolled him at Frohm's Martial Arts School, where he learned a combination of Tae Kwon Do, karate, and boxing. At sixteen he was grand champion in both the kata and point fighting competitions in all the divisions in his region. As a teenager he attended "Camp Akili" in Sonoma, California, one summer. The camp took a hundred or more urban youth between the ages of fourteen and seventeen on a weeklong retreat. Cell phones were off limits, and the goal of the camp was to develop leadership skills with an additional focus on decolonizing the minds and healing the psyches of young people who had internalized pain, anger, and trauma. As such, the camp, run by African-centered leadership, functioned as a kind of detox from the social and emotional poisons of urban inner-city life. Using words such as "bitch" and "nigga" was taboo and punished with twenty push-ups each. The camp included male and female "rites of passage" ceremonies meant to prepare them for the emotional responsibilities of approaching adulthood. Campbell and the other boys participated in a day devoted to understanding and deconstructing sexism in urban everyday life; this included examinations of the stereotypes associated with the "pimp," "bitch," and "ho" as well as relearning effective communication across gender lines. By the time he came to OU on a debate scholarship, he had had an intensive education in internal and external discipline, structured workshops aimed at decolonizing and reconstructing his young Black male psyche, and substantial exposure

to Black radical political thought as a result of the influences of his grandmother. Campbell brought this wealth of structural information with him to college. But his life had not been a seamless, uplifting dream.

There were three key experiences that functioned as young Campbell's informal education, laying a foundation for the consciousness he would develop, shaping the worldview he would espouse, and carving out the activist practices he would enact. The first was an incident that happened at his cousin's house when he was a preteen, the second involved his stepfather, and the third related to homelessness. He remembers his mother repeatedly saying, "You're from the hood, but you're privileged in the hood." His mother had a childhood friend who was like an aunt to him and whose children functioned as his "cousins." When he went to visit, he enjoyed himself immensely, but even as a child, he was aware of the differences between their circumstances and his own. His aunt and her kids lived in the projects of North Oakland. While his own family lived paycheck to paycheck, there was always food in the refrigerator, clean clothes, and a washer and dryer in the house. Additionally, since his Nondy ran a daycare, the house always had to be clean. His aunt's house, on the other hand, was hardly ever clean, and food was always scarce.

On one day in particular, there was absolutely no food and the adults were at work. His older cousin asked, "Y'all hungry?" To young Campbell's astonishment, the cousin left and sometime later returned, rushing into the house and slamming the door behind him. His black jacket that housed his tall and skinny frame was pregnant with newly acquired "stuff." There were tree leaves in his hair, and as the door closed behind him Campbell and the younger cousins thought they glimpsed helicopters overhead and heard police sirens. His cousin advanced to the table and opened his jacket, spilling a host of corner-store Mexican food products onto the table: burritos, taco shells, ground beef, cheese, rice, and seasonings. They ate well that night. Campbell remembered wondering, with the dim awareness of the innocent, "Did he just steal this stuff?" As they ate, they could still hear sirens and choppers in the background.

What this incident gave Campbell was a critique of those who demonize poor Black people who make such choices while turning a blind eye to the system shaping the conditions structuring the choices they had or appeared to have. The experience disavowed him of the type of worldview that would state "I'm Rashid Campbell. I made it to the University of Oklahoma [; therefore,] anybody can do this. If you didn't make it, it's your fault!" He stated, "I understood that people [had] it worse than I [had] it, and I [had]

it bad.” While those not from these kinds of circumstances may treat such a tale with suspicion, doubting the necessity of food theft or refusing to decriminalize this choice even if they were empathetic, Campbell establishes an alternative view: “I literally experienced people in my area . . . where I’m like I don’t see, in any scenario, how you[’re] still surviving . . . and to make it anywhere higher than where you are right now, would be nothing short of a miracle.” Because of the near impossibility of acquiring opportunity and success on the terms that the dominant society has established, he stated that those at the proverbial bottom celebrate the moments in which someone manages to outsmart the system. “You don’t understand what a celebration it was that he completed this robbery,” Campbell insists. He further explains that incidents like these “were almost seen as trophies.”

This inverted worldview in which the outlaw is the hero also shaped the consciousness of his mother, who, idealizing the men who managed to carve out a successful life in the streets, often criticized Campbell for not becoming a mover and a shaker in that world. Her boyfriend Mark, a stepfather of sorts to Campbell, functioned in this way. As Mark attempted to move out of the underworld, he was murdered on a night when Campbell had begged and been denied permission to spend time at his house. The trauma of his death radically destabilized everyone. Campbell explained, “Men were typically the enemy in my mother and grandmother’s household, but Mark had broken the mold.” When Mark was around, resources were flowing. Mark bought Campbell expensive clothes and bought gifts for his mother, and Mark and Campbell’s Nondy were working together on a real estate deal at the time of his death.

When Mark was killed, all the money was gone, all the support was gone, and Campbell’s mother was a mess. She wept and had nightmares for months. She drank heavily and woke up three or four times in the middle of the night, yelling and screaming at the top of her lungs. It became clear that this was the worst thing that had ever happened to her. Mark had been the love of her life. Mark’s death functioned for Campbell’s mother and grandmother, however subconsciously, as another instance of male abandonment. The message that had been internalized was “men always let you down.” Campbell asserted:

After the death of Mark, the household took on an anti-man vibe and [I was] enemy number one. [The feeling was we have been] abandoned . . . again; all of the stuff we [feared] has happened again. . . . We opened up and trusted a man; now he’s gone. Now where we at? And Rashid, what are you good for, because now, you’re the only man [we] see and you can’t do nothing for us.

The matriarchal household became unbearable. Between his mother's increased drinking and bloodcurdling screams, Campbell's childhood home ceased being a haven. Campbell describes this second experience, the death of Mark, as jolting him out of childhood and making him recognize that he didn't have the luxury of lollygagging around. These pressures and anxieties pushed him toward awareness of his larger situation, and at the same time his discomfort in the household created a desire to escape. He decided to leave.

At this stage of his life, Campbell was in high school. When he left home after Mark's death, he attempted to stay at a shelter but found that the rules and regulations were a turn-off after just having escaped from the seeming tyranny of his mother and grandmother's household. Instead, for about six months he lived between the homes of various friends, without official supervision of any kind, while still attending school completely of his own volition. He slept on the floor in the homes of his friends. Although he soon discovered that the quickest way to get kicked out of these abodes was to eat the food in the refrigerator. Yet he remembers this as initially one of the happiest periods of his life. However, two months into being homeless, one bitterly lonely and cold night, he notes, "I was walking down the street, I was by myself, and I was like, goddamn I wish I had some parents." In a moment of wistfulness, he called his mother, who it turned out was at the movies. After making sure he was not in the hospital or in jail, she promptly hung up, leaving him to his fate. He thought to himself at this point, "I don't got no daddy, and none of my parents or family members are going to look out for me. Only I can solve this problem because it's my problem and I have no help."

Before leaving home and before the death of his stepfather, Mark, Campbell was also shaped by his experiences in the education system. During his early years his educational experience was typical of young Black children in his social environment. He describes his elementary school as nothing special. The population was predominantly Black and Mexican, and he remembers students bringing bullets to school to show off. His mother's decision to sacrifice a good portion of their welfare check to send him to a private Black Christian middle school was a scholastic game changer. The population at this new school was small, consisting of only two hundred students, but he describes this as the strongest academic experience of his youth. It laid the foundation for him to graduate from high school. He describes it as an environment with a lot of religious indoctrination but one in which the teachers cared about the students. They also had more freedom to insert Black history

into the curriculum, and he remembers this being empowering. He went on to attend Skyline High School, a public school that previously had a reputation as an excellent educational institution. However, the school's resources were not what they used to be. The city had manipulated the zip codes to extend the district lines, which came to include an urban poor area referred to as "The Flats." With the stretching of the zip codes, many Black students came to the school and many white students left. The parents of the now mostly Black and struggling students did not have the time, money, or taxes to support the school's structure. Campbell describes the school as in many ways a replica of society: "Soon you had a school in a suburban area that was all 'hood kids.'" There were a handful of middle-class kids, a majority of economically struggling Black kids, and no wealthy kids.

Campbell had learned a lot about "race," Africa, and Black history from his grandmother; he described himself as "knowing a lot without knowing what it [really] meant." In high school, after he left home, he was in a Racism in America class with Mr. Shears, who was also the high school's debate coach. Shears said to Campbell, who was often the class clown and know-it-all, "You're always yelling. You need to sign up for debate." The media studies debate class that Mr. Shears taught was of little interest to Campbell, but it came with free food at a time when he was homeless. Furthermore, nobody knew if he was going to school or not. He could have dropped out of school right then and there. But instead, he got up early, he was there on time, and he became serious about his schoolwork. He was also consistently at debate practice. In addition to being able to access food, more crucially he realized he didn't want to remain in this situation; he saw schooling as his only mode of escape, the alternative to life in the streets. He says about this period in his life, "Homelessness scared me into progression . . . and also made me a better student."

If you don't know my struggle

So you can't feel my hustle.

—Boosie Badazz (George Lee's signature quotation)

George Lee was born on December 9, 1990, in Bryan, Texas, to a sixteen-year-old mother and a seventeen-year-old father.⁵ His mother was born in Dallas and raised in Hearne, Texas, by her great-grandmother. Lee describes Hearne as a town of approximately four thousand people that was previously a large plantation abandoned by white owners after emancipation. The 2007 film *American Violet*, based on an incident that occurred in Hearne, highlights the corruption of the justice system and the systemic lack of opportunities that

continue to plague the area well into the twenty-first century. Lee's mother, Lashika Harris, was raised by her great-grandmother, a Cherokee Indian from Alexandria, Louisiana. No one knows Lee's great-great-grandmother's birth date. She seems to have been alienated from the Cherokee Nation. Her own daughter, Sylvia Harris, Lee's great-grandmother, died under mysterious circumstances (there was suspicion of poisoning). His Cherokee great-great-grandmother died when his mother was thirteen, while his mother and maternal grandmother struggled with drug addiction.

In terms of his paternal lineage, the stories that were passed down to Lee from his father's side date back to the days of slavery. He was told that his paternal ancestors were slaves in the Carolinas who were sold to a family named Varisco in Midland, Texas. As the story goes, one of his paternal great-grandfathers ran from the Midland area and settled in Bryan, Texas. Generations later, his father, George Lee Sr., was an entrepreneur who owned several trucks, did concert and party promotions, and briefly owned a record store. He also made his living in the streets and was in and out of prison as a result. His significant reputation, however, and his worldly comrades protected "little George" when he was not around. George Lee Jr. grew up on government assistance as the oldest of his mother's four and one of his father's eight children. When Lee Sr. was not incarcerated, they lived well. When he was in jail, the siblings subsisted on his mother's food stamps, eating well at the beginning of the month (jambalaya and steak), ramen noodles by month's middle, and by month's end relying on the "Kool Cup House" or the "Candy Lady" for sustenance.⁶ Lee describes the Kool Cup House as a place where you could buy concentrated frozen mini-cups of Kool-Aid, pickles, chips, and the like, all for a dollar or less. These "meals," along with what he calls "sleep for dinner," were the subsistence routine for himself and others in similar situations, until they had access to the free school lunch the following week or parental food stamps that kicked in at the beginning of the next month. Life with mom also included periods with no lights, no water, and constant relocation when unpaid bills caught up to them.

Lee's cartography of economic survival practices in his town highlights long-term partial or total subsistence on government aid, temporary work doing manual labor, illegal activity, and a few "elite" jobs in the fast-food industry, the prison system, or the post office if one was lucky. Many individuals and whole families often lived in "grandma's house," grandma usually having access to somewhat more stability than the younger generations did. As Lee's mother became addicted to drugs, the instability at home grew

worse. Food stamps were in short supply and the street-life crew increasingly took up residence in the household. With what appears to have been his father's intervention, in the seventh grade George Lee Jr. was relocated to the home of his paternal grandmother. His father's mother worked at Dillard's and her husband, who treated Lee as a grandson, worked for the city. His grandparents struggled to pay bills and make ends meet, but theirs was a much more stable environment than his mother's home and may have been similar in ways to Rashid Campbell's childhood home.

When asked about the beliefs, hopes, and dreams of his people, Lee describes them as prioritizing "survivability" rather than investing in the American dream. Some of the phrases he heard frequently were "This is a white man's world; we just living in it" and "It is what it is." He states, "The whole Black Power movement was criminalized and demonized by my family." When he came home from college and began to share information about Black empowerment or ways of escaping current conditions, the response would often be something like "We's gon' get in trouble" as the person looked nervously around, lest this "runaway slave plot" be overheard by the powers that be. When he was away at college, similar to hip-hop activist Sister Souljah's description of her experience of schooling, Lee was seen as being a part of the oppressed underclass in the white world and part of the talented tenth and Black bourgeoisie by his family.⁷

In his father's absence, his mother surrendered the role of "man of the house" to him. Her drug addiction increased his de facto responsibilities and independence. Literal hunger as well as lessons learned from his father increased his survival instincts and quick thinking while sharpening his analytical skills. These tools, developed from the reservoir of experiences he had had, proved critical in aiding him in assessing predicaments and dilemmas he would encounter in the future. Additionally, the rules and regulations in his paternal grandmother's home gave him the structure necessary to develop the type of self-discipline that he would need to advance in school. As he entered the realm of formal education, he not only gained some of the necessary skills and information the environment had to offer; the understanding of reality that his background had awakened in him bequeathed a shrewd perceptivity, one giving him a seemingly uncanny ability to make philosophical sense of whatever he encountered. Over time, these experiences, one set from the home space and the other garnered in the halls of the state-mandated institutions of learning, proved in combination to be a kind of informal schooling that was ideologically superior to the official education he was acquiring on its own terms.⁸

Lee's depiction of his schooling paints a searing portrait of the contradictory landscape of urban education after 1990. He describes his school life as a paradox. School was an affirmation of his intellect and intelligence as well as an exposure of the extent to which Black children were presumed inferior and treated as such from a very early age. In the first grade, he attended South Noel Elementary in College Station, Texas. There, although he was in school with the children of professors, "it was assumed that [he] would have developmental issues." When he didn't, he was seen as an anomaly, a special child whom one of the student volunteers identified as "different" and "not like the rest of them"—those others being his peers from similar circumstances who were presumed developmentally disabled whenever their academic knowledge fell behind the state-mandated grade level.⁹ This experience of "difference," despite its contradictions, made him feel as if he had something to offer to the world because, as he states, "white people affirmed it. . . . That made me value education and . . . not put all my eggs in the sack of athletics." Once identified as such, he was placed in the "gifted and talented" program from first grade all the way through high school.

Lee describes this early educational experience as inaugurating a kind of "magical Negro phenomenon" in his life, one in which he was both subject and object. The "magical Negro," from his vantage point, represented both how he was perceived by those he encountered in predominantly white school settings and his uncanny ability to influence and navigate the spaces and places he entered.¹⁰ He left South Noel and moved on to Crockett Elementary (a school with a predominantly white and Mexican student population) for most of the second and third grades. There he was the rebellious Black child, one who consistently received excellent grades academically but poor marks for conduct. During the fourth and fifth grades, his mother moved back to Bryan, Texas, where he attended Kemp Elementary, a predominantly Black school.

Lee describes two specific experiences that made a significant impression on his burgeoning consciousness, one occurring in Kemp Elementary and the other when he was a student at Bryan High School. At Kemp, Lee saw the first big difference between how "bodies were controlled in schools" in predominantly white versus Black environments. At Crockett, an action, such as disrespecting the authority of the teacher, would result in an in-school detention or being sent to the principal's office. At Kemp, on the other hand, the same behavior was cause for police intervention, with students being escorted off the premises in handcuffs and receiving a citation requiring them to appear in criminal court. Extreme discipline was privileged over education

and empowerment in the Black school environment at Kemp. As Lee put it, “It was more important how the bodies [of Black children] were situated and less important what [was being put] into [those] bodies.”

Lee’s experiences at Crockett and Kemp made him more alert to hierarchies of inequality in his environs than he may have been if he had stayed at one predominantly white high school as a “gifted and talented” Black student. The “gifted and talented” label, however, meant that he was required to take advanced classes throughout his educational career. While at Bryan High School, his annoyance with the discrepancy between the work he had to do in AP English and what his peers were doing made him decide to leave the AP English track. This move required a signed note from his grandmother. Once he switched, he was astonished to discover that although the school was 40 percent white and 25 percent Black, with the remaining 35 percent of the students being of Mexican or other ethnicities, the AP classes were almost exclusively white. The regular English class was almost exclusively Black and Latino, and the pace of work was two weeks behind the AP classes. Furthermore, the content in the regular class was many grade levels behind; his peers there were learning grammatical constructions that he had mastered in elementary school. They also could not take their books home. The varying levels of education that students within the same high school were receiving was eye-opening for Lee.

In his AP US History course, Lee’s love of the subject predisposed him to high levels of engagement. He discusses an incident that occurred in that class as a “tipping point,” one that both expanded his critical thinking skills and exposed the “racial mountain” that students of color with a wealth of lived experiences would have to climb. As one of three Black students, the only Black male and the only Black student who was “not from the middle class,” he found himself trying to explain what it meant to be Black *and* poor in relation to the accessibility of resources and opportunity. Each time he attempted to articulate the connectedness among these things, he was “trumped” by either the teacher or one of the white students, who would inevitably say that “their parents had been poor too.” The point of this was to suggest that success was a product of determination and drive. Inevitably, however, he experienced this type of argument as neutralizing the realities of race and racism as prohibitive factors that adversely affected people of color in conjunction with poverty. He remembers the frustration at not having the conceptual language to argue his position in a way that would be persuasive to his classmates.

He also remembers the class being introduced to the Jeffersonian concept that “the government is best that governs the least.” He remembers the look

of quizzical shock on his teacher's face when he asked if this was the case, then does it mean that Native American approaches to governance were superior to Western approaches? Additionally, he felt the door was closed when it came to discussions of Blackness. Despite the race-based reality of American history, W. E. B. Du Bois, Booker T. Washington, Martin Luther King Jr., slavery, and the Civil War were almost exclusively the focal points of discussions about the Black presence in America; everything else was implicitly the legacy of Europe. His experiences outside school as well as his increasingly shrewd assessment of the unacknowledged hierarchies of race and power within school laid a solid foundation for his emerging critical consciousness and perception of "anti-Blackness" as a phenomenon long before he was exposed to discourses of Afro-pessimism. At the same time, his popularity grew as a result of his ability to wield his influence; he was chosen as class president, homecoming king, and prom king in a graduating class of seven hundred students.

When George Lee became part of the debate team at the University of Oklahoma, he accidentally stumbled into a context in which his love of history, his identification with hip-hop, and his life experience could work in conjunction with the research and evidence necessary for debate—creating a platform for both debate success and intellectual advancement. At OU George met Paul, whom he describes as "one of those very conscious self-reflexive white men [who understood] that no matter how much he [was] against white supremacy, he still benefits from white supremacy. He under[stood] that no matter how much he [was] an anti-racist, he still benefits from racism." Paul was a debater who suggested that George join the team after hearing him perform a spoken-word poem by Saul Williams. Paul mentioned that there was a debate team currently on the circuit from Louisville, Kentucky, that made arguments about race and oppression using spoken-word poetry as part of their techniques of persuasion. George decided to follow up, and shortly thereafter he met Rashid Campbell.

THE N-WORD AND BLACK SUBJECTIVITY

If use of the word *Black* signifies different things to insiders versus outsiders of the African American cultural landscape, then use of the N-word in hip-hop and contemporary Black grassroots culture ignites controversies that are in many ways equally complex. When the disturbing video from the Sigma Alpha Epsilon (SAE) chapter of the University of Oklahoma was leaked to social media, among other things, what surfaced in the aftermath was public

revisitation and discussion of the controversial use of the N-word.¹¹ On radio programs, on social media sites, and even in classroom conversations, some in the mainstream queried why this had become such a big deal since “rappers use the word *nigger* all the time.” The implication of this statement, among other things, was something to the effect of “Now that we are in a postracial if not entirely color-blind society, and racial discrimination has been more or less eliminated, there is no hierarchy between me, even if I’m white, and the rapper who uses this word. There is no power dynamic in which I am his slave master or social superior—the proof of this is that we all *should be* free to use the word—without anyone getting hurt or taking offense.” In an interesting move, the fact of *anyone* being able to use the word is meant to function as proof that racism no longer exists. If Black people can use the word among themselves, while it functions as restricted and taboo among white people, then this makes histories of racial violence and the ghosts of slavery ever present rather than a thing of the past.

There are many problems with this position, not the least of which is the elision of the imagery of death and violence at the heart of the SAE chant. After all, this was not a rap song that the fraternity brothers were singing along to as they cleaned the fraternity house and went about their day. This was a chant about lynching that had apparently been passed down *within* the fraternity itself. The assumptions that inhere are also fascinating with regard to the projection onto Black bodies, the responsibility for a crime that is actually committed by white people. Lynching was most often a white crime committed against a Black body, with the charge often being that Black crime and guilt were the real culprits in the scenario.¹² In the SAE moment, the crime was rhetorically committed by white men singing a chant on a fraternity bus. Yet the interrogative shifts the guilt from white rhetorical violence to the bodies of Black rappers whose *profanity* is seen as the problem instead of the real problem being white racism.

The contradictions inherent in the dramas surrounding the SAE incident may have been one of the reasons why more conscientious white persons were so horrified by this incident. It was at odds with the notion that the system can be trusted to protect marginalized groups if established laws are dependent on the mindset of biased private citizens to ensure their enforcement and viability.¹³ In the era after George Floyd, it becomes clear that laws don’t mean anything if the consciousness of the white masses remains untransformed. One of the questions that the SAE incident symbolically raised was whether Black death has become such a normalized aspect of Western modernity that one can presume that a chant about the

lynching of a Black body is interchangeable with Black rappers' uses of the N-word.

Several "inversions" are revealed in the wake of this explosive controversy. First, the "nigger" of the SAE chant is locatable within the realm of the "object" rather than in the realm of the "human," as referenced often by George Lee and Rashid Campbell within the context of their college debate arguments. Second, personal use of the words *nigger* with an *er* is seen by many socially progressive groups as taboo, even across racial lines. Yet the in-group colloquially prevalent use of *nigga* among the Black grassroots has a variety of functions that are distinct from the out-group slur *nigger*, which is the sign and substance of racist violence.

George Lee and Rashid Campbell attempted to invert the "nigger" logic exploited by the SAE fraternity, replacing it with the rhetorical logic of the "nigga," which became commercially popular with the explosion of gangsta rap in the late 1990s. In 1994, some twenty years before Lee and Campbell's debate success, scholar Ronald Judy, summarizing the then current scholarship on hip-hop, argued that the genre is grounded within African American oral traditions and is also a product of moral malaise engendered by capitalist hegemony. Judy argues that thinking critically about "the nigga" requires what he calls "thinking at the crux" of both approaches and "thinking hard core."¹⁴ Anticipating the rise of gangsta rap as an international genre as well as the hypercommodification of experience associated with hip-hop "gangstas," Judy's article was ahead of its time.¹⁵

Using the stereotype of the hardcore gangster rapper as a personification of society's evils, Judy traces the genealogy of the words *negro*, *nigger*, and *nigga* with an eye toward querying whether the "nigga" of gangster rap is a continuation of the trickster/outlaw/hero/bad man and/or bad "nigger" of early African American folklore and culture, and further if this persona/identity can be seen as an "authentic" articulation of African American-ness in the midst of the hypercommodification surrounding its emergence in popular culture. The hypercommodification is interesting since the very young men who sang the SAE chant may also be fans of the "bad man / bad nigger" image at the heart of gangster rap. This could be seen as an example of the desire and disdain that coexist in the mainstream American psyche for the Black subject at the proverbial bottom. In fact, rapper Waka Flocka Flame had been invited by one of the fraternities at OU to perform, and he chose to cancel his engagement after the SAE incident occurred. Interrogating the concept of "the nigga" in relation to definitions of "human," "object," "thing," "affect," and the "political economy of late capitalism," Judy mounts

a discursive external assessment of the way “nigga” as a concept circulates within hip-hop in a way that challenges the notion that those associated with the term are responsible for the decay and despair that the music addresses.

Of significant interest in Judy’s article is the genealogy he traces of the use of the word *nigger*. Using the *Oxford English Dictionary*, he charts *nigger* from the French *negre*, which “like its Spanish cognate, *negro*, was used in early modern times to designate black people.” He states that it came to English through the Dutch in the sixteenth century with the variant spellings *neeger*, *neager*, *negar*, *negre*. As Judy states, “In its earliest known literary reference of 1587, it is already associated with slavery: [‘there were also in her[e] 400 neegers, whome they had taken to make slaves . . .’].” He notes that by 1624 it refers to Black people as slave labor. He cites Captain John Smith’s observation about “a Dutch man of warre that sold us twenty Negars.” By 1676, using Samuel Sewall’s diary as a source, Judy argues that it refers to slave labor as property: “Jethro, his Niger, was then taken.”¹⁶ By this time there is conflation of black skin color, excessive work, and slave status. These three things are all implied and inseparable in the use of the word *nigger*; it’s like calling someone a “Black” working slave that “you” own.

Of significance to Judy is the “belonging-togetherness of the categories *nigger* and *work*.”¹⁷ He quotes from an 1861 letter written by George Eliot in which she says of her brother, “Charles . . . will . . . work like a nigger at his music.” The nexus of these references leads Judy to conclude that *nigger* not only means exceptionally hard work but *niggers* “by definition are labor commodities (. . . an index of productive labor that is somebody else’s property). . . . The value of the nigger is not in the physical body itself but in the energy, the potential force, that the body contains. . . . That force is the thing that the planter owns. It is the property of the planter. The nigger is that thing.” Bringing the word *negro* into the mix, Judy describes it as originally referring to color and functioning as a somewhat more respectful reference to Black people of African descent. After Booker T. Washington and others agitated for the term’s capitalization in the early twentieth century, “*negro* (small n) or *Negro* (big N) was utilized to designate a human identity, in opposition to *nigger*, which designated a commodity-thing.” Judy sees the widespread use “of the appellation *nigger* among antebellum slaves . . . as an ironic ‘misnaming’ . . . turning the nigger-thing back into the black (*negro*) human who forms community bonds.”¹⁸

Turning to the concepts of the “bad man” and the “bad nigger,” and arguing that the distinctions that earlier scholars made between these categories were artificial, Judy then describes the bad man, on one hand, and the bad

“nigger,” on the other, as members of the African American community who represented resistance to the oppressive order dating back to the days of slavery. Referencing sociologist John Roberts’s *From Trickster to Bad Man: The Black Folk Hero in Slavery and Freedom*, Judy draws on Roberts’s research, among others, to argue that the “bad man” who outsmarted the law was a figure of resistance and heroism in the Black community of old.¹⁹ The “bad nigger,” on the other hand, at least according to Judy’s reading of Roberts, represented lawlessness during slavery, was considered “misbehaving property” by slave owners, and was feared by “well-behaved” enslaved people on the plantation. Judy critiques Roberts’s attempts to keep the two categories separate by idealizing one and critiquing the other. Judy’s analysis suggests that the “bad man” and the “bad nigger” are fused in the “niggaz” (as in Ice Cube’s group N.W.A, Niggaz With Attitude) of hardcore gangsta rap who are personified in young Black men who fall outside the economy of “work” as well as discourses of “the human” that are linked to notions of respectability within Western social hierarchies. The “nigga” of gangsta rap therefore represents, among other things, a Black someone who is outside Black bourgeois middle-class narratives of respectability, outside the social and cultural constructions of those who identify with those things, and outside the economy of legitimate accessible work.

Several things are apparent after considering Judy; in the same way that there are genealogies of Blackness in terms of outsider/insider perceptions of the category, the terrain of the “nigger” as a construct has an outside and an inside as well. The day after the SAE incident happened, students in my predominantly white classroom asked for an open space to discuss the issue. As it turned out, one of the members of the SAE fraternity was enrolled in the course. We all had an honest conversation in which we brought our feelings about the incident into the discussion. I said to them, “I have a question, not as your professor but as a Black person. Do you all hate us that much?” I purposefully phrased the questions provocatively, using personal pronouns to make it clear to my students that real people’s feelings were involved. I also asked the question as an insider to the experience of pain associated with the racial slur “nigger” as well as the hatred of Blackness expressed in the SAE chant.

The white students in my class were puzzled by my identification with the “nigger” of the chant, stating, “We’re sure the men who sang the chant were drunk and don’t actually *hate* Black *people*; we’re sure they have Black friends.” For them, “nigger” in the discussion functioned subconsciously the way it did for Samuel Sewall in the seventeenth century—as

a “black-working-slave-thing-that-you-own.” It was distinct, at least in the moment, from the Black-woman-human-professor-with-the-power-to-give-out-grades standing in front of them in the classroom.²⁰ At the crux of Judy’s argument, however, is the genealogy of the word and its meaning over time in relation to the concept of a Black human being versus a laboring, three-fifths human “thing” that is property.

Linking the concept of “knowledge of self” to the realm of “human nature,” Judy states, “The human is that creature which knows itself knowing. The human can be enslaved but never *is* a slave.” He further states that the human can be designated “a phenomenal thing of the slave experience, *nigger*, but never *is* a nigger. This is a liberal knowledge that presumes the universality of apperception without knowing it and makes the human the significance of experience. The purpose of African American society, then, is the liberation of humans as subjects of knowledge . . . from the commodified nigger of slavery. . . . Thinking with the nigga is to become concerned with it as an expression of an emergent utterance—hip-hop—which does not work according to the purpose of liberal knowledge.”²¹

While Judy explains and contextualizes the push in the African American context to liberate Black people from the “commodified nigger of slavery,” there is also in his phraseology an implied critique of this liberation being modeled on the telos of a Western humanism premised on the production of subjects of liberal knowledge. Judy’s argument, while persuasive in terms of its situation of notions of “nigga-hood” as it relates to hip-hop at the crux, nevertheless begs the question of whose notion and genealogy of “the human” is being interpolated when the Black subject liberates his or her “humanness” from the “commodified nigger of slavery”—a task that is both necessary and righteous. In the rhetoric of the SAE students and even the students in my class, “nigger” was/is an object/thing, not a Black human being. It is rude to call a Black human being a thing. The implied dichotomy between “thing” and “human” clears the conscience.

In my mind, as a Black woman, I am the being that knows itself as *not* that “nigger” thing. I am the being that knows itself as more than that thing. I am equally the being that understands that the external world perceives me as both the descendant of that thing and the thing itself. Finally, I am also the being that knows that my “Black-woman-humanness” not only defines the terms of the “not-woman” but also identifies the parameters of what is a female-sexy-spiritual-erotic-being according to Lorde’s notions of the erotic as power. As was articulated in the previous chapter, the energy of the Afrospora feminine did not originate on the plantation. “Human” was the

framework that Black people reached for after slavery because it was the official society's construct. However, they afroindigenized the "human" framework, although that process has no name. They called a different thing by the same name.

Judy's critique of the human, and the "Negro" as the Black human, within the context of the project of the Enlightenment is well taken, to the extent to which it deconstructs a moral order based on raced and gendered hierarchies in which the rational subject of Western reason is at the apex and center of the discourse. On the other hand, however, formerly enslaved Africans, in an attempt to retrieve their sense of humanity from the "thingification" of "nigger" as object without self-knowledge, constructed a discursive identity from a trajectory that operated outside the project of Western modernity. The Afrosporic discourse of "the human" was distinct from that emerging from Western philosophy, although there were frequently no scholarly institutional markers to capture its genealogy. Yet the fact of its existence is apparent in what George Lee describes as the "nigga," or hip-hop's ability to be subversive through commodification, or Judy's statement that "*nigga* defines *authenticity* as adaptation to the force of commodification."²² I call this an instance of afroindigenization; afroindigenization here is a process of reauthentication. Afrospora culture constantly and consistently reauthenticates itself as a strategy of survival. This is what the project of "the human" looks like on this side of the divide. Judy states that "at those moments in which rap's appropriation by the transnational economy appears to signal its comprehension and diluting, hard core is reclaimed as the source."²³ Hip-hop emerges as an art form that critiques and highlights the oppression of people of color in urban environments after civil rights. While the art form can be commodified, the open critique of oppression within it contradicts the commodifying impulse. This is clear by the fact that most of the artists who consistently critique the state or even those songs by commercial artists who critique the state hardly, if ever, become popular.

Judy's point is very well taken when he states, "Yet, because we have failed to think about rap at the crux, *nigga* with an 'a' is misread as *nigger* with an 'er.' Once this association is made, the departure of hard core from the purpose of African American society can only be thought of as regressive. In this regressive thought, the hard-core *nigga* is an expression of angry, self-destructive violence, the armed and insatiable beast of capitalism that knows only exchange-value and the endless pursuit of greater pleasure."²⁴ Without a context for understanding the use, appropriation, and function of the term *nigga* conceptually in hip-hop and the cross-section of African American

culture and society that produced it, then, both in the mainstream context and within the group, “nigga” and “nigger” are conflated and reduced to the lowest common denominator.

By contrast, Judy implicitly situates “nigga” as a form of self-awareness, whereas “nigger” is not. If “nigger” is the outside category, then “nigga” within both Judy’s analysis and hip-hop discourse is situated as the inside. “Nigga” is ironically—and maybe, for some, surprisingly in certain ways—more aligned with the capital “B” of Blackness. Lying outside the economy and in the zone of “nonproductive consumption,” the “niggaz” of hip-hop *are* the “low down folk” subjects of Zora Neale Hurston and Langston Hughes’s parlance. Like the “bad man / bad nigger” construct and reality, they are outside the traditional Black middle-class categories of desire and imitation and function as both a threat to the stability of this assimilation-based world order and part of the creative ground, or what Toni Cade Bambara calls the “fecundating matrix,” of African American culture.²⁵

There is a moment in Judy’s argument in which he addresses and stages the significance of not so much the “bad man” trickster figure who was the productive outlaw hero during reconstruction and after but rather the “bad nigger” enslaved African, the “obstreperous, dangerous nigger, who threatened the order of the plantation by refusing to submit to its laws.”²⁶ For Judy, the real power of the “bad nigger” is his symbolic disruption of the foundational ground of a kind of Enlightenment subjectivity. With an 1856 text as his source, Judy cites John Little’s seemingly contrary description of the “bad nigger [as] the negro who is put in . . . stocks [and] irons” as a result of his rebelliousness, but once he has successfully escaped slavery, Little remarks, “the man who was a ‘bad nigger’ in the South is here [in Canada] a respected independent farmer.”²⁷ On one hand, there is the “bad nigger” who does not fear death, scares other slaves, and frightens the planter “not only because the force that he [the planter] understood to be his property is being withheld but because it is withheld through an unknowable agency.” On the other hand, there is the “bad nigger” who transforms into the “respected independent farmer.” For Judy, the coexistence of both of these identities exhibits “the groundlessness of the sovereign individual.”²⁸ Judy seems interested in the extent to which these inversions represent a kind of radical instability or, as he says later, indicates “the historicity of [an] indeterminate identity.”²⁹ Judy’s argument here exemplifies a kind of oppositional resistance to the neat categorization of the “bad nigger” as either “an unbridled, lawless force” or a Black human farmer-turned-subject. The bad nigger-in-the-process-of-transformation is no traditional Enlightenment subject in

the conventional sense. There are no markers to capture our genealogy of the “Black human” as more than a member of Fanon’s buffer class or Carter G. Woodson’s miseducated “Negro” desirous of assimilation.³⁰ Yet if the radical humanity of nineteenth-century figures such as David Walker and Ida B. Wells-Barnett or twentieth-century figures such as Malcolm X and Assata Shakur are any indication of this other trajectory, then the signposts are everywhere. But what functions for the planter as the bad nigger’s “unknowable agency” is a source of further interest.

What if we discuss this “unknowable agency” less as a product of a binary or Hegelian struggle in which the enslaved finally gains individual sovereignty but instead think about “this force” or “unknowable agency” as more than an accidental form of consciousness on the part of the enslaved? What if we think of this “unknowable agency” as having a logic and a power that are informed less by the individual actions of one rebellious slave and more by the submerged consciousness of the group, heavily informed by the folks lowest down, who are the most prone to forms of resistance that they pioneer? It is with these notions as a kind of foundational ground that I return to the afroindigenizing of debate performed by Rashid Campbell and George Lee during their decisive 2014 debate success.

ANTI-BLACKNESS AND THE WARRIOR AESTHETIC

And I think I really took [on] like this warrior aesthetic, where I . . . felt like everybody I was debating against, I was debating what they [had] learned from their community. . . . So what you saw as a disadvantage we were gonna make it an advantage; that’s what made me and Rashid start winning. We used like disenfranchisement, oppression and white supremacy, and inaccessibility as advantages to debate; the position informs thinking. We felt like we [were] on the bottom. . . . We felt like from the top you can’t see much. On the bottom you see everything . . . and we [were] like you can’t tell [us] nothing about being on the bottom. You debating about theory, we debating about experience; we debating about truth, you debating about hypothetical BS.

—George Lee

For Campbell and Lee, the primary ground for the philosophical arguments from which they mobilized their attacks was rooted in theorizations of anti-Blackness. Lee’s assessment of hip-hop located it within the contours of social death. Referring to Saidiya Hartman’s *Scenes of Subjection* and Orlando Patterson’s *Slavery and Social Death* as texts that heavily

influenced their theoretical landscape, Lee argued that an understanding of social death as part and parcel of civil society was inherent. Describing the Middle Passage as a “de-ontologizing of the African . . . where Africans got onto the boats as Africans and got off as slave, as negro, as black,” Lee states, “Instead of subjects we were objects; instead of being about production and consumption it became about fungibility and accumulation.” In his assessment of this discourse, civil society is built on the backs of the enslaved, it is structured through anti-Blackness, and Black people are rendered socially dead and therefore are prone to gratuitous violence. Within this framework, Black people have an antagonistic relationship to the world and the world has an antagonistic relationship to Blackness, one that is structured through anti-Blackness.

Making connections between these discourses and the world of hip-hop, Lee affirms:

I think that all of hip-hop is an embodiment of Afro-pessimism. And within an understanding of social death Afro-pessimists write that there is a way to celebrate social life within social death. I believe that hip-hop is the celebration of social life within social death. . . . To me hip-hop *is* Afro-pessimism; hip-hop embodies that, *it is it, you feel me?* I feel like hip-hop, if you listen to it and you think about social death, all rappers gon’ talk about it. They ain’ gon’ use *the term* social death, but they gon’ be rapping about social death. Rapping about how Black people are rendered, you know what I’m sayin’, socially dead, and [it’s] always seen as rational [and] justifiable.

With this philosophical approach, Campbell and Lee’s strategy of success tactically manipulated the connections among these theories, their lived experience, and the philosophical positions of hip-hop artists. Their combative styles were notorious; they were also personalized, intellectual, confrontational, poetic, and deftly astute all at once. In 2014 the college debate topic resolved that “the US government should substantially increase statutory and/or judicial restrictions on the war powers authority of the president with regards to targeted killing, indefinite detention, and armed intervention into hostilities.” Campbell and Lee, feeling as if they had nothing to lose in an arena where they were presumed not to have access to “anything worth knowing,” refused to relate to the topic in the ways that were expected. Lee asserted, “We didn’t talk about just one issue [as was expected]. We refused the distinctions [between the issues]; we were trying to philosophically debate above the topic—trying to define what is or is not human. What it

means to be human also has an ontology; the ‘nigger’ was excluded from the ontology of being human.”

Demonstrating the way that anti-Blackness functioned within the context of the debate world and turning that negative into a positive, Campbell and Lee launched a type of warrior offensive when they argued:

White people are never forced to engage [a] Black aesthetic, but Black people are always forced to engage [a] white aesthetic. This . . . exemplifies how different perspectives in education are valued. The education coming from Black people is never valued. . . . When you read five pieces of evidence, I am forced to go [and] read those five pieces of evidence and engage them. If I [spit] four rap [bars], you look at [me] . . . like I didn’t do nothing.

Lee expounded further, “We started making arguments about that. . . . We started making the debate community respect the art form[s] of rap and poetry as being intellectual and political.” In addition to this, each debater had unique strategies that made him good at what he did and amplified their collective success when combined. Campbell, in describing his own technique, explains:

In debate, one of the things that made me a better debater than most folks was that I have an ability to engage what was said in debate rounds. I can process information quickly and debate outside of the context of what we call “cards” or evidence, right? What debaters do a lot of times is they have “reading competitions.” They bring their evidence; they study their evidence; and they live off that evidence. I would combine my experiences and just the real stuff that I knew [with whatever] they were saying. And when[ever] I would bring [in] those sporadic ideas and make the text come alive, they wouldn’t be able to engage it. If it was any one thing that made me a better debater than most folks that had . . . obviously better GPAs and [who were] academically far . . . smarter people [was] my ability to just feel out truths right, in debate they call [this] “non-falsifiable” [evidence]. [Let’s say that someone has] a solvency for the ways that gun control happens, or something right, just bringing up a random [example], in the context of the debate, I would give an example [from] my specific situation that solvency wouldn’t have solved for, you get what I’m saying? And [my opponent] would say, “Well, I can’t deny that that wouldn’t have worked for you because it’s non-falsifiable.” They couldn’t say that my experiences were right or wrong or happened or didn’t happen. [Since it

was non-falsifiable, however,] in a debate it would become null and void. So what I would do was . . . I would use that example that was considered null and void or seen [simply] as an experience or whatever, and I would say these would be the experiences of other folks, right, and I would make people have to engage me [during] cross-X (cross-examination). [In] cross-X in debate, when you ask a question, people have to answer it. I would turn cross-X into a performance. I would give examples and dominate [my opponents] in ways [that made them] not understand their own argument and I would confuse them. So even the smartest, academically evidence-based policy debater [had a hard time] debat[ing] me because they were based [solely] on their evidence and were not [personally invested in it], right. [I would use] critical thinking that could engage you for what you were saying, and I would change the modes and the ways that you [could] engage in debate. And it was weird for folks because it does not seem like a way that you would win debates. Everybody was saying, like, you need your evidence, you need your research. I would use that experience as that research.³¹

Campbell's description of his lived experience as indirectly informing his debate strategy is unorthodox and may be seen by some assessments as biased in favor of the personal rather than the seemingly objective. Yet what he and Lee managed to do was expose the extent to which the exclusion of experiences like theirs, documented so well in the musical commentary made by the hip-hop artists they cited, was a function of anti-Blackness rather than a manifestation of an unbiased and objective approach.

Lee, for his part, describes his encounter with the writings of Black Panther founder Huey P. Newton as transformative, personally and politically, in ways that catapulted him several notches forward within the context of debate. Lee quotes Newton as stating that "power is the ability to define the phenomenon and make it act in a desired manner." He elaborates:

So when I got into just like that understanding, [about the function of power] . . . that whole understanding became the hubris of how I debated. Whether I was [debating on the] affirmative [or] whether I was negative, whether I was debating against feminists . . . the Marxists . . . the policy hacks, whether I was debating the Afro-futurists or Afro-pessimists, or whatever the hell you want to call yourself, I was going to figure out a way to define the phenomenon of you, or the phenomenon of what you [were] debating about, and make it act in a desired manner.

Lee's strategy, similar to Campbell's, was *an internal strategy*. He was banking on his ability to outthink and outsmart his opponent, regardless of his or her ideological bent. Their combined approaches were reflective of a type of warrior aesthetic, the likes of which the debate world appeared not to have previously seen. Their use of an anti-Black worldview against itself, as a type of internal "fire power" or creative motivation to outwit and outdebate their opponents, is a manifestation of afroindigenization in action.

AFROINDIGENIZATION AS AFFECT AND EFFECT

But the reason why me and Rashid got good at debate . . . As Black men, for us, [debate] was the first space that people were forced to listen to us. Debate took [an] hour and a half [to] two hours. No matter how much you think I'm wrong, no matter how much you disagree with me, you have to listen to me. . . . Oh! And you also have to respond. For us, that was empowering. For us to be up and get into a space and talk about Big K.R.I.T. and . . . J. Cole and Kendrick Lamar as being these organic intellectuals, and for us to be able to talk about K.R.I.T. and [Cole] in the same light as somebody would talk about Heidegger and Nietzsche and Derrida or Agamben, it was empowering.

—George Lee

When Lee and Campbell encountered Ronald Judy's article, they were able to use the concept of the Black rebellious ("nigga") outsider as a subversive and uncontainable entity to their advantage. They rhetorically asked within the context of debate if embodying the rebellious slave was a good thing in the face of a system that sees Black people as nonhuman; they vehemently answered yes! Their definition of *nigga* was a rebellious bad slave—presuming that a submissive "good slave" is nothing to philosophically aspire toward. Understanding that the finer distinctions between "nigga" and "nigger," while functional inside the Black community, were illegible to the outside, they maintained that the construct "nigger" put pressure on existential definitions of "the human" within Western liberal enlightenment discourse as Judy argued, since on a most basic and literal level "the nigger" was/is not constructed as "human" in any real sense.

Within the Black community, certain conflation had also become true. As Elaine Brown effectively argues in *The Condemnation of Little B: New Age Racism in America*, in 1997, when Little B, a teenage boy in Atlanta, was accused of killing Darrell Woods, the descriptions of B as a "thug" versus Woods as a "Black family man" mirrored the "respected independent farmer" versus "the

bad nigger in stocks and irons” described by fugitive slave John Little during the antebellum period. Woods’s widow lamented, “The only thing Darrell wanted was to raise his family and have a home. He didn’t ask for handouts. We were raising our sons to be men. We didn’t want to raise no thugs.” Furthering the dichotomy between Woods and Little B, Atlanta police officer Mickey Lloyd was “quoted over and over as saying [Little B] . . . was acting like the thug he is.”³² Unlike the pre–Civil War era when Little “humanizes” the “bad nigger” in stocks and irons who is rebelling against an oppressive system by marking his transformation into the “good” independent farmer, by contrast, in the situation of Little B and Darrell Woods, 141 years later, Brown effectively shows that the Black community now “believes the negative hype.” The “thug”/“nigga” is perceived of as a menace to Black and white society. And as Campbell and Lee, using Judy as a stepping stone, argued, “Police cars are one of the many material manifestations of the slave ship. Social control is dependent upon the management of Niggas.”³³ Understanding this helps further explain why Tupac Shakur would adopt the ironic moniker “Thug Life.”

In the final section of his article, “Das Nigga Affekt,” Judy describes an uneasy alliance between the notion of gangsta rap as a destabilizing force within the Black community and the art form as appropriated for its “affect” and somehow still resisting total appropriation from outsiders by the very nature of its recurring hardcore political critique. Gangsta rap, for Judy, represents a crisis of morality in the Black community. The segment of the community invested in a politics of respectability as a vehicle for rehumanizing a people who were historically dehumanized by the state during slavery and afterward is symbolically threatened by the hardcore “nigga” of gangsta rap. As Judy declares, the advent of “identification of society as economy has led to the displacement of the negro-subject with the nigger-thing from *within* the community.”³⁴ In other words, if everything is economically driven, then loftier “human” ethics and morality have become subservient to a materialistic worldview. Judy quotes Joe Woods’s September 1991 *Village Voice* article, “Niggers, Negroes, Blacks, Niggaz and Africans.” Woods maintains that although “folks do listen to other music . . . the essential music—the ‘real’ thing—is the nihilistic capitalistic hard-core hip-hop rap shit. . . . We want the real niggaz even when they’re fronting all that bitch shit because of this: in America, violence and making dollars make for respect and those motherfuckers are getting it.”³⁵ Woods’s 1991 statement proved prophetic as the hardcore gangsta rappers of that era, those whose very music popularized using the term *nigga* in hip-hop music, are in many instances some of the wealthiest musicians in the industry today.³⁶

Within the context of the materialistic reality determining the nature of the affect, Judy draws on the words of rapper Ice-T, arguing that “the process of consuming rap music is tantamount to the niggafication of white suburban youth.” What does this mean? Judy describes this as more than Ice-T commenting on the spread and popularity of hip-hop, noting that “he is also remarking on the equally inevitable loss of experience to commodified affect. . . . Nigga is a commodity affect” and “the nigga is constituted in the exchange of experience for affect.”³⁷ His meaning, among other things, is that *hip-hop and the “Nigga” concept are being consumed for their affect by those who are outside the history of the experience of being made into slave-laboring things.* He distinguishes affect from feelings of empathy, linking it instead to strong passions such as anger, rage, and intense pleasure.

In the 1980s, in the early years of commercial rap music hitting the airwaves, my sister went to a junior high school in Boston where a group of young Jewish boys, calling themselves the Fresh Jew Crew, put together a rap about the McDonald’s fast-food chain:

I went to Mickey D’s to get a D.L.T.
And all I got was lettuce and cheese
Huh huh huh huh huh huh huhhuh
It rhymes like a beeeee-hive.³⁸

Here is a simple example of the appropriation of affect at its finest. The rhyme makes no literal sense; there are no politics to it. But the consumption of the rhythm and style of hip-hop is apparent in terms of both the a cappella rapping and the choice of group name. Furthermore, the verse highlights an interesting aspect of the production of authenticity as it relates to hip-hop culture. A fascinating element of hip-hop monikers is the essentializing of a stereotype through the privileging of a name that creates an identity. The stereotypical name that emerges ends up functioning as a process of authentication. In this instance the young Jewish boys’ hip-hop moniker is the Fresh Jew Crew. Centralizing and essentializing the word *Jew* as representative of a particular identity, and adding “fresh” as a prefix, the group links the “affect” of “fresh,” a Black vernacular term popular at the time, with the “affect” of “Jew,” which, used by any non-Jewish person, may quickly be perceived of as antisemitic. Yet a reversal is possible because the group claims Jewishness. In the documentary *Rize*, the young Asian clown group called themselves the Rice Track Clowns in a similar kind of move. They reappropriate the stereotype of Asian people and rice to their benefit. The name of a 1980s hip-hop group from Houston, the Geto Boys, is yet another example of

this phenomenon: essentialization as an effective process of authentication. As Black men naming and claiming the proverbial “ghetto,” they make the negative into an authenticated positive. The naming strategies by these artists and groups are effective to the degree that the consumption that follows marks the *effect* of the *affect*. The irony here is that white youth who may use “nigger” in that Southern plantation racist sense of the word may be some of the same ones who are desperate to appropriate the energy of the “real nig-gaz,” the hip-hop gangstas, whose rebellion is premised on the “bad nigger” that represents the negative Black stereotype in the white mind. They desire the very “thing” that they disdain.

Judy has a powerful critique of authenticity, one that remains fresh in the face of the explosion of gangster rap onto a world stage. It is unique because of its specificity in relation to the production of authenticity or “realness” as it connects to the *idea* of the Black gangsta. The projection of a cool-hard-ghetto-thug persona is almost a prerequisite for entering this aspect of the hip-hop game now. Yet I maintain that imitation is one thing, but the ability to adapt and improvise reconstitutes what functions as authentic in this arena as well. Furthermore, the ability to use what Judy calls the “unknowable agency” is not only an extension of the reconstitution of the authentic and a manifestation of what Amiri Baraka refers to as “the changing same”; it is also an example of a hip-hop aesthetic.³⁹

When Judy states that “Nigga defines authenticity as adaptation to the force of commodification,” the notion of “authenticity” as a product of “adaptation” stands out as a key maneuver with both theoretical and practical manifestations. The movement between authenticity and adaptation connects to Baraka’s notion of “the changing same” spoken differently; it is an instance of afroindigenization. The business of taking what functions for the Afrospora individual as culturally authentic and, of necessity, adapting and transforming a situation in which one has limited control externally into something that can be manipulated by one’s access to internal power as Campbell and Lee did in the debate world is evidence of afroindigenization-in-action. In a clever afroindigenizing move, Campbell and Lee applied one of the principles taken from Black Panther Huey Newton to one of the primary concepts grasped from Judy’s article. George Lee, paraphrasing Huey Newton’s principle, described it as “defining the phenomenon and making it act in a desirable manner.” What they came up with was the idea that the world, in light of both the subconscious and overt prevalence of anti-Blackness, was going to view Black people, particularly those from the bottom of society, in a way that demonstrated either “negrophilia,” an exoticizing desire for Blackness,

or “negrophobia,” fear and disdain for Black subjectivity. In order to win debates, Campbell and Lee used the un-interrogated essentializing Black logic of their mostly white opponents against them, exposing their ideology and defeating them in the process.

They interpreted Judy’s “Nigga” of hardcore gangsta rap as a figure of subversion. Their partial identification with these identities as products of the hip-hop generation made their ability to manipulate this perspective easier. As Lee maintains, “Once we figured out the perception that you had of us in your mind, we was just goin’ be subversive through that and beat your ass. . . . If [you] feared us, because debate is all about impacts, we would use [that] fear [describing] how fear has always been correlated with Blackness; you fear me; you’re scared of me; and because you’re scared of me it’s going to determine how you interact with me and how you engage me. And anything I say that’s outside the norm, you’re going to always filter it through [your fear].” On the other hand, if debaters tried to romanticize their introduction of hip-hop lyrics into evidence as “cool,” they worked in the other direction, pointing out the hypocrisy of romanticizing the violence or oppression that the lyrics of various artists depicted. Campbell and Lee’s third-level reading of Judy’s essay as a paradigm for understanding the categorizations of Blackness and particularly Black maleness in terms of desire and disdain was translated by both of them into an afroindigenizing strategy, one in which a negative situation was rearticulated into a positive tactical maneuver within the terrain of college debate. The disdain and anti-Blackness that elements of hegemonic society have for the Black subject are resolved *inside the group* by functional art that has the capacity at its best to heal both the individual and the collective. Campbell and Lee made their strategy of debating into a functional art.

Finally, at the heart of their enterprising approach to hip-hop was also a serious engagement with and use of African American Vernacular English (AAVE), otherwise known as Black English or Ebonics. In the mid- to late 1990s, the controversy surrounding the Oakland School Board’s attempt to take Ebonics seriously as a strategy for teaching Black youth was both misunderstood and publicly ridiculed. Within the context of hip-hop, AAVE has significantly diverse manifestations within East and West Coast, and South and Midwest regional populations. The linguistic complexity and variation of hip-hop from these geographic areas bespeak the philosophical intricacies of this language. Lee observed that as debaters, the source of his and Campbell’s inspiration for taking their own language culture seriously was a team they crossed paths with from Emporia State in Kansas. He reports:

We came downstairs and the bus was about to leave after their debate. [But w]e got to see them kinda debate Black, pretty much. When I say debate Black, they were really expressing themselves through a Black aesthetic; they wasn't censoring themselves; they wasn't going out they way trying to enunciate; it was like, it was Black; the debate was Black; they mannerisms was Black; their enunciation was Black; their impacts was Black; their perspective was Black. So, me and Rashid seen that, so we was like oh! We can do that!

The term *Black* in this context is code for feeling free to express themselves in their homegrown speech and voice and style without shame. Campbell and Lee's use of Black language highlights a tension related to the perception of African American culture that is as exaggerated during the current era as it may have been historically. The mainstream perception of Ebonics as an inferior form of English and the speakers of it as "street smart," maybe, but less intellectually intelligent than speakers of the "King's English," runs deep.⁴⁰ While the fields of cultural linguistics and anthropology as well as aspects of rhetoric and composition studies hold Black language in some esteem, the public notion that AAVE not only has a grammatical structure and philosophical worldview of its own but also, far from being inferior English, is closer to what Woodson in the 1930s called "a broken-down African tongue" is categorically unknown and significantly underestimated in many quarters.⁴¹ The pejorative view of Black language as broken English unmoors Black identity from any cultural roots outside colonization; Woodson's perspective, on the other hand, makes it possible to understand the complexity of a range of related issues, not the least of which is the tonality and philosophical worldview associated with Black speech.⁴²

On another level, the afroindigenizing principle that Campbell and Lee used in their debate praxis bears similarities to VèVè Clark's notion of *marasa* consciousness, with the *marasa trois* signaling the intersection of uniformity and improvisation. We can deploy the concept of *marasa* consciousness to interpret Campbell and Lee's intuitively intellectual strategies in debate. The oppositional struggle between desire and disdain for the Black subject, or "negrophilia" and "negrophobia," was deconstructed and reconstructed by the duo in such a way that allowed for a third principle to emerge in the form of a convincing argument. Their methods were unorthodox and employed improvisation, similar to the depictions of uniformity and difference coexisting in the *vèvè* of the *marasa trois*. They did with language and persuasion what the *vèvè* diagram of the *marasa trois* does visually.⁴³ The oppositional

arguments can be seen as the variation at the top and bottom of the *marasa* diagram, while Campbell and Lee's winning strategy is represented by the field of interaction where the vertical and horizontal lines meet, creating uniformity. The uniformity is achieved ultimately when they succeed in making the phenomenon of other debaters' arguments "act in a desirable manner," opening the door for their victories. The ability to practice this type of afroindigenization, linked here to the *marasa* ability to reconcile or shift seeming contradictions into energy that works in one's favor, is, at root, a way of talking about spiritual power. The spiritual power that the individual or the group manipulates internally is the afroindigenizing impulse in action; sameness and difference can coexist and/or discordant differences can be balanced out. In these ways, Campbell and Lee afroindigenized the college debate world. They made this manifest in a diversity of contexts and in a variety of ways. The African American proverbial notion of "working the good out of evil" is demonstrated in each of these instances. And in "working the good out of evil," they demonstrated Ìwàpèlé, or "good character," by making something beautiful out of the pain and destruction that were part of their early lives.

Afterword

KRAK: “Jack Mandora Mi Nuh Choose None”

In rural Jamaican storytelling traditions, sometimes at the end of a story, the teller will say, “Jack mandora mi nuh choose none,” meaning “I have presented the story as it was told to me and I have not added or subtracted anything from it.”¹ By way of ending this multichapter narrative story, I add a personal one of my own.

I composed this book as a way of finishing a thought that was a fleeting reference in my first book. The thought was really an understanding I acquired in nonacademic Black grassroots environments, which led me to believe that whenever people there talked about “culture,” rather than it being a neutral category, it usually was suggestive of “the powers that kept you alive.” This is not to say there was any naivete in these environments about the existence of both internal and external forces of destruction. In fact, the presence of negativity was often so pervasive—economically, emotionally, socially, and psychologically—that no reminders were needed. And maybe because of this, the implied definition of culture was necessarily rooted in affirmation as opposed to doubt, and like Dianne Stewart’s “theory of masquerading” and Zora Neale Hurston’s “feather-bed resistance,” this cultural, Black public secret was often implied by head nods, vernacular greetings, spontaneously

intimate conversations between Black strangers, and the deep wisdom that often characterized the disposition of Black elders of an earlier generation.²

When George Floyd was publicly murdered, it reminded me of why these small and large forms of collective affirmation were necessary. We live in societies that are premised on our destruction but that also appear not to have the tools to fix the larger problems they have created. And so, as Walter Rodney states, “colonialism had dehumanized the colonizer more than the colonized.”³ We, on the other hand, the colonized, had not collectively become monsters, despite historical treatment suggesting that we were both beasts and savages. And herein lay another public secret of a different order: The societies that we found ourselves in—ones with institutions that were not a product of our ancestral cultural value systems—prized etiquette over justice. From the times when Black men could be publicly lynched based simply on perceived disrespect toward white women, while Black women were consistently raped and violated by white men without retribution, all the way up to the 2019 and 2021 Trump impeachment hearings in which the noise of protesters was perceived by the “far right” as a greater travesty than the matters under investigation—etiquette was prized over justice. We have long been familiar with the dominant society’s fear of truth-telling or of an ethical stock-taking, one in which the crimes of Black people in the current day are weighed against the proverbial “case for reparations.”

There were other truths as well. After twenty-three years of teaching in a politically conservative US state, I realized that the self-loathing and the “colonized mindset” that we, the descendants of enslaved Africans, had struggled to reconcile and unshackle ourselves from was a mere drop in the bucket in relation to what the members of the dominant society also appear to have internalized for very different reasons. At least we, the despised and discarded, had Bob Marley’s “redemption song” call to “emancipate ourselves from mental slavery.”⁴ The call to develop our own internal resources was a fundamental necessity for surviving the manic and destructive world order in which we found ourselves. This survival was not only expressed in dramatic political gestures but was also laid bare in long chats with male and female friends, at family reunions, and with laughter, laughter, and more laughter. Our dark humor revealed the reason why master comedians arose from among many of our people. We had learned how to “work the good out of evil” and how to “tek bad tings mek laugh” in the face of hard times. As poet Lucille Clifton states, “even in death’s hand / we fold the fingers up / and call them greens and / grow on them, / we hum them and make music.”⁵

On the other side of the divide, the reality of slavery, enslavement, and the transatlantic slave trade in Africans had also had a brutal psycho-social effect on the heirs of Manifest Destiny. I saw it clearly one day in class when I was teaching a segment from the civil rights documentary *Eyes on the Prize*. “The Time Has Come” is a chapter that focuses on the life and death of Malcolm X and his lasting impact on the civil rights movement. I often screened this segment in classes when it seemed relevant since it did a good job of explaining the significance of Malcolm X’s life in a non-pejorative way while also representing the moment in the civil rights movement when there was a shift and a substitution of the slogan “Freedom Now” for a new one—“Black Power.” In this segment of the series, there was coverage of another documentary, within the documentary itself. A youthful Mike Wallace (prior to his fame on *60 Minutes*), with the aid of African American journalist Louis Lomax, produced a broadcast for WNTA-TV in New York City from July 13 to 17, 1959, titled, *The Hate That Hate Produced*—which was described as a five-part “television documentary about Black nationalism in America, focusing on the Nation of Islam and, to a lesser extent, the United African Nationalist movement.”

It was stated that this production “marked the first time that most white people heard about the Nation, its leader, Elijah Muhammad, and its charismatic spokesman, Malcolm X.”⁶ One day, I stumbled upon the idea of asking my students what they thought about the title of the documentary, *The Hate That Hate Produced*. I didn’t care for it myself since it set up an implicit equalizing binary between historically white hate groups and implied Black ones. But putting aside and not sharing my own bias, I simply asked the students, “Let’s presume that the title is accurate. What are your theories about the reasons for the imagined hatred on both sides of the divide?” They thought about it for a moment and then some students voluntarily said that on the Black side the reasons for the imagined hatred could be the history of slavery, the violence of “Jim Crow” society, and the reality of lynching, racial discrimination, and police brutality. On the white side, they further volunteered, the imagined hatred was about a fear of Black people and what they might do.

I commented sarcastically on the balanced nature of what they had accurately observed. One set of feelings was based on actual historical experiences, while the other set was rooted in anxiety about a hypothetical future. But the people who had experienced more actual violence had taken no collective and public forceful action against the perpetrators of this terrorism. On the other hand, there was evidence that the ones who feared Black people and what they might do had taken action on many occasions, in advance of any perceived danger. The takeaway was that the fear of hypothetical Black frenzy

was really a fear on the part of the dominant society's collective submerged psyche of the self. In other words, it was a projected fear of what an imaginary and empowered Black populace would do if the tables were turned. As Jon Stewart jokingly stated on one of his shows on the eve of the election of President Barack Obama, "Mr. Obama, if you become president are you going to enslave all the white people?" Therefore, two psychological legacies of slavery, for the descendants of European settler-immigrants, were fear and denial.

It seems that future attempts to seek multiracial and multicultural just societies will have to theoretically contend with this fear-based legacy of denial as seriously as we, the descendants of enslaved Africans, have had to contend with "the struggle to emancipate ourselves from mental slavery." Although Black people are collectively on the bottom economically, both here in the Americas and worldwide, fear of imagined Black power and resilience, particularly in the United States, has kept gun suppliers in business, especially in rural white spaces.

I developed an interest in West and Central African precolonial cultural and spiritual ways of knowing when I realized that my ancestors and the ancestors of other descendants of formerly enslaved Africans had figured out, however subconsciously at times, strategies for maintaining a sense of their own humanity in the face of aggressive and consistent fear-ridden and dehumanizing representations of us as Black people. It was not an accident that many among us had envisioned ways of holding on to a sense of humane generosity and decency, while at times setting the standard for society at large. Our maintenance, at our best, of high levels of integrity occurred simultaneously with our demonization, incarceration, ridicule, and pathologizing by a general public—while negative use of the N-word never went out of style. The desire for and fear of us bespoke a deeper set of complexities on both sides of this divide. I concluded that at a minimum, the projected fear and hatred of us was at times thinly disguised jealousy. How was it possible that the descendants of those who had been enslaved had not died out but had instead managed to procreate and furthermore produce music, dance, food culture, style, humor, and spiritually inspired theological approaches to reality that influenced those around them? And why wouldn't they/we be imagined to be a threat to power if left unshackled, even without reparations? During slavery, our ancestors had been forced to do the best work for no pay. As Ta-Nehisi Coates has noted, enslavement was theft—250 years in which the benefit of our ancestors' labor was stolen from us—thus making generational wealth impossible.⁷ Yet, at the moment of emancipation, these people, our ancestors, were the best *skilled* laborers who had worked for

centuries without compensation. What would they do with all those skills if left to their own devices in a fair world, one without the dominant society's fear and denial?

Afroindigenization is the ability to transform a negative situation into a source of internal power. The secret is the "turn loose"—letting go as opposed to holding on to anxiety and dread. This submerged consciousness is part of an Afrospora psycho-spiritual reality. It doesn't define us all, but it is one of the primary grassroots characteristics shaping the psyches of those who survived with their humanity intact. The future of just societies at this "Floyd-ian crossroads" will require more than forgiving and forgetting when the heirs of Manifest Destiny have not yet learned how to "turn loose." It will require, among other things, accepting the fact that the demonized, even if imperfect, grassroots heirs of a submerged Afrosporic indigeneity have something to teach the world. Giving us the opportunity to lead and share the things we know that are worth knowing may be one of the cornerstones that will make future cosmic and societal shifts possible.

Jack Mandora mi nuh choose none.

INTRODUCTION

- 1 I borrow and expand on the use of the term *Afrospora* as defined by M. NourbeSe Philip. She used it when presenting at the Institute of Gender and Development conference in Barbados in 2018. I subsequently reached out to NourbeSe Philip for further information, and she shared the definition cited here with me in an email in 2019. “My creation of the neologism *Afrospora* came out of a desire to speak to our unique history. . . . The other expression I use is The Great Scattering of our people . . . enslaved Africans . . . and then the examples of Caribbean peoples moving—following work . . . to England . . . France . . . to help build the Panama Canal, then to Cuba, Afro Brazilians moving to Portugal etc.—always following work—scatterings upon scatterings. I knew that the second syllable [of *Diaspora*] was linked to spore, which comes from the Greek, *spora*, a seed, sowing, seed time. . . . Thinking of the seed, the spore, being scattered I decided to add *Afro* to that, to speak to the uniqueness of our scattering which began in such horrific ways. . . . I also think that inherent in the scattering, which in the case of our history can be seen to be destructive and negative, there is also a possibility in the word spore in that it is also about seeding, making new life—which still escapes us in its necessary fullness as I write, but it leaves me filled with the possibility of a seeding of African life in all its inherent beauty around the world. Am tempted to say that it would be wonderful to get the word in different African languages that speak to this activity—scattering, sowing, seeding.”
- 2 Edwidge Danticat popularized the oral storytelling device “Krik/Krak” in her early collection of the same name. It has also been referenced in other parts of the French-speaking Caribbean, and there are similar kinds of traditions in the rest of the region.
- 3 Zora Neale Hurston to Langston Hughes, November 22, 1928, in Kaplan, *Zora Neale Hurston*, 131–32.
- 4 Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, 269.
- 5 Clark, “Developing Diaspora Literacy” (2009), 11.
- 6 Clark, “Developing Diaspora Literacy” (2009), 11.

- 7 Clark references the chapter "A Myth of Origins: Esu-Elegbara and the Signifying Monkey," from Gates's *The Signifying Monkey*.
- 8 As Clark states, "Legba is the first Lwa whose presence in a Vodou ceremony must be acknowledged before ritual practice commences. He not only 'opens the doors' for interactions with the spirits through drum, dance and song but also figuratively stands at the gates of literacy" ("Developing Diaspora Literacy" [2009], 12).
- 9 Clark, "Developing Diaspora Literacy" (2009), 12–13.
- 10 Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, 1.
- 11 Mbembe and Goldberg, "In Conversation."
- 12 Baraka, "The Changing Same," 196.
- 13 Baraka, "The Changing Same," 199.
- 14 Some might presume similarities between these formulations and Claude Lévi-Strauss's theories about mythical thought moving from opposition to resolution: "Mythical thought always progresses from the awareness of oppositions toward resolution" (*Structural Anthropology*, 221). However, the linguistic structure of myth and its function are not at issue here.
- 15 Baraka, "The Changing Same," 196–97.
- 16 This characteristic is one of several identified in Hurston's essay "Characteristics of Negro Expression," reprinted in *The Sanctified Church*.
- 17 Hurston, "Characteristics of Negro Expression," 26.
- 18 Weheliye, *Phonographies*, 13. Weheliye juxtaposes the seemingly incongruous "mixing tactics" of hip-hop DJs with the formal structure of Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk*.
- 19 Banks, *Digital Griots*, 7.
- 20 Warner-Lewis, *Central Africa in the Caribbean*, 140.
- 21 Stewart, *Three Eyes for the Journey*, 19.
- 22 Lethabo-King, *The Black Shoals*, ix.
- 23 See Fay Yarbrough's *Race and the Cherokee Nation and Choctaw Confederates*; Tiya Miles's *Ties That Bind*; Mark Anderson's *Black and Indigenous*; Juliet Hooker's *Black and Indigenous Resistance in the Americas*; and Celia Naylor's *African Cherokees in Indian Territory*.
- 24 Amadiume, "Theorizing Matriarchy in Africa," 96.
- 25 I borrow the term *un-visible*, as opposed to *invisible*, from Katherine McKittrick's *Demonic Grounds*. According to McKittrick, to be un-visible is to "not really [be] invisible; rather [to be] an 'imperceptible social, political, and geographic subject who is rendered invisible due to [one's] highly visible bodily context'" (18–19).
- 26 The discourses of hybridity related to Blackness that rose to prominence in the 1990s in tandem with the British school of cultural studies linked to scholars such as Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, and Kobena Mercer, among others, were in many ways examining structures of Black identity that were products of a modernity in which Western ways of being and seeing had infiltrated what I am referring to as more indigenous notions of Black culture. This body of

knowledge also boldly exposed and explained the extent to which much of Western knowledge was hopelessly intertwined with this “black thing.” The trend was to analyze the ways in which Blackness was integral to, constitutive of, and inseparable from mythical notions of European whiteness and purity. These types of projects are extremely valuable as they paved the way for my own work. This is therefore not an anti-narrative. What is at stake here, however, are readings that go in another direction.

- 27 Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality,” 267–73.
- 28 Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality,” 263–64.
- 29 Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality,” 264, emphasis added.
- 30 Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality,” 264.
- 31 Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality,” 282, emphasis added.
- 32 M. J. Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, 15.
- 33 Du Bois states: “The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife,—this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the old selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism” (*The Souls of Black Folk*, 215).
- 34 Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” 68.
- 35 Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” 68.
- 36 Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, xiii–xiv. This is suggested by the direction of the text as a whole, as well as Hartman’s opening “Note on Method.”
- 37 Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” 73, emphasis added.
- 38 Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” 74–75, emphasis added.
- 39 Miles, “Uncle Tom Was an Indian,” 137.
- 40 Miles, “Uncle Tom Was an Indian,” 130, quoting the *Maryland Gazette*, May 21, 1752, p. 3.
- 41 Miles “Uncle Tom Was an Indian,” 130, quoting the *Virginia Gazette*, July 15, 1773, p. 3.
- 42 Miles, “Uncle Tom Was an Indian,” 146, quoting the *Virginia Gazette*, November 11, 1773, p. 2.
- 43 Miles, “Uncle Tom Was an Indian,” 146.
- 44 Miles, “Uncle Tom Was an Indian,” 140.
- 45 This is the opening of the chapter “Embarrassments and Perplexities: The Church, the Nation, and Slavery,” in Kidwell, *The Choctaws in Oklahoma*, 30.
- 46 Spigner-Littles further references this information in her documentary *Collective Visions*. Spigner-Littles also shared much of the information provided here in a phone conversation on December 27, 2019. Spigner-Littles claims from her understanding that if you were a member of the nation your allotment was supposed to be 360 acres for each person. If you were a freedman, your allotment was 40 acres. Children born after 1902 who were the descendants of freedmen did not receive land. Kirbie Greene, an elder Oklahoman who

was also a descendant of the Chickasaw and Choctaw freedmen, stated that although his great-uncles received land, they were shortly thereafter cheated out of it by unscrupulous white settlers, with the “freedmen” having no legal recourse that could be enforced in the face of naked racist aggression. Spigner-Littles further notes that it was widely held among freedmen that the Dawes Commission was predominantly if not exclusively controlled by white men. Littles reported that many of the freedmen *believed* that corruption and power allowed some white settlers with no indigenous ancestry to place themselves on the rolls and thus receive generational benefits. Greene says that his ancestors referred to such people as “five-dollar Indians,” implying that they had bought their way into indigenous identity during a moment when others with “blood lineage” did not have the resources.

- 47 Anderson, *Black and Indigenous*, 1.
- 48 Anderson, *Black and Indigenous*, 11.
- 49 Anderson, *Black and Indigenous*, 3.
- 50 Anderson, *Black and Indigenous*, 3.
- 51 Anderson, *Black and Indigenous*, 2–9.
- 52 Stewart, *Three Eyes for the Journey*, 163.
- 53 Stewart, *Three Eyes for the Journey*, 151–52.
- 54 Gomez’s *Exchanging Our Country Marks* examines this issue extensively.
- 55 Stewart, *Three Eyes for the Journey*, 4–5. It must be made clear here that Stewart’s references to a Westernized Christianity transmitted to Black Jamaicans is distinct from the Black Jamaican Kumina practitioners who practice something else.
- 56 Stewart, *Three Eyes for the Journey*, 4–6.
- 57 Jeffers, *The Age of Phillis*, 3, emphasis added.
- 58 Stewart, *Three Eyes for the Journey*, 6.
- 59 There are two interpretations of the term *Nyabinghi* that I have encountered. The term *Nyabinghi* has been understood and embraced within grassroots Rastafari contexts. Oral lore states that the name originally belonged to an African princess from the region of Uganda who resisted British imperialism. Within the context of patriarchally oriented Rasta society, these origins have been replaced or forgotten. (I owe these insights to a conversation with Africana scholar Greg Graham, October 22, 2021.) Second, *Nyabingi* (spelled without the h) is a Kinyarwandan word for a powerful spirit-deity coming from the precolonial Rwandan spiritual culture. *Nyabingi* in this context was powerful and seen as an energy capable of endowing one with the power to destroy one’s enemies. (I owe this insight to Jean Nsabumuremyi from Rwanda.)
- 60 Stewart, *Three Eyes for the Journey*, 19. Stewart here is directly citing Leonard Barrett’s *Soul-Force*.
- 61 Stewart, *Three Eyes for the Journey*, 220–21.
- 62 Stewart, *Three Eyes for the Journey*, 221.
- 63 See Zakiyyah Iman Jackson’s *Becoming Human*; Saidiya Hartman’s *Scenes of Subjection*; Eric Lott’s *Love and Theft*; and Fred Moten’s *In the Break*.

- 64 Hooker, "Indigenous Inclusion / Black Exclusion," 300, emphasis added.
- 65 John, "Blackness Through a Dual Lens."
- 66 S. Jackson, *Creole Indigeneity*, 2–5.
- 67 Borges, *The Life of Language*, 22–24.
- 68 S. Jackson, *Creole Indigeneity*, 5. Jackson also cites Bonita Laurence and Enakshi Dua in her statements here.
- 69 Brodber, *The Continent of Black Consciousness*, 26, 30–31.
- 70 Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*. In his chapter "The Pitfalls of National Consciousness," Fanon articulates the contradictions of the situation of a Black bourgeoisie in a colonial nation-state on the brink of decolonization.
- 71 Lethabo-King, *The Black Shoals*, x.
- 72 In his essay "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," Hughes states: "But then there are the low-down folks, the so-called common element and they are the majority—may the Lord be praised!" (1268). Zora Neale Hurston, in "Characteristics of Negro Expression" while noting that the most self-despisement lies in an imitating Black middle class, further observes that "the Negro farthest down" is the least concerned with slavish mimicry of the elite.
- 73 Brathwaite, *History of the Voice*.
- 74 Lethabo-King, *The Black Shoals*, 4.
- 75 R. M. Brown, *African-Atlantic Cultures and the South Carolina Lowcountry*, 30, emphasis added.
- 76 R. M. Brown, *African-Atlantic Cultures and the South Carolina Lowcountry*, 30.
- 77 Manigault-Bryant, "African and African Diaspora Traditions," 195.
- 78 Moore, "Theorizing the 'Black Body,'" 184.
- 79 Antonio, "Desiring Booty and Killing the Body."
- 80 Moore, "Theorizing the 'Black Body,'" 187.
- 81 Lynn, "The Corner."
- 82 Western notions of "lack" as it relates to female gender identity are deeply theorized by and in response to the work of Jacques Lacan by Western psychoanalytic feminists.
- 83 By "informal institutions," I am referencing things like spiritual communities, including and extending beyond Black churches, youth groups, lodges and burial schemes, community organizations, family reunions, cookouts, church fairs, bible study groups, juke joints, domino games, community centers, and the like. These were the spaces in which consciously and subconsciously we handed down the ancestral traditions that laid the foundation for individual and collective cultural self-affirmation.
- 84 D. Scott, "Introduction," vii.
- 85 D. Scott, "Introduction," vi.

CHAPTER ONE. MERMAIDS IN WOODSIDE, JAMAICA

- 1 Bordelon, *Go Gator and Muddy the Water*, 69–70.
- 2 Wynter, "Jonkonnu in Jamaica," 35.
- 3 Wynter, "Jonkonnu in Jamaica," 36.

- 4 Reid, "St. Mary's Woodside."
- 5 For further details on Brodber's literary significance, see my interview with her, "Caribbean Organic Intellectual." For more details on the village's emancipation celebration, Brodber's community activism, and gendered dynamics between youth and outsiders in the Woodside community, see John, "From Nielsen Estate to Africa House."
- 6 John, "Caribbean Organic Intellectual," 74.
- 7 Testimonies by Nnamdi Lumumba, Kirsten Edwards, Andrew LeGrand, Shane McClendon, Jaden Edwards, Carey Flack, Rashid Campbell, and Aisha Finch were provided with the permission of these individuals.
- 8 Wynter, "Jonkonnu in Jamaica," 35.
- 9 R. M. Brown, *African-Atlantic Cultures and the South Carolina Lowcountry*, 253–54.
- 10 R. M. Brown, *African-Atlantic Cultures and the South Carolina Lowcountry*, 257.
- 11 R. M. Brown, *African-Atlantic Cultures and the South Carolina Lowcountry*, 253.
- 12 R. M. Brown, *African-Atlantic Cultures and the South Carolina Lowcountry*, 255.
- 13 Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*.
- 14 Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, 137.
- 15 Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, 135. Here Gomez is citing Higgins, "Charleston: Terminus and Entrepot of the Colonial Trade," 119–20.
- 16 R. M. Brown, *African-Atlantic Cultures and the South Carolina Lowcountry*, 260–61.
- 17 R. M. Brown, *African-Atlantic Cultures and the South Carolina Lowcountry*, 273, emphasis added.
- 18 Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, 286.
- 19 R. M. Brown, *African-Atlantic Cultures and the South Carolina Lowcountry*, 279.
- 20 *Orisa*, in the Yorùbá cultural world, refers to four hundred plus one deities that can be appealed to by humans for assistance in the material world.
- 21 In a presentation given at the University of Oklahoma in the spring of 2018, scholar Kinitra Brooks provided an analysis of Beyoncé's *Lemonade* demonstrating the layers of African *orisa* spiritual references that were incorporated throughout the lyrics.
- 22 Warner-Lewis, *Central Africa in the Caribbean*, 158–59.
- 23 Warner-Lewis, *Central Africa in the Caribbean*, 158–59. Warner-Lewis also cites work from Lydia Cabrera's 1986 work, *El monte* (120–23). The last section of the quotation comes directly from Montilus, "Guinea Versus Congo Lands."
- 24 Warner-Lewis's work contributes to exposing the coexistence of the Central African knowledge systems.
- 25 Warner-Lewis, *Central Africa in the Caribbean*, 170. Warner-Lewis also quotes from Wyatt MacGaffey's *Custom and Government in the Lower Congo* and Robert Farris Thompson's "The Sign of the Four Moments of the Sun," in Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit*.

- 26 Stewart, *Three Eyes for the Journey*, 112. Stewart cites George Simpson's *Black Religion in the New World*.
- 27 R. M. Brown, *African-Atlantic Cultures and the South Carolina Lowcountry*, 29. Brown cites Wyatt MacGaffey's article "Twins, Simbi Spirits, and Lwas in Kongo and Haiti."
- 28 R. M. Brown, *African-Atlantic Cultures and the South Carolina Lowcountry*, 1.
- 29 Brown explains that this essay is in *Proceedings of the Elliott Society of Science and Art, or Charleston, South Carolina* 2 (October 1860): 28–31.
- 30 In her text *Woodside, Pear Tree Grove P.O.*, Brodber notes that "according to the oral sources [the Neilsons] gave Bramber, a hilly area far from the great house but very close to the Louisiana and Waterton great houses [in St. Mary, Jamaica], to the enslaved as their provision grounds" (112). The stories about the mermaid and the construction of the road were told to me by Pearl and Roy Crossman in the summer of 2001 and recorded in a journal entry I made on June 21, 2001.
- 31 To demonstrate the deep roots of the research that backed Brodber's version of the reenactment play, her text states at one point: "The first person called Ferguson in the slave records consulted for Woodside Estate, is a Negro male, His name is Quamin, an African-sounding name; his alias was 'William Ferguson.' Quamin was born in Jamaica, possibly in Woodside, St. Mary. His mother was Charlotte, born in Africa in 1762, and in 1817 one of Dr. Neilson's slaves. She produced Quamin in about 1792, here in Jamaica. William Ferguson died in 1820 at age thirty-three, but there was at this time another Ferguson, Billy, who was only three years old. Billy's mother was Fanny alias Mary Ann Drew who had also produced for Woodside the creole Edward John Marshall, four years earlier" (*Woodside, Pear Tree Grove P.O.*, 113–14).
- 32 I thank Erna Brodber, Roy and Pearl Crossman, and Mrs. Cherry Riley (may God rest their souls), Shango Edwards, Gilda Sharpe Etteh, David Surratt, Chris Lester, Lorna Williams, Lennox Boyd, Greg Graham, Fenton Freeman, and Marie Casimir for sharing, over the years, the mermaid stories and insights that are included in this chapter.
- 33 R. M. Brown, *African-Atlantic Cultures and the South Carolina Lowcountry*, 2.
- 34 Marie Casimir shared these insights with me in Norman, Oklahoma, in December 2018.
- 35 Wynter, "Jonkonnu in Jamaica," 41.
- 36 Warner-Lewis, *Central Africa in the Caribbean*, 190.
- 37 Warner-Lewis, *Central Africa in the Caribbean*, 189.
- 38 Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, 145. Here Gomez cites Thornton, "African Dimensions of the Stono Rebellion."
- 39 Warner-Lewis, *Central Africa in the Caribbean*, 189, emphasis added.
- 40 While Warner-Lewis and Gomez rely on Thornton works such as "The Development of an African Catholic Church in the Kingdom of the Kongo, 1491–1750," there is some resistance to totalizing assumptions about how

rooted Christianity became during the earlier periods as well as questions about which segments of the population were the most deeply impacted.

- 41 Warner-Lewis, *Central Africa in the Caribbean*, 145.
- 42 Warner-Lewis, *Central Africa in the Caribbean*, 147.
- 43 Wynter, “Jonkonnu in Jamaica,” 41. Here Wynter quotes from English observer John Taylor’s 1680 journal, which is held at the National Library of Jamaica. The history of revolt in Jamaica is not to be taken lightly. It was second only to Haiti in terms of the frequency and widespread nature of the activity. As Brodber notes, “Nevertheless Jamaican slaves still resisted enslavement, and violently too, after the Haitian revolution. The evidence is mostly of plots discovered before they were put in force. The clearest evidence of actual physical resistance occurred firstly in 1808 when 33 Chamba slaves and again Coromantee slaves—i.e. slaves from the Akan-speaking regions of West Africa, recruited to the West India regiment—mutinied and killed two of their officers while being drilled. Half of them were killed in action and the others executed. Another occurred between 1823 and 1824 in Hanover. The leader, this time an Ibo, committed suicide. As we can see, the incidence of post-1784 attempts at physical liberation were less than before” (“Liberation Thought and Action 1789–1900,” 34).
- 44 Wynter, “Jonkonnu in Jamaica,” 41.
- 45 Wynter, “Jonkonnu in Jamaica,” 41. Here Wynter is quoting Bunbury from Cassidy and Le Page, *Dictionary of Jamaican English*.
- 46 R. M. Brown, *African-Atlantic Cultures and the South Carolina Lowcountry*, 26–27.
- 47 Brodber shared this information with me when I spoke to her on December 18, 2019. The Taino chief is Kasiki Kalaan Nibonrix.
- 48 See Brodber’s recent text *Moments of Cooperation and Incorporation*.
- 49 Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, 147.
- 50 Beckwith, *Black Roadways*, 101.
- 51 Wynter, “Jonkonnu in Jamaica,” 35; R. M. Brown, *African-Atlantic Cultures and the South Carolina Lowcountry*, 279.
- 52 Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, 292.
- 53 Wynter, “Jonkonnu in Jamaica,” 44, emphasis added.
- 54 “Ribba Mumma,” the mermaid we are addressing here; “Anancy,” the spider coming from the Ashanti spiritual context; and “Rolling Calf,” believed to be the spirit of a butcher who has died and who roams the landscape at night signaled by the sound of a heavy chain dragging on the ground, are three of the most dominant folkloric figures on the Jamaican landscape.
- 55 Lorna Williams, one of the teachers in the Woodside emancipation summer school between 2001 and 2006, shared this information with me. She is also of Taino and African ancestry. Brodber shared that spiritual people influenced by the teachings of Malidoma Somé and the Dagara traditions have visited Woodside and see the Atabay site as a portal to other dimensions.
- 56 Hurston, “High John de Conquer,” in *The Sanctified Church*, 71.

- 1 Krumping, within the documentary *Rize*, is represented as a cross between a style of hip-hop-influenced dancing called “Clowning” that preceded it and a frenetic style of spirit-inspired movement used as a way to release stress within a communal space with other Krumpers.
- 2 What was previously referred to as South Central Los Angeles was officially changed in 2003 to South Los Angeles. But for the purposes of using the vernacular of that moment, I have kept the language of South Central Los Angeles.
- 3 Clark, “Developing Diaspora Literacy and *Marasa* Consciousness” (2009), 12.
- 4 The idea of the spiritual entranced person as “the horse” being ridden is suggested by the title of Maya Deren’s documentary on Vodun ceremonies in Haiti, *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti*, as well as by the title of Hurston’s text that references Haitian ritual, *Tell My Horse*.
- 5 Benedicty-Kokken, *Spirit Possession in French, Haitian, and Vodou Thought*, 5.
- 6 Bellegarde Smith, *Haiti*, 12.
- 7 Haitian American visual artist Florine Démosthène mentioned in a conversation on October 11, 2018, that from her observational perspective, the mountings depicted had an air of staged performativity to them.
- 8 Montilus, “Vodun and Social Transformation in the African Diasporic Experience,” 5.
- 9 Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, 292.
- 10 Stuckey, *Slave Culture*, 44.
- 11 Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, 20.
- 12 Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, 22–31.
- 13 Stuckey, *Slave Culture*, 64, emphasis added.
- 14 Stuckey, *Slave Culture*, 68, cites Edward Warren’s 1885 text, *A Doctor’s Experience on Three Continents*, as well as Dougald MacMillan’s 1926 article, “John Kuners.”
- 15 Stuckey, *Slave Culture*, 71. In the Jamaica that I grew up in during the 1970s and early 1980s, the descriptions of these particular masqueraders are almost identical to a festival figure referred to then as “Pitchy Patchy.”
- 16 Wynter, “Jonkonnu in Jamaica,” 37. Here Wynter is citing Hans Sloane’s *A Voyage to the Islands*.
- 17 Wynter is citing Orlando Patterson’s *The Sociology of Slavery*. Conversations with Aboubacar Sidick Camara from 2013 to 2017 about similar practices among the Baga and Soussou tribes in Guinea lead me to believe that these ethnic groups may be another possible origin point for these traditions in the African diaspora.
- 18 Stuckey argues in depth in the first chapter of *Slave Culture* that the ring shout emerges as a syncretic fusion of West and Central African ethnic cultural beliefs that were crosscut with Christian teachings. He specifically isolates continental African cultures who held in high esteem the act of honoring ancestors

- and who saw the circle as a sacred symbol of the relationship between the living and the dead. Stuckey further states that “substantial numbers of Bakongo, Angolans, and west coast Africans were enslaved in Virginia” (*Slave Culture*, 35).
- 19 Wynter, “Jonkonnu in Jamaica,” 40. I elaborate and explain Wynter’s references to Myal in the previous chapter.
 - 20 Zora Neale Hurston to Langston Hughes, November 22, 1928, in Kaplan, *Zora Neale Hurston*, 131–32.
 - 21 Stuckey, *Slave Culture*, ix.
 - 22 The work of a wide variety of scholars, among them Stuckey, Wynter, Gomez, Hurston, and Baraka, already mentioned in this book, as well as many others substantiates the complex relationship between Africanity and Western Christianity. Desmangles, *Faces of the Gods*, is also worthy of mention here.
 - 23 Stuckey, *Slave Culture*, 35–36.
 - 24 Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, 247. Gomez is citing Luther P. Jackson’s “Religious Development of the Negro in Virginia.”
 - 25 Gomez cites the clergy of Wilmington parish in Virginia, who are responding to questions posed by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel about “the state of infidelity” in the colonies, presumably as it relates to Black and Indigenous populations. Gomez’s source for this is *Historical Collections Relating to the American Church*, ed. William S. Perry (n.p., 1840), 1:264–65.
 - 26 Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, 247–49.
 - 27 Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, 252.
 - 28 The multiple and complex ways in which the Christian message has been deployed for revolutionary purposes is of interest with regard to figures such as Nat Turner and Denmark Vesey, Black men who were both professed Christians and who led revolts against the slave regime in the United States.
 - 29 Oba T’Shaka isolates fifteen forces that have hit Black US communities since 1968. Among them he lists the rise of the foster care system and the prison-industrial complex; urban removal; the introduction of crack cocaine; COINTELPRO; government agencies hostile to the single-parent family; the removal of Black males from the economy due to industrial production outsourcing and the increase in the computer-driven sector of the economy; and the rise of peer groups that have come to have more influence over Black youth than family, church, or school. T’Shaka, “Choosing African and African American Culture,” 2–3.
 - 30 Hurston, “Characteristics of Negro Expression,” in *The Sanctified Church*, 54–55.
 - 31 Krumper Dragon makes these comments in the documentary at 0:02:51–59 and 0:03:07–20. All direct quotes are from the subjects of the documentary.
 - 32 In the original DVD and in the digital version online, there is no subtitle in the film stating where the footage is from. The credits mention only “stock footage courtesy of Absolutely Archives, All-Stock, LA News Service, Library of Moving Images, Inc., and World Wrestling Entertainment Inc.”

- 33 Frederick John Lamp's illustrated and scholarly text *See the Music, Hear the Dance* draws on the research of thirty-five scholars of continental African forms prevalently including masquerade and is a useful source for this claim.
- 34 Stewart, *Three Eyes for the Journey*, 222.
- 35 Brathwaite, *History of the Voice*, 19.
- 36 Carole Boyce Davies, in her text *Black Women, Writing and Identity*, uses this expression to address the need to work with aspects of Western discourse within African diaspora contexts.
- 37 Clark's theories are laid out in full in this book's introduction.
- 38 Clark, "Developing Diaspora Literacy and *Marasa* Consciousness" (2009), 13.
- 39 Clark, "Developing Diaspora Literacy and *Marasa* Consciousness" (2009), 13.
- 40 It has been my observation that the coexistence of community and individuality is a unique feature of grassroots Black space. This is at odds with the union of individualism and conformity that I have observed, on the other hand, in the collective behavior associated with predominantly white sororities and fraternities on college campuses. In these instances, conformity is prized over individuality—while "individualism" is still idealized.
- 41 Clark, "Developing Diaspora Literacy and *Marasa* Consciousness" (2009), 12.
- 42 Clark, "Developing Diaspora Literacy and *Marasa* Consciousness" (2009), 12.
- 43 Clark, "Developing Diaspora Literacy and *Marasa* Consciousness" (2009), 12.
- 44 Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, 271.
- 45 Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, 271.
- 46 Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, 268.
- 47 Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, 268. Gomez's citations of Dixon and Grubbs are taken from George P. Rawick's *The American Slave*. Rawick's edited narratives are extensive, with at least two series—one of which has more than nineteen volumes covering testimonies from enslaved people all over the United States. Each volume seems to focus on particular states.
- 48 Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, 273.
- 49 Stuckey, *Slave Culture*, 61–62.
- 50 I touch briefly on this point in the introduction to my book *Clear Word and Third Sight* (6). It was my hope then that my next project, the one developed here, would explore more deeply the notion of internal consciousness as part of the diasporic psyche.
- 51 I elaborate further on the idea that one of the central features of African American culture is this ability to "move the spirit" in my article "The Man in the Gutter Is the God Maker."
- 52 Clark, "Developing Diaspora Literacy and *Marasa* Consciousness" (2009), 12.
- 53 Baraka, "The Changing Same," 187.
- 54 Wilson, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, 83–85.
- 55 The references in this scene in the play bear a striking resemblance to what is often referred to as the vision or valley of dry bones in the King James Version of the Bible.
- 56 White-Mulcare, "Final Paper," 3–4, reprinted with permission of the author.

- 57 Clark, "Developing Diaspora Literacy and *Marasa* Consciousness" (2009), 12.
- 58 Lynn, "The Corner."
- 59 Kanye West is currently referred to as Ye.
- 60 I owe this insight to my "brother in struggle" from Washington, DC, Niidodi Glover. The Genius website translation of the meaning of these lyrics is also consistent with Glover's statement.
- 61 This was also just a year after the death of Martin Luther King Jr., which further suggests that Reagan's sympathies lay outside the civil rights movement. For information on this protest, see "California: Postscript to People's Park," *Time* magazine, February 16, 1970.
- 62 See the 2004 hip-hop documentary *Letter to the President* (dir. Thomas Gibson) for a fuller elaboration of the hip-hop nation's views of the Reagan presidency.
- 63 Gil Scott-Heron wrote and performed the spoken-word piece "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised" (1971, <https://genius.com/Gil-scott-heron-the-revolution-will-not-be-televised-lyrics>).
- 64 See Ida B. Wells-Barnett's *Red Record* and Jacqueline Royster's publication of Wells's *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases*.
- 65 This is addressed by the filmmakers and hip-hop artists interviewed in *Letter to the President* as well as in a variety of texts that discuss the rise of the prison-industrial complex.
- 66 The history of the anxiety created in aspects of white American society when Black wealth accrues is also instructively documented by much of the formal and informal research surrounding the cause of the 1921 Tulsa massacre in the Greenwood District of Oklahoma known at the time as Black Wall Street.
- 67 Christopher George Latore Wallace (Notorious B.I.G.), "Things Done Changed," *Ready to Die* (1994).
- 68 I owe this insight to debater George Lee, who talked about hip-hop as the creation of social life within the confines of a society that perpetuates social death.
- 69 Scott, "Viktorius." All songs by Big K.R.I.T. are listed in the bibliography under Scott.
- 70 Rappers such as Souljah Boy, Lil Jon, Waka Flocka Flame, and others who constitute the genre of hip-hop music that receives significant commercial radio play and attention from predominantly white male fraternities on college campuses often fall into these categories.
- 71 Dead Prez, "They Schools."
- 72 Wynter, "Jonkonnu in Jamaica," 44, emphasis added.
- 73 Clark, "Developing Diaspora Literacy and *Marasa* Consciousness" (2009), 12.
- 74 Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*, 16.
- 75 Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*, 17.
- 76 Winfrey, "Super Soul Special."
- 77 Clark, "Developing Diaspora Literacy and *Marasa* Consciousness" (2009), 12.
- 78 E. Alexander, *The Black Interior*, x.
- 79 Lorde, "Sisters in Arms," in *Our Dead Behind Us*, 4.
- 80 Reference is made here once again to a line from Brathwaite's *History of the Voice*.

- 1 Ferreira da Silva, *Hacking the Subject*. Ferreira da Silva quotes Truth's statement "I can work as hard as a man, eat as much as man, bear the lash as well, but ain't I a woman." She further cites Lorde's statement "What does it mean when the tools of racist patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy? . . . Those of us who stand outside the circle of this society's definition of acceptable women . . . know that survival is not an academic skill. It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths" (19).
- 2 While this talk was eventually published in the journal *philoSOPHIA* in 2018, the quotations here were directly transcribed from the talk at Barnard, which was subsequently available online as "Denise Ferreira da Silva—Hacking the Subject: Black Feminism, Refusal, and the Limits of Critique," Barnard Center for Research on Women, November 24, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T3B5Gh2JSQg>.
- 3 This is a direct quotation taken from the end of the Barnard talk.
- 4 My article "Insurgent Attitude" squarely addresses this business of Black female "attitude" as falling outside a strictly Western female gender logic.
- 5 The pun here is on the word *free*—since the "free zone" was, in the 1990s, an industrial space on the island of Jamaica, akin to a sweatshop, in which workers were paid US\$30–US\$50 per week for long workdays with minimal breaks. The "free zone," despite being in Jamaica, was the sovereign property of US multinational corporations. See *Black, Life and Debt* by, which documents the relationship between the IMF, the World Bank, and Jamaica. The suggestion here is also that the "free market economy" has similar symbolic and literal tabs on Black bodies.
- 6 Cooper, *Eloquent Rage*, 1–2.
- 7 Amadiume, "Theorizing Matriarchy in Africa."
- 8 Amadiume, "Theorizing Matriarchy in Africa," 83.
- 9 Despite Lévi-Strauss's structuralist approach moving away from a historical "master narrative" strategy, his work, as Amadiume reads it, still falls within a certain tradition of universalizing. Amadiume specifically takes issue with the underlying "incest taboo" feature of his "alliance theory." In Lévi-Strauss's *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, the exchange of women between families is attributed to a more or less universal incest taboo that is seen as motivating men to seek women outside their inner kinship circle to marry or procreate with. These alliances, as opposed to descent from a common ancestor, are also seen by Lévi-Strauss as an alternate explanation of the formation of kinship networks versus the idea of descent from a common ancestor as the exclusive interpretation emerging from a previous "functionalist" school of anthropology. Amadiume argues that once the matricentric unit and matriarchal ideology in continental African systems are taken seriously, the assumptions of ownership and exchange implicit in Lévi-Strauss's work are neither universal nor stable.

- 10 Amadiume supports this argument, citing Friedrich Engels's *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. In terms of the indigenous West African context, Amadiume mentions four ethnographic societies: the Nnobi, the Tallensi, the Jelgobe, and the Merina. In three of the four contexts there exists complex, very structured and also interactive male and female cultural institutions, all of which also have as a feature a spiritual system tied primarily to female ancestresses, spirits, and deities. Additionally, in the Nnobi context in particular, the male and female identities are cultural institutions in which what Oyèwùmí refers to as anatomical males ("anamales") or anatomical females ("anafemales") in *The Invention of Women* may occupy a position at odds with their anatomical sex classification. This implies that the rigidity associated historically with Western understandings of sex/gender is subverted in these contexts. Amadiume ultimately states, "The presence of these fundamental matriarchal systems generating love and compassion means that we cannot take the Oedipal principle of violence as a basic paradigm or given in the African context. . . . The balancing matriarchal system acted as a constraint on the patriarchal structure, checking the development of totalitarian patriarchy and monolithism" ("Theorizing Matriarchy in Africa," 96).
- 11 Amadiume, "Theorizing Matriarchy in Africa," 89.
- 12 Amadiume's focus is on *the coexistence of different but interacting cohesive systems*, of which her reference to the Nnobi at the end of her essay is of substantial significance. Amadiume, drawing on Diop, later explains that prior to the sixteenth century, "African societies had been densely populated and extensively centralized under empires and monarchies in well-developed urban cities . . . with thriving international commerce" ("Theorizing Matriarchy in Africa," 88). Re-tribalization occurred during the period of the Atlantic slave trade with the weakening of empires, beginning with the trans-Saharan slave trade and "Arabo-Islamic conquests and imperialism." Quoting from Diop's *Precolonial Black Africa*, Amadiume argues that the "regression and decline intensifies under European colonization and the imposition of the European state system." Radical change in kinship structures that occurred under European colonialism apparently surpassed changes that previously occurred during periods of ancient monarchies, the rise of empire and urban centralization, or even Islamic colonialism. Amadiume, quoting Diop, states that even during the period of African monarchies, "the matriarchal system was subjacent"—that is, situated just below—in power and priority. But, she states, "I have called it [instead a] juxtaposition of systems" (89). She adds further that while "the role of mother/sister in economic, social, political and religious institutions" was seen in the African context as a central part of "the makeup [of] a society or social system," European writers "did not seem to have . . . a parallel historical experience of mother-focused systems to draw from," thus the "patriarchal paradigm was taken from the fixed point of the father [and] this affected their understanding of the African data" (91).

- 13 Amadiume, "Theorizing Matriarchy in Africa," 90; Engels, *The Origin of the Family*. Amadiume also cites Cheikh Anta Diop's *Precolonial Black Africa*.
- 14 Amadiume, "Theorizing Matriarchy in Africa," 89. Amadiume also cites Cheikh Anta Diop's *The Cultural Unity of Black Africa*.
- 15 Amadiume, "Theorizing Matriarchy in Africa," 88.
- 16 Amadiume, "Theorizing Matriarchy in Africa," 92. Amadiume cites Wendy James's "Matrifocus on African Women."
- 17 Amadiume, "Theorizing Matriarchy in Africa," 93.
- 18 Akyeampong and Obeng, "Spirituality, Gender, and Power in Asante History,"
- 19 Akyeampong and Obeng, "Spirituality, Gender, and Power in Asante History," 29.
- 20 Akyeampong and Obeng, "Spirituality, Gender, and Power in Asante History," 29.
- 21 Akyeampong and Obeng, "Spirituality, Gender, and Power in Asante History," 30.
- 22 Akyeampong and Obeng, "Spirituality, Gender, and Power in Asante History," 33.
- 23 Akyeampong and Obeng, "Spirituality, Gender, and Power in Asante History," 33–36.
- 24 Akyeampong and Obeng, "Spirituality, Gender, and Power in Asante History," 30.
- 25 Oyèwùmí, *What Gender Is Motherhood*.
- 26 Oyèwùmí, *What Gender Is Motherhood*, 57; Oyèwùmí's translation from the Yorùbá.
- 27 Oyèwùmí cites Abiodun, "Verbal and Visual Metaphors" and "Woman in Yorùbá Religious Images"; and Ogungbile, "ÉÈRìndínlógún."
- 28 Oyèwùmí, *What Gender Is Motherhood*, 46.
- 29 Oyèwùmí, *What Gender Is Motherhood*, 7.
- 30 Oyèwùmí, *What Gender Is Motherhood*, 52.
- 31 Oyèwùmí, *What Gender Is Motherhood*, 58.
- 32 Oyèwùmí makes these claims throughout the third chapter of *What Gender Is Motherhood*, "Matripotency: Ìyá in Philosophical Concepts and Sociopolitical Institutions."
- 33 Oyèwùmí, *What Gender Is Motherhood*, 86.
- 34 Oyèwùmí, *What Gender Is Motherhood*, 84. Referencing D. O. Fagunwa's *Forest of a Thousand Daemons*, Oyèwùmí notes the influence of Fagunwa's fiction and children's book on Yorùbá culture.
- 35 This Yorùbá translation and explanation of the terms was provided for me by Kola Abimbola, son of scholar Wande Abimbola.
- 36 "Orowole" has several suggested meanings. The most literal is "Oro has entered into the house." There is also an interpretation suggesting that the child so named was born after the parents tried to conceive for a long time and were only successful after propitiating the entity Oro. It could also mean that the extended family acquired the deity Oro (in a spiritual sense) as part of the household, and the naming of the child was in honor of this occurrence.
- 37 Wande Abimbola's *Ifá: An Exposition of Ifá Literary Corpus* is the point of departure for Oyèwùmí's analysis of *ajé* as both "witch" and "female." She also cites his essays "The Bag of Wisdom" and "Images of Women in the Ifá Literary Corpus."

- 38 Oyèwùmí recognizes Abimbola as a highly esteemed and influential Yorùbá scholar and respects much of what he has contributed. It seems clear that her point is not to demonize his work but to point out that his translation and interpretation of the term *ajé* inherits and promotes a bias not indigenous to the culture but one, based on her historical research, that was inherited over time. It is my hope that her intervention will be understood as an elucidation and clarification rather than simply negative critique or defamation of Abimbola's corpus. Oyewùmi, *What Gender Is Motherhood*, 86.
- 39 The first verse that Oyèwùmí references from the *odù* speaks of humans and the *ajé* as both coming to Earth together from the celestial realm. The *ajé* do the sacrifices that are prescribed by divination and are meant to assist with easy transition to Earth. The humans, on the other hand, refuse to do theirs. It does not work out for the humans once they arrive on Earth. The humans accuse the *ajé* of being the source of their misfortune (instead of their distress being a result of not heeding the original commandment to sacrifice). Once the humans actually perform the sacrifices required, they then destroy the *ajé*, presumably because they still see them as implicated in their affliction. In the second verse referenced, the *ajé* are said to have devoured Yemòó, the wife of the god of creation, and Òsàálá, the god himself, after Yemòó contaminates the drinking water source of the *ajé* with her menstrual blood during a time when water is scarce. Oyèwùmí's analysis suggests that the devouring of the deities is seen as proof of the wickedness of the *ajé* in Abimbola's interpretation of the verse. She argues, however, that the *ajé*'s actions are justified since "apart from the fact that [polluting the drinking water with menstrual blood] is unhygienic . . . blood is . . . sacred [and] is perceived to be a neutralizer of *àse* and hence disempowering for anyone who gets close to it. Consequently, Yemòó's act of fouling the brook with blood can be viewed as a declaration of war" (*What Gender Is Motherhood*, 88). In essence, Oyèwùmí is arguing that the *ajé*'s actions are not irrationally evil but are instead a just response to aggressive action in the second *odù*, while they are the victims of displaced anger in the first one.
- 40 Oyèwùmí, *What Gender Is Motherhood*, 90–91.
- 41 Oyèwùmí, *What Gender Is Motherhood*, 89.
- 42 Oyèwùmí, *What Gender Is Motherhood*, 90.
- 43 Murray, *Song in a Weary Throat*, 6. Murray describes herself as a "rebel, instigator, and survivor, at times a nettle in the body politic, an opener-of-doors, and always a devout child of God and friend of mankind" (xiv).
- 44 K. Jones, "Big Momma Thang."
- 45 K. Jones, "Custom Made."
- 46 Allen, "16 Shots." The literal translation of this line is "No girl has the right to say anything about my mother." The suggestion is that any such inferred disrespect will be met with violence.
- 47 Sister Souljah, *No Disrespect*, 3.
- 48 Steady, *The Black Woman Cross-Culturally*, 29.

- 49 Stewart, *Obeah, Orisa, and Religious Identity in Trinidad*, 7.
- 50 See Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function."
- 51 Sawaya, *Modern Women, Modern Work*, 2.
- 52 Amadiume, "Theorizing Matriarchy in Africa," 89–90.
- 53 Amadiume, "Theorizing Matriarchy in Africa," 89.
- 54 Katrin Bennhold, "The Stigma of Being a Housewife," *New York Times*, July 20, 2010.
- 55 Bennhold, "The Stigma of Being a Housewife."
- 56 Steady, *The Black Woman Cross-Culturally*, 15.
- 57 Sandberg, *Lean In*, 12–13.
- 58 Steady, *The Black Woman Cross-Culturally*, 11.
- 59 Steady makes this claim by citing two Ousmane Sembene films, *Emitai* and *Mandabi*, in which women withheld food from French occupying soldiers and their husbands, both acts of resistance within the context of struggles for power. The films, though fictional, draw from historically real events. Steady, *The Black Woman Cross-Culturally*, 6.
- 60 Amadiume, "Theorizing Matriarchy in Africa," 88.
- 61 Soyinka, *Death and the King's Horseman*. It is also worth noting that in her data, Oyèwùmí, in *What Gender Is Motherhood* argues that the feminization of the "market woman" is a later phenomenon and that in the Yorùbá context historically, "the trader" was both male and female (75). Yet the preeminence of the Black woman in the space of the market on both the African continent and the Afrospora supports Steady's data describing Black female agricultural dominance in continental Africa historically. Steady, *The Black Woman Cross-Culturally*, 15.
- 62 I heard this statement on a trip to Nigeria. I have also seen firsthand the enormously female space of Medina Makaté, the market in Guinea, Conakry. Afrosporic markets in rural and urban Jamaica, though smaller, are also predominantly female spaces. The term *market woman* does not have a gendered equivalent such as *market man* in the Anglophone Caribbean context.
- 63 The use of "psychic landscape" to reference what has been inherited by women of African descent in the Afrospora is borrowed from Brodber's *Perceptions of Caribbean Women*.
- 64 Truth, "Ar'n't I a Woman?," 245–49. Included in *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, these statements are some of the most famously reported as part of Truth's speech at the 1851 Women's Rights Convention, in Akron, Ohio.
- 65 Davis, "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role." See also J. Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*.
- 66 Lorde, *Zami*, 7.
- 67 Bambara, "Some Forward Remarks," 9–13.
- 68 The list of Black women writers and activists who died at a fairly young age is significant; Zora Neale Hurston died at sixty-nine, Toni Cade Bambara at fifty-six, Octavia Butler at fifty-nine, Gloria Naylor and June Jordan at

- sixty-six, and Audre Lorde at fifty-eight, as well as countless Black women in the everyday context whose names are unknown or unremembered.
- 69 Cade [Bambara], "On the Issue of Roles," in *The Black Woman*, 101.
 - 70 Steady, *The Black Woman Cross-Culturally*, 29.
 - 71 Steady, *The Black Woman Cross-Culturally*, 30.
 - 72 Stewart notes this in the chapter "You Had the Respected Mothers Who Had Power! Motherness, Heritage Love and Womanist Anagrammings of Care in the Yoruba-Orisa Tradition," in *Obeah, Orisa, and Religious Identity in Trinidad*, 149.
 - 73 This can be sourced with reference to Warner-Lewis, *Central Africa in the Caribbean*; Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*; Somé, *Of Water and the Spirit*, as well as the portrait of women in Julie Dash's film *Daughters of the Dust*, among other works.
 - 74 Lorde, *Black Unicorn*, 4–5.
 - 75 Truth, "Sojourner Truth," 247–49.
 - 76 The quotation from Sister Souljah was taken from a VHS video recording of the speech. The reference seems to be to Dinknesh/Lucy, the female skeletal bones found in 1974 dating back 3.2 million years.
 - 77 Clifton, *Good Woman*, 44.
 - 78 Cliff, "Love in the Third World," in *The Land of Look Behind*, 103.
 - 79 Sister Souljah, *No Disrespect*, 3.
 - 80 G. Naylor, *Mama Day*, 3.
 - 81 Marshall, *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, 52–53.
 - 82 Lorde, *Zami*, 12.
 - 83 Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe."
 - 84 Spillers, "Sex Roles and Survival Strategies," 75.
 - 85 Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 66.
 - 86 Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 67.
 - 87 Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 67. Haile Gerima opens his signature film *Sankofa*, about the experience of chattel slavery in the Americas, with poetic verse speaking directly to the African spirits.
 - 88 Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 67.
 - 89 Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 67.
 - 90 See Morrison, "Unspeakable Things Unspoken."
 - 91 Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 74.
 - 92 Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 66.
 - 93 Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 72.
 - 94 Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 76.
 - 95 Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 75–76. Spillers cites Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*.
 - 96 Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 75.
 - 97 Ironically, the childless, middle-class, and upper-class Black woman (if childlessness is a choice) has de facto implicitly and unconsciously chosen a womanhood shaped by hegemonic patriarchal codes of gender, which by and large have emerged as a response to Western patriarchy.

- 98 Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 74.
- 99 Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 75.
- 100 Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 80, bold emphasis added.
- 101 Wynter makes an argument in "Afterword" supporting the absence of Black women from the libidinal Western frame.
- 102 This argument is made by Trinidadian writer Merle Hodge in her introduction to Brodber's text *Perceptions of Caribbean Women*.
- 103 Some cultural critics and probably the artist herself would maintain that Lil' Kim's plastic surgery is a choice that implies agency and independence. While this is the case in certain ways, the fact that these plastic surgery choices by Black women overwhelming restructure their features in the direction of hegemonic Euro-influenced beauty standards begs the question of how free these choices actually are.
- 104 Hall, "99 Ways."
- 105 The view of anal sex in the twenty-first century among Jamaicans both at home and in the diaspora has shifted to some degree from the perceptions that held in the late 1990s, when Saw's music was at the height of its popularity.
- 106 The term *buddy* here is a reference to the penis.
- 107 While it is not the purpose of this chapter to explore and analyze the contours and parameters of anti-LGBTQIA+ attitudes in Jamaican society, this complex terrain is neither straightforward nor simple, and if taken seriously, study of this landscape adds depth and nuance to sex and gender conversations in the Afrospora.
- 108 Ellen Scott, now deceased, was a senior cousin and aunt to me, of my mother's generation.
- 109 In this song, Saw claps back at the Jamaican moral majority's critique of her open discussion of sex as "slackness" by highlighting things that for her constitute real "slackness," such as unfixed roads, broken government promises, and political violence.
- 110 My point is to show the Afrospora feminine as wedged between Western and African norms and ethos.
- 111 I explore this concept in full in my article "Insurgent Attitude." See also Wynter, "Afterword."
- 112 McKittrick, *Sylvia Wynter*.
- 113 Amadiume, "Theorizing Matriarchy in Africa," 87, emphasis added.
- 114 Amadiume, "Theorizing Matriarchy in Africa," 86. Here Amadiume is quoting from Cheik Anta Diop's *Civilization or Barbarism*.
- 115 Stack, "Sex Roles and Survival Strategies."
- 116 Stack makes this argument with data sources from 1958 to 1974.
- 117 Stack, "Sex Roles and Survival Strategies," 350.
- 118 Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 74. When referencing African kinship networks, Spillers quotes from Claude Meillassoux's "Female Slavery."
- 119 Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 74–75.
- 120 Steady, *The Black Woman Cross-Culturally*, 35, emphasis added.

- 121 Hodge, "The Shadow of the Whip," 191.
- 122 Hodge, "The Shadow of the Whip," 192.
- 123 Hodge, "The Shadow of the Whip," 193.
- 124 Cade [Bambara], "On the Issue of Roles," in *The Black Woman*, 106.
- 125 Lil' Kim (a.k.a. Kimberly Jones), "Suck My Dick."
- 126 Lady Saw (a.k.a. Marion Hall), "Woman Sneaking." Translation: "Women sneak around / But men do the same / You can't blame every man for what one man did to you / Men are deceiving / Don't you think women are too? / We don't do nearly as much as you all do / That's a lie!"
- 127 Hodge, "Introduction," xiii.

CHAPTER FOUR. ENTER THE DRAGONS OF DEBATE

Epigraphs: "My Head to the Sky," lyrics by Lil Wayne, selected by Rashid Campbell to represent his story; "If You Don't Know My Struggle," lyrics by Boosie Badazz, selected by George Lee to represent his story.

- 1 I owe this translation and explanation to conversations with Baba Kólá Abimbólá.
- 2 Campbell and Lee further maintain that the five all-white policy judges (four male and one female) on the strike sheet (a list of judges from which the debaters have the option of eliminating two that they think may be biased against them) were surprisingly un-diverse, extremely conservative, and biased toward Georgetown.
- 3 See the YouTube clip of this debate: "2014 NDT Round 8—Northwestern MV vs Oklahoma CL," Debate Stream, March 30, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AY32UtQGgSE>. The video begins to have sound at twenty-one seconds.
- 4 This quotation and all facts concerning Campbell's life were recorded and transcribed from a phone interview conducted in October 2015.
- 5 All facts and quotations concerning Lee's life were recorded and transcribed from an in-person interview conducted in September 2015.
- 6 Barbara Guy, resident of Memphis, Tennessee, refers to the "Candy Lady" as "the convenience store for kids." She describes her role in similar terms as Lee's description of the "Kool Cup House."
- 7 In a speech at Rev. Calvin Butts's Abyssinian Baptist Church in New York in the mid-1990s, Souljah stated that while she was perceived as "poor, Black, and from the underclass" while in school, she had managed, within the context of this category, to work for a congressman, participate in a youth conference in Russia, visit a village in Zambia, write a thesis on propaganda, and be class president and the head of the junior varsity basketball team. That is, the perception of Black children coming from certain environments is often at odds with their accomplishments.
- 8 In the documentary *Rize*, a similar phenomenon is apparent during the extensive interviews that LaChapelle does with the young subjects of his film.

The philosophical depth with which they assess the Krumping art form and its meaning in their lives is an example of the type of genius based on lived experience that is overlooked in mainstream contexts but is apparent in many aspects of grassroots Black life.

- 9 Again, Sister Souljah's experience is instructive. The phrase "not like the rest of them" was used by her to describe her own experiences in the New York public school system in the 1980s when she was singled out as a "talented and gifted" child. A range of literature is emerging on the discriminatory tracking of Black children, boys in particular, into special education classes from a young age because they are performing below grade level. Some texts addressing this are Kunjufu, *Keeping Black Boys Out of Special Education*, and Williams, *The Burning House*.
- 10 The term *magical Negro* has historically referred to Black actors in fiction and film who play the role of mystical, self-sacrificing savior to a white individual or populace.
- 11 The controversial portion of the chant stated: "You can hang a nigger from a tree but he'll never be a member of SAE."
- 12 See Royster, *Southern Horrors*. Frequently the charge was Black male impropriety with white women when in actuality, Wells argues that it was Black business owners who were perceived of as threats to white economic advancement who were lynched. See also Lightweis-Goff, *Blood at the Root*, and Hill, *Beyond the Rope*, for detailed analyses of the relationship between lynching and the American psyche.
- 13 In *The Black Image in the White Mind*, Frederickson states, "Whatever the fate of some of its interpretations, the book remains, at the very least, a useful and balanced description of white thinking about blacks in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries" (xi). The SAE situation also calls to mind Marcus Garvey's statement in Tony Martin's *Race First* about lynching—this being that all the lynch laws were irrelevant if they could not be enforced.
- 14 Judy argues in "On the Question of Nigga Authenticity" that "thinking about rap in the way of hip-hop is to think it hard core, to think it like a nigga" (214). At the philosophical level, Judy seems to be suggesting that the situations engendering the experiences that inspire artists to create the music are part of a whole worldview and way of seeing reality that is worthy of consideration. The hundreds of books that have been written about hip-hop since the publication of Judy's article are overwhelming. The sheer volume indicates that the phenomenon of hip-hop has opened up a range of discursive fields of inquiry that are rapidly expanding both within and outside academia.
- 15 Old-school hip-hop heads describe hip-hop's origin story in terms of five elements: (1) the DJ or disc jockey who spun the records on a turntable; (2) the MC or master of ceremonies at the mike who rapped rhymes over the beats that the DJ put forth; (3) the B-Boys or break dancers who literally danced during the breaks in the music; (4) the graffiti artists whose tags imitated

the twists and turns of the break dancers' Capoeira-like movements; (5) and knowledge of self—put forth most coherently by Africa Bambaataa and the Zulu Nation. Bambaataa, who is seen as the “Godfather of Hip-Hop,” was a member of the street gang the Black Spades. But after going on a trip to continental Africa, which was the prize for an essay-writing contest, he formed the Zulu Nation, changed his name (which was previously Kevin Donovan), and was a force of unity both among gang members in the South Bronx and in the emerging world of hip-hop parties and music. The “knowledge of self” concept, associated with hip-hop at its best, reflects Bambaataa's transformation. See Steve Knopper, “Africa Bambaataa: Crate-Digger, Collector, Creator,” *Chicago Tribune*, May 5, 2011.

- 16 Judy, “On the Question of Nigga Authenticity,” 222.
- 17 Judy, “On the Question of Nigga Authenticity,” 223.
- 18 Judy, “On the Question of Nigga Authenticity,” 224. This quotation is Judy's assessment of how the N-word functioned colloquially in-group in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
- 19 Judy, “On the Question of Nigga Authenticity.” Judy cites John W. Roberts's *From Trickster to Badman*.
- 20 Evaluations aside ☺.
- 21 Judy, “On the Question of Nigga Authenticity,” 217.
- 22 Judy, “On the Question of Nigga Authenticity,” 229.
- 23 Judy, “On the Question of Nigga Authenticity,” 229.
- 24 Judy, “On the Question of Nigga Authenticity,” 217.
- 25 Bambara, “Some Forward Remarks,” in the introduction to Hurston, *The Sanctified Church*, 9. The reference to the folks lowest down as the source of the richest elements of Black cultural expression is raised in two texts discussed in previous chapters: Hurston, “Characteristics of Negro Expression,” and Hughes, “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain.”
- 26 Judy, “On the Question of Nigga Authenticity,” 225.
- 27 Judy, “On the Question of Nigga Authenticity,” 224–25.
- 28 Judy, “On the Question of Nigga Authenticity,” 225.
- 29 Judy, “On the Question of Nigga Authenticity,” 229.
- 30 Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*; Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro*.
- 31 An excellent example of this occurs between 8:35 and 11:35 in the Campbell and Lee debate with the team from Northwestern. See “2014 NDT Round 8—Northwestern MV vs Oklahoma CL,” Debate Stream, March 30, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AY32UtQGgSE>.
- 32 E. Brown, *The Condemnation of Little B*, 3–4.
- 33 Rashid Campbell and George Lee, “The Nigga Debate Cards,” 2013–14. Campbell and Lee shared their debate cards on the Judy article with me. The cards consist of a main argument articulated in a topic sentence and then relevant quotations from the article that supported their position. Some of the other arguments on this card were “Niggas are always in opposition to Government,” “Knowledge turns the Nigger into a Nigga,” “Niggas, within the

English Language are only understood as slave labor/property,” “The autonomous will of Niggas embodies the fears of whites,” and “What it means to be a Nigga is not a moral question, it is the existential question of what it means to be human.”

- 34 Judy, “On the Question of Nigga Authenticity,” 227.
- 35 Judy, “On the Question of Nigga Authenticity,” 214.
- 36 These would be rappers and hip-hop producers such as Jay-Z, Ice Cube, Diddy before his tumble from prominence, and Dr. Dre, to name a few.
- 37 Judy, “On the Question of Nigga Authenticity,” 227–28.
- 38 The McD.L.T. was a McDonald’s burger from the 1980s.
- 39 I am suggesting here that what is referred to as “unknowable agency” has a connection to “diasporic consciousness,” a term that is addressed in full in my book *Clear Word and Third Sight*.
- 40 Smitherman, “Students’ Right to Their Own Language.” See also Smitherman, *Talkin and Testifyin*; Gilyard, *Voices of the Self*; and Logan, *Liberating Language*.
- 41 In his 1933 text *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, Woodson states, “In the study of language in school pupils were made to scoff at the Negro dialect as some peculiar possession of the Negro which they should despise rather than directed to study the background of this language as a broken-down African tongue—in short to understand their own linguistic history, which is certainly more important for them than the study of French Phonetics or Historical Spanish Grammar. To the African language as such no attention was given except in the case of the preparation of traders, missionaries and public functionaries to exploit the natives” (19).
- 42 In a course I taught for several years, “Hip Hop as Poetry, Literature, and Cultural Expression,” by way of tackling and taking seriously the issue of Ebonics in hip-hop we would have a discussion about whether you could tell if someone was “Black” by talking to them on the phone. Inevitably some students “heard” the question as about their ability to “see skin color” and reacted accordingly with a vehement “No!” Others heard it as a question about the cultural tonality captured in the sound of one’s voice. These students were usually split between saying yes and no to the original question, with their no grounded in contradictory statements such as “There are some Black people who sound white and some white people who sound Black.” When I pushed them back to the original question and expanded upon it by asking, “What does it mean to sound Black?” some then begin to speak of certain tones and accents as cultural. What became clear after a while is that in the absence of African Americans having their own claims to a separate national identity, the cultural origins of their speech patterns were also invisible. In other words, one *cannot* point to how Black people from the United States speak and say, “That is a Jamaican accent!” or “That is a Nigerian speech pattern.” Instead, it is simply identified as “Black” and “country,” thus usually evoking shame and ridicule. Woodson as well as the work done by African American linguists and rhetoricians has opened the door to deeper philosophical engagements with

the cultural worldview and reality behind AAVE and Ebonics. Introducing West and Central African language to young Black children in the diaspora would be the next step in expanding the discursive terrain of understanding their speech history.

43 See the *marasa* diagram in the introduction.

AFTERWORD

- 1 I owe this interpretation and understanding to Karen Gillette of Woodside, St. Mary, niece of Pearl Crossman.
- 2 The “feather-bed resistance” tactic, referred to by Hurston in *Mules and Men*, addresses what she describes as a strategy, in Southern African American communities, for dealing with outsiders, an exterior show of friendliness while community members mask their motives and maybe pertinent information. I address this concept in substance in John, *Clear Word and Third Sight*. Dianne Stewart, in *Three Eyes for the Journey*, discusses a “theory of masquerading,” in relation to the use of Western Christianity, as a mask for African religious modes in the diaspora context.
- 3 Rodney makes this statement in the published Q&A from the conference where he presented the article that was eventually published as “Problems of Third World Development.”
- 4 Marley, “Redemption Song.”
- 5 Clifton, “roots,” in *Good Woman*.
- 6 Wallace and Lomax, *The Hate That Hate Produced*, <https://www.columbia.edu/cu/ccbh/mxp/pdf/o71659hthp-transcript.pdf>.
- 7 Ta-Nehisi Coates, Hearing on Slavery Reparations, US House Judiciary Committee, June 19, 2019, C-SPAN, <https://www.c-span.org/program/house-committee/hearing-on-slavery-reparations/528322>.

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