

Octavia Butler's *Parables* and Black African American Hyper-Empathic Neurodivergent Feminists: On Shame and Solidarity

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Abstract

As renowned scholar and researcher Sara Ahmed (2004; 2015) reminds us, emotions do things to us because they are relational. This dissertation takes aim at one emotion in particular: shame. By recognizing the similarities between us—that we all feel some degree of shame—we nonetheless inevitably arrive back at our differences: Not all feminists are bombarded with shame equally or in the same way. With a particular emphasis on the ways that shame can obstruct interpersonal relationships within the feminist movement, in this dissertation, I pay close attention to the complexly suppressed shames we encounter when stepping into solidarity with one another, mapping out how negotiating shame can come to represent feminism as a multiplicity. Drawing from shame researchers like Ahmed (2015), Brown (2006), Harris-Perry (2011), and Halberstam (2005b) and Black feminist theorists like Crenshaw (1991), hooks (1992), Lorde (1984), Alexander, (2005), Hill-Collins (2017) and many others, I ask what shame *does* to feminists in solidarity with one another. To try to answer this question, I rely on Black feminist theory and methodology, focusing on autoethnography as well as a critical discourse analysis of two of Octavia Butler's novels, *Parable of the Sower* (1993) and *Parable of the Talents* (1998). The following research questions guide my analysis: 1a) How is shame conceptualized in shame research? 1b) How does shame function and why? 2) How does shame hinder our interpersonal relationships with one another? 3a) What does shame do to the mind-body? and 3b) What implications does this have for feminists? Octavia Butler's fiction provides representations of shame that help us to conceptualize harms that result when feminists are affected by an excess accumulation of shame. This study hypothesizes that, to avoid being derailed by difficult emotions like shame, we must explore different conceptions of shame as essential contributions to feminist understandings of solidarity.

Dedication

“When the power of love overcomes the love of power, then the world will know peace.”

- Jimi Hendrix

I dedicate this to my maternal grandmother, Mrs. Dorothy Osei. Thank you for bringing me to and carrying me through. For your guidance and protection, I love you, your granddaughter.

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Shame and Feminism

Introduction

As renowned scholar and researcher Sara Ahmed (2004; 2015) reminds us, emotions do things to us because they are relational. This dissertation makes a contribution to studies on the inner workings of shame. The emphasis in this project is on shame that reorganizes how feminists are in proximity with one another, separating and dividing us, obstructing interpersonal relationships within the feminist movement. To examine the affect of shame, this dissertation draws on theoretical frameworks from Black feminist theory for its methods and methodology, focusing also on autoethnography and critical discourse analysis. It uses two of Octavia Butler's texts, *Parable of the Sower* (1993) and *Parable of the Talents* (1998) to examine the following research questions: 1a) How is shame conceptualized in shame research? 1b) How does shame function and why? 2) How does shame hinder our interpersonal relationships with one another? 3a) What does shame do to the mind-body? and 3b) What implications does this have for feminists?

Octavia Butler's fiction provides theoretical and artistic representations of shame that help us to conceptualize harms that result when feminists are affected by an excess accumulation of shame. The study hypothesizes that, to avoid being derailed by difficult emotions like shame, we must explore different conceptions of shame as essential contributions to feminist understandings of solidarity. By inserting the similarities between us—that we all feel some degree of shame—we inevitably arrive back at our differences: Not all feminists are bombarded with shame equally or in the same way. As such, the goal is to pay close attention to the complexly suppressed shames we encounter when stepping into solidarity with one another, mapping out how negotiating shame can come to represent feminism as a multiplicity, situating

white feminism's convoluted history as a multiplicity. While other scholars have theorized aspects of feminism as a multiplicity vis-à-vis frameworks such as intersectionality, matrix of domination, transversal politics, and palimpsest glimpses (see Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Haritaworn et al.; Alexander, 2005; Hill-Collins, 2017; Yuval-Davis, 2006), multiplicity here is understood in Deleuzoguattarian terms to convey the feminist terrain as a rhizome.

Feminism and Its Multiplicities

Throughout the history of feminist theorizing and activism, white North American feminism has typically been understood as a binary. Liberal and progressive frameworks that stress our similarities and figures models of solidarity as universal (read: "we are all one") sit at one end of the polemic, while intersectional and post-structural frameworks that stress the importance of recognizing difference situate itself at the other. The stakes of these different understandings of solidarity are high. Feminist writer Robin Morgan (1984) provided an account of this in *Sisterhood is Global: The International Women's Movement Anthology*, where the presumed premise was that feminists who identified as women were part of what she called a "global sisterhood" in the fight against patriarchy. Global sisterhood claimed to encapsulate the rights of all women based on their essentialized similarities, like biology and a shared struggle against patriarchy, what Morgan called "Big Brother" (see also Antrobus, 2004; Mohanty, 2003). Such conceptualizations imagined solidarity as universal, organic, and a given necessity for the feminist movement (see Featherstone, 2012; Mohanty, 2003; Morgan, 1984). Under this model, shared commonalities were the glue that bound feminists together and they were understood to outweigh any differences.

Ironically, by minimizing difference and overemphasizing sameness, Morgan's articulation of solidarity as inclusionary simultaneously excluded women who were low-income,

queer, trans, gender nonbinary, nonconforming, Black, Indigenous, and other racialized non-white women, as well as those who were disabled, neurodiverse, intersex, Muslim, or based outside of North America and Europe (see Alexander & Mohanty, 1997; Bacchetta, 2002; Mohanty, 2003). Universal models of solidarity have been rightfully challenged for being exclusionary and divisive by postcolonial and critical race scholars like Jacqui Alexander (2005c), Chandra T. Mohanty (2003), and Jasbir Puar (2017). These scholars highlight the importance of accounting for difference and intersectional operations of power and oppression¹ while building models of solidarity that depend on groups working intentionally together across their differences. In this camp were Anzaldúa (2015), hooks (1992), and Lorde (1984), where differences were acknowledged and celebrated, rather than excluded, rejected, or feared. These models were developed by feminists willing to name race, ethnicity, class disparities, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, gender expression, disability, neurological variance, and geographic, migration, and citizenship status (see Ahmad, 2018; Antrobus, 2004; Haritaworn et al., 2018; Piepzn-Samarasinha, 2018; Ware, 2018). Those marked as different and who sought to name and take ownership of their differences were said to be engaged in *identity politics* (Trask, 2003). Despite their best sustained interventions, these feminists received and continue to receive backlash from white feminists who claim they are being divisive and polarizing (Jones, 2019; Lorde, 2015; Mohanty, 2003), a charge typically directed at Black and other feminists of colour.

Where solidarity as universal was criticized for being too idealistic, unrealistic, and utopic, identity politics raised criticism for being exclusionary, redundant, and futile (see Dean, 1996; Featherstone, 2012), the assumption for the latter being that paying attention to our differences would never yield the common ground necessary for solidarity to take place

(Mendoza, 2002). This dissertation counters these reductive assertions, suggesting instead that a binary approach to North American feminism smooths over nuances that make solidarity dynamic (see Dean, 1996; Featherstone, 2012; Mohanty, 2003). Drawing from these debates and building on the works of others, this project theorizes white North American feminism as a *multiplicity*.

The Multiplicity of Becoming-Rhizome

French philosopher Gilles Deleuze and French psychiatrist Félix Guattari (1987) articulated the term multiplicity in their book *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. For the two, a multiplicity is a philosophical concept that explains how distinct and heterogenous lines that appear separate and divided are at once always still connected. As Stephen Linstead and Alison Pullen (2006) wrote, “multiplicity is conventionally used to indicate multiple units or qualities, identifiable as separate and numerous. This type of multiplicity is extensive, comprising several things that are distinct but may be linked under one category”; adding, “For example, in terms of the different experiences a person has in a day and contains in their emotional memory—happiness, frustration, achievement, love, boredom, pain, motivation—all leaving their immediate mark and remaining without fading away before the other experiences crowd in, leaving a complex of often contradictory feelings” (p. 1289). These articulations of multiplicity helped make sense of feminism (singular) as simultaneous feminisms (plural). What was one, becomes many.

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) provide an example of a rhizome to elaborate. They explain that rhizomes are non-signifying systems and a-centred networks what Manuel De Landa (2012) calls “meshwork”: “a series of middles with no beginning nor end,” “no departure nor arrival, origin nor destination,” “always in the middle, between things, interbeing” (n.p.; see also

Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 25; Goodley, 2007; Linstead & Pullen, 2006, p. 1290; Taylor & Harris-Evans, 2018, p. 1263). A rhizome has no point of origin or central axis (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Goodley, 2007; Linstead & Pullen, 2006; Taylor & Harris-Evans, 2018). As Deleuze and Guattari share, “any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other and must be, there is no point or positions in a rhizome, there are only lines” (1987, pp. 7–9). These lines extend in all manner of direction, taking flight with no given route or any particular order (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Goodley, 2007; Linstead & Pullen, 2006; Ringrose & Renold, 2014; Taylor & Harris-Evans, 2018). Even when “ruptured, broken, or shattered,” a rhizome “will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines because these lines always tie back to one another” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, pp. 8–9). New articulations veer off, while still connected, always of the same origin, which is gender equality for women and girls. These were some of the different articulations of multiplicity that were considered in this study as it was attentive to how emotions like shame move us relationally, away interpersonally. Distancing us from the work while still connecting to it and each other.

In this regard, this study adds to feminist scholarship on solidarity by theorizing and examining shame that saturates feminist projects and subjects. Drawing from shame researchers like Sara Ahmed (2015), Brené Brown (2006), Melisa Harris-Perry (2011), and Jack Halberstam (2005b), it assesses what shame *does* to feminists in solidarity with one another, arguing that with shame, solidarity is complicated and made dynamic, locating us in the universal as well as in models of difference. The maladaptive and problematic thought patterns and behaviours that shame drives us to shatters feminist solidarity as a neat and tidy binary. On the surface, at the level of the material and social, we may appear to be unified and working toward a common

goal, yet across psychic fields and beneath the surface, how we feel and are moved by shame, as well as the meanings we give to it, can run contrary to solidarity.

The Evolution of Shame

Shame is a social and global emotion filtered through cognition with no single universal approach, differing in context depending on cultural nuance, geographic location, and time (Harris-Perry, 2011; Stearns, 2017). The emotion is universal and interwoven with the human experience (Book, 2014; Harris-Perry, 2011). Shame moves us (a) at the individual level, experienced as a sense of inferiority; (b) vicariously, on behalf of others; or (c) collectively, as intergenerational, transgenerational, or intercultural group or ancestral shame felt by the wider society (Fischer, 2018; Probyn, 2005; Stearns, 2017). Even still, not all have access to shame in the same way. As Sara Ahmed's work suggests, while it is felt by all, how it has come to be represented discursively and socioculturally shapes who it accumulates on, making it difficult to track.

In *Fear: A Cultural History*, Joanna Bourke (2005) wrote: "Was what people in the 1970s called 'fear' the same thing as it was in the 1870s? Probably not. Or, more accurately, many historians feel that they have no way of knowing" (p. 6). The same can be said about shame. Because shame is an internal and subjective experience, it can take different forms and is felt and experienced differently from person to person, making it a "slippery" emotion when it comes to defining, identifying, and analyzing it, said Clara Fischer (2018, p. 371) in *Gender and the Politics of Shame: A Twenty-First-Century Feminist Shame Theory*. For Fischer, this means that different things shame people in different ways. How shame gets taken up culturally has much to do with the cultures and people making sense of shame at any given time. For example, shame has been documented to decrease in urban environments because it is easier to be

anonymous there than in rural communities, which tend to be more cohesive, making shame more impactful (Stearns, 2017, p. 50). These situated and nuanced details shape how shame is articulated in the research.

Etymologically, the word *shame* has Germanic roots and comes from the Indo-European/Goth word *scham*, which means to cover or covering of the face (Ahmed, 2015; Probyn, 2010; Stearns, 2017), although in fifteenth century feudal Britain and Japan, shame was tied with dishonour and disgrace (Stearns, 2017; see also Kilday & Nash, 2016). Not surprisingly, shame moves us to cover and hide, silencing people and producing secrecy in order to avoid disgrace and dishonour (Ahmed, 2015; Brown, 2006; Deonna et al., 2011; Harris-Perry, 2011). Historical texts have highlighted the linkages between shame and nakedness. The biblical creation story has Adam and Eve aware of their nakedness for the first time after committing “original sin,” criminals were whipped naked in public or forced to walk around the marketplace naked, and women accused of adultery were paraded naked through the streets on the backs of donkeys (Stearns, 2017). Quite literally, shaming meant rendering people naked in public.

But shame also leaves us feeling naked in other ways too. As Brené Brown's (2010, 2011) work highlights, exposure is tied to emotional vulnerability and the fear of it. Brown (2011) defines vulnerability as emotional risk, exposure, and uncertainty. This description is at the crux of shame; it leaves us feeling emotionally exposed. This has to do with how we perceive the gaze of another as threatening. It is as if they are seeing us emotionally naked, which makes us feel vulnerable. As historian Peter Stearns (2017) noted, men are more likely to wash their hands in public restrooms if others are there, and that people are more inclined to wear their seatbelts if others are in the car, highlighting our sensitivities to shame in the face of company. No matter how mild the setting, to be seen as shameful or viewed as violating community

standards in front of others is difficult. As Ahmed (2015) elaborates, “if we feel shame, we feel shame because we have failed to approximate ‘an ideal’ that has been given to us” (p. 106). In this way, shame surfaces in the failure to meet cultural expectations (Ahmed, 2015). Anytime we rely on community standards, are required to follow societal scripts, or are encouraged to engage in perfectionism to appease others, the intensity of shame will follow (Stearns, 2017), a vulnerable experience that intensifies shame.

The Physicality of Painful Shame

For many, the vulnerability that accompanies exposure to shame, or being exposed as shameful, is terrifyingly painful (Brown, 2006; see also Biddle, 1997). This *painful* aspect to shame was documented in early English literature, where shame was referred to by some as “greater than any physical wound” (Stearns, 2017, p. 38). Shame, perhaps more than any other emotion, “hits close to the bone,” as the idiom goes.² It is so painful that some Japanese cultures have referred to it as an energetic force that crushes, injures, and soils (Stearns, 2017). Shame is like fear in this way, embodied as a warm sensation, or as Ahmed (2015) said, “a heat that envelopes the body” (p. 63). We can say that this heat, this added pressure, causes emotional distress, which is experienced as physical pain.

Emotional suffering tied to shame translates to the brain as physical pain (Gatchel et al., 2007; Guerin et al., 2018; Turner-Cobb et al., 2015; Werner et al., 2004). According to Hanifa Menen (2018), Marwa Azab (2019), and Lorimer Moseley (2014), the human brain is unable to decipher between emotional pain and physical pain. The two states register to the brain as pain all the same, even when the pain is not real. We have to consider what this means for the brain in shame. “There is no feeling more painful,” Jennifer Biddle (1997, p. 227; see also Probyn, 2010b) said of shame. Similarly, Brené Brown (2011) identified shame as “the intensely painful

feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging” (pp. 3). For Melissa Harris-Perry (2011), “shame is among the most physically painful human emotions because it cuts to the core of one’s sense of self-worth through repeated acts of misrecognition” (pp. 107). And while these scholars share just how physically painful shame is, unless one personally knows the painful sensation of shame, it can be easy to underestimate its physicality.

Shame is not only located in the discursive, or sociocultural, but across psychic fields, as an energy in motion in and around the body, embodied and felt, not just experienced, or known. It is as much ontological as it is epistemological. When we better understand just how painful shame is to the mind-body, we can begin to make sense of why so many of us are shame averse, wanting nothing to do with the emotion. This is quite rational and human, requiring some patience and compassion. It would be preposterous to beg someone to sit for long hours with a toothache. Most know better than to expect anyone to love the idea of living daily with a broken collar bone, or even a broken finger. No one is excited about painful migraines visiting them daily. Would we find it normal for anyone to take pleasure in 48 hours of painful labour contractions or agonizing menstrual cramps with no pain medication? No. So why shame?

I raise 48 hours because Peter Stearns (2017) suggested that this is how long the feeling of shame typically lasts. I would add, however, that, especially for those who are neurodiverse, highly sensitive, or extrasensory, like me, this feeling can last much longer. While studying myself in shame for this dissertation, I noted long bouts of chronic shame, lasting more than three months, amplifying my chronic pain and mental illness, which research has shown is linked with shame (see Menen, 2018). It is unfathomable that we should suggest that people endure physical pain for longer than 48 hours, let alone chronically, with no soothing or pain numbing

remedies. That runs contrary to wellness and is the antithesis of health. However, this is exactly the solutions that therapists and shame researchers present, that we should sit with and process shame to the point that we build enough of what Brené Brown (2011) called “shame resilience.”

Brown (2011) defined shame resilience as “the ability to recognize shame, to move through it constructively while maintaining worthiness and authenticity, and to ultimately develop more courage, compassion, and connection as a result of our experience” (p. 4). Brown suggests that building shame resilience requires us to talk about our shame. Not just to share it with others, but to understand why shame happens, assess the stories we give to our shame, and heed the meanings we create to ascribe it. While I agree with these solutions, endorse them, and have used these strategies myself, I also want to flag that these propositions are not entirely reasonable or practical for the very reason that we underestimate the power of shame and the painful sensations that keep us from engaging with it. Moving through shame as Brown suggested is painful.

Because shame is so painful, humans have adapted ways to avoid it (Stearns, 2017), including eschewing vulnerability and accountability. When shame remains unresolved, we project it onto others, fight shame with shame, or weaponize shame using control dynamics (Brown, 2010). In *I Ego You* (Attakora-Gyan, 2020), I write about my own struggle with owning all the fragmented and contradictory parts of myself that have drawn shame in me and others. I share that while it was not (and is still not) easy to heal and face shame, doing so saved my life in many ways, and I urge others to tackle shame too. I tell others to do the work around shame while also noting its painful, sometimes fatal, aspects. I remind us that shame is tied to suicidality, addiction issues, and other mental and chronic diseases and illnesses. It is not a benevolent emotion. People murder to cover their shame or when their shame is exposed. Many

others take their own lives to escape the painful emotional distress tied to shame and other difficult and traumatic sensations.

Shame is a hard emotion to negotiate. It is understandable that we all find it challenging. But that does not mean that we should not engage with shame. In fact, as Brown's work (2010, 2011) suggests, it is in facing shame that we destroy shame. Brown asked that more of us "reckon" and "rumble" with shame because not enough of us do. Instead, we gaslight and diminish the seriousness and very real impacts of shame. That is, until we have no choice but to confront shame ourselves head-on, something anti-critical race theory crusaders are grappling with in the twenty-first century.

Anti-Critical Race Theory Advocates Covering and Evading Shame

Sara Ahmed (2015) reminds us that stepping into wrongdoing is to simultaneously step into shame, something most people refuse to do. However, evading shame is particularly damaging when white people do it, because of the powers and privileges they hold. Some even go so far as to ban schools from teaching students about white European-descended histories of conquest, imperialism, colonialism, white supremacy, anti-Indigenous, anti-Black, and anti-people of colour racism. This has become a hot topic of debate as right-wing conservatives in Texas, Virginia, Tennessee, Idaho, and other parts of the United States move to ban the teaching of critical race theory (CRT) in schools.

In *Critical Race Truth: Republicans Keep Trying to Revise America's Racist History*, Black American journalist and political commentator Anoa Changa (2021) described CRT as "the favorite boogeyman of the right" (paras. 15; see also Ray & Gibbons, 2021). CRT was born out of critical legal studies (CLS) in the 1960s and '70s, though it was formally organized at the first annual Workshop on Critical Race in 1989 and credited to a collective of legal activist-

scholars like Kimberlé Crenshaw, Derrick Bell, and Richard Delgado (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d.). CRT frameworks originally taught graduate students that America's racist history of slavery, segregation, and Jim Crow laws were all systemic, made possible by laws and other legal institutions rooted in white supremacy (Gabriel & Goldstein, 2021; The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d.). CRT tells the story of white European-descended men in America, specifically, the "founding fathers" who set out to create the country that made life easier for them while making it harder for others. They did so by using laws and other such institutions to cement white privileges, affording white people unearned opportunities based solely on their race, thereby perpetuating race-based oppression. CRT tenets include the idea that race is a social construct created to oppress non-white people and uphold white superiority, teaching that (unconscious) racial bias is instituted into systems and individual minds, making racism a systemic, and not solely individual, issue (Gabriel & Goldstein, 2021; The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d.). The theory has grown beyond the academy and into popular mainstream media as antiracist educators fight to teach students K-12 about race, gender, intersectionality, and other such social justice related topics, much to the dismay of conservative right-wing Americans.

Trip Gabriel and Dana Goldstein (2021) found that those, like State Representative Don Jones, who oppose CRT consider it "dangerous," "flat-out wrong," and "Marxist." Jones and other anti-CRT protestors believe that "students should not be asked to 'examine their whiteness' or 'check their privilege.'" Fox News reportedly cited "critical race theory" 1300 in under four months (Ray & Gibbons, 2021, paras. 1), and according to Ines Santos (ACLU, 2021), as of August 2021, 27 state legislatures and 165 national and local organizations had made efforts to restrict educators from teaching CRT in schools. So far, Idaho, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas,

New Hampshire, South Carolina, Arizona, and North Dakota have passed anti-CRT legislation, with Idaho and North Dakota being the only two to explicitly state the term “critical race theory.” Rashawn Ray and Alexandra Gibbons (2021) add that 20 other states have introduced or plan to introduce guidelines derailing CRT-related topics, including Montana, Florida, Georgia, Utah, and Alabama.

Ray and Gibbons write that the ban prohibits any discussions in schools that suggest that America is inherently racist, forbidding themes like conscious and unconscious bias, white privilege, discrimination, and oppression. According to Emma Green (2021) writing for *The Atlantic*, the bill bans educators from “teaching students that any individuals are inherently privileged, sexist, or oppressive based on their race or sex” (paras. 5). Green goes on to share the story of Tennessee high school teacher Matt Hawn, who was fired for using Ta-Nehisi Coates’ article *The First White President*, which argued that Trump supporters voted for him because he was white and because they themselves were grieving an America they had lost while President Obama was in office. Matt Hawn had his students read the article to start a conversation and was terminated for doing so.

The Sullivan County Board of Education that Hawn worked for upheld their decision to sack him, citing, “The record establishes that Mr. Hawn failed to follow the Teacher Code of Ethics and in doing so acted unprofessionally” (paras. 5). They went on to say that “Mr. Hawn was insubordinate in that he failed to follow the reprimand that prohibited him from using materials with inappropriate language. And failing to present varying viewpoints, despite knowing he was to do so” (paras. 6). The school board denied that firing Hawn was linked to the critical race theory ban (Wagner, 2021). This is the extent white conservatives will go to deny

historical facts that frame them in a negative and shameful way, operating according to the very definition of shame: to cover.

These are not made-up theories, nor propaganda, nor even “fake news” that they are trying to cover. These are historical facts derived from scholarly data and scientific research. As Changa (2021) writes, “The truth is a fascinating concept. But facts do matter” (paras. 4). What anti-CRT supporters communicates suggests that these white people just might know and understand the power of negative stereotypes and the material consequences they generate. Facing these shameful histories has proven too challenging for them. Republican representative Kristey Williams, for example, was reportedly afraid teaching CRT would result in students “internalizing shame” (Bahl, 2021). Suddenly, white conservatives care about shame, not just white pride. Williams was quoted to have said, “If you are confronted with the fact that you, because of the color of your skin, are racist and you are the problem then that can manifest shame, especially in adolescents and women” (Bahl, 2021, paras. 3). This is a convenient argument given that critical race theorists have long spoken to how constructions of Black people as shameful brings more shame to them, negatively impacting their lives and standard of living. When Black communities argued that this representation of Blackness as shameful is harmful, they were ignored, gaslighted, and dismissed as overly sensitive and emotional manipulation; and yet here we see white communities making the same claim unproblematically and without irony.

Shame and Identity

Western society has identified certain groups as characteristically [more] shameful than others (Stearns, 2017), such as Black people. Stuart Hall (1997a) and Tamara Winfrey-Harris (2015) argued that negative stereotypes of Black people emerged with the construction of

Blackness and race as early as the seventeenth century when the idea of race emerged to justify slavery and the subordination of Black people. Black people were stereotyped as inherently bad and dangerous, and as unintelligent, lazy, inferior criminals. They were viewed as failing to conform to society in comparison to those of the dominant group (Ahmed, 2015; Harris-Perry, 2011; Winfrey-Harris, 2015). These stereotypes of Black people as shameful have been damaging to the Black community.

Black American scholar and social commentator Melissa Harris-Perry's (2011) *Sister Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes, and Black Women in America* addresses shame as it relates to the intersections of gender, race, and class. Harris-Perry deconstructs stereotypes of Black women as Jezebel (hyper and oversexed), Mammy (nurturing and self-sacrificing), and Sapphire (the angry or strong Black woman; see also Mock, 2017). bell hooks (2001) identified similar tropes, arguing that Black women are portrayed as mummies, whores, and sluts (see also Fischer, 2018), linking shame directly with Black women. For Harris-Perry, the issue is not that Black American women are shameful or that they do shameful things to perpetuate these stereotypes, but rather that they find themselves conforming to society's "crooked room," unable to stand upright in a toxic and volatile environment rife with abuse and oppression. It is Black women who pay the price, never the so-called founding fathers that created these inequities in the first place.

The very emphasis on shame in this dissertation emerges because of how women, and Black women in particular, are framed as shameful, especially those who identify as feminists and who chose to push against patriarchy. This gendered aspect of shame, where women and the feminine are coded as more shameful, is a theme that shows up repeatedly in history. Shame is interwoven with gender constructs and disproportionately affects women, who are identified as more prone to shame than men (Stearns, 2017). For Clara Fischer (2018), framing women as

shameful is productive for subjecting women to coercive and degrading treatment. Fischer argued that gendered shame reinforces strict codes of femininity that reduce and diminish women to animalistic sexualized objects. And while women were constructed differently in relation to shame, it is interesting to note that such framings still came with discrepancies when it benefited men. In Springfield, Massachusetts during the early 19th century, for example, a woman who was caught swearing and insulting another person in public was allowed to “apologize like a woman,” but was “still sentenced to public stocks like a man, since she swore like one” (Stearns, 2017: pp 43). Similarly, because femininity is located in white womanhood and Black women are masculinized and coded as masculine, Black women are punished and shamed like men, facing harsh repercussions as a result.

Negative Consequences of Shame

Returning to the example of anti-CRT protestors, these next two sections ask: What if, in the white imagination and delusion, such bans were rationalized by the white conservative as normal, even loving? In *All About Love*, bell hooks talked about how abuse and intimate partner violence is so often coded as loving, justified because it is done out of love. “I hit you because I love you,” we sometimes hear. While this is far from the truth, psychology has proven that abusers often do in fact see nothing wrong with their violence, typically blaming the victims instead and using love as justification (hooks, 2005). Here, white right-wing conservatives are communicating something similar. Anti-CRT conservatives have cited concerns of depression, trauma, and anxiety as a result of the shame white students feel upon learning about CRT, feelings that emerge because shame produces cortisol, the stress hormone (Harris-Perry, 2011), and is connected to suicide.

Suicide rates for white adolescents and young adults outnumber those of Black people, although this is a bit of a misnomer given that white people outnumber Black people in the US, and because suicide rates for white adolescents have continued to drop while they have only increased among Black youth (Caron, 2021). In any case, the topic of suicide is no joke; it is a serious subject that gets glossed over because of its taboo nature. Mira Kelley (2014) writes, “The World Health Organization states that, in some countries, suicide is among the top three leading causes of death for those 15–44 years of age. It estimates that globally there are between 10–20 million suicide attempts every year” (p. 111). Speaking specifically to the United States, Kelley identifies,

The 2008 National Survey on Drug Use and Health revealed that there were 8.3 million adults in the US alone who had serious thoughts of committing suicide that year. Another 2.3 million had made plans to commit suicide, and 1.1 million had actually attempted it. (2014, p. 111)

This points to larger issues among the general population. (I also want to note here that the language is dated, and the term *death by suicide* is preferable to *commit suicide* for the very reason that suicide is no longer a criminal offence).

In Black communities in the United States, Black children are more likely than white children to face adverse childhood experiences. Although this has resulted in higher suicide rates among Black boys than girls, Christina Caron (2021) has noted that Black girls are more likely than boys to receive a diagnosis of depression and anxiety and that suicide rates among Black girls has increased by 6.6 percent each year between 2003 and 2017, more than twice the increase of Black boys (see also Moyer, 2021). Self-reported suicide attempt rates among Black adolescents rose by 80 percent between 1991 and 2019, which was untrue for other

demographics (Caron, 2021). A 2018 study showed that Black children between the ages of 5 and 10 were twice as likely to die by suicide than white children the same age (Caron, 2021; Moyer, 2021). Furthermore, between 2013 and 2019, the suicide rate for Black boys and men between the ages of 15 and 24 rose by 47 percent; for Black girls and women of the same age group there was a 59 percent increase (Caron, 2021). Given that Black people in the United States make up only 13 percent of the population, these statistics are staggering, and one has to ask where the empathy and concern is for how shame affects Black mental health. How is it that the same anti-CRT conservatives that gaslighted Black communities for claiming that shaming stereotypes matter and have material consequences now use these very arguments to protect white students from the shame of their history?

Emotions, which have thus far been framed as irrational, weak, and feminine, suddenly become threatening and real, capable of medical consequences, with the grave potential of sending white students into mental and emotional distress. If non-white students have had to endure these false history lessons and the ridicule that comes with being depicted as shameful; if they have had to navigate the mental health industrial complex for depression, anxiety, suicide, and other trauma-related issues as a result of this shame, is it just to protect white students from the same experiences? Putting this ban into place to protect white students at the expense of continuing to perpetuate shameful stereotypes for Black and other communities of colour sets a hypocritical and harmful precedent that supports the very ideas that CRT espouses, which is that racism and preferential treatment is institutionalized and the law aids in upholding this white supremacy. To use Elspeth Probyn (2005) in, *Ancestral Shame*, in creating anti-CRT bills, they get to deny shame.

In other words, instead of focusing on the necessarily intertwined and intersubjective production of shame, an abstract use of the term-as in “the shameful past”-poses two solitudes, placed within the transhistorical and undifferentiated space of the shamed and the ashamed. (2005, p. 114).

To this end, we must see these anti-CRT bans for what they are: excuses for white communities to evade their shame and shirk accountability.

Evading Shame in the Name of Love

Sara Ahmed's (2003) article *The Politics of Fear in the Making of Worlds* supports this idea that feelings of white supremacist hatred and ignorant xenophobia are understood by white nationalists to be rooted in love. Speaking in the British context, Ahmed argued that the emotion of fear slides over white nationalists while accumulating on Black and Brown asylum seekers. Her article suggests that in feeling love for what they understand as “their country,” white nationalists were moved to hate those they perceived as a threat to “their home.” This fear, this hatred rooted in love, mattered, as Ahmed attests to, because the collective emotions shaped British culture and influenced British politics. It informed the word choice used by British Conservative Party member William Hague in his speeches on asylum seekers, where words like “stuck,” “flood,” “swamped,” “dirt,” and “sewage” created an image of asylum seekers as dirty, unruly, and uncontrollable, thus heightening the fear and moral panic on the part of white British nationalists already conditioned to hate asylum seekers.

This emotional contagion mobilized some white Brits to think in particular ways and to say certain things, including racist and xenophobic remarks (Ahmed, 2003). It changed their views on immigration policies and sought to influence how legislature and future laws were written, as with the case of anti-CRT bills in the United States. This is the trajectory that began

with an emotional reaction to being affected by emotions, including shame. This dynamic plays out at the level of discourse, where stereotypes, language, imagery, and messages in the media are used to identify Black and other POC as more shameful (or fearful, or threatening, or more guilty, etc.), resulting in physical and material consequences, as Stuart Hall (1997a; 2016a), bell hooks (1992), Feminista Jones (2019), Robyn Maynard (2017), and others have thematized. This is not new, though how we document and present them might be.

What is new here, however, is white people grappling with being constructed as shameful. This is not a reality that white people have had to face *as white people*, even when called to do so for decades, centuries even. For those white people with privilege and power, there has always been a means to keep shame at arm's length, evading shame, and redirecting and projecting it onto others instead. White communities have projected shame onto others, expecting us to carry the burden with grace and gratitude, in silence and ease. We have carried this burden of shame for over 500 years and have endured, resisted, remained resilient. But white people are breaking under the pressure after only a few years. Where is the strength, the fortitude, the endurance? To better understand these present-day dynamics around white shame, we must start at the beginning.

A Brief History in Shame: Premodern Societies

This section draws from historian Peter Stearns' (2017) work *Shame: A Brief History*, unless otherwise indicated. The first signs of shame appear as a pedagogical and disciplinary framework in the education system in ancient Egypt, where students who performed poorly were put in public stocks (Stearns, 2017). In ancient Europe, the Romans, British, and French overemphasized shame as a form of social control, particularly in private homes, where caregivers and guardians relied on shame as a form of correction, and corporal punishment was

used to keep children in order, often in front of other people (Stearns, 2017). In trying to understand the origins of shame, scholars have put forward a number of theories, arguing, for example, that shame emerges from toddlers' shameful experiences of wetting or soiling themselves (an origin story that was later debunked) or that infants first experienced shame when their caregivers failed to mirror their facial expression, which the child internalizes as misrecognition, a sense of powerlessness that draws shame (Harris-Perry, 2011). However, though scholars have posited many theories, there is no answer to the question of where shame begins.

Stearns is clear that no conclusive global account of shame exists in scholarship, leading to gaps in the research. Similarly, in *Fear: A Cultural History*, Joanna Bourke (2005) said, "The reluctance of many historians to analyse emotions stem from problems of nomenclature. Looked at historically, subjective feelings are invisible. We can identify publicly choreographed panic reactions but how do we know what individuals 'really felt?'" (p. 6). In any case, the word *shame* is said to have first appeared in the eighth century, and was, Stearns noted, part of premodern societies like ancient Egypt, classical Greece, Confucius China, Japan, Thailand, Malaysia, India, and Burma, as well as parts of the Middle East, Eastern Africa, different parts of Polynesia, Micronesia, Mexico, Peru, Western Europe, the Balkans, and colonial America.

Anthropological studies show mixed results for how shame was used among Indigenous community's precontact. Stearns cited that the Ilongot people of the Philippines, the Bengkulu of Indonesia, and the Masai of Kenya relied heavily on shame in childrearing and regulating sexual behaviour, while the San people of the Kalahari Desert in Botswana and Angola, the Semai people of Malaysia, the Tahitians, and the Utku Inuit group rarely used shame at all (Stearns, 2017). Instead, these latter groups utilized milder forms of shame, such as embarrassment,

teasing, humour, and boasting (Stearns, 2017). When European colonizers first arrived in Turtle Island, they considered Indigenous peoples emotionally inferior because they did not blush. The Europeans thought the original people of North America were shameless, and therefore, untrustworthy. "How can he be trusted, who knows not how to blush?" wrote Stearns, quoting a settler (2017, p. 39). Later, the same was said about Black people, because they too could not blush. Thomas Jefferson is said to have thought that Black people were inferior for their inability to blush, believing that white women were modest for being able to do so (Harris-Perry, 2011). Similarly, according to Stearns, the Bengkulu of Indonesia were suspicious of those who did not show the appropriate signs of shame, finding them untrustworthy and unpredictable and calling them "thick-eared."

A Brief History of Public Shaming

When it comes to public shaming, Stearns noted exaggeration in research findings in places like ancient Japan and colonial America, known for public stocks, or in Babylonian law, known for public slaps. Public shaming in Europe accelerated in frequency after the late Middle Ages due in part to Christianity, advances in medicine, and chivalric culture, said Stearns. For example, the concept of manners took shape during the Renaissance, as early modern Europeans used shame to instill etiquette practices at the community and familial level. For European elites, enforcing manners was meant to control "disruptive emotions, violence, and bodily excess" (Stearns, 2017, p. 42). But shame was understood in other ways as well.

In other instances, not observing the Sabbath was a shameful offence during the mid-1600s, as was forgery and counterfeiting (Stearns, 2017). In Britain, forgers were put in public stocks with a piece of paper on their head, adulterers were paraded around with a mocking crown, and bad musicians were given special flutes (Stearns, 2017). In Europe and North

America, dunce caps were given to disobedient students as a form of punishment, while grading and marking rubrics rooted in competition were also used to shame students who received poor evaluations (Stearns, 2017). Those who practised medicine without the standard qualifications were made to sit backward on donkey's and marched through town, sex workers were carried around in barrels, and perjurers were mocked on a wooden horse (Stearns, 2017). At times, the shamed individual wore a bell to draw large crowds, or their face was blackened with soot (Stearns, 2017).

By the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Western Europe had expanded shame's range considerably as practices that were once routine were considered shameful if performed in public, like urination of flatulence; "One should make sacrifices, with the buttocks firmly pressed together," it was said (Stearns, 2017, p. 42). Note that in ancient Greece, men could once attend outdoor parties completely naked, including in front of their servants; this changed in the seventeenth century as nakedness in public began to be considered shameful and covering up was instituted in law. In this way, shame not only transformed experiences for women and girls but also determined how boys and men performed masculinity.

Terms like "sissy," which were used affectionately to describe one's sister in the 1840s, was, by the 1880s, used to shame boys and men who did not perform the physically dominant, emotionally aloof, stoic masculinity mandated at the time (Stearns, 2017). Other terms, such as "crybaby" were used as a show of strength as boys challenged each other while playing (Stearns, 2017). They dared each other in games, shaming and casting out weaker participants. In this way, shame played a role in gaming and sport (Stearns, 2017). The rise in sports intensified this nuanced shame narrative, constructing masculinity in a very particular way that excluded those who performed gender differently than the stereotypical male athlete (Stearns, 2017). American

sports like football were said to be the “maker of men,” and excluding women from sports was the norm, as was using scripts like, “throwing like a girl,” or calling those who performed poorly “women” (Stearns, 2017, p. 87). Coaches were key culprits in normalizing the use of shame in sports, berating players for perceived failure, often in front of others (Stearns, 2017). Stearns noted that the association of shame with failure would extend into class, business, and socioeconomic status, as poor and failed business owners were seen as failing, and therefore, shameful.

It was in the mid-eighteenth century, after 1750, that drastic changes to how shame was understood and punished took place (Stearns, 2017). Western innovators believed that shame needed “major reconsideration,” with more emphasis put on human dignity and covering up; an innovation that led to the emergence of the nightgown (Stearns, 2017, p. 43). By the middle to late eighteenth century, using corporal punishment as part of penal reform, including torture and capital punishment in public settings (Stearns, 2017). Western Europeans, particularly British colonists, instituted some of the harshest public shaming, argued Aaron Book (2014) in *Shame on You: An Analysis of Modern Shame Punishment as an Alternative to Incarceration*. Book (2014) shares that the shamed individual was sent to the pillory, bilboes, branks, ducking stools, or stocks.³ Or they could have their heads, hands, or ears chopped off, their foreheads branded, their bodies mutilated, or their hair shaved off (Aitchison & Mechled-Garcia, 2021; Book, 2014; Garvey, 2014); anything to publicly mark them as shameful. Such practices were a form of what Guy Aitchison and Saladin Mechled-Garcia (2021) call “communicative social practice” (p. 10). Here, shame was used to let the community know that an individual with their head shaved was to be excluded.

Prior to the birth of prisons, penitentiaries, or jails, shame penalties included decapitation, branding on the forehead, or standing naked in public stocks for hours and sometimes even days (Book, 2014; Brooks, 2014; Stearns, 2017). As Aaron Book (2014) explained, “primitive [European] societies wiped out sin by wiping out the sinner” (p. 658), including by death (see also Garvey, 2014). These same European men brought the practice of public shaming with them to colonial North America, where shame was primarily documented in New England, though it was less harsh than in Europe (Books, 2014; Stearns, 2017). Even as colonial officials tried to distance themselves from the British monarchy, they adopted “barbarous and inhuman” shame-based systems much like those used in the Old-World centuries prior (Stearns, 2017, p. 43).

In nineteenth-century colonial New England, public shaming was central to controlling people and more favourable than punitive corporal punishment (Stearns, 2017). In the New World, Stearns noted that shaming was tailored to the offence, compared to other forms of punishment. For example, those who were accused of adultery were required to wear the letter A on their body while standing in an open scaffold for hours; a person who stole a pair of pants was required by Virginia law to spend hours in the stocks with a pair of britches on their head (Stearns, 2017, p. 44). Aaron Book (2014) writes that in Williamsburg, Virginia, a thief could have their ear nailed to the wooden brace of the pillory. How long they were nailed to the wood depended on the severity of their crime. Afterward, authorities would pull them from the pillory without first removing the nail, hence the term *ear-marked*. In other instances, a cleft stick was put on tongues for those caught swearing (Book, 2014; Garvey, 2014). Such practices were a supposed improvement from those enacted in Europe.

With this lineage in mind, we can begin to understand why white conservative anti-critical race crusaders want nothing to do with shame. No one does. But facing their history

would be especially challenging given that there is a lot to be ashamed of, just as there is a lot to be proud of too. Like any other culture, both versions of history are important, not to mention several other points of departure and/or convergence. Telling one side of the story alone does not give an accurate reading of the experiences of white European-descended people in North America. The multiplicity needs to be accounted for. Meaning—the conquest, the raping and pillaging, imperialism, colonialism, theft, stolen lands, slavery, residential schools, murder, public shaming, forcing women to ride naked on the backs of donkeys, nailing people's ears to wood and then ripping it out without removing the nail—these are not pleasant histories, but rather shameful histories. My hypothesis is that the white intergenerational trauma connected to shame would show up today as an intense fear of shame, leading to the projection of that shame onto those without the power to refuse it—and the resulting consequences for communities of colour at the receiving end.

Shame in Modern Societies

Google trends show references to shame peaking around 1820, when Protestants associated the term with original sin (Stearns, 2016). The *New York Times* shows similar findings, suggesting a peak in the referencing of shame in the 1860s, a result of slavery and military conduct (Stearns, 2016; 2017). The term shame would again gain some traction following the 1960s and '70s, as shame became more popular within social psychology and social work, shifting definitions from a focus on group shame to individualized versions that brought it into the realm of psychology. Harris-Perry noted that the first book on clinical shame was published in 1971, and marriage counselors in these decades urged couples to become more comfortable sharing their shameful secrets with each other and others, suggesting that increased openness would bring mental comfort (Stearns, 2017, p. 99). As such, Stearns argued that while

some people relaxed in their approach to shame, sharing private matters publicly and freely, even exposing personal information about themselves and others on television talk shows such as the *Jerry Spring Show*, others exploited this impulse to tell, “seizing these unguarded statements, turning them into unprecedented shame bombardments” (Stearns, 2017, p. 99), a split that remains.

After the 1960s, in the US, we also find new shame meanings tied to political and partisan divides, as liberals and conservatives alike used similar emotional tactics, though to different ends (Stearns, 2017, pp. 59, 97). Stearns recounted that “Liberals delighted in shaming politically incorrect references, often forcing culprits out of jobs, particularly in the entertainment industry but also in politics; Conservatives stepped up efforts to use shame against real or imagined abuses of the welfare system” (Stearns, 2017, p. 97). Shame around financial and economic failure remained into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries too. Economic failure was not necessarily new in the nineteenth century, though it did show up differently. Take credit reports, for example, which used phrases like, “worthless and always will be,” alluding to blame that was placed on the “weak” individual for failing to “climb the ladder” (Stearns, 2017, p. 88). Additionally, while the emergence of the nineteenth century brought associations of shame linked to Christian traditions that were homophobic, producing excess shame for same sex loving individuals, the twentieth century brought both public pressure against homosexuality as well as resistance movements like the Stonewall riots in 1969. Those who found themselves on the receiving end of anti-TLGBQ+ shame faced consequences, material and physical, with some losing jobs. Many were forced to move or abandon their families, and others fell physically ill (Stearns, 2017, p. 126). The same was true for fat people.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century we find shame scripts tied to fatness and fat bodies, and around the 1950s campaigns against obesity emerged, leading to a social obsession with fat shaming. Fat shaming went beyond jokes and mockery, as overweight people were regularly held back from employment, a practice that was legal until the 1970s. Though fat people had been teased before, what was new was the medical data that was used to shame fat people, as health practitioners cited health risks associated with excessive weight. Fashion and beauty industries would use this information to push models to the extremes of thinness, associating slenderness with beauty and health, a stark contrast to a century earlier when plumpness had been associated with good health and prosperity. Furthermore, Stearns found that fat shaming was linked with racism and anti-Blackness, as immigrant communities received more backlash for excessive weight and as this weight was conceived of as a moral weakness and failure to curb impulses. Anti-fat-shame advocates would counter these campaigns, citing fear mongering and medical myths with no real or scientific health problems targeting women, racialized people, and welfare recipients—communities that were powerless to evade the shame.

The twentieth century also brought more shame for TLGBQ and fat people. In one case, in 2006, 21 members of an American sorority were expelled for fear that their fatness would send the wrong message and discourage new “more desirable members” from joining (Stearns, 2017, p. 113). Later, in 2013, a NYU professor tweeted, “Dear obese PHD applicants: if you didn’t have the willpower to stop eating carbs, you won’t have the willpower to do a dissertation” (Stearns, 2017, p. 113). Yikes! (I still do not have the will power to stop eating carbs, but here you are reading this PhD dissertation).

Shaming environmental offenders who littered or wasted water amid water shortages was prevalent in the twentieth century. As social standards changed, things that had previously been

considered shameful became more accepted. Adultery, premarital sex, and illegitimate births, for example, were less contentious than before. At the same time, Stearns (2017, p. 102) said that shaming around workplace harassment gained greater attention, survivors of sexual assault were told to cast away shame, and sexual offenders were required by law to register their whereabouts to police, even after serving time in prison.

Technological advancements in the twenty-first century have created new possibilities for shaming, as social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook provide new channels and easier access for public shaming efforts, often used by “anonymous and vicious” online users who “employed the emotion as a weapon” (Stearns, 2017, pp. 97–8). Given the pervasive harshness found online, Stearns compared present day shaming on social media with the public stocks from back in the day, adding that social media “provides unprecedented opportunities to convey shame” (2017, p. 203). Online public shaming has become so brutal that laws are being implemented to allow people to delete references on the Internet that frame them as shameful. This was the case in 2010 when a Spanish citizen took to the courts to legally remove public references to a resolved foreclosure on the grounds that it had caused unnecessary shame (Stearns, 2017, p. 128). These different articulations of shame have influenced our interpersonal relationships.

Productive Uses of Shame in Premodern Societies

While shame is often understood and felt as a negative emotion, it can have its productive uses. Shame was viewed productively by the Bengkulu of Indonesia and the Mehinaku people of Mato Grosso, Brazil, where young men in the village spoke of shame tied with shyness and an inferiority complex when approaching their village elders, which for them was a sign of respect (Stearns, 2017). Because of their sensitivity to shame, the Mehinaku people were serious about

healing the painful aspects of shame (Stearns, 2017). The shamed individual would intentionally remove themselves from the community temporarily, opting for walks in the woods, tending to their garden, or curling up in the fetal position in a hammock (Stearns, 2017). These rituals allowed them to move through shame gradually, and in private, before re-entering the community. During this time, they reflected and made better sense of how they had violated community standards (Stearns, 2017). Having shame as a moral compass aided these communities in meditative self-reflection and introspection.

In *Trauma and Its Institutional Destinies*, Karyn Ball (2000) shared that for Jean-Paul Sartre, shame resulted in self-consciousness, whereas for Virginia Woolf, shame provided insight into the “dynamics of power” (p. 32). According to Ball, Virginia Woolf believed that shame shows us where power is being violated, abused, or sent out of balance. These readings of shame as providing enlightenment and raising our consciousness were also found in ancient Greece and China. Studies show that shame featured prominently in shaping seminal texts in Greek and Chinese philosophy, as well as other intellectual life, including the book of Genesis in the Bible. Greek philosophers such as Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle spoke of shame. Stearns argued that Socrates saw that in questioning his students relentlessly, he could generate shame in them, using the painful elements of shame to provoke stubborn students into dropping arguments with him. Socrates used shame to stir discomfort in students on purpose with the hope of striking humility, which he felt was socially useful. Plato, however, was more mindful of how humiliation underscored shame, believing instead that when combined with respect, shame was beneficial, like the Mehinaku people approaching their village elders with humility (Stearns, 2017). Aristotle, on the other hand, found shame to be productive as a moral blueprint for ethical

behaviour, believing that shame was useful for judging oneself internally to build better self-understanding that could guide moral human conduct (Stearns, 2017).

In China, it is said that Confucius centred roughly 10 percent of his work around discussions of the importance of shame in regulating social relationships, addressing the topic more directly than the Greek philosophers did and influencing other East Asian societies that looked to China for cultural cues (Stearns, 2017). Confucianism articulated shame as a source of discipline and conformity, valuable in upholding moral standards best represented as boundary violations, showing up when socially acceptable patterns and behaviours were ignored (Stearns, 2017). As such, Confucian thinkers believed that shame forced people to live up to moral codes that were fundamental to social relationships and subjected them to punishment if said standards were violated (Stearns, 2017). As such, shame was used to punish bad behaviour, promote conformity and orderliness, and uphold community standards. Of interest here is the interconnectedness between shame and power and what happens when community standards are violated or not met.

Social psychology, social work, sociology, anthropology, legal scholars, literary critics, and other social and behavioural sciences have featured shame quite prominently (Harris-Perry, 2011; Stearns, 2017). However, with the exception of academic writers like Melisa Harris-Perry (2011), Sara Ahmed (2015), Jennifer Biddle (1997), Brené Brown (2010), Elspeth Probyn (2010), Kathryn Bond Stockton (2006), and Jack Halberstam (2005b), very little scholarly work has attended to shame and *what it does* to Black highly sensitive neurodivergent feminists, especially as it pertains to the intersections of feminist solidarity, critical race theory, affect theory, trauma studies, queer theory, and disability studies. In this regard, this project is timely. It documents references to shame in the twenty-first century and how shame plays out in North

America. Using Lauren Olamina, the protagonist in Octavia Butler's *Parable* series, this project explores how shame circulates throughout feminist movements, suggesting that we cannot afford to continue denying and avoiding the existence of shame and what it does to our relationships.

Chapter Breakdown

Chapter 1, "Feminism and its Multiplicities," provides a literature review of the theoretical and methodological frameworks I engage with in this project. It begins by addressing who and what a feminist is, tracing the trajectory of white mainstream feminism to Indigenous, Global South, and Black feminist interventions. It then moves to explore the different debates that have shaped how feminism has come to be understood in both singular and plural terms; as both feminism and feminisms. Using Black feminist theory, critical discourse analysis, autoethnography, and affect theory, this dissertation situates North American mainstream feminism's convoluted history as a multiplicity.

If shame enters a relationship, especially if there is significant shame, drifting apart is the likely outcome. The second chapter uses Octavia Butler's novel *Parable of the Sower* to delve deeper into the role of shame in interpersonal relationships. It provides a broad overview of shame and solidarity as themes in the field of feminist studies. The emphasis is on contagious shame that separates and divides us. It looks to Brené Brown's work on shame that moves us (a) away, (b) against, and (c) toward one another.

The third chapter uses Octavia Butler's novel *Parable of the Talents* to explore how shames association with power is interwoven with anti-Black racism and white supremacist violence. Using the continuing story of Lauren Olamina, this chapter examines how: 1) in using negative stereotypes and misinformed framings of Black women as shameful, the media, the state, and corporations deploy shame to construct Black women as shameful, which inevitably

harms and oppresses them by way of sociocultural, political, economic, and health inequalities;

2) these unfair disparities have consequences for Black women, and as such, how shame becomes a form of punishment used to discipline Black women framed as shameful; and 3) this process, whereby some Black women conform to the status quo as a response to shame punishment, highlights shame as a form of social control used to manipulate Black women.

When shame is weaponized by those in positions of power and authority, Black women are made more pliable and therefore easier to control.

“After Shame, Beyond Solidarity: Becoming Rhizome-Tree” concludes this dissertation by offering a call for feminists to do more thinking about shame as part of feminist solidarity articulated as a multiplicity. It draws from Deleuze and Guattari to suggest that, with attention to emotions like shame, North American white feminism is more becoming-rhizome-tree than becoming-rhizome alone. This can be productive, as paradoxical lines that make up the same assemblage are the very hallmark of a multiplicity.

Conclusion: Shame and Feminism

This study argues that most feminists are healing from some form of emotional injury while located inside a movement that will inevitably trigger or create more emotional harm. There are those who continue to recover and heal while still being wounded. As scholar Ann Cvetkovich (2003) reminds us in *An Archive of Feelings*, “activism is not only a response to trauma but can itself be traumatic because of its emotional intensities and disappointments” (p. 230). Such emotional intensities and disappointments can leave us scattered and unable to find any common ground. Shame does not encourage healthy dynamics, it instead generates much repair work, requiring us to constantly troubleshoot conflict and tension in some way (Stearns, 2017). The forceful nature of shame, particularly the painful aspects discussed above, can result

in maladaptive behaviours that distance us from one another. We will do anything to avoid feeling the agony of shame, including hurting ourselves and others.

As feminists, it is not uncommon for us to trigger difficult emotions in each other. Often, the original wound goes unaddressed and the pain that sparked the splinter is left vacated. In this regard, how we feel and experience shame in our feminist work collapses the binary. As such, this study focuses specifically on the damaging aspects of shame rather than its productive uses. In the following chapters, the emphasis is strictly on the negative elements—because we cannot continue to erase the fact that shame circulates within the feminist movement, moving us apart relationally and getting in the way of our work.

As feminists, while we have been remarkably successful in our advancements, we have not always been able to successfully negotiate conflict, nor heal from wounding that results in our differences (Bacchatta, 2006; Blackwell, 2006; Dempsey, 2011; Mohanty, 2003; Lock Swarr & Nagar, 2010). And yet, not being able to identify and accept our shared and common humanity comes with its own set of consequences. Even when invested in a common vision, feminist solidarity can look like divisions and appear to be riddled with conflict, which manifest as fragmentation (Jones, 2019). This dissertation seeks to acknowledge some of these tensions, contributing to a feminist theorization of solidarity as a multiplicity that accounts for the role of shame. What we find is that because of the rhizomatic nature of lines of multiplicities, even when difficult emotions like shame are used against us, weaponized as technology or used as a disciplinary tool for social control, they can at once split off into additional lines that counter and contradict what once was territorializing. Learning to shape shame differently in tandem with feminist solidarity—this is the call to action that this dissertation is invested in.

Notes

- ¹ I find Marilyn Frye's (1983) deconstruction of the term *oppression* particularly useful. Frye writes,
The root of the word 'oppression' is the element 'press.' Presses are used to mold things or flatten them or reduce them in bulk, sometimes to reduce them by squeezing out the gasses or liquids in them. Something pressed is something caught between or among forces and barriers which are so related to each other that jointly they restrain, restrict or prevent the thing's motion or mobility. Mold. Immobilize. Reduce. (p. 2)
- ² This idiom is taken from Melissa Schwartz in interview with Patricia Young. "The Sensitivity Summit Featuring Patricia Young." You Tube. Uploaded by Leading Edge Parenting. August 27, 2019. Accessed October 11, 2019.
- ³ In *Shame on You: An Analysis of Modern Shame Punishment as an Alternative to Incarceration*, Aaron Book (2014) shares,
the pillory was a device that restrained the criminal's head and hands between two boards. The stocks restrained the criminal's head and feet. Typically, the pillory and stocks were placed in a very public area of the town or village so that the criminal was subject to the most severe embarrassment. (p. 10)

Feminism and its Multiplicities

Introduction

This chapter provides a literature review of the theoretical and methodological frameworks that make up this project. It explores feminist studies, feminist solidarity literature, Black feminist theory, and affect theory as its primary theoretical frameworks. To do this, the first section addresses who and what a feminist is, giving a brief genealogy of white feminism, exploring first- and second-wave feminism before moving into third-wave feminism, which attends to the exclusion and erasure of Indigenous, Global South, Black, and other feminists of colour. I insert interventions from the latter groups and the different debates that have shaped how feminism has come to be understood in both singular and plural terms. This provides context and a backdrop for the type of feminist terrain that is made sense of in this project, supporting the argument that white North American feminism is a multiplicity.

The second section examines the role of Black feminist theory as a methodological framework, tying in autoethnography and critical discourse analysis as methods. Patricia Hill Collins (2001; 2000a; 2000b) suggested that there are three key tenets to Black feminist theory: (a) self-definition and self-valuation, (b) addressing the intersecting nature of oppression, and (c) the importance of redefining culture. Drawing from the first and third pillars, the section looks at the role self-definition and self-valuation played in autoethnography as a method.

Autoethnography and a study of the self was integral to considering shame in relation to feminism and solidarity. It allowed for an assessment of the embodiment of shame, not just a theoretical and scholarly examination of emotions. For this reason, this section elaborates the

function of emotions research while at the same time supporting the use of critical discourse analysis as a method—specifically Octavia Butler's literature—as essential to redefining culture.

Finally, the third section addresses research limitations. It delves into why Black feminist theory and autoethnography were not credible enough within the academy as stand-alone research methods, pointing to the very erasure of Black and Indigenous methodologies from mainstream white feminism discussed in earlier sections as an example of white feminism's multiplicity. It is this theme that the following chapters grapple with as I follow Octavia Butler's Black neurodivergent protagonist and her negotiation of shame.

Theoretical Frameworks

Working Solidarity Backward: Defining Feminists and Feminism

In this section, I provide a framework for how feminism and feminist solidarity are understood in this study. While the chapters that follow do not necessarily name these feminist histories or movements per se, this context is important because these debates and the environments that contain them provide the backdrop for this project. Historically and to date, feminist scholars and activists have defined feminism in many ways. In *In Sisterhood and Solidarity: Queering African Feminist Spaces*, African scholar Awino Okech (2013) posited that feminism consists of “our friendships, networks, our bonds, organizations, and our individual and collective feminist energies” (p. 16). Okech wrote that the feminist movement is a space where feminists “mobilize” their “feminist principles” (2013, p. 16). For the most part, feminist principles promote equality and equity for all people, including women and girls (see for example Tripp, 2013; Hobbs & Rice, 2013). In this regard, feminism is a sociopolitical and revolutionary movement that works to end violence against women and girls (Tripp, 2013). In *What's in a Name? Womanism, Black Feminism and Beyond*, Black feminist theorist Patricia

Hill Collins (1996) cited activist Pearl Cleage's definition of feminism as: "the belief that women are full human beings capable of participation and leadership in the full range of human activities—intellectual, political, social, sexual, spiritual and economic" (p. 12). Cleage's articulation of feminism stresses the importance of recognizing the humanity of women and girls as integral to shielding them from and against oppressions of different sorts. Similarly, combating oppression is central to bell hooks' definition of feminism. hooks (1984) noted that feminism takes place "anytime and anywhere people resist sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression" (p. xi). But because oppression takes shape in different ways, so too does the work to end it, making the breadth and depth of feminism expansive. For this reason, how feminism is expressed and practised remains broad and contested (Tripp, 2013). According to feminist historian Estelle Freedman (2013), the word feminism emerged in France in the 1880s, "the term combined the French word for woman *femme*, and *-isme*, which referred to a social movement or political ideology" (p. 32). By 1890, it had spread through Europe, making its way to North and South America by 1910, growing into "waves," first, second, and third, with some even arguing for a fourth.

First- and Second-Wave Feminism

While feminism has become a convoluted movement, its inception was imagined by white feminists to have been much less nuanced and more straightforward. The first two waves contextualized feminism as universal, premised on the idea that it is rooted in our biological and lived experiences as cis-gendered women living in and resisting a patriarchal world (Morgan, 1984). First-wave feminists demanded an end to sexism and misogyny. In North America, for instance, first-wave feminism, active between 1880 and 1930, was known as the suffrage movement. During this time, women demanded gender equality with men through social reform.

This era was marked by protests for human rights such as the right to vote, the right to education, and labour rights (Collins, 1996; Hobbs and Rice, 2013; Tripp, 2013; Valentine, 2002). New Zealand would be the first to grant women voting rights, in 1893; Australia followed in 1902. Finland did the same in Europe in 1906, as did Canada in 1918. Ecuador would pave the way in South America in 1928, Sri Lanka in Asia in 1931, and Senegal for Africa in 1945 (Hobbs and Rice, 2013; Tripp, 2013). In this way, first wavers are seen as the founding and seminal figures of feminism, understood broadly, worldwide.

Second-wave feminism, on the other hand, was active after World War II, between 1945 and 1975. It emphasized equal pay with men, reproductive rights, and sexual liberation, as well as an end to violence against women, including domestic violence (Hobbs & Rice, 2013; Tripp, 2013; Valentine, 2002). Aili Mari Tripp (2013) suggests that it was during the second wave that European and North American based organizations doing gender equity work began to focus more on international efforts. On the other hand, during this same period, women's movements worldwide were launching, independent from women's movements in the West. So much so that the United Nations (UN) would declare 1975 the International Women's Year, and the First UN World Conference on Women took place that same year in Mexico City (Dufour et al., 2010; Hobbs & Rice, 2013; Tripp, 2013). During this time, Latin American women suffragists were active around their continent, energizing others internationally. These international movements took on leadership roles and shifted what Tripp (2013) identified as, "the center of gravity in global women's mobilization dynamics" (p. 696), thereby expanding and enriching how we have come to understand feminist organizing and solidarity movements.

Feminist Organizing as Solidarity

Sociologist Manisha Desai (2002) indicated that by the nineteenth century, women in Europe and the United States had already begun organizing for the abolition of slavery. This points to a key component of feminism: solidarity, a term that is in its own way broad and contested, and for some, even elusive. In *Solidarity of Strangers* feminist theorist Jodi Dean (1996) argued that at least three individuals are needed to form solidarity: "I ask you to stand by me *over* and *against* a third" (p. 3). As Dean herself recognized, this articulation of solidarity revealed some of feminism's paradoxical nature. The very use of the words "over" and "against" suggests that solidarity requires that we oppose something or someone in the name of solidarity. This opposition could be against patriarchy, racism, capitalism, or heterosexism (among other isms), but sometimes it includes other feminists. This obviously defeats the assumed idea of solidarity as purely universal or exclusively unified. It instead sets solidarity up as *also* exclusionary and divisive, terms we generally understand as the opposite of solidarity (Dean, 1996, p. 15). Such tension was felt and exhibited during the early years of feminism.

This dominant articulation of feminism broadly understood as universal and all-encompassing is typically endorsed by white women in positions of power or white activists who assume they have already advocated on behalf of *all* women, irrespective of their differences. In this way, voices of white middle-to-upper-class Western feminists took up space in the movement and affirmed feminism as unidirectional, flowing from "the West" (read: Europe and North America) to "the rest" (Collins, 1996; Mohanty, 2003). In *Becoming Through Others: Western Queer Self-Fashioning and Solidarity with Queer Palestine*, activist-scholars Nayrouz Abu Hatoum and Ghaida Moussa (2018, p. 174) were critical of Western feminism's push for "internationalization," arguing that such tropes actually work as a decoy, masking Western

imperialism and the white saviour complex *as* internationalization when in actuality it serves more as “hegemonization” (see also Mohanty, 2003). For example, the authors suggested that part of mainstream feminism’s becoming lies in extending its services externally to those residing in Palestine and the Global South more broadly. Hatoum and Moussa (2018) wrote: “As a concept, solidarity relies on a thread of commonality, which often engages an identification that assumes a shared struggle.” This “shared struggle” is then used to “mobilize the West” to “establish the imagined Other as familiar and as worthy of solidarity” (2018, p. 174). In doing so, Western feminists get to assert themselves as benevolent experts, or what Mohanty (2003) identified as *the original*, a transaction that sets the recipient up as *mimicry* (Mohanty, 2003; see also Hatoum and Moussa, 2018). For Hatoum and Moussa (2018) this exchange becomes self-gratification that then gets taken up *as* solidarity. Much of first- and second-wave feminism employed these types of unidirectional exchanges that came to undergird the hallmark of feminist organizing.

Feminist solidarity is interdisciplinary and crosses an array of topics and issues (Tripp, 2013). How feminists show up for others is vast. Feminist solidarity looks like many things to different feminists. Some focus less on the divisions that emerge when mobilizing and instead place emphasis on coalition building (see Garcia-Rojas, 2019), while others suggest that solidarity emerges when groups of people come together in an alliance to defend and protect each other through unions or as part of political activity such as protests (Featherstone, 2012). David Featherstone (2012) argued that organizing within labour movements, for example, may be contained within the nation-state, but often, solidarity flows across and transcends borders, as is the case with transnational feminism.

Transnational feminist scholars like Myra Marx Ferree and Mari Tripp (2006), Vera Mackie (2011), and Valentine Moghadam (2005) have centered their feminist work on human rights, the UN, and “NGOization.”¹ Sonya Alvarez (1998; 2000) and Nancy Naples (2002) question hierarchies within social movements and why those who are privileged and have power, like feminists located within the West, the UN, and larger NGOs, tend to exert power over those located in grassroots movements or the Global South. Maylei Blackwell (2006) “weaves” Indigenous voices into larger spaces such as the UN where they had historically been excluded. Sarah E. Dempsey, Patricia Parker, and Kathleen J. Krone (2011) join Lyndi Hewitt (2011), Sarah Mahler, and Patricia Pessar (2001) in broadening definitions of feminism to include identity and place-based politics as well as postmodernism.

Chandra T. Mohanty (2003), Virginia Vargas (2003), Mary Hawkesworth (2006) and Nancy Naples and Manisha Desai (2002) have illustrated how feminism should involve a critique of the nation-state, nation-building, globalization, colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism. Chandra T. Mohanty (2003) and Amrita Basu (2004), in particular, have taken an interest in addressing globalization and anticapitalism. Valentine Moghadam (2005) does the same with issues of development. While Alicia Hovorka (2006, 2009), Meredith Abarca (2010), and Carolyn Sachs (1996, 2013) address women in relation to food security and food sovereignty. These are but some of the different manifestations of feminist solidarity. However, up until second-wave feminism, much of feminist organizing in North America still consisted of this unidirectional flow discussed above. This complexity, where solidarity is enacted at the expense of marginalized communities perceived as helpless and passive recipients was called into question by Global South, postcolonial, Black, Indigenous, and other non-white racialized feminists who set the tone for new articulations of feminism.

Third-Wave Feminism

Indigenous, Black, and other non-white voices of colour would continue to be excluded from feminism until 1985, when events like the Third United Nations Women's Conference held in Nairobi laid the groundwork for third-wave feminism (Basu, 2004; Dearham, 2013; Moghadam, 2005; Valentine, 2002). In Nairobi, more than 60 percent of the participants were from the Global South (Tripp, 2013). Mari Tripp (2013, p. 695) posits that it was at the Nairobi conference that women from "the South" challenged the "ideological dominance" and "cultural imperialism" of "the North," seeking a redefinition of feminism that was plural (see also Mohanty, 2003; Reagon, 1983). This marked a shift toward more inclusion of diverse voices from outside of Europe and North America. Nairobi was a pivotal moment for the feminist movement in that tensions that erupted resulted in participants questioning gender in relation to issues of race, multiple geographic scales, as well as the role of women in political decision-making (Dufour et al., 2010; Hobbs & Rice, 2013; Tripp, 2013). This would in turn shape how third-wave feminism has come to be characterized by tensions, internal conflict, and opposition to feminism as a monolith.

In an interview with *Time* titled "10 Questions for Jamaica Kinkaid," (2013) Black Caribbean American writer Jamaica Kinkaid stated, "I think one of the terrible things that feminism never addressed is the moral situation.... We are so interested in equality. We want to do the things that men do, but so many of the things that men do are repulsive and shouldn't be done at all" (5:34). Here, Kinkaid reminds us that on our quest for feminism we need to be attentive to bell hooks' assertion that "patriarchy has no gender"; that is, even feminists can internalize patriarchy and misogyny. In this regard, third-wave feminists challenged internalized patriarchy and highlighted divisions and tensions within the feminist movement. South Asian

artist and educator Vivek Shraya (2018) suggests that misogyny's insidious and pervasive nature seeps into all women, "Even those who profess to love women" (p. 76), including feminists. To quote Shraya,

I'm afraid of women who've either embodied or defended the men who harmed me, or have watched in silence. I'm afraid of women who adopt masculine traits and then feel compelled to dominate or silence. Women who see me as a predator and whose comfort I consequently put before my own."

She adds, "I'm afraid of women who have internalized their experiences of misogyny so deeply that they make me their punching bag" (2018, p. 76). To this end, the third wave brought to light these inter and intra relational breakdowns between feminists, even among those working toward a common vision.

In *The Pathology of Racism: A Conversation with Third Word Wommin*, Black African American womanist Doris Davenport (2015) articulated, "While black and white feminists can sometimes work together for a common goal with warmth and support and even love and respect occasionally, underneath there is still another message. That is that white feminists, like white boys and black boys, are threatened by us" (p. 82). Further to this, Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003) asserted, "histories of feminism document histories of domination and oppression. No non-contradictory or pure feminism is possible" (p. 63). These quotes summarize the rallying cry of non-white third-wave feminists. This challenge to a monolithic understanding of feminism meant that the third wave has been characterized by tensions and internal conflict, much like at the Third United Nations Women's Conference held in Nairobi (Dufour et al., 2010; Hobbs & Rice, 2013; Tripp, 2013). The Fourth UN conference, held in Beijing in 1995, was less tense and allowed feminists to expand the definition of violence against women to include issues of

environmental degradation, economic disparity, armed conflict, and poverty (Hobbs & Rice, 2013; Tripp, 2013). In a sense, Nairobi and Beijing laid the groundwork for new articulations of feminism and feminist solidarity. It was third-wave feminists who insisted on a rewriting of feminism's origin, which had long suggested it was located solely in North America and Europe.

Intervention from Indigenous Feminists

White feminism would have you believing that Indigenous women are passive recipients of white feminism. In actuality, history has shown that, precontact, these women had agency and power in their communities, unlike white European women. Cree Métis professor Kim Anderson (2013) wrote, "where native women were powerful workers, white women were encouraged to be weak and frail. Where native women had sexual liberty, white women were restricted from pleasure" (p. 272). Similarly, Cree Métis researcher and educator Verna St. Denis (2013) and academic Cynthia Stirbys (2013) argue that Indigenous women native to Turtle Island historically occupied positions of power and authority, autonomy, and high status. Stirbys adds, "European traders had difficulty dealing with Aboriginal women who, in some societies were in charge of furs and whose consent was required before men could complete bargains" (2013, p. 453). Both St. Denis and Stirbys explain that in many cases, it was Indigenous women who modelled the women's equality that underpins feminism, and not their European counterparts, who instead faced subjugation from European men.

For example, Anderson (2013) pointed to matrilineal communities such as the Iroquois, the Navajo, and the Apache to challenge the myth that white women are "the origin" of gender equality expressed as feminism. In *Gender-Based Analysis and Indigenous Worldviews* Cynthia Stirbys (2013) reminded us that gender inequality was not a major issue precontact because each person, regardless of gender, was "valued and held an important role within the community:

men, women, elders, and children” (p. 451). While Indigenous women living in matriarchal or egalitarian kinship precontact cannot be said to be feminists proper (because there was no patriarchy per se for them to oppose), the ideas and models they emanated were feminist in the sense that they believed in the inherent equality between all they are in relationship with, not just between humans, or men and women.

White feminists merely gave a new name to concepts already being enacted by many women globally. In China, feminism was referred to as *feminology* (see Edwards, 2010), in the Philippines it was *Babaylan Feminism or babaylanism* (see Roces, 2010a). In *A Century of Women's Activism in the Philippines, 1905–2006*, Mina Roces (2010) told us about Babaylan, a traditional Priestess native to the Philippines who was considered the pre-Hispanic feminist archetype and who continues to influence modern-day Filipina feminist activists who have reinvented themselves as “modern babaylans” (p. 42). The same can be said for some Black African women who lived an Indigenous way of life precontact.

In *Orishas, Goddesses, and Voodoo Queens: The Divine Feminine in the African Religious Traditions*, Lilith Dorsey (2020) educated us on West African female deities of Benin, Nigeria, and Ghana, specifically, the Yoruba, Igbo, and Akan traditions, which have been influential to Haitian, Cuban, Brazilian, Trinidadian, New Orleanians, and other Black Diasporic women looking for guidance and direction. According to Dorsey, some of these women include the ancient Nana Buluku, Yemaya, Oshun, Mami Wata, and Oya. These deities represented power void of corruption and abuse. Though they were not perfect, they point to a history that Western feminism typically ignores, creating a gap in our understanding of feminism globally.

The introduction of settlers and missionaries disrupted traditional ways of life for Indigenous peoples within less than a century of contact (Anderson, 2013; Stirbys, 2013).

Cynthia Stirbys (2013) wrote,

Missionaries tried to install values of a nuclear family with a husband as the authority and where children and wives are to be disciplined. This contrasted with the values of Aboriginal extended families and closely-knit clans where individual autonomy was respected and children were sacred. (p. 453)

Since then, Indigenous women have been written out of much of North American history and dominant culture. Mainstream feminism is, unfortunately, no exception. Indigenous feminists and scholars such as Verna St. Denis, Cynthia Stirbys, and Kim Anderson challenge this erasure, insisting that Indigenous women's voices be heard and integral. Their demand reminds us that women in these communities have long been resilient and innovative trailblazers.

Intervention from Global and Queer Feminists

Mari Tripp (2013) also challenges the notion that feminism was solely rooted in Europe and North America. Tripp (2013, p. 693) provides a different genealogy of those outside the continent, focusing instead on countries like Japan, China, India, and Chile, where women were already involved in activism around education and labour movements that far exceeded those in North America. For example, Mina Roces (2010) pointed to women's organizing in Asia that dates as far back as the 1920s and '30s, what the writer identified as "home-grown feminism," signifying a "difference from the West" (pp. 7, 2) According to Roces, the diversity of the Asian region did not allow for "a quintessential Asian woman," therefore, women's work differed from country to country (2010, p. 3). And while some white feminists insist that they influenced global articulations of feminism, for Amrita Basu (2000), the common denominator was not

global influence per se, but a product of nationalism (see also Tripp, 2013). Susan Blackburn (2010) also suggested that the emergence of feminism in places like Indonesia was closely connected to nationalism and the fight for independence, as was true for other Asian countries colonized by European colonial regimes such as Korea, India, or the Philippines (see also Roces, 2010). For example, in Indonesia, the largest Islamic country in the world, formerly colonized by the Netherlands, the first women's group was formed after 1910 (Blackburn, 2010). Blackburn notes that these early feminists were mindful of Western feminism and careful not to claim it because the nationalist movements were suspicious of outside influences from the West.

In places like China, Cambodia, Singapore, and Thailand, there was fear that Western feminism was entirely too radical and a threat to the state and family structure. Roces (2010, p. 1) argues that some Asian women activists avoided the word feminism because of its perceived associations with bra-burning white women, individualism, and anti-men, anti-children, and anti-family rhetoric. There were lively debates around the topic of feminism in Asia, as the idea of women's suffrage, women's rights as valid human rights, and the importance of reproductive health, reproductive rights, and self-determination heavily influenced feminist activists all over Asia (Blackburn, 2010; Roces, 2010). To this end, Asian feminists like Piya Chatterjee (2013), Mina Roces (2010), Mitsuye Yamada (2003, 2015), and Merle Woo (2003) remind us that even in cases where white feminists influenced global articulations of feminism, the erasure of these other diversified stories contributed to a less expansive and inclusive version of feminism.

Others, such as Paola Bacchetta (2002), Audre Lorde (1980a), Sara Ahmed (2017), Cherrie Moraga (2003a), Gloria Anzaldúa (2015b), and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha (2015), bring our attention to lesbians and women who identify on the 2STLGBQQIA+ spectrum, including those at the intersection of race, class, disability, mental illness, and

neurodiversity. Janet Mock (2014, 2017), Vivik Shraya (2018), Jack Halberstam (2005, 2012), and Eli Clare (2005) have asked us to consider how we approach gender variance, trans identities, and those on the gender nonconforming spectrum. Scholar Celeste Orr (2018) connects feminist queer theory with disability studies and intersex studies, asking that we challenge the medical-industrial complex and how it orders and essentializes bodies. Yet these accounts of feminist mobilization, theorization, and resistance globally were marginalized, if not erased entirely. A reminder that while mainstream feminism has purported to “universal” models of solidarity, it has done so while minimizing stories of feminist organizing both inside and outside of Europe and North America. Black, Indigenous, and other feminists of colour have pushed back against this erasure. In a way, these feminists demanded that white feminists acknowledge that first- and second-wave feminism had been fraught with contradictions and exclusion. Because of them, these interventions have resulted in transformations that differentiate third-wave feminism from the first two. Black feminism in particular has contributed immensely to the bulk of this research.

Interventions from Black African Feminists

White feminism has typically constructed Black sub-Saharan African women as passive recipients of aid and unable to solve our own problems, many of which were brought on by white Europeans. African feminists such as Ama Ata Aidoo (1998), Akosua Ampofo Adomako (2009), and Awino Okech (2013) have all claimed space within African feminism and have worked to disrupt feminist campaigns to “save” African women from African men and other ideas shrouded in colonial, and now, neocolonial rhetoric that suggests that patriarchy and misogyny are inherent to or even synonymous with Africa. According to Aidoo (1998), the “docile, mendicant, African woman of today is a media creation” (p. 42; see also Gassama, 2019). As with

Indigenous women, these distortions are far from true, though this is not to say that patriarchy and misogyny are not issues African women contend with.

Aidoo (1998) identified three historical factors that have shaped the idea that contemporary African women are weak, submissive, not-feminist-enough, or anti-feminism. They include: (a) Indigenous African societal patterns, for example, traditional gender roles rooted in heteronormativity that said that women had to marry men and reproduce babies; (b) the conquest of Africa by Europe (read: “the scramble for Africa,” colonization, and imperialism); and (c) the lack of vision, courage, and leadership of African leaders in the postcolonial period (for example, corrupt African government officials seduced by white European ways of being and dominating; p. 42). Speaking on the submissive African woman Aidoo wrote, “if she does exist, she is the result of the traumas of the last five hundred years’ encounter with the West, the last one hundred years of colonial repression, and the current neocolonial disillusionment” (1998, p. 42; see also Gassama, 2019). These three factors work together to shape the idea that African women are not only submissive, but that they are against the idea of feminism, seeing it as a Western by-product and un-African. To be clear, African women who deny and reject feminism do exist. But in many cases, it is not that these African women are against the idea of feminism per se or opposed to gender equality. Like the Asian feminists discussed above, they instead reject the idea of white feminism in favour of broader articulations of gender equality that are attentive to cultural nuance, such as the fight for nationalism and independence.

In *The African Woman Today*, Aidoo (1998) gave examples of African women who fought for liberation from various European colonizers well before North American first-wave feminism formally existed. For example, Aidoo directs our attention to ancient Benin circa the 1600s where an “all-female battalions of Dahomey [women] protected their empire from being

invaded.” During the seventeenth century, Queen Njinga Mbandi “fought [with] uncompromising viciousness to prevent the Portuguese from overrunning Angola” (1998, p. 42; see also Gassama, 2019). In Ghana, known then as the Asante Empire/Kingdom, Queen Mother and soldier Yaa Asantewaa led an uprising against the British during the War of the Golden Stool, also known as the Asante-British War of 1900 (Aidoo, 1998, p. 42; see also Edgerton, 1995; Gassama, 2019). In Nigeria, Igbo women in the East “harassed the British colonial administration in 1920” to the point that they had to move their headquarters from Calabar to Lagos (Aidoo, 1998, pp. 40–1). In Zimbabwe, Mbuya Nehanda was hanged for an insurgency against the British. And in Kenya, General Muthoni was a guerrilla leader during the Mau Mau Rebellion against the British. Aidoo also names the powerful African women of more recent times who have stepped into leadership roles, such as Winnie Mandela, Sibongile Mkhabela, Albertina Sisulu, and Zodwa Sobukwe. These examples of African women pushing back against patriarchy vis-à-vis struggles for nationalism and independence get erased and overlooked as women’s work.

While these earlier narratives cannot be said to be examples of feminism proper, based on Western definitions of feminism, because it was not Black patriarchs these women opposed, we cannot separate patriarchal oppression from colonial oppression. An intersectional analysis is needed here. While it was not the African man that these women warriors were fighting against at the time, it was colonial patriarchy all the same. The battles they took on were against white colonial men, and in the name of equality. They fought not only on behalf of women, but also children and men. Rarely does African feminism leave men and children behind (Adomako, 2009). These were prime examples of women’s liberation, even when African women fought for more than just women alone.

But what white feminists have done is to claim the word *feminism* and define it as something that Black, Indigenous, and other feminists of colour have taken issue with. This has led to non-white feminists distancing themselves from the term feminism, even if they also provided templates of what we currently envision as feminism. While some African women have always been doing and advocating for women's work and gender equality, white feminism has hijacked and claimed ownership over these types of work and erased different articulations only to then turn around and claim these histories are not feminist enough because patriarchy, as white women know it, was not centered in these histories. While Africa is the origin of so much of what has come to be co-opted and appropriated, African women (and Africa in general), have been etched into the collective consciousness as obsolete, an afterthought, and to use Mohanty (2003), as mimicry. Despite these challenges, African feminists have resisted and continue to do so. These feminists exist and have existed and they continue to engage in revolutionary work. This trailblazing spirit of African feminists can be found throughout the continent and extends to those in the diaspora.

Interventions From Black Feminists and Black Feminist Theory

In the Americas, Black women born during the era of slavery, such as Black revolutionary leader Sojourner Truth, were actively engaged in feminist organizing as early as 1851 (Hobbs & Rice, 2013; Jones, 2019; Springer, 2002). In *Third Wave Black Feminism?* Kimberly Springer (2002) brought our attention to Black feminist figures who were already actively resisting sexism, slavery, and anti-Black racism as far back as the antebellum period. Notably, Springer (2002, p. 1062) highlights contributions from Angela Davis (1995), Deborah Gray White (1985), and Harriet Jacobs (1987), whose research on slave narratives sheds light on how enslaved women fought back against rape, forced pregnancy, and separation from their

children and families. These forms of feminist rebellion predate first-wave feminism. As with much of mainstream feminism, the erasure of Black women (and Blackness in general) meant that these accounts were minimized, if not erased entirely (see also Hobbs & Rice, 2013; Jones, 2019). For this reason, Black American women have had to carve out their own place within the feminist movement.

Black Americans such as Patricia Hill Collins (2000, 2001), Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991), Audre Lorde (1984), and bell hooks (1991, 1992, 2003, 2005, 2014) have advocated for Black feminisms. Alice Walker, for instance, created new vocabulary like womanism and womanists to replace feminism for Black women who envisioned and lived the fight for gender equality differently than white feminists (see Blay, 2008). Black feminism was a direct response to second-wave white feminism and its anti-Black exclusionary practices. It emerged in the late 1960s thanks to Black second-wave thinkers and activists who took issue with white feminism's inability to address Black women who stepped into the movement as both gendered and racialized beings (Hill Collins, 2000a, 2000b; Jones, 2019; Springer, 2002; Tripp, 2013). Black feminist theory gained popularity by the 1970s and was well-positioned as a theoretical framework due in large part to the Combahee River Collective (2015; Jones, 2019; Thompson, 2003), founded in 1973. The Combahee River Collective is best known for their role in the creation of Black feminist theorizing and Black feminism. The Collective originated in the United States, born out of the National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO). According to Black feminist writer Becky Thompson (2003, p. 400), the Collective was named after a river in South Carolina where Black revolutionary Harriet Tubman led a resistance movement that resulted in 750 slaves becoming free (see also Jones, 2019). Black activist and author of *Reclaiming Our Space*, Feminista Jones (2019), told us that the Combahee Collective included

“Chirlane McCray, the First Lady of New York City and wife of Mayor Bill DeBlasio, and the acclaimed writer and activist Audre Lorde” (p. 5). Jones added that *The Combahee River Statement*, a manifesto drafted by the Collective, was put together by Black activists like Barbara Smith, Beverly Smith, and Demita Frazier.

The Collective was formed out of resistance to challenge white supremacy within mainstream feminism (Combahee River Collective, 2015; Jones, 2019; Springer, 2002; Thompson, 2003). They took issue with white feminism's inability to hold space for issues of anti-Black racism, diverse sexual orientations, gender variance, disability, and class as inseparable from one's gender (Combahee River Collective, 2015; Hill Collins, 2001, 2000a, 2000b; Jones, 2019; Springer, 2002). Black activists, organizers, artists, scholars, and other professional and everyday feminists argued that while they were able to organize on behalf of a vast majority of women, not just Black women, white feminism struggled to mobilize on behalf of Black and other women of colour (Collins, 1996; Jones, 2019; Springer, 2002). It is out of this genealogy that Black feminist theory was born. While Black queer and trans women worked toward a truly universal vision of freedom and liberation for more women, including those that were poor and low-income and those located outside of the United States, white feminism was given the credit for being universal. Meanwhile, Black women were told that they were divisive and polarizing (Jones, 2019). This rupture resulted in separation and division. Take the words of Indigenous poet Chrystos (2015), who explained, “I left the women's movement utterly drained. I have no interest in returning....Perhaps white women are so rarely loyal because they do not have to be” (pp. 66–67). These are the ways tensions, conflict, and negative experiences within feminist movements are *felt* and have impact.

The Co-Option of Affect Theory

Feminist solidarity will not always make us happy, as Sara Ahmed (2010) reminds us in *The Promise of Happiness*. The feminist history mapped out above will leave feminists affected because our experiences with each other are felt, embodied, and lived. In this section, I outline key concepts from the field of affect studies that form part of the theoretical framework for this project. As a theoretical framework, affect theory is vast, and arriving at any one definition is difficult. The term can be understood in various ways depending on the field, discipline, framework, and or lens used to interpret it. Definitions of affect are nuanced by lived experience, perception, and/or worldview. This is because the term is a slippery concept that refuses confinement or containment. The concept remains abstract and elusive, making it difficult to define without a multidisciplinary approach.

Etymologically, the word *affect* has its roots in Latin, French, and late nineteenth-century Middle English. At its core, it means to be moved or influenced to produce a change in some way. While affect is popularly understood to mean to have an effect on, make a difference, feel something, make or have an impression, or to influence disposition, its meanings are actually much more expansive. It can also be understood in some of the following ways: (feeling) sensations (Ahmed, 2015; Huffman et al., 1987; Massumi, 2015); incorporating the body/bodies/flesh/organs/bodies without organs (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Linstead & Pullen, 2006; Rajiva, 2014); involving our nervous system and neurology (Soler, 2016; Taylor, 2008; Weissman, 2004); our perceptions, thoughts, and consciousness (Massumi, 2015; Rajiva, 2014); shaping our physiological/psychosomatic/neurological/and biochemical responses (Ahmed, 2015; Fisher, 2017; Soler, 2016); moving us beyond thresholds (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Linstead & Pullen, 2006; Massumi, 2015; Rajiva, 2014); or transitions (Deleuze & Guattari,

1987; Massumi, 2015; Rajiva, 2014); becoming (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987); encounters with other beings and nonhuman entities and spirits (Clough, 2010; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Gregg & Seigworth, 2010; Linstead & Pullen, 2006; Massumi, 2015; Rajiva, 2014; Setka, 2016); as objects, substances, particles, and matter (Weissman, 2004); as capacity (Rajiva, 2014); force, forces, and forceful (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010; Rajiva, 2014); intensity/intensities (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010; Rajiva); located in the social, psychic, and or, spiritual realm (Alexander, 2005; Doumbia & Doumbia, 2004); involving theology, spirituality, the occult, or the metaphysical (Alexander, 2005; Doumbia & Doumbia, 2004); involving the quantum realm (Clough, 2010; Massumi, 2015); as an economy (Ahmed, 2004); as sacred (Alexander, 2005); harmony, serendipity, or synchronicity (Adorno, 1994; Alexander, 2005; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Frideres, 2016); as intuition (Alexander, 2005; Bergson, 1960, 1965; Massumi, 2015); or, contagion (Ahmed, 2015; Massumi, 2015; Rajiva, 2014). Some of these concepts shape affects' convoluted understanding.

Classical definitions are attributed to psychologist Silvan Tomkin, Dutch philosopher Benedictus (Baruch) de Spinoza, and French psychoanalyst and psychiatrist Jacques Lacan (Rajiva, 2014). But for this study, I took the definition of affect to mean a multiplicity as it was expressed through French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's (1987) concept of multiplicity, as discussed in the previous chapter. As such, much of the scholarly literature on affect theory acknowledges and credits the works of white professionals affiliated with the academy in some way, past and present. However, the theorization of affect owes a considerable amount to Indigenous, Black, and other communities of colour who have conceptualized many of these same ideas in different ways, using different language and on different terms (Alexander, 2005; Lorde, 1984). Black feminism for instance, does not take for granted the many

intangible objects and nonhuman entities that we interact with that shape and form who we are as Black feminists and how we engage with one another (see Alexander, 2005; Craft et al., 2007; McKittrick, 2007; Nash, 2011; Tinsley et al., 1997). This includes how we feel, sense, process, emote, and are moved by others, as well as some of the invisible components of which we are a part. Take for example, the role of spirits, the spirit world, and communication with our ancestors as inseparable from day-to-day living. However, these same communities tend to be left out or called into question as theorists, scholars, and valid knowledge producers, even when located within the academy (see others on this topic including, Crenshaw, 1999; Harris-Perry, 2011; Haritaworn et al., 2018a; Haritaworn et al., 2018b; Hill Collins, 2000a, 2000b). When Gilles Deleuze frames affect as “life-force,” he is considered one of “the foremost contemporary philosophers” (Grosz, 2005; Linstead & Pullen, 2006, 1289; Ringrose & Renold, 2014). But when Buddhism, Taoism, Jainism, Hinduism, African, and Indigenous cosmologies attest to “life-force,” this knowledge is relegated to the spiritual, at best. In most cases, they are disregarded and discredited because of their inability to prove or rationalize much of affect and its many slippery concepts. (It is also important to note that even within academia, philosophers such as Deleuze, Guattari, and Bergson are also heavily discredited by these same positivist approaches, although to a lesser degree and while still holding some semblance of power and privilege).

In *Telepathy and Medical Psychology* Jan Ehrenwald (1948) writes, “the savage is convinced that he is able to cause crops to grow, rain to fall, storms to subside, through his rites and ceremonies” (13). The emphasis here is not so much on whether the claims made by these communities are valid and true. Instead, the tone and derogatory language point to the disrespect and paternalism on the part of white Europeans observing non-whites. This has typically been

the Western positivist approach to Indigenous worldviews. And yet you will find conversations of spirituality,² metaphysics, occultism,³ intuition, telepathy,⁴ ancestors,⁵ spiritual consciousness,⁶ synchronicity, ontology,⁷ cosmology,⁸ epistemology,⁹ contagious energy, forces, entities, spirits,¹⁰ nonlinear time, queering of space, and Otherworldly experiences or encounters within affect theory dressed in academic jargon and packaged as theory. Indigenous communities in North America have incorporated knowledge from creation stories,¹¹ animism, chaos theory, Otherworldly experiences, and queer time and space for centuries (Frideres, 2016). While scholars in the academy have co-opted and repackaged some of these same concepts, Indigenous and other communities of colour have historically been criminalized and banned from practising or sharing this knowledge and ways of knowing and being. While settlers have profited from, and in more recent years, appropriated, these same concepts, Indigenous, Black, and other communities of colour have been constructed as primitive, non-normative, pathological, demonic, and evil (see Frideres, 2016; Linklater, 2014; Martin-Hill, 2004). This historical and continued erasure supports the genealogy of white feminism that claims to be the all-knowing higher authority. This was made clear when it came to choosing methods and a methodological framework for this study.

Methodology and Methods

Black Feminist Theory as Methodology

This study is grounded in a methodological framework that draws from Black feminist theory born out of and rooted the United States, articulated through American English. Though it should be noted that Black feminists exist outside of this geographic context. Contributing non-English Black feminist scholarship in places like in Canada, the United Kingdom, Central and South America, the Caribbean, and beyond. In this section, I identify key concepts from Black

feminist thinkers that contributed to making sense of how to approach autoethnography and critical discourse analysis as research methods. Patricia Hill Collins (2000a, 2000b, 2001) suggests that there are three key tenets to Black feminist theory: (a) self-definition and self-valuation, which allows Black feminists to push back against negative stereotypes of Blackness and asks Black women to define ourselves, for ourselves, rather than taking on the projections of others;¹² (b) addressing the intersecting nature of oppression;¹³ and (c) redefining culture on our own terms by narrating our own stories and creating opportunities for diverse representations of Blackness.¹⁴ While all three were foundational to this research, this section stresses the importance of the first and third.

Black feminist scholar Becky Thompson (2003) quotes the Combahee River Collective to address the first tenet in *Multiracial Feminism*: “We believe that the most profound and potentially most radical politics come directly out of our own identity, as opposed to working to end somebody else’s oppression” (p. 400). To this end, Collins (2000) reminded us that, as it pertains to anti-Blackness, not all white feminists were (or are) invested in ending white supremacist anti-Black racism. And so, Black feminism was (and is) unapologetic about decentring whiteness (Jones, 2019; Thompson, 2003). It instead centres the lived experiences of Black women. Because representations of Black womanhood are still largely marginalized, Black feminism’s ability to advocate on behalf of Black women’s everyday lived experiences as valid and scholarly knowledge producers serves as a critical counternarrative (Collins; 2000; hooks, 1992; Reynolds, 2002). In centring our narratives, Black feminists have asked that we consider the more intricate and intimate parts of the everyday lived experience as theoretical (Collins, 2001; Jones, 2019; Nash, 2011; Springer, 2002). It is this first principle of Black

feminist theory and its emphasis on lived experience as a valid contribution to theory and worldmaking that informs my use of autoethnography as a method.

Autoethnography as Method

During the early stages of this study, as I was planning to conduct interviews and thinking through and drafting interview questions for participants, I kept returning to what emotions and traumas the research questions would invoke, for them as well as myself. What would this mean ethically? And how would these feeling sensations inform participant responses? I asked because research has shown that participants will twist their responses based on what they think the researcher wants to hear (see Abu-Lughod, 2002; Aull Davies, 1998; Hesse-Biber, 2007; Nagar, 2014), meaning that if I wanted to explore how shame got in the way of feminist work, and with unabashed raw honesty at that, I would need participants willing to get into the complicated nuances they feared an interviewer would judge them on. At the time, it also became clear that I was under-resourced and at a limited capacity with respect to my mental, emotional, and physical health. I was in no shape to (nor could I) ask participants to dive into questions that I was unprepared to address publicly with others. The best solution was to be the research participant I was looking for. "Working with vulnerable communities on such a fragile topic would pose a risk for participants and myself. I have been saying all along that I am being called to embody and live out my research. What better way than to return to the method I initially wanted to explore in my first year, autoethnography," I wrote in my notes.

According to Sarah Wall (2014), autoethnography is "highly personalized accounts that draw upon the experience of the author or researcher for the purpose of extending sociological understanding" (p. 21; see also, Buch and Staller, 2007). The term is credited to David Hayano via Karl Heider in 1975 (Bochner & Ellis, 2016; Chang, 2008; Wall, 2014). Autoethnography is

interdisciplinary and is conceptualized in some of the following ways: as personal narrative; critical autobiography; evocative narrative; reflective ethnography; personal sociology; auto-anthropology; sociological narrative; emotional sociology; first-person accounts; self-ethnography; autobiographical sociology; and ethnographic novel (Bochner & Ellis, 2016; Chang, 2008; Wall, 2006). All of these methods require a level of creativity, introspection, and attention to scholarly research to connect linkages.

Autoethnography is both process and product, autobiography and ethnography (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 273; Lapadat, 2017). Drawing from the fields of anthropology, sociology, psychology, literary criticism, journalism, and communication, autoethnography is the study of the self (auto), the study of culture (ethno), and the application of a research process (graph; Chang, 2008; Ellis & Bochner, 2016; Lapadat, 2017; Wall, 2006). Said differently, “autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno).” This “challenges canonical ways of doing research,” which typically focuses on research participants as the point of analysis (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 273). Charlotte Aull Davies (1998) shared that “in doing research of any kind, there is an implicit assumption that we are investigating something outside ourselves” and that “the knowledge we seek cannot be gained solely or simply through introspection” (p. 3). Autoethnography debunks such myths but is nonetheless debated as a valid research method. However, just as “ethnography is not a mere reporting of culture, neither is autoethnography a mere description of life experiences. Writing autoethnography represents more than rearranging data bits,” (Chang, 2008, pp. 139–141). It helps us to re-examine our personal and cultural experiences in such a way that shapes culture itself (Collins, 2001). This iterative process, where the sociological shapes the personal and the

personal informs the theoretical, makes Black feminist theory and autoethnography dynamic and creative research methods.

As such, Arthur Bochner and Carolyn Ellis (2016) defined autoethnography as “an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural.” The two add, “autoethnographic texts appear in a variety of forms: short stories, poetry, fiction, novels, photographic essays, personal essays, journals, fragmented and layered writing, and social science prose” (p. 65). Heewon Chang (2008) identifies various writing styles that auto-ethnographers use: descriptive-realistic, where realistic detailed descriptions are used to enhance the story;¹⁵ analytic-interpretive, which Chang said is your traditional writing style within academia (2008); confessional emotive, typically raw, and vulnerable;¹⁶ and imaginative-creative writing, which is less structured and even less realistic.¹⁷ This project utilized all of these modalities, albeit at differing times and in different ways. For me, this looked like journal entries, video/audio recordings, recorded dreams, meditation journeys, past life regressions, therapy sessions, and moments in crisis when affected or in emotional distress. I jotted notes and wrote poetry, short stories, essays, free-form automatic writing, streams of consciousness, fiction, nonfiction, and used creative imagination to make sense of the work, eventually returning to standard nonfiction academic writing to summarize the findings.

Of interest was the role of (a) memory work¹⁸ (for example, dream work, meditation journeys, psychotherapy) and (b) story-making (creative writing, storytelling, journal writing; Bochner & Ellis, 2016, p. 252). For me, this meant observing what was triggering me, when, why, and how, and noting tensions in my body and how they connected with interpersonal relationships and conflicts. I scanned my environment for what emotions circulated and

documented or noted them in memory. I retrieved memories and tried to process traumas from my past, observing myself, others, and cultures around me, connecting what I perceived with what I was living. I then integrated my interpretations and analysis with theoretical frameworks drawn from scholarly literature, paying attention to themes that kept emerging, connecting them back to my research. For this reason, the first principle of Black feminist theory and autoethnography affirmed directing the research gaze inward toward self. As methods, they were important in situating precisely where I landed in relation to my work and others. They pushed me to question how negative emotions near, around, and in me operated, and to ask how shame, trauma, and other difficult emotions obstructed my interpersonal relationships with others.

Feeling Research Through Autoethnography and Emotions

The theme of emotional suffering shows up frequently in autoethnography because, according to Carolyn Ellis (2009), rarely do we document our joy. We are more likely to write down the distress and tensions in our lives. This focus on negative affect is common in autoethnographical writing. As Brené Brown (2006; 2011) has suggested in her work, shame research is not only a vulnerable experience, but the study of vulnerability itself. The practice of autoethnography also requires vulnerability, which, according to Ellis, a good autoethnographer must be open to. Autoethnography necessitates tapping into emotions and feeling sensations. Emotions are not the same thing as feelings. Feelings are a by-product of emotions, we feel emotions. In the literature, emotions are constructed in some of the following ways: as universal,¹⁹ as affect, distinct and separate from affect, as responses and reactions to being affected,²⁰ a form of communication (Siegel, 2009), a form of expression (Somé, 1997; Weissman, 2004), as performative (Ahmed, 2015), a noun (Ahmed, 2015), a verb (Siegel, 2009), contagious (Ahmed, 2004, 2015, 2017; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), relational (Ahmed, 2015),

thoughts converted into matter,²¹ energy in motion (Swan, 2016; Tolle, 2005), objects that carry information (Lorde, 1984), located or held in the body (Weissman, 2004), as well as outside the body (Ahmed, 2003, 2004), and as spaces of transformation (Chin, 2018).

Historically and to date in Europe and North America, emotions have been understood through a host of articulations. Take the emotion of fear, which I also examined in this research though it is not the primary focus of this dissertation. In *Fear: A Cultural History*, historian Joanna Bourke (2005) suggested that what was constructed as fearful in the past may not resonate in the same way in a contemporary setting. During the 1860s, for example, French neurologist Duchenne de Boulogne connected fear with facial expressions and the muscles and neurons regulating them. For de Boulogne, facial expressions signalled emotion that aided in human communication. A tightening of certain neck muscles accompanied with a grimace indicated to others that an individual was in extreme pain, what de Boulogne equated with fear. Charles Darwin on the other hand, refuted this argument, arguing instead that facial expressions served nothing more than a biological function. Rather, for Darwin, fear was a matter of human survival. He believed that “the species which ‘feared rightly’ increased its chances of survival” (Bourke, 2005, p. 16). Others, such as psychologist Knight Dunlap, writing in the 1930s, negated fear (and emotions in general) as psychological or as affect. Bourke (2005) shared that Dunlap found emotions to be located in the theological, something humans merely spoke about rather than an internal attachment or affect that moved us.

That de Boulogne, Darwin, and Dunlap each had their own interpretation of fear is typical for how constructions of emotions emerge. Because emotions are subjective and difficult to quantify, it is difficult to determine precisely what emotions circulate, their original source (if any), or how we humans interact with and are moved by them. As Bourke (2005) posed, “was

what people in the 1970s called 'fear' the same thing as it was in the 1870s? Probably not."

Adding, "more accurately, many historians feel that they have no way of knowing. Looked at historically, subjective feelings are invisible. We can identify publicly choreographed panic reactions but how do we know what individuals 'really felt'?" (p. 6). This ambiguity points to the evolutionary nature of emotions and its various meanings and representations, which shift over time, making emotions a cultural artifact (Bourke, 2005; see also Cvetkovich, 2003, 2011, 2012). While the emotion of fear was widely discussed during the ethnographical component of this study (think the US presidential elections leading up to Trump's victory), just below the surface, I tapped into another subtle emotion that was equally pervasive but less discussed because of how it has been constructed as even more taboo than fear: the emotion of shame. In studying myself in relation to emotions, I discovered that core and repeated patterns of shame were sabotaging so much in my life, including interpersonal relationships.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the word shame first appeared in the eighth century, and some of the earlier forms of documented shame appeared from the eighteenth century onward (Stearns, 2017). The emphasis in this work was on the role of shame in disrupting interpersonal relationship between and among feminists. I examined the following research questions: 1a) How is shame conceptualized in shame research? 1b) How does shame function and why? 2) How does shame hinder our interpersonal relationships? 3a) What does shame do to the mind-body? and 3b) What implications does this have for feminists? In a sense, studying what got in the way of solidarity produced more of the negative affect being studied, which in turn got in the way of solidarity. This destructive loop contributed to valuable data but wreaked havoc in my personal life. For this reason, when I argue that shame is relational and that it moves us apart from one another, distancing us from ourselves and each other, I suggest this because I

lived it. This data was echoed in shame research and presented as a reoccurring theme across various cultures. Observing patterns in myself play out in others and in the scholarly literature made vulnerability less difficult. Plus, the vulnerable nature of autoethnography and shame research felt familiar and safe, though still terrifying and difficult. "Autoethnography seems [like] the best fit at the moment. As [the] most authentic. My forte. [It] allows me to decolonize methodologies and validates this/and frameworks. [It is] also [the] most realistic [method] based on my current capacity and resources," I wrote in my journal. But in the end, much of the emotional and affective labour that accompanied studying self in relation to emotions would remain controversial and futile.

Undermining Black Feminist Theory and Autoethnography as Methods

Just as Black feminist theory is called into question within academic circles for being unscholarly, so too is autoethnography. They are positioned as not real research, lacking rigour, too generalizable, posing a threat to the academy, unprofessional, unacademic, narcissistic, self-indulgent, too personal, of little interest to social scientists, controversial, as conversations better left for therapists, too risky, too vulnerable, and uncomfortable reading (see Ellis, 2009; Greckheimer, 2014; Lapadat, 2017; Lazer, 2005). Chang (2008) reminded us, for example, that "confessional-emotive writings do not always enjoy favorable reviews. Rather, they are sometimes branded as emotional catharsis or 'self-indulgence' because they are seen as unloading their authors' personal burdens in narration" (p. 145). These critiques are not surprising. Often, critics have made the charge that lived experiences do not count as substantial research because the case study is focused on the individual, and therefore unreliable, ineffective, and unscientific (Ellis, 2009). But Black feminists and those who use autoethnography as a method say otherwise. Lived experiences count as qualitative empirical evidence. In connecting

my lived experience with the scholarly literature, theoretical frameworks, critical discourse analysis, and several (sub)cultures, it was apparent that my experiences were relatable and did not stand alone. There were crossovers and overlap, pointing to generalizability and validity. How I negotiated shame showed up in the literature. How shame moved me maladaptively was in line with others in the cultures being observed, online and in person.

In this way, much of what gets raised in the research findings that follow this chapter *are* informed by my personal experience and studying myself in relation to shame and other fear- and trauma-based emotions. However, my own narratives are not explicitly interwoven throughout this body of work, and on purpose. Earlier stages and previous writing drafts tried this approach of inserting my personal stories directly and infusing it with the research. This did not work. I failed for various reasons, including my inability to safely document my personal experiences without implicating others and their privacy and confidentiality. It was too risky and minimized the academic and theoretical messages I was trying to convey. So, instead, personal accounts that contributed to the data come alive through Octavia Butler's characters. It is in Lauren Olamina that I ground my Black womanhood and lived experiences. For this reason, critical discourse analysis formed the bulk of what has come to shape this dissertation.

Black Feminists Critically Analyzing Discourse and Redefining Culture

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) became popularized as an academic methodology in the early 1990s in Europe and North America (Locke, 2004; Van Dijk, 2011; Wodack, 2002). Key scholars credited with its formation are Norman Fairclough,²² James Gee, Gunther Kress, Theo van Leeuwen, Ruth Wodack, Teun van Dijk, and Michael Meyer. It was born out of Neo-Marxism, the Frankfurt School, poststructuralism, and postmodern theory and was heavily influenced by thinkers like Habermas, Althusser, and Foucault (Locke, 2004). CDA looks at how

societies and cultures are ordered hierarchically according to discursive flows, assesses power relations that determine who and what we prioritize as valid knowledge, and questions who we position as knowledge producers driving culture (Locke, 2004; Wodack, 2002). In *Rigor, Transparency, Evidence, and Representation in Discourse Analysis: Challenges and Recommendations*, Thomas Greckhamer and Sebnem Cilesiz (2014) provided one of the simpler definitions of discourse analysis. They make sense of it as language that is used in social settings constituted by social, political, and cultural formations, examining how language plays out in a complex web that involves “other stuff,” like texts working in tandem with social practices or identity construction (2014, p. 423). For Greckhamer and Cilesiz, the structural and systemic, what we can think of as organizations, institutions, societies, and cultures, are constructed through texts. Take for example, legislative bills, human rights, treaties, and other legal texts that dictate how individuals and states are to conduct themselves. Or the influence of music, television, film, and books in popular culture that in turn shape how people within cultures operate or take up discourse. These texts, though not material, are coded with underlying meanings and representations, what Greckhamer and Cilesiz called a “repository of sociocultural practices and their effects” (2014, p. 424).

Terry Locke (2004) argued that CDA is “concerned with the ways power relations are produced by discourse and maintained and/or challenged through texts and the practices which affect their production, reception and dissemination” (p. 38). Ruth Wodack (2002) suggested that some of the central themes of CDA lie in its concern with the following: power and power relations;²³ history; language; critical self-reflection; knowledge production; ideology; domination; texts; media; political discourse; identity-based research/politics; social inequalities (see also Van Dijk, 2011); interdisciplinary frameworks; liberatory and emancipatory objectives

(see also Fairclough, 2011); social transformation, specifically, for the purposes of sovereignty, autonomy, and liberation; and critical engagement. This list (although not exhaustive) overlaps with the themes and concepts of Black feminist theory and each of the three Black feminist principles. However, just as feminism is attributed to white, European, and North American frameworks, so too is CDA, although here with an added emphasis on contributions from white men (see Lazar, 2005). Black women are rarely seen as knowledge producers driving culture in the mainstream cultural imagination.

Black feminists have done and continue to do critical discourse analysis and do it well. Black feminist theory argues that what counts as worldmaking and knowledge production is not located *only* within the confines of the upper echelon, whiteness, the ivory tower, or mainstream institutions (Collins, 2001, 2000; Storey, 2009). As Patricia Hill Collins (2000) stated, “Black women intellectuals are neither all academics nor found primarily in the black middle class” (p. 14). Differently situated Black women located in all sorts of communities, including working-class and poor women and those on the frontlines and at the grassroots, are all equally responsible for shaping culture. Take, for example, Kimberlé Crenshaw’s (1991) concept of *intersectionality*²⁴ or Audre Lorde’s (1984) critique of the *institutionalization of difference*.²⁵ Their interventions grew out of their need to critically analyze discourse that was not working for them, nor ever really meant to. Mainstream white feminism is one aspect of hegemonic (read: dominant) discourse that Lorde and Crenshaw took issue with. The two were critical of white mainstream feminism’s inability to address their versions of reality. Lorde and Crenshaw questioned the absence of representation, language, laws, policies, and literature that spoke to their situated differences and experiences.

Through this questioning, they were useful in creating political, social, and cultural transformations. The two spoke back to power, challenged systems of oppression, and called out problematic institutions. They not only offered critique but dreamt up solutions and imagined alternatives. They gave Black women a new language to work with and make sense of our oppressions (e.g., intersectionality, institutionalization of difference/deviance, myth of normalcy). They provided relatable context using metaphors (e.g., the analogy of a traffic light intersection, where the roads are understood as the sociopolitical structures that shape identity construction, and the traffic running in all directions is likened to discriminatory policies that cause Black women harm) and imagery that was digestible and accessible. Lorde and Crenshaw shaped feminist theorizing and reimagined legal frameworks. According to Claudia Garcia-Rojas (2019), intersectionality informed legal recourse and allowed employers to better grasp how Black women were twice marginalized based on their gender and race. These two Black feminist giants are the perfect examples of CDA at its finest. Their work has been influential to Black women spanning from activists and organizers, lawyers, and policymakers, to scholars and everyday women. Yet we do not immediately conjure up images of Kimberlé Crenshaw and Audre Lorde when we hear CDA. When Black feminists are inserted into CDA, cultural studies theorists Stuart Hall and bell hooks are typically as close as we get. This gap can be a disservice to Black feminists using our lived experiences as a point of analysis and reference in our research, both methodologically and theoretically. It is for these reasons that I used critical discourse analysis vis-à-vis Black feminist theories to assess shame and solidarity. With all of this said, it made the most sense to read Black lesbian and science fiction writer Octavia E. Butler's works as text to make sense of and communicate the data.

Reading Octavia Butler as Text

Octavia E. Butler was a Black African American lesbian science fiction genius and the first Black woman to win the Hugo and Nebula awards for science fiction. She was born in the late '40s in Pasadena, California, and passed away on February 24, 2006, in Seattle, Washington, at the age of 58, after falling outside of her home (Democracy Now!, 2021). In what was one of her last television interviews, filmed in November of 2005 with Amy Goodman and Juan González of *Democracy Now!*, Octavia Butler shared that as a little girl, she got into writing after watching “a bad movie, a movie called *Devil Girl from Mars* and went into competition with it.” She was only 12 years old at the time and had set out to write an even better version of the story (Anderson, 2020; Democracy Now!, 2021). Butler expressed,

it gave me the chance to comment on every aspect of humanity. People tend to think of science fiction as, oh, *Star Wars* or *Star Trek*. And the truth is, there are no closed doors and there are no required formulas. You can go anywhere with it. (Democracy Now!, 2021)

And anywhere she went.

Historically, science fiction was not taken seriously as high art and was devalued in literature as a lesser genre. Stephanie Smith (2007) suggested that it was the feminist, Black, 2STLGBQQIA+, and class movements of the 1950s and '60s that contributed to the diversification and appreciation of sci-fi, which had until then remained largely white male dominated. In this regard, Octavia Butler was instrumental in situating the Black experience within sci-fi, paving the way for Black women (Jesser, 2002; Smith, 2007). Smith (2007) wrote, “Butler was the only prominent, popular, female, African American and decidedly feminist voice in a historically white domain” (p. 385). To this day, her work is world-renowned and has been

taken up by activists and scholars in Afrofuturism, critical race theory, Black feminist theory, queer theory, and disability studies (Anderson, 2020).

It is well documented that Butler identified as a feminist. She has been praised for centring Black women as protagonists in her stories, disrupting gender norms, and rejecting binaries (Jesser, 2002). Butler provided us with stories of Black women living with disabilities, shifting how we look at what Megan Obourn (2013) called, “injury and impurity that values motherhood as a historically determined and embodied social identity and political position” (p. 110). Butler’s novels have been heralded for their accurate predictions of dystopian futures that many of us find ourselves currently living in (Anderson, 2020). But as Nancy Jesser (2002) asserted, “Octavia Butler is both a heroine and problem child” (p. 1). There are those who have found Octavia Butler to be problematic and essentializing, arguing that she perpetuates harmful stereotypes of women, reducing them to mothers, “Black Eve’s,” “earth mothers,” healers, teachers, and artists (Jesser, 2002; Foster, 1982). Butler has also been known to pair strong Black women with white men and young girls with older men. Even when Black women are paired with Black men, the characters are typically heterosexual and the male gaze centred (Jesser, 2002; Foster, 1982), although, in the *Parables* series, Lauren explores intimacy with another woman and Lauren’s brother Mark is gay, though not out because of his role in the church.

Additionally, some of her storylines have sanist moments, labelling those with mental illness or some form of madness as crazy. Ableism also slips into her novels at various points, including in *Talent* (1998), when a child with Tourette’s Syndrome is beaten and killed because their condition was considered a sign of possession by the devil (pp. 278–279). Butler has written in fat-phobic comments, classism against the working class, and characters grappling

with their homosexuality in the church. It is not always clear if Butler explores these sentiments and narratives as social commentary or if she herself endorsed these problematic scripts.

The compilation of chapters that follow this one draw primarily from Octavia Butler's texts *Parable of the Sower* (1993) and *Parable of the Talents* (1998), though some of her other works, including *The Evening and the Morning and the Night* (1987; 2001), *Fledgling* (2005), *Kindred* (2003), and *Wild Seed* (1980) were also used to make sense of this project. In reading her texts, I was interested in questions of representation. Which bodies were represented, how, and why? And which were left out, how, and why? I paid attention to who was granted permission to feel and express their emotions, and who was not; who was burdened with emotional and affective labour, and who was not. Which communities experienced increased deterioration in their health? I also assessed how this was tied to an accumulation of emotional and affective residue. I asked, which bodies were most likely to be constructed as shameful and to be most feared? Which communities were already up against inter, trans, and multigenerational emotional distress while continuing to be traumatized? And I observed how encounters with negative emotions resulted in relational, psychosomatic, and material consequences in characters' lives.

Feminist researcher and theorist Sara Ahmed was helpful in paying attention to the larger affective assemblages that influenced how I read and analyzed Octavia Butler's work. For example, in *Affective Economies*, Ahmed (2004) was not only critical of the word choice used by British Conservative Party member William Hague in his speeches on asylum seekers, but also what sort of affects they generated for those listening. Ahmed draws our attention to the use of "sticky words" like, "stuck," "flood," "swamped," or, "dirt," and "sewage" to create linkages between these terms and asylum seekers, constructing asylum seekers as unruly and

uncontrollable, heightening fear and moral panic about the nation being overtaken by what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) would call “the Other.” In this way, feeling and reading into discourse is an integral part of CDA that I had to learn to adopt. With this in mind I asked: What am I feeling? What emotions have rushed into the room, environment, or me? What emotion was the author or writer trying to convey? What did it elicit? Was this intentional, and if so, why? How did the author’s decisions shape my reading of their work; how did my bias toward the author inform how I read their work? How were emotions being used strategically? Which ones *leaped* out of texts? Did they move me closer in solidarity with the author and others? Or did they distance and separate me?

Research Limitations

As with any research study, there were limitations to the research I undertook. Each step of the research phase posed its own set of challenges. Translating theory into practice proved challenging. Having to step outside of myself, to assess me in relation to scholarly texts and the personal testimonies of others, was difficult to keep up with. This was particularly so when up against the mental illness and disability frameworks that showed up in the very embodiment of shame. While the topic itself and the research questions remained more or less the same, determining how to communicate the findings was challenging. I made mistakes and failed often, compromising ethics and my integrity along the way. Writing critically as a human who is imperfect required a level of accountability that was challenging. To evolve the methods and writing, I needed to continuously call myself out and be open to being called out. This necessarily made engaging in solidarity difficult, something that was reflected in the research.

While autoethnography and CDA do not require research ethics approval, in retrospect, certain measures could have been taken to better protect me and others. From security and

confidentiality to sensitivity around questions being asked of self (especially as it related to trauma and emotional pain), work-life balance (or lack thereof), and poor boundary setting, there were safety precautions and a level of care and sensitivity that researchers take when conducting studies with others that are not given the same attention in studying the self (see Lapadat, 2011). Certain elements, such as how the mind-body negotiates and recovers from triggers, retraumatization, and revictimization, were overlooked, even when using CDA to analyze texts.

Clara Fischer (2018) and Elspeth Probyn (2010) talked about the costs of studying and writing about shame in their work, touching on the affective toll on researchers. Because shame is a physically painful emotion to work with, both writers talk about how it hurts shame researchers' mind-bodies, data I echo and can attest to. I am in agreeance with Probyn (2010), who believes that "reading too much into affects leads to 'hypochondria'" and "makes you more aware of the operation of different affects in the body" (p. 72). Studying shame and other difficult emotions tied to trauma quite literally almost broke me, not only in spirit, but also in my muscles and bones, as I developed chronic pain that still goes undiagnosed. This begs the question of what role REB should play in autoethnography and CDA projects that do not explicitly study other humans per se, but rather the self in relation to others. How do researchers safeguard their research *and* their well-being when researching self? Do we even care and should we? Research in general has historically been so problematic and unethical to Brown and Black human subjects and for so long, especially those that are marginalized or oppressed in some way (see Lapadat, 2017). Does it take researchers turning the lens on themselves to finally understand how so much research has been innately violent for people of colour? If so, I hope more of us shift the lens on ourselves and feel and experience what we have asked our research participants to do for centuries.

Given all the limitations, it was difficult to present only Black feminist theory and autoethnography as methods. They were too messy for a number of complicated reasons. Black feminist theory and autoethnography as methods only made it into this chapter out of resistance and after many challenges with how to sneak them in. They could not compete with more traditional scholarly methods like critical discourse analysis, which was instead where I was directed. Subversion only went so far, even within a feminist department. However, there was a simultaneous and stubborn need to push back and centre Black experiences, Black women, and Black feelings, even when it seemingly failed to work. Methodological limitations with using Black feminist theory and autoethnography as methods clearly articulated the multiplicity this body of work sought to examine. It highlighted the power struggle inherent in binaries and the difficulties in centring Black voices within predominantly white spaces.

Grappling with this odd and jarring combination set the tone for how solidarity was made sense of as a multiplicity in this body of work. It affirmed that Black and Indigenous feminists are the primary demographic who have and continue to ask mainstream white feminists to be more honest about feminism's dynamic nature, including multiplicities that we traditionally perceive as "different," "messy," or "negative" (see Collins, 2001; hooks, 2003; Nash, 2011). White feminism believes itself to be championing universal unity, togetherness, and progress. They claim to be advocating for the majority, including those outside of the white mainstream. This perception is typically brought into opposition with the image of aggressive non-white feminists who, in arguing for attention to difference and contextualized nuance, are said to bring division and separation that take the feminist movement backward. This is the binary model of feminist solidarity that this study seeks to destabilize.

Mainstream white feminism broadly understood as universal and all-encompassing has been the dominant articulation of feminism (Jones, 2019; Mohanty, 2003). This feminism has the most power because it is [typically] endorsed by white women in positions of power who assume they have already advocated on behalf of *all* women irrespective of their differences. Under this model, to identify as a Black feminist is unnecessary and redundant because universal feminism includes Black women by virtue of serving *all* women (Morgan, 1984). Difference (say, Black feminism) is constructed as an aberration that the feminist movement needs to rid itself of. This is not unlike with the affect of shame. Because of its negative connotations and uncomfortable feeling sensations, shame is especially difficult to navigate. A theme that the following chapters examine.

Conclusion

If we are to truly build feminist solidarity, we must accept the messy and unpleasant aspects of it. It is for this reason that this dissertation takes the more painful emotions that are difficult to speak of, like shame, as its point of analysis. How we embody, feel, and are moved by shame can tell us a lot about some of solidarity's multiplicities. In what follows, two of Octavia Butler's texts are used to suggest that on the surface, at the level of the material and social, we may appear to be unified and working toward a common goal, yet beneath the surface, how we feel and are moved by shame, as well as the meanings we give to it, can run contrary to solidarity. Unresolved and unidentified shame given power can move us to think, behave, and act in ways that result in conflict, oppression, tension, and sometimes even death. Shame's sticky residue can move us through and beyond binaries. Shame sets us in motion across multiple times and space, destabilizing feminist solidarity and its multiplicities, and asking of it, and of us, a renewed becoming. Throughout the following chapters, I use an analysis of Octavia Butler's

novels to argue that moving beyond the binary model of solidarity is of crucial importance.

Theorizing and responding to shame is central to this project of moving beyond “all or nothing” solidarity and the wounds that fracture and constrain feminist activism.

Notes

¹ Kaitlin Dearham (2013) defined NGOization as: “the process of institutionalization and professionalization of NGOs” (p. 186).

² The spiritual, said Alexander (2005) “is lived very much in a domain that is social in the sense that it provides knowledge whose distillation is indispensable to daily living, its particular manifestations transforming and mirroring the social in ways that are both meaningful and tangible.” She views spiritual work as a form of “body praxis,” which she defined as: “a form of embodiment,” and understands the Sacred as “denied entry into the modern which renders African-based cosmological systems as subordinate to European cosmos” (pp. 296–297).

³ For Adorno (1994), believers and students of the occult are irrational. He goes so far as to call occultism, “the metaphysic of dunces,” stating, “the tendency to occultism is a symptom of the regression in consciousness” (pp. 128–130).

⁴ Telepathy for Ehrenwald (1948) is “the perception by a person of another person’s mental processes, without the aid of sensory channels” (p. 13).

⁵ Doumbia and Doumbia (2004) honour the role of ancestors, writing, “our ancestors are the closest to us of all the intermediary spirits; they are our guardian spirits.” The two add, “Our ancestors maintain their role in our families and lives, more significantly than when they were physically present. They are always available to us, offering their guidance and protection” (p. 9).

⁶ For Alexander (2005) “spiritual consciousness” includes one’s ability to ascertain the ways in which the Sacred is embodied as well as the ways in which Sacred energies intervene in our daily lives. Sacred energies, according to Alexander, “surround, protect, push, strengthen, and bring a sense of purpose so that the individual is attuned to the Soul’s purpose” (p. 301).

⁷ For Frideres (2016), ontology deals with the “philosophical theory of reality, including consideration of the universe” (p. 49).

⁸ Frideres (2016), defined cosmology as: “the general philosophy of the universe considered as a totality of parts and phenomena subjects to laws” (p. 39).

⁹ Frideres (2016) teaches us that epistemology is the study of the foundations of knowledge and examines the nature of this premise and how they work, arguing that “epistemology is how you think about that reality. It is the question of how do we know that something is true? How do we come to know something? How is knowledge structured and evaluated?” (p. 49).

¹⁰ Adama and Doumbia (2004) argued that, for those who believe in and practice African cosmology, there is an understanding that “the energy of Spirit permeates everything in nature, and it is within our very reach to work with this exceptional force” (p. xiii).

¹¹ Across many Indigenous communities, Creation stories are fundamental to understanding cosmology. It is through these stories that the universe is explained and made sense of (Martin-Hill, 2004, p. 143).

¹² According to Patricia Hill-Collins (2001), “self-definition involves challenging the political knowledge-validation process that has resulted in externally-defined, stereotypical images of Afro-American womanhood.” For Collins, “self-valuation stresses the content of Black women’s self-definitions-namely, replacing externally-derived images with authentic Black female images.” She added, “black women’s insistence on self-definition, self-valuation, and the necessity for a Black female-centered analysis is significant for two reasons.” First, “defining and valuing one’s consciousness of one’s own self-defined standpoint in the face of images that foster a self-definition as the objectified ‘other’ is an important way of resisting the dehumanization essential to systems of domination.” “Secondly, black female self-definition and self-valuation concerns their value in allowing black women to reject internalized, psychological oppression” (p. 16).

¹³ Attention to the interlocking nature of race, gender, and class oppression is a second recurring theme in the works of Black feminists (Collins, 2001). Collins added,

the black feminist attention to the interlocking nature of oppression is significant. This viewpoint shifts the entire focus of investigation from one aimed at explicating elements of race or gender or class oppression to one whose goal is to determine what the links are among these systems....The more holistic approach implied in Black feminist thought treats the interaction among multiple systems as the object of study (pp. 16–17).

¹⁴ Collins (2001) suggested that we redefine and explain the importance of Black women's culture. In doing so, "black feminists not only uncover previously unexplored areas of the black female experience, but they also identify concrete areas of social relations where Afro-American women create and pass on self-definitions and self-valuations essential to coping with the simultaneity of oppression they experience" (17).

¹⁵ Chang (2008) stated that "realistic descriptive narratives depict places, people, experiences, and events as accurately as possible with minimal character judgement and evaluation" (143). In this writing style, detailed descriptions are added to enrich the storytelling.

¹⁶ Chang (2008) shared that "the autoethnographers' vulnerable self-exposure opens a door to reader's participation in the stories...You are free to expose confusion, problems, and dilemmas in life. Personal agonies, usually hidden from public view are often subjects of confessional and emotive writing" (145).

¹⁷ Chang (2008) said, "imaginative-creative writing style is the boldest departure from traditional academic writing." She added, "You can express your story in less structured and inhibited formats" (148).

¹⁸ Bochner and Ellis (2016) wrote: "Memory work always involves transformation; it is not the past, only a form or representative of the past." They added, "Remembering is active and continual; it is personal, political, emotional and relational. Memory is also a destination, a place we inhabit or revisit in order to question and reflect on the meaning of the past" (252).

¹⁹ Hoffman et al. (1987) and Siegel (2009) draw our attention to Darwin's 1872 book *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* where Darwin identifies emotions as universal attributes that contribute to our survival. According to Siegel "Darwin identifies universal affects including: joy, surprise, fear, anger, sadness, disgust and shame. These are also called the universal affects because the expressions of these internal states—the affects—has been identifiable in cultures throughout the world" (160–1).

²⁰ For Sara Ahmed (2015) emotion can be defined as "the feeling of bodily change" (5).

²¹ Scientists who study emotions on a molecular level have proven that neuropeptides: "the specific chemicals triggered by emotions, are thoughts converted into matter" (Weissman, 2004, 129).

²² Norman Fairclough defined CDA as: "to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power" (cited in Locke, 2004).

²³ Terry Locke (2004) argued that CDA is concerned with the ways power relations are produced by discourse and maintained and/or challenged through texts and the practices which affect their production, reception and dissemination" (38). (WHERE DOES THE QUOTE BEGIN?)

²⁴ Black feminist activist-scholar and lawyer Kimberle Crenshaw (1991) popularized the term *intersectionality*. Intersectionality is a theoretical framework born out of Black feminist theorizing and women of colour activism (Crenshaw, 1991; Jones, 2019; Puar, 2007). Crenshaw's seminal work argued that as Black women we do not navigate the world (and feminism) simply as women. At any given moment our multiple identities and sites of oppression intersect with one another. She theorized that it was impossible for Black women to address gender related issues without simultaneously addressing race and anti-Blackness among other intersections of identity. Since its inception, the term has expanded and come to mean different things for different people, including those outside of the Black community (Jampel, 2018; Choo and Ferre, 2010).

²⁵ Black feminist poet and lesbian activist Audre Lorde (1984) wrote that human differences could easily be reduced to human deviance by oppressive systems of power. She proposed that it was common for some individuals to erase or hide their differences in order to escape being marked as deviant, which she identified as "a race towards a mythical norm" (116). For Lorde, "normal" was a myth and the forced departure from difference toward normalcy was set up as such that difference became a form of institutionalization, which we can liken to sociologist Emile Durkheim's concept of *medicalization of deviance*. In, *The Medicalization of Deviance: From Badness to Sickness* authors Peter Conrad and Joseph W. Schneider (2001) remind us that, for Durkheim, deviance was fluid rather than fixed. The basis of Durkheim's argument according to Conrad and Schneider was that by associating difference with deviance, and deviance with medicalization, bodies that were depicted as different and outside of the norm (read:

anything other than white, straight, cis, rich, affluent, educated, Christian, able-bodied, sane, and neurotypical), they were pathologized as wrong and constructed as abnormal, and thus in need of medical intervention. For both Lorde and Durkheim, such institutionalized interventions served to maintain social order and kept deviant bodies (read: those marked as different) under social control. This was strategic. According to Sara Ahmed (2014, 2017), social control demands a straightening of queer bodies and asks that they follow the narrow path toward normalcy. Brian Massumi (2014) echoed this sentiment, writing, “disciplinary power molds the resistant body into normative shape” (40). Institutionalization, certain medical interventions, and some forms of medication can be thought of as tools that shape deviant bodies into “normative shape” (see also Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018; Orr, 2018; McRuer, 2006; Clare, 2017; Danquah, 2003a; Mollow, 2006). In this way, Lorde’s institutionalization of difference and Durkheim’s medicalization of deviance ask that we approach the medical-industrial complex (among other institutions) with caution, and that we be critical of how we reproduce the myth of normalcy through our participation in these systems that seek to erase difference. Similarly, white mainstream feminists (and all feminists in general) have to reconsider the idea that differences are deviant and not be so quick to exclude those that are different. This requires a major cultural shift.

Parable of the Sower: Unmasking Shame

Introduction

As independent feminist researcher Sara Ahmed (2015) reminds us, emotions do things to us because they are relational. Inspired by Ahmed and vulnerability and shame researcher Brené Brown (2010), the emphasis in this chapter is on contagious shame that reorganizes how we are in proximity with one another, separating and dividing us. Shame can move us to project the worst parts of ourselves onto others and can drive us to aggression or to engage in control dynamics that can be unhealthy (Brown, 2006). This chapter addresses some of these themes. Using Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (1993), the first section introduces the novel, using the storyline to map out the concept of emotional contagion. While Octavia Butler does not explicitly use the term emotional contagion, the concept is introduced to put shame in conversation with definitions of affect that explore how shame moves and circulates in and around us. I find it useful to frame shame as emotional contagion as a reminder that, whether we want to admit it or not, shame functions as it does, circulating in and around us, leaping on and off bodies, including our own.

The second section explores the relational elements of shame and the dysfunctional dynamics that it produces. Brown (2010) identifies three primary functions of shame that disrupt healthy interpersonal relationships: (a) shame that “move[s] us *away* by withdrawing, hiding, silencing ourselves, and keeping secrets”; (b) shame that “move[s] us *against* by trying to gain power over others, by being aggressive, and by using shame to fight shame”; and (c) shame that “move[s] us *toward* by seeking to appease and please” (p. 46; emphasis in original). This section explores the challenges that shame presents to feminist solidarity in these three ways, using Butler's protagonist, Lauren Olamina, and her dynamics with others to provide tangible

examples. At its core, the chapter works to call our attention to how the weaponization of shame can further separate us, impeding interpersonal relationships.

Parable of the Sower Overview

In what is one of Octavia Butler's more prophetic novels, the main character, Lauren Olamina, provides an example of what happens when feminists that identify as a multiplicity step into a feminist terrain that is in its own way a multiplicity. Published in 1993, the book takes place in a future California, in the year 2024. In the span of three years, Lauren's dystopian life unfolds in a deteriorating America set on social, economic, and political ruin. The president-elect, leader of a fascist organization called Christian America, is a regressive Christian and white-supremacist dictator who reintroduces slavery, bringing about the resurgence of the enslavement of Black and other people of colour and the exploitation of their labour. In, '*A Racist Challenge Might Force Us Apart: Divergence, Reliance, And Empathy in Parable of the Sower, By Octavia Butler*, Gabriela Brushini Grecca (2021) pointed to similarities between Lauren's reality and nineteenth-century slavery, highlighting arranged marriages between the enslaved, economic exploitation, narratives of escape, running away, and the enslaved "smoothing their divergence" in the face of danger when confronting threat (p. 357; see also, Achachelooei and Leon, 2021). Central to Grecca (2021) and Elham Mohammadi Achachelooei and Carol Elizabeth's (2021) arguments is the continuum of time, the past indicative of the present and future.

In, *Survival by Any Means: Race and Gender, Passing and Performance in Octavia Butler's Parable of the Sower and Parable of the Talents*, Micah Moreno (2020) pointed to Octavia Butler's feminist tone, specifically, how the novels critically attend to the intersections of race, slavery, classism, and war. In the introductory chapter of *Human Contradictions in*

Octavia E. Butler's Work, Martin Japtok and Jerry Rafiki Jenkins take this analysis further, expanding the scope of Butler's contributions to include: "climate change/global warming, slavery, religion, colonialism, racism, sexism, heterosexism, survivalism, otherness, exploitation, consent, negotiation, the workings of power and the tools of the powerless, the impact of hard and bio-technologies, and the meaning of being human" (pp. 1). In this way, the scholars argue that Octavia Butler connects the local, national, and global, as well as the past, present, and future. For them, why Butler's work was viewed as "experiments in social justice" (Japtok and Jenkins, 2020, pp. 1).

For Micah Moreno, Butler provided social commentary on gender, gender roles, gendered performance, and gender passing, contributing to gender theory, and I would add, queer theory, and disability studies (see also, Stark, 2020). According to Moreno, Octavia Butler's uniqueness is in how she merges a pragmatic view of gender, class, and race in the survival of fugitives from slavery in an apocalyptic future. In *Parable of the Sower*, for instance, the dangers of a binary system are clear, as rigid sexist and racist constructs stifle Lauren's humanity and her survival, as it did enslaved ancestors before her.

Along these lines, Moreno also connects Lauren's choice to pass as a man with African and Pan-African mythology rooted in Yoruba spirituality, specifically, the divine trickster figure, Esu-Elegbara (see also, Dorsey, 2020). Like Esu-Elegbara, Lauren inhabits two gendered spaces of dual gender. In Esu-Elegbara's case, they have a "remarkable penis," though equally female (Moreno, 2020, p. 201), while Lauren is identified as a cis woman passing as man for most of the novel (more on this later). This idea of Black fugitives and enslaved women needing to adopt masculine attributes is reminiscent of slavery and West African cultural traditions, says Moreno. According to Moreno (2020), women in West African countries like Nigeria are "expected to be

independent and self-sufficient,” even when they marry (pp. 201). Yoruba women for example, are expected to be “self-confident” and “competent,” so rarely allowed to be economically dependent on their husbands (p. 201). “A dependent woman, it is said, is treated with contempt” (p. 201). The same can be said about Lauren Oya Olamina. Like her middle and surname which are taken from the Yoruba people of Nigeria, Lauren is tasked with independence and strength, much like her Black African American enslaved ancestors in American history.

As the sociopolitical climate worsens, the nation spirals into overinflation, poverty, and increasing violence. An intuitive visionary and community organizer, Lauren’s determination is put to the test after her community is overtaken by arsonists, thieves, drug dealers, and gang members. Her younger brother is brutally murdered, her father disappears and is presumed dead, and seniors and children alike are raped and murdered. Eventually, her whole community and life as she knew it was completely uprooted, taken away by looters and pyromaniacs hungry for power, fire, and whatever they can salvage.

Writing *Parable of the Sower* in the early 1990s, Octavia Butler drew from the crack epidemic devastating the Black community at the time, touching on themes of drug addicted people in the future, an important detail given current rates of drug overdose-related deaths, which have increased since 2019. According to Devin E. Banks et al. (2021), overdose deaths disproportionately affect Black Americans in the United States, with opioid overdose deaths skyrocketing since 2012, increasing from 26 percent between 2013 and 2018, compared to just 13 percent for white Americans. Additionally, the COVID-19 global pandemic has amplified this crisis. Banks et al. shared statistics from St. Louis that suggested that between January and June of 2020 opioid-involved deaths rose 53 percent compared to the same months in 2019, up by 64

percent among Black users compared to only 40 percent among white people. In the face of this death, Lauren flees home.

With only two familiar faces left to turn to, a young white man named Harold “Harry” Balter and Zahra Moss, a Black former street-involved mother, Lauren is tasked with leading a group of about 20 strangers from the Los Angeles region where she was born and raised to Northern California—or Oregon, or Alaska, or even Canada—anywhere she can search for safer living conditions, a cheaper standard of living, and employment.¹ Although none of the characters in the novel explicitly identify themselves as feminists per se, including Lauren. This chapter uses Jodi Dean’s (1996) definition of solidarity as: “I ask you to stand by me over and against a third” (p. 3) to make sense of the team Lauren is travelling and rebuilding with as feminists with whom she is negotiating the feminist terrain. Taking from African scholar Awino Okech (2013), here, feminism consists of “our friendships, networks, our bonds, organizations, and our individual and collective feminist energies” (p. 16). Lauren’s vision of “Earthseed” (discussed below) incorporates objectives that transnational feminists work together to achieve, flowing across and between borders, human rights, gender equality, access to education, food sovereignty, and critiques of the nation-state. To use Okech (2013), Earthseed is where Lauren mobilizes her feminist principles.

A Black Neurodivergent Using Earthseed as Resistance

As a neurodivergent, no movement welcomes Lauren Oya Olamina with ease, especially not Christian America. Lauren is a willful activist, an organizer, and a change agent; a chaotic force to be reckoned with, always ready to take charge. Founder of the Earthseed movement, Lauren sought power in knowledge and learning. “She paid attention to the wider world. Politics and war mattered very much. Science and technology mattered, fashions in crime and drug use

and in racial, ethnic, religious and class tolerance mattered,” said her daughter, Larkin (p. 80). As a child, she envisioned a belief system and social movement called Earthseed, which was influenced by Black American, Buddhist, African, and Indigenous cosmological systems. Through it, she wanted to teach people to believe that God was malleable and shaped in collaboration with and through human agency. She did not like the idea that people, especially women, were passive recipients of a personified God reinterpreted by men as a man.

She wrote her first *Earthseed Manifesto* rather young, publishing it later in life, leading to the rise in her popularity. Earthseed was Lauren's *talent*, which she persevered to *multiply*. This is a nod to Biblical scripture, from which the title of the novel is taken, where a man repeatedly fails to grow seeds that he has sown, eventually finding fertile ground and bearing “fruits of hundredfold” (Tweedy, 2014, p. 7). For her, Earthseed was more than a project, rather, it was a natural drive to fulfill her purpose, what she described as comparable to, “paying ice to be cold” (p. 391). “It's who I am. It's why I exist,” she explained (p. 361). It was her vision and calling set in motion since childhood. She fights, starves, kills, and risks death for it.

She dreamt of Earthseed as a nationwide movement where communities of strangers turned into extended family, one where her follower's collectively built settlements together and educated themselves and one another. Her vision was that each settlement was to have “no more than a few hundred people, never more than a thousand. A community whose population grew to more than a thousand was to be split and ‘parent’ a new community” (pp. 170–171). She believed people were more accountable to one another in small communities. She and her husband, Bankole, along with a handful of strangers, manage to successfully venture by foot from Southern California to lands they believed to be safer. Acorn is the first of many Earthseed settlements that Lauren and her team build from the ground up, struggling for five years to get

established. The community was tucked away in the mountains of Northern California on Bankole's property.

Through Acorn, Earthseed was to be a counterculture borne out of resistance. It was intentional about its social justice mandate rooted in equity, liberation, communal interdependence, sovereignty, self-sustainability, and self-determination. In her communities, people cared for and protected one another, relying on "fictive kinship" ties. Melisa Harris-Perry defines "fictive kinship" ties as "the connections between members of a group who are unrelated by blood or marriage but who nonetheless share reciprocal social or economic relationships" (p. 102), a concept that accurately describes Acorn. Lauren was not only Acorn's community othermother, but she created a community of othermothers who engaged in communal mothering (Hinton, 2018). Adults were taught how to operate heavy machinery, educated on how to use guns and other weapons, and trained on how to defend themselves and their neighbours. They looked out for one another and took rotating turns guarding the compound, practising drills on what to do in case of attack and other such emergencies. Teaching, learning, and education were important components of Earthseed, in part because Lauren was raised by two educators and had herself been a Sunday school teacher as a youth. Everyone was taught to read and write in English and Spanish, and the children attended school onsite and were educated by older children or adults. Collectively, they built classrooms and a library filled with books of various genres for every reading level. They used practical experiences to develop and expand their academic curricula, including teaching the adults financial literacy and how to become thriving entrepreneurs, allowing them to create jobs for themselves to feed their families. As a collective, they built a successful wholesale retail business, growing and selling fresh produce they farmed and harvested themselves.

Honouring and protecting the land was an integral part of Earthseed. They learned about different types of plants and trees and how to use them medicinally and for other purposes such as building furniture and honouring the dead, practices that marked them as heathen witches and a cult to outsiders. To remain self-sustainable, they were taught how to survive off the land, relying on sustainable development as much as possible (Dunning, 2020). Although they were equipped with technological machinery, they lived a simple lifestyle that challenged the fascist government, which would rather that they relied on a state that left its civilians to starve to death or die from overall poor living conditions and ill-health with the hopes of wiping out the poor underclass and those considered inferior, weak, or vulnerable (see Dunning, 2020). As Alda Facio (2013) asserts:

It is only logical to assume that a market economy needs people who are unhappy with who they are and with what they have. The strategy is to make us feel unhappy, unworthy, dirty, sick, foul smelling and dependent so we can buy things that will make us clean, healthy, free and independent. (p. 43)

In this way, Earthseed was her form of resistance.

Her vision reminds me of Indigenous communities pre- and post-contact, the Nation of Islam, and the Black Panther movement. Others have seen different influences. Stefanie K. Dunning (2020) sees the influence of Taoism; Ikea M. Johnson (2020) sees Buddhism; Jasmine Noelle Yarish (2021) connects the dots between Lauren Olamina and Black feminist organizers like Harriet Tubman, Ella Baker, Claudia Jones, and Melina Adbullah; while Clarence Tweedy (2014) connects Lauren's vision of Earthseed with the Black church and Black theology. Tweedy touches on Lauren's spirituality, which they argue influenced her revolutionary spirit, forcing her to overcome the sociocultural and political nihilism she faced, focusing on the role of the Black

African American theological tradition. Tweedy credits the influence of the Black churches' theological tradition of liberation and Octavia Butler's own upbringing in a Baptist church, where God is conceptualized as "an agent of social change, an avenger of social justice, and a supreme being that desires the liberation of oppressed peoples" (2014, p. 1; see also, Moreno, 2020). The writer connects the four tenets of Black theology with Lauren's *Earthseed*, highlighting: (a) *Earthseed*'s ability to address the Black experience of humiliation and suffering; (b) Black history, which Octavia Butler weaves into the novel; (c) the revelation of God through acts of human liberation; and (d) the practice of traditions, which Lauren implements in *Earthseed*, like planting trees to memorialize the dead.

Through *Earthseed*, Lauren gives us insight into how, on their quest for recognition and to be humanized, Black women embody specific struggles tied to hurt, rejection, and faith (or lack thereof; see Harris-Perry, 2011, p. 4). As a Black mother and wife who is disabled, working-class, gender fluid, and queer, Lauren exposes society's ableism, which devalues Black motherhood as pathological and deviant, simultaneously blaming her for her socioeconomic issues (Hinton, 2018; see also Obourn, 2013). While others, such as Alison Kafer (2003), find nothing exceptional about Black poor women living with disabilities (Hinton, 2018). Anna Hinton (2018) points to Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's argument that Black disabled women who embrace their disabilities are powerful. To this end, Hinton frames Lauren as empowered because of her disability, not despite it (see also Obourn, 2013). It is her disabled status that forces her to acquire survival skills that in the end not only save her life, but also revolutionize the *Earthseed* movement (Hinton, 2018; Obourn, 2013). In this way, through *Earthseed*, Lauren was able to resist the fascist regime (see Dunning, 2020). Something she would surely pay for because she posed a direct threat to the president, who constructed her as a shameful cult leader

and Black witch to be feared and disposed of. Because of her activism, she was framed as a terrorist and threat to the state.

Conceptualizing Shame

Shame as Contagious Accumulation

This section puts Lauren Olamina in conversation with disability justice theory and affect theory to make linkages between contagious shame and disability through the lens of neurodivergent highly sensitive people. The group Lauren leads north face numerous challenges on their journey, many of which threaten to destabilize their solidarity with one another. One such threat is Lauren's ability to feel and share emotions with others, a disability the rest of her team is unaware she has. Lauren lives with a condition called hyperempathy syndrome, otherwise known as "sharing." Her disability causes her to share pain and pleasure with others, humans, and nonhumans alike. As Lauren explains, "I'm supposed to share pleasure *and* pain, but there isn't much pleasure around these days" (p. 12; emphasis in original). Thus, in this dissertation, Lauren comes to represent neurodivergent² and highly sensitive people (HSP), specifically those with some form of sensory processing sensitivity³ (SPS).

In *Highly Sensitive Patients: Who They Are, Who They Aren't, and Why It Matters* author and leading researcher on HSPs Elaine Aron (2010; see also, Aron, 2017) suggests that though not a diagnostic category, in the US, roughly 15 to 20 percent of the population identify as highly sensitive. HSPs are people like Lauren who are genetically more vulnerable to tapping into subtle sensory and energetic events in and around them (Aron et al., 2012). They are intuitive, able to pick up on nonverbal cues, and more aware of the thoughts and emotions of others (Aron, 2010). Similar to Lauren, they can sense low-intensity stimuli from their body, other bodies, and the environment. They tend to be easily aroused and overstimulated, process sensory information

more deeply than the average person, and have stronger emotional reactions (Aron et al., 2012). I took an interest in the relationship between feminism and HSPs who engage emotions and interpersonal relationships differently than the average “neurotypical” person because I believe they can tell us much about the future of emotions. As we begin to understand emotions differently and learn to tap into them, and as more people step into their high sensitivity, the more we can shape how emotions move us relationally.

I was particularly interested in Black feminists living with some form of madness, level of neurological variance, mental illness, invisible disability, neurodivergence, or who identify as a wild woman. The ones Clarissa Pinkola Estés (1992) calls “women who run with the wolves,” the equivalent of Sara Ahmed’s (2014) the “willful woman” and “killjoy.” These are the Black feminists that make other feminists uncomfortable by tackling difficult emotions. And these are the feminists like Lauren Olamina, who, as a multi-, extra-, and hypersensory intuitive, are overburdened with the added task of feeling objects that circulate, but at intensity, and from elsewhere, unknown. They operate from and in their most affected state, which is to say, when the capacities of their mind-body faculties are overwhelmed by *intensities* that push them beyond *thresholds*. These are concepts that come out of affect theory.

Emotional Contagion as Affect

Etymologically, the word *affect* has its roots in Latin, French, and late nineteenth-century Middle English. How we respond to, feel, express, and are moved by emotions is one way to make sense of the word affect (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010). At its core, it means to be moved or influenced to produce a change in some way and is popularly understood to mean to have an effect on, make a difference, to feel something, have an impression on, or to influence disposition. This points to Spinoza’s definition of affect as: “the ability to affect (*affectus*) and be

affected (*affection*)” (Massumi, 2015, p. 48), meaning, we are affected by and affect everything.

Which is not to say that feeling the sensation of emotion or having an emotional reaction is the same as emotions *leaping* from one body to another. In affect studies, the latter would be considered affect and not emotion (see Rajiva, 2014). Scholars like Melissa Gregg (2010a, 2010b), and Gregory Seigworth (2010) remind us that emotions are not the same thing as affect. Instead, they argue that emotions are responses to and by-products of being affected. Take emotional contagion.

In *Emotional Contagion and Socialization*, Giuliana Isabella and Hamilton Carvalho (2016) define emotional contagion as “an outflow of emotions transmitted by facial expressions, voice, posture, movements, and other instrumental behaviours from one person to another” (p. 63). The two identify emotional contagion as an automatic universal process that we are all subject to whereby we “catch” other people’s emotions, which are transmitted through nonverbal cues. As Lauren states, “I couldn’t help seeing-collecting some of their general misery” (p. 11). In a sense, emotional contagion is when we mimic or mirror someone near us unknowingly or spontaneously, uncovering our collective ability to share, feel, be moved by, or influenced by one another. This unrepresentable nature of *catching* other people’s emotions or mirroring them without meaning to can be considered affect (Rajiva, 2014). For example, think of when someone yawns and you find yourself yawning, or when you smile when looking at someone who is also smiling, or tear up when someone is crying. This unrepresentable and involuntary acted-upon-ness that happens “places affect at every level of matter” (Clough, 2010, p. 201). Affect blurs the boundaries of living and nonliving, biological, and physical. As professor of sociology and women studies Patricia T. Clough (2010) asserts, “The natural and the cultural

begin to fade" (p. 210), or rather, they bleed into one another, as indecipherable as Lauren's sharing when she mirrors others.

In *Sower* Lauren experiences every pain, injury, gunshot wound, and bleeding that occurs in others as if she herself were on the receiving end. In one scene she explains, "I saw it die. I felt it die. I bit my tongue as the pain I knew it must feel became my pain. One more step and I would fall and lie in the dirt, helpless against the pain" (pp. 44–45). These are the words of a tortured Lauren as she passes by a wild dog that has just been shot to death but has yet to die. She assesses, "I felt the impact of the bullet as a hard, solid blow—something beyond pain. I went a little numb" (p. 45). Later, as her group battles intruders, she herself is shot and wounded. She describes,

I tried to remember whether I'd been shot. I had no sense of my own body. I hurt, but I couldn't have said where—or even whether the pain was mine or someone else's. The pain was intense yet defuse somehow. I felt...disembodied. I died with someone. I died with someone else. (p. 297)

Emotional contagion disables Lauren's ability to decipher between what is hers and what belongs to another. An indication that the affective nature of emotion is not personal, internal, nor even located solely in the individual mind-body per se (see Ahmed, 2015), pointing to emotional contagion as affect, external, and collective.

And while this unexplainable and unrepresentable emotional contagion points to emotions as affect and not the other way around, I am nonetheless fascinated by the need to constantly disentangle the two in ways that inevitably reads as gendering emotions as feminine, the very thing feminists find problematic. Within affect theory, affect gets framed in masculine ways as complex and machinic (see Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Gregg, 2010; Gregg &

Seigworth, 2010). Emotions are made a sort of childlike response to being affected, a reaction to something grander. Affect becomes the adult in relation to emotions, while emotions are articulated as juvenile in their incapacity to be controlled, unintelligent in their unconsciousness and reactionary nature. This is how the separation of the two gets reproduced in ways that mark emotions as lower and less intelligent. In this equation, emotions are marked as feminine while affect, masculine. What we find is a privileging of the masculine, something that feminists typically denounce, take issue with, and question. In this way, I am curious about why affect is not held with the same level of contempt and suspicion as emotions. This hierarchy and misgendering of emotions inevitably give emotions a bad reputation, especially in cultures that already negate and pathologize them. Shame perhaps more than any other emotion has a bad name.

The Object of Shame

Emotional contagion points to emotions circulating in the environment, not of us, in us, ours to own, or possess. Ahmed's (2003) work explicitly suggests that emotions do not accumulate *in* mind-bodies per se. For Ahmed, the idea that emotions are *in us* endorses a pathologizing of emotional bodies that asserts emotions as "psychological givens" (2003, p. 382). Rather, Ahmed argues that emotions are *outside* of us in our environment, experienced individually and shared collectively as contagion, flowing through what Ahmed identifies as an *affective economy*, generating sociopolitical discourse that then reproduces social hierarchies (more on this shortly). We can make sense of shame as an enmeshment of contagious energy circulating in the environment, colliding with mind-bodies, giving the impression of being one with shame, so much so that we begin to identify with it.

Shame in this context is understood through Ahmed's (2004) analysis of emotions as moving objects. Here, the object of shame slides over and avoids some bodies while sticking onto and accumulating on others. In *Affective Economies*, Ahmed (2004) contrasts white British nationalists with Black and Brown asylum seekers, noting that the latter primarily accumulate fear. It is important to note that these Black and Brown migrants do not acquire more fear because of any inherent flaw on their part. Rather, it is how they are marked and perceived by society as threats to the nation-state and white supremacy. Fear of Black and Brown asylum seekers results in more fear being projected in their direction. This excess fear makes them vulnerable to more fear. This is because their social location as marginalized and oppressed people of low social ranking work to keep them accumulating more of these negative objects. As Ahmed argues, constructing asylum seekers as individuals to be feared works to draw more fear to them. This in turn favours white nationalists who exploit said fear and moral panic with the hopes of keeping Black and Brown asylum seekers out of what they perceive to be "their country."

A similar phenomenon can be identified in Butler's character, Lauren Olamina. Due to her social location, she catches objects like shame and pain intensely, her hyperempathy making her even more susceptible. The excess accumulation surrounding her attracts objects to her. Where and how Lauren is situated socio-politically and economically is of importance to how she accumulates excess shame, and in turn, pain. All her life she was made to be ashamed of her hyperempathy and as a result, she hid it. With the exception of her biological mother, who died while giving birth to her, the only other characters in *Parable of the Sower* with hyperempathy syndrome are runaway enslaved people who escaped owners that had exploited their disability, citing their ability to share as a contributing factor to their productivity and docility, and in turn,

their exploitation. As Lauren poignantly notes about the slave owners, "They have no power to improve their lives, but they have the power to make others even more miserable. And the only way to prove to yourself that you have power is to use it" (p. 143). And use it they did, or rather, abuse it they did.

In the novel, hyperempathic slaves were profitable for the very reason that their condition made them more obedient. As Lauren argues, "If everyone could feel everyone else's pain, who would torture? Who would cause anyone unnecessary pain?" (p. 115). If being beaten and whipped caused intense pain, and if bearing witness to others in pain limited your capacity to function, which in turn risked you receiving additional punishment, then logic would have it that you would avoid allowing anyone, yourself included, to step out of line at any cost. Doing as you were told and influencing others to do the same would help you avoid the experience of pain. Knowing this, pain was weaponized by the slave masters to assert disciplinary power and maintain control over the hyperempathetic enslaved. Just as nineteenth-century European criminals were put on a scaffold and publicly shamed, or even decapitated and executed as an example and warning to the rest of society not to disobey authority figures (Book, 2014; Brooks, 2014; Foucault, 1977), we can surmise that public shaming functioned similarly in this context. And shame functioned particularly well with the hyperempathic Black enslaved who were already sensitive to the touch of shame and the pain associated with it.

According to Stephen Garvey (2014), shaming penalties can have a weaker or stronger effect on people depending on the individual and their attachment to others in their community. Those who are socially alienated or removed from their community may not be as heavily influenced by shame as those who care too much about what others think about them and have a deeper attachment to their community. The latter applies to Lauren and other enslaved living

with hyperempathy because their condition inevitably makes them feel (and care) more deeply about others, which is the same for most HSPs. As Lauren explains, "Sharing is a weakness, a shameful secret. A person who knows what I am can hurt me, betray me, disable me with little effort" (pp. 178). Adding, "I can do okay as long as other people don't know about me" (pp. 12). Being outed as a sharer was dangerous, it meant being vulnerable, increasing their risk of receiving more violence.⁴ This connection between Black hyperempathic enslaved people like Lauren and the accumulation of shame is not unlike Ahmed's (2004) assessment of Brown and Black asylum seekers' accumulation of fear. This accumulation is relational. Brown (2010) identifies three ways in which shame moves us relationally: away, against, and toward. I begin first with shame that moves us away.

The Functionality of Relational Shame

Shame That Moves Us Away

Sara Ahmed (2015) suggested that we cover shame by turning away from others, by hiding, covering, or retreating into ourselves, a tragic fate that Lauren inherits. Lauren explains, "Dad is big on privacy and 'family business.' There's a whole range of things we never even hint about outside the family. First among these is anything about my mother, my hyperempathy, and how the two are connected" (p. 12). In the novel, little is said or known about Lauren's mother, who was otherwise depicted as a shameful drug addict who abused "paracetco," a prescription medication that was supposedly the cause of Lauren's illness. Her mother is hidden in many ways, a family secret that remained covered, like Lauren. What readers eventually learn is that revealing her hyperempathy would expose her father and mother's supposedly shameful past. It would disclose her mother's drug addiction and uncover her father's first marriage to a darker-skinned Black woman (her stepmother was described as a lighter complexioned Afro-Latina),

something her highly respected father forbade. "To my father, the whole business is shameful. He's a preacher professor and a dean. A first wife who was a drug addict and a daughter who is drug damaged is not something he wants to boast about," says Lauren (p. 12). For this reason, Lauren's father ensured that every member of her family kept her disability hidden, projecting shame onto her, asking that she carry the brunt and burden of it in silence and isolation.

As bell hooks (2005) reminded us, some Black women like Lauren mask health challenges like depression in silence and isolation, performing "normalcy" in public, even while they suffer in private. hooks said, "many of us suffer periods of suicidal depression that no one ever notices...though we know we are suffering life-threatening 'blues'" (2005, p. 80). Instead, we persevere and are resilient. To quote Ghanaian American writer Meri Nana-Ama Danquah (2003), "Depression teaches you the fine art of multiplicity. You become adept at wearing the right mask for the right person on the right occasion" (p. 34), feeling unsafe in sharing vulnerabilities with others.

Achille Mbembe (2017) shared that the Black body in pain "arouses only more disgust" (p. 107). So rarely are Black women met with compassion, understanding, and support. Knowing this and aware that little empathy will be directed her way, Lauren pushes through her disability, masking and performing as able-bodied. According to Esther Jones (2015b), because Lauren's disability cannot be easily read off her body and because most do not view Lauren as sick or stereotypically disabled, [she] copes with an impairment which given the disturbed conditions of her society, marks her as vulnerable and at times functionally disabled, even as it gives her keen insight into the change needed to survive in a dystopian world. (p. 127; see also Hinton, 2018)

So, she moves through the world as able-bodied, hiding her health challenges, a beacon of strength for others. Disability activists and scholars like Eli Clare and Robert McRuer (2006b) critiqued *supercrip narratives* of disabled people trying to overcome their disability (see also Jones, 2015b; Hinton, 2018). But for Lauren, performing as able-bodied was a form of survival (Jones, 2015b; see also Mia Mingus' work on this topic). Anna Hinton (2018) suggested that Lauren avoids the more problematic aspects of supercrip scripts because she controls her narrative, even when she passes as able-bodied and male (see also, Moreno, 2020). She does this by juxtaposing her strength with her challenges and embracing her vulnerabilities, even as she struggles with being vulnerable.

It is important to note here that requiring Lauren to hide her disability was not a matter of protection or safety, nor was it a matter of privacy. The demand to hide her disability was the result of shame that was never hers or even about her. You can keep something private and secret and not be ashamed of it. It is possible to cover and hide something not because you fear or are ashamed of it but because it is personal and no one else's business. This is not what her father asked of her. He could have asked her to keep her disability private as a protective mechanism, but that was not the case in the story. Instead, he weaponized shame to hide his own perceived shameful secrets. He was concerned that others knowing about Lauren's condition would reflect negatively on himself and his family, bringing a sense of dishonour and disgrace. Lauren explains,

My father taught me to hide it. He was right. In this world, there isn't any room for housebound, frightened, squeamish people, and that's what I might have become if everyone had known about me—all the other kids, for instance. Little kids are vicious. Haven't you noticed? (p. 194)

Lauren adds, "Lucky for me. Being the most vulnerable person I know is damned sure not something I want to boast about" (p. 12). Ripe with respectability politics, she does not share what they perceive of as shameful outside of the home.

Respectability tropes influence this kneejerk need to withhold information. This was particularly true within the context of the British family, which remains a template for Commonwealth countries globally due to British imperialism and colonization. Historian Peter Stearns (2017) suggested that just as shame played an integral role in emotional and community life in early modern Britain, so too in the British colonies, including North America. Take for example the use of the word shamefast, which first appeared in the nineteenth century but later gained traction for two hundred years starting at the beginning of the sixteenth century, said Stearns. The word, which meant "full of shame," could be translated to extreme modesty or bashfulness, and women were said to display a "sweet and shamefast look" (Stearns, 2017, p. 41). As the term surged in Britain, so too did its popularity in British colonies. Similarly, Stearns found that in Britain, it tended to be older generations that valued secrecy when it came to perceived shame, sharing that from the 1930s to 1950s, keeping secrets about "homosexuality, illegitimate birth, disability, and adoption" was the norm for British households (2017, p. 99), as was the case with Lauren's father, who although American, was still influenced by British conquest in the Americas.

Shame is not just in the exposure of what is perceived of as shameful. Sara Ahmed (2015) suggested that shame also *functions* to maintain control of possible negative outcomes through covering up. Typically, the loss of control that accompanies the shame of not being able to keep something hidden requires reestablishment of more control and covering. This results in a double bind (Ahmed, 2015; Brown, 2006). Ahmed argued that in moving away from others and

into ourselves, we simultaneously turn away from ourselves, a double failure to maintain control.

This leaves us feeling as if we have nowhere to turn, which draws more shame, making us feel even more powerless (see also Brown, 2006; Deonna et al., 2011). Brené Brown's (2006) work on shame research identifies this feeling of being trapped and powerless. In *Shame Resilience Theory: A Grounded Theory Study on Women and Shame*, Brown shared how in feeling powerless to shame around issues related to self-esteem, depression, addiction, eating disorders, bullying, suicide, family violence, and sexual assault, her participants isolated themselves. Their sense of powerlessness from having been in and feeling shame was so intense that not even therapy worked. This was because they felt ashamed of needing to go to therapy, even when therapy was to address their shame in the first place. Here, turning away from others (i.e., therapists) is an attempt to regain some semblance of control and re-establish power in an effort to minimize the shame of exposure.

For Lauren Olamina, her very existence was mired in shame, and not because she was shameful per se, but because of external projections. In her society, "repression of women has become more and more extreme" (p. 50). A woman who expresses her opinions, "'nags,'" disobeys her husband, or otherwise, "tramples her womanhood" and "acts like a man," might have her head shaved, her forehead branded, her tongue cut out, or worst case, she might be stoned to death or burned" (p. 50). This is reminiscent of how shame functioned historically in Western Europe and other places, as associating shame with disobedient women gained traction (Stearns, 2016). This gendered aspect of shame, where women and the feminine were coded as shameful, shows up repeatedly in history, something we are still contending with in the twenty-first century, shame that moves us *against*.

Shame That Moves Us Against

For many, the vulnerability that accompanies the exposure of shame is terrifying (Biddle, 1997; Brown, 2006). Brené Brown (2011) defined vulnerability as emotional risk, exposure, and uncertainty. This description is at the very crux of shame, having partly to do with how we perceive the gaze of another and being vulnerable as threatening. Shame experienced privately and alone is not the same as shame that is put on display. Sara Ahmed (2015) wrote, “shame as an emotion requires a witness; even if the subject feels shame when she or he is alone, it is the imagined view of the other that is taken on by a subject in relation to herself or himself” (p. 106). Ahmed adds that while shame need not require a witness for it to be felt, the gaze of another adds intensity to the experience.

In *Parable of the Sower*, for instance, Lauren admits that she would exert excessive force against her peers so as not to appear vulnerable or weak, despite the fact that inflicting pain on others caused her pain too. As she states, “I didn’t fight much when I was little because it hurt me so. I felt every blow that I struck, just as though I’d hit myself” (p. 11). But when she had to fight, she would overcompensate, exerting undue force to mask her hyperempathy:

when I did decide that I had to fight, I set out to hurt the other kid more than kids usually hurt one another. I broke Michael Talcott’s arm and Rubin Quintanilla’s nose. I knocked out four of Silvia Dunn’s teeth. They all earned what I did to them two or three times over. (pp. 11–12)

To this end, she dealt with her hyperempathy in silence and isolation on the one hand, and in overexerting herself on the other. Of interest is how Lauren’s inferiority complex rooted in shame pushes her to perform hyper-superiority. Lauren was overcompensating for her sense of

unworthiness, which drove her to perform a sort of self-assured superiority. We see this most clearly in Lauren's relationship with Zahra.

While both Lauren and Zahra are Black women, there was a power imbalance between the two because of Lauren's more privileged location, which put her in closer proximity to whiteness. Although both women were poor and of the same community, Lauren had access to more resources. She was educated and raised in a two-income household by parents who held positions as leaders, educators, and professors. Zahra on the other hand was a former street-involved poor woman whose mother had sold her off to a man in exchange for money. Lauren was a community organizer and teacher, even in her youthful age. Zahra, a stay-at-home mom, was married to a misogynistic and controlling polygamist husband. Lauren could read and write, while Zahra was taught to do so by Lauren. There were clear power differentials that favoured Lauren. For these reasons, she had grown up never taking Zahra seriously.

Despite the advantages that Lauren enjoyed because of her privileged position, she was also plagued by insecurity and jealousy. Zahra reminded Lauren of her own inadequacies. Throughout the novel, Lauren laments Zahra's hyperfeminine beauty in comparison to her own androgynous features. As the eldest of all boys, Lauren had internalized the stereotype that women, femmes, and the feminine were weak and men and the masculine, stronger, more well-protected. "I intend to go out posing as a man when I go," says Lauren regarding venturing outside of her community for the first time, onto what is described as the dangerous highways of California (p. 138). Throughout much of the story, Lauren passes as a man. As she described, "We're like that, we Olamina's—tall, sturdy, fast growing people. I'm still the tallest" (p. 104). This passing was not merely a form of androgyny or being a "tomboy" says, Moreno (2020). Instead, Lauren "inhabits a male-gendered persona while remaining biologically female" (pp.

197). Micah Moreno (2020) discusses this in, *Survival by Any Means: Race and Gender, Passing and Performance in Octavia Butler's Parable of the Sower and Parable of the Talents*.

According to Moreno, Lauren passes as a man in order to secure safety and access privileges she otherwise would not have been privy to as a woman. Not passing would have meant risking sexual assault, starvation, or death, rendering passing a viable option, though not the most desirable (Moreno, 2020). This is reminiscent of racial passing common in Jim Crow America, whereby Black people who were read as ambiguous or able to easily mask their racial phenotype, gained access to some of the same privileges as white Americans, passing here, rooted in survival and a chance at upwards mobility otherwise withheld from Black people (Moreno, 2020). Similarly, Lauren passes as male. In this way, gender posed both a threat to her survival, as well as provided some form of protection (Moreno, 2020). Moreno suggests, like Judith Butler's (2015a; 2015b) work does, that Lauren's ability to adopt both masculine and feminine attributes point to gender as performance rather than an inherited set of genetic codes (p. 196). What this means for Moreno, is that Octavia Butler uses the two novels to portray gender as an "ambiguous and amorphous human characteristic and suggests that the gender binary is an outdated social construction with little relevance in a modern society, certainly in the postapocalyptic one she portrays" (pp. 196). This ability to adopt or discard gender sets Lauren apart from Zahra.

Zahra, on the other hand, is short, petite, and curvy. As Lauren noted, Zahra was able to fit into Lauren's youngest brothers' shirts and jeans (pp. 170–171). According to Lauren, Zahra was always "the best-looking woman in the neighborhood" (p. 186). "Zahra attracts enough of the wrong kind of attention with all her clothes on" (p. 204–205). "She was a beautiful woman, and I would never be beautiful—which didn't bother me. Boys had always seemed to like me.

But Zahra's looks grabbed male attention" (p. 168). These comments point to patriarchy's deliberate attempts to set women up against each other. Here, Octavia Butler is addressing shame tied to unrealistic beauty expectations, which can trigger insecurities and shame that get in the way of our relationships.

Women's studies professor Carla Rice (2013) and communications professor Kathleen LeBesco (2013) maintain that women and girls face significant pressure to conform to beauty standards, approaching their bodies as a project; what they call "beauty projects." Rice (2013) identifies the following four beauty projects: (a) the weight project, (b) the hair project, (c) the skin project, and (d) the breast project (see also LeBesco, 2013; Odette, 2013). Lauren and Zahra remind us that these so-called beauty standards have concrete consequences; the impossibility of attaining these standards draws shame that distances us. With the force and intensity of shame, these scripts move us to think, behave, and perform in counterproductive and unhealthy ways. This is linked to cultures of perfectionism and ideas around purity that beauty industries use to finesse our insecurities as women (see Rice, 2013). The myth tells us that if we avoid failure to attain perfection, we will also avoid shame. Ironically, this pressure always draws shame because failure and shame are inevitable; without even knowing or ever intending to, Zahra strikes shame in Lauren.

As Lauren admits to Zahra, "I wasn't crazy about you" (p. 186). This dislike rooted in insecurity resulted in Lauren taking a paternalistic approach with Zahra. She would re-establish her own power by being condescending to her, thus, remedying her own shame. To redirect shame, Lauren made harsh judgments of Zahra, expressing arrogance and superiority. This lack of empathy toward Zahra was part of what makes shame an "ugly emotion" for Julien Deonna, Raffaele Rodogno, and Fabrice Teroni (2011). According to the authors, when shame puts us in

distress, we are less likely to empathize with others. They argued that episodic shame is narcissistic, shifting the focus away from how others feel and squarely on our own needs, cutting us off from understanding and loving each other. This mechanism worked to create distance between the two.

Before they began travelling together, Lauren had viewed Zahra as a docile third wife. She would often mock her friend, saying things like, "Zahra has a soft, little-girl voice that I used to think was phony. It sounds painful, as though it's abrading her throat as she speaks" (p. 168). She assumed that Zahra did not know how to work a rifle as well as she did because her husband, who was later murdered, never allowed Zahra to leave the house to attend the shooting sessions Lauren's father organized for the community. In actuality, Zahra had an impeccable shot. She protected herself successfully and later protected Lauren as well, teaching her what she had learned from her former life on the streets. These assumptions they made about each other and the stereotypes that guided them repelled them at first. As Zahra professes to Lauren with amusement, "I didn't think I'd like you, Preacher's kid, all over the place, telling everybody what to do, sticking your damn nose in everything. But you ain't bad." To which Lauren responds, "Neither are you" (p. 186). This aversion that Lauren and Zahra have toward one another is not distinct or unique to Black women alone. Doris Davenport (2015) argues that some Black women also have aversions to white women.

In *The Pathology of Racism: A Conversation with Third Word Wommin*, Davenport (2015) explained that

Although black and white feminists can sometimes work together for a common goal with warmth and support, and even love and respect occasionally, underneath there is still

another message. That is that white feminists, like white boys and black boys, are threatened by us. (p. 82)

The author goes on to identify three ways in which Black women have aversions to white women: (a) aesthetically, (b) culturally, and (c) socially/politically. Davenport said of the first point:

Aesthetically (& physically) we frequently find white wimmin repulsive. That is, their skin colors are unaesthetic (ugly, to some people). Their hair, stringy and straight, is unattractive. Their bodies: rather like misshapen humps of whitish clay or dough, that somebody forgot to mold in-certain-areas. Furthermore, they have a strange body odor. (2015, p. 83)

To cultural aversions, Davenport stated:

Culturally, we see them as limited and bigoted. They can't dance. Their music is essentially undanceable too, and unpleasant. Plus, they are totally saturated in western or white American culture with little knowledge or respect for the cultures of third world people. (That is, unless they intend to exploit it).

Adding, "The bland food of white folks is legendary. What they call partying is too low keyed to even be a wake. (A wake is when you sit up all night around the casket of a dead person.) And it goes on and on" (2015, p. 83).

On speaking to political aversion, she said,

Socially, white people seem rather juvenile and tasteless. Politically, they are, especially the feminists, naïve and myopic. Then too, it has always been hard for us (black folk) to believe that whites will transcend color to make political alliances with us, for any reason. (The women's movement illustrates this point.) (Davenport, 2015, p. 83)

Despite this tension, they *are* able to get along and build together. These issues Lauren and Zahra have between them, like the challenges between white and Black feminists, are often unspoken and even unrecognized, but they do drive us apart on some level. This is a reminder of the complexity of solidarity, which is neither entirely universal unity, nor riddled with conflict and difference.

The Seductive Pull of Shame

A less discussed phenomenon in Brené Brown's (2010, 2011) work is shame that pulls us toward others by seeking to appease and please. Brown (2011) called shame resilience: "the ability to recognize shame, to move through it constructively while maintaining worthiness and authenticity, and to ultimately develop more courage, compassion, and connection as a result of our experience" (p. 4). Brown suggested that to build shame resilience we must talk about our shame. This does not mean, however, that we share our shame stories with just anyone. While breaking free from shame requires that we speak it, disclosing shame for the sake of soothing shame can be dangerous and reckless. Some people weaponize shame for personal gain. For this reason, it is not advisable to disclose our shame to just anyone. Brown discusses six types of people we should never share our shame stories with: (a) the friend who hears the story and actually feels shame for you; (b) the friend who responds with sympathy rather than empathy; (c) The friend who needs you to be the pillar of worthiness and authenticity; (d) the friend who is so uncomfortable with vulnerability that she scolds you; (e) the friend who is all about making it better and, out of [their] own discomfort, refuses to acknowledge that you can actually be crazy and make terrible choices; and (f) the friend who confuses "connection" with the opportunity to one-up you: "that's nothing. Listen to what happened to me one time!" (2010, pp. 10–11). In *Parable of the Sower*, Lauren discovers just how harmful disclosing shame stories to the wrong

person can be when she finds the courage to share the status of her hyperempathy with Zahra and Harry, her oldest remaining friends. As it turns out, Harry proves to be an example of who not to disclose our shame stories to, demonstrating how shame can pull us toward others through control dynamics that give away our power, leaving us in more shame.

At the point of disclosing to both Harry and Zahra, Lauren had never divulged her “shameful secret” with anyone outside of her family and a previous lover. Toward the end of the novel, she recognized that not disclosing her hyperempathy could cost both her life and the lives of her companions. “They deserve to know that I’m a sharer. For their own safety, they should know,” she reckons (p. 178). “I’m going to tell you about myself, I don’t know whether it will help you to understand me, but I have to tell you. You have the right to know,” she begins. Butler writes, “And in a low whisper, I told them about my mother—my biological mother—and about my sharing” (p. 191). In putting out her shame story, Lauren released old shame as she simultaneously stepped into new shame. “I’m sorry I didn’t tell you before. I knew I should, but talking about it is...hard. Very hard. I’ve never told anyone before now,” she added (p. 192). Among the two, Zahra handles the news well and receives Lauren with compassion. “My mama took drugs, too,” she said. “You ain’t got nothing wrong with you, Lauren” (pp. 192–193). Her affirming reply is necessary for thwarting shame, as she takes the opportunity to disclose her own secret, sharing her own shame.

Shocked and clearly distrustful, Harry, with his male privilege and white fragility, responds differently. He takes a more narcissistic approach and makes the disclosure about his own feelings. “Well. I did not know you were a manipulative bitch. I thought I knew you,” he snaps back. To which Lauren replies solemnly, “No one is who we think they are. That’s what we get for not being telepathic.” Rattled, Harry retorts, “I don’t understand how you could have

been like this all the time. How could you hide your sharing from everyone? So...you faked everyone out. You must be a hell of an actor" (pp. 193–194). This metaphor of acting, or performing, is an important element of shame, as was discussed above. However, here, I want to draw our attention to how taking off masks can also draw shame and put us in harm's way.

Even when attempting to break performative cycles of shame to usher in more authenticity, doing so can be costly. It comes at the risk of inviting more shame, as well as the possibility of eroding the trust that is essential to the maintenance of healthy relationships. Even when well-intentioned, exposing shame will make us feel vulnerable at first and [appear to] corrode trust. Lauren acknowledges this when she assesses Harry's anger and frustration. "Was he angry with me for almost breaking up the group? He had reason to be, I suppose," she thinks to herself (p. 194). Understanding that trust has been broken and knowing that she is not entitled to further trust, she says to Harry, "You've trusted me so far—and I've trusted you. I've put my life in your hands. What are you going to do?" (p. 193). In that moment, Harry decides to capitalize off her shame. He uses her disclosure as an opportunity to blackmail her into crossing a boundary, demanding more vulnerability, conveniently forgetting that she had just found the courage to share a secret with him.

This reminds us of Sara Ahmed's (2003; 2004) analysis of emotions sliding over some bodies while accumulating on others. Note in this scene that shame slides over Harry's white male body, accumulating instead on the two racialized Black women. Harry, aware of the power imbalance already in his favour, weaponizes shame, directing any not accumulating on him toward Lauren. It is one thing to deny and reject shame, it is another to humiliate and dehumanize others in an effort to not feel it. Rather than accepting and interrogating shame to understand its ebbs and flows and assess how it impedes interpersonal relationships, Black and

other people of colour are dehumanized through objectification that repositions the Black body as the site and origin of shame (Halberstam, 2005b). This is in stark contrast with the prideful white body, through which white people feel better about their own internalized shame, which is why, for Halberstam, the projection of shame is intentional. Even when unconscious it is “neither random nor unpredictable” (2005b, p. 224).

In putting Lauren in a vulnerable position, Harry “can access the pleasure of humiliation without actually having to embody the shame” (Halberstam, 2005b, p. 225). Like the white slave masters, he exploits Laurens’ hyperempathy. He uses her emotions against her, insisting that, for him, rebuilding trust means having even more access to the intimate details of her life. He wants to read her diary, to know what she keeps in her journal. “What do you write in your book every night?” he asks. “Interesting shift,” Lauren assesses. “My thoughts. The day’s events. My feelings,” she responds. True to his white male privilege he asks, “Things you can’t say? Things that are important to you?” “Yes,” she replied. “Then let me read something. Let me know something about the you that hides. I feel as though...as though you’re a lie. I don’t know you. Show me something of you that’s real” (pp. 194–195) he asks of the already vulnerable Black disabled woman.

Lauren is taken aback. “What a request! Or was it a demand?” she ponders (p. 195). In a move that is reminiscent of the white male gaze and surveillance culture, Harry demands more intimate access to Lauren, like software programs used by online stalkers to “troll” and surveil women 24/7. Shoshana Magnet and Kelly Gates (2009) explain that some

computer programs may be covertly installed. Once set up, the software gives the installer second-by-second screen shots of what is happening on the computer or cell phone. Information transmitted may include email messages or communication sent by an

Internet phone. Every moment of the target's day may be tracked—including for example, email sent to a domestic violence shelter, or a call made to a crisis hotline. (p. 10)

Harry reminds us of state surveillance of Black activists like Malcolm X, Angela Davis, and Assata Shakur and those in the Black Panther Party and Black Lives Matter. Or Japan's militarist government keeping Japanese suffragists under close surveillance (Molony, 2010). Keeping tabs on those who pose a threat is a form of domination through control dynamics. Harry understands this. Gaining access to unprecedented information like her diary is for his personal gain, not hers. He knows that access to Lauren's journals will give him even more power over her.

Lauren, not wanting to lose Harry, succumbs to the pressure and accommodates him. In any case, she agrees to his request. "The risks you ask me to take, Harry...But, yes, I'll show you some of what I've written. I want to. It'll be another first for me," she explains (p. 195). She even goes so far as to choose with care which entry she wants to introduce him to. "Harry did feel lied to, and perhaps he wondered what lies I was still telling or living," she reasons (p. 199). "He had to be eased into them. If he read the wrong thing, it would just increase the distance between us," she reflects (p. 195). This interaction reveals some of the more violent negotiations shame can bring us to, what Brown (2010) identifies as "moving *toward* others by seeking to appease and please" (p. 46). This has to do with the fear of disconnection discussed above.

However, unlike the fear of disconnection that makes us pretend to be something we are not, here, fear makes us want to give our power away. Rather than fight or flee, we fawn. We become who others need us to be, even when it goes against our belief systems and threatens our safety or way of life. Our people pleasing tendencies lead us to disavow ourselves. Even after she grants Harry permission to read her journal, Lauren understands that something has shifted and

changed. "I couldn't prevent Harry from keeping other things as well: His new distrust for me, for instance, almost his new dislike. I was not quite Lauren Olamina to him any longer" (p. 199). As such, Harry is successful at manipulating Lauren, using shame as a tool. Shame, the withholding and exposure of it, diminishes, if not outright destroys, any sense of trust between the two. Here, even moving toward is a distancing and separation.

Shame: Implications for Feminists

In *Josephine and Me: Teaching About Racism in Women Studies*, Merle Woo (2003) drew our attention to tensions between feminists within academia. As an educator, Woo shared an experience of breakdown in communication and how differences of opinion rendered women of colour silent in spaces they believed should be "emotionally safe spaces." Similarly, in *The Race to Innocence: Confronting Hierarchical Relations Among Women*, Mary Louise Fellows and Sherene Razack (1998) called this, "the problem of competing marginalities" (p. 335). This is when women belonging to the dominant group are concerned only with their own marginalization and fail to identify their participation as oppressors of other women, maintaining innocence even when having wronged. This results in what Fellows and Razack pinpointed as "securing a toehold on respectability," whereby these same women assert their domination over others because they feel it is "the only way to win respect for her claim to subordination" (1998, p. 336). The idea being that claiming victimhood and calling attention to their own subordination somehow frees them from the responsibility of acknowledging the accusation of subordinating other women, thereby "racing to innocence" without any considerations for how they occupy dominator culture. In this way, the race to innocence foregrounds self-victimization that moves us *against* and *away* from other feminists.

Unable to assess how they are implicated in the oppression of others, white feminists in turn centre themselves, continuing to engage in practices that oppress others (Fellows and Razack, 1998). Doris Davenport (2015) wrote, “white feminists have a serious problem with truth and ‘accountability,’ about how/why they perceive black wimmin as they do” (p. 82). She added,

somewhere deep down (denied and almost killed) in the psyche of racist white feminists there is some perception of their real position: powerless, spineless, and invisible. Rather than examine it, they run from it. Rather than seek solidarity with wimmin of color, they pull rank within themselves. (2015, p. 84)

And victimize themselves in the process.

In *White Tears/Black Scars: How White Feminism Betrays Women of Color*, writer Ruby Hamad (2020) directed our attention to author Luuvie Ajayi's concept of “the weaponizing of white women's tears,” whereby when challenged by Black and other women of colour, white women will “lean into her racial privilege to turn the tables and accuse the other woman of hurting, attacking, or bullying her” (p. 7). Hamad added, “having a legitimate grievance is no match for the strategic tears of a white damsel in distress whose innocence is taken for granted...Whether we are angry or calm, shouting or pleading, we are always seen as the aggressors.” She concluded that

this process almost always siphons the sympathy and support of any onlookers to the apparently distressed white woman, helping her avoid accountability that may be due and leaving the woman of colour out in the cold, often with no realistic option but to accept blame and apologize. (2020, pp. 7, 9).

Such dynamics are far from passive or benevolent; they result in harsh consequences for Black and other women of colour, including material and fatal repercussions. Hamad went on to state that Black and other women of colour who are charged by white women of “dividing the sisterhood,” or engaging in “racism against white women” risk being “blackballed” or “fired” (2020, pp. 8, 9). Unable to confront how they subordinate others, white women view themselves as innocent.

This lack of accountability is tied to avoiding shame because accountability requires that we grapple with shame (see also BCRW video *How Shame Can Block Accountability*, 2019). As Sara Ahmed (2015) insisted, stepping into wrongdoing means simultaneously moving into shame. In blaming others and victimizing themselves, white feminists redirect shame away by assuming a self-righteous stance, which justifies any feelings of animosity, resentment, fragility, and rage expressed toward those who ask of them critical analysis and accountability. In playing victim, they get to be right while making others wrong. As Brené Brown (2010) suggested, this is necessary for keeping shame at bay. This inevitably gets in the way of interpersonal relationships, and by extension, any collaboration that could be productive for the collective.

Conclusion

I fear the day will come when we are freer from structural and systemic oppression only to realize that we are *still* not liberated from ourselves and each other. What results is lateral and intra-violence, leaving the structural and systemic uninterrupted. Shame highlights just how easy it is to split off from lines of flight that deterritorialize and move into lines of articulation that territorialize (see Lush, 1992). What I mean by this is that the maladaptive behaviours and negative thought patterns we adopt to soothe and negotiate shame create pathways for disintegration and relationship breakdown (see Lush, 1992; Stearns, 2017), setting us in motion

away and apart, toward and against (Brown, 2010). While shame is subjective and not the only variable that stands in the way of feminist solidarity, its relational elements need to be accounted for because the emotion of shame is tied to so many different aspects of life, including interpersonal relationships. When an accumulation of shame sticks to feminist subjects in excess, it becomes more difficult to build with one another, resulting in failed or subpar dialogue (Fellows & Razack, 1998). We in turn find conferences riddled with conflict, coalitions that disintegrate, and ineffective organizing (see Fellows & Razack, 1998). Further to this, those who draw shame in white feminists who are unable to confront their role as oppressors can find themselves a target of revenge and violent retaliation.

While the weaponization of shame can turn dangerous for anyone, when used by white women against Black women, it can result in some lasting and damaging consequences, such as the loss of employment, online ridicule and backlash, or death threats. Black women are never extended the same grace and dignity as white women. Ruby Hamad (2020) wrote that we are rarely considered worthy of sympathy and support. If we are angry, it is because we are bullies. If we are crying, it is because we are indulging in the cult of victimhood. If we are poised, it is because we lack emotion. If we are emotional, it is because we are less rational human and more primitive animal. (p. 16)

While emotions are still framed in public discourse as frivolous and unintelligent, these dynamics can seriously derail crucial feminist work that could otherwise transform society. From feminists taking sick and mental health days for recovery, or needing to constantly recuperate, to disability leaves, leave of absences, and sabbaticals, we have to consider how shame (though not the only variable) not only moves us away from each other, but also takes us away from the crucial work we engage in. It halts progress, stifles creativity, and dampens moods and spirits. In

the most extreme of cases, toxic dynamics rooted in shame can cause individuals to take their own lives or be killed.

While these examples may not seem related to shame, I want to suggest that these are some of the dangers that surface when Black and other women of colour dare to push back and shame men or white women. In this way, this chapter has been a call to our attention, asking that we consider more thoroughly how shame destabilizes how we are in relation to one another and feminist work. While not explicitly stated in this chapter, what undergirds these dynamics are structural and systemic problems interwoven with emotions. The next chapter addresses the dynamics we adopt vis-à-vis structural and systemic domination, linking shame with what bell hooks (2013) identified as “imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy.” Because, while shame at the individual and interpersonal level may come off as passive, when shame is used as a weapon and technology, it is fatal. This is neither exaggeration, melodrama, nor hyperbole. People have died because of excess shame, be it from death by suicide or murder (Crowder and Kimmelmeier, 2018). Constantly triggering shame in one another will always yield harmful repercussions. Shame used as a disciplinary tool will have us enacting what Angela Davis (2016a) identified as, “the state in us.” This is when shame becomes particularly dangerous - when it truly separates and divides us.

Notes

¹ Other than Harry and Zahra, the group consists of the Douglas', a mixed-race family of three, Travis, Natividad, and their baby, Domingo; Taylor Franklin Bankole, a fifty-seven-year-old Black African American who Lauren later marries; sisters Allison “Allie” and Jillian “Jill” Gilchrist, “two medium-size, brown-haired white women in their twenties”; Justin Rohr, a three-year-old orphan; a mixed race family of two, Emery Tanaka Solis and her nine-year-old daughter, Tori, escaped Black slaves both living with hyperempathy; and another family of two, Grayson Mora, “a Black Latino” and his daughter, Doe, both runaway slaves also living with hyperempathy.

² Neurodivergent is used here intentionally over neurodiversity to stress not only neurological difference but the rebellion, defiance, resistance, and nonconformity that tends to get ostracized even within neurodiverse communities.

³ Elaine N. Aron, Arthur Aron, and Jadzia Jagiellowicz (2012) wrote, "SPS (unrelated to Sensory Processing Disorder) is proposed to be a genetically determined trait involving a deeper cognitive processing of stimuli that is driven by higher emotional reactivity" (p. 262).

⁴⁴ As Lauren notes about another character named Mora, the only male she had ever met with hyperempathy, "He did a lot to keep people away from him—keep them from knowing too much about him, keep them from seeing what he was feeling, or that he was feeling anything—a male sharer, desperate to hide his terrible vulnerability" (p. 324).

Parable of the Talents: Unraveling Shame

Introduction

Shame thrives where power is struggled for, abused, in excess, or imbalanced. Those with excess power who abuse it weaponize shame to control others for personal gain. This chapter is inspired by somatic teacher Prentis Hemphill, who, in a podcast interview on *Blackness and Belonging*, connected shame with anti-Black racism and white supremacy, suggesting that shame is useful for controlling people (see Irresistible, 2017). This chapter follows a similar logic. It addresses what shame looks like when enacted by systems of domination with excess power, like the state and its agents.³³ Of interest is how shame generated from above trickles down and gets taken up by the everyday individual at the interpersonal level. To illustrate, I look again at Lauren Olamina, but this time in Octavia Butler's second book in the *Parables* series, *Parable of the Talents*, where the protagonist still lives in an American society rife with abuse of power, her life overburdened by white men like the president and his supporters.

I would be remiss to not directly address white patriarchy. It would be irresponsible of me to only blame white women for generating shame without addressing white men too. It is white male dominator culture that holds the ideological and paradigmatic power necessary to generate shame for all women, including white women. White male supremacy is where white feminism anchors itself and finds its stronghold, though simultaneously claiming to resist it. Using the storyline of *Talents*, this chapter looks at shame in the following three ways: 1) In using negative stereotypes and misinformed framings of Black women as shameful, the media, the state, and corporations deploy shame to construct Black women as shameful, which inevitably harms and oppresses them by way of sociocultural, political, economic, and health

inequalities; 2) These unfair disparities have consequences for Black women, as such, shame becomes a form of punishment used to discipline Black women framed as shameful; and 3) This process, whereby some Black women conform to the status quo as a response to punishment, highlights shame as a form of social control used to manipulate Black women. This suggests that when shame is weaponized by those in positions of power and authority, it makes Black women more malleable, and therefore more controllable. Shame's lines are traced in this way to consider how tensions related to shame can derail and delay, if not completely dismantle, feminist initiatives, obstructing work that could otherwise transform society.

***Parable of the Talents* Mirroring Historical and Contemporary America**

While *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents* are fictional texts, the histories that Octavia Butler draws from are factual. She based both novels in her own personal experiences, as well as American history, says Micah Moreno (2020). In an interview with *Essence* (2000) she shared that the secret to predicting the future lies in studying the past. In this way, for Moreno (2020), *Parable of the Talents* serves as a cautionary tale. The postapocalyptic America of Lauren's tale is merely a reflection of American history repeating itself (Moreno, 2020). Butler spoke to the importance of studying history as a way to forecast the future, which in the *Parables* series, highlights poverty, drug addiction, the rise of big pharma, illiteracy, police brutality, increased crime, and criminalization, as well as high mortality rates for Black and Brown people and the defunding of social services and public schools (Butler, 2000; see also Aguirre, 2017; Anderson, 2020). Butler read and studied *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* and other such books on Nazi Germany to write both novels. She stated, "All I did was look around at the problems we are neglecting now and gave them about 80 years to grow into full-

fledged disasters. I use our past and present behaviors as guides to the kind of world we seem to be creating” (p. 165). She added,

The past is filled with repeating cycles of strength and weakness, wisdom and stupidity, empire and ashes. To study history is to study humanity. And to try to foretell the future without studying history is like trying to learn to read without bothering to learn the alphabet. (2000, p. 166)

Butler wrote the Parable series from a place of deep historical research, giving her knowledge and insight that would prove useful in telling Lauren Olamina's fictional tale.

As the feminist adage goes, “the personal is political.” Lauren Olamina illustrates this in the novel by offering the reader insight into her internal, psychological, emotional, and personal life (Harris-Perry, 2011, p. 5). She documents trials and tribulations in her diaries and journals, which are later found and sorted through by her daughter. Set in the future of 2032 (to 2090), in *Parable of the Talents* the sociopolitical and economic climate in the United States has worsened since we last saw Lauren in *Parable of the Sower*. The book takes place during and after a period referred to as “the Apocalypse,” or more commonly, “the Pox” (p. 8), which lasted from 2015, or perhaps even before the turn of the millennium, through to 2030 (p. 85), with flashbacks to earlier times. Lauren describes this time as, “a decade and a half of chaos” (p. 8). In the story, “there were several small, bloody shooting wars going on around the world” (p. 8). Butler writes,

Kenya and Tanzania were fighting; Bolivia and Peru are having border disputes. Pakistan and Afghanistan have joined forces in a religious war against India. One part of Spain is fighting against another. Greece and Turkey are on the edge of war, and Egypt and Libya are slaughtering one another. China, like Spain, is tearing at itself. (p. 83)

Meanwhile, in the United States, Texas Senator Andrew Steele Jarret has been inaugurated as president. He declares war with Canada and Alaska, which has gained independence from the US. There was also talk of Texas gaining independence from the United States and themes of imperialism and colonialism that mirror historical and present-day rhetoric.

President Jarret's conquest reminds readers of European empires like the Portuguese, who, in 1471, were the first Europeans to arrive in parts of Africa now known as Ghana, originally the Asante Empire, later known as the "Gold Coast" (see Edgerton, 1995; Obeng, 1996). By 1685, the French, British, Spanish, Italian, Belgian, German, Dutch, and Danish colonists and missionaries all followed to conquer and colonize much of Africa in what has come to be known as "the Scramble for Africa" (Edgerton, 1995; Osei, 1999). This eventually expanded to other parts of the world, including Turtle Island, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, India, Indonesia, Cambodia, Philippines, the Caribbean and West Indies, New Caledonia, Guam, New Zealand, and Australia, to name but a few places where European men stole land and claimed ownership. Jewish American writer Mab Segrest (2003) wrote, "By 1914, Europe controlled 80% of the globe: 283 Europeans would rule nine hundred million non-European peoples" (p. 247). Segrest goes on to suggest that white Europeans "seemed driven by a psychosis of domination" (2003, p. 248); other scholars have noted the same (see for, Somé 1997; 1999).

Edgerton (1995, p. 9) cites that the Portuguese were particularly brutal in Angola, and that the Germans were the more draconian among the European powers, mainly in Eastern and Southern Africa. In Ghana, the British posed the most threat (Edgerton, 1995). Edgerton wrote, "armed with repeating rifles and machine guns, the British burned homesteads, destroyed crops...killing about one thousand five hundred people, a number so large that they were unwilling to reveal the truth to London" (1995, p. 10). Similarly, Segrest (2003) contended that

“British racism was even harsher than the Spanish variety, partly because the British did not have to reckon with the competing interests of the Catholic Church and partly because British capitalism was more ruthless as Britain gained control of the slave trade” (p. 251). The role of the church here is important.

African shaman Malidoma Patrice Somé (1997) and Indigenous author and politician Wab Kinew (2015) have documented how some Christian missionaries exported patriarchal, anti-Indigenous, anti-Black, and anti-POC teachings through global missions and residential schools. In *Ritual: Power, Healing, and Community*, Somé, a Black continental African, shared accounts of being kidnapped from his family home as a child to be raised by a French Catholic missionary in Burkina Faso, West Africa. Somé, who later escaped, speaks of violence and abuse at the hands of caretakers, often priests and nuns. His missionary experience, particularly his escape from the residential school, reads like the narratives of enslaved Black Americans who ran away, as he ventured through wooded areas at night, using stars to guide him back to his family home, walking for days on end. Much like Lauren Olamina venturing toward a new life by foot, before and after escaping enslavement and the occupation of her own home.

In, “*We Need the Stars*”: *Change, Community, and the Absent Father in Octavia Butler's “Parable of the Sower” and “Parable of the Talents,”* Mathias Nilges (2009) posited that for Black African Americans stars are a sign of freedom. Much like Somé, they guided many enslaved Africans to freedom. Which is telling, because in the *Parables* novels, stars were no longer as visible during Lauren's time, in comparison to her fathers' and generations before, a sign of regression. Why it was important for Lauren that “Earthseed take root among the stars” (Nilges, 2009, p. 1338). For Nilges, this dream to take root among the stars symbolized a shift away from centralized paternalistic power and rule to a return to ultimate freedom (p. 1339).

"We need the stars," Lauren says, "we need purpose" (Nilges, 2009, p. 1339; Butler, 1998, p. 179). In this way, for enslaved Black Americans during antebellum slavery, Lauren and other enslaved in *Talents*, and Malidoma Somé's story, stars come to represent freedom and the future.

Somé's testimony runs parallel with those of Indigenous communities in North America who were brought up in residential schools run by the American and Canadian government along with churches of different denominations. In *The Reason You Walk*, Wab Kinew (2015) shared stories of his father's experience as a residential school survivor in Ontario, Canada. Essentially, his father was told never to speak his native language or wear cultural garb, both of which were punishable offences. Like many who have since come forward against the Canadian government and Catholic church, Kinew's father was physically assaulted, sexually violated, and faced racism meant to "eliminate the Indian"; what others have named genocide (see Linklater, 2014; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). Kinew's father was taught that Indigenous people were lesser than white people and was made to love and appreciate whiteness and the powers it wielded. One way churches were used to suppress communities of colour was by successfully brainwashing them into believing they were sinners by virtue of their ethnicity and race and that only a white God or Jesus could save them (Kinew, 2015; Somé, 1997). This can be accurately identified as anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism. This quest for power "driven by a psychosis of domination" remained well into the twentieth century.

However, colonial occupations are not merely a thing of the past; there are still occupations that continue globally today. According to Hawaiian scholar Haunani-Kay Trask (2003), France continues to occupy Kanaky (New Caledonia) while using French Polynesia as a nuclear weapon testing site. The United States similarly still occupies Guam, the Federated States of Micronesia, Belau, the Marshall Islands, American Samoa, and Hawaii (Trask, 2003).

In all these regions, local Indigenous communities and nations continue to resist colonial occupation,³⁴ including in the Americas.

Parable of the Talents Overview

In *Talents*, the US is in “climatic, economic, and sociological crisis. Education [has] become more a privilege of the rich than [a] basic necessity. There is dangerous environmental degradation, and poverty, hunger, and disease [have] become inevitable for more and more people” (p. 8). Butler writes, “The climate is still changing, warming. It’s supposed to settle at a new stable state someday. Until then, we’ll go on getting a lot of violent erratic weather around the world.” She adds, “The warming has made tropical diseases like malaria and dengue normal part of life in the warm, wet Gulf Coast and Southern Atlantic coast states” (p. 82). As such, we can think of *Parable of the Talents* as a story of the anthropocene, whereby human activity alters fundamental aspects of Earth’s ecosystems (Leong, 2016). In, *The Mattering of Black Lives: Octavia Butler’s Hyperempathy and the Promise of the New Materialisms*, Diana Leong (2016) shares that in highlighting global warming, climate crisis, biodiversity loss, and environmental racism, Octavia Butler illustrates destructive human patterns that have devastating consequences for nonhuman systems. These regressive changes that mirror our present-day catastrophes suit the president just fine.

President Jarret is an alt-right white supremacist capitalist patriarch, what Lauren identifies as a “demagogue, rabble-rouser, and hypocrite” (p. 20). He is hungry for power and abuses any that he is given or takes. The head of state is a leader of Christian America, a ruthless religious sect and secret society “made up of thieves, kidnappers, slavers, and murderers” (p. 306), created to “help make America great again” (p. 20). In, *A Dystopian Novelist Predicted Trump’s Campaign Slogan in the ’90s*, Maddie Crum (2016) broke down the lineage of this

infamous slogan now trademarked by Donald Trump and used widely by right-wing American conservatives. Crum noted that Butler wrote this line two decades before the 45th president of the United States did (see also Aguirre, 2017; Anderson, 2020). However, Crum also noted that in the late 1970s, Ronald Reagan printed "Make America great again" on buttons in response to increasing inflation rates. Butler's use of the slogan "Make America Great Again" is precisely how it is used today, a nostalgic yearning for a racist America influenced by Klansmen emboldened to put all non-whites in their place.

In *Talents*, "the all-male Christian America Center Security Force was made up of retired and off-duty cops" (p. 319), a nod to white supremacy's ties with the long history of policing in America. We can look to Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor (2016) and Robyn Maynard (2017), who teach us that North American police services have historical ties with slavery and slave patrollers. Additionally, Christian America gives readers Ku Klux Klan (KKK) vibes, a real-life white supremacist domestic terrorist organization with roots in Christianity formed in the United States following the civil war (Chow, 2018). The KKK uses symbolic representations of power such as the crucifix cross, which they have been known to burn or raise up when burning down property belonging to Black people or boasting about lynching them (Chow, 2018). In *Talents*, they call themselves, "Jarret's Crusaders." Lauren explained, "They're extremists who believe that reeducating heathen adults and placing their young children in Christian American homes are the only way to restore order and greatness" (pp. 306, 19–20, 322). This is a nod to the Indigenous children who were placed in white homes during what is known as the Sixties Scoop, which began in Canada around the mid-1950s but extended south of the border into the US and lasted well into the '80s (see Dart, n.d.; Frideres, 2016; Linklater, 2014). Much like how Indigenous families were expected to be grateful that their children went

to “better” homes, Lauren and others were expected to be grateful that Christian America had “saved” their children from their “heathen ways.”

In this way, while Butler's Christian America is fictional and set in the future, her prophetic writing is at once historical, taking readers back to sites of white male violence such as the theft, exploitation, and enslavement of Black Africans in the “New World” (Osei, 1999); the US government overthrowing Queen Lili-uokalani in 1893 and occupying the then independent state of Hawai'i (Trask, 2003); the literal castration of Black men in America, whereby their genitals were kept as a sort of souvenir (Segrest, 2003); and Jim Crow laws (see Jones, 2019; Maynard, 2017; Taylor, 2016). Such unfounded and barbaric logics are in line with events like the Salam witch hunts in Massachusetts in 1692 (Koopsen & Young, 2020); germ warfare conducted by the US military against Indigenous people in 1837, whereby European settlers gave Indigenous communities smallpox-infected blankets while withholding vaccines (Koopsen & Young, 2020); scorched earth policies where Indigenous lands including crops and villages were burned to the ground (Koopsen & Young, 2020; Deerinwater, 2020); the criminalization of Indigenous cultural and traditional practices like pow wows and sweat lodges through the implementation of racist and anti-Indigenous policies like the Indian Act (Anderson, 2013; Bear., & the Tobique Women's Group, 2013; Koopsen & Young, 2020; St. Denis, 2013); what has come to be known as the Chinese head tax in British Columbia, what some Chinese Canadians call “Canadian Apartheid” (Hobbs & Rice, 2013); Japanese internment camps in British Columbia, where Japanese people were sent to concentration camps after the attack on Pearl Harbour (Hobbs & Rice, 2013); eugenics and the forced sterilization of Indigenous women in Alberta that was legislated by the province (Deerinwater, 2020; Savage, 2013); the theft, exploitation, and enslavement of Black Africans in places like Quebec and Ontario (although

Canada is often touted as the “land of the free” for Black American and Caribbean slaves; see Cooper, 2013); or the displacement of Black people from Africville in Halifax, Nova Scotia, where Black communities have been treated as second-class citizens (Cooper, 2013).

To make matters worse, in the year 2032, in his home state of Texas, the president brings back slavery and the exploitation of Black and Brown people known as debt slaves, eventually spreading slavery throughout the whole country.³⁵ Though tension and conflict had previously risen on her property, Acorn, the community had remained peaceful. That is, until it was attacked by Christian American slave owners, many of whom were reverends in the church. Gabriela Brushini Grecca (2021) pointed to similarities between Lauren's reality as an enslaved person and antebellum slavery in the nineteenth century, highlighting arranged marriages between enslaved, narratives of escape, running away, and the enslaved “smoothing their divergence” when facing threat (p. 357). While Butler appears to tell a story of slavery through the lens of a historical past, sociologists have shared that there is currently more slavery now than ever before in history, including mass incarceration and human trafficking (Hobbs & Rice, 2013). Today, people are bought and sold for their organs, entertainment, sex work, domestic and agricultural labour, or factory work in sweat shops, prisons, and export processing zones (see Hobbs & Rice, 2013; Tomlinson, 2013; Waring, 2013). In this regard, Butler was attentive to the cyclical nature of human injustice and tended to it.

In *Talents*, the slavers took over Lauren and her husband Bankole's land, turning it into a plantation-style prison. Outcasts from other marginalized communities were brought in to be tortured and used for their free labour. At one point the camp grew to “roughly 250 inmates and 20 guards” (p. 232). The slavers used physical force and psychological and emotional warfare to rule the site. Fear and the anticipation of it led to a frightful existence for her community, or as

Lauren put it, “a university of pain” (p. 227). The newly enslaved worked long punishing hours (sometimes 16 hours straight), on little to no sleep and even less food. “They lashed you if you stopped to pee. You had to just do it on yourself and keep working,” Lauren elaborated (p. 241). Men and women captives were divided and placed in separate rooms. Everyone went to bed late, rose early, and slept on the classroom and library floors.

The Christian American slave owners attacked the land, making them cut down and destroy most of their trees and plants. All their book collections, teaching materials, marriage licences, tax receipts, and deeds to the land were burned and destroyed, along with their children's records, such as birth certificates and report cards (although Lauren was smart enough to make multiple copies, hiding the originals in a safety deposit box located off the property). She explained, “Our captors order us to kneel, to pray, to sing, to testify, and we do. They eat our food and feed us their leavings. They live in our houses and sleep in our beds while we sleep on the floor.” Adding,

Being lashed hard several times is enough to induce temporary coordination problems and memory loss.... We were not married by a minister of the Church of America.

Therefore, we have been living in sin— “fornicating like dogs!” I heard one Crusader say. That same Crusader dragged Diamond Scott to his cabin and raped her. (p. 209)

As Lauren resolves, “There are no words to explain the twisted, schizoid ugliness of this” (p. 234). Ugliness that worked best when the targeted individual or group was framed as shameful and thus deserving of their oppression. Even better if they are publicly shamed to set an example for others to stay orderly and in line.

Weaponizing Shameful Stereotypes to Oppress and Harm Black Women

Dr. Melisa Harris-Perry believes that oppressions such as racism and sexism should be understood as shaming others based on their identity. Influenced by Harris-Perry's (2011) *Sister Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes, and Black Women in America*, this section looks at how negative stereotypes and misinformed framings of Black women as shameful get weaponized by the state to further oppress and harm communities already forced into marginalization and vulnerability. To quote Harris-Perry, "My point is not that shame is uniquely politically relevant for black women; rather, my goal is to show the specific ways that shame is meaningful for black women's politics" (2011, p. 119). While Black men and other communities are also subjected to stigma due to shame, the emphasis in this chapter is on Black women. Even then, as Harris-Perry reminds us, not all Black women experience individual or group shame in the ways framed in this chapter.

A fascist organization, members of Christian America "have been known to form mobs and burn people at the stake for being witches." The president claims these people are witches and "Nasty. Very Nasty" (p. 89), Lauren is one such target. They also include "cultists," "anyone who doesn't quite match Jarret's version of a Christian—Moslems, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, Mormons, Jehovah's Witness', Catholics, atheists, or well-to-do-eccentrics" (p. 19). Adding, "'Cultist' is a great catchall term for anyone who fits into no other large category, and yet doesn't quite match Jarret's version of Christianity" (p. 19). For Jarret, these people were shameful, a threat to the nation, and had to be dealt with accordingly.

As the founder of Earthseed, Lauren posed a direct threat to the president, who constructed her as a shameful cult leader and Black witch to be feared and eliminated. Lauren elaborates, "They believe in what they are doing. They do believe that we inmates are, somehow,

enemies of the country. Their superiors have told them that parasites and heathens like us brought down 'America the mighty'" (p. 233). With this justification in mind, Christian American slavers claimed that their racist ideologies and exploitative messaging were rooted in service. "They look at us with unmistakable hatred, disgust, and contempt, and they insist that it's love that they feel. Their God requires them to love us, after all" (p. 248), Lauren states. And so, their captors continued to abuse and mistreat them. To this end, because of her activism, she was framed as a terrorist and threat to the state. An identity marker that would eventually lead to increased vulnerability for her.

However, it should be noted that Lauren too weaponized stereotypes. Understanding the power of stereotypes, she trained her community to "attack the credibility" of anyone that suspected them of being on the run. She says, "Accuse them of being secret cultists, witches, Satanists, thieves. Whatever you think will endanger your accusers the most, say it!" (p. 274). These are the same labels that others had used against her. She co-opts them and turns them on her enemies in the face of danger as a defense and survival strategy, precisely as the Christian American leaders did to her in their state of fear, viewing her as a threat. Constructing all sorts of stories about her and her followers, and ensuring that the public turned against them, hoping to make her more vulnerable to attack and abuse.

As Harris-Perry (2011) said, if we feel social shame, it is because we perceive an imagined audience witnessing us as shameful. Like the president and Christian American leaders, those in positions of power, government officials, as well as the media, are instrumental in creating audiences that perceive Black women as shameful, and this in turn shapes their social lives. This is particularly true for Black women and girls, who, Harris-Perry said, rely on social networks to construct their self-identity.

Western society has identified certain groups as characteristically [more] shameful than others (Stearns, 2017), and Black people are one of them. As Harris-Perry pointed to, the media portrays Black people as dangerous criminals, linking Blackness with criminality, looting, drug abuse, homicide, and rape (2011, p. 13). Black women are overgeneralized as failing to conform to normative scripts in comparison to those of the dominant group (Ahmed, 2015; Harris-Perry, 2011; Winfrey-Harris, 2015). They are seen as welfare queens, incapable housekeepers, negligent mothers, and bad role models to their children (Harris-Perry, 2011). These framings have a history.

Cultural studies theorist Stuart Hall (1997a) and writer Tamara Winfrey-Harris (2015) argued that negative stereotypes of Black people emerged with the construction of Blackness as early as the seventeenth century, when the idea of race developed to justify slavery and the subordination of Black people. Jim Crow laws, for example, contributed to the production of shame, forcing shame on Black Americans (Harris-Perry, 2011). From segregated schools to water fountains, the state endorsed propaganda that depicted Blackness as a contagious disease that needed to be quarantined (Harris-Perry, 2011, p. 111). Specific tropes emerged about Black womanhood as well, placing Black women into three distinct categories: (a) Jezebel, the stereotype that Black women are hyper, overly, and innately sexual; (b) Mammy, Black women as desexualized, nurturing, and self-sacrificing; and (c) Sapphire, the angry or strong Black woman (Harris-Perry, 2011; see also hooks, 2000; Mock, 2017). In *Talents*, Lauren was constructed as Mammy and Sapphire. To use Harris-Perry, these stereotypes negatively shaped her social world, having sociocultural, economic, and political consequences, as her home was eventually occupied and she, her husband, and community, enslaved.

In shame we shrink, feel small, and make ourselves small (Harris-Perry, 2011). Unlike pride, which makes us taller and more confident, shame makes us timid and closed off, which is especially corrosive for Black women who internalize negative assumptions that say they are worthless and inferior (Harris-Perry, 2011). Not only do Black women respond to shaming negatively, but these stereotypes also change how others behave in relation to them. Because simply existing marks them as bad, wrong, and shameful, Black women do not even need to commit any bad act to be seen as shameful (Harris-Perry, 2011). As Harris-Perry contended, because the nature of shame is to distort the image of those framed as shameful, “shaming is not restricted to individuals whose acts transgress the law but is deployed against whole groups based on identity alone” (2011, p. 108). This is especially harmful when codified in law. When the media and state apparatus impose shameful narratives on Black women, they construct the Black body as defective and in need of fixing, correcting, or disciplining (Harris-Perry, 2011). This has lasting and punishing ramifications.

Weaponizing Shame as Discipline and Punishment

Shame will cause distress and make us uncomfortable. Harris-Perry (2011) suggested that Black women fight so hard for recognition as humans because dehumanization creates conditions for depression, alcoholism, social anxiety, personality disorders, suicide, and hostility that drives stigma and discrimination. Like Lauren Olamina's hyperempathy, excess shame connects with chronic pain, mental illness, and suicidality, a theme Mensah Adinkra (2012) explored in *Better Dead than Dishonored: Masculinity and Male Suicidal Behaviour in Contemporary Ghana*. As with fifteenth century feudal Britain and Japan, where shame was tied with dishonour and disgrace (Stearns, 2017), Adinkra speaks of suicide as the ultimate form of covering, as some prefer death over being seen as bringing shame and dishonour (although suicide is made sense of

in many different ways). "Death with honor is preferable to a life of shame," said one fifteenth century Englishman (Stearns, 2017, p. 42). It was this emphasis on dishonour as shameful that increased punitive approaches to shame (Kilday & Nash, 2016). This has to do with physiological responses to shame.

Harris-Perry (2011) noted that exposure to chronic shame causes the body to release hormones such as cortisol, which communicates to the body that we should hide, fight, or flee (p. 122). Because high cortisol levels can be debilitating, those who face repeated shame become more vulnerable to risk factors associated with poor health. Elevated cortisol levels contribute to weight gain, heart disease, and compromised immune systems. But social rejection leads to other problems as well. Black women get surveilled and judged and their space and privacy are invaded. As such, how others see Black women influences how they treat them. And rather than understanding this shame as projected by the external world, Black women internalize the shame and attribute their chronic shame to their own failings, believing that they are worthy of punishment.

In addition, shame incites conflict and is a by-product of it (Stearns, 2017). In conflict and disagreements, shame becomes intolerable, and rage becomes the most viable option to discharge shame, what Harris-Perry called "shame-rage spirals" (2011, p. 123). Shame produces secondary emotions such as anger, rage, anxiety, and fear (Brown, 2006: p. 45; Deonna et al., 2011). Rage rooted in shame can become particularly damaging, never passive, or benevolent (Deonna et al., 2011). Harris-Perry (2011) posited that rage "helps to ward off shame by protecting the self from further exposure" (p. 22; see also Deonna et al., 2011). When this gets coupled with patriarchy and misogynoir, it can have deadly consequences for Black women,

especially so when they try to redirect shame back to those who project it onto them in the first place.

Just as Blackness in America is marked by shame (Harris-Perry, 2011), so too is womanhood. Historically and to date, patriarchal churches in North America (if not globally), have played a major role in giving men a lot of power over women and children (Wall, 2015). The given assumption is that men are superior to women and therefore should be treated differently, which has always meant better. In this regard, missionaries have taught millions of people that women should submit to men, directions that get used to justify violence and abuse toward women and children who are typically framed as shameful (Wall, 2015). This is especially true when it comes to disciplining women.

In *Talents*, gone too are the days of women's rights. Instead, gendered disparities are rampant. The humanity, livelihood, and labour of women and girls are devalued and exploited. Butler writes, "Little girls are valued because they can be used in so many ways, and they can be coerced into being quick, docile, and disposable labor" (p. 40). On the other hand,

repression of women has become more and more extreme. A woman who expresses her opinions, "nags," disobeys her husband, or otherwise, "tramples her womanhood" and "acts like a man," might have her head shaved, her forehead branded, her tongue cut out, or worst case, she might be stoned to death or burned. (p. 50)

While set in the future, this treatment is reminiscent of public shaming in the past, as was discussed in the Introduction (see, Aitchison & Mechled-Garcia, 2021; Book, 2014; Garvey, 2014; Stearns, 2017). From being forced outside naked, whipped, branded, mutilated, or having their head shaved off in front of others, Lauren and other women in her community were

subjected to violence and abuse meant to discipline them, like was experienced by women in places like Europe, New England, or Japan.

Lauren reflects, "Most often, they lash a woman, then rape her. Rape is done with the pretense of secrecy. They say they're religious, but power has corrupted even the best of them" (233). Secrecy here is a paramount indicator that shame is present. Knowing that what they were doing was wrong, the slavers hid their vile actions, a function of shame. Some crusaders would rape a woman, then leave Lauren and Bankole's compound-turned-prison and return home to their family where they would live and perform a double life, hiding these shameful aspects of themselves. On the mistreatment of women Lauren adds,

We were all lashed. The men were made to watch. We were marched out of the school and lashed as we were made to kneel and pray, to scream out our sins, to beg for forgiveness, and to quote Bible verses on command. I kept thinking they would make a mistake and kill some of us. This was an orgy of abuse and humiliation. (p. 211)

Drunk with power, these Christian American slavers mask their fears, insecurities, and shame by exercising hypermasculinity, projecting their shame onto women. Lauren says of the public shaming, "Actual beatings couldn't have left me feeling any worse. I remember wishing I could die" (p. 211). It is important to note here that Jack Halberstam (2005b) connects shame with "a gendered form of sexual abjection" that "belongs to the feminine." Halberstam adds that "when men find themselves 'flooded' with shame, chances are they are being feminized in some way and against their will" (2005b, p. 226).

Pacifying this shame required a certain level of performativity where they vied for clandestineness and hid the parts of themselves that they believed would be rejected by others. Or they projected the shame onto others, like Lauren. Taking their shame out on her through

aggression. Fighting their inferiority complex rooted in shame by performing hyper-superiority.

These maladaptive mechanisms redirected shame away. It restored their sense of right when shame made them feel wrong (Brown, 2011, 2012, 2015; Harris-Perry, 2011; Vanzant, 2015).

But this comes at a cost; these ruptures were so painful that conflict was difficult to resolve. In many cases, it was the brutalized victim that is unable to find resolve, who gets stuck in shame not theirs. This reiterates the cultural assumption that women and the feminine are shameful, not men. This assertion distances men from shame.

For white men, especially those with fragile egos and toxic masculinity, shame is so unbearable that they will punish others for how they strike shame in them—even more so for darker complexioned disabled Black women, like Lauren. This is because it is women who are said to be shameful—dark-skinned women especially, as lighter complexions are afforded a buffer of sorts because of their proximity to whiteness. Although no woman is safe from such vile and toxic negative stereotypes tied with womanhood of any kind, what we find is that shame draws a sense of emasculation and feminization viewed as despicable and wrong (Biddle, 1997). And because shame is a powerful emotion contextualized as a feminine emotion, it reduces men and women to objects, the feminine, the abject, and the disgusting (Biddle, 1997, p. 227; see also Bissenbakker; Halberstam, 2005). In this way, while we all struggle with accepting and admitting to shame, white men (het-cis men in general) have a hard time with shame (see Halberstam, 2005b), especially with being seen as shameful by women.

Male fragility is important here. It links to shame associated with the failure to conform to societal norms. This mythical script suggests that (white) men should be and are dominant to (Black) women. This poses a challenge when white men, or men in general, are challenged by Black women, or women in general, especially when done publicly. As Sara Ahmed (2015)

insists, “shame implies that some quality of self has been brought into question” (p. 105). Due to misogynoir, most men cannot stand to be questioned by Black women. They become particularly volatile when “the badness of an action is transferred to [them], such that [they] feel [themselves] to be bad and to be found out as bad by others” (Ahmed, 2015, p.105). This is because shame makes all of us feel bad and wrong, which is unlike guilt. The difference between guilt and shame lies in identity formation tied to shame. With guilt, we perceive ourselves as having done something wrong or bad, but we do not internalize the action. With shame, we perceive ourselves as wrong and bad for having done something wrong (see Ahmed, 2015; Biddle, 1997; Bissenbakker, 2018). This way of constructing identity through the lens of shame is harmful, if not destructive.

Taking from Margaret Atwood, Keely Weiss (2019) wrote, “We have been taught that if a woman laughs at a man, she will be killed for it” (paras. 5). We cannot rule out shame as a catalyst. As Marit F. Svindseth and Paul Crawford (2019) explain in *Healing, Neutralizing, and Preventing Humiliation*, “public shaming, that is, humiliation, can drive people into psychologically compromised states, which, in turn, may develop into self-or-other-directed violence” (pp. 3–4). If we are serious about having our shame covered and hidden, when others threaten to expose said shame we will go so far as to enact violence as retaliation, to fight shame with shame, and get aggressive, says Dr. Brené Brown (2010). Some will stop at nothing to keep their shame hidden, including meeting those who draw shame in them with revenge, including intimidation, counter-shame campaigns, or violence. Lauren observes, “These men feast on our pain—and they call us parasites. [They] lash us until they have orgasms. Our screams and convulsions and pleas and sobs are what these men need to feel sexually satisfied” (p. 233). Drawing from Harris-Perry (2011), the hostility of the Christian American slavers gets redirected

as retaliation toward the rejecting other (p. 122). This is particularly true if the rejecting other is of a lower status, as Black women are.

In *So You've Been Publicly Shamed*, for instance, author Jon Ronson (2015) shared a story of a Black Jewish woman who finds herself a target of public shaming after responding to what she perceived as grossly inappropriate behaviour by white men at a conference. Because most men cannot stand to be questioned by Black women, her attempt to publicly shame them backfired, and in ways that other demographics will never experience, with the exception of women of colour like Anita Sarkeesian who was on the receiving end of online hate, showing us what happens when public shame and humiliation are used to discipline women.

The Internet, social media, and video games were created as innovative social solutions (Valenti, n.d.). In, *Anita Sarkeesian Interview: "The word "Troll" Feels Too Childish. This is Abuse*, Jessica Valenti (n.d.) points to feminist gamer Anita Sarkeesian who shared that the internet was born out of a desire for "ultimate democracy" (Valenti, n.d.). Sarkeesian quotes professor Alice Marwick who states, "The promise of the early internet was that it would liberate us from our bodies, and all the oppressions associated with prejudice. We'd communicate soul to soul, and get to know each other as people, rather than judging each other based on gender or race" (paras. 37). Sarkeesian goes on to add,

But because the default assumed identity was white and male, anyone who brought up their race or gender or dared to complain about bias was seen as disturbing that dream. We didn't build up this technology [while] understanding the power dynamics and the very real systems of oppression that were just going to follow us online. One of the profound things the feminist movement and the civil rights movement did was to change the systems we live in. They didn't stop every individual being sexist or racist, but they

changed the systems that we participated in, so you couldn't be that way in certain environments (paras. 37-8).

We have since seen that these sexist and racist dynamics did indeed follow us online. They are already playing out as bias in algorithms. Technology has been weaponized, and women bear the brunt of this violence, specifically, Black, Indigenous, and other racialized women, including those who identify as trans.

Jessica Valenti shares that it is women who are more likely to be severely harassed online compared to their male counterparts, adding that the abuse is more likely to be sexually violent in nature. Valenti goes on to share a study out of the University of Maryland that suggests that when women reveal their gender identity online, they are twenty-five times more likely to experience harassment. Even having a female sounding name was enough to up the frequency of harassment online (Valenti, n.d.). One such notable individual who faced brutal online abuse was Anita Sarkeesian. Sarkeesian has been victim of death and bomb threats (Valenti, n.d.). She was stalked and intimidated, her accounts hacked, and her and her family's information leaked (Valenti, n.d.). Men have created video games simulating her rape, reported her to the IRS and the FBI, and produced documentaries in an attempt to destroy her reputation and discredit her work (Valenti, n.d.). Sarkeesian attributes this online violence to toxic masculinities and misogyny toward women and feminists.

Like Anita Sarkeesian, Ronson outlines, the Black Jewish woman raised earlier, received death threats, lost her job, and had men online calling for her to be raped and killed. What bystanders learned quickly is that Black women do not get to partake in public shaming as freely as others because they are constructed by mainstream culture as the original site of shame (see Halberstam, 2005b). The assumption is that white people have pride and Black people are

shameful, therefore, a Black person cannot shame a white person, just as women cannot shame men, disabled people cannot shame able-bodied people, the poor cannot shame the rich, and so on. In all these cases, shame is redirected and projected right back, and at higher frequencies and intensities, to put the former back in their rightful place. This is usually achieved through manipulation and control dynamics.

Weaponizing Shame as Social Control

Shame can be used as a tool to get people to comply. For instance, shame is weaponized in cases of blackmail. The goal is to threaten to expose someone's shame, or to publicly shame them into doing what we want. Shame functions here as a control tactic, a topic that was discussed in the previous chapter as shame that moves us toward others. In that example, Harry Balter, Lauren's white male companion, weaponized shame to gain access to her journal entries. Knowing that she already felt guilty and ashamed, he leveraged his power to get her to do something he wanted, for his own personal gain, leaving her more vulnerable. That example looked at the dynamics we find in interpersonal relationships. This chapter, however, asks us to consider what this looks like when weaponized by the state for the same means, as a form of control, meant to force citizens to comply.

Peter Stearns (2017) shared that for the first half of the nineteenth century in North America, shame was productive for maintaining social order and decorum, adding that the connection between shame and social order was particularly beneficial before the importation of prisons from Europe to America, primarily because it kept people in line. In the United States, punishment through public shaming only decreased when prisons arrived and European settlers made their way from the east coast to the West, though the connection between these factors and public shaming was not made clear (Book, 2014). In any case, shame has proven to be useful in

getting people to conform and comply, with some finding it extra beneficial because it can cost less than other measures, depending on the kind of shaming that is enacted.

According to Aaron Book (2014), in Dan Kahan's earlier work *What Do Alternative Sanctions Mean*, professor Kahan advocated for shaming penalties as an alternative sanction in the legal system, and is quoted to have said, "shaming is a potentially cost-effective, politically popular method of punishment that will enjoy future success because people want more criminal punishment. They want a message. They want moral condemnation of their offender" (quoted in Book, 2014, p. 654). At the time, Dr. Kahan believed that ritualistic shaming penalties were cost effective and "less debilitating for offenders" (2076). Later, in *What's Really Wrong with Shaming Sanctions*, Dr. Kahan "recants" his earlier ideas from a decade prior, no longer advocating for shaming punishments as productive, advocating instead for restorative justice programs as better suited for minor forms of criminality³⁶. What is important to note here is that there have been those who believed that public shaming was an effective form of punishment legally. Aaron Book (2014) went on to say, "in light of the current violent and overcrowded atmosphere of American prisons, shaming constitutes an efficient, fiscally sound, and creative form of sentencing that can have positive deterrent effects and reduce recidivism rates" (p. 657). In this regard, shame, because of its intense emotional discomfort, is powerful in getting people to comply, and in some cases, tougher on the accused than prison (Stearns, 2017). Ronson (2015) quotes a conservative politician as having said,

I have put my share of folks in the penitentiary. Sixty-six percent of them go back to prison. Eighty-five of those people we publicly shamed we never saw again. It was too embarrassing for them the first time. It wasn't the "theatre of the absurd," it was the theatre of the *effective*. It worked. (86; emphasis in original)

It works especially well on vulnerable communities, like marginalized people who are most negatively impacted by public shaming and who are in turn most likely to conform as a survival tactic. Lauren found herself conforming to the violence directed at her.

“I’ve made it clear to the others through my own behavior that we should obey,” says a defeated Lauren, sick of all the violence and abuse. “Why should anyone resist and risk torture or death? What would be the good of that?” (p. 209). All the public shaming, the whipping, the lashes, the rape, the violence, all of it becomes too much for her and her community, though they find their ways to resist and plot escape. And while they do eventually escape, thanks to divine intervention from mother nature—a landslide comes to their rescue—public shaming, which was most effective because of the stereotypes thrust on them, was an effective way to get them to comply.

Research has shown that public shaming is most effective when the shamed individual is part of a community that they have close ties and strong social bonds with (Aitchison & Mechled-Garcia, 2021; Book, 2014; Brooks, 2014). The impact of public shaming is greatest with those who care about what others think of them (Aitchison & Mechled-Garcia, 2021; Book, 2014; Brooks, 2014). But even Black obedience still has a price to pay. “Even though we obey, the Crusaders must have their amusements. This is nothing compared to the fires of hell,’ they tell us. ‘Learn your lessons or you’ll suffer like this for all eternity!’ How can they do what they do if they believe what they say?” (p. 209), Lauren asks. But as we know with systems of domination like white supremacy, and the projections that come with it, none of it makes any logical sense, though justified as sound.

Implications for Feminists: Shame and Call-Out Culture

In, *A Note on Call-Out Culture*, activist Asam Ahmad (2015) defines call-out culture as: “the tendency among progressives, radicals, activists, and community organizers to publicly name instances or patterns of oppressive behaviour and language used by others. People can be called out for statements and actions that are sexist, racist, ableist, and the list goes on” (n.p.) Ahmad adds, “Because call-outs tend to be public, they can enable a particularly armchair and academic brand of activism: one in which the act of calling out is seen as an end in itself” (n.p.). Similarly, academic, and activist Michael Chin (2018) draws our attention back to Asam Ahmad (2015), Verónica Bayetti Flores (2014), and Katherine Cross (2014), who like Chin, address fear of call-out culture. Ahmad (2015) writes: “it isn’t an exaggeration to say that there is a mild totalitarian undercurrent not just in call-out culture but also in how progressive communities police and define the bounds of who’s *in* and who’s *out*” (quoted in Chin, 2018: 106; emphasis in original). Further to this Cross (2014) adds, “the wages of rage in our communities, and the often aimless, unchecked anger striking both within and without have created a climate of toxicity and fear that not only undermine our highest ideals, but also corrode the comforts of community for the very people who most need it” (n.p.). In this regard, everyday people, you, and I, including those of us that identify as feminists, can find ourselves engaged in what Chin identifies as lateral violence³⁷, doing *similar* work as the state (not to be confused with *the same*³⁸), and in the name of social justice.

As Brené Brown notes, we fight shame with shame. This plays out in an uncanny way that mirrors the state, whereby everyday people do the work of the state to police and discipline each other through punishment and harm. Chin states, “The practice of calling out replicates the criminal legal system because of its harsh, punitive nature” (113). Adding, “In both cases, the

perpetrators of violence can be isolated from their communities: in the first, the perpetrator is incarcerated by the criminal legal system, while in the second, the called-out perpetrator is pushed out of their social circles either actively or by being shamed for their political “crime” (113). Here, public shaming functions as a disciplinary tool meant to get those who are called out to conform, comply, and change their harmful ways. These are some of the moving pieces that have shaped shames’ genealogy historically and to date that mark shame as a weapon, form of social order and control, as well as disciplinary tool.

Conclusion

While there are debates on whether white people are aware that they weaponize shame and other emotions (Halberstam, 2005b; Taylor, 2016), Jack Halberstam (2005b) was very clear that the projection of white shame occurs through the humiliation and dehumanization of Black people, something that is done very intentionally. As Halberstam insisted, discharging shame is easiest to do when the subject who replaces the white body becomes the target of shame, which is quickest to arrive at through dehumanization. In dehumanizing the Black body, it becomes object, no longer subject, making it possible to commit crimes against them with little to no objection. If the known and common trope is that Black women are dirty, nasty, shameful objects to be feared and marked as a threat to the state and its civilians, then injuring, harming, or punishing said Black women, including through torture and death, is deemed justifiable. Black death here is made sense of as legitimate, done for the protection of the greater common good. In this way, it is the white Christian American slavers and the president who come off as victims in need of protecting.

The previous chapter addressed white women victimizing themselves in the face of criticism and push back. White men and Christian America are no different. After all Lauren and

other Black people had endured, it was the white Christian American Crusaders who claimed to be the victims. In the story, in line with the projection and placing of blame that come with the deflection of shame and negative attention, Christian America later sued Lauren Olamina for “false allegations” made against them (p. 396). In the end, Lauren countersued.³⁹ What is worth noting here is the repetitive theme and predictable pattern of those who will do anything to evade not only shame, but also accountability, which would only make them feel more shame. Given all that they have negatively contributed to, white European-descended men still claim to have it the hardest. According to sociologist Michael Kimmel (2013) in, *Angry White Men: American Masculinity at the End of an Era*, they believe they face some of the harshest conditions on Earth. As Kimmel eloquently explained, “White men are the beneficiaries of the single greatest affirmative action program in world history” (2013, p. 8). And still, they are hungry for more power, more domination, more control.

Michael Kimmel (2013) shared that right-wing programs such as *Savage Nation* and on-air personalities like Rush Limbaugh and Sean Hannity reached 8.25 million *listeners* each week, were heard on more than 600 stations, reaching weekly audiences of more than 20 million *followers* (p. 38; emphasis not in original). Limbaugh, Hannity, and *Savage Nation* are popular because they generate white rage as a way to discharge fear and project shame. These rage-shame spirals, as Harris-Perry (2011) called them, are seductive to conservatives who feel empowered by it. As Kimmel asserted, “everyday negative affect such as sadness, anxiety, grief, and worry are carefully manipulated into political rage” (2013, p. 32). He insisted that through the use of “overgeneralizations, sensationalism, inaccurate information, ad hominem attacks, and partial truths” (2013, pp. 32–33), angry white men have continued to turn other white men (and women) against Black and Brown people. Kimmel insisted that they project their inferiority

complex on racialized subjects, a product of their white shame (see also Halberstam, 2005b), with grave consequences for Black women.

Black women push back against these assumptions, as Lauren does. To use Harris-Perry (2011), rather than internalize the distorted and harmful misinformation, Lauren understands that it is the system that is askew, not her (p. 105). Others, thinking the room is correct, adapt and accommodate, which, in a way, she does too for survival. As with everyone, Black people who are framed as shameful feel the psychological effects, wanting to hide when they experience shame, lowering their heads, avoiding eye contact, or dropping their shoulders (Harris-Perry, 2011). Connecting Harris-Perry (2011, p. 5) to Butler, Lauren responds in similar ways, performing docility while strategizing and organizing a revolt that could lead to her freedom, preserving her authentic self while simultaneously masking it to secure her safety.

To close I ask: What happens when, like the state, we are too unconscious of and unwilling to confront our own discriminatory and exploitative ways? Shame that is projected onto all of us from systems of domination eventually erode our relationships with one another. Our dysfunctional dynamics with one another at the interpersonal level are intimately tied to systems of domination. Of course, patriarchy has an issue with power, control, and domination (hooks, 2000), and if a vast majority of households globally are patriarchal (including single and same sex run homes), then societies will continue to be patriarchal. At this point, many, if not all, of us are implicated in power abuse and domination of some sort, not to mention the shame that comes with it. As feminists, it is very likely that we were nonetheless raised in patriarchal homes. A patriarchal environment will reproduce patriarchal agents, including feminists who are no more immune than the average individual.

While we dismiss emotions as benevolent and weak, shame is anything but. As Stephen Garvey (2014) stated, “the shamed self is either passive and helpless, or enraged” (p. 60; see also Deonna et al., 2011). Emotions are great at moving us, shame in particular. It will either mobilize or immobilize us, energize or incapacitate us. This means that we have to continuously ask ourselves what messaging and stereotypes we have rationalized as normal, especially socialized patterns that are not immediately evident. White women especially need to do the work of asking who constructed these stereotypes, when they emerged, who benefits from them, how they impact the lives of those negatively framed, and why. It is crucial they pay attention to their bodies as they ask and interrogate these questions, assessing where shame is showing up and being mindful of how said shame will make them want to hide, avoid, evade, blame, and self-victimize, because present-day iterations of Western feminism are stuck in this reckoning, or awakening, even where we unwittingly internalize that which we seek to dismantle.

White North American feminism, and North America in general, currently finds itself in a shameful mess, with shame moving so many unconsciously, haphazardly, and recklessly. Though not solely to blame, shame (among other challenging emotions) and the drive for power and domination have successfully divided and separated us from one another. These dynamics produce a volatile environment that can take away from the work, and most of us do not even know it, nor will we face the grave realities of our times, realities that are mirrored in Octavia Butler's *Parables* series. Our struggles to make room for diverse voices reveal this. Our challenges with being called out, our lack of accountability, and the force with which we call others out through public shaming highlights this. We cannot always listen to those we claim we want to help. We expect the governmental systems and corporate structures to do what we are

unable to do interpersonally, making us appear more rhizome-tree than rhizome alone, a topic taken up in the next chapter as I close out this dissertation.

Notes

³³ To define "state," I use Robyn Maynard (2017) who, in a Canadian context, recognized the term to include: "federal and provincial governments, government funded programs such as schools, social and child services, and the enforcement of state institutions such as the municipal, provincial, and national police" (p. 6).

³⁴ Trask (2003) declared,

We believe that the first-born people of these lands should govern their own land. The Tahitians should govern Tahiti, the Maori should govern over Aotearoa (New Zealand), the Samoans should govern Samoa, the Kanaks should govern Kanaky (New Caledonia), the Chamorros should govern Guam, the Hawaiians should govern Hawai'i. (pp. 138–139)

³⁵ Butler wrote,

Debt slaves are a legally indentured person bound for her family's unpaid debts. The debts were accumulated because she worked for an agribusiness corporation that underpaid its workers in company script instead of money, and then overcharged them for food and shelter so that they could stay in ever-increasing debt." Adding, "It's against the law for the company to break up families by selling minor children away from their parents or husbands from their wives. It was against both local and federal law. (p. 192)

But the presidents' supporters get away with it anyway.

³⁶ The question, "what's worse, shame or imprisonment?" made Kahan realize that his earlier work had been "too flat" (2076). Kahan later realized that shaming penalties are "deeply partisan," and "robustly pluralistic" (2076).

³⁷ Chin (2018) writes: "I am interested in considering the ways in which QTPOC call each other out or accuse each other of failing to live up to the regulatory ideal of radical anti-oppressive politics as a kind of "lateral violence" (109).

³⁸ It is important to note that Chin (2018: 113) also goes on to acknowledge that queer and trans people of colour publicly chastising each other is not comparable to the actual experience of incarceration. Nor those who call-out comparable to those who enforce state apparatus. The two are not the same and the differences in kind are vast as Chin points out. However, there are similarities in kind that can tell us something about what fear and shame *does* to us, how they function, and why they are weaponized for social control.

³⁹ Butler wrote, "Then suddenly, without explanation, CA dropped its suit and settled with her, paying her an unreported, but reputedly vast sum of money" (p. 396). In both cases, it was historical facts that saved them.

After Shame, Beyond Solidarity: Becoming Rhizome-Tree

Doing Emotions Research as a Black Neurodivergent: The Multiplicity

When I first set out to do this autoethnographical study and was tasked with considering myself in my most *affected* state and how this shifted my relationship dynamics with others, some of the research questions I first asked were: 1) What happens when we are all too traumatized and inundated with difficult emotions to show up for one another meaningfully? 2) What happens when we are too affected to show up for others how they need? and 3) What happens when others are too debilitated by seemingly negative emotions to show up for us how we need? (In the earlier stages, too, I had set out to better understand the productive uses of shame and how healing shame could point to alternative feminist futures).

I asked because I found that in working with and healing my own emotional distresses, I was unable to show up for others, never mind how they needed me to. I was also less available to the feminist movement and other social justice initiatives. The more I studied how trauma and negative emotions got in the way of feminist solidarity, the less I was in solidarity with others. The scholarly literature, specifically, Melisa Harris-Perry (2011), Sara Ahmed (2003; 2004; 2015; 2017), and Jack Halberstam (2005), told me that emotions were relational. But living this relationality in real time was intense, adding to my already affected state. The research was very clear that social and political posttraumatic stress, depression, anxiety, and suicidality were closely linked to trauma and difficult emotions such as shame and fear. Elspeth Probyn (2010b) even went so far as to say that studying and writing about shame makes you a hypochondriac. Brené Brown (2006; 2011) said that studying shame is a simultaneous study in vulnerability, and that shame research makes you vulnerable while at the same time requiring you to be vulnerable.

I just never imagined how sick studying shame would make me, or that I would have to take a six-month leave of absence to recover from a failed suicide attempt, and another to process the exhaustion that comes with passive suicidality and never feeling good enough. Diagnosed with mild to severe depression, generalized anxiety, a supposed drug-induced psychosis, self-diagnosed complex posttraumatic stress, burn out, neurodiversity, possible autism, being highly sensitive, gifted with intuition that reads more like schizophrenia, living with chronic fatigue, in chronic pain, with an overregulated nervous system - these realities of my life were not only bad for my wellness, but also interrupted my interpersonal relationships, negatively effecting my personal, professional, academic, and research life.

I had underestimated the physicality of what I was studying and miscalculated the frequency with which trauma, shame, fear, and power struggles would play out on my mind-body, never mind the unexpected ways it showed up in and around me. I could not physically attend to things in the same way. I became more agoraphobic, my mobility restricted mostly to inside the house, if not in bed, soaking in the tub, or laying on the couch. Depleted, exhausted, and struggling to move the same way, I was unable to regulate most things, never mind my day-to-day life, my relationships, finances, or my emotions. I was immersed in disability studies and learning about disability justice as I was becoming more invisibly disabled, an experience I had never grappled with in this way before. While I have been neurodivergent my entire life, I had no language for it, not until my adult years. I was also in chronic pain in some way, but never able to—or afforded the opportunity to—identify and accept the experience for what it was due to my own internalized ableism. Never mind the sanism and ableism directed at me. Or, the stigma and discrimination that came with having the audacity to discard the strong Black woman trope, softening instead into vulnerability and high sensitivity.

On good days, when I was able to get out of the house, I was paranoid, cautious, fearful, mistrusting, and easily rubbed the wrong way by others. Seeing people became challenging, encountering them, unbearable. The feelings were typically mutual. Showing up would end in hurt feelings, disappointment, projections, self-censoring, or conflict of some sort. I was irritated and irritable, finicky, and easily triggered. Misunderstandings, mistakes, and missteps happened often. The personal, which was already political, was only getting messier, pointing to another central question: What happens when feminist encounters rub us the wrong way, and for seemingly no reason, without any identifiable cause? With this backdrop, I considered the role of invisible objects like shame getting in the way. Shame in this context was understood through Sara Ahmed's (2004) analysis of emotions as moving objects. Here, the object of shame slid over and avoided some bodies, typically white women, while sticking onto and accumulating on others, like me. Contagious energy that circulated in the environment, colliding with my mind-body, gave the illusion of being one with shame. So much so that I began to identify with it, never mind the trauma and fear that accompanies it.

Taking Flight: The Pivot

Trying to study trauma, fear, *and* shame did not end well. I had asked the questions mentioned above in the early stages of the research, around 2015 and 2016, when I still thought that studying affect, emotions, *and* trauma were all realistic and manageable expectations. I set out to study all three, and did, for some time. I also studied afrofuturism, Black feminism, feminist solidarity, transnational feminism, food sovereignty movements, queer theory, disability studies, autoethnography, critical discourse analysis, psychology, history, anthropology, cultural studies, and some philosophy. I was doing too much, and at a time when I had the least amount of energy to give. This meant that I was unable to do the research well at times.

I was incapable of getting clear about my topic and was even less certain about how to communicate my message. As a trauma survivor healing my past traumas while continuing to be traumatized, at the same time as studying myself through the process of being traumatized, while inundated by fear, as I was brought to shame at frequencies and intensities I had never experienced—it all turned out to be unsustainable. In the end, I could not study trauma, let alone my own. I could not understand fear while captive to it. Instead, to document what I learned about trauma, power, shame, and fear, I have started writing other chapters that did not appear in this dissertation.

As such, my next project is called *Octavia Butler and the Future of Emotions*. It will continue to use Octavia Butler to map out how I envision the futurity of emotions through a sci-fi lens. For example, I will use *Fledgling* (2005) to discuss fear and symbiotic relationships; “The Power of Wild Seed” will draw from Butler’s novel *Wild Seed* (1980) to assess the role of power abuse in interpersonal relationships; while “Kindred, Telepathically, Yours,” uses *Kindred* (2003) to assess how trauma and telepathy not only collapse solidarity, but time and space; and, lastly, “Drifting Out of Solidarity” uses *The Evening and the Morning and the Night* (1987; 2001) to take a spiritual, energetic, and afrofuturist approach to objects like emotions, asking that we consider what I call *telepathic solidarity* as a possible reimagining of a feminist future where ancient technologies like intuition and telepathy are no longer debatable or contested but part and parcel of a feminist way of life. Just imagine.

Brené Brown’s (2011) work looks at shame that moves us (a) away, (b) against, and (c) toward one another. In future studies, I ask us to consider a fourth element, which is shame that moves us *across*. By shame that moves us across, I speak of energetic shame that, once tapped into spiritually and decoded energetically, can move us across other mind-bodies, creatures,

entities, objects, subjects, signs, environments, plant life, and nature, as well as differing spatial-temporal zones, including dream space, parallel realities, alternative dimensions, and so on.

These conversations take an obvious departure from Western positivist framings that position Western science as the only valid source of reason and logic, or as *entirely* sound. It troubles definitions of “fact,” “evidence,” and “real” on purpose. Blurring the line between fiction and nonfiction, reality, and fantasy, suggesting that, for Black neurodivergent highly sensitive feminists in solidarity with one another, the interconnected web that connects us all can point to a promising (and radical) possibility that at any given moment we are connected to an infinite number of energetic objects, such as shame, that expand who and what we are in solidarity with. It asks: Solidarity where? Across what time and space? In which dimension and realm? How far are we willing to go for solidarity?

I eventually pivoted and focused solely on shame, an emotion I was familiar with as a Ghanaian Canadian raised Catholic and taught to be ashamed of many things. Pivoting to shame felt more manageable, though burdensome all the same. I worked with Octavia Butler's texts *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents* to examine the following research questions: 1a) How is shame conceptualized in shame research? 1b) How does shame function and why? 2) How does shame hinder our interpersonal relationships with one another? 3a) What does shame do to the mind-body? and 3b) What implications does this have for feminists? Notice that I left out studying the productive uses of shame and how healing emotional distress could prove beneficial to our movements. As discussed above, it was all entirely too much, and therefore, taken out of this dissertation. In the end, the focus of this thesis was exclusively on how shame obstructs interpersonal relationships.

Octavia Butler's fiction provided theoretical and artistic representations of shame that helped conceptualize the harms that result when feminists are affected by an excess accumulation of shame. I wanted to know how shame got in the way of my relationships with others. As a neurodivergent, highly sensitive, wild seed archetype, it felt important to investigate how shame moved Black feminists like me and Octavia Butler's Lauren Olamina who feel too much. We struggle with hyperempathy, are apt to challenge the status quo, and pay a heavy, sometimes almost fatal price for doing so. This is risky when operating within white North American feminism, which is in many ways very normative, narcissistic, ableist, sanist, and neurotypical. Running contrary to, even opposing the ways and being of Black neurodivergents. Like Lauren, I was navigating excess shame in political climates much like in Octavia Butler's *Parables* series. In the wake of regressive changes like abortion rights being overthrown, "don't say gay" bills, anti-trans and anti-critical race theory bills, climate crisis, and the global COVID-19 pandemic, Octavia Butler's prophetic story became more and more real, as emotions ran high and emotional intelligence, rather low.

This study spoke specifically of neurodivergent feminists who purport to some form of animism⁴⁰ or Indigenous and shamanic⁴¹ cosmological system. We are the wild seed Clarissa Pinkola Estés (1992) calls "women who run with the wolves." The equivalent of Sara Ahmed's (2015) the "willful woman" and "killjoy." What Alice Walker calls a "womanist," not to be confused with feminist (see, Blay, 2008). Audre Lorde (1984) identifies her as "sister outsider." Maxine Hong Kingston (2015) says her name is "woman warrior," while for Gloria Anzaldúa (2015), she is known as "new mestiza." We are what Black podcaster and blogger Ev'Yan Whitney (2014) calls "the too much woman," or the "too known girl" as we call her in my Ghanaian culture. To draw from Roxane Gay (2013) in *Bad Feminist*, our "unlikability" is what

makes us come alive. It is also what others resent most about us. In any case, we share some level of lived experience that cannot be easily understood by normatively wired people who do not feel, perceive, or sense touch in the same way. I wanted to better understand how we negotiate shame because we are not only multiplicities, but we also trouble and disrupt multiplicities, especially when navigating white spaces as Black neurodivergents.

The Multiplicity of Becoming-Rhizome

I wanted to better understand how shame's mechanisms delayed and derailed my ability to collaborate with other feminists interpersonally. What I learned was that shame thrives where power is struggled for, abused, in excess, or imbalanced. This gets in the way of our relationships. For Sara Ahmed (2008) "emotions shape what we do, how we do things, what we do things with, and where we go. Emotions affect how bodies take shape in social space and how spaces cohere around bodies" (p. 12). Further, according to Brown (2010) there are three primary functions of shame that disrupt healthy interpersonal relationships: (a) shame that moves us *away* by withdrawing, hiding, silencing ourselves, performing, wearing masks, and keeping secrets; (b) shame that "move[s] us *against* by trying to gain power over others, being aggressive, using shame to fight shame," and I would add, judgement rooted in an inferiority complex, performing hyper-superiority, placing unnecessary blame on others, projection, deflection, denial, delusion, being petty, lacking accountability, evading shame, and various forms of violence, including revenge, retaliation, smear campaigns, and murder; and (c) shame that "move[s] us *toward* by seeking to appease and please," engaging in control dynamics, and I would add, fawning, people-pleasing, self-harm, self-sabotage, and suicidality (p. 46; emphasis in original). These are all themes Lauren Olamina and her comrades Zahra Moss and Harry Balter showed us, as discussed in "*Parable of the Sower: Unmasking Shame*".

In chapter three, "*Parable of the Talents: Unraveling Shame*," I used Harris-Perry's (2011) *Sister Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes, and Black Women in America* to illustrate how negative stereotypes and misinformed framings of Black women as shameful gets deployed by the media, the state, and corporations to further oppress Black women, a community already forced into marginalization and vulnerability. Being pinned as shameful leads to inevitable harms by way of sociocultural, political, economic, and health inequalities. These unfair systemic barriers have consequences for Black women. Taking the form of chronic stress, high cortisol levels, depression, heart disease, suicide, being surveilled, getting judged, or humiliated, and so on. As such, shame becomes a form of punishment used to discipline Black women framed as shameful. This leads some Black women to conform to survive. This process, where Black women contort to the status quo as a response to shame punishment, highlights shame as a form of social control used to manipulate Black women, making them, in turn, more malleable to further control. This was true for me in my autoethnographic study, similar to what Harris-Perry points to in the literature.

These dynamics trickle down and are enacted by everyday people, including white women, who leverage shame against Black women to maintain power and domination, causing disruptions in interpersonal relationships. At the sociopolitical level, we may appear to be in harmony with one another and working toward solidarity. But underneath, in nonphysical and invisible realms such as the psychic and quantum fields,⁴² shame works in tandem *with* discursive and social frames to press against, sometimes even collide with the material and physical, and in profound ways that threaten any pure definition of solidarity or feminism in binary terms. Said differently, we make appear to get along and like each other, but below the surface, our feelings toward one another are anything but loving. It is for this reason that this

study theorized white feminism as a multiplicity. While other scholars have theorized aspects of feminism as a multiplicity vis-à-vis frameworks such as intersectionality, matrix of domination, transversal politics, and palimpsest glimpses (see Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Haritaworn et al.; Alexander, 2005; Hill-Collins, 2017; Yuval-Davis, 2006), multiplicity here is understood in Deleuzoguattarian terms

Becoming-Multiplicity

Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) definition of the rhizome model, discussed in the introductory chapter, spoke to the social justice and liberatory models that multiplicities and feminism seeks to achieve. While white feminism can be described as a multiplicity, what I quickly learned was that it cannot be said to be a multiplicity in Deleuzoguattarian terms as signified by the rhizome. Jenny Mackness (2014) provided a list of words that participants in their study associated with the rhizome metaphor. They include subversive, nonlinear, multidirectional, connections, haphazard, messy, serendipitous, esoteric, dynamic, unpredictable, adaptive, self-organizing, and nonhierarchical. With the genealogy of Western feminism and the discussions from previous chapters in mind, so rarely are any of these descriptors entirely true for white feminism.

The more complicated pieces of white feminism's multiplicity tend to get glossed over by the vast majority of white feminists, who, instead, only present versions of their best feminist practice. As Brown's (2011) research stated, fear of vulnerability that underscores cultures of perfectionism can erode interpersonal relationships. This is the element of shame that moves us away from one another. This is especially true in our current polarized political climate, where many are sensitive to call-out and so-called cancel culture, afraid of being exposed as shameful. Of course, we need positive narratives, and more of them. But being honest about the whole

assemblage is also necessary and political. Feminists do not operate in a vacuum nor in binaries.

Shame positions us messily along both sides of the binary. In this regard, shame is in many ways Deleuze and Guattari's hierarchical tree. It fragments, divides, separates, and sorts, the very antithesis of the rhizome. Emotions like shame are the quickest indicator of how we become more rhizome-tree than rhizome alone.

According to Deleuze and Guattari (1987), rhizomes are nonlinear and nonhierarchical, thus, "one can never posit a dualism or a dichotomy" (p. 9; see also Goodley, 2007; Grosz, 2005; Linstead & Pullen, 2006; Massumi, 2015; Rajiva, 2014; Taylor & Harris-Evans, 2018). And yet in framing the rhizome as a multiplicity, they do just that; setting it up against trees, roots, and branches. For Deleuze and Guattari, rhizomes are unlike the arborescent and root-based tree. According to the two, the ontology of a tree is hierarchical and linear, ordered and dominating (Goodley, 2007; Linstead & Pullen, 2006; Taylor & Harris-Evans, 2018). They stated, "A rhizome as subterranean stem is absolutely different from roots and radicles. Multiplicities are rhizomatic and expose arborescent pseudo-multiplicities [read: trees] for what they are" (1987, pp. 403–405). For the pair, trees, with their vertically growing roots and branches, represent power that constrains (Goodley, 2007; Linstead & Pullen, 2006). Stephen Linstead and Alison Pullen (2006) shared,

For Deleuze and Guattari our very mode of thinking is dominated by the root metaphor...we are forced to act and think like trees as this locks us into the preservation of centered systems of power and knowledge that perpetuate hegemony and oppression. (p. 1290)

Thereby, mirroring human behaviour.

For the two philosophers, this way of *becoming* is unnatural (Goodley, 2007; Linstead & Pullen, 2006). As they explained, “many people have trees growing in their heads” (quoted in Linstead & Pullen, 2006, p. 1290; see also Goodley, 2007), pointing to hierarchy and imbalance, themes that were explored in this study. What this tells us is that these top-down systemic approaches and unidirectional flows in power that strategically disenfranchise us are seductive. The pull for power and domination can be so enthralling that the quest for it becomes a goal (Hall, 1997; Linstead & Pullen, 2006), perpetuating and reproducing the very structures that overpowered and oppressed us, often using shame to do so. We saw this exhibited in Octavia Butler's work. In *Parable of the Sower*, shame played out interpersonally, as Lauren looked down on Zahra, and Harry tried to manipulate Lauren. In *Parable of the Talents*, President Jarret and Christian America revealed what happens when power is abused and shame is weaponized to maintain domination and discipline or assert social control. All of which are examples of becoming rhizome-tree rather than becoming-rhizome alone.

Becoming Rhizome-Tree

In situating the multiplicity within a binary (rhizome vs. tree), Deleuze and Guattari (1987) overlooked some of the overlapping elements in both. They acknowledged, as I do, that there are commonalities between the rhizome and trees. They added,

There exist tree or root structures in rhizomes; conversely, a tree branch or root division may begin to burgeon into a rhizome. A new rhizome may form in the heart of a tree, the hollow of a root, the crook of a branch. Or else it is a microscopic element of the root-tree, a radicle, that gets rhizome production going. (1987, p. 405)

They are right. Tree roots resemble ginger to some extent. From a certain angle, branches give the appearance of ginger. Roots do extend outward horizontally, although not to the same extent

as ginger. Ginger veers off in all manner of direction, including vertical, giving it depth and range, although not to the same degree as branches or roots. The rhizome may not mean to grow in any other way than a horizontal and nonlinear manner, but its unpredictable becoming lets us know that it can deviate off course and shoot vertically. Trees may not mean to appear as though they are liberated, but their ability to stretch outward toward the sky while also digging and reaching deep into the earth lets us know otherwise. With these commonalities in mind, we can deduce that if there is no hierarchy in one (read: ginger), then at some point, neither hold hierarchies to be entirely true. Similarly, if hierarchies are present in trees, and ginger has a similar unfolding as branches and roots, then hierarchies have to be taken as possible even for ginger.

This body of work understood the object of shame as the tree branch. It asked, how does shame (the tree) function and why? In assessing shame as Deleuze and Guattari's tree, it took interest in how shame hinders our interpersonal relationships, asking, what implications does this have for feminists. What happens when like the state, we are like trees and too unwilling to confront our own discriminatory and exploitative ways? Because at this point, many, if not all of us, are implicated in power abuse and domination of some sort, not to mention, the shame that comes with it. Shame that is projected onto all of us from systems of domination eventually erode our relationships with one another. Our dysfunctional dynamics with one another at the interpersonal level are intimately tied to systems of domination. That is, when we do the work of the state to uphold systems of domination that keep hierarchies in place that erase, eradicate, and divide us. This sounds very much like the tree branch, if not the tree trunk, though still embedded within a rhizome model. Nowhere is this clearer than our expressions of harm rooted in shaming practices.

If white feminism's terrain is said to be a multiplicity as articulated by the rhizome, I argue that the object of shame is metaphorically and philosophically disguised as the tree branch, inserting itself in the movement camouflaged as ginger. Because the differences in kind are subtle, rarely can we decode the difference between rhizome and tree. As such, trees dressed as rhizomes (read: feminists in deep shame) become pervasive in the movement, disrupting our interpersonal relationships, slowing down our work. Note that the emphasis is on the association between branches/roots and ginger/rhizome, not necessarily tree and ginger. This is because branches and roots do not veer that far off from ginger aesthetically. Branches and roots are not drastically more hierarchical than rhizomes. The tree trunk however is. It is the aspect of the tree that is truly linear and vertical, and obnoxiously so. It is the trunk of the tree that gives us the image of the dominating hierarchy that the tree has come to be known for. Like the myelin sheath that connects dendrites and axon terminals in neurons, these particular kinds of middles can be jarring. But what if we approached this difference differently?

A closer examination of tree bark and we find chaotic lines. While the majority of them are still vertical, there are those that veer sideways. Furthermore, interwoven within the tree's hierarchical structure is nonlinearity. If we slice open the trunk, we find not only lines but circles. In this way, the tree can come to represent linear hierarchy *and* disorganized nonlinearity, just as ginger and rhizomes spread horizontally but can also set off on vertical lines that give it depth. Both ginger and tree give us the impression of hierarchy *and* no hierarchy at the same time. With this in mind, I ask: What if trees were also an example of a multiplicity by virtue of encapsulating both arborescent and rhizomatic-like models? What if the rhizome remained a multiplicity, but not because it was imagined as purely non-hierarchical, but rather because linear and hierarchical lines were also possible, truly complicating its already chaotic

nature? Though ginger and root-based trees are obviously not the same things and Deleuze and Guattari (1987) are accurate in their assessment of their sociopolitical and philosophical differences, their similarities in kind do unravel the binary. The possibility that both are valid and true multiplicities renders each side obsolete, so to speak, either end as absolute or pure multiplicities crumbles. This added complication can be productive. The nullification of the binary creates space for new iterations of the multiplicity. These contradictory elements are instead accounted for in how we make sense of a multiplicity. Paradoxical lines that make up the same assemblage are the very hallmark of a multiplicity.

After Shame

The last two years of surviving a global pandemic have answered the research questions I originally set out to study. We are seeing what happens when we are all too traumatized and inundated with difficult emotions to show up for one another meaningfully. More of us know what happens when we are too affected to show up for others how they need. It has become a new normal, recognizing that others are too debilitated by their own stuff to show up for us how we need. We saw that social isolation and being in the house all the time takes a toll on our mental health; emotions play such a crucial role in our day-to-day lives. The bottom line is this: We are all more likely to be the worst versions of ourselves in our most negatively affected state, at least I was, as were Lauren Olamina and her comrades.

There is nothing benevolent about emotions. The more difficult ones, like shame, are heavy, the weaponization of them, deadly. As such, this work is political, radical, and revolutionary resistance. We have to consider this when we direct shame in other people's direction. Too many Black women are framed as shameful and suffer material consequences because of it. Now, it seems even white people are paying attention to shame, as anti-critical

race crusaders fight to ban CRT in schools, hoping to evade shame, fearing an increase in depression and anxiety for their children. But hiding these shameful parts of ourselves, our identities, our histories, is counterintuitive. We must work in tandem with shame rather than against it; rather than avoiding, denying, and covering it. Multiplicity understood as becoming-rhizome-tree would account for these indiscretions that are shameful.

Multiplicities must create room for contradiction, rather than looking away from or doing away with them. Refusing to accept that we are like trees is counterproductive to our liberation. The rhizome alone cannot give us a comprehensive picture of the multiplicity, especially if it cannot account for the very fact that multiplicities will in some cases territorialize, produce imbalances in power, and wield hierarchal frameworks, as this dissertation explored. Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) conceptualization of a multiplicity expressed as a rhizome is limiting when assessing white feminism, and altogether too utopic for the times. White feminism collapses the binary that Deleuze and Guattari's multiplicity finds itself in. I want us to consider shame and what it does to feminists as that "thing" that moves us from becoming-rhizome to becoming-rhizome-tree.

The rhizome becomes a model we equip ourselves with to pass through the binary. In moving beyond the binary, we enter what Linstead and Pullen (2006) call a "Third Space" (see also Dean, 1996). We can think of this space as becoming-rhizome-tree. But this too is limiting, and as Linstead and Pullen note, "simply moving away from binary thinking is not enough" (2006, p. 1288). The possibility of a third space opens us up to "other possible combinations that transcend dimorphism" (Linstead & Pullen, 2006, p. 1300). Any fourth, fifth, or sixth space (and all subsequent additions that follow, though not linear either) direct us to a "this/and, plus" framework, something Black, Indigenous, and other racialized feminists of colour, queer

activists and theorists, and those that identify on the Trans, 2 Spirit, gender nonbinary, nonconforming, and intersex spectrum have called for.

As Deleuze and Guattari (1987) remind us,

The rhizome is reducible neither to the One nor the multiple. It is not the One that becomes Two or even directly three, four, five, etc. It is not a multiple derived from the One, or to which One is added ($n + 1$). It is composed not of units but of dimensions, or rather directions in motion. (p. 405)

This means becoming any number of possibilities. All of these ways of becoming are possible as a multiplicity when we give up the need to box multiplicities into any one model, what Deleuze and Guattari were initially trying to do with the rhizome and becoming in the first place. To use Linstead and Pullen (2006), solidarity's becoming is "not a fluid movement across a binary boundary (which nevertheless leaves the binary in place) or across several horizontal boundaries between the multiples." The two add, "becoming is motion, a fluidity that dissolves boundaries and carries them off in its flood" (2006, p. 1305). And so, there will also be those who become nothing at all, or in particular. Not animal, nor plant, not object, or any other form or shape (Goh, 2009; Linstead & Pullen, 2006). Their feminist becoming is just that, becoming. Deleuze and Guattari remind us that becoming does not need to take a form, become something, or embody anything (see also Goh, 2009; Linstead & Pullen, 2006; Taylor & Harris-Evans, 2018).

In all cases, contradictory lines are always just becoming. They care not how we represent or signify them. If anything, they lose their political significance and "mean nothing" (Goh, 2009, p. 54). As Irving Goh (2009) shares, "lines of flight in themselves are not necessarily political," nor do they "articulate a politics," they only become so because of how we signify them (p. 54). Meaning we shape how we interpret rhizomes, trees, and multiplicities.

Conclusion: Beyond Solidarity

After shame, we move beyond solidarity. Beyond what, no one knows. Or, rather, the knowing is embodied, and answers only arrive once we experience the future of emotions. For now, we cannot speak of feminist solidarity as a multiplicity if the rhizome model does away with hierarchies completely. If we are to truly build solidarity, we must accept the messy and not-so-pleasant aspects of it. This gives an incomplete reading of the movement. Even if feminism were to have no beginning or end like a rhizome, its middle has always consisted of both hierarchy and non-hierarchy. Feminism's becoming has always been one of contradiction. At any given moment we are one line of flight away from that which we frame as the opposite; we are united and in some form of solidarity while also separated and divided. Rarely are we located exclusively in one or the other. Tree and rhizome coexist under the feminist spectrum, and at the same time. Shame shows us this, that we deterritorialize solidarity and also territorialize it (see Linstead & Pullen, 2006). It is in these liminal spaces of transitions in motion that feminist solidarity is most like a multiplicity, with shame asking of it, a renewed becoming.

Notes

⁴⁰ In *The Spirit of Water in the World of Shamanism*, José Luis Stevens (2004) defined animism as: "the belief that the world consists of overlapping energy fields and that underlying the visible world is the spirit world, the origin of all power, energy, and vitality." Stevens adds, "Animists believe that invisible forces or spirits can affect physical elements including people" (p. 186).

⁴¹ Drawing from Stross (2006),

Shamanism will here be considered as pertaining to a worldview in which the cosmos and all within it is assumed to be animate, and animated by a spiritual essence and life force that is shared, and that underlies the potential for magical transformation, and further that individual body and soul are functionally separable entities under certain conditions, and capable of rejoining...at the core of shamanism as considered here is the assumption that the spiritual essences (or souls) of individuals that we can call shamans are capable in certain circumstances of leaving their body and visiting an alternative reality that can be called the Otherworld in ways that would strike us in the western world as magical. (p. 6)

⁴² According to Mauro (2015),

quantum scientists have discovered that a sea of interactive, interconnected energy underlies the physical world. They have also provided us with evidence that suggests that we, too, are part of this energetic field. What they haven't—and *can't*—tell us is exactly *how* this occurs. (p. 9; emphasis in original)

Mauro (2015) claimed that

when scientists investigated matter at the subatomic level, they made a surprising discovery. They discovered that matter, at its most fundamental level, is not solid or separate; it is instead a web of interconnected particles capable of exchanging information across space and time. (p. 21)

They also discovered that energy exists in the space between particles—what they call the “Zero Point Field” (p. 21).

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