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small axe a caribbean journal of criticism

Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism is published in March, July, and November by Duke University Press, 905 W. Main St., Suite 18B, Durham, NC 27701, on behalf of Small Axe, Inc.

Number 49 corresponds to vol. 20, no. 1, 2016.

Submissions/correspondence Manuscripts of no more than 7,000 words should be submitted electronically as MS Word attachments to submissions@smallaxe.net.

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Subscriptions Direct all orders to Duke University Press, Journals Customer Relations, 905 W. Main St., Suite 18B, Durham, NC 27701.

Annual subscription rates: print-plus-electronic institutions, \$175; print-only institutions, \$160; e-only institutions, \$136; individuals, \$35; students, \$25.

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Back volumes: institutions, \$160. Single issues: institutions, \$53; individuals, \$14.

For more information, contact Duke University Press Journals at 888-651-0122 (toll-free in the US and Canada) or 919-688-5134; subscriptions@dukeupress.edu.

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ISSN 0799-0537

Cover Art: Angelika Wallace-Whitfield, *The Unconscious, Subconscious, and Conscious Self*, 2013; enamel and charcoal on canvas, 4 × 6 ft.; photograph by Christine Wallace-Whitfield. Used by permission of the artist.

Journal design and layout by Juliet Ali

Typesetting by MacKey Composition
Set in Helvetica Neue 9/14
Printed in the United States of America





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The Small Axe Project consists of this: to participate both in the renewal of practices of intellectual criticism in the Caribbean and in the expansion/revision of the horizons of such criticism. We acknowledge of course a tradition of social, political, and cultural criticism in and about the regional/diasporic Caribbean. We want to honor that tradition but also to argue with it, because in our view it is in and through such argument that a tradition renews itself, that it carries on its quarrel with the generations of itself: retaining/revising the boundaries of its identity, sustaining/altering the shape of its self-image, defending/resisting its conceptions of history and community. It seems to us that many of the conceptions that guided the formation of our Caribbean modernities—conceptions of class, gender, nation, culture, race, for example, as well as conceptions of sovereignty, development, democracy, and so on—are in need of substantial rethinking. What we aim to do in our journal is to provide a forum for such rethinking. We aim to enable an informed and sustained debate about the present we inhabit, its political and cultural contours, its historical conditions and global context, and the critical languages in which change can be thought and alternatives reimaged. Such a debate we would insist is not the prerogative of any single genre, and therefore we invite fiction as well as nonfiction, poetry, interviews, visual art, and book discussions.

This issue of *Small Axe* is dedicated to the memory of Sidney Mintz (16 November 1922–26 December 2015), anthropologist of the Caribbean. Over the course of a long and remarkable scholarly career, and in relation to what he felicitously called three “ancient colonies,” Puerto Rico, Haiti, and Jamaica, he enabled us to see the place of the Caribbean in the formation of the modern world and of the place of the modern world in the formation of the Caribbean.

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Preface: Sylvia Wynter's Agonistic Intimations

David Scott

I vividly remember arriving at Sylvia Wynter's (then) home in Palo Alto, California, on the morning of 19 November 1999 (almost exactly sixteen years ago to the day I write this) to conduct my planned interview with her.¹ She greeted me at the door with an embracing smile of incalculable width and warmth and ushered me in to the living room where we would speak over the course of the next two days. It seemed to me such a familiar space, this living room—familiar in the elegant statement of its decor and furnishing, in its formal and subdued gaiety. There was a *just-so* character to it, as though everything had been carefully, deliberately chosen and arranged and now resided exactly where it had always belonged. And though we had never met before, Sylvia, too, was immediately recognizable to me, in her mannered sense of poise and propriety and solidity and decorum, mixed with an undercurrent of mischief and irreverence and an altogether wicked sense of humor. She projected a no-nonsense personality and a formidable intellectual presence that gave you to understand that the time you were now spending with her was of no trifling significance and should not be wasted. It is an experience of sheer intellectual adventure I will not soon forget. In every way, I have always thought, Sylvia Wynter is entirely—and precisely—what Rex Nettleford would have called (with all its Jamaican resonances and inflections) a “lady of quality.”

1 See David Scott, “The Re-enchantment of Humanism: An Interview with Sylvia Wynter,” *Small Axe*, no. 8 (September 2000): 119–207.

At the time I set about making the systematic preparations for the interview some months before I arrived at her doorstep that November morning, I could scarcely have imagined that in the space of little more than a decade Wynter would become something of an iconic figure for a revisionist black intellectual orientation thematized around the trope or the poetics of the “human” (notably rendered in ontological tones as a substantive: *the human*).² Certainly she was *already* iconic to me—but perhaps in a less abstract or, in any case, a more *circumscribed* way. To me, at the time, Wynter was one of the predominant figures in a Jamaican (and, more broadly, Anglo-creole Caribbean) intellectual generation, whose work had been formative for my evolving sense of the theoretical languages of postcolonial criticism. *This* is how I’d come to her—feeling my way through the debates about Jamaica’s cultural-political sovereignty. Perhaps not surprisingly, then, though I had read her 1962 novel *The Hills of Hebron* while an undergraduate at the University of the West Indies, Mona, in the late 1970s, and had a sense of its ambiguous place in the canon-forming *doxas* of Caribbean literary criticism (Kenneth Ramchand’s, for example, in *The West Indian Novel and Its Background*), it was less this articulation of her creative impulse that captured my imagination than the nonfiction essays of the late 1960s and early 1970s.³ For in these essays, it seemed to me, one could discern, at least in outline, agonistic intimations of a generative style of literary-cultural criticism that turned around the attempt to summon into theoretical intelligibility the paradoxical situation of the African presence in the slave and postslave plantation complexes of the New World. There is no way to even sketch here (much less detail) the rich complexity of the problem-space in which these essays intervene during the first decade of Jamaica’s political independence, but to me essays such as “We Must Learn to Sit Down Together and Talk about a Little Culture” and “Jonkonnu in Jamaica” mark out a field-forming model of cultural-political theoretical work that, in part at least, sought to work out the answer to a question that might be formulated as follows: How might we figure the relational conundrum of an African presence that was at once an *object* in the dehumanization and acculturation of colonized life and a *subject* in the rehumanization and indigenization of “native” black life?⁴

The interview with Sylvia Wynter was, I believe, the sixth I conducted with Caribbean writers and the fifth actually published in *Small Axe*. It therefore forms part of my overall idea of

2 One thinks of collections such as Anthony Bogues, ed., *After Man, Toward the Human: Critical Essays on Sylvia Wynter* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2005); and, more recently, Katherine McKittrick, ed., *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015).

3 Ramchand’s judgment is well known. See Kenneth Ramchand, *The West Indian Novel and Its Background* (London: Faber and Faber, 1970), 41. Wynter’s response is embodied in her essay “Creole Criticism: A Critique,” *New World Quarterly* 4, no. 4 (1972): 12–36.

4 See Sylvia Wynter, “We Must Learn to Sit Down Together and Talk about a Little Culture: Reflections on West Indian Writing and Criticism, Part 1,” *Jamaica Journal* 2, no. 4 (1968): 23–32; “We Must Learn to Sit Down Together and Talk about a Little Culture: Reflections on West Indian Writing and Criticism, Part 2,” *Jamaica Journal* 3, no. 1 (1969): 27–42; and “Jonkonnu in Jamaica: Toward the Interpretation of Folk Dance as Cultural Process,” *Jamaica Journal* 4, no. 2 (1970): 34–48. In *Contradictory Omens*, of course, Kamau Brathwaite would productively engage Wynter on this theme; indeed, one might well see *Contradictory Omens* and “Black Metamorphosis” as being in a kind of dialogue with each other. See Kamau Brathwaite, *Contradictory Omens: Cultural Diversity and Integration in the Caribbean* (Mona: Savacou, 1974), 15–16.

mapping the temporal contours of overlapping Caribbean intellectual generations and also part of my overall idea of the Small Axe Project as a platform on which to think through our intellectual inheritances and traditions.⁵ All the interviews I've conducted doubtlessly have their specificities, not to say their idiosyncrasies. They have all been challenging in distinct (and, I hope, *productive*) ways. Each has involved a steep learning curve on my part because in every instance I was obliged to adjust and readjust myself hastily to the styles of thinking-out-loud of my various interlocutors, and therefore to adjust and readjust my expectations regarding the temporally, contingently, unfolding dialogical realities. For example, during my interview with Richard Hart in London in 1997 and 1998, he always insisted on immediately getting up to go check his voluminous files to make sure he had given me the correct information. The facts mattered to him. With Sylvia, what I remember most pronouncedly is her resistance to my urging that for the moment she lay aside her *current* theoretical framework and simply reconstruct for me the past as she *remembered* living and thinking it. It quickly and somewhat disconcertingly struck me that for her the past (including her own past) was not over; it was not the past. The past for her was *still* a part of her present and *therefore* still under revision, still open to contestation and change, still open to being recast and reanimated in new theoretical languages. *That* is where she was, not where I imagined she *should* be. She would not sum it all up retrospectively. She would not allow herself so easily to be relegated to being an object of (what might have appeared) an *antiquarian* inquiry. She had not stopped thinking, after all. Indeed, she had barely begun, it could be argued. So, that evening when I returned to my hotel (or, not quite a hotel; it was actually a Motel 6 in a strip mall not far from Sylvia's house) I was obliged to revise the interview questions substantially, and together with these, revise my whole dialogical strategy.

Over the years, *Small Axe* has published critical essays on Wynter's work.⁶ In this issue, however, we venture a larger project—a critical discussion of an unpublished 900-plus-page manuscript, “Black Metamorphosis: New Natives in a New World.” (I am grateful to my *Small Axe* colleague Aaron Kamugisha for urging us to undertake this discussion and for helpfully guiding the process from start to finish.) Curiously, “Black Metamorphosis” is not mentioned in my interview with Sylvia. To my shame, I had not known of its existence, and she did not seem to feel it might have been—or *should* have been—of interest to me. How could this have happened? What clues had I missed in constructing my map of her work? What was Wynter's relation to the text of “Black Metamorphosis” at the time of my interview? How would she have told the story of the part it played in the evolution of her thinking about black life? What story

5 See David Scott, “The Temporality of Generations: Dialogue, Tradition, Criticism,” *New Literary History* 45, no. 2 (2014): 157–81.

6 See, for example, Natasha Barnes, “Reluctant Matriarch: Sylvia Wynter and the Problematics of Caribbean Feminism,” *Small Axe*, no. 5 (March 1999): 34–47; and Shirley Toland-Dix, “*The Hills of Hebron*: Sylvia Wynter's Disruption of the Narrative of the Nation,” *Small Axe*, no. 25 (February 2008): 57–75.

might she have told me about what got in the way of its completion and publication? Alas, these are questions I cannot now answer. Written with a view to publication by the Institute of the Black World in Atlanta (an enormously important organization that was to attract the participation of a number of Caribbean intellectuals in the early 1970s), “Black Metamorphosis” is in many respects an attempt to expand and elaborate the thesis of *indigenization* expounded in the earlier essays.⁷ Confronting what Wynter discloses as the persistently haunting anxiety of a black “cultural void” in which only mimicry can be born, she now availed herself of the opportunity to provide a broader, more integrated theoretical-historical canvas for her story of how an African becomes a native in the context of New World plantation slavery—the material and metaphysical metamorphosis that *constitutes* the New World black as both an object of power and a subject of creative endeavor. And for Wynter, notably, while this is broadly a story of New World experience, she aims to elaborate its structure and ideology largely through the exemplary lens of the Caribbean, and Jamaica especially.

Each of the essays in our section on “Black Metamorphosis” takes up the text from a different perspective and holds it before us in such a way as to afford us a vivid glimpse of Sylvia’s practice of thinking about a “little culture” at a fundamental conjuncture of her intellectual life. All of them enact a critical return that is at once an index of our present. *This* is a recurrent activity at the heart of the work of *Small Axe*. I find myself endlessly repeating that part of what we are concerned with in the Small Axe Project is an ever-*recursive* mode of reflective thinking. In various iterations, we are forever in the loop of a nonrepetitive *return* from a present in which we contingently find ourselves to some past (recent or not) in order to try to discern something new, something *else*, about our Caribbean intellectual inheritances, something that we had not previously known or understood, perhaps, or known or understood in a way that *now* (in a new conjuncture) makes different sense, strikes us as worth knowing in a changed or expanded way. Ours, I believe, is this constant work of provisional, reiterative *edification* and *clarification*, a constant, reopening reengagement with those—like Sylvia Wynter—we thought we knew but who can now belong to us in new and unexpected ways.

New York—Leiden, November 2015

7 For a fascinating account of the Institute of the Black World that takes up the question of Caribbean intellectuals, see Derrick White, *The Challenge of Blackness: The Institute of the Black World and Political Activism in the 1970s* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011).

Sylvia
Wynter's

"BLACK METAMORPHOSIS"

a discussion

guest edited by Aaron Kamugisha



Sylvia Wynter, circa late 1950s. Photograph by Oswald Jones. Used with permission

“That Area of Experience That We Term the New World”: Introducing Sylvia Wynter’s “Black Metamorphosis”

Aaron Kamugisha

In 1971, after meeting at a conference at the Mona campus of the University of the West Indies (UWI), the Jamaican cultural theorist, playwright, and novelist Sylvia Wynter wrote African American historian Vincent Harding of her intention to write an essay on the African experience in the Americas for publication by the Institute of the Black World. This conference, the Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (ACLALS), then held in the Caribbean for the first time, was a critical event in anglophone Caribbean criticism and an integral part of a series of events that made the UWI Mona of the late 1960s into early 1970s a charged, unsettled, and enormously productive intellectual space.¹ The previous decade had seen the emergence of the New World Group, Black Power, the occupation of the Creative Arts Centre, Walter Rodney’s mesmerizing impact (curtailed after less than a year), and the birth

1 The Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies was held on 3–9 January 1971 at UWI Mona. A sustained discussion of this conference does not yet exist, but for accounts by major participants, see Edward Baugh, “Confessions of a Critic,” *Journal of West Indian Literature* 15, nos. 1–2 (2006): 15–28; and Kamau Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems* (New York: Savacou North, 1993), 321–25. For analyses of the importance of the conference, see Laurence A. Breiner, *An Introduction to West Indian Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); and Norval Edwards, “The Foundational Generation: From *The Beacon* to *Savacou*,” in Michael Bucknor and Alison Donnell, eds., *The Routledge Reader in Anglophone Caribbean Literature* (New York: Routledge), 111–23.

of *Abeng* and *Savacou*.² Since its inaugural edition, the year prior to the conference, *Savacou* under the editorship of Kamau Brathwaite had begun the labor of sketching the contours of a Caribbean literary and aesthetic tradition of criticism. ACLALS was the international literary conference at which the tensions surrounding this newly emergent Caribbean criticism would explode, and become posed as a number of irreconcilable polar opposites—the responsibility of the Caribbean intellectual versus the disinterested writer, represented by Brathwaite and Vidia Naipaul; the allegiance of literary criticism with the folk versus a Leavisite criticism, represented by Sylvia Wynter and Kenneth Ramchand.

At the time of ACLALS, Wynter was a lecturer in Spanish in the Department of Modern Languages at the University of the West Indies, a noted novelist and playwright, and considered a significant Caribbean cultural theorist.³ However, in her proposed essay for the Institute of the Black World, Wynter wanted to try her hand at something new—to move beyond her then Caribbean-centered critical essays toward a hemispheric conception of the weight placed by colonialism on black culture. Clarifying her work, in a letter written within a month of the conference, she stated that her intention would be to

explore the Minstrel show as the first Native North American theater—and why Amerika distorted it; why a process of genuine creativity became a process of imitation and degenerated into a power stereotype, a cultural weapon against its creators. I shall relate the Minstrel show to the nineteenth century folk theatre patterns of the Caribbean and Latin America trying to link it to certain archetypal patterns of theater that we find for example among the Yoruba, the Aztecs and the folk English; and the way in which the blacks created a matrix to fuse disparate and yet archetypically related patterns.⁴

This preliminary sketch would expand beyond authorial intention and become Wynter's major project of the 1970s, in its final iteration a 935-page manuscript, which never saw publication by the Institute of the Black World. The only part of this manuscript that has been published is her 1979 essay "Sambos and Minstrels," though excerpts of and allusions to many of the other texts she wrote in the 1970s can be found in the manuscript, particularly

2 The most accessible place to gain an appreciation of the ferment of that time at UWI Mona remains a series of interviews conducted by David Scott and published in *Small Axe*. See especially "The Vocation of a Caribbean Intellectual: An Interview with Lloyd Best," *Small Axe*, no. 1 (March 1997): 119–39; "Memories of the Left: An Interview with Richard Hart," *Small Axe*, no. 3 (March 1998): 65–114; "The Archaeology of Black Memory: An Interview with Robert A. Hill," *Small Axe*, no. 5 (March 1999): 81–151; and "The Dialectic of Defeat: An Interview with Rupert Lewis," *Small Axe*, no. 10 (September 2001): 85–177. For an examination of that turbulent decade in Jamaica, see Obika Gray, *Radicalism and Social Change in Jamaica, 1960–1972* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997).

3 Sylvia Wynter's essay "We Must Learn to Sit Down Together and Talk about a Little Culture: Reflections on West Indian Writing and Criticism" (pt. 1, *Jamaica Journal* 2, no. 4 [1968]: 23–32; pt. 2, *Jamaica Journal* 3, no. 1 [1969]: 27–42) would be hailed by Brathwaite as "one of [the region's] great critical landmarks: a major essay into literary ideas, and the first to be written in the West Indies." See Kamau Brathwaite, "The Love Axe/I: Developing a Caribbean Aesthetic," in Houston Baker, ed., *Reading Black: Essays in the Criticism of African, Caribbean, and Black American Literature* (Ithaca, NY: Africana Studies and Research Center, Cornell University, 1976), 27 (italics in original); republished in Yanique Hume and Aaron Kamugisha, eds., *Caribbean Cultural Thought: From Plantation to Diaspora* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2013). In addition to this and other essays, Wynter had published "Jonkonnu in Jamaica" (*Jamaica Journal* 4, no. 2 [1970]: 34–48), a similarly pathbreaking critical essay on Jamaican culture.

4 This letter by Wynter, dated 15 February 1971, is quoted in Derrick White, "Black Metamorphosis: A Prelude to Sylvia Wynter's Theory of the Human," *C. L. R. James Journal* 16, no. 1 (2010): 129.

“Jonkonnu in Jamaica” (1970), “Novel and History” (1971), “Ethno or Socio Poetics” (1976), “The Politics of Black Culture” (1977), and “In Quest of Matthew Bondman” (1981).⁵

“Black Metamorphosis: New Natives in a New World” is a remarkable manuscript and deserves close study for a number of reasons. It is arguably the most important unpublished nonfiction work by an anglophone Caribbean intellectual and one major guide to the transition in Wynter’s thought between her work mainly on the Caribbean and black America in the 1960s and 1970s and her theory of the human from the early 1980s onward.⁶ Those already familiar with some of Wynter’s theoretical shift from, through, and with Marxism, Caribbean studies, and black studies, and toward her theory of the human, will find in “Black Metamorphosis” a complex and provocative study, however incomplete. The manuscript does more than clarify Wynter’s reflections on the process of indigenization and black cultural nationalism; it is her most sustained discussion of the politics of black culture in America. In my view it constitutes a highly significant contribution to the black radical tradition and is one of the most compelling interpretations of the black experience in the Western hemisphere ever written by a Caribbean intellectual.

Tracing the development of “Black Metamorphosis” is a difficult task; despite the existence of the complete text (though absent footnotes), the correspondence on the text uncovered to date does not clearly indicate when certain key decisions were made about its composition. In its initial form, the work constituted a 40–page essay titled “Natives in a New World: The African Transformation in the Americas.”⁷ A longer version consisting of seventeen chapters and running to 251 pages in length seems to have been the version that the Institute of the Black World was familiar with through most of the 1970s. In the final 935–page manuscript, the page numbers break at page 251 and resume with page 370. The 120 missing pages correspond exactly to the number of pages in a series of descriptions of revolts by enslaved persons in Jamaica, and it appears that they were meant to be inserted at this point in the text.⁸ A further thirteen chapters and over 550 pages follow the resumption on page 370, with the project ending at page 935. Given that the long version of the manuscript in its

5 Wynter, “Jonkonnu in Jamaica,” 34–48; “Novel and History, Plot and Plantation,” *Savacou*, no. 5 (June 1971): 95–102; “Ethno or Socio Poetics,” *Alcheringa: Ethnopoetics* 2, no. 2 (1976): 78–94; “We Know Where We Are From”: The Politics of Black Culture from Myal to Marley” (paper presented at the joint meeting of the African Studies Association and the Latin American Studies Association in Houston, Texas, November 1977); “In Quest of Matthew Bondman: Some Cultural Notes on the Jamesian Journey,” *Urgent Tasks* (Summer 1981): 54–69, republished in a slightly changed version in Paul Buhle, ed., *C. L. R. James: His Life and Work* (London: Allison and Busby, 1986).

6 This point is made well by Derrick White in his essay “Black Metamorphosis: A Prelude.” To my knowledge, prior to this issue of *Small Axe*, White’s is the only existing published critical commentary on “Black Metamorphosis.”

7 On my copy, Wynter attached two handwritten (potential?) subtitles, “Return of the Native Sons” and “Native Sons in the New World.”

8 These pages are divided into five chapters, with the titles “The First Maroon War” (27 pages), “Nanny Town” (22 pages), “The More Honourable to Them” (25 pages), “The Black Gendarmes” (16 pages), and “Tacky War” (30 pages). Though they are numbered chapters 12–16, respectively, they are omitted from the order in the early table of contents and are the only pages not numbered as part of the manuscript. They consist of historical descriptions in a manner quite divergent from the main text, and one wonders if they were originally slated to be a lengthy appendix to the earlier 250–page text. There is some justification for this, since the gap between page 250 and 370 in the final manuscript corresponds exactly to the total number of these pages.

early pages still refers to the manuscript as an essay, it seems that chapters were continually added onward without a revision of the manuscript in its entirety, which is corroborated by the table of contents that was never revised past chapter 17 and page 251. It is not clear when the manuscript was completed, with a number of references post-1978 suggesting that Wynter may not have concluded it until the early 1980s.

With thirty chapters ranging from seven pages to ninety-two in length, "Black Metamorphosis" defies easy summarization. It commences with the transformation of culture wrought within the Caribbean plantation experience, and concludes with lengthy meditations on the possibility of social transformation in the United States, with little of the major political conundrums faced by 1970s black intellectuals untouched in between. The relationship between the text and Wynter's publications over the decade of the 1970s is a key area of inquiry for anyone interested in this manuscript, for although only one published article emerged from it, there are several intertextual references and allusions to her published work. When Wynter commenced work on the original essay "The African Transformation in the Americas," she had published within the previous year the essays "Jonkonnu in Jamaica" and "Novel and History." Chapters 7 to 9 of "Black Metamorphosis," titled "Jonkunnu Festival—As Cultural Ritual," "Jonkunnu Festival—An Economic Consideration," and "Jonkunnu Festival—As Religious Rites and Rebellion," respectively, suggest that the manuscript was Wynter's attempt to consider "Jonkonnu in Jamaica" on a hemispheric level.⁹ It is the published essay by Wynter that has the heaviest responsibility for the original conception both of "Black Metamorphosis" and other creative work by Wynter in the 1970s, most notably her play *Maskarade*.¹⁰ "Novel and History" also plays an important role in the manuscript, with chapter 5, "Transplantation and Transformation of African Beliefs and Behaviour," dependent on it, while clear allusions to "In Quest of Matthew Bondman," Wynter's first essay on C. L. R. James, can be found closer to the manuscript's conclusion.¹¹ Three essays from the last half of the 1970s are key to understanding the development of Wynter's ideas in "Black Metamorphosis." In "Ethno or Socio Poetics," Wynter outlined an abbreviated intellectual history of Western humanism, followed by a critique of the consequences of humanist ideology through the lens of black experience.¹² "Sambos and Minstrels," the lone publication to emerge directly from "Black

9 It is not clear why Wynter chose this alternative spelling—"Jonkunnu"—in her manuscript.

10 The connection between Wynter's play *Maskarade* (1973) and "Jonkonnu in Jamaica" is noted by Carole Boyce Davies; see her essay "From Masquerade to *Maskarade*: Caribbean Cultural Resistance and the Rehumanizing Project," in Katherine McKittrick, ed., *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 205, 222. In a 1980 interview, Wynter suggests that she continued to work through the ideas of "Jonkonnu in Jamaica" for the next decade. See Daryl Cumber Dance, "Interview with Sylvia Wynter," in *New World Adams: Conversations with Contemporary West Indian Writers* (Leeds, UK: Peepal Tree, 1992), 303–4.

11 For parts of the manuscript that borrow from "Novel and History," see Wynter, "Black Metamorphosis," 48, 51–54, 228. For allusions to "In Quest of Matthew Bondman: Some Cultural Notes on the Jamesian Journey," see "Black Metamorphosis," 663, 842.

12 This essay can be seen as an early sketch of the intellectual history of Western humanism that would be central to Wynter's later work. See Wynter's "The Ceremony Must Be Found: After Humanism," in "Humanism and the University," special issue, *boundary 2* 12/13 (1984): 359–78. The issue of *Alcheringa* containing "Ethno or Socio Poetics" also saw the publication of Edouard Glissant's remarkable essay "Free or Forced Poetics," later republished as "Natural Poetics, Forced Poetics" in *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1989).

Metamorphosis,” is adapted mainly from chapters 19 and 20 in the text.¹³ “The Politics of Black Culture from Myal to Marley,” a conference paper, is perhaps the single best example of her work on popular culture in the late 1970s and is the key place to discern the theory underlying the final chapters of “Black Metamorphosis.”¹⁴ It is this essay that James read and declared as evidence that Wynter had “the greatest mind the Caribbean has ever produced.”¹⁵

The reasons why “Black Metamorphosis” languished are complex and can be only partially gleaned from the correspondence surrounding the text in the archive.¹⁶ The correspondence between members of the Institute of the Black World shows their awe at the magnitude of the project that Wynter was undertaking as well as their uncertainty about how it might be rendered in a publishable form. The first version of the work, “Natives in a New World: The African Transformation in the Americas,” was by December 1972 in the hands of Sharon Bourke at the institute— “[It is] some of the most vital and rich scholarly writing I’ve ever encountered in my duties as an editor”—and her editorial queries were on their way back to Wynter the following month.¹⁷ The correspondence over the next couple of years does not quite indicate at what point the transition from lengthy scholarly paper to full-length manuscript took place or at what point a decision was made to proceed with the work as a book.¹⁸ This was also a particularly hectic period of Wynter’s life—she left the University of the West Indies and Jamaica for the University of California, San Diego in 1974, and then left that institution to chair the Department of African and Afro-American Studies at Stanford University in the fall of 1977.¹⁹ A flurry of significant correspondence followed in 1976, at which time Wynter thought the book could be completed and available as a text for black studies courses by year end; at the same time, Howard Dodson of the Institute of the Black World was in consultations with James Turner of Cornell University over a possible joint publication of the manuscript.²⁰ By this time, a new title had emerged for what was now definitely a book-length manuscript, “Black Metamorphosis,” a title suggested, according to Wynter, by Vincent Harding.²¹ Yet despite the seeming coherence of the manuscript, editorial difficulties remained, particularly in the form

120–34. For the significance and influence of “Free or Forced Poetics” on Kamau Brathwaite, see Brathwaite’s *History of the Voice: The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry* (London: New Beacon, 1984), 16.

13 Sylvia Wynter, “Sambos and Minstrels,” *Social Text*, no. 1 (1979): 149–56. See Wynter, “Black Metamorphosis,” 402, 410, 428. Chapter 19 is titled “Contemporary Implications”; chapter 20, “Indigenization and the Underlife.”

14 See Wynter, “Black Metamorphosis,” chapter 23, “The Middle Passage Reversed”; chapter 29, “The Relative Gap”; chapter 30, “The Politics of Black Culture”; and the conclusion.

15 White, “Black Metamorphosis: A Prelude,” 127. James wrote the quoted words on his copy of Wynter’s “The Politics of Black Culture,” which is housed in the library of the Oil Workers’ Trade Union in Trinidad and Tobago.

16 The full text of “Black Metamorphosis,” along with related correspondence, is housed in the Institute of the Black World papers at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York.

17 Sharon Bourke, letter to Sylvia Wynter, 13 December 1972; Sharon Bourke, letter to Sylvia Wynter, 11 January 1973. Institute of the Black World archives, box 2, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York. Bourke’s second letter contains five pages of editorial queries that end at page 40, suggesting that the manuscript had not expanded beyond this size at this time. All subsequent correspondence cited is from this archive location.

18 Vincent Harding, letter to Sylvia Wynter, 11 September 1974; Betty Chaney, letter to Howard Dodson, 27 February 1975.

19 For Wynter’s account of this transitional time in her life, see David Scott, “The Re-enchantment of Humanism: An Interview with Sylvia Wynter,” *Small Axe*, no. 8 (September 2000): 171–73. It is striking that Wynter does not mention “Black Metamorphosis” at any time during this eighty-page interview, the most comprehensive in print of her life and work.

20 Sylvia Wynter, letter to Betty Chaney, 23 February 1976; James Turner, letter to Howard Dodson, 19 April 1976.

21 Sylvia Wynter, letter to Betty Chaney, 23 February 1976.

of missing footnotes, today still absent from the Institute of the Black World archive's copy of the text and which were seemingly never completed by Wynter.²² Wynter continued to work on the manuscript through the late 1970s, as can be seen by the inclusion of a number of reflections on the *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* decision of 1978, and she published one article from it, "Sambos and Minstrels," in the inaugural issue of the journal *Social Text*. However, "Black Metamorphosis" in its entirety, eventually comprising 935 pages of typed text, never saw publication.

Sylvia Wynter has been known for more than four decades as a theorist of immense range and sophistication, and often her contributions to edited texts have become acknowledged as the signature events of those volumes. Examples of this abound: her 1984 essay "The Ceremony Must Be Found: After Humanism" led a special issue of *boundary 2* on humanism and the university; "1492: A New World View" similarly opened the collection *Race, Discourse, and the Origin of the Americas*; "Beyond Miranda's Meanings" provided a critical afterword to the landmark text of Caribbean feminist criticism *Out of the Kumbula*.²³ Apart from glowing comments on her work by Brathwaite and James, an essay on her novel *The Hills of Hebron* by Victor Chang, and an interview conducted in 1980 with Daryl Cumber Dance, sustained scholarship on Sylvia Wynter would await the turn of the twenty-first century.²⁴ This work on Wynter's thought and legacy would emerge largely as a result of a collaboration between a group of Africana thinkers from the Caribbean at Brown University and the Centre for Caribbean Thought at UWI Mona, and a number of Wynter's former students from Stanford University, then in graduate work or on faculty at universities in North America. Paget Henry's essay on Wynter in his landmark text *Caliban's Reason: Introducing Afro-Caribbean Philosophy* was published the same year as David Scott's interview in *Small Axe*, the most comprehensive Wynter interview to date.²⁵ The following year the *Journal of West Indian Literature* published a special issue titled "Sylvia Wynter: A Transculturalist Rethinking Modernity," while in 2002 the first conference on Wynter's work was held at UWI Mona under the title "After Man, Towards

22 Njeri Jackson, letter to Howard Dodson and Sylvia Wynter, 9 November 1977. In a telephone conversation with me on 25 August 2015, Howard Dodson noted that the single greatest difficulty with moving "Black Metamorphosis" toward publication was the absence of these footnotes.

23 Wynter, "Ceremony"; "1492: A New World View," in Vera Hyatt and Rex Nettleford, eds., *Race, Discourse, and the Origin of the Americas: A New World View* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian, 1995), 5–57; "Afterword—Beyond Miranda's Meanings: Un/Silencing the 'Demonic Ground' of Caliban's 'Woman,'" in Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido, eds., *Out of the Kumbula: Caribbean Women and Literature* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World, 1990), 355–72.

24 See my earlier references for the comments by Kamau Brathwaite and C. L. R. James. See also Victor Chang, "Sylvia Wynter," in Daryl Cumber Dance, ed., *Fifty Caribbean Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook* (London: Greenwood, 1986), 498–507; and Dance, "Interview with Sylvia Wynter," 298–305. The interview was conducted in February 1980. For an essay critical of Wynter's position on feminism published shortly before the work mentioned below, see Natasha Barnes, "Reluctant Matriarch: Sylvia Wynter and the Problematics of Caribbean Feminism," *Small Axe*, no. 5 (March 1999): 34–47.

25 Paget Henry, "Sylvia Wynter: Poststructuralism and Postcolonial Thought," in *Caliban's Reason: Introducing Afro-Caribbean Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2000), 117–43; Scott, "Re-enchantment of Humanism," 119–207.

the Human: The Thought of Sylvia Wynter.²⁶ This gathering, which also saw the genesis of the Caribbean Philosophical Association, was the inaugural conference of the then one-year-old Centre for Caribbean Thought, which would proceed to host a number of memorable conferences on Caribbean intellectuals over the next decade.²⁷ The first volume of critical essays on Wynter's work, mainly the revised essays from the 2002 conference, was published as *After Man: Towards the Human* in 2006.²⁸ The last decade has witnessed the republication of her novel *The Hills of Hebron*, another edited collection of essays, and a number of monographs that have relied on Wynter's work for their key theoretical inspiration.²⁹

This special section of *Small Axe* devoted to "Black Metamorphosis" seeks to contribute to this work by clarifying a key transition in Wynter's thinking made possible by her relocation to the United States in the mid-1970s.³⁰ The essays here, in response to and in conversation with "Black Metamorphosis," represent an initial attempt to come to terms with the weight and value of this text by a group of scholars whose work has been indelibly influenced by Wynter. Demetrius Eudell traces the means by which Wynter gives up on Marxism as the theory with the greatest import for understanding black exploitation in the Americas, and the theoretical innovations this disavowal introduces into her manuscript. Greg Thomas highlights the black revolt at the heart of Wynter's work, placing it in conversation with work on marronage throughout the Western hemisphere. Katherine McKittrick considers the value of "Black Metamorphosis" through its attention to black music and its meaning for human life in an antiblack world. Relying on Wynter's insights into the overrepresentation of Western man as the human, Tonya Haynes deploys them to reflect on the emergence of what she terms "Caribbean heteromascularity studies." Nijah Cunningham suggests that a focus on the pathways presented on black embodiment, social living, and the concomitant desire for freedom in black life would allow us to decipher Wynter's fundamental contribution in her manuscript. In my own contribution, I argue that the theory of "Black Metamorphosis" turns on the uniquely black experience of embodying the non-norm and that for Wynter the determined struggles to refuse that signification constitute the meaning of the black presence in the Americas. Each

26 Demetrius Eudell and Carolyn Allen, eds., "Sylvia Wynter: A Transculturalist Rethinking Modernity," special issue, *Journal of West Indian Literature* 10, nos. 1–2 (2001); for the account of one of the central conveners of the conference, see Paget Henry, "After Man: The Thought of Sylvia Wynter," *Black Renaissance* 4, nos. 2–3 (2002): 199–201.

27 These included conferences dedicated to the work of George Lamming, the New World Group, Stuart Hall, M. G. Smith, Richard Hart, Gordon Lewis, and George Padmore. The proceedings of each conference were subsequently published in the Caribbean Reasonings book series under the imprint of Ian Randle Publishers.

28 Anthony Bogues, ed., *After Man, Towards the Human: Critical Essays on Sylvia Wynter* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2006).

29 Sylvia Wynter, *The Hills of Hebron* (1962; repr., Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2010), with an introduction by Anthony Bogues and an afterword by Demetrius Eudell; McKittrick, *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*. For monographs significantly inspired by Wynter's work, see Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006); and Alexander Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).

30 This transition has been alluded to in the past but not traced, impossible to do without "Black Metamorphosis." See Norval Edwards, "'Talking about a Little Culture': Sylvia Wynter's Early Essays," *Journal of West Indian Literature* 10, nos. 1–2 (2001): 12–38, for a comprehensive introduction to Wynter's Caribbean essays prior to her departure for the United States.

of us, then, works with and through "Black Metamorphosis," both highlighting its insights and showing its influence on our own work.

"Black Metamorphosis," Wynter's great project of the 1970s, was never published by the Institute of the Black World. By the early 1980s, it seems Wynter let the project rest, preferring the pathways she was then forging toward a critique of Western reason through a return to Renaissance humanism, which would produce her path-breaking 1984 essay "The Ceremony Must Be Found: After Humanism."³¹ We might do well to recall Karl Marx, who, in his preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, famously said the following of his then-unpublished essay *The German Ideology*: "We [himself and Engels] abandoned the manuscript to the gnawing criticism of the mice all the more willingly since we had achieved our main purpose—self-clarification."³² For Wynter, "Black Metamorphosis" accomplished this and more. It would be enough if "Black Metamorphosis" were simply the finest attempt by a Caribbean intellectual of her generation to consider black struggle in a New World hemispheric perspective, unfettered by the boundaries of the nation-state. However, this manuscript made possible even more than this—it embodied an epistemological uprising that Wynter would later term the demand for the human *after* Western man, a quest for a future beyond coloniality, Aimé Césaire's "undared form," in our present tragic times.³³ It is also a demand for an end to the deferral of the question of black self-determination—political, economic, and cultural—that remains urgent.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my appreciation and respect for each of the contributors to this section, who accepted the challenge of reading the entire manuscript and crafting a reply both in response to it and based on their own current work. Special thanks also to David Scott, for inviting me to edit this special section; to Jack Dresnick, for his assistance and collaboration on this issue; to Todne Thomas, for her critical responses to my work and our conversations about Sylvia Wynter and black radicalism; and to Paget Henry, Anthony Bogue, and Scott Rasmussen for facilitating my first encounter with "Black Metamorphosis." I am forever indebted to Sylvia Wynter for the gift of her work.

31 For Wynter's return to this essay, see "The Ceremony Found: Towards the Autopoietic Turn/Overturn, its Autonomy of Human Agency, and Extraterritoriality of (Self-)Cognition," in Jason R. Ambrose and Sabine Broeck, eds., *Black Knowledges/Black Struggles: Essays in Critical Epistemology* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), 184–252. With thanks to Jason Ambrose for sharing this essay with me.

32 Karl Marx, "A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy," in *Early Writings*, trans. Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton (London: Penguin, 1992), 427.

33 Aimé Césaire, *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*, trans. Annette Smith and Clayton Eshleman (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan, 2001), 34.

From Mode of Production to Mode of Auto-Institution: Sylvia Wynter's Black Metamorphosis of the Labor Question

Demetrius L. Eudell

The task of Black scholarship for the Eighties will be to continue the theoretical delegitimation of the cultural universe of the bourgeoisie, of its *representation of reality*, of its *control* of the way we view reality.

It is in this sense that we will be continuing the task of the post-Middle Passage voyager. . . . It is now our task to translate the implications of the cultural underlife into the mainstream—to rehumanize it, reinterpret it, re-represent it and on the basis of this counter-representation to actively and “materially” transform it. There can be no revolutionary praxis without revolutionary counter-representation.

—Sylvia Wynter, “Black Metamorphosis”

Sylvia Wynter's unpublished manuscript and intellectual tour de force “Black Metamorphosis: New Natives in a New World” could easily be identified as the summation of a life's work and thinking, if it were not succeeded for more than four decades by a prodigious oeuvre that only deepened and amplified the original insights contained therein. In this monograph, Wynter puts forth an analysis of the black experience as constituting a distinctive sociocultural formation, what she terms *neoindigenization*, a historical process in which those who were “disrupted from their place of origin” and “transplanted in a new reality” would be forced into

a process of “nativizing exile.”¹ The European settler, although in a “settler to native” relation to the “ex-African” also, “became in certain senses neo-indigenous,” and especially so in the United States (62). While different forms of colonialism, imperialism, empires, and kingdoms have been recorded throughout history (Greek, Roman, Egyptian, Mongol, Ottoman, Mughal, Almoravid, Ghanaian, Mexican/Aztec, Incan), the massive transshipment of peoples from various societies of one continent to that of another, and, moreover, one that was not the original habitat of the colonizer (although early in the history of the Middle Passage [pre-1518] slaves were transported to the Iberian peninsula before being sent to the Americas), constituted a unique departure in the history of the invention of human social orders.

In this essay I follow one of the many powerful tributaries of “Black Metamorphosis.” Using as her point of departure the epic of the Middle Passage, Wynter proposes a theory that reinterprets the history and contemporary social reality of the Americas and, by extension, the Western epistemological locus. She does so not only by incorporating and synthesizing the insights of the then-competing liberal, Marxist, and Black Cultural Nationalist paradigms but also by attempting to move beyond what these modes of analysis remained unable to elucidate. Central to her explanatory model remain the countercosmogonic conceptual and social systems of the peoples brought from Africa to the Americas, which, she illustrates, can serve as the basis from which to rethink the praxis of being human.²

Before the Portuguese voyages along the West Coast of Africa in the 1440s and those of Christopher Columbus beginning in 1492, the peoples of Europe, sub-Saharan Africa, and the Americas lived quite separate existences. However, on the basis of the Western European Christians’ expansion first into Africa and then into the Americas, these formerly unconnected worlds would be drawn, if initially only partially and to different degrees, into a more interactive world system. The Europeans’ invasion into what to them were “new worlds” produced profound changes within their own self-conceptions and social orders as well as within those of the societies with which they came into contact: “The Christian civilization of the West was mutated into Western civilization at the same time as African cultures were stigmatized as its very polar negation, the absence of civilization, its void” (382).

In this context, the pigmentary hereditary variations of peoples from the continent of Africa would be conceptually collapsed into the idea of “Black skin,” which “would be confused with the social being of a slave” (25). This understanding, one that differed substantially from the self-conceptions of the various societies on the continent of Africa, transformed the “multi-tribal” and “multi-cultural” peoples into a completely new historic entity: the Negro (25). This new ascription, in which *slave* came to mean archetypally African and Negro, was adopted by all Christian European slave traders and thereby gave new meaning to a not-so-peculiar

1 Sylvia Wynter, “Black Metamorphosis: New Natives in a New World” (unpublished ms., n.d.), 486; hereafter cited in the text. The quote used as an epigraph is found on 917 (italics in original).

2 See Katherine McKittrick, ed., *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015).

institution.³ Whereas extensive slavery and slave trading had existed globally prior to the Middle Passage, the extent of the purely economic objectification of the Negro-slave seemed to have intensified beyond previous forms, as those from the continent of Africa were reduced to “a form of labor power calculated in terms of exchange value, bought and sold not as a slave, but as a commodity” (27; original in all caps).

This totally new (and imposed) model of identity of a racialized slave would for trading purposes also be identified as *pieza* (Spanish for “piece”), an interchangeable productive unit of measurement based on the estimated productive capacity of an able-bodied, usually male, slave of a certain height and size. Being too old, sick, or physically disabled would render one less than a full *pieza*. This method of assessment was to determine the value/equivalence of the enslaved person, which implied that the actual number of biological human persons on a slave ship would not necessarily correspond to the number of *piezas de Indias* to be traded.⁴ In the seventeenth century, as Leslie B. Rout Jr. notes, several of the *asiento* contracts (licenses issued by the Spanish state to carry slaves to the Americas) attempted to establish a standard of evaluation of *pieza de Indias*, but these varied widely from “a ratio of 1 *pieza* to 1.31 persons” to a *pieza* being “deemed to equal 1.74 persons, and, under usual conditions, as many as 11 persons.” Nonetheless, the “process of computation” demonstrated “that *bozales* [people taken directly from Africa as slaves] were considered to be something less than human by the persons who arranged for or dealt in the traffic.”⁵ Wynter emphasizes this ontological dimension as well, noting that “the conversion of tribally defined Africans” into *piezas* “reveal[s] that the ‘value’ of the commodity is not related *only* to the labour incorporated in it, but an initially *societal* definition of the value of that labour according to the *social value* ascribed to the bearers of particular variants of labour-power” (890; italics in original).

The early part of the manuscript, in which Wynter discusses how the African and ex-African as slave would be “metamorphosed into commodity,” illustrates the extent to which her thinking remained indebted to certain Marxian formulations (28). Indeed, the commencement of the argument emphasizes the economic functioning of the institution of slavery: “The European slave traffic across the Middle Passage was from the beginning a capitalist enterprise” (27). In fact, rather than seeing slavery as competing with capitalism, Wynter argues, against the interpretation put forth by Eugene Genovese, that “slavery was but a unit of it [capitalism] in the same way as the factory” (139). Moreover, this devaluation of the labor power of blacks carried out through the exchange of slavery produced the phenomenon of

3 See Moses I. Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology*, ed. Brent D. Shaw (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener, 1998). Finley insightfully notes, “In the context of universal history, free labour, wage labour, not slavery is *the* peculiar institution. For most of the millennia of human history in most parts of the world, labour power was not a commodity that could be bought and sold apart from, abstracted from, the person of the labourer” (299).

4 Colin A. Palmer, “The Company Trade and the Numerical Distribution of Slaves to Spanish America, 1703–1739,” in Paul E. Lovejoy, ed., *Africans in Bondage: Studies in Slavery and the Slave Trade* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), 29–30.

5 Leslie B. Rout Jr., *The African Experience in Spanish America: 1502 to the Present Day* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 61–63.

racism: "In the global capitalist system it is not the perception of the Black (the Indian, the Native) as inferior, . . . [that is,] it is not the ideology (superstructure) but the material base, the economic infrastructure which is finally determinate of the racism intrinsic to the capitalist system" (33; original in all caps).

Given the explanatory power of a Marxist critique of history and politics, some notable black scholars have logically been drawn to this model of analysis in order to explicate slavery and the experiences of blacks. As Oliver C. Cox notes in *Capitalism as a System*, Karl Marx viewed slavery as part of the "idyllic proceedings" of the phase of "primitive accumulation," which, with the "dissolution of feudal society," signaled "the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production."⁶ According to Cox, Marx emphasized "the economics and sociology of capitalism in order to provide a theoretical foundation for his proletarian ideology." In other words, had Marx been preoccupied with "the scientific study of capitalism as a form of social organization, with only a derived interest in the contemporary class struggle," Cox asserts, "his entire theoretical work would have been differently informed."⁷ From Cox's perspective, what is often characterized as subsidiary in classical economics can actually play a central role, which means that Marx's "primitive accumulation" could be understood as "none other than fundamentally capitalist production."⁸

Although Eric Williams's *Capitalism and Slavery* preceded Cox's work by two decades, it can be argued that, thematically, he takes up the baton where Cox leaves off. The 1964 republication of Williams's now classic text, which generated a fair amount of debate within the discipline of history, coincided with the appearance of his fellow Trinidadian's work. Williams insists that not only did the intensification of capitalism lead to the abolition of slavery but that this occurred only after slavery had laid the foundation for industrial capitalism itself, with the implication being that slavery generated the consequent wealth and political hegemony of the Western world. As W. E. B. Du Bois had also argued in his groundbreaking *Black Reconstruction*, slavery "became the foundation stone not only of the Southern social structure, but of Northern manufacture and commerce, of the English factory system, of European commerce, of buying and selling on a world-wide scale."⁹ Thus, from Cox, Du Bois, Williams, and early Wynter, one approach that emerged located slavery in the history, indeed at the origins, of capitalism. Moreover, from the perspective of Williams, slavery served a central role in its transformation, both through its decline in economic value (a result of overproduction, a contentious point historiographically) and its loss of political support in the British Parliament in the wake of the passage of the 1832 Reform Bill, which defused the West India voting bloc that had previously voted to support slavery in the colonies (a less contentious point).¹⁰

6 Karl Marx, quoted in Oliver C. Cox, *Capitalism as a System* (New York: Monthly Review, 1964), 213.

7 Cox, *Capitalism as a System*, 212.

8 *Ibid.*, 214.

9 W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction: An Essay toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860–1880* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1935), 5.

10 Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944; repr., London: Andre Deutsch, 1964).

Following explorations of the relation between slavery and capitalism, the status of blacks after slavery also remained a preoccupation of black thinkers, in particular, the relation of working-class labor movements, especially communism, to the experiences of a formerly enslaved population. This engagement manifested itself in multiple genres, including literary fiction, historical investigations, political essays, and letters of resignation. As Cedric Robinson has contended, in the beginning of the US communist movement, blacks were often viewed as backward because of a lack of “class consciousness,” which made any expressions of nationalism, such as in the case of Marcus Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association, “a potential threat to the socialist movement itself.” Even after Vladimir Lenin in 1921 first raised the “Negro Question,” urging US communists to recruit black members, the results were disappointing.¹¹ And a central reason for this had to do with the racial structure that underlay the US social order, one in which the working classes remained complexly implicated. Du Bois explored this ontological issue as well, noting in “The Class Struggle,” an opinion piece published in the *Crisis*, “Theoretically we are part of the world proletariat in the sense that we are mainly an exploited class of cheap laborers; but practically we are not part of the white proletariat to any great extent. We are the victims of their physical oppression, social ostracism, economic exclusion and personal hatred; and when in self defense we seek sheer subsistence we are howled down as ‘scabs.’”¹² Du Bois develops this argument more comprehensively in his seminal *Black Reconstruction*, in which he argues that black slaves in the United States “represented the worst and lowest conditions of modern laborers” and “in a very real sense the ultimate degradation of man.”¹³

Amplifying this point, and doing so before studies more systematically addressed the “wages of whiteness,” Wynter argues that not only were blacks during and after slavery the more “degraded form of labor” but the very realization of white working-class identity was made possible by the devaluation of the existence of blacks.¹⁴ Hence, the “race prejudice” expressed by the white worker toward the black “was not due to some inherent sickness” but rather constituted an “economically logical” response as “the existence of more devalued labor made the white worker more of a man. *His being came to depend on the lesser being of black*” (157–58; original emphasis in all caps). In such a structure of social relations, any measures of keeping the blacks in their socially and conceptually defined space assured the “relative superiority” of the white working classes, even “at the expense of accepting [their] own relative exploitation by the bourgeoisie” (158).

To illustrate this point, Wynter utilizes an evocative scene from Richard Wright’s *Black Boy* in which this dynamic is depicted in a most heartrending manner. Trying to find work so that

11 Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism* (London: Zed, 1983), 301–3.

12 W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Class Struggle,” *Crisis* 22, no. 4 (1921): 151.

13 Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 9.

14 See David R. Roediger’s seminal *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 1991).

he can move out of the suffocating social strictures of the South, Wright landed an opportunity, through his friend Griggs, to be an apprentice in an optical shop run by a Northerner, Mr. Crane. The employer instructed his two white workers, Pease and Reynolds, to train Wright in the necessary skills. But Pease and Reynolds had no intention of following the orders of their employer, and Wright was relegated to custodial work as well as subjected to verbal taunts, including commentary regarding the size and use of the sexual organs of blacks. Having the temerity to ask about the training that he was not receiving provoked the response that he was trying to “get smart” and that he was thinking and acting as though he were white. The situation rose to a climax “at noon one summer day,” when Reynolds accused Wright of calling Pease by only his last name, without using the epistemologically mandated, racially honorific title of “Mr.” As a consequence Wright was trapped in a classic Sartrean *huis clos*: “If I had said: No, sir, Mr. Pease, I never called you Pease, I would by inference have been calling Reynolds a liar; and if had said: Yes, sir, Mr. Pease, I called you Pease, I would have been pleading guilty to the worst insult that a Negro can offer to a southern white man.” In the end, Wright begged them not to hit him, since he knew exactly why they were intimidating and threatening him: “They wanted me to leave the job.”¹⁵

Explicating this scene, Wynter maintains that Pease and Reynolds wanted “above all, recognition of their absolute unquestioned mastery,” but that their “emotional terrorism” was equally “matched by their subservience to the Yankee employer” (406). By seeing themselves as master, they remained “unable to apprehend the reality of their own form of servitude” and would “feel no compulsion . . . to decode the cypher of social reality as Richard Wright was impelled to do” (422). It is precisely this dynamic, whereby the white workers could experience themselves as the norm as opposed to the conceptual other at the level of labor, that sets the black labor question apart from the white.

Indeed, such experiences certainly informed Wright’s disavowal of communism, which he openly declared in 1944 in his two-part essay in the *Atlantic*, “I Tried to Be a Communist.” Despite attempts like those of Wright and others, such as the valiant efforts of communists in Alabama so compellingly rendered by Robin D. G. Kelley, it often remained difficult, conceptually and, by extension, politically, to incorporate the experiences of blacks into the theoretical models and organizing efforts of the white-dominated labor movement.¹⁶ C. L. R. James, who remained committed throughout his life to the tenets of Marxism and socialism, acknowledged “this difficult relationship between the independent Negro movement and the revolutionary proletariat,” lamenting that in the past “and by some very good socialists too,” the black struggle was interpreted as having only “episodic value” and, moreover, could “constitute a great danger not only to the Negroes themselves, but to the organized labor

15 Richard Wright, *Black Boy (American Hunger): A Record of Childhood and Youth* (1945; repr., New York: Perennial Classics, 1993), 189–90.

16 Robin D. G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists during the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

movement.”¹⁷ Along these lines, Wright posed the following questions, after being warned by a black communist “comrade” against holding the incorrect ideological position: “Why was I a suspected man because I wanted to reveal the vast physical and spiritual ravages of Negro life, the profundity latent in these rejected people, the dramas as old as man and the sun and the mountains and the seas that were taking place in the poverty of black America? What was the danger in showing the kinship between the sufferings of the Negro and the sufferings of other people?”¹⁸

This consistent and often-demonstrated antipathy to the experiences of black and colonial peoples also prompted Aimé Césaire in 1956 to resign from the French Communist Party. In his paradigmatic “Lettre à Maurice Thorez,” Césaire addresses two issues that Wynter develops in “Black Metamorphosis.” First, insisting on an honest “self-critique” of their “unshakable self-satisfaction,” Césaire stresses that he is not repudiating the theories of Marxism and communism but rather disavowing the uses to which they were being put, as he feels they should be made to serve the interests of “black peoples” rather than the converse. The other point on which a substantial portion of Wynter’s argument builds concerns the nature of coalitions, which, again, Césaire does not reject outright; but at the same time, he insists that they have to confront “the uniqueness of [blacks]’ situation in the world which cannot be confused with any other” nor be reduced to an ancillary element of an ostensibly more fundamental issue.¹⁹

In the vein of Césaire’s attempt to decolonize Marxism, Wynter also argues against the use of the code of class to homogenize the global experiences of black and colonized peoples merely within the terms of the paradigm of labor. However, more than this, such an analysis is coupled with liberal attempts to do the same. In particular, the theoretical “imposition of the ‘immigrant paradigm,’” based on “the fiction of equivalence” (826), needs to be challenged, since this conceptual framework enables white ethnic groups to be constituted “as the Social Norm, in relation to the deviant other, the Black” (886). This intellectual strategy, identified by Wynter as “the tolerant ‘ethnicity’ code,” reduces “the social differences produced by an unjust mode of distribution, to fixed ‘ethnic differences’” (856) and, in effect, denies that “Blacks have been socially exploited not as an ‘ethnic group,’ nor as a ‘minority’ but as a social group defined as the Deviant Other,” that is, as a “socially-produced caste” (907, italics in original; 908). Therefore, neither the Marxist approach, compelled to view the black, slave, and colonial experiences primarily in the terms of labor, nor the liberal humanist-derived immigrant paradigm, premised on the autonomous, freely willing and freely desiring liberal human

17 C. L. R. James, “The Revolutionary Answer to the Negro Problem in the United States,” in *C. L. R. James and Revolutionary Marxism: Selected Writings of C. L. R. James, 1939–1949*, ed. Scott McLemee and Paul Le Blanc (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1994), 179, 183.

18 Richard Wright, “I Tried to Be a Communist,” *Atlantic*, August 1944, 67.

19 “Autocritique probe”; “son inaltérable satisfaction de soi”; “peuples noirs”; “singularité de notre ‘situation dans le monde’ qui ne se confond avec nulle autre”; “singularité de nos problèmes qui ne se ramènent à nul autre problème”; Aimé Césaire, *Lettre à Maurice Thorez* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1956), 7, 6, 12, 8, 8 (translation mine).

subject with social mobility, could sufficiently deal with the specificity and fundamental quality of ontological otherness that remained central to the *being* of being black.

And yet, at the same time, it becomes clear that it remained not only important to relate the experiences of blacks to those of the working classes but, in so doing, to insist on reconsidering chronologically the genealogy of labor in the modern world. In this vein, "Black Metamorphosis" fits within a line of thinking that seeks to reconfigure the historical trajectory of the making of the proletariat in the Americas. Just as Du Bois had noted that slavery preceded the rise of the white working classes, Wynter also maintains that "the alienated wage worker of the Industrial Revolution was preceded by the black slave," which results from the plantation having "prefigured important aspects of the organization of modern industrial/technological society" (113–14). The production of sugar using enslaved black labor provides a clear example that elucidates this historical phenomenon. In addition to the agricultural aspect of harvesting sugar cane, not only was a specific infrastructural and substantial capital investment needed for machinery but as well the enterprise required skilled labor akin to the later industrial process. Although the cultivation of sugar preceded the Encounter of 1492, nonetheless, as Stuart B. Schwartz notes in the case of Brazil, the developments on slave plantations in the Americas signaled a historic departure: "Pressing the canes in the mill, clarifying the liquid in a series of cauldrons, skimming impurities, and pouring the liquid into molds that then crystallized into sugar were processes as old or older than the medieval Mediterranean world but were in some ways strikingly modern."²⁰ Moreover, the work rhythm "closely resembled the modern industrial assembly line" and, indeed, because of their industrial nature, the mill and boiling house were referred to as *fábrica* ("factory").²¹

Yet despite acknowledging the inescapable, indeed interdependent, relation of the issues of slavery and race to those of labor and class formation, Wynter is nonetheless compelled to rethink the earlier assertion made in the monograph, in which she "accepted the theory that the economic tended to determine the 'superstructure'" (430). In the latter part of the text, Wynter calls this analytic framework into question, as, for instance, with the instituting of the stereotyped image of the figure of Sambo. Whereas earlier Wynter describes the Sambo

20 Stuart B. Schwartz, *Slaves, Peasants, and Rebels: Reconsidering Brazilian Slavery* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 42.

21 *Ibid.*, 43. "Factory" stems etymologically from late Latin *factōria*, a factorship, an agency and also from *factorium* "oil press" (*The Barnhart Dictionary of Etymology*, ed. Robert K. Barnhart [Bronx, NY: H. W. Wilson, 1988], 365). Also it derives from or is related to the Portuguese word *feitoria*, which was a trading post, Portugal's primary overseas commercial institution that managed trade as well as bought and sold goods (*The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, ed. C. T. Onions [London: Oxford Clarendon, 1966], 341). Historically, *factory* meant "an establishment for traders carrying on business in a foreign country." See *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 11th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), s.v. "factory"; and Bailey W. Diffie and George D. Winius, *Foundations of the Portuguese Empire, 1415–1580* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 22. And, in Portuguese the person who dealt with the foreign government was called a *feitor* or "factor." Thus, if the origin of *fact* lies in the Latin "to do" or "to make," and the "factor" is the one who does or acts, that is, an agent, then *factory* becomes where things are done. Diffie and Winius, however, cautioned against conflating *feitoria* with "factory" (or "manufactory"), since the former was not a center of production (*Foundations*, 313). The main point here, however, is to convey the central relation of slavery to early modern understandings of trade and production, on which the late eighteenth-century industrial order would be built. In fact, the Portuguese *feitor*, which could be translated as "land agent," also came to mean "overseer," a term with specific resonance in the context of plantation slavery.

figuration as serving “in the last instance an economic function” (162), it would subsequently be interpreted as a mechanism “far more central to capitalism’s functioning as a mode of domination” and, thereby, “extracting surplus value” became “secondary to its functioning of permitting a mode of domination to be generalized at all levels of the system” (429). Wynter asserts that, like capital, power can be “accumulated and redistributed, at different relative levels of gratification” (429–30), which implies that even the so-called disempowered exert power as it is asserted against them: “By being allowed to terrorize the freed slave, the poor whites are induced to accept the relatively milder forms and modalities of social repression exercised by the bourgeois[ie] against them. The slave too used his vicarious identification with the rich masters to look down on the poor whites [511]. As Fanon says, the Negro *too* wants to be master. The proletariat wants to be the bourgeoisie, as the middle class black wants to be the white master” (430; page citation in original but not footnoted). This mode of argumentation, in which it becomes increasingly challenging to invoke victims and oppressors, reflects a shift toward a theorization of the psychic dimensions not only of being black but more fundamentally of being human. And the invocation of Frantz Fanon in this context is indeed pointed, since he illustrates in *Black Skin, White Masks* how the colonized often internalize the negative self-images disseminated by the dominant system of knowledge, a mechanism of mimetic aversion that, Wynter insists, necessarily accompanies the mimetic desire that René Girard has argued defines all human behavior.²²

Wynter ascribes Marxism’s inability to “account for the radically different quality of the black experience even in those areas where the parallels between the condition of the proletariat and the conditions of the Negro were clear” to its reliance on the “factory model of exploitation” as the explanatory key (562). Although Marx himself seemed to have contradicted his earlier formulation that consciousness was produced by the social conditions, this “materialist theory of the mind” would remain central to the theoretical framework on which labor politics and organizing were based (562). By minimizing, when not completely overlooking, the historical precedent of the slave plantation, “the first large scale site of the mass-production of man as interchangeable production units—i.e. *pieza*, labelled ‘negroes’” (564), the factory model of exploitation became “an analysis only of the *core form* of exploitation” (574; original emphasis in all caps). Thus, this model of analysis disregards not only the colonial origins of capitalism but also its continued dependency on colonialism. Indeed, Wynter asserts, capitalism, when understood as a world system rather than as “capitalist enclaves and tendencies within European society,” is only “made possible by the sudden acquisition by European

22 Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lamm Markman (1952; repr., New York: Grove Press, 1967). Sylvia Wynter, “The Ceremony Must Be Found: After Humanism,” in “On Humanism and the University I: The Discourse of Humanism,” special issue, *boundary 2* 12, no. 3 / 13, no. 1 (1984): 51. Girard’s elaboration of his seminal idea can be found in René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966).

countries of a new frontier which psychologically transformed all Europeans into actual or potential settlers" (563).

On the basis of the foundational conditions of settler colonialism and slavery in the Americas, Wynter proposes an alternative paradigm to counter the factory mode of explanation, which she terms "the nigger-breaking model." Characterized as being "the more universal model," this analytic framework "gives insights into what we can call the ideological nigger-breaking mechanisms that produce the worker as always eternally proletariat, the woman as eternally female, the black as negro, the white as norm" (566). Using the archetypal scene of Frederick Douglass's slave narrative in which the slave driver and overseer Edward Covey has to devastate Douglass's psyche in order to force him into accepting his subordinate status, Wynter offers a theory of the role of the plantation as site of convergence for the creation of the structure of identities that would institute and reproduce the societies of the Americas: "The secret of capitalism is to be found not in the factory but in the plantation" (582).

In this context, one could revise U. B. Phillips's assertion that slavery "was less a business than a life" because it made "fewer fortunes than men." By emphasizing that the plantation was "at once factory, family, and social site on which multilayered levels of identities confronted each other," Wynter's analysis suggests that the plantation was indeed a form of life that produced many fortunes (à la *Capitalism and Slavery*) as well as "men" (591). And, not only men but also women, in both the plantation mistress modality of a Lady Nugent throughout the Americas and that of working-class women of the US North.²³ Indeed, in adopting the bourgeois "mode of symbolization" in which the prescribed gender roles entailed "cosy domesticity" for the woman in the private sphere and the male proletariat laboring in the public sphere of the factory, Marxism separated the family from the factory, an ironic move when we consider the role of the young women of the textile factories in Lowell, Massachusetts, the site of the first factory town and a central location of the birth of industrialization in the United States.²⁴ Indeed, several decades before academic discourses of intersectionality became more common, Wynter had already insisted (though still somewhat within terms of political economy) that the "capitalist system can only be seized by and through its interrelationships" where "fixed coefficients of exchange need to be established" (591).

In such a frame, no issue should be singled out of a wider interacting context, since "the autonomization of the unit of analysis be it factory or the plantation, leads to ideology" (591). With the example of the phenomenon of race, Wynter notes that the Black Muslims "found the mechanism to de-nigger break the lumpen-outcasts of the society," doing so "by constituting them as the new Norm." Yet, like Garveyism, these "counter systems of symbolization" that

²³ See Wynter, "Lady Nugent's Journal," *Jamaica Journal* 1, no. 1 (1967): 23–34.

²⁴ Thomas Dublin, "Women, Work, and the Family: Female Operatives in the Lowell Mills, 1830–1860," *Feminist Studies* 3, nos. 1–2 (1975): 30–39. See also Julie Husband, "'The White Slave of the North': Lowell Mill Women and the Reproduction of 'Free' Labor," *Legacy* 16, no. 1 (1999): 11–21, in which writers for *Lowell Offering*, a periodical authored by and for the "mill girls," seemed unwilling to embrace an identification with either slavery or degraded labor in general.

delegitimated the hegemony of the dominant order could at the same time produce “the fascist temptation which resides in any system of exclusivity based on a Single Norm, its totalitarian nature which calls for subjection to the hegemonic Cause.” The contradiction, or logical consequence, of this mode of explanation led Malcolm X, in his challenge to the “narrow imprisoning recoding that institutionalized the Black Muslim movement,” to break with the group, just as in Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* (1952) the “fictional Narrator would break with the fictional representation of the Communist Party, the Brotherhood, for whom history had replaced manifest destiny; and for whom the destiny of the Symbolic Proletariat had replaced the Great/White and Single Race” (722–23).

Dissecting the intellectual strategy of the “Single Norm” explanatory principle goes to the heart of Wynter’s reconceptualization, her “black metamorphosis” of the labor question. Although the paradigms of Marxism and Cultural Nationalism began to delegitimize the economic and social power of the hegemonic bourgeoisie, by inverting “one, the Economic Norm, the other, the Racial Norm,” instead of “deconstructing the category of the Norm,” these models of analysis “translated the bourgeois law of value” that, in the end, would change only “who was to occupy the place of the norm” (723). Moreover, both these theoretical and political approaches reflected a deterministic understanding of culture, which Wynter asserts “is not a substance which has a fixed nature” (843). Consciousness, she then proposes, “emerges from interrelationships that constitute social life” with culture dialectically existing “as the expression both of these interrelationships and its negation” (562).

Such an understanding implies that “the social constructs of Black and White groups” are categories “constituted not so much by their places of origin—Europe/Africa—as by the social interrelation between them” (821). It can therefore be argued that with respect to the question of labor, class and racial consciousness are “not determined by one’s relationship to the means of production, but rather [determined] by one’s relative placing in the global structures of production.” Just as Wynter demonstrates, with respect to the *pieza* classification, that an underlying ontological structure assigns one’s place in the system, such a structure could be generalized to all subordinated peoples: “It is the institution of a mode of social relations that marks, inscribes, the groups that are to be exploited by different attributes, attributes which then become the condition of possibility of the varying forms of exploitation” (564). In her seminal study of West Indian slave laws, Elsa Goveia notes that “before slave laws could be made, it was necessary for the opinion to be accepted that persons could be made slaves and held as slaves,” and thereby necessarily calling into question an understanding of the enslavement of peoples from the continent of Africa as having resulted from, in Winthrop Jordan’s somewhat naturalizing terms, “an unthinking decision.”²⁵

25 Elsa V. Goveia, “The West Indian Slave Laws of the Eighteenth Century,” *Revista de Ciencias Sociales* 4 (March 1960): 75; Winthrop Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550–1812* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 44–98.

Employing what she later defines as a “deciphering practice,” which examines literature in order to reveal “the dynamics of desire at the deep structural level of the order’s symbolic template,” Wynter forges an original analysis of the racial and class dynamics using the idea of inscription as a conceptual framework.²⁶ Once again rethinking some earlier assertions in the manuscript, Wynter redefines the plantation system by noting that in Douglass’s example “nigger-breaking is not an exercise undertaken only for an economic purpose” (589) but as well “to get him to accept his prescribed ego-identity, and therefore getting him, freely, to stay in his place.” This equally compelling motivation leads Wynter to conclude, “Nigger-breaking reveals itself as an initiation rite in which the task of social inscription was at least as important as the task of economic extraction” (590).

Thus, the forced labor of the enslaved served in brutal terms not only to subordinate the population group physically and metaphysically but, in so doing, to produce, verify, and legitimate an understanding of being human that enables the realization of the society in culture-specific (in Wynter’s contemporary vernacular), auto-poetic, auto-instituting terms: “With theologization of material life, its production of the economic as its sole reality principle, its reduction of man to his productive capacity” (439), in which labor “is inscribed as a commodity” (620), remain the central strategies by means of which the bourgeoisie “controls and regiments the multiple layers of its world system” (439). Such control could not be effected without controlling the terms through which the social reality should be interpreted: “Political economy of our times has been produced as the reality principle of our society and as [Jean] Baudrillard points out, words like profit, surplus value, class struggle have been strung together to form a discourse of reference” (624).

In effect, “Black Metamorphosis” offers a *productivist* analysis of our present social order based on the metaphysics of production and within whose logic the division of labor must be inscribed as *the* factor that gives rise not only to the economic system but also to the wider social system as a whole. Without denying the centrality of labor to human orders, the particular form that it began to take during the industrial revolution cannot be separated from a completely new understanding of the self and world that occurred in the wake of the intellectual transformations of the late eighteenth century, most centrally the idea of the human as a purely natural organism that could be defined by labor. Such an understanding, while a progression of the specifically Western epistemology stemming from Renaissance/lay humanism (with its shift to politics and reasons of state against those of the church and its interpretations of nature), nonetheless began to break with all previous ideas that still sought explanation in supernatural/divine principles.

26 Sylvia Wynter, “On Disenchanting Discourse: ‘Minority’ Literary Criticism and Beyond,” *Cultural Critique* 7 (Autumn 1987): 241, and “Rethinking ‘Aesthetics’: Notes Towards a Deciphering Practice,” in Mbye Cham, ed., *Ex-Iles: Essays on Caribbean Cinema* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World, 1992), 237–79.

This new vision also called for a reconceptualization of the human past—one now represented as being defined according to modes of subsistence. Despite the changes it would undergo, this interpretation was paradigmatically expressed within the Scottish (and French) Enlightenment's stadial theory of human societies progressing/evolving from nomadic hunter-gatherer modes of existence to pasturage, subsequently to agriculture, and finally to a commercial/industrial organization of society.²⁷ Marx's theory of the evolution of societies from primitive communism and slavery to feudalism, capitalism, and finally to socialism also presumes a similar progressive schema based on a history of modes of production, and notably so with a beginning not that distinct from Adam Smith's "lowest and rudest state of society," which also seemed to have existed prior to "any social organization of production."²⁸ The central consequence remains that in the contemporary context references to developed, developing, and underdeveloped societies are indeed generated from the matrix of thought surrounding the narrative of human origins initially asserted during the Scottish Enlightenment.

Such a thesis prompts Wynter to pose the question, "Is development a purely empirical concept or also teleological?" A clear instance of this problem occurs with the utopian concept of ever-increasing economic growth, an idea that must be discursively produced in the most rigorous manner in order to give it empirical life, which then enables it to "lay down the prescriptive behavioral pathways instituting of our present world system."²⁹ In other words, despite forging a profound rupture at the level of the human species, Wynter insists, at the same time, that the secular West has not broken from the process by means of which humans come to know and experience our narratively instituted worlds as reality. In such a frame, then, capitalism forms a part of the governing symbolic code in which all human groups/societies must necessarily come to know their social reality in adaptively advantageous terms, which then enable the realization of specific modes or *genres* (to which gender role allocations remain central) of being human and thereby the realization of our specific sociohuman orders as living systems—in our case, that of *Homo oeconomicus*, Economic Man.

As humans, we cannot preexist our narratives of origins, be they myths, legends, or, in the post-Enlightenment context, the disciplinary discourse of history (a secular reoccupation of the former two), since the indispensable condition of our existence remains in what Wynter identifies as the *laws of human auto-institution*. On the basis of Fanon's redefinition of the human as a *hybrid* being, phylogenic and ontogenic, on the one hand, and sociogenic, on the

27 Ronald L. Meek's *Social Science and the Ignoble Savage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976) provides a seminal analysis of the development of this concept. As a result of the anxiety and, in some instances, the stigma surrounding luxury and consumption in the eighteenth century, which were linked also to a gendered discourse of effeminacy, the commercial/industrial stage was acknowledged with much trepidation. See J. G. A. Pocock, "The Mobility of Property and the Rise of Eighteenth-Century Sociology," in *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 103–23; and Drew R. McCoy, *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 13–47.

28 McCoy, *Elusive Republic*, 19.

29 See Sylvia Wynter, "Is 'Development' a Purely Empirical Concept or also Teleological? A Perspective from 'We the Underdeveloped,'" in Aguibou Y. Yansané, ed., *The Prospects for Recovery and Sustainable Development in Africa* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1996), 300.

other, Wynter argues that the sociogenic principle, as the analogue of the genomic principle that determines how organic forms of life *adaptively* perceive and classify their respective social worlds, remains the explanatory key, both to what David Chalmers has identified as “the puzzle of consciousness” as well as to the laws that govern human behaviors.³⁰

The implications here are indeed significant. Rather than the Marxian concept of modes of production, it is the *modes of auto-institution*, according to Wynter, that determine human behaviors. The specific mode of material provisioning, or in our present auto-instituting terms, economic production, is an indispensable but only proximate mechanism, since capitalism serves the central function of instituting our present specific (though globally hegemonic) *genre of being human*, of *Homo oeconomicus*. Although she does not fully articulate it in these terms, Wynter already broaches this line of thinking in “Black Metamorphosis” when she notes that what capitalism expropriates “is not merely labour power” but “far more comprehensively . . . social power,” which is effected through the control of “the means of socialization and signification” (394). In this regard, “the ritual of work” also “functions as a central means of socialization” (925). Hence, given that such “control can take the form of ownership,” it “allows the ruling class not only to legitimate its hegemony, but to appropriate the right to self-definition, and to self-expression by all other groups in the society, as well as to subordinate these groups to the purpose of its own self-expression and definition” (565).

For this reason, arguments that focus (especially to the exclusion of other aspects) on the transformation of the relations of production as the pathway toward emancipation remain incomplete: “The control over the means of production is a central factor, but only one factor, in [the ruling class’s] strategy of socialization.” This conclusion can also illustrate the limitations of “the factory model of exploitation” that “reveals the mechanism of one of the forms of exploitation” but “cannot extend into a revelation of the mode of socialization by which the ruling class—in this case, the bourgeoisie—carries out its strategies of domination” (565), and therefore cannot “extend into these other areas, to reveal the extent of the qualitative social and symbolic exploitation” (567). As was made clear by the incident with Pease and Reynolds in Richard Wright’s *Black Boy*, and in his *Native Son* (1940), in which criminal activities “are the only *creative* acts permitted Bigger by the social order, the only opportunity to actualize his *human* power,” the materialism of “official Marxism” remains “unable to comprehend the social claim for recognition.” For this reason, during the 1960s, the black social movements became “the first form of revolt directed explicitly not at the bourgeois *mode of production*, which is only a partial aspect—but at its *cultural signification system*” (914; italics in original).

Although it has been argued that “the philosophical assumptions of the Marxist theory do not preclude the use of a concept of culture encompassing all the spheres of social activity

30 Sylvia Wynter, “Towards the Sociogenic Principle: Fanon, Identity, the Puzzle of Conscious Experience, and What It Is Like to Be ‘Black,’” in Mercedes F. Durán-Cogan and Antonio Gómez-Moriana, eds., *National Identities and Sociopolitical Changes in Latin America* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 30–66.

and its product,” this dimension has often remained subordinated to the economic aspects of human existence.³¹ “Black Metamorphosis,” however, seeks to systematically theorize the role of these cultural expressions (in Wynter’s contemporary parlance, auto-instituting technologies) with respect not only to the black population but as well to the very being of being human itself. In this vein, Jonkunnu and other slave cultural forms challenge the “mechanization of existence” on which the plantation (and subsequently the factory) were premised (107). Embodying a “counter-aesthetic and counter ethic” in which their “oath-taking ceremonies and subsequent revolts were at one and the same time a form of praxis and abstract theoretical activity” (139), the black oral cultures of the New World were therefore compelled to reexpropriate “the intentionality of consciousness” (744). After the abolition of slavery, a similar dynamic arose: “Out of another dispossession, out of another Middle Passage of the spirit, Reggae, like the blues, like jazz articulates the revolutionary demand for happiness on the part of the wretched of the earth—the global natives of all races disrupted from their traditional cultures into twentieth century terror” (205). Wynter thus concludes that the universal is no longer bourgeoisie versus the proletariat but, rather, the socially incorporated versus the socially marginalized (897). According to Fanon, *les damnés de la terre* “demand reciprocal human relations,” since the present “social order based on relations of accumulation and expropriation” remains unable “to find the mechanism for rational social and global distribution” (912). Such a position would then necessarily demand the reconceptualization of our social order beyond the poetics of labor, instituted on the basis of the conception of the human as *Homo oeconomicus*. Fundamentally, human existence would therefore need to be decoupled from “making a living,” the belief according to which all of us are induced to be and to behave. As Wynter so poignantly expresses it,

Labour time is not man’s lifetime. Man’s vital demand is the demand to participate in the constitution of a sense of self-worth by and through his creative action upon the world. It is not true, insists Césaire, that the task of man is finished [734]. The task of the twenty-first century is a task for which the social imperative of black culture—the neo-native culture of the U.S.A. is supremely fitted—the task of inventing a social order based on reciprocal recognition, on the reciprocal conferring of human value [735]. (616; page citations in original but not footnoted)

31 Antonina Kloskowska, “The Conception of Culture According to Karl Marx,” in Jerzy J. Wiatr, ed., *Polish Essays in the Methodology of the Social Sciences* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1979), 34. Kloskowska notes that the distinction between material and spiritual production does emerge in Marx’s writing. However, the latter, which “included intellectual activity towards the development and transmission of knowledge and the work of performing artists, orators, priests, etc.,” belonged “to a category basically different, and not equivalent to productive labour producing material values” (41, 42).

Marronnons / Let's Maroon: Sylvia Wynter's "Black Metamorphosis" as a Species of Maroonage

Greg Thomas

That initiation was the beginning of transformation and that the ecology of the self, the tribe, the species, the earth depending on just that. In the dark of the woods[,] . . . the thunderous beginning of the new humanism.

—Toni Cade Bambara, *The Salt Eaters*

Rions buvons et marronnons.

—Aimé Césaire, "Le verbe marronner"

Each return, Symbolic and actual, was a great blow in the great cultural task of revolution. . . . Each escape, each flight was a species of marronage, the quest for a free space from where to wage the ongoing process of revolt against the cultural colonization carried out by the productive bourgeoisie who attempted to model America in its own image.

—Sylvia Wynter, "Black Metamorphosis"

On and off the printed page, Sylvia Wynter has expressed a profound fondness for Aimé Césaire. In her writing, he reminds us that black people are the only population group "whose humanity has been totally denied," for example. He shares her need for "a science of the word" to supplant "biocentrism" or the reigning discourse of Western bourgeois "Man." He reiterates the ultimate goal of this urgent praxis—toward a "humanism made to the measure of the world," a "humanism" that does not relegate black human beings to the unbearable

realm of *désêtre* (nonbeing/antibeing/dys-being).¹ And who else could inspire her awesome critical coinage in “Sambos and Minstrels”: “Blanchitude.”² Then, beyond the printed page, she once said as we parted ways at her California home, quoting Césaire’s long-neglected poem, “Marronnerons-nous . . . marronnerons-nous?”³

The Negritude poet first published “Réponse à René Depestre, poète haïtien (Éléments d’un art poétique)” in 1955. The venue was *Présence Africaine*, the sudden site of a sharp ideological battle over freedom of poetic form after a recent French Communist Party decree. For his *Œuvres complètes* in 1976, a final revision of this poem appeared as “Le verbe marronner (à René Depestre, poète haïtien).” When the collection was translated into English for a bilingual edition in 1986, *Aimé Césaire: The Collected Poetry*, “The Verb ‘Marronner’ (for René Depestre, Haitian Poet)” would incite, “Let’s laugh drink and escape like slaves.”⁴ The only extant English translation fails to translate the point of this neologizing poem.⁵ There are three variations over time: “marronnons-les Depestre marronnons-les” in 1956 becomes “marronnerons-nous Depestre marronnerons-nous?” in 1976, while “rions buvons et marronnons” remains constant and riotously felicitous decade after decade.⁶ Some renewed attention to this poem seems to assert itself in mere fits and starts in recent times. But what Janis A. Mayes dubs a “transatlantic translation” demands more robust memory and fluency in Césaire’s visionary verb—*marronner*, to *maroon* or to *go maroon*, to *marronize*—a memory and fluency manifest in Wynter and her “Césairean” work for the future.⁷

The vital reference points for a *hemispheric* or international black intellectual history in Wynter’s “Black Metamorphosis: New Natives in a New World” are virtually as vast as this volume is itself. Beyond Negritude, there is an applied thinking through of work by C. L. R. James, Marcus Garvey, Frantz Fanon, Amílcar Cabral, Richard Wright, Malcolm X, Martin

1 See Sylvia Wynter, “Black Education, Toward the Human, After ‘Man’: In the Manner of a Manifesto,” in Joyce E. King, ed., *Black Education: A Transformative Research and Action Agenda for the New Century* (Washington, DC: American Education Research Association, 2005), 358–59.

2 See Sylvia Wynter, “Sambos and Minstrels,” *Social Text*, no. 1 (1979): 149–56.

3 Oakland, California, circa January 2013.

4 Aimé Césaire, *Aimé Césaire: The Collected Poetry*, ed. and trans. Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 369.

5 Indeed, so much of the academic discourse on Maroons rhetorically re-enslaves Maroons of Maroon community encampments by referring to them, still, as “rebel slaves” or “escaped slaves” and so on, certainly displacing all history of African identification in the process. One interesting aspect of this “Let’s laugh, drink and escape like slaves” translation, nevertheless, is that it can be read to suggest that what it means to be enslaved is to be resisting, rebelling, or revolting against this slavery—to escape or to Maroon.

6 “Let’s go maroon on them, Depestre, let’s go maroon on them”; “dare we maroon ourselves, Depestre, dare we marronize ourselves?”; “let’s laugh drink and maroon” (translation mine).

7 This specific take on translation is indebted to my personal conversation with Janis A. Mayes. The decision for “to marronize” is hers. It complements my leaning toward “to go Maroon on” as one of *multiple* renditions to be employed including some quasi-*reflexive* options (“to make ourselves/become Maroon,” etc.). I like its very contemporary black vernacular sound and style, and threat. See also Christopher Winks’s substantial discussion of Césaire in *Symbolic Cities in Caribbean Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009). See, further, Janis A. Mayes, “‘Her Turn, My Turn’: Notes on Transatlantic Translation of African Francophone Women’s Poetry,” *Palabres* (2001): 87–106. For additional commentary on Césaire and the verb *marronner*, see James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988); Vera M. Kutzinksi, “Creolization and Caribbean Literature,” in *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005); and Neil Roberts, *Freedom as Marronage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

Luther King Jr., Harold Cruse, and even George Jackson. (This is not to mention Mikhail Bakhtin, G. W. F. Hegel, or Alexis de Tocqueville, and more.) Wynter's later essays' regular citation of Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda is present and accompanied by enduring references to Gregory Bateson and Claude Lévi-Strauss. Neither Edward Long of British colonial Jamaica nor Daniel Moynihan of neocolonial Anglo-America will ever look the same again. In full effect, moreover, is Wynter's paradigmatic treatment of Marxism and liberalism, apart from black cultural nationalism as well as bourgeois women's movements and imperial multiculturalism (or "ethnic pluralism"), if in a budding critical form. Today's "cultural studies" cannot compare to her inspired and extensive commentary on black popular culture (whether in the context of carnival or funerals; blues, jazz, reggae, or calypso; rock, high-life, or Fela Kuti's Afro-beat) in continental Africa and the Americas. The established disciplines most centrally engaged range from history, political economy, social science, and religion with tremendous insights on Myal (and Vodou), whereas some of the looming subjects at hand include *revolution* and signification, the state, populism, colonialism, fascism, genocide, the Middle Passage, and slavery, as well as "slave revolt" and *marronage/maroonage*.⁸ This massive manuscript goes all in to wage war on the entrenched order of knowledge—à la Césaire—to unsettle and displace it for black and human liberation: "Marronnerons-nous," indeed.

Homocide: On "Man" and Marxism, *Marronage* and Metamorphosis

A tripartite cultural-political schema structures "Black Metamorphosis" as a whole. There are three processes that "lead to three well-defined philosophies of action on the part of Blacks in the New World," named in "Black and Blues of the American Dream," chapter 16 of the manuscript: "creolization," "marronage," and "indigenization."⁹ Ideally, they should climax in an explosion of blacks and black struggles out into the dominant world at large, quite Maroon-like still, as a matter of course.

Creolization comes from the principle of "adaptation" and leads to the philosophy of "integration," writes Wynter, providing more context for her critique and suspicion of the creolization concept in the Caribbean and beyond. In one of several chapters on Jonkunnu, for example, she states, "The cultural concept of creolization therefore meant a self-conscious attempt to be culturally half-castes and to deny the cultural dynamic of their being" (116). *Marronage*, by contrast, comes from the principle of "resistance" and is said to lead to the principle of "separation." Regarding Afro-North America, Wynter can speak of "the Civil Rights myth of creolization, assimilation" and "the marronage of the Black Muslims" or their "mythological reservation" (222). If for some, her critique simply calls to mind Kamau Brathwaite—and not

8 The now-dual conventional spellings of *marronage* and *maroonage* may shift according to different kinds of discursive, linguistic, and geographical locations, a matter to be discussed across these locations in due course.

9 Sylvia Wynter, "Black Metamorphosis" (unpublished ms., n.d.), 228–29; hereafter cited in the text.

multiple, contestatory figurations and movements across the Americas that do not contest enough, in her view—she is refusing any stand-alone *rhetoric* of “creolization” for a deficient recognition of and resistance to overt or covert, direct or indirect, witting or unwitting Westernization, as in her critique of Western bourgeois “Man” and its many “sub-versions.” There is an elite colonial power politics of “pluralism” at the level of “culture,” however critical or uncritical, which she is wont to reject for an alternative, more resolute and *massive* politics of opposition, cultural and otherwise.¹⁰ The mobile principle of resistance that is marronage will be central to everything here as it takes shape across these many hundred pages. For if “indigenization” comes from the “contradictory adaptation/resistance process,” finally, and “*must*” lead to the principle of “liberation” (228, 229), Carole Boyce Davies is perceptive to identify its basis in a “variety of Maroon contexts,” while invoking Wynter’s dramatic theater of dance and kinesthetic rebellion, accordingly: “Jonkunnu take to the hills / Jonkunnu maskarade hide in the shadows.”¹¹ When it comes down from the hills, and out of the shadows, physically as well as metaphysically—armed with all manner of weapons—“marronage” will not be contained by the concept of “creolization” or even that of “indigenization” in “Black Metamorphosis.”

In short, a bound or limited marronage may be sublated or subsumed into black liberation with indigenization, to be sure. But it expands exponentially in Wynter, as elsewhere.¹² That ultimate liberation will represent a greater maroonage: “The eruption of the natives of the world from their marginal reservations into the mainstream of the supernatural systems,” “all over the world” (229). Thus “Black Metamorphosis” becomes maroonage; it is *macrological* maroonage, ultimately—unbound, unlimited, unreserved.

In 2010, Derrick White would initiate a scholarly discussion of this mammoth unpublished manuscript in the *C. L. R. James Journal* in which he characterizes “Black Metamorphosis” as a “prelude” to Wynter’s subsequent metatheoretical discourse on humanism. He describes it as a “fulcrum”—“A key document because it is a blueprint for Wynter’s ever evolving thinking on culture and ideology. In ‘Black Metamorphosis,’ Wynter starts with a project of reconciliation between Black culture and Marxist analysis and ends with the seeds of her theory of the

10 Decades later, Wynter still demonstrates her disruptive critical distrust of the conventional intellectual attachment to the rhetoric of *creolization* (regardless of the formulation) over *indigenization*—even if or when the two are said to be dialectical supposedly within the privileged, stand-alone term-concept of *creolization*—without the third term of *marronage* in her tripartite system, of course: “I also very much wanted to know, and still want to know, why there were and are these two cultural tendencies, a crossover one that can be adopted and taken up even into the topmost layers of society and then this other tenacious underground world that eventually surges up in Afro-popular music like ska, reggae, dub, in millenarian paintings like those of the Rastafari, in a world figure like the poet-prophet-singer Marley.” David Scott, “The Re-enchantment of Humanism: An Interview with Sylvia Wynter,” *Small Axe*, no. 8 (September 2000): 164. The subversive “surge” of these comments is no doubt the rhetorical praxis of marronage, past and present tense.

11 Carole Boyce Davies, “From Masquerade to *Maskarade*: Caribbean Cultural Resistance and the Rehumanizing Project,” in Katherine McKittrick, ed., *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 214.

12 For more on conceptualizing maroonage in multiple dimensions, see Greg Thomas, “‘Neo-slave Narratives’ and Literacies of *Maroonage*: Re-reading Morrison with Dionne Brand, George Jackson, and Assata Shakur,” in Andrée-Anne Kekeh-Dika, Maryemma Graham, and Janis A. Mayes, eds., *Toni Morrison, au-delà du visible ordinaire / Beyond the Ordinary Visible* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, 2015), 199–230.

Human."¹³ That the terms *ideology* and *culture* have themselves fallen out of her preferred intellectual vocabulary might offer further support for this textual interpretation. Without a doubt, it is amazing to witness—up close—a titan intellectual journey in motion, both at one pivotal moment in time and across such a great swath of time. This is “Middle Passage voyaging,” to quote the manuscript’s conclusion (918, 930). It is no less striking to behold the continuities and consistencies of Wynter’s marathon corpus. For, early Marxist orientations aside, the politics of human being, on the one hand, and “Man” or Western/bourgeois humanism, on the other, are actually a central concern for Wynter here—in *flight* throughout the “Black Metamorphosis” manuscript.

“The Negro, said Césaire, is the only human being in the world whose humanity has been totally negated,” Wynter begins her sixteenth chapter. The result is a “double alienation” as “worker” and as “human being” (220). This same point concludes the first official chapter of the manuscript, “The Sepúlveda Syndrome and the Myth of the Cultural Void” (24). In one sense, “Black Metamorphosis” could be read as a black radicalization of Melville Herskovits’s *The Myth of the Negro Past* (1941), a book that conceals its debt to the likes of Carter G. Woodson and W. E. B. Du Bois and whose lasting status as a counterpoint to the work of E. Franklin Frazier is seriously misleading, since Frazier’s public position espousing “the de-Africanization of the Negro” was a strategy of “integration,” not an actual belief of his, as time would in fact tell. The “cultural void” thesis upheld by Sepúlveda, Gunnar Myrdal, “Frazier” (and, via him, Harold Cruse), Daniel P. Moynihan, and Nathan Glazer or normative Western social science as a whole, is demystified by Wynter as a myth, a fantasy, a form of Western cultural chauvinism informed by a “conditioning fallacy” (890) or a vain and destructivist cultural determinism (454). The task before Wynter is to retrace the African struggle to “rehumanize exile” (59), as she stresses in “Transplantation and Transformation of African Beliefs and Behaviour” (chap. 5). Those who are reduced to “so many *piezas* of labor” (68) by European imperialism would endure and resist “not only exile from place, but exile from what was defined as the human condition” (56).¹⁴

Already it is a matter of “auto-salvation” and “man,” or humanity (“humiliated, degraded, disrupted, abandoned man”) (50), from the earliest chapters of “Black Metamorphosis”: “Black human beings” are both negated and devalued “merchandise and counter-men” (70). Hence the thesis to be restated so many times in this sprawling text: “The Black man, converted into commodity/object, used his former culture to restructure a social phantasy system which would create him, define him as human. And in defining himself as such he became the neo-native of the American continent—and the proto-native of the emerging world system”

13 Derrick White, “‘Black Metamorphosis’: A Prelude to Sylvia Wynter’s Theory of the Human,” *C. L. R. James Journal* 16, no. 1 (2010): 144, 133.

14 For more *pieza* reflections, of course, see Sylvia Wynter, “Beyond the Categories of the Master Conception: The Counter-doctrine of the Jamesian Poiesis,” in Paget Henry and Paul Buhle, eds., *C. L. R. James’s Caribbean* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992), 63–91.

(243–44). Writing on this struggle in light of “slave revolts”—as the “earliest form of labour struggle,” no less—still in the first quarter of the manuscript, Wynter concludes in Fanonian tones: “The new struggle is that of the world’s natives, the wretched of the earth, to reclaim their disputed humanity. The rights of the natives to manhood implies imperatively the negation of the rights of some men to super-manhood” (148). That would be “indigenization” informed and energized by a limited “marronage” for a greater (macro-logical) maroonage liberating us all (on and off the reservations) from what Wynter would now identify as Western bourgeois “Man.”

A rich formulation reveals her subject to be the “extra-African” in the so-called New World (17). The home continent of Africa had been posited as “the land of the Negation of all that Culture was” (437). To elaborate, Wynter adds, in “The Making of the Myth,” that Africa “was first said to have no culture; when it was admitted that Africa had a culture, the New World black was said to have lost all elements of a former African culture” (44). The double alienation of the extra-African separated from the “intra-African” and forcibly extracted from the continent leads to a dual or double struggle constituted at once by “physical revolt and cultural re-invention” in its never-ending rejection of dehumanization (42). The struggle “fights on two fronts”—“to revindicate the devalued culture of origin, and then to demonstrate that it was this original culture, metamorphosed, that had been transplanted by the black during a process in which they became indigenous to a new landscape and reinvented themselves as *natives* in a new world” (44). A new, extra-African “orthodoxy of change and adaptation” obtains, across time and across the hemisphere, although it might be explicitly noted that it renews itself in an ancient, intra-African orthodoxy of a “changing same” in the process (69).

This “survival and transformation” operates under a principle of “decentralization” despite the ruling bourgeois fetish for centralization and the “fascist complex that haunts Western civilization and the global areas it has colonized” (447). It is a black survival and transformation that shall lurch forward toward global revolution, the feat of a “historical” collective rather than a “tribal-ethnic” group of some naturalized anthropological imagination (see 459–62). Critically, beyond merely nationalist and regionalist metaphysical work, “Black Metamorphosis” tells the story of the blacks or extra-Africans of the “intra-empire of the U.S.A.” (233) and those of the extra-empire of “global monopoly capitalism” (457) and neocolonialism, who have conducted an ironic blackening of the Americas themselves.

Needless to say, Marxism could not capture this struggle as a paradigm. The latter chapters of “Black Metamorphosis” focusing on black cultural “underlife” and revolutionary transformation sharpen Wynter’s critique of economic reductionism in the past and the present. Theoretically, she replaces the priority given to the “ownership of the means of production” with the “control” of the means of “socialization” (927–28), and, analogously, the “economic law of value” with the “social law of value” in international as well as national social relations (891). Decades later, in *Proud Flesh*, Wynter will state, “The heresy that I’m putting forward is

that capitalism is itself a function of the reproduction of 'Man,' that 'Man' whose conception we institute in our disciplines. So then you can understand why I'd expect blows?!"¹⁵

That heresy is "*Homocide*"—a political coinage much needed after deicide and regicide, tyrannicides. One could think of the indigenous (Cherokee) surname "Mankiller" in this scenario. A political-discursive assassination of "Man"—for humanity—might be thought of as "*Homocide*," while "Man" itself mystifies its symbolic as well as material homicide or homicides worldwide. As Fanon wrote famously in *The Wretched of the Earth*: "When I search for Man in the technique and the style of Europe, I see only a succession of negations of man, and an avalanche of murders."¹⁶

A steady critique of European conceptions has Wynter write free of discipline in "Black Metamorphosis": "The theoretical implications of the Black experience point to the Western bourgeoisie's global social organization of production, and of *distribution*, through its *control* of the means of *socialization*." Her analytic move to the specific realm of "overrepresented" "Man" is forthcoming. For now, there is the "cultural colonialism" of a "bourgeois representation of reality" or its "totalitarian signification system," which was first revealed in the "plantation model of social relations" and which goes on to be disseminated worldwide (929; italics in original). Not only does Marxism fail to capture the struggle against this totalitarianism, it remains a form or genre of Western cultural nationalism or chauvinism, which is premised on the myth of a black-African "cultural void" (104). Meanwhile, maroonage remains "central" and "crucial," since "Black Metamorphosis" insists there "can be no revolutionary praxis without revolutionary counter-representation" (917).

The Maroon Chapters, Unbound

When Wynter writes on slavery and maroonage in "Black Metamorphosis" during the 1970s, she is uncannily in tune with the best and rarest scholar-activism of today, namely, Gerald Horne's *The Counter-Revolution of 1776* (2014).¹⁷ "Rewriting knowledge," she interrogates the most basic details and impulses of historiographical imperialism—and Sambo (or Quashie) historiography. Like Horne, she writes of "intestine" enemies of Anglo-colonial empire as well as settler-enslaver "failure" and ample black rebel "success," beyond the "black shot" guides and "baggage porters" of "slave-hunting." Recalling the Maroons of Nanny and Kojo/Cudjoe, all across the island, she places Afro-Jamaica of this period on par with Haiti and Palmares in the annals of Pan-African black liberation struggle. She gets sacrilegious with numbers and demographics by consistently noting "a greater number of women" in these Maroon encampments that are figured to be larger than conventionally estimated. Inciden-

15 Greg Thomas, "Proud Flesh Inter/Views: Sylvia Wynter," *ProudFlesh*, no. 4 (2006): 29–30.

16 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove, 1963), 310.

17 Gerald Horne, *The Counter-Revolution of 1776: Slave Resistance and the Origins of the United States of America* (New York: New York University Press, 2014).

tally, she clowns Orlando Patterson's Occidentalizer illiteracy in African guerrilla warfare while analyzing Cudjoe versus the British or the white West (chap. 12, chap. 15).¹⁸ And as C. L. R. James would in his preface to Jean Fouchard's *The Haitian Maroons* (1982), she maintains the *guerrilla* identity of the Maroons in the mountains and maroonage elsewhere, along with their world-historical agency in shaping or dictating the contours of the Western Hemisphere over the past five hundred years.

The first half of "Black Metamorphosis" is arguably dominated by chapters concerning antislavery revolt or rebellion and maroonage, explicitly and implicitly. Chapter 6 is titled "Maroonage," simple and plain. Chapter 10 is titled "Slave Revolts: Earliest Form of Labor Struggle." It sets a foundation, grounding all such struggles of the future in this specific matrix. (The "modern" revolutions in China and Cuba are repositioned to learn from them this extra-African history of insurrection.) Soon the chapter enumeration and pagination system of "Black Metamorphosis" turns somewhat ambiguous in this now permanent work in progress. Nevertheless, a series of no fewer than four chapters follow chapter 11 (or "Negro into Native"), all cohering around antislavery or *marooning* counterviolence, in particular. One could cull a solid, smaller manuscript on this topic from the longer manuscript, thanks to the appearance of these chapters: "The First Maroon War," "Nanny Town," "The More Honorable to Them," and "The Black Gendarmes," each centering on maroonage while "Tacky War" concerns another rebellion itself related to maroonage and the official "Maroon warring" that comes before it. Then, later in "Black Metamorphosis," directly before a chapter titled "The Mayflower and the Middle Passage: Back to Africa, Back to Europe, and the Return to the Source," there is an equally explosive chapter titled "Indigenization and the Underlife: The Man/Negro, Master/Slave Mechanism of Rebellion." This topic is almost always at issue in "Black Metamorphosis."

Wynter is clear that the term *Maroon* is a vexed one. Ultimately, "Black Metamorphosis" will speak of *species of maroonage*, a multiplex of marooning actions, practices, or activity. When the term *Maroon* is introduced or reintroduced in these chapters, the language employed is "the Maroons, as the rebel slaves had come to be called" or "the escaped slaves who had come to be known as Maroons" (n.p.). There is caution, reservation, skepticism. The act or practice preceded the term or this particular set of terminology, even if some of "the Maroons" of the camps came to adopt the name with pride (71). This proper name usage (*Maroon*) that unduly limits the noun form of *maroonage* and typically restricts it to select (pseudoethnic) populations and (rural-mountain) geographies is given apt etymological attention: "The word 'Maroon' was derived from the Spanish 'cimarrón' meaning wild or unruly" (n.p.). Wynter proceeds to discuss some of the earliest uses of the term from the Spanish Empire in Cuba to the English adoption of *simeron* in their symptomatic attempt to connect *cimarrón* and the Latin root *simia* (or Spanish *simio*), "meaning ape"—likely for "the Anglo-Saxon theory that the African was sub-human." Although this claim has not migrated to Anglo-America, current

18 The chapters on maroonage, labeled 12 through 16 and separately bundled, have no pagination.

scholarship in Spanish suggests *símaran* was originally a Taíno-Arawak word (for "stray or runaway arrow," etc.) that was adapted or appropriated by Spaniards for *cimarrón* (chap. 12, note), a philological fact that could explain *Seminole*, in due course.¹⁹ At any rate, the *colonial* link underscored here between *Maroon* or *maroonage* and "feral" or livestock (*cimarrón* as escaped cattle, then escaped "Indians," then escaped Africans or "Negroes" in Plantation America) highlights the *basic* antagonism between "maroonage" and the "humanism" critically examined for decades now by Wynter.

The chapter of the manuscript subtitled "The Man/Negro, Master/Slave Mechanism of Rebellion" does not end the collection of chapters *explicitly* devoted to latter-day slavery and antislavery. The theme of "nigger-breaking" is inscribed at the center of two more chapters in the second half of the manuscript. One chapter is titled "Inscription and Counter-Inscription: Frederick Douglass, Mr. Covey, and the Nigger-Breaking Model of Exploitation." It is inspired by the scene in Douglass's narrative in which he finally takes up physical violence—against Covey, the "antebellum" specialist in "negro-, slave- or nigger-breaking." The ensuing chapter is entitled "The Factory Model/The Nigger-Breaking Model and the American (U.S.A.) Experience." For neither slavery nor breaking comes to an end with the nineteenth century or the official plantation regime. Intellectually, Wynter never tires of recalling the import of Richard Wright's "Pease and Reynolds" stories in *Black Boy* (1944), another postcommunist text. The one published excerpt from "Black Metamorphosis" (which invokes Pease and Reynolds frequently) is "Sambos and Minstrels" (1979), in which Wynter thinks through the compulsion of these two racist white workers to "break" and terrorize the young Wright as a "fellow" black worker in the US South.

Outside "Black Metamorphosis," these thematics of "breaking" (and physical as well as cultural resistance to it) may be most famous in the work of George Jackson, who was himself positively fabled for his proclamation in *Soledad Brother* (1970): "They'll never count me among the broken men."²⁰ He was *the* organizing theorist of "neo-slavery," the "new slavery, the modern variety of chattel slavery updated to disguise itself," during which "you are free—to starve."²¹ Where slavery does not end, neither does maroonage, which is the veritable epitome of unbroken or unbreakable life. Like few academicians today, Wynter cites his "brief, brilliant life" (911) along with his "blazing incandescent letters" from prison (246). As one scholar has written, "The historical (i.e., absent) maroon is preferred over the present-day rebel for the danger that the latter represents."²² All the same, Wynter continues to invoke this black revolutionary guerrilla after his assassination, and, in her conclusion, she

19 This information was shared by Price in the new preface to his *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas* (1973; repr., Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996). It is based on the work of José Juan Arrom, a Cuban philologist. Much later, Umi Vaughan also mentions it via the work of Angel Quintero-Rivera on sociology and salsa; see Umi Vaughan, *Rebel Dance, Renegade Stance: Timba Music and Black Identity in Cuba* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013).

20 George Jackson, *Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill, 1994), 26.

21 *Ibid.*, 251.

22 Vaughan, *Rebel Dance, Renegade Stance*, 44.

produces some startlingly prescient commentary on mass black imprisonment as the logical outcome of the present social system with its *updated* “plantation nigger-breaking model” of *domination* and exploitation (919).

“Species of Maroonage”—Extra-African *Flights of Consciousness*, Black

The hills or mountains have become not just one place of maroonage, like guerrilla warfare in general, but a powerful *metaphor* for all maroonage, which can take place in any kind of space, anywhere. (After all, Maroon camps have literally taken root in the middle of plantations.) When the metaphor is literalized in more restrictive conceptions, equating all maroonage with encampments or mountain “reservations,” much is regrettably lost in the official thinking of maroonage.²³ Wynter first worked the metaphors of hilly mountain-based maroonage in her novel *The Hills of Hebron* (1962). After delineating maroonage as resistance tradition and resistance “reservation” in “Black Metamorphosis,” she multiplies the conceptions of maroonage in her chapter “The Mayflower and the Middle Passage” by speaking of “species of maroonage” in a discussion of white and black artistic movements *away* from the United States: “Each escape, each flight was a species of *marronage*, the quest for a free space from where to wage the ongoing process of revolt against the cultural colonization carried out by the productive bourgeoisie who attempted to model America in its own image” (438). This searching intellectualism is a mode or “species” of maroonage itself, like “Black Metamorphosis,” on a grand scale.²⁴

Roger Bastide had defined *maroonage* in “The Other Quilombos” (1960) as “collective flight and . . . resistance.”²⁵ This conception does not shroud the “runaway” in individualism or fear, as is common in discourses of “de-radicalization,” to invoke Daniel O. Sayers on the “Underground Railroad” mythologies and diverse traditions of maroonage active throughout the Western Hemisphere.²⁶ “The Other Quilombos” further identifies maroonage or *quilombismo* for *Les religions africaines au Brésil* (1960) as the first of a two-step process—communal aggregation or re-aggregation in an alternative space (“flight”), then collective resistance (or return) in the form of “armed revolution” or revolutionary, often guerrilla struggle.²⁷

The landmark *Maroon Societies* collection edited by Richard Price tied the concept of maroonage to space or place, normally mountain-based encampments, paradoxically referring to its rebels still as “slaves” and its communities as “societies,” a cherished nomenclature that strikes a blow to Western anthropological and sociological chauvinism, to be sure. At the same time, *Maroon Societies* expands our languages of maroonage, multiplies our names for

23 The term *reservations* appears to be critically applied to “nation-state” neocolonies, too.

24 The notion of “guerrilla intellectualism” appears in Robert A. Hill, ed., *Walter Rodney Speaks: The Making of an African Intellectual* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1990).

25 Roger Bastide, “The Other Quilombos,” in Price, *Maroon Societies*, 191.

26 Daniel O. Sayers, “The Underground Railroad Reconsidered,” *Western Journal of Black Studies* 28, no. 3 (2004): 435–43.

27 Bastide, “The Other Quilombos,” 200.

it, in African directions, quiet as it is kept. There have long been other terms for this species of antiplantation liberation, such as *palenque* and *quilombo*, of course, but also *cumbés*, *ladeiras*, *mambises*, *mocambos*, and so on. African languages have erupted here and refuse continued repression insofar as *quilombo* derives from *Ki-lombo* (a Jaga "war camp") and *mucambo* from *mu-kambo* (an Ambudu "hideout"). The useful essays collected in *Maroon Societies* reveal this much, if not that *cumbé* can mean "hill/mount/height" (and "dance/party/celebration") in yet another West-Central African language, or that the practice indicated by *maroonage* exceeds conceptual containment in encampments, mountain-based or otherwise: Wynter had much cause to view *Maroon* as a vexed term in "Black Metamorphosis" (see 1, 174).

It seems that a more expansive use of the noun form of *maroonage* has since taken shape, to some extent, mostly in the context of black scholarship in the "anglophone" humanities. The helpful but limited language of *petit marronage* ("temporary" flight or "repetitive or periodic truancy") and *grand marronage* ("permanent," alternative community formation) took hold elsewhere in more historical, ethnographic, or political economic discourses focusing on French and Dutch as well as Spanish colonies in the Caribbean and South America (3). Different spellings often inscribe different academic groundings. Apparently, what gets called *maroonage* has become much less bounded than what gets called *marronage*. "Black Metamorphosis" may spell it "marronage," but the text does not respect these boundaries, either conceptually or geographically. It spans across all of the Americas, Afro-North America not excluded. It ranges in and out of mountain-based "reservations" of ex-slave black guerrilla warriors metamorphosing Africa in new terrain and in new domains. Marooning itself, "Black Metamorphosis" goes beyond established boundaries in a marginalized "Afrophone" intellectual tradition that it both precedes and can help further develop now, several decades after it was originally written or completed.²⁸

Conceptually, the work of Carolyn Cooper stands out in this regard. It begins in *Noises in the Blood*, in which she introduces the concepts of "verbal maroonage" and, pivotally, "erotic maroonage," after defining *maroonage* generically as the "tradition of resistance science that establishes an alternative psychic space both within and beyond the boundaries of the enslaving plantation."²⁹ *Maroonage* is not simply the noun form of a term whose meaning is restricted to the physical community space of rural mountain or territorial encampments, ones that may become "sovereign" or quasi-sovereign/pseudo-sovereign under the white Western "world system" of racism and empire. Maroonage can be mobile or urban; hydro or maritime; folkloric, cosmological, metaphysical, or supernatural; spiritual or religious as well

28 The term *Afrophone* is used in Toni Cade Bambara's first novel, *The Salt Eaters* (New York: Random House, 1980), in which she shares and channels Wynter's ideas in stunning fashion: "One would tap the brain for any knowledge of initiation rites lying dormant there, recognizing that life depended on it, that initiation was the beginning of transformation and that the ecology of the self, the tribe, the species, the earth depended on just that. In the dark of the woods[,] . . . the thunderous beginning of the new humanism" (246).

29 Carolyn Cooper, *Noises in the Blood: Orality, Gender, and the "Vulgar" Body of Jamaican Popular Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 4.

as territorial and psychological, *and so on*. It is “resistance science,” generically, animating “psychic space” in whatever “physical spaces” in need of this antiracist and antislavery resistance tradition. The general practice or *praxis* of maroonage takes place in “psychic space” in order to take place in physical-territorial spaces of many kinds, on and off the plantation. This is how Cooper can deliver “verbal maroonage,” as in “the rude impulse of language . . . oral art-form,” as in “the lyrics of the DJ’s,” and, no less, as in the renegade intellectualism of her *Sound Clash* (2004) and the work of Wynter—all “noises in the blood,” as it were: “black metamorphosis” incarnate.³⁰

“Erotic maroonage” was next defined as “undomesticated sexuality (especially when female)” in Cooper’s “Slackness Hiding from Culture: Erotic Play in the Dancehall.”³¹ Another elaboration defines it as “an embodied politics of disengagement” from “Eurocentric discourses,” even an “ideological revolt against law and order; an undermining of consensual standards of decency.”³² The upshot is nothing short of enormous, in light of Audre Lorde’s own etymological attention to the term *eros*, its root in “love” for ancient Greek language or discourse and in the “life-force” for the West African cultural cosmologies she reinscribes in *The Black Unicorn* (1978). If the “erotic” refers to “life” itself, “life” as a whole and fully at large, then the concept of “erotic maroonage” is a marooning conception come full circle. It is marooning at the level of life, for life. What maroonage should not be an erotic maroonage, consequently, at bottom?

It is telling that so much of this more *macro*-logical maroonage work has come to center on music, song, and dance, or ceremonial practices of African performance and embodiment. Of the Afro-Venezuelan Network with its prominent *cumbé* preservation programs, Jesús “Chucho” García has argued for “active” (fighting against the system of slavery “at any cost”) and “passive” (fighting against slavery and colonialism via “institutional resources” of the status quo) *cimarronaje*, en route to a systemic appreciation of whole “cultures of resistance” grounded in Afro-Venezuelan history.³³ Recently, Umi Vaughan has employed “maroon aesthetics” in *Rebel Dance, Renegade Stance: Timba Music and Black Identity in Cuba*. The “maroon music” of this aesthetics is not the “maroon music” of the maroonage of mountains alone. He refers to *timba* as “timba brava,” inasmuch as *timba* is “brave, ferocious, wild, splendid” and invokes “anger, unpredictability and excellence in rebellion.”³⁴ Associated with *mal gusto* or “bad taste,” riot over debate, “vulgarity” and offense, it remains based in “outsider identity” vis-à-vis race and class and routinely manifests artful strategies of “raiding.”³⁵ The

30 Ibid., 161–63.

31 Ibid., 137, 166.

32 Carolyn Cooper, “Erotic Maroonage: Embodying Emancipation in Jamaican Dancehall” (paper presented at the Ninth Annual Gilder Lehrman Center International Conference, Yale University, 3 November 2007), glc.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/Cooper.pdf, 1.

33 Jesús “Chucho” García, *Demystifying Africa’s Absence in Venezuelan History and Culture* (Caracas: Fundación Afroamericana, 2000), 5–6, 13.

34 Vaughan, *Rebel Dance, Renegade Stance*, 3.

35 Ibid., 8, 44, 3, 45.

most skilled performers of *timba* are even commended as *escapao* or *fugao* by aficionados of the medium.³⁶ The program of unsettling domestication is broadcast in this sonic maroonage as it was in Cooper's *Noises in the Blood* and *Sound Clash*. Moving from mountain to other, "ghettoized" spaces and worlds beyond, this work responds well to Césaire's "Le verbe marronner," moving in tune and in step with Wynter's metaphysically groundbreaking "Black Metamorphosis."

Contrary to academic and popular propaganda, "Black Metamorphosis" makes it plain that black slavery was "synonymous with revolt" (71). Not only were the revolts of enslaved Africans "frequent" for centuries, they were "cultural" as well; and this cultural resistance was as "synonymous" with slavery as physical resistance or revolt, or physical and territorial maroonage (72). Still, each new revolt was met with "surprise," Wynter remarks. The "mystification" of them was manic and automatic for the self-preservation of the material and symbolic order of enslavement, leaving a lasting record of dissimulation and mystification for posterity (103). This is the focal point of Gerald Horne in *The Counter-Revolution of 1776: Slave Resistance and the Origins of the United States of America* (2014). He contends that African maroonage in the Caribbean effectively ran off many British settlers from the islands, evacuating them into a search for refuge that actually led to the settler-colonial explosion of the US state formation in North America, where they were seized by the same crazed dialectic—absolute addiction to slavery's economic profits; absolute shock, hysteria, and denial in the face of endemic African revolt and maroonage. Among other things, *The Counter-Revolution of 1776* has now ratified the insistence on revolt in "Black Metamorphosis," in addition to its black-international and black-hemispheric perspective on African enslavement as synonymous with African resistance and maroonage, all across these Americas.

And the unbound or unlimited, unreserved conception of maroonage in Wynter's "Black Metamorphosis" expands to entail several unifying dimensions: black intellectual activity; mass cultural resistance (or "cultures of resistance"); and physical or political movements of liberation, in no elite hierarchy of importance. Each is to be epic and epistemic in importance. The task of black intellectualism for Wynter here is "to continue the theoretical delegitimation of the cultural universe of the bourgeoisie, of its *representation of reality*, of its *control of the way we view the world*" (917; italics in original). This would effect a kind of "reversal" of the Middle Passage in some respect (457). "Normative" scholarship should be faced with more methods of *flight* (927), for official as well as "unofficial scholars" must "move outside" the "common ground" (426) of bourgeois scholarship and continue to "set in motion" (923) something else: "Until the Black intellectual begins his own self-subversion against middle class values, he cannot articulate or communicate or even be able to 'read' the alternative non-middle class 'values' that are constituted by Black culture" (920). The goal is to radically expand "the 'outlyer' consciousness of Blacks" (896), a remarkable formulation since

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 44.

“outlying” functions as a euphemism for maroonage in North America, which rhetorically deports maroonage from its psychosymbolic if not geopolitical limits as a historical rule.³⁷ The manifold black political movements of the masses examined in Wynter’s conclusion have engaged in these reversals and transformations by metamorphosing themselves *back* from “negro-pieza” to “*prieto*-Black,” significantly, at the level of group naming, cultural identification, and political praxes enacting multiple “species” of maroonage (934).

By contrast, Sylviane A. Diouf’s *Slavery’s Exiles: The Story of the American Maroons* continues to nationalize and negativize maroonage (as “failure”), conceiving of it in traditionally narrow terms as an empirical object (Maroon camps or individuals) of an unquestioned order of knowledge, while defining “America” as the “United States of America” alone.³⁸ While nationalizing maroonage to discuss “Haitian maroonage” in particular (as “success”), for a narrow disciplinary nexus of “political theory,” Neil Roberts’s *Freedom as Marronage* claims for itself and a creolizing Edouard Glissant what is infinitely more appropriate for Wynter or her Institute of the Black World opus, which moves beyond both colonial discipline and neocolonial nationalization, not to mention epistemic conceits of “failure”—a radical reconfiguration of maroonage “transhistorically to account for . . . previous understandings of flight while expanding the idea of maroonage.”³⁹ How does scholarship on maroonage (not) maroon from scholarship as such, in form or content, against the prevailing order of knowledge, piece by intellectual piece?⁴⁰

The exceptional diasporic theorizations of “maroon aesthetics,” “cultures of resistance,” and “erotic maroonage” could in any event find an exhilarating, encyclopedic home in the trailblazing theorizations of “Black Metamorphosis.” There Wynter reflects extensively on the relationship between singing and exodus; laughing and resistance; funeralizing and rebellion; drumming and consciousness; dancing and the gods, as well as antislavery revolt or insurrection. The entire cultural complex is depicted as a “mobile” one, a culture in and of and for flight. “The song is the Exodus,” she writes (441). The words of Esteban Montejo, who lived a late life of maroonage in a Maroon encampment and at 103 years of age saw his autobiographical narrative published in Cuba, introduce a key discussion of dance in Wynter (426). A former dancer herself, she notes that black music was “antidote” (69), and it was by means of culture that the dehumanized were rehumanized of their own will: “The Black’s alternative definition of man is embodied in the blues, spirituals, the reggae, afro-cuban, the whole tradition of jazz, [etc.]” (249). She observes how popular ritual, song, and ceremony give structure to orchestrations of resistance that are continually misconstrued as “spontaneous” acts of resistance, riot, or rebellion (180). The erotics of all this maroonage is witnessed from the “bawdy rites” (117) of

37 See Herbert Aptheker, “Maroons within the Present Limits of the United States” in Price, *Maroon Societies*, 151–68. The Great Dismal Swamp (Virginia/North Carolina) and “Fort Mose” or *García Real de Santa Teresa de Mose* (St. Augustine, Florida) are only the “grandest” examples.

38 Sylviane A. Diouf, *Slavery’s Exiles: The Story of the American Maroons* (New York: New York University Press, 2014).

39 Roberts, *Freedom as Marronage*, 10.

40 See, for an earlier rethinking of maroonage, Thomas, “Neo-Slave Narratives,” 199–230.

transplantation to more contemporary utopic longings such as "the blues-man's and the rock star's quest for love and happiness" (918). "The song is the Exodus," moving maroonage on.

The long arc of "Black Metamorphosis" militates for a "Black counter-culture" (423) loaded with its "mechanism of rebellion" (131), a "counter-aesthetics" (218) as well as a "counter-ethics" (464), a "counter-poetics" (186), a carnivalesque "counter-order" (426), or a complete "counter-symbolic culture" (443) because "this is what Revolutions are about—the actualization of the symbolic" (449). No wonder "Black Metamorphosis" gives a transatlantic nod to Amílcar Cabral, author of *Our People Are Our Mountains* (1972), in Wynter's promotion of so many "species of maroonage." Since there is "no revolutionary praxis without counter-revolutionary representation," Wynter comes back from the hills to destroy the "single norm" of "culture" in "Black Metamorphosis" before she moves on to counterattack Western bourgeois "Man," the "biological norm of being human," as she puts it in "On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory, and Re-imprisoned Ourselves in Our Unbearable Wrongness of Being, of *Désêtre*: Black Studies toward the Human Project."⁴¹ And so the "war" that continues on this front in her "A Black Studies Manifesto" is a "Maroon war" continued.⁴²

In a new century of "mono-humanist" domination, Sylvia Wynter would recast that question of *désêtre* via Aimé Césaire. His *présence africaine* is strongly felt among many black intellectual others in "Black Metamorphosis," which can be read as a valiant response to his call in "Le verbe marronner"/"The Verb 'Marronner': 'Marronnerons-nous . . . marronnerons-nous?'" To maroon. To become Maroon. To go Maroon on (all the forces of slavery; not as in "to go native" in imperial anthropological parlance). Even to maroon off (enemies of our humanity). To marronize. To make Maroons of ourselves. The noun *maroonage* might then refer to a long-running resistance "science of the word" and deed, expanding or extending beyond temporal as well as spatial limits, boundaries, "reservations." What if "Le verbe marronner" was not just rarely recalled here and there but was as well known, and discussed, as *Discourse on Colonialism*—or "postcoloniality"—among black academicians, at least, today?

Once, Walter Rodney rued the fact in "African History in the Service of Black Revolution" and *The Groundings with My Brothers* (1969) that we have yet to appreciate what it took for Africans just to *survive* enslavement and colonization in Africa and the Americas: "Apart from the measurable effects, one must also consider that a fantastic amount of physical and social energy went into the defensive task of sheer survival. We did survive not only in Africa, but on this side of the Atlantic—the greatest miracle of all time! And every day Black people in the Americas perform the miracle anew."⁴³ The politics of *survival* itself is underappreciated and

41 Sylvia Wynter, "On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory and Re-imprisoned Ourselves in Our Unbearable Wrongness of Being, of *Désêtre*: Black Studies toward the Human Project," in Lewis R. Gordon and Jane Anna Gordon, eds., *Not Only the Master's Tools: African-American Studies in Theory and Practice* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2006): 107–69, esp. 117.

42 Sylvia Wynter, "A Black Studies Manifesto," *Forum N.H.I.* 1, no. 1 (1994): 11.

43 Walter Rodney, *The Groundings with My Brothers* (Chicago: Frontline Distribution International, 2001), 58.

underestimated by traditional political paradigms of all sorts, particularly formal articulations anchored in the mental structures of Western bourgeois society rather than, say, the song stylings of Bob Marley and the Wailers (“We’re the survivors! / The Black survivors!”). Yet, existentially and ontologically, Wynter is preoccupied with just this survival and more in her “Black Metamorphosis,” for nearly a thousand pages of intellectual maroonage, one “species” of maroonage among many all-important others. This text deserves enormous attention in its *own right* as well as in relationship to other black texts and the rest of Wynter’s entire body of work.

How else shall we think of such a thing? Who else writes a 900-plus-page manuscript for the struggle alone? Who writes such a massive tome and *forgets* it, as she had? Do we compare it to Karl Marx’s *Grundrisse* (1857–61/1939–41), parenthetically? Or could it be figured as one woman’s uncontested “Encyclopedia Africana,” complete but unpolished and unpublished? Has not Wynter’s present penchant for long-distance writing turned out to be a trace of what was—unbeknownst to us—writ large in “Black Metamorphosis”? Unlicensed by any ideological orthodoxy, has she not for decades written out of bounds, so to speak, with 100-plus-page articles (“Beyond . . .,” “After . . .,” “Beyond . . .”) chopped up for the business protocols of publication or simply not read or published by consumer Western academia?⁴⁴ How else shall we think of a career that ranges from dance to drama to *The Hills* novel to nonfiction in the form of the epic critical essay?

In retrospect, it makes sense to read this manuscript with regard to her critique of what black studies and black intellectualism have become with institutionalization. The politics of black studies in its “original thrust” signified, for Wynter, a momentary if partial emancipation from “our present order of truth and aesthetics” and “our present mainstream aesthetics and order of knowledge.”⁴⁵ Soon enough, however, it was “reterritorialized” along with other intellectual and political movements of the 1960s and 1970s, locally, nationally, and internationally. They are “sanitized” of their heresies and reincorporated back into liberal universalism, “the Liberal-universalist mainstream,” “the ostensible universalism of Euro-American-centered scholarship” or Western bourgeois scholarship as a whole, which is to say, the West’s own “ethno-class, biohumanist, and therefore Liberal modality of universalism.”⁴⁶ In its subsequent, prevailing form, it is subverted to become merely another “sub-version” of something else in the West, a subordinate version of the order of knowledge once confronted and renounced: “No longer a Black utopian alternative mode of thought”—*something Maroon*, in flight—“but, rather, an Ethnic [or national or regional] sub-text of the Ideologies of *Man’s Word*.”⁴⁷ Before

44 I explored the significance of the “Beyond” (and “After”) in the titles of many of Wynter’s essays for a previous essay, “Sex/ Sexuality and Sylvia Wynter’s *Beyond . . .*: Anti-colonial Ideas in ‘Black Radical Tradition,’” *Journal of West Indian Literature* 10, nos. 1–2 (2001): 92–118. One can argue further here that these prepositional utopics index a persistent praxis of maroonage, its spatial and temporal mobility for black and human liberation.

45 Wynter, “On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory,” 153.

46 *Ibid.*, 114, 163.

47 *Ibid.*, 158.

its academic domestication concurrent with a stricter nationalization or regionalization of black intellectualism worldwide, C. L. R. James spoke of a (new) black studies (now old) that could lead him to "run with the hare and hunt with the hounds."⁴⁸ In retrospect, then, "Black Metamorphosis" provides both a bold explanation of James's acclamation of Wynter ("the greatest mind the Caribbean has ever produced")⁴⁹ and a blueprint for what black studies might have gone on to be and what (international or extranational) black intellectualism can still move on to become—*marooning*.

48 C. L. R. James, "Black Studies and the Contemporary Student," in *The C. L. R. James Reader*, ed. Anna Grimshaw (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 404.

49 James wrote this comment on his copy of Wynter's conference paper, "'We Know Where We Are From': The Politics of Black Culture from Myal to Marley" (presented at the joint meeting of the African Studies Association and the Latin American Studies Association, Houston, Texas, November 1977).

Rebellion/Invention/Groove

Katherine McKittrick

I've got the life.

—Nina Simone, "I Got Life"

We just made ourselves/invisible/underwater.

—Erykah Badu, "The Healer"

I'm devoted.

—Kanye West, "Black Skinhead"

The rhythm, the beat, was to become the central underlying principle.

—Sylvia Wynter, "Black Metamorphosis"

In her essay on jazz, Dionne Brand writes that black music "leaves you open, and up in the air and that this is the space that some of us need, an opening to another life tangled up in this one but opening."¹ Writings on black music abound, tracking a range of social, political, economic, affective, and geographic patterns and contexts, as well as the biographical narratives that inform music, music making, and musicians. These writings also draw attention to the tensions between the materiality of black music (the racial economies and racial histories that underpin the production and distribution of black creative works), lyrical content (if the tune indeed has lyrics), and the waveforms that underpin and sonically frame

¹ See page 91 for song lyric rights and permissions.

¹ Dionne Brand, "Jazz," in *Bread Out of Stone* (New York: Random House/Vintage, 1994), 161.

song.² Black musical aesthetics not only emerge within and against long-standing antiblack practices, they are heard and listened to across and in excess of the positivist workings of antiblack logics. Waveforms—beats, rhythms, acoustics, notational moods, and frequencies that intersect with racial economies and histories and available lyrical content—cannot be exacted yet speak to exacting racial technologies. With this, black music, what we hold on to and what we hear, moves between and across and outside ungraspable waveforms, the anticolonial politics underpinning black cultural production, and the racial economy of white supremacy that denies black personhood. In this essay I want to think about these tensions—between waveforms, anticolonial politics, the memory of slavery, and longstanding practices of antiblackness and racial violence—as they emerge in Sylvia Wynter’s “Black Metamorphosis.”³

Before turning to an analysis of “Black Metamorphosis,” it is important to briefly situate this monograph in relation to Wynter’s thinking on art, cultural production, and music. Wynter’s dramatic plays and her novel *The Hills of Hebron*, as well as her analyses of films, poetry, drama, music, and fiction, demonstrate a steady critical engagement with creative worlds. Wynter works out how creative narratives (including but not limited to the works of Ralph Ellison, William Shakespeare, Miguel de Cervantes, Toni Morrison, Edouard Glissant, Aimé Césaire, Bob Marley) simultaneously narrate and disrupt normative conceptualizations of humanism.⁴ Her work draws attention to the overlapping epistemologies fostered during and after colonialism and transatlantic slavery and uncovers the ways black worldviews are relational to overarching systems of European and Western knowledge. Indeed, overarching systems are powerfully anchored to uneven practices of accumulation and dispossession that thrive on replicating themselves through rewarding human activities that validate inequities. Wynter’s insights on creative works are therefore not simply a call to integrate “race” or “black art” into the global histories and knowledge systems of the West; rather, she argues that the perspectival economic imperialism of the planet, and attendant racial processes such as plantation slavery, produced the conditions through which the colonized would radically

2 With the exception of the short introductory Brand quotation, I am working only with Wynter’s writings in this essay. To assist with my reading of music histories, biographies, sounds, and theories, I have been engaging the following thinkers: Richard Iton, Clyde Woods, LeRoi Jones, Mark Campbell, Jacques Attali, Edouard Glissant, Paul Gilroy, Fred Moten, Sylvia Wynter, Robin D.G. Kelley, Lawrence Levine, Angela Davis, Alexander Weheliye, Oliver Sacks, Vijay Iyer, Daniel J. Levitin, Nina Simone, Betty Davis, Funkadelic, Drexciya, Kanye West, Erykah Badu, Jimmy Cliff, and Michael Jackson.

3 Sylvia Wynter, “Black Metamorphosis: New Natives in a New World” (unpublished ms., n.d.); hereafter cited in the text. The quote used as an epigraph is found on 877.

4 For example, see these works by Sylvia Wynter: *The Hills of Hebron: A Jamaican Novel* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1962); “The Eye of the Other,” in Miriam DeCosta, ed., *Blacks in Hispanic Literature: Critical Essays* (New York: Kennikat, 1977), 8–19; “Rethinking Aesthetics,” in Mbye Cham, ed., *Ex-iles: Essays on Caribbean Cinema* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World, 1992), 238–79; “On Disenchanting Discourse: ‘Minority’ Literary Criticism and Beyond,” in Abdul R. JanMohamed and David Lloyd, eds., *The Nature and Context of Minority Discourse* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 432–69; “One-Love Rhetoric or Reality? Aspects of Afro-Jamaicanism,” *Caribbean Studies* 12, no. 3 (1972): 90–97; “Ethno or Socio Poetics,” *Alcheringa/Ethnopoetics* 2 (1976): 78–94; “Jonkonnu in Jamaica: Towards the Interpretation of Folk Dance as a Cultural Process,” *Jamaica Journal* 4, no. 2 (1970): 34–48; and *Maskarade*, in Easton Lee, Sylvia Wynter, and Enid Chevannes, *West Indian Plays for Schools*, vol. 2 (Kingston: Jamaica Publishing House, 1979), 26–55.

and creatively redefine—*reword*, to be specific—the representative terms of the human. It is suggested, therefore, that such inequitable systems of knowledge can be, and are, breached by creative human aesthetics. In “Black Metamorphosis” Wynter thinks through the ways the Middle Passage and plantation systems produced the conditions for a range of black rebellions that were initiated by figures that reinvented and affirmed black humanity and black life and engendered New World cultural inventions.⁵ These inventions were, largely, musical inventions that, in their waveform and lyrical enunciations, expressed new forms of what it means to be human.⁶

In what follows I trace Wynter’s exploration of the plantation economy, antiblackness, and the negation of black humanity. In “Black Metamorphosis” Wynter unveils how the plantation slavery system and its postslave expressions produced black nonpersons and nonbeings (through brutal acts of racist violence designed to actualize psychic and embodied alienation) just as this system generated black plantation activities that rebelled against the tenets of white supremacy. This first section is titled “Rebellion.” I then explore how black plantation activities engendered music and creative spaces that wrote, rewrote, and continue to write and rewrite black life, from the perspective of the ex-slave archipelagoes, as the “imposition of style in chaotic circumstance” (196). Steadily throughout “Black Metamorphosis” Wynter draws attention to how the creation of culture, the making and praxis of music—within the context of hateful and violent antiblack axioms—is underwritten by “the revolutionary demand for happiness” that, at the same time, demonstrates that creative acts mark the affirmation of black life (198). This second section is titled “Invention.” Finally, in the section titled “Groove,” I read Wynter’s discussion of musical beats, to think about black waveforms as rebellious enthusiasms. I argue that waveforms—the beats, rhythms, acoustics, notational moods, frequencies that undergird black music—affirm, through cognitive schemas, modes of being human that refuse antiblackness just as they restructure our existing system of knowledge. I focus on the waveforms, rather than solely on lyrical content, to draw attention to the ways an ungraspable resonance—sound—allows us to think about how loving and sharing and hearing and listening and grooving to black music is a rebellious political act that is entwined with neurological pleasure and the melodic pronouncement of black life.

5 I use the term *New World* following Sylvia Wynter, “1492: A New World View,” in Vera Lawrence Hyatt and Rex Nettleford, eds., *Race, Discourse, and the Origin of the Americas: A New World View* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), 5–57.

6 To clarify my terms: *reinvention* is the process through which enslaved and postslavery black communities in the New World came to live and construct black humanity within the context of racial violence—a range of rebellious acts that affirmed black humanity and black life were and are imperative to reinvention. *Invention* is meant to signal those cultural practices and texts—marronages, mutinies, funerals, carnivals, dramas, visual arts, fictions, poems, fights, dances, music making and listening, revolts—that emerged alongside reinvented black lives. I want to point out, too, the relational workings of reinvention and invention: the reinvention of black life *and* attendant cultural inventions were engendered by the Middle Passage and plantation systems dynamically and simultaneously. One cannot reinvent the human without rebellious inventions, and rebellious inventions require reinvented lives.

Rebellion

Sylvia Wynter explores many layered and knotted plantation narratives in “Black Metamorphosis.” The monograph begins with a discussion of enslaved Africans who, following Middle Passage terrors, were forced to occupy and work violent plantation economies. The Middle Passage and plantation systems transformed—or, more specifically, converted—the enslaved into units of labor. The enslaved perceptively and conceptually became homogenous units of labor, planted in the New World not to inhabit (people, settle) the land but to mechanically produce monocrops and fuel the economic system (1–3). The plantation system, above all, sought profit. It follows that the enslaved units of labor, as owned property, were embedded in a system that benefited from, and calcified, their nonpersonhood and nonbeing; and it is precisely because they were planted in the New World not as “buyers and sellers” but as commodities that were “bought and sold” that black enslaved peoples in the New World were at once alienated from and implicated in the racial economy as nonbeings/nonconsumers/mechanized labor (232). Put differently, the plantation context required the impossibility of black humanity. At the same time, transatlantic slavery—the Middle Passage and plantation systems—totally cut off the enslaved from their former cultures and histories while normalizing a collective “mode of knowing” that sustained white supremacy and geographically codified racial differences (387). Indeed, the economic mechanization and negation of blackness was entwined with the geographic removal from the continent of Africa, geographic estrangement on arrival in the New World, and plantation geographies designed to simultaneously immobilize and mechanize black labor units. Imposed placelessness was accompanied by the negation of black humanity and an “alienated reality” (7). These same processes, we can conclude, humanized white colonial geographies as productive sites of settlement, belonging, and capital accumulation. Belonging and settlement and accumulation were thus entangled with dispossessed black labor units and entrenched, extrahumanly and not, the “nothing” of the enslaved and the “being” of the settler (146).

Later in the manuscript Wynter rethinks her initial black labor-unit model to argue that the plantation economy must, in fact, be understood alongside the widespread assault on all aspects of black life. Calling into question and reworking Karl Marx’s “factory” hypothesis, and reading a series of black intellectual texts, Wynter identifies that practices of “nigger-breaking” initiated the enslaved black population *and* the colonizing white population through acts of violence, as asymmetrically raced black nonbeings and raced white beings, through the colonization of consciousness: “Nigger-breaking reveals itself as an initiation rite in which the task of social inscription was at least as important as the task of economic extraction. . . . The plantation and the nigger-breaking model of exploitation reveals that the social order of production, in order to function, needs to establish fixed coefficients of social exchange, and that the strategy of the economic is a central means of establishing these fixed coefficients

of exchange” (590–91). In “Black Metamorphosis” Wynter shows that the unsettling workings of antiblack racism and violence grew out of and were sustained by a plantation system that geographically, economically, socially, and psychically produced the punished and punishable laboring black body (not the laboring black *person*) as necessary to antiblack socialization across racial identifications. What Wynter traces, then, are not only the historical plantocratic processes through which blackness becomes an absolute negative sign “in the mathematics of inequality” (214) but also how the interpellation of the self-as-free, in knotted slave-plantation-and-post-slave-plantation contexts, is produced within a normative bourgeois order of consciousness—propped up by a global political economy of race—that is antiblack.

Slavery was, Wynter writes, “the first large-scale intensive attempt at the *mechanization* of human existence” (107; emphasis mine). The mechanization of the black labor-unit status was anchored to a range of antiblack practices (premature and preventable deaths, lashings, segregations, bindings, lynchings, cuttings, brandings, dismemberments, malnourishments, rapes, impoverishments, incarcerations, thrashings designed to break black into absolute negation) that expertly located black nonpersonhood and nonbeing within the fabric of, and therefore necessary to, collective social consciousness. In many ways, what can also be observed is what I consider to be one of Wynter’s more provocative insights: how practices of racism and narratives of antiblackness not only permeate how we collectively understand one another but also inform negative physiological and neurobiological responses to blackness.⁷ What Wynter offers in her unraveling of the plantation in “Black Metamorphosis” is how psychic and affective negative feelings about blackness—feelings that are so often experienced as though they are truthful and bioinstinctual—are implicit to a symbolic belief system of which antiblackness is constitutive (569). Antiblackness informs neurobiological and physiological drives, desires, and emotions—and negative feelings—because it underwrites a collective and normalized, racially coded, biocentric belief system wherein narratives of natural selection, and the dysselection of blackness, are cast as, and *reflexly* experienced as, commonsense. Social consciousness, then, across racial identifications, includes physiologically and neurobiologically feeling and sensing and knowing antiblackness as a normal way of life. Feeling normal is feeling, as if bioinstinctually, black-as-worthless. It is worth repeating that Wynter also identifies racist violence, emerging from plantation logics, as initiation; rites of passage mark entrance into, and therefore replicate and normalize a European-centered bourgeois social order (423). Importantly, then, the process of coming into and being accepted into the world relies on conceptions of—or, more brutally and dismally, acts of—racist violence that reinforce the physiological and neurobiological refusal of black humanity.

7 It is worth thinking about this alongside Wynter’s “Towards the Sociogenic Principle: Fanon, Identity, the Puzzle of Conscious Experience,” in Mercedes F. Durán-Cogan and Antonio Gómez-Moriana, eds., *National Identities and Socio-political Changes in Latin America* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 30–66.

“Black Metamorphosis” does not, however, descriptively rehearse the refusal of black humanity. Every line of the text is sutured to black life. As one reads the monograph, the brutal and racist imperative to totally negate black peoples in slave and postslave eras is undone by Wynter’s documentation of a range of black rebellions: marronages, mutinies, funerals, carnivals, dramas, visual arts, fictions, poems, fights, dances, music making and listening, revolts, “periodic uprisings and . . . the ongoing creation of culture” (83). Every line of this text is sutured to black life as the rebellious impulse to indict and overturn the dominant values that engender and profit from black nonbeing and nonpersonhood.⁸ The total negation of blackness described above (the widespread oppression that normalized white supremacy, the calcified antiblack plantation logics, the psychic and neurological and physiological negative responses to blackness, the antiblack violence underpinned by racial capitalism) is always written as analytically relational to a series of rebellions that affirm black life. Wynter’s reading of oppression and resistance is not, therefore, dichotomous but rather a “question mark . . . a dynamic dialectic of terror and hope” (225).

Significantly, the racial order of things that emerged within and alongside Middle Passage and plantation terrors also produced the conditions to reinvent and reorder black life. The negation of black humanity within the plantation context provided new and different ways to pronounce black life. It is important to note here that the affirmation of black life includes, but is not restricted to, the repurposing of multiethnic African traces and phantasies—not as vestiges of nostalgic idealization but as adaptive social innovations.⁹ The affirmation of black life, then, requires thinking across a range of racial identifications and practices (African and non-African, black and nonblack) within a system that axiomatically situates black life *outside* plantocratic conceptions of humanity and, in so doing, reinvents black selfhood-community-life anew.

Notable here is Wynter’s concept of indigenization.¹⁰ Throughout the manuscript she tracks the different ways displacement, negation, and antiblack violence fostered radical practices of black humanization. These practices delineate a “sustained and prolonged attempt

8 I am paraphrasing and bringing together two moments in “Black Metamorphosis.” When discussing rebellions and religious ceremonies performed by the enslaved on the plantation—acts that undermined the dominant colonial ways of knowing—Wynter writes, “One central impulse was clear, the impulse to enslave the system which negated them” (82). Later in the monograph, she describes the pathologization of black communities (through official documentation and data collection on black victimhood, e.g., the Moynihan Report) as conducted and written by figures that “internalized market values” and saw the “failure of blacks as an incapacity rather than as an indictment of the dominant values to which they subscribe” (232). The postslave documentation of pathologization and dehumanization also engendered revolt and indictment (232, 242–44).

9 See 243–44, 506. It is important to underscore that the specificity of Africanness, the varying intimacies of multifarious African indigenous lives, are not replicated by the enslaved—retention in the New World is trace, and trace is repurposed in the context of the New World plantation logic.

10 In “Black Metamorphosis” Wynter’s concept of indigenization is not, it should be noted, a discussion of teleological-temporal New World arrivals and here-first-spatial-birth-claims; *indigenization* is a verb. It is, then, a thinking through of the ways Middle Passage and plantation systems produced a range of differential modes of knowing and uneven perceptions of humanness (from which the enslaved black was excluded altogether as labor unit). This analytical approach allow us to think through the heavy weight of normative ideologies and values and the brutally oppressive technologies of slavery and colonialism that, all together, produce modern relational histories and narratives *and* dynamic acts of rebellion—rebellion is indigenization—against the codes of unfreedom that violently marginalize *global damnés*. See her discussion of the “under-life” throughout the manuscript, too.

to reinvent the black as human” (248). What she begins to open up, then, is the perceptive and groundbreaking claim that *making black culture reinvents black humanity and life*. The affirmation of black humanness is enunciated through an “alienated reality” that is rooted in antiblack plantocratic histories, practices, and geographies. This alienated-reality status does not provide a New World cosmogony that situates the black enslaved as settlers or property holders or autochthonous; the alienated-reality status, instead, draws attention to black diaspora *activities* as geopolitical responses that unsettle antiblackness and objectification. This means the affirmation of black humanness is both relational to and in contradistinction to the dominant order of consciousness because *rebellions*—which are activities! not identities! not places!—honor black life as an ongoing struggle against what is truthfully represented as and believed to be preordained dysselected objecthood and placelessness. It is the process of creating blackness anew within the context of antiblackness that shifts our focus away from perceiving a range of New World inhabitants as differently occupying resolved knowable and distinct noun-places (settler/property holder/autochthonous/labor unit) and toward the politics of being human as praxis.

Let me explain this a little further: Sylvia Wynter writes that (mythic and real) autochthonous cultures of Africans from various locations and those indigenous to the New World were violently disrupted—in their own lands—by both transatlantic slavery and colonialism (13–14). The forced movement of Africans into the New World meant that this disruption was extended to and reworked on the Middle Passage and within the plantation. The loss of land to colonizing forces (experienced by those indigenous to Africa and those indigenous to the New World) was followed by a “change in continent” and the “total conditioning power of the plantation” for the black enslaved (17). The change in continent required—unlike those indigenous to the New World who were violently initiated into “Indian-ness” through genocidal systems and reserve systems in their own lands—black rebirth and cultural self-recreation in an entirely new geographic context. The reinvention of the human that took place in black communities, Wynter writes, was folded into the collective rebellions against plantation and colonial capitalist structures and their attendant modes of knowing (83).

As noted above, the geographic stakes of enslavement and colonialism unveil ungeographic black labor units (planted in, not intended to *people*, space) and settler geographies that are humanized through production, accumulation, and profit generation. Indeed, in this model the normative human is produced, and revered, as a geographic actor whose belonging is buttressed by consumerism and land ownership. The racial economy that designated the enslaved as nonbeings/nonconsumers/mechanized labor requires that the radical affirmation of black life be sought and claimed outside colonial—land-settling and land-claiming and land-exploiting and genocidal—paradigms. It follows that the reinvention of black life, and the challenge to our collective consciousness, must be engendered outside the logics of accumulation, land ownership, and profit generation, regardless of racial identification, while also

paying close attention to rebellious acts that indict and counterpoeticize a system of knowledge that venerates practices of antiblack racial violence as initiatory acts of humanization. This means, too, noticing that the process of black objectification implicit to the Middle Passage and plantation systems also required that the enslaved be indispensable to wider global interhuman exchanges and initiations and inventions—including, of course, African traces and black rebellions and subversive cultural texts. Indigenization, then, is not bound up in spatial claims (which are always, within our present system of knowledge, decidedly ethnically absolutist claims). Nor is indigenization held in strict and steady opposition to, say, oppressive homogenous colonizing powers. Indigenization is rebellion. Indigenizations are *ongoing* rebellions that demand we think outside our normalized order of consciousness (an order that sites the consumer-driven-accumulating-property-owning-always-wealthy-noun-place human as a finished, settled, thrived-for figure that is seemingly unmitigated by the messy consequences of interhuman exchanges that were [and are] engendered by our collective plantation histories and futures) and uncover the potentiality of rehumanized liberation and joy.

Invention

“Black Metamorphosis” traces the ways the Middle Passage and plantation systems produced the conditions to reinvent new forms of human life. Rebellions, uprisings, and cultural production, Wynter writes, disclose black intellectual strategies that “operated by a different principle of thought from that of the rational mind related to that of the plantation” (109). She continues, “Revolts were, at one and the same time, a form of praxis and an abstract theoretical activity. Neither could be separated from the other. Theory existed only in praxis; praxis was inseparable from theory” (139). Part of Wynter’s underlying claim in this text is that black rebellion is an intellectual breach. It is worth repeating that what is being breached (a dominant order of consciousness and its attendant initiation system that rests on entwining biocentric and economic antiblack practices) is heavy: it is a naturalized and normalized teleological belief system that preordains a racial economy of antiblackness and black objecthood; it is narrated as a commonsense cosmogony and “destiny” (444). Rebellious activity calls into question the preordained, profitable, and reflexly felt (as if bioinstinctually) workings of antiblackness.

Rebellious activities honor black life through expressing a model of liberation that is a “subversion of the axiomatic culture [and] the axiomatic psyche” (387). Reading across a range of creative and intellectual texts, Wynter’s discussion of black music and popular culture illuminates the interrelated praxes of inventing culture and reinventing black life through alienated realities. Her analyses of reggae, the blues, and jazz, for example, think through music as, among other things, a layered site of mythical, symbolic, and experiential histories; a secularizing ritual; tempos and beats that recode normative time; repurposed and shared

(among a range of black and nonblack artists) texts and rhythms; intertextual; citing suffering, survival, love, happiness, revolution; a kinship-making activity. With this, black music “was created in this exterior [alienated reality] social space, out of an outlier consciousness that was born from the sustained experience of social marginality. Because of this even as the record industry makes black music the ‘raw material’ of its profit production, and diffuses it globally, the bourgeois order itself creates the condition of possibility of its own subversion” (896). The creation of culture through black inventions animates liberation as praxis of rebellious subversion. Similarly, inventing black music out of our plantation pasts demonstrates that the figure that was never intended to *be*—because *being* is iconized as property-owning-settled-geographically-belonging-nonblack—in fact empirically and experientially questions the ontological terms of humanness and therefore *becomes* through subversive rebellion and as subversive rebel. The black figure that emerged from an alienated-reality status as black-human-life therefore reorients us to radical praxes of liberation that do not replicate a colonial order of knowledge. The reinvention of black life and community, and inventive rebellious practices, regardless of scale, clearly demonstrate a revolt against an entire belief system, including a sanctioned order of consciousness, that negates black humanity; these reinventions and inventions transform an impossibility—black humanity—into an imaginable and valuable and expressive form of black life.

In the early portions of the manuscript Wynter delineates how black rebellions, uprisings, and cultural production, together, were resistances and critical responses to the labor-unit status imposed on the enslaved (117). Black cultural production and inventions were, of course, seen as noncultural within the dominant order of knowledge—for the enslaved were, first and foremost, labor units bereft of humanity and therefore without cultural-intellectual acuity (467). Black culture was (is) therefore logically stigmatized because it resides outside normative, respectable, cultural codes. Wynter also outlines how black cultural practices were threats—“property that had rebelled, thereby affirming its status as human, [was] burnt (i.e., tortured) as a terror” (79), and overseers thwarted dances that “serve[d] to keep alive that military spirit” (129). In mapping out how nonpersons were punished for producing noncultural inventions that critiqued and reimagined the dominant system, “Black Metamorphosis” opens up a way to think about how the reinventions of black life were tied to “mechanisms of rebellion . . . sited in culture” that “profoundly undermine the bourgeoisie utilitarianism and the instrumental rationality of the dominant order” (411–12, 545–46). In several instances Wynter therefore shows how the plantocratic values that negated and objectified blackness were subverted and restructured by black cultural practices such as work songs, stories, dramas, dances, poems. She writes that the “subversive quality of black popular music has been primarily its assault on this [colonial] sense of time, its freeing of time from a market process, its insistence on time as a life process” (199). She continues, later, to write that the “paradox of black culture is that, stigmatized as the negation of the norm, it was left alone to develop

alternative possibilities; to provide the ground, the basis, for subversion of the dominant values of the hegemonic culture” (478). In “Black Metamorphosis,” the invention of black music is a revolutionary act that keeps heretical (nonmarket) time, negates black nonbeing by honoring and recoding black life, repurposes and interrupts linear temporalities, and is expressed in the midst of a violent and stigmatizing knowledge system. These musical practices, generated out of time and place, were also collaborative inventions because they were anchored to associative sounds, lyrics, myths, rituals, songs, and experiences—associative because they are familiar waveforms, stories, and tunes that the musician, the listener, the dancer, the audience, come to know jointly. Musical subversion is, importantly, tied to the development and legitimation of new modes of social kinship relations, reciprocal exchanges that do not replicate colonial family figurations or individualist models but, rather, establish networks that collectively rebel (844–45). Music, then, is not only an invention that subverts and undoes commonsense workings of antiblackness; music, music making, and music listening, together, demonstrate the subversive politics of shared stories, communal activities, and collaborative possibilities wherein “one *must participate* in knowing” (546; emphasis mine).

Wynter’s work on music thinks through how the affirmation of black life and practices of rebellion are intimately tied to cultural production. Making, sharing, and listening to black music are rebellious activities that evidence “a long tradition of social resistance,” and provide “a theoretical framework for social revolution” (849). What is at stake, then, are not texts and expressions and sounds that are disconnected from and oppositional to the dominant order but rather *activities* that are entangled with—because they are plantocratic—a range of racial identifications that provide clues to think outside, and change, our present order of knowledge. Musical inventions subvert—overthrow, ruin, undermine—the existing system by exposing its inequities and limits, while also engendering black joy and collaborative acts.

Groove

As noted above, musical inventions are anchored to associative sounds, lyrics, myths, rituals, songs, and experiences (185–87, 191–97). As well, musical inventions not only cushion “the shock of dispossession,” they “oppose it, by reminding, at deep psychic levels, of a potential return to humanity” (114). I conclude this essay with a discussion of sound and grooving to argue that waveforms are reparative rebellious inventions. I draw out some of the beats and grooves and feelings that Wynter writes into “Black Metamorphosis” in order to suggest that these are waveforms that undo the aforementioned negative physiological and neurobiological responses to black life. My discussion of sound, then, seeks to demonstrate that one of Wynter’s rebellious analytical moves in “Black Metamorphosis” is to provide an opening to think about how sounds, and grooving to music and beats, necessarily complement the aforementioned reinventions, inventions, subversions, collaborations. Indeed, part of my claim here

is that listening to and grooving to black music provides the conditions to intellectually engage and love ethically. Music waveforms allow us to glean that reinventing black life anew is bound up in cognitive schemas that envision, and feel, black sound outside normative structures of desire. This is to say, in order to be newly human, one does not simply rebelliously site and make black culture in a world that despises blackness; one also *engages* cultural inventions and sounds and ideas and texts, deeply and enthusiastically, to affirm humanity: one grooves *out of* the logics of antiblackness and *into* black life.

Also noted above, in this work Wynter traces how reinvented black life-forms and creative inventions emerged out of a range of violent racist acts. Throughout the text there are many instances where she identifies the profoundly human consequences of antiblack violence and what she describes as “death in life” and the “long and sustained agony of black experience” (212, 627). She writes of, for example, intolerable psychic pressures, anxieties, alienations, unsettling modes of cognition, colonized desires, among other neurobiological, physiological, and affective responses to oppression.¹¹ These responses to racism clearly delineate how the overarching extrahuman system of knowledge imposes itself on, and shapes, black and nonblack consciousness, with those cast as nonpersons neurobiologically, physiologically, and affectively occupying a world that makes humanness known through refusing black life. I draw attention to these neurobiological, physiological, and affective moments in “Black Metamorphosis” because they are, in part, within the realm of consciousness in which Wynter explores black rebellion. The brutality of racism is relational to, she notes, the *impulse* to resist, the *impulse* to produce oppositional narratives, the mind *feeling* theory, a profound *enthusiasm* for black culture, and longings *felt* in the flesh.¹² Again, these are not bioinstinctual impulses, feelings, and enthusiasms—although they may be experienced as such; they are, rather, indicators of a normalized, racially coded, biocentric belief system that shapes how we collectively feel and know and affectively negotiate the world. These specific impulses, feelings, and enthusiasms delineate the limits of the overarching system in that black *life*—neurobiological, physiological, and affective life—is enunciated as rebellious life *at the level of consciousness* and, simultaneously, through the reinventions and inventions noted above. This claim, then, totally undoes the mode of knowing that extracts livingness from blackness and black life by drawing attention to correlational (reinventions-as-inventions-as-rebellions-as-consciousness-as-being-as-praxis) human *activities* rather than unchanging biocentric *categories* of being that cosmogonically anticipate black dysselection.¹³ This alternative order of consciousness emerges from knotted and messy and awful plantocratic pasts that, I

11 For example, see 243–44, 248, 387, 403.

12 For example, see 82, 109, 412, 545–46, 817.

13 See also Wynter’s long and comprehensive discussion of bios-mythoi and human being as praxis. Sylvia Wynter and Katherine McKittrick, “Unparalleled Catastrophe of Our Species? or, to Give Humanness a Different Future: Conversations,” in Katherine McKittrick, ed., *Sylvia Wynter On Being Human as Praxis* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 1–89.

suggest here, are relational creative acts that unfold as reparative possibilities rooted in black intellectual activities.

The impulse and enthusiasm to subvert indicates the powerful possibilities that music, music making, and other creative acts engender. Wynter suggests that because systems of oppression and antiblackness were and are so brutal, deep, and heavy, black cultural activities are embedded with, and thus invite, “emotional charge” (412). She also writes, “Music is strictly structured and thinks itself through the senses” (245). These insights, together, begin to frame up how the relational acts of making and engaging black music—grooving—are collaborative rebellion. In her discussion of religious and secular music and dance, for example, she documents how tempos, steps, groans, shuffles, abrupt turns, laughter, hip-sways, beats, songs, foot-stamping, arm movements, and other beats and grooves are expressions of conscious art, renewed realities, and life-forces for the dispossessed (191–97). While the music, sound, and dance archived in “Black Metamorphosis” point to a number of entwining practices and sources (African and non-African, black and nonblack), what I want to emphasize are the ways Wynter couples rebellion, critique, invention, and reinvention with rhythms and grooves. She writes, for example, that rhythm is “the aesthetic/ethic principle of the gestalt” and thus central to the reconstitution of black life (245). Indeed, the beats and grooves within the monograph shed light on an “alternate way of thought, one where the mind and senses coexist, where the mind ‘feels’ and the senses become theoreticians” (109). It follows, then, that the aforementioned alternative mode of consciousness—the impulse to innovatively subvert—is, in part, constituted through “a radicalization of desire” (817).

Wynter writes beats and grooves and waveforms as productive sites of resistance that are relational to revolution and the affirmation of black life. She writes that drums are “the enabling mechanism of consciousness reversal” and that listening to beats, grooves, and music fosters collective “cosmic unity” between the self and the social body: people “listening or dancing participate in the experience of the music [and are] linked to the physiological experience of the beat” (878–79). Indeed, in sharing and grooving to music, histories are renarrated, kinships are reimagined, and a different mode of representation is performed, heard, repeated, enjoyed: this is a very different kind of initiation into humanness than a normative model that requires racial violence. With this, Wynter writes, “Enthusiasm and exaltation are the uncolonized flow of desire that expresses liberation from societal codings” (549). Enthusiasm, I want to suggest, radically refuses the dominant order: the feeling of exaltation, emerging as a form of knowledge that is necessarily collaborative praxes, cites and sites black joy and love. For it is in the waveforms of music—beats, rhythms, acoustics, notational moods, and frequencies that intersect with racial economies and histories—that rebelliousness is enunciated as an energetic (neurological, physiological) *affection for black culture as life*. In this, “Black Metamorphosis” asks for an engagement with music that couples rebelliousness and subversion with the act of making, hearing, listening to, and moving to, song. The aesthetic waveforms call attention

to the ways the praxis of black life—which includes behaviors and brain activities that find pleasure in song—is articulated through music, music making, music listening, orchestration, beats, bass, notations, lyrics, rhymes, soul, groove. This opens up a meaningful way to think about how the politics of sound, and grooving to song, are assertions of black life that indict and subvert antiblackness and, at the same time, notice the inventive aspects of our collective and difficult plantocratic histories, traces, and memories: “The ethic is the aesthetic” (900).

Acknowledgments

Thank you Aaron Kamugisha, Kelly S. Martin, David Scott, Shelby Stinnissen, Sylvia Wynter, and the anonymous reviewers.

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Kanye West, “Black Skinhead”

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Sylvia Wynter's Theory of the Human and the Crisis School of Caribbean Heteromascularity Studies

Tonya Haynes

A number of questions might well be raised about the now burgeoning body of work on Caribbean masculinities. What is the study of Caribbean masculinity for? Is it explicitly guided by feminist ethics, and what futures does it hope to imagine?

—Aaron Kamugisha, “The Hearts of Men? Gender and the Late C. L. R. James”

Engagements with Sylvia Wynter's thought on gender often seek to either discipline her to a normative feminism, insist on the inability of nationalism to admit feminism, or, while claiming her for black feminism, assert that she rejects gender analytics. Her (alleged) rejection of gender analysis is troubling, given that “the banning of black subjects from the domain of the human occur in and through gender and sexuality.”¹ Katherine McKittrick's pioneering work that articulates the liberatory geography of black women's demonic grounds and Greg

1 Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 42. See also Natasha Barnes, “Reluctant Matriarch: Sylvia Wynter and the Problematics of Caribbean Feminism,” *Small Axe*, no. 5 (March 1999): 34–47; and Tonya Haynes, “The Divine and the Demonic: Sylvia Wynter and Caribbean Feminist Thought Revisited,” in V. Eudine Barribeau, ed., *Love and Power: Caribbean Discourses of Gender* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2012), 54–71.

Thomas's conceptualization of erotic self-determination are significant, productive exceptions.² While I have insisted on the importance of Wynter's thought to Caribbean feminist theory, especially to gender and development studies, I have not yet made use of Wynter's ideas in analyzing dominant discourses on gender and sexuality in the Caribbean.³ In this essay I trace the rise of what I call the crisis school of Caribbean heteromascularity studies, reading critically across popular writing, policy research, and scholarly work on Caribbean masculinity. Mobilizing insights articulated in Wynter's "Black Metamorphosis" and developed in her later essays, I examine the circulation of knowledge on gender and sexuality emanating from the crisis school. Highlighting the points of convergence found in government-sponsored policy studies, academic scholarship, and the newspaper column of a men's organization from Barbados, I reveal a particular investment in a specific way of being human in this work and question what such investments mean for black liberation, gender relations, and power/knowledge.

Signs and Power

"Black Metamorphosis" represents the working through of ideas and intellectual paradigms that results in the development of Sylvia Wynter's theory of the human.⁴ Wynter traces the invention of "axiomatic normative man as bourgeois," as "white, male and pure intellect" and the parallel processes of "negrofication of the black," "femalization of the woman," and "proletarianization of the popular classes" required to instantiate white, bourgeois man as Man, as norm, and as the human itself.⁵ As a text that reveals Wynter's exploration of her own ideas, it is foundational for understanding how Wynter theorizes (or does not theorize) gender. For Wynter, sociogeny explains the striving to embody and enact the idealized way of being human as it is culturally defined. She traces how Man incorporates sub-versions or lesser versions of itself, thus subverting the liminal potential for revolution and ensuring that the very symbolic system of meaning that excludes many from the human can remain intact. For example, she is critical of the attempts of Black Nationalism to "creat[e] an Afro-Man as Norm—rather than deconstructing the cultural code."⁶

Drawing on her knowledge of Spanish Renaissance history, Wynter reveals the connections between the move from feudal power to capitalist relations and the rise of "castration plays" in which husbands murder wives to escape social castration and reassert their honor as men. Here, Wynter reveals the fragility of power that is dependent on the symbolic order

2 Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006); Greg Thomas, "The 'S' Word: Sex, Empire, and the Black Radical Tradition," in Anthony Bogues, ed., *After Man, Towards the Human: Critical Essays on Sylvia Wynter* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2006).

3 See Haynes, "The Divine and the Demonic."

4 Derrick White, "'Black Metamorphosis': A Prelude to Sylvia Wynter's Theory of the Human," *C. L. R. James Journal* 16, no. 1 (2010): 127–48.

5 Sylvia Wynter, "Black Metamorphosis" (unpublished ms., n.d.), 473.

6 White, "Black Metamorphosis: A Prelude," 144.

to legitimize itself: "A sign has to be revalued, its value realized by and through one's actions, which could prove that one had honour. But this honour could be put in doubt with the next breath of gossip, of doubt. One then tried to fill the lack ceaselessly and by the very filling of the lack, re-engendered a new sense of lack."⁷

Wynter's work can help us rethink this notion of perpetual crisis in relation to masculinity, to see masculinity as a sign that must be constantly revalued, while each revaluation produces crisis. In other words, masculinity must constantly rearticulate itself and each new rearticulation produces "a new sense of lack," that is, masculinity as crisis. More important, I mobilize Wynter's ideas to question the very political project and framing of Caribbean heteromascularity studies. Operationalizing Wynter's insights into how all our academic disciplines share a complicity in legitimating and maintaining Western hegemony, I examine Caribbean heteromascularity studies' relation to power and liberatory politics.

I do not read Wynter's use of the example of "castration plays" as mere metaphor for articulating how power operates both discursively and materially. Instead, I see her arguments in "Black Metamorphosis" as providing insight into the very gender analytics she is so frequently accused of rejecting. Wynter's invocation of gender here is particularly telling because it gives definition to how the overrepresentation of one way of being human is achieved through processes of gendering and racialization (among others). When she flags the absence of "Caliban's woman," this is what she is getting at: gender is a key constitutive part of genre.⁸ While it may be tempting to read "Caliban's woman" as a heteronormative and patriarchal slippage, it is perhaps more productive to view it as gesturing toward the racialized inequality of love that Averil Clarke reveals based on empirical data from heterosexual black women's lives.⁹ Both gender and (hetero)sexuality are part of the prescribed way of achieving idealized Man, and both are sites for racialized exclusion. Wynter is concerned, however, that when we separate political struggles against the overrepresentation of Man as the human itself into single-issue or identity struggles, the effect is to "retreat into the bourgeois order of things."¹⁰ Herein lies Wynter's quarrel with normative Western feminisms and analyses that seek to parse gender from the episteme that gives life to it. Citing Judith Butler, Wynter understands gender to be performative: it is gender itself that re/produces gender.¹¹ Such an understanding fits nicely within Wynter's theory of the human, which is premised on the capacity of the episteme to produce taken-for-granted understandings of the world that reproduce

7 Wynter, "Black Metamorphosis," 470–71, 471.

8 Sylvia Wynter, "Afterword—Beyond Miranda's Meanings: Un/Silencing the 'Demonic Ground' of Caliban's 'Woman,'" in Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido, eds., *Out of the Kumbia: Caribbean Women and Literature* (Trenton: Africa World, 1990), 354–72.

9 Averil Y. Clarke, *Inequalities of Love: College-Educated Black Women and the Barriers to Romance and Family* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

10 Sylvia Wynter, in Katherine McKittrick and Sylvia Wynter, "Unparalleled Catastrophe for Our Species? or, To Give Humanness a Different Future: Conversations," in Katherine McKittrick, ed., *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 23.

11 *Ibid.*, 33; see Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

Man as self-legitimated. In “Black Metamorphosis” Wynter works through and eventually moves beyond a Marxist analysis that she finds wanting in order to arrive at her theory of the human. The Western invention of the human, Man, necessitates the production of “Others”: “The lower classes as the lack of the normal class, that is the middle class; all other cultures as the lack of the normal culture, that is Western culture; the nonheterosexual as the lack of heterosexuality, represented as a biologically selected mode of erotic preference; women as the lack of the normal sex, the male.”¹² Doing gender emerges as part of the praxes of being human. Such analysis exposes heteronormative and heterosexualized renderings of gender that reinscribe man as norm.¹³

Returning to and expanding the questions posed in the epigraph,¹⁴ I ask the following: If feminism mistakes the map for the territory (to borrow from Wynter), what do we make of the Caribbean masculinity studies that emerges out of and is indebted to feminist work on gender?¹⁵ Does Caribbean masculinity studies also suffer from genre trouble, misunderstood as gender trouble? Do we find in Caribbean masculinity studies an articulation of a vision and politics of liberation? What exactly is the project of Caribbean masculinity studies? How is doing gender understood within the crisis school, and how is such praxis related to claims to the human?

Overview of Caribbean Masculinity Studies

Caribbean scholarship on men and masculinities is emerging as a distinct and sustained field of inquiry. Far from Caribbean masculinity studies being taboo, it has a long history of affecting public policy in the region.¹⁶ However, recent work on Caribbean masculinity must be understood as distinct from earlier efforts, such as the structural-functionalist social and anthropological studies that concentrated on the pathology of the Afro-Caribbean family and the marginality of Afro-Caribbean men.¹⁷ While, as I demonstrate later, this early work still casts a long shadow over current Caribbean studies of men and masculinity, the academic focus on (largely Afro-Caribbean) men that emerged in the late 1980s has other points of departure, including, especially, a response to feminism.

12 Sylvia Wynter, “1492: A New World View,” in Vera Lawrence Hyatt and Rex Nettleford, eds., *Race, Discourse, and the Origin of the Americas* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1995), 42.

13 I am thinking here not only of masculinity studies but also of the tendency to measure “women’s empowerment” via a series of indicators aimed to capture women’s position relative to men’s, which proves less and less useful as men’s position continues to be eroded under neoliberal economic configurations.

14 Aaron Kamugisha, “The Hearts of Men? Gender and the Late C. L. R. James,” *Small Axe*, no. 34 (March 2011): 79.

15 Sylvia Wynter, “On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory and Re-imprisoned Ourselves in Our Unbearable Wrongness of Being, of Désêtre: Black Studies toward the Human Project,” in Lewis R. Gordon and Jane Anna, eds., *Not Only the Master’s Tools: African American Studies in Theory and Practice* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2006), 107–69.

16 Jenny Sharpe and Samantha Pinto, “The Sweetest Taboo: Studies of Caribbean Sexualities; A Review Essay,” *Signs* 32, no. 1 (2006): 265.

17 Raymond Smith, *The Negro Family in British Guiana: Family Structure and Social Status in the Villages* (London: Routledge and Keagan Paul, 1956); Christine Barrow, “Caribbean Masculinity and Family: Revisiting ‘Masculinity’ and ‘Reputation,’” in Christine Barrow, ed., *Caribbean Portraits: Essays on Gender Ideologies and Identities* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 1998), 339–58.

Caribbean writing on masculinity since the 1990s has focused on exposing the vulnerability of boys and men in diverse areas including education, socialization, changes in the international political economy that destabilize masculine identities, and youth.¹⁸ Attempts to give an account of Afro-Caribbean men's gender identities have focused on slavery, socialization, and interrogating the construction and performance of masculinity.¹⁹ While much of this focus is heteronormative, there is also significant work on men's erotic and intimate lives with other men, though this work does not always or exclusively frame itself under a masculinity studies rubric.²⁰

Linden Lewis's work stands out for its engagement with feminist theory, attention to the flexibility and resilience of masculinized power, and his ongoing commitment to examining

- 18 On education, see Barbara Bailey, "Gendered Realities: Fact or Fiction? The Realities in a Secondary Level Coeducational Classroom," in Patricia Mohammed, ed., *Gendered Realities: Essays in Caribbean Feminist Thought* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press and Centre for Gender and Development Studies, 2002), 164–81; Mark Figueroa, "Male Privileging and Male Academic Underperformance," in Rhoda E. Reddock, ed., *Interrogating Caribbean Masculinities: Theoretical and Empirical Analyses* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2004), 139–66; Mark Figueroa, "(Old) Female Glass Ceilings and New (Male) Looking Glasses: Challenging Gender Privileging in the Caribbean," in Barbara Bailey and Elsa Leo-Rhynie, eds., *Gender in the Twenty-First Century: Caribbean Perspectives, Visions, and Possibilities* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2004), 134–61; Jeanette Morris, "Gender and Schooling: Implications for Teacher Education," in Bailey and Leo-Rhynie, *Gender in the Twenty-First Century*, 82–98; Odette Parry, *Male Underachievement in High School Education in Jamaica, Barbados, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2000); and Verene Shepherd, "Gender, History Education, and Development in Jamaica," in Bailey and Leo-Rhynie, *Gender in the Twenty-First Century*, 61–81. On socialization, see these publications by Barry Chevannes: *What We Sow and What We Reap: Problems in the Cultivation of Male Identity in Jamaica* (Kingston: Grace, Kennedy Foundation, 1999); *Learning to Be a Man: Culture, Socialization, and Gender Identity in Five Caribbean Communities* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2001); "The Role of the Street in the Socialization of Caribbean Males," in Linden Lewis, ed., *The Culture of Gender and Sexuality in the Caribbean* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), 215–33; and "The Role of Men in Families in the Caribbean: A Historical Perspective," in Ian Bannon and Maria C. Correia, eds., *The Other Half of Gender: Men's Issues in Development* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2006). On destabilized masculine identities, see, for example, these essays by Linden Lewis: "Caribbean Masculinity: Unpacking the Narrative," in Lewis, *Culture of Gender and Sexuality*, 94–125; "Caribbean Masculinity at the Fin de siècle," in Reddock, *Interrogating Caribbean Masculinities*, 244–66; "Masculinity and the Political Economy of the Body," in Bailey and Leo-Rhynie, *Gender in the Twenty-First Century*, 236–61; "Caribbean Literary Discourses on the Polyvalence of Masculinity," *Caribbean Quarterly* 60, no. 4 (2014): 64–83; and "Gender and Performativity: Calypso and the Culture of Masculinity," *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies* 8 (2014): 15–42, sta.uwi.edu/crgs/december2014/journals/CRGS_8_Pgs015-42_GenderPerformativityCalypso_LLewisx.pdf. See also Keith Nurse, "Masculinities in Transition: Gender and the Global Problematique," in Reddock, *Interrogating Caribbean Masculinities*, 3–37. On youth, see Herbert Gayle, "Adolescent Male Survivability in Jamaica" (Jamaica Adolescent Reproductive Health Project, 2002); Herbert Gayle and Horace Levy, "Forced Ripe! How Youth of Three Selected Working Class Communities Assess Their Identity, Support, and Authority Systems, Including Their Relationship with the Jamaican Police" (World Bank, Poverty Reduction Management, Poverty Reduction, and Economic Management Network, 2009); Herbert Gayle and Nelma Mortis, "Male Social Participation and Violence in Urban Belize: An Examination of Their Experience with Goals, Guns, Gangs, Gender, God, and Governance" (Government of Belize, 2010); and Anne Eckman et al., "The Policy Environment for Male Youth in Jamaica: Findings from a Pilot of the Gender Equitable Male Involvement (Gemi) Tool" (United States Agency for International Development, 2005).
- 19 See Hilary Beckles, "Black Masculinity in Caribbean Slavery," in Reddock, *Interrogating Caribbean Masculinities*, 225–43; Tracy Davis and Alvin Thomas, "Exploring the Constructions of Masculine Identities among St. Lucian Men," *Journal of Men's Studies* 14, no. 3 (2006): 292–310; Donna P. Hope, "Dons and Shottas: Performing Violent Masculinity in Dancehall Culture," *Social and Economic Studies* 55, nos. 1–2 (2006): 115–31, and *Man Vibes: Masculinities in the Jamaican Dancehall* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2010); and Gordon Rohlehr, "I Lawa: The Construction of Masculinity in Trinidad and Tobago Calypso," in Reddock, *Interrogating Caribbean Masculinities*, 326–403.
- 20 See Andil Gosine, "Murderous Men," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 15, no. 4 (2013): 477–93; Wesley Crichlow, "History, (Re)Memory, Testimony, and Biomythography: Charting a Buller Man's Trinidadian Past," in Reddock, *Interrogating Caribbean Masculinities*, 182–222; Carlos Ulises Decena, *Tacit Subjects: Belonging and Same-Sex Desire among Dominican Immigrant Men* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011); Mark B. Padilla, "The Embodiment of Tourism among Bisexually Behaving Dominican Male Sex Workers," *Archives of Sexual Behaviour*, no. 37 (2008): 783–93; Jafari S. Allen, *¡Venceremos! The Erotics of Black Self-Making in Cuba* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

questions of masculinity and power in the Caribbean.²¹ I see Lewis's work as seeking to sketch out how Caribbean masculinity studies should proceed, outlining some pitfalls to avoid, and engaging with the "men in crisis" debate from a profeminist stance. Aaron Kamugisha's exploration of Austin Clarke's Bajan boyhood demonstrates that the concept of male privilege and male privileging actually masks neglect and even abuse of boys.²² His nuanced analysis reflects an ability to simultaneously explore the physical, emotional, and sexual violence that inhere in the socialization of boys into becoming men—understood as heterosexual, relatively dominant (at least in relation to women, even if not in relation to all other men), publicly active—while understanding how masculinity functions as a sign.

Many Caribbean scholars are drawing needed attention to vulnerabilities faced by boys and men in the Caribbean.²³ This essay does not contest any of the claims made about the violence, marginality, and vulnerability that characterizes the young men's lives that are the focus of these studies. In fact, it seeks to argue that issues facing men and boys are valid in and of themselves and not only when it can be argued that conditions for men are worse than for women. My interest in examining these and other works on Caribbean masculinities is to interrogate the framing of the research and expose its investments in a particular way of being human: Man.

Masculinity studies in a Western/Northern context has been described as a profeminist subfield that retains modernist theoretical frameworks. It views masculine identity as agentive, produced through social structures (patriarchy), and conceives of men's sexuality and sexual pleasure in predominantly negative terms. Masculinity studies views power as oppressive and as something that some have (like transnational businessmen) and that others do not. It has been argued that whereas feminist studies and sexuality studies take up the cause of women and sexual minorities, masculinity studies does not take up the cause of masculinity.²⁴ While there is Caribbean masculinity scholarship that follows the patterns observed globally, there is also a distinct strand of policy, academic, and popular knowledge production that deviates from these larger trends in the field. These deviations center on taking up the cause of masculinity, framing masculinity studies in such a way that it is masculinity itself that becomes agentive, an uncritical avowal of Man as the idealized way of being, and a failure to recognize the ways we are all positioned in relation to gender.

21 From Linden Lewis, see "Nationalism and Caribbean Masculinity," in Tamar Mayer, ed., *Gender Ironies of Nationalism* (London: Routledge, 2000), 260–281; "Envisioning a Politics of Change within Caribbean Gender Relations," in Mohamed, *Gendered Realities*, 512–30; "Caribbean Masculinity: Unpacking the Narrative"; "Caribbean Masculinity at the Fin de siècle"; "Masculinity and the Political Economy of the Body"; and "Man Talk, Masculinity, and a Changing Social Environment," *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies* 1 (2007): 1–20, sta.uwi.edu/crgs/journals/Linden_Lewis_pm_07.pdf.

22 Aaron Kamugisha, "Austin Clarke's Bajan Boyhood: Coming of Age in *Amongst Thistles and Thorns*, *Growing Up Stupid under the Union Jack*, and *Proud Empires*," *Journal of West Indian Literature* 21, nos. 1–2 (2013): 42–59.

23 Corin Bailey, "Social Protection in Communities Vulnerable to Criminal Activity," *Social and Economic Studies* 59, nos. 1–2 (2010): 211–42; Chevannes, "Role of the Street"; Gayle, "Adolescent Male Survivability"; Gayle and Levy, "Forced Ripe!"; Gayle and Mortis, "Male Social Participation."

24 See Chris Beasley, "Mind the Gap? Masculinity Studies and Contemporary Gender/Sexuality Thinking," *Australian Feminist Studies* 28, no. 75 (2013): 108–24.

Introducing the Crisis School of Caribbean Heteromascularity Studies

Within Caribbean studies on men and masculinities, a crisis school of Caribbean heteromascularity studies has emerged. Bryce Traister argues that American masculinity studies is often concerned with heterosexual masculinity and ultimately differentiates between homo- and heteromascularity. He argues that heteromascularity studies positions itself outside both feminism and queer theory, insofar as it is “dedicated to the revitalization of a ‘true manhood.’”²⁵ My use of the term *heteromascularity studies* borrows this insight into the way such studies position themselves against feminism, feminist theory, and queer theory. I will also demonstrate that Caribbean heteromascularity studies are themselves dedicated to a “revitalization of true manhood,” using Wynter’s theory of the human to do so. Further, I use the term *heteromascularity* to signal that the crisis school is not only interested in studies of heterosexual masculinity but, as Rinaldo Walcott argues in a different context, “a heterosexual black masculinity is assumed and always found wanting.”²⁶ Thus Walcott’s analysis brings together the assumed heterosexuality of (Afro-)Caribbean masculinity, the normalization of heterosexuality, and the understanding of black masculinity as being perpetually in crisis. For example, Trinidad and Tobago’s *No Time to Quit: Engaging Youth at Risk; Executive Report of the Committee on Young Males and Crime in Trinidad and Tobago* “questioned whether Trinidad and Tobago had a ‘young Afro male’ problem or a young poor male problem.” It concludes, among other things, that Indo-Trinidadian men faced problems related to “parental wealth,” ethnic identity in a creolized society, and domestic violence. However, black men were the very “problem” that prompted the state to call for this investigation of masculinity in the first place. This juxtaposition of the “pathologies related to family wealth” and the “powerful media images of young Afro males being arrested during the 2011 State of Emergency” reinscribes the men-in-crisis discourse in the region as a deeply racialized one in which black men emerge alternately (and sometimes simultaneously) as problem and as victim.²⁷ Further, the fact that male Caribbean scholars from across the disciplines have been marshaled to the cause of interrogating Caribbean masculinities emerges as reflective of the crisis discourse on Caribbean masculinity.²⁸

Errol Miller’s male marginalization thesis is the foundation of the crisis school. Miller argues that Afro-Caribbean women have been allowed access to resources such as education and employment in order to thwart any threat from men of subordinate groups to the hegemonic masculinity of the dominant group. Thus, women’s liberation (an assumed fait accompli) has been the result of the attempts by men of dominant groups to marginalize men of subordinate groups. As evidence, he cites women’s higher enrollment levels in education, women’s increased participation in the workforce, and the feminization of the teaching

25 Bryce Traister, “Academic Viagra: The Rise of American Masculinity Studies,” *American Quarterly* 52, no. 2 (2000): 278.

26 Rinaldo Walcott, “Reconstructing Manhood; or, The Drag of Black Masculinity,” *Small Axe*, no. 28 (March 2009): 76.

27 Office of the Parliament, Trinidad and Tobago, *No Time to Quit: Engaging Youth at Risk: Executive Report of the Committee on Young Males and Crime in Trinidad and Tobago* (2013), 18, www.ttparliament.org/documents/2197.pdf.

28 See Reddock, *Interrogating Caribbean Masculinities*.

profession. He argues that the teaching profession was progressively feminized as a result of efforts of men of the dominant group to prevent the development of militancy among black men.²⁹ Miller revisited his 1988 thesis in 2004, considering his initial analysis on male marginalization to have been vindicated by history.³⁰ Miller's thesis predicts civil war: "The greatest threat to the sequence outlined is minority males holding their position by virtue of a coup d'état with aid from some majority males employed as mercenaries. While this military option could delay the rise of patriarchy, it will not prevent it. The coup d'état, however, raises the prospect of civil war."³¹

Miller's thesis has met with constant criticism from within the academy.³² Many of Keisha Lindsay's observations about Miller's male marginalization thesis are also true for others within the crisis school: the conceptualization of gender relations as win or lose for either men or women at a particular historical juncture and the privileging of some data sources while ignoring others. While Miller's ideas may have been discredited by feminists in the academy, they survive in other centers of knowledge (re)production, such as in men's organizations. In addition, while many scholars are critical of Miller's arguments, they share his concern about men's changing status in society and an uncritical acceptance of Man as the idealized way of being human.

Reading the Crisis School through Wynter's Theory of the Human

Gender consciousness has resulted in a broad-based discourse on gender in the region,³³ where, I argue, knowledge circulates among popular, academic, and policy spaces with some knowledge producers occupying all three spaces. The crisis school of Caribbean heteromasculinity studies refers to a strand of Caribbean thought expressed both in scholarship and popular gender-conscious knowledge production that views Afro-Caribbean heterosexual masculinity as being in a constant state of crisis. Even very recent masculinity scholarship from the Caribbean has retained an uncritical framing of crisis in relation to black masculinity articulated as the "gylification of man," "fragile masculinities," and the social exclusion and racialization of black men in predominantly black societies.³⁴ This work must be viewed as coextensive with commissioned policy studies on black masculinity and youth by governments

29 Errol Miller, *Men at Risk* (Kingston: Jamaica Publishing House, 1991), 72–87.

30 Errol Miller, "Male Marginalization Revisited," in Bailey and Leo-Rhynie, *Gender in the Twenty-First Century*, 99.

31 Errol Miller, "The Rise of Patriarchy in the Caribbean," *Caribbean Quarterly* 34, nos. 3–4 (1988): 19.

32 Eudine Barribeau, "Requiem for the Male Marginalization Thesis in the Caribbean: Death of a Non-Theory," in Eudine Barribeau, ed., *Confronting Power, Theorizing Gender: Interdisciplinary Perspectives in the Caribbean* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2003): 324–53; Aviston Downes, "Gender and the Elementary Teaching Service in Barbados, 1880–1960: A Re-examination of the Feminization and the Marginalization of the Black Male Theses," in Barribeau, *Confronting Power, Theorizing Gender*, 303–23; Keisha Lindsay, "Is the Caribbean Male an Endangered Species?," in Mohammed, *Gendered Realities*, 57–76; Figueroa, "Male Privileging"; Figueroa, "(Old) Female Glass Ceilings."

33 Patricia Mohammed, "Like Sugar in Coffee: Third Wave Feminism and the Caribbean," *Social and Economic Studies* 52, no. 3 (2003): 5–30.

34 Ian Bennett, "Fragile Masculinities: The Loss of Young Men and the Pervasive Models of Masculinity in the Bahamas that Encourage Them to Fail," *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies* 8 (2014): 43–77, sta.uwi.edu/crgs/december2014/journals/CRGS_8_Pgs043-78_FragileMasculinities_Bennett.pdf; Clinton Hutton, "The Gylification of Man: The Expression of

and international organizations in countries such as Belize, Trinidad and Tobago, and Jamaica. These policy studies are often completed by academics who may also be linked to advocacy work and activism on gender issues. Heightened attention to the articulations between and among scholarship, policy, and popular discourse is therefore justified. These policy studies and the aforementioned scholarly work are the targets of my critique. In particular, I examine the policy work of academic and activist Herbert Gayle and colleagues as exemplar of the crisis school of Caribbean heteromascularity studies, while drawing in the arguments of other masculinity studies scholars to demonstrate the wider circulation and preexistence of similar ideas and analysis.

The crisis school is often concerned, and rightly so, with the social, political, and economic disenfranchisement of dysselected young men in the region.³⁵ My interest here is in how the dysselection of some young men, often refracted through the lenses of race and class that are sometimes proxies for each other, gets coded as a *gender* dysselection by crisis school scholars and activists. Young women's experiences of vulnerability are bracketed as either related to sexual abuse *only* or of lesser concern because of women's lower propensity for violence.³⁶ This bracketing of women's vulnerability as exclusively sexual reinscribes gender in terms of feminine lack and male normativity. What is missed in this kind of analysis that views gender relations (or perhaps women themselves) as a problem is an understanding of how the overrepresentation of a particular way of being human has unleashed environmental and social crises globally, included those responsible for the dysselection of young Afro-Caribbean men that crisis school scholars claim to be concerned about while sidestepping analysis of masculinist configurations of power that may still benefit even the most disenfranchised men. It also fails to recognize how our globalized economic systems and systemic poverty dysselect many young women as well.

The problems faced by young, poor, and working-class men and boys are reduced to the absence of fathers in the home and the failure of men to be husband-fathers, in other words, to inhabit a particular gendered way of being human, which, after Wynter, must be exposed as racialized, classed, and necessarily unachievable by those dysselected. Wynter moves beyond acknowledging "the myth of the male breadwinner" in the Caribbean to revealing how the notion of the breadwinner itself signals multiple valences of inequalities based on class, race, and gender and is enshrined in a world economic system that has seen increasing income inequality and disparities between "developed" and "developing" countries:

Because *Man* further defines itself as *homo oeconomicus*, . . . its "Other" . . . is the category of the *Poor*, i.e. the jobless and semijobless; as well as, in terms of the global system as a whole,

Male-Male Conflict in Jamaica and the Roots of Homoeroticism in the Political Ideology, Ontology, and Praxis of White Supremacy," *Caribbean Quarterly* 60, no. 4 (2014): 21–45.

35 The term *dysselected* is Wynter's. See Sylvia Wynter, "Africa, the West, and the Analogy of Culture: The Cinematic Text after Man," in June Givanni, ed., *Symbolic Narratives/African Cinema: Audiences, Theory, and the Moving Image* (London: British Film Institute, 2000), 25.

36 Gayle and Mortis, "Male Social Participation," 27.

the so-called “underdeveloped” countries of the world. While because economic *Man* is optimally defined as the *Breadwinner* (with the working classes thereby being defined as secondary Breadwinners to the middle classes, specifically to their investor upper class), the “*Other*” to this definition is, logically, the category of the *jobless, semijobless Poor*, together with that of the underdeveloped countries, both of which are made to actualise the negative alterity status of *defective Breadwinners*.³⁷

Such analysis serves as a necessary corrective to crisis school analyses that view boys’ academic underachievement and overrepresentation of male youth in crime as the result of the male socialization that leaves them ill-prepared for school.³⁸ Mothers, they argue, cannot adequately socialize boys and boys undergo violent socialization in the interest of making them men.³⁹ Herbert Gayle and Nelma Mortis proceed along two axes in their argument that “father absence” explains the vulnerability men and boys face. First, they argue that women’s increased economic autonomy (and following their illogic, men’s subsequent economic vulnerability) erodes men’s position in society and in the family. Arguments by the crisis school revolve around the extent to which black men are unable to inhabit bourgeois man. They blame women for failing to assist black men in realizing this particular way of being, arguing that women’s economic concerns result in them removing the biological fathers of their children from the home:

Women have even described men as “half of a man” when they become unemployed and remain in that state for a prolonged period; and deliberately annoy them so they leave to allow a “full man” in to act as “step-father.” . . . Some scholars have over-emphasized power-relations as the core of the battering of women by men but it is this factor combined with economic problems that is lethal. Men who cannot reaffirm their importance by earning money often await the female partner’s almost certain provocation to attack her.⁴⁰

Women here emerge as mercenary, emasculating, and ultimately responsible for any violence against them by men. Crisis school scholars have favored a misogynist rendering of women as calculatedly humiliating their partners and responsible for men’s violence against them. They have removed the understanding of *defective breadwinners* from its epistemic function in legitimating particular ways of being and reduced it to class-based intragroup gender relations.

Men’s violence against women is explained away by women’s “almost certain provocation.” The discourse of provocation to explain heterosexual intimate partner violence has been shown to be a part of popular and state discourses on masculinity and violence against women in the region. The sexism in such analyses has been exposed.⁴¹ That some members of the crisis school seek to explain away violence against women as either women’s fault

37 Wynter, “Africa, the West, and the Analogy of Culture,” 25–26 (italics in original).

38 Figueroa, “Male Privileging.”

39 Gayle and Mortis, “Male Social Participation”; Chevannes, *What We Sow and What We Reap*.

40 Gayle and Mortis, “Male Social Participation,” 103.

41 Halimah A. F. DeShong and Tonya Haynes, “Intimate Partner Violence in the Caribbean: State, Activist, and Media Responses,” *Global Public Health* (2015), dx.doi.org/10.1080/17441692.2015.1012529.

or as grossly inflated by feminists must be understood as a discursive tactic intended to further crisis school claims that contemporary Caribbean gender relations are characterized by black, heterosexual men's vulnerability and worsened position and status relative to their female counterparts. Because violence against women is frequently used as an indicator of asymmetrical relations of gender that disadvantage women, some crisis school members have chosen this specific area for sustained critique and dismissal (while refusing to cite or engage any of the scholars who do research on intimate partner violence in the region).

This crisis school analysis, however, lacks Wynter's insights into the way the majority of human beings are made to experience themselves as dispossessed, disposable, and excess—as the outer limits of the human—because of a self-legitimizing system in which their exclusion is not only made to seem justified but couched as their own responsibility.⁴² That crisis school scholars view this dysselection to be best understood as a result of gender relations demonstrates not only that gender is part of genre, as Wynter argues, but that there are different ways gender can be made to function in terms of power/knowledge. To question masculinity and masculinized power would be to question Man. Instead, crisis school scholars and activists seek to revalue masculinity as a sign: Spanish Renaissance “castration plays” set in the contemporary Caribbean. Wynter's concerns about the limitations of gender mobilized as an analytical category removed from interlocking constellations of power seem less a rejection of gender analytics and more a necessary caution.

That crisis school scholars turn to essentialisms to explain the harms they believe Afro-Caribbean men face reveals their investment in Man, understood as an acultural, transhistorical category, a privilege denied to black men that must be restored. They argue that it is the loss of the father as a biologically male presence and as patriarchal head and decision maker in the household that creates social problems and vulnerabilities for boys: “The position taken therefore is that if father is present and is head of the household and thus wields real power boys should compete better with girls in terms of finances and even emotional support. They should also have a role model to pattern and not feel emasculated, and seek alternative vehicles to feel like a man. Families with powerful fathers are more secured and reassuring for both boys and girls.”⁴³

Here, Gayle argues that a father in a position of power within the household would ensure that resources and care are distributed to boys. Gayle appears to suggest that mothers discriminate against sons because they are male, withholding financial and emotional support from sons but not from daughters. In addition, the presence of a powerful male role model is assumed to deter boys from violence. The authors seek to rehabilitate patriarchy in the name of antiviolence. Gayle and Mortis support these claims through the construction of

42 Compare Jennifer M. Silva, *Coming Up Short: Working-Class Adulthood in an Age of Uncertainty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

43 Gayle and Mortis, “Male Social Participation,” 97.

Table 1. Male-Biased Gender Index

Categories	Availability of Biological Parents	Decision Maker
Excellent	Both parents in the home (Nuclear)	Father or both parents
Good	Availability of father only; or both parents but with one or none in the household	Father or father and other male figures
Fair	Father available	Father not seen as decision maker
	Father not available	Other male decision makers
Poor	Father not available	No male decision maker

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what they call a “male-biased gender index,” intended to measure the father’s “parent and masculine roles.”⁴⁴

They explain that since the study is focused on understanding men’s participation in violence, the index is “focused on males and father presence.”⁴⁵ Thus, they have already reached conclusions about “father absence,” male socialization, and young men’s involvement in violence even *before* they begin to carry out the empirical study. Ultimately their arguments suggest that only patriarchal masculinity can ensure positive outcomes for boys and young men. The arguments only hold if Man is represented as acultural and extrahistorical, as biological category. Fathers leave home for one of two reasons, they argue: either because they cannot afford to economically support their families or because their “masculine status” has been undermined by women in the family.⁴⁶ The arguments rest on gross oversimplifications of complex social realities.

While Gayle and Mortis claim to be focused on fathers, it is clear that their attention is also trained on mothers, who wind up either implicitly or explicitly blamed for not maintaining nuclear, coresident, patriarchal families and for undermining men’s “masculine status.” Mothers’ caring work is discounted, since the presence of *any* male decision maker in a boy’s life is deemed as more important to determining his life chances than the presence of his mother (see table 1). In this analysis, women emerge as bearing a moral responsibility to Afro-Caribbean patriarchal masculinity in relation to adult men as well as to boys.⁴⁷ Here, Caliban’s woman is simultaneously produced and effaced. In the attempt to have Man include black men, black women are called on to coconstruct heteropatriarchal gender relations. These heteropatriarchal gender relations are given supernatural powers as readily available solutions to gang

44 Ibid., 74–76.

45 Ibid., 74.

46 Ibid., 76.

47 See also Lloyd J. Springer, *Fatherhood in the Neighbourhood: Fifty Boyfriends and Husbands Talk about Their Fathering* (Maitland, FL: Xulon, 2009).

violence, youth unemployment, and dissatisfaction. These gendered expectations extend to feminist scholarship in the academy. Eudine Barriteau has called attention to the redemptive mission of masculinity studies that Caribbean feminists are being asked to endorse.⁴⁸

The crisis school posits that there is fundamental gender inequality in the Caribbean that results in the marginalization of men and arises from state policies that favor women at the expense of men:

[Belize] has two major crises: gender inequity and reactive uninformed policy project orientation to development. Since its independence it has taken the track of the rest of the Caribbean of a gender-lopsided development creating a society that is male youth unfriendly, especially in its rapidly growing urban space. All transitions are challenging. However, these transitions can be made to be painful when the approach used lacks balance and is not informed by sterile, objective information with an aim to operate over long, continuous periods.⁴⁹

Without citing any Caribbean feminist work on gender and development or gender and the state, such an understanding of Caribbean postindependence development policy directly counters feminist analyses that have outlined the gendered, asymmetrical, and contradictory ways Caribbean states engage women.⁵⁰ Feminist knowledge is rejected as ideological and failing to meet the standards of scientific “sterile, objective information.” By engaging a fictive feminism rather than directly engaging Caribbean feminist thinkers, feminism is made more manageable and can therefore be easily dismissed.

Writing on Barbados, Astrid Ellie Hurley too has suggested that an international gender paradigm was operationalized in Barbados through the influence of United Nations–backed policies and programs that contributed to the marginalization of issues affecting men. Men’s issues, she argues, were seen as a result of men’s own behaviors and shortcomings and not warranting the attention of the state.⁵¹ This, Ellie Hurley argues, resulted in state feminism aimed at addressing women’s issues and state inattention to men. She makes the point that the issues women face are seen to be structural but the issues men face are seen to be individual. Here, she refuses to acknowledge that states do pay attention to men: “boys on the block” are mentioned in election manifestos, training and employment programs are directed toward them, sporting facilities are created in communities, and carceral populations in the region are overwhelmingly male. States do recognize men as a political constituency and as citizens, though many of the ways they engage with poor men are ultimately punitive and harmful and reinforce essentialized understandings of masculinity. To suggest that the

48 Eudine Barriteau, “Confronting Power and Politics: A Feminist Theorizing of Gender in Commonwealth Caribbean Societies,” *Meridians* 3, no. 2 (2003): 73.

49 Gayle and Mortis, “Male Social Participation,” 10.

50 Michelle V. Rowley, “Whose Time Is It? Gender and Humanism in Contemporary Feminist Advocacy,” *Small Axe*, no. 31 (March 2010): 1–15, and *Feminist Advocacy and Gender Equity in the Anglophone Caribbean: Envisioning a Politics of Coalition* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Eudine Barriteau, *The Political Economy of Gender in the Twentieth-Century Caribbean* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

51 Astrid Ellie Hurley, “Filtering the International Gender Paradigm: Perspectives of Gender in Barbados” (PhD diss., Florida International University, 2011), 83.

Barbadian state is blindly following an international gender paradigm that has paid attention to women but ignored men misses the opportunity to critique the ways the state does engage with men, in areas such as welfare, incarceration, youth employment, and skills-training programs. For example, Michelle Rowley has demonstrated that Caribbean welfare policies draw on essentialist understandings of gender that construct men as providers and heads of household but discount the caring work that men do.⁵² Caribbean men are by no means outside state policy making; they make up the majority of state managers notwithstanding. Many of the reports I cite in this essay and critique as forming part of the crisis school were commissioned and paid for by Caribbean states concerned for the well-being of young men, especially in relation to violence and formal education.

Ellie Hurley focuses her analysis on education, labor force participation, and political representation in order to advance her argument that the adoption of an international gender paradigm by Barbados has resulted in state neglect of men and destabilization of men's identities. She claims that while she did not find evidence of the kind of male marginalization advanced popularly, there is evidence to suggest that taken-for-granted understandings of women and men's relative status that view women as always already in an inferior position may be inaccurate:

While men do not exist at the margins of Barbadian society, they appear to have a much more limited social identity than their female counterparts. As such, though the numbers show them to be the economically and politically dominant group, they do not wield the same measure of social power as do their female counterparts. In other words, both as individuals, and as a group, women appear to have fewer restrictions applied to the ways and means by which they experience their day-to-day lives.⁵³

Here again we see what Wynter refers to as social castration and the masculinity-as-crisis need to stabilize the sign, while the very work to stabilize the sign destabilizes it. The question remains, Why do men, if they do, have this much more limited social identity? The focus on masculine identity as both problem and solution oversimplifies complex social realities, atomizes masculinized power, and psychologizes and individualizes rather than interrogates Man and male investment therein. While Ellie Hurley argues that Barbadian men experience greater restrictions than women in their everyday lives, have less social power, and have a more limited social identity, many other crisis school adherents do not typically call for more expanded and diverse social identities for men; in fact, they tend to call for the reverse.⁵⁴ They

52 Michelle V. Rowley, "Crafting Maternal Citizens? Public Discourses of the 'Maternal Scourge' in Social Welfare Policies and Services in Trinidad," *Social and Economic Studies* 52, no. 3 (September 2003): 31–58.

53 Hurley, "Filtering the International Gender Paradigm," 142–43.

54 Claims that black Caribbean men and boys have a more limited social identity than women and girls are often found in the literature on gender and education. For example, Mark Figueroa states, "Increasingly, as women 'take over' so-called male academic subjects, the options for boys will be more and more limited. Ultimately there will be little that boys can safely do without threatening their masculinity" ("Male Privileging," 159).

tend to demand increased opportunities for heterosexual, Afro-Caribbean men to inhabit the domain of Man, if even as a lesser version of the ideal.

Within the academic and policy literature of the crisis school there is a distinct recourse to biological explanations of men's experiences: "It is professional facticity [*sic*] that males are more aggressive by necessity (as hunters) and hence biologically their chemical make-up fosters aggression, aided by socialization. This characteristic of males is both an advantage as it fosters his muscular development and character as protector of his family, and a disadvantage as he is more involved in violence."⁵⁵ The recourse to biological maleness seeks to circumvent the other ways poor black men are unable to inhabit bourgeois, racialized-as-white Man. The crisis school seeks to circumvent the problem of sociogeny with recourse to biology.

There is an essentialized understanding of men and women within this literature. Men's right to leadership, household headship, and the resources of the state are taken for granted: "The early emphasis of the feminist movement was on improving women's access to such amenities as education and political rights. Not until the 1970s did the feminist stance in the Caribbean turn towards challenging the existing status quo and the status of men within Caribbean society."⁵⁶ For women, education and political rights are understood as "amenities." The granting of these amenities to women, however, should not mean any challenge to asymmetrical gender systems. This reveals the ultimate concern of the crisis school: that relations of gender in the region are changing to such an extent that many areas of discrimination against women have been lessened. Women therefore engage in gender negotiations from an improved position.⁵⁷

Using the lives of dysselected young men as a point of departure, crisis school scholars and activists make broader claims about the status of men relative to women. This assessment is based on a zero-sum reading of relations of gender that views any improvement in women's lives as related to a subsequent downgrading in men's.⁵⁸ Negative outcomes for men are understood a priori to be a result of gender discrimination, foreclosing on an understanding of other factors that may explain the harms men face. The analysis slips into woman blaming and claims of overzealous state feminism resulting in marginalization of men's issues. Conceptually, it ends up locked into responding to, refuting, and dismissing the claims of a fictive, caricatured feminism. It assumes as normative a particular way of being human, Man, and proceeds from a critique of the extent to which black Caribbean men have been excluded from the human through slavery or wage labor that are perceived to have undermined their roles as husband-fathers, understood as a transhistorical, acultural category.⁵⁹ Having rightly

55 Gayle and Mortis, "Male Social Participation," 95.

56 Gayle, "Adolescent Male Survivability," 14.

57 Patricia Mohammed, *Gender Negotiations among Indians in Trinidad, 1917–1947* (New York: Palgrave, 2002).

58 Barriteau, "Requiem."

59 While Beckles rightly points out that black men were denied access to patriarchal masculinity, his arguments appear to contain an implicit normalization of patriarchal masculinity as male birthright. Beckles, "Black Masculinity in Caribbean Slavery"; See also Leo Coucaud, "The Effects of Industrialisation on Gender and Cultural Change in Jamaica," *Social and Economic Studies* 61, no. 4 (2012): 1–36.

established the ways black men have been excluded from Man, the crisis school seeks inclusion through the reassertion of unequal relations of gender that privilege men.⁶⁰

If male is the single sex that is also racialized as white and positions the feminine as other and lack, what does it mean for crisis school thinkers to position black women as privileged, if only for the purposes of reasserting a dominant position?⁶¹ First, crisis school claims of women as privileged represent an inversion of the victim feminism of some articulations of feminist thought and practice that have been critiqued by feminists themselves and that come in for critique from Sylvia Wynter. Second, this inversion cannot hold, since women were never the norm and are not the modal citizen.⁶² The binary understanding of gender does not construct masculinity and femininity as equal opposites but as dichotomized dominant and subordinate. One cannot merely invert feminist analysis to explain men's lives. In addition, considering that Wynter demonstrates that black women are racially excluded from the category of feminine, such gender inversion should be even less tenable in the Caribbean. Third, it does not serve to further analysis of men's lives but to dismiss feminist claims. Men's lives and experiences continue to go unexamined. Fourth, an issue facing men is important in its own right and not only if men as a group can be empirically proven to be faring worse than women as a group in that particular regard. Such crude reductionism obscures significant ingroup difference with regard to power, access to resources, and vulnerability to harm. It ignores the extent to which some Afro-Caribbean men are able to enjoy the privileges of Man, albeit as lesser versions of the racialized-as-white, bourgeois, able-bodied, heterosexual, patriarchal ideal. Wynter's own work has called attention to the dysselection of young black men and their overrepresentation in US prisons. This she views as a function of an episteme that requires the very denial of black humanity in order to legitimate itself, not as a function of intragroup gender relations. As Andaiye has noted, it is erroneous to claim that Caribbean men are in no way marginalized.⁶³ Addressing the needs of men and boys who face harm, however, should not require unsubstantiated claims that all men as a group are doing worse than women as a group and slipping into misogyny.

60 For example, Wigmoore Francis argues that "the making of a black world in this period unwittingly necessitated the intellectual subjugation of black women." Wigmoore Francis, "Nineteenth- and Early-Twentieth-Century Perspectives on Women in the Discourses of Radical Black Caribbean Men," *Small Axe*, no. 13 (March 2003): 117.

61 Wynter, "Black Metamorphosis," 470.

62 Tracy Robinson, "Fictions of Citizenship, Bodies without Sex: The Production and Effacement of Gender in Law," *Small Axe*, no. 7 (2000): 1–27; and "Gender, Feminism, and Constitutional Reform in the Caribbean," in Bailey and Leo-Rhynie, *Gender in the Twenty-First Century*, 592–625.

63 Andaiye, "Smoke and Mirrors: The Illusion of CARICOM Women's Growing Economic Empowerment, Post-Beijing," in Gemma Tang Nain and Barbara Bailey, eds., *Gender Equality in the Caribbean: Reality or Illusion* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2003), 73.

Reading the Men's Forum

The Men's Educational Support Association (MESA) is a men's rights organization in Barbados established in 2000. All members are required to self-present and identify as heterosexual; homosexual men are not permitted as members.⁶⁴ MESA's newspaper column, Men's Forum, appeared February 2001 to April 2005, under the larger heading "Gender Issue," in the leading daily print newspaper in Barbados, the *Nation*. The only articles that appeared under "Gender Issue" were those submitted by MESA, cementing MESA as part of popular dialogue on gender and (hetero)sexuality in the region. The articles were written by MESA members, which included Ralph Boyce, a retired civil servant and chairman and founder of MESA. The Men's Forum ran somewhat weekly, although there were some months during which no column appeared. A search of the electronic archives of the Nation Publishing Company using the key words "Men's Educational Support Association" was performed and a total of 160 articles submitted by or featuring MESA were retrieved; these form the basis of the discussion that follows. Aside from their popular knowledge production, evidence of their legitimacy in Barbadian public life includes an invitation "into the High Court, by the Director of Public Prosecutions to hear the sentencing of a man who had pleaded guilty to burning down the matrimonial home, endangering some family members" as well as their presence at gender equality consultations organized by state and international organizations.⁶⁵ MESA's popular knowledge production is articulated with the "men-in-crisis" discourse.

MESA's claims to Man are articulated through misogyny. MESA laments the loss of male control over women's sexuality as a result of state intervention into the private sphere: "Law forbids them to go within a certain distance of their homes, while no restraint is put on other men visiting, or residing in the interim."⁶⁶ MESA's understanding of men rests on the assumption of "the *a priori* right of the male to deal with the state, as a dialogue among equals."⁶⁷ Where legislation exists to correct discrimination against women, the state is viewed as having betrayed men, leaving them vulnerable to emasculation, sexual infidelity, and inciting them to violence:

In relation to domestic protection orders, Boyce said some men got "unfair" because they were forced from their homes and had to seek refuge wherever they could. . . . "Some men have to go back home with their mothers. Others may pass their house and see some other men sitting in their patio with a foot up on the wall. That is provocation. . . . Boyce said some women provoked men by using sex as a weapon. "Some women are not giving sex and they walk about naked in the house flaunting it in front of the men who end up fighting for it. Some men do have the investment theory, but there is provocation," he said.⁶⁸

64 Julie Wilson, "Mesa—No Gays!," *Daily Nation*, 21 April 2005, 3.

65 Men's Educational Support Association (MESA), "Annual Report" (MESA, 2008), 3.

66 "Tackling Domestic Abuse," *Daily Nation*, 23 July 2003, 38A.

67 Rowley, "Crafting Maternal Citizens?," 39.

68 Wendy Burke, "Male Victims: MESA Head; Some Men Wrongfully Blamed," *Daily Nation*, 1 February 2006, 3A.

The Barbadian man emerges as emasculated and infantilized by both women and the state. The state then leaves him vulnerable to the ultimate act of emasculation—sexual infidelity. The patriarchal privilege of man as head of household and de facto owner of private property is viewed as having been undermined by the state. This is paralleled by men’s sexual access to female partners as property. Men’s violence is excused as having been provoked by the emasculating behavior of the state and women.

MESA’s investments in bourgeois Man as ideal are revealed in their texts. The Men’s Forum yearns for the good old days:

Women of today are not putting up with the unfaithfulness or other actions of the man, as in the days of our parents and grand-parents. As in my own experience, a man had another woman with his wife, the wife knew and she never ever made a fuss, never confronted the husband she also knew the other woman and at some point in time had to make contact with her.

This she did and never got into an argument or fight with her, actually they greeted each other and moved on.

There was no name-calling, no dropping of dirty remarks, no gossiping. Where in today’s world would you ever come across a situation like that? Is this one of the reasons why there are so many breakdowns in relationships? I am not saying that what the husband did was right, but when other men see situations like the one just mentioned, they also believe that it’s okay and they can do it also. Unfortunately, it’s not happening in today’s world.⁶⁹

Control over the sexuality of multiple women is presented as a desired expression of masculinity. Anxieties over changing relations of gender are expressed in sexual terms; specifically, women’s increased economic independence is viewed as resulting in sexual losses for men. These losses are then extended to the breakdown in heterosexual partnerships that are viewed as having negative outcomes at the level of society. If modernist masculinity scholars demonstrated the ways capitalism paid men in feelings of masculinity as it extracted their labor, neoliberal understandings of gender relations see hetero/sexist, asymmetrical relations of gender as compensation for loss of status brought about by neoliberal philosophy and economic policy. In this way, the crisis school seeks to promote heterosexual partnerships in which asymmetrical relations of gender are normalized and naturalized. Any deviation from this norm results in “crisis.” Gender relations are mapped as heterosexual relations writ large.

The crisis school identifies heterosexual relationships as a key site of loss and vulnerability for men. The Men’s Forum’s focus on sex as a key area of men’s loss of status echoes that of scholars in the academy who link men’s unemployment to a loss of (heterosexual) men’s “sexual potency” or argue that unless disparities in education and employment that disadvantage men are addressed, men cannot be expected not to aggress against their intimate partners.⁷⁰ The point to be made here is that the articulations between the popular and

69 “Breakdown in Relationships,” *Daily Nation*, 27 June 2001, 16A.

70 Keith Nurse, “Feminism and Masculinity,” *CAFRA News* 16, no. 1 (2002): 14; Rohan D. Jeremiah, Peter E. Gamache, and Cecilia Hegamin-Younger, “Beyond Behavioral Adjustments: How Determinants of Contemporary Caribbean Masculinities Thwart Efforts to Eliminate Domestic Violence,” *International Journal of Men’s Health* 12, no. 3 (2013): 228–44.

academic are many and it is incorrect to assume that knowledge about gendered relations produced in the academy is always already progressive or even profeminist. Herbert Gayle and Horace Levy's young male informants from poor communities argue that women's femininity and sexuality gave women an advantage over young men (i.e., women could exchange sex for economic resources in ways that men cannot, unless they are willing to engage in homosexual sex). Further, they argue, men's "natural" desire for sex with women meant that they spent significant economic resources on attracting women and negotiating sex.⁷¹ This analysis, of course, obscures the extent to which sexuality may be a source of disempowerment and vulnerability for young women. What it does reveal, however, is the extent to which young men have internalized an understanding of themselves as disadvantaged in comparison to young women. This message is implicit in the knowledge disseminated by the crisis school, such that the crisis school sees a recycling of its own arguments being offered by key informants. Academic and popular knowledges are blurred and feed into each other. Not only does it dismiss and distort the experiences of young women, ultimately this will prove disadvantageous to vulnerable young men themselves as their lives continue to be misunderstood.

The Men's Forum proposes a normative masculinity. References to "normal men" and "true men" appear frequently in their texts.⁷² They argue the following:

Males tend to be more aggressive and more inclined to lead.

When the male psyche functions as intended, it is sensitive to the needs of women and loving to children.

The masculine temperament lends itself to two major responsibilities: to protect and provide for the man's family.⁷³

The Men's Forum clearly articulates that not all males are Men. Normative masculinity therefore involves leadership, heterosexuality, and control over women and children. The recovery of Barbadian manhood requires the insurance that "men [return] to their rightful roles within the family and the society," and this is deemed to be the task of all responsible men.⁷⁴ References to the man as loving protector are intended to obscure the will to power of the protector.⁷⁵ Control over women as a feature of normative heteromascularity is articulated blatantly within their texts.

Nothing in MESA's articulation of normative masculinity is either novel or peculiar to Barbados or the Caribbean. Indeed, the World Bank itself has been promoting heterosexual partnerships as a key to development, devoid of feminist analysis of gendered power relations

71 Gayle and Levy, "Forced Ripe!," 42–43.

72 Ralph Boyce, "Many Good Men," *Daily Nation*, 25 April 2001, 19A; Dawn Morgan, "Men Urged to Speak Out," *Daily Nation*, 1 November 2000, 20A.

73 "Bringing Up Boys—Part 3," *Daily Nation*, 30 March 2005, 18A.

74 "Fathers Look at Roles," *Daily Nation*, 31 October 2001, 23.

75 Zakia Pathak and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, "Shahbano," in Micheline R. Malson et al., eds., *Feminist Theory in Practice and Process* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 261.

within intimate relationships, heterosexism, and heteronormativity.⁷⁶ The promotion of private solutions to development, whether these are market solutions or the private nuclear family, is, of course, a defining tenet of the neoliberal paradigm. Increasingly, calls to imbue men with a sense of responsibility and ensure they contribute to care work shifts solutions from the state and collectivity to the private nuclear family. The crisis school's woman blaming and claims that nuclear, patriarchal families will avert social and economic crises fold neatly into neoliberal logic. Such logic encodes an implicit conflation of the human with economic Man: individual, entrepreneurial, self-managing.

Within the crisis school, as part of their promotion of complementarity in heterosexual partnerships, an essentialized understanding of women emerges. The Men's Forum creates an image of irresponsible femininity:

He contended that "the flamboyant, aggressive girls who were once seen as the outsiders are now the dominant females."

And relating this to the wider society, he saw this trend: The dominant females "sexy, aggressive and liberated" dictated everything related to the sub-culture.

They dictated to the boys how they should dress and behave, with emphasis on being rough, thuggish and uninterested in formal learning.

. . . "Her attitude and what she espouses are a threat to family life," he declared. Indeed, the words of the popular calypso "man can't head she" reflect her general attitude, which can lead to disorder in the family.

"God is a God of order," he reminded.⁷⁷

Aggression, a stereotypically masculine trait, is seen as undesirable in a woman and is linked to women's liberation, visibility in the public world of Man, and sexual autonomy. Such women are "a threat to family life" because they resist patriarchal dominance in their most intimate relationships, which is described here as Man's God-given right. Women's self-assertion and sexuality are constructed as disorderly, lawless, and a threat to the nation. These "dominant females" are viewed as disorderly and as inimical to the Christian nation of Barbados. The "modern woman" that MESA constructs is a twenty-first-century update of the unruly black woman of the nineteenth century whose presence in the public sphere was also viewed as disruptive and inimical to society.⁷⁸ The references to "liberated women" and "dominant females" must be read as direct references to feminism that is constructed as antimale and antinational. CARIMAN, a regional men's network, has produced a training manual for men in which they use focus-group comments to guide the discussions. One of the discussion areas is "Men and the Educated Woman"; this suggests that concerns over "liberated" and "educated" women are not exclusive to MESA.⁷⁹ Concerns over "educated," "liberated,"

76 Kate Bedford, *Developing Partnerships: Gender, Sexuality, and the Reformed World Bank* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

77 "Liberated Woman Threat to Family, Says Kid Site," *Daily Nation*, 1 September 2004, 22A.

78 Pamela R. Franco, "The 'Unruly Woman' in Nineteenth-Century Trinidad Carnival," *Small Axe*, no. 7 (March 2000): 60–76.

79 Caribbean Male Action Network (CARIMAN), "Caribbean Men Talking about Manhood," training manual, 2010.

“modern,” and “professional” women represent attempts to simultaneously exclude women from bourgeois Man while attempting to argue themselves into this category.

The rejection of formal education by some boys and men is also blamed on women. Stereotypically masculine values such as being “rough” and not soft, which are transmitted to young boys by both men and women, are here construed as being transmitted by women and girls only. That women as teachers, mothers, and students have been blamed for the underachievement of Afro-Caribbean boys is well documented.⁸⁰ What a closer analysis of this text reveals is that the much-maligned “bashment schoolgirl” is conflated with the “career woman” to construct women’s sexual and economic autonomy as threatening to masculinity and the nation.⁸¹ Both the bashment girl and the career woman represent consumerism that is gendered as feminine and is linked to sexual wantonness and lawlessness—a subversion of the desired asymmetrical relations of gender. The “career woman” reappears as a pair of disembodied high heels in MESA’s narrative of men’s emasculation and marginalization by women: “Boyce said some men ‘are struck with high heels and so on.’ . . . One of the major concerns of MESA is to ‘stop further marginalisation of males’ and ‘to empower men.’”⁸²

Beyond Man

As Wynter notes, while Man overrepresents itself as though it were the human, it is, in fact, only a specific way of being human. The fulfillment of this particular way of being human has resulted in the attempted dehumanization of the majority of the world’s people and economic and environmental degradation. Caribbean people’s investments in this particular way of being human are exposed in their anxieties over black heterosexual masculinity. While masculinity scholars in general do not at all engage with Sylvia Wynter’s ideas, they would be well placed to do so. Her ideas open the possibilities of more sustained inquiry into men’s and boys’ lives using frameworks that avoid the heterosexism, heteronormativity, misogyny, and biological determinism of the crisis school that are part and parcel of their taken-for-granted allegiance to Man as the ideal way of being human. It is time for Caribbean masculinity studies to move beyond Man, toward a plural understanding of being human as liberatory practice.

80 Barriteau, “Requiem.”

81 Christine Barrow, “Sexual Identity, HIV, and Adolescent Girls in Barbados,” *Social and Economic Studies* 57, no. 2 (2008): 7–26.

82 Morgan, “Men Urged to Speak Out.”

The Resistance of the Lost Body

Nijah Cunningham

I shall command the islands to be.
—Aimé Césaire, “Lost Body”

We groped for coherence and failed.
—Sylvia Wynter, “Creole Criticism: A Critique”

In his 1924–25 essay “Goethe’s *Elective Affinities*,” Walter Benjamin draws on a curious concept of life. He elaborates a theory of criticism that turns on the distinction between critique, which is concerned with the philosophical contemplation of an artwork, and mere commentary. Benjamin enacts this mode of critique by attending to the “hidden layer” of meaning in Goethe’s 1809 text in which an “expressionless power” emanates and conveys “something beyond the poet [that] interrupts the language of the poetry.”¹ In his contemplation of “truth content” and how its interruptive force functions as a displacement of the author’s intentions and conscious techniques, Benjamin makes use of the concept of the daemonic to highlight the mysteries and dreadful elements that irrupt within the aesthetic realm. In his reading of *Elective Affinities*, he states, “The daemonic principles of conjuration irrupt into the very center of the poetic composition. For what is conjured is always only a semblance—in Otilie, a semblance of living beauty—which strongly, mysteriously, and impurely imposed itself in

1 Walter Benjamin, “Goethe’s *Elective Affinities*,” in Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, eds., *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, vol. 1, 1913–1926 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 342.

the most powerful sense as ‘material.’” The daemonic corresponds to the forceful interruption of something unexpected that bears a semblance or glimmer of the secret dwelling in the artwork. Here, Benjamin takes advantage of biographical details which suggest the idea of the daemonic “accompanies Goethe’s vision all his life.”² Goethe described the daemonic as “that which cannot be explained by Reason and Understanding; it lies not in nature, but I am subject to it.”³ In the context of Benjamin’s theory of criticism, the daemonic refers to the “moving truth” that the critic is tasked with revealing as well as the destabilizing effects of something beyond the author’s conscious technique and, most important, the human order irrupting from the artwork.⁴ Indeed, for Benjamin, the daemonic refers to something otherworldly and divine. It evokes what he calls a certain “fear of life,” an experience of that which cannot be explained, comprehended, reasoned with, or understood that the critic is meant to embrace. Benjamin calls for a critical practice that moves beyond commentary and its affirmation of the knowable and, instead, contemplates the daemonic elements of a given work in an act that defies “the fear of [life’s] power and breath . . . the fear of its flight from the embrace that would contain it.”⁵ Ultimately, Benjamin’s invocation of the daemonic works in the service of revealing a kind of hope or redemptive possibility that exist beyond the domain of human life. We are left to contemplate these alternatives in the final sentence that reads: “Only for the sake of the hopeless ones have we been given hope.”⁶

I open this essay with a somewhat truncated discussion of Benjamin and the redemptive potentials registered in the concept of the daemonic as a way of approaching Sylvia Wynter’s unpublished manuscript, “Black Metamorphosis: New Natives in a New World,” and the conceptual field from which it emerged. Benjamin becomes relevant to the discussion of “Black Metamorphosis” when we take note of the epigraph in Wynter’s 1972 essay “Creole Criticism: A Critique Critique” that cites his theory of criticism: “Critique is concerned with the truth content of a work.”⁷ This quick citation offers a sense of the “problem-space” that Wynter inhabited as she initiated the ambitious project that would eventually turn into the 900-plus-page manuscript “Black Metamorphosis.”⁸ The problem that Wynter seeks to address when she

2 Ibid., 339, 316.

3 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Johann Peter Eckermann, and Frédéric Jacob Soret, *Conversations of Goethe with Eckermann and Soret*, trans. John Oxenford (London: Smith Elder, 1850), 359. See also Angus Nicholls, *Goethe’s Concept of the Daemonic: After the Ancients* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2006), and “The Philosophical Concept of the Daemonic in Goethe’s ‘Mächtiges Überraschen,’” *Goethe Yearbook* 14 (2007): 147–70.

4 Benjamin, “Goethe’s *Elective Affinities*,” 276. See also Sigrid Weigel, “The Artwork as Breach of a Beyond: On the Dialectic of Divine and Human Order in Walter Benjamin’s ‘Goethe’s *Elective Affinities*,’” in Beatrice Hanssen and Andrew Benjamin, eds., *Walter Benjamin and Romanticism*, trans. Geraldine Grimm (New York: Continuum, 2012), 181–96.

5 Benjamin, “*Elective Affinities*,” 318.

6 Ibid., 356. See Giorgio Agamben, “Walter Benjamin and the Demonic: Happiness and Historical Redemption,” in Daniel Heller-Roazen, ed., *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 138–59.

7 Walter Benjamin, quoted in Sylvia Wynter, “Creole Criticism: A Critique,” *New World Quarterly* 4, no. 4 (1970): 12.

8 I borrow the concept of “problem-space” from David Scott, who uses it as a way of distilling the discursive terrain from which critical concept emerges. See David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 1–22.

turns to Benjamin is related to the ambivalent status of blackness within the emergent field of Caribbean literary and cultural criticism. Indeed, the majority of “Creole Criticism” challenges Kenneth Ramchand’s assertion that “in the background of the liberated slave was a cultural void.”⁹ I want to suggest that while “Creole Criticism” is concerned with the symbolic negation of black life in the Caribbean, “Black Metamorphosis” seeks to render coherent a sociopoetic force that persists despite the imposition of nothingness and what Wynter describes elsewhere as the “damming up of the potentiality of non-Western man, by the negation of his being.”¹⁰ I argue that what is at stake in our critical approach to this unpublished document is a recalcitrant form of life that fails to assimilate within either normative conceptions of the human subject or the critique of Western humanism and its invention of man. The sociopoetic force that I want to address can be thought in relation to the concept of the daemonic to the extent that it both destabilizes the racial logics that undergird the modern idea of the human and also defies the critical assumptions staged in the critique of “man” as the normative configuration of human life.¹¹ These critical assumptions seek to explain the lived experience of those relegated outside the epistemological constraints that define human life as a means of providing evidence for the necessity of said critique or a way of imagining the overcoming of the order of man. This critique cannot explain and has little interest in addressing the practices, sensibilities, affects, attachments, capacities, aspirations, and general rhythms of social life that unfold in, alongside, and as the effect of the racialized processes of subjugation that throw into question black life’s status as human. The daemonic, in turn, enables a specific attunement to the potentialities that gather inside the cultural void and nothingness that the philosophical category of the human engenders. Within the context of Wynter’s quarreling with the symbolic negation of blackness at an earlier point of her career, the daemonic invites us to consider how black sociality is operative of life’s flight from embrace. As this text emerges out of a conceptual field shaped by Wynter’s quarrel with negation, I argue there is a sociopoetic force that finds its expression in “Black Metamorphosis.” However, this force diverges from the horizon of Wynter’s more recent critique of the human.

9 Kenneth Ramchand, *The West Indian Novel and Its Background* (London: Faber and Faber, 1970), 38.

10 In a publication that came out of the First International Symposium on Ethnopoetics hosted at the Center for Twentieth-Century Studies of the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee in 1975, Wynter speaks to a “yet still living force” in her essay titled “Ethno or Socio Poetics.” Here, she describes how “black popular culture—spirituals, blues, jazz Reggae, Afro-Cuban music—and its manifold variants have constituted an underground cultural experience. . . . For it was this culture that the blacks reinvented themselves as a *we* that needed no *other* to constitute their Being.” Sylvia Wynter, “Ethno or Socio Poetics,” in “A First International Symposium on Ethnopoetics,” ed. Michael Benamou and Jerome Rothenberg, special issue, *Alcheringa* 2, no. 2 (1976): 85 (italics in original). This interdicted potential that gives rise to alternative modes of being is what I am after when I refer to a “sociopoetic force.” A similar invocation of this concept can be found in Fred Moten and Stefano Harney’s formulation of the “undercommons” and its relation to the limits of critique: “Critique endangers the sociality it is supposed to defend, not because it might turn inward to damage politics but because it would turn to politics and then turn outward, from the fort to the surround, were it not for preservation, which is given in celebration of what we defend, the sociopoetic force we wrap tightly round us, since we are poor.” Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (New York: Minor Compositions, 2013), 19.

11 For Wynter’s recent discussion of “man” as the prevailing “genre of the human” in the modern world, see Sylvia Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument,” *CR* 3, no. 3 (2003): 327–28.

This special section of *Small Axe* dedicated to Wynter's "Black Metamorphosis" not only offers an occasion to analyze the significance of this understudied work in relation to the wider career of such a tremendous Caribbean thinker but also allows us to reflect on some of our own critical investments in her thought. With my contribution to this discussion on "Black Metamorphosis," I want to contemplate our approach to the text. I want to see how what we find in the pages of this text relates to the celebrated theorist we know in the present. In this essay, I try to suspend the major theoretical insights for which Wynter is popularly known—namely, her theory of the human and related critique of Western humanism—and the influence that her recent work holds over our interpretation of "Black Metamorphosis." In doing so, I address features of the text that challenge our understanding of her intellectual project and consider what might be described as the daemonic elements that irrupt from the manuscript.¹²

"Black Metamorphosis" orbits around one of the many central assertions that Wynter outlines at the beginning of the manuscript. "The systematic devaluation of the black as human went hand in hand with the systematic exploitation of his labor power," she writes.¹³ At times, Wynter turns away from this question regarding the link between devaluation and exploitation only to come back to it from a different theoretical vantage point or equipped with a new set of critical concepts. However, as we see in the following passage, she continuously grapples with the divergence between categories of knowledge and the practices of living that she seeks to address:

Brought to the new world in this figuration/representation of the Earth are the complex attitudes that will provide the common ground for the creativity of the black popular masses. The concept of man as *generator*, both of his material and of his social life, would remain dynamically viable in the underlife of the slave's life, in that underlife where they gave expression to that unique aspect of soul, at the same time as they conformed to their role as *piezas* in the superordinate system of the plantation.

Dance and song and music, like all art in the culture of origin, were represented as the result of man's self-expression, his unique fulfillment of the Earth's generative powers working through him, as she, the Earth, fulfilled herself in giving birth to the crop and therefore, to man. For the earth—like the sea for fishing tribes—was the 'material' basis of man's existence, in his environment, was represented as the generator of life. And the supreme ethic that arose from this representation was the commandment to generate life as man's life was itself generated. Evil was the absence of life. But the absence of life was not death. Rather, death was the ground of the regeneration of life. Evil was anything that halted or broke the exchange of life and death. (548)

12 What distinguishes the daemonic from Wynter's brilliant formulation of the "demonic ground" is how the latter is preoccupied with the systematic function of the "ontological absence" of a black female subject *position* within the ruling epistememes of the modern world and Wynter's subsequent call for a "second self-assertion able to respond to the new metaphysical imperative . . . of altering our systems of meaning." In part, through my use of the daemonic I am trying to move against the grain of Wynter's eventual turn toward modern epistememes and altering systems of meaning that takes her away from her initial concerns of embodied practices and lived experience. Sylvia Wynter, "Afterword: Beyond Miranda's Meanings; Un/Silencing the 'Demonic Ground' of Caliban's 'Woman,'" in Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido, eds., *Out of the Kumbia: Caribbean Women and Literature* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World, 1990), 363, 365 (italics in original).

13 Sylvia Wynter, "Black Metamorphosis: New Natives in a New World" (unpublished ms., n.d.), 12; hereafter cited in the text. Unless otherwise indicated, all emphasis is in the original.

Here, Wynter describes a regenerative vitality that is irreducible to the abstract form of life that the figure of the slave (a *pieza*) represented from the standpoint of capital. In light of her assessment of the ways capitalism “sets out to reduce, man (people), all men (people), any men (people), to so many units of labor power,” Wynter’s notion of “underlife” marks a zone of existence that exceeds the logic of capitalist production (17).¹⁴ The underlife, for Wynter, is represented in the provision ground or “plot” on the colonial plantation.¹⁵ The modes of performative self-expression enacted in this obscured realm of lived experience enabled the revaluation of blackness and represented an incalculable generativity that was bound up in the capitalist exploitation of the black body. When Wynter describes how the underlife blurs the distinction between life and death, she comes up against a fleeting sociopoetic force that diverges from normative conceptions of human life. If the underlife preserved a “complex attitude” that survived the Middle Passage and a concept of life in which “death was the ground of the regeneration of life,” the generative force that finds its expression in “dance and song and music” not only called into question the objectification of the life of the enslaved but also signaled a vitality that deviated from the human as a category of knowledge. When she turns to the underlife of the plot, Wynter seems to encounter something daemonic that dwells beyond the domain of man.

Throughout “Black Metamorphosis,” Wynter repeatedly revises and amends her understanding of the devaluation of blackness and black life. There is an interesting moment when Wynter traces her notion of the underlife from the plot of the colonial plantation to “the black cultural underlife and the *black minority experience in America* [that] compels blacks in the United States to be the bearers of a political and philosophical creed of populism—one which incorporates the *populist* elements of Liberalism, Marxism and *cultural nationalism* but goes beyond them” (915). By linking the plot to the underlife of “the black minority experience in America,” Wynter traces latent forms of popular pluralism that haunt extant forms of political organization. The underlife can be seen as a gathering of potentialities and the site of the unfolding of nascent modes of sociality. We have to think about the sociopoetic force of “dance and song and music” and how modes of black performative expression generate alternative forms of social life. Wynter briefly alludes to this generative capacity elsewhere in the text when she links embodied performance to the creation of social forms: “Unity is not if it merely *is*. Unity is because it is danced. Because it is lived, participated in, experienced” (548). What dwells in the underlife is something that is danced, lived, participated in, and experientially practiced that we might call black social living.

14 The insertions of the word *people* appear in the original as handwritten annotations. This universalizing gesture was possibly meant to serve as a corrective to the argument’s masculinist focus but nonetheless obscures the gender politics and divisions of labor that condition capitalism’s objectification of life.

15 For another example of Wynter’s theorization of the provision grounds as a zone of subsistence within the plantation, see Sylvia Wynter, “Novel and History, Plot and Plantation,” *Savacou*, no. 5 (1971): 95–102.

Let us return to “Creole Criticism” to gain a better understanding of the daemonic entity that I am calling black social living. To be sure, I am not arguing that the epigraph in the essay represents Wynter’s debt to historical materialism, the critical theories of the Frankfurt school, or any of the various schools of thought that she engaged with before her eventual turn to poststructuralism.¹⁶ Rather, the epigraph allows us to consider the nonequivalence between categories of life and practices of living that is the animating backdrop against which “Black Metamorphosis” would initially emerge. While Benjamin took up the daemonic in order to address a divine power that operates outside of the human domain, during the earlier period of her career Wynter struggles to account for practices of living that have been obscured by liberal-humanist accounts of modernity and, as a result, embody a mysterious and dreadful status similar to the daemonic. One is reminded of the characters called the “New Believers” in Wynter’s 1962 novel *The Hills of Hebron* and how these descendants of ex-slaves haunt the pages of the story of their own “placelessness”:

And even if they had been able to read, in the history books they would have found themselves only in the blank spaces between the lines, in the dashes, the pauses between commas, semi-colons, colons, in the microcosmic shadow world between full stops. Between the interstices of every day on which a deed was done, they haunted the pages, imprisoned in mute anonymity, the done-tos who had made possible the deed.¹⁷

Or, similarly, we can turn to “Creole Criticism” and consider Wynter’s description of “the art of social living” that she uses to refute Ramchand’s devaluation of blackness:

[George] Lamming looked down away from the mono-crop export complex and its imported and imitative super-structure of culture to the only living tradition in the Caribbean—that of the peasants. They were now for the writer not a source of labor, but of culture, of a way of life, and of the art of social living battered, tormented, assaulted, dispossessed, ignored, despised, but alive—the culture of the peasant, of the landless marginal man; of the indigenous man. For it was only by drawing from, by feeding from him that a truly national literature could begin.¹⁸

In both passages, there is a semblance of life’s flight from embrace and the shadowed emergence of a sociality from within the “mute anonymity” of history. For Wynter, the “living tradition” of black peasants in the Caribbean represents a “source of vitality” subsumed within the global capitalist economy and rendered obscure by its systems of production and signification.¹⁹ It is in this way that Wynter demonstrates how the cultural void that blackness

16 Certainly, as Paget Henry argues in *Caliban’s Reason*, Wynter’s intellectual concerns during this earlier period were organized around a concept of history similar to Benjamin’s critique of historical time. Henry writes, “[Wynter] is committed to the liberation of the colonized and racialized African through historical action, but sees historical projects leading more often to Benjaminian piles of wreckage than to liberation. These wreckages and their betrayals void or interrupt the more progressive or teleological constructions of history that we find in [C. L. R.] James and [Frantz] Fanon.” Moving with and against Henry, I am interested in the socialities that come into view in the interruption of historical time. Paget Henry, *Caliban’s Reason: Introducing Afro-Caribbean Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2000), 124.

17 Sylvia Wynter, *The Hills of Hebron: A Jamaican Novel* (1962; repr., Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2010), 54.

18 Wynter, “Creole Criticism,” 20.

19 Ibid.

represents is the by-product of the evasions of Ramchand's "creole eye" and his general aversion to lived and imaginative experiences that fail to assimilate within this "grid of misconceptions prepackaged in the cornflakes of colonial education."²⁰ Wynter points out this aversion in order to come to her own defense and the defense of other Caribbean writers of her generation that Ramchand disparages for their dealings with the "incoherence of African religions and magic." She writes, "We groped for coherence and failed. Dr. Ramchand looks for evidence of the incoherence he requires; our failure provides him with the evidence."²¹ Notice how Wynter describes her writing practice. Groping for coherence can be understood as a mode of intellectual activity that moves provisionally, recursively, and is always open to revision. Seen as an interpretative mode or critical approach, groping conveys a desire to move beyond a limit or boundary with only a premonition of what might lie on the other side. Fumbling, tentatively testing one step, jumping blindly to the next, turning around, getting lost and feeling your way across an unfamiliar terrain: groping for coherence is a practice of reaching into the void and a diligent grasping after life's constant escape.²² This understanding of criticism as a way of groping for coherence allows us a way of approaching "Black Metamorphosis" and the complex interplay between life and living from which it emerged. This groping characterizes the critical practice that unfolds in the pages of this manuscript. Rather than try to summarize the argument or contain the immense scope of this work, I want to address the daemonic character of black social living it conveys.

Preface to a Critique of Humanism

In recent years, Wynter has become one of the most compelling thinkers of black radicalism and anticolonial politics. Her formidable critique of Western humanism and its normative configurations of human life has revitalized philosophical debates across black studies, critical ethnic studies, postcolonial criticism, and black feminist theory around both the historical project of decolonization and the ontological status of blackness in the modern world. With the publication of a number of special issues and edited volumes of critical essays dedicated to Wynter's contribution to intellectual traditions of the Caribbean and the African diaspora more broadly, there has been an ever-intensifying gravitational force drawing scholars to Wynter's thought.²³ This is especially true in the case of younger generations that are first encountering

20 Ibid., 12.

21 Kenneth Ramchand, quoted in *ibid.*, 31; *ibid.*, 12. The second epigraph to this essay also quotes this passage.

22 Fred Moten encourages us to consider life's flight as a kind of freedom in unfreedom: "Perhaps constant escape is what we mean when we say freedom; perhaps constant escape is that which is mistreated in the dissembling invocation of freedom and the disappointing underachievement/s of emancipation." See Fred Moten, "Taste Dissonance Flavor Escape: A Preface for a Solo by Miles Davis," *Women and Performance* 17, no. 2 (2007): 242–43.

23 I am referring to publications such as Demetrius Eudell and Carolyn Allen, eds., "Sylvia Wynter: A Transculturalist Rethinking of Modernity," special issue, *Journal of West Indian Literature* 10, nos. 1–2 (2001); Anthony Bogues, ed., *Caribbean Reason: After Man, Beyond the Human; Critical Essays on Sylvia Wynter* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2005); Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014); and Katherine McKittrick, ed., *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015).

her work. Yet the increased critical attention has had curious effects on the general perception of Wynter and her intellectual pursuits.

For some, Wynter's critique of Western humanism has become the organizing principle of black radicalism and anticolonial resistance. Part of the value of Wynter's critique of the human and what makes it so well received in the current moment has to do with how it enables scholars to reformulate utopian longings for black freedom and anticolonial revolution within a philosophical idiom that is seemingly more sophisticated and less ideologically weighted than the exhausted political possibilities once imagined by, say, Marxism, democratic socialism, or cultural nationalism. For many scholars, Wynter's theory of the human serves as the answer to the problems that plague our political present and offers a means of reimagining future possibilities or a way out of the current situation of a world stranded in the tragic aftermaths of the revolutionary past.

A quick look at how scholars characterize Wynter's intellectual life gives a sense of how her theoretical approach to the human as a category of knowledge has been put to use to reinscribe old utopian aspirations onto the horizon of our present. For Anthony Bogues, Wynter's theory of the human serves as a link between the revolutionary past and our postcolonial present: "What Wynter's intellectual work continues is the quest which Fanon, Césaire and James began in the early twentieth century—a quest generated by radical anti-coloniality—what is the nature of the human?"²⁴ Bogues uses Wynter to rewrite a history of anticolonialism into a "quest" to interrogate "the nature of the human." However, his argument moves as a self-fulfilling prophecy. When the anticolonial visions of Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, and C. L. R. James get relegated solely to a question of the human, Bogues reframes anticolonialism in such a way that Wynter's critique of Western humanism is made to answer its own call. Where Bogues mobilizes Wynter's theory of the human to resurrect a liberatory quest from the crypts of our dead anticolonial heroes, Norval Edwards's description of Wynter's "epistemic turn" toward poststructuralism after she moved to the United States has the effect of rendering Wynter's earlier scholarship into a prefiguration of a more capacious intellectual project. As a result, the works that precede and coincide with her writing of "Black Metamorphosis" are represented as simply "lay[ing] the groundwork for the rigorous philosophical critique of humanism that characterized her later essays."²⁵ What gets lost when Wynter's earlier intellectual activity and the more expansive field of anticolonial politics are rendered into a preface to her critique of humanism? What is generated from a historical narration of the anticolonial movement that culminates in Wynter's critique of the human?

Turning to Derrick White's essay on Wynter's unpublished manuscript, "Black Metamorphosis: A Prelude to Sylvia Wynter's Theory of the Human," these questions become even

24 Anthony Bogues, "The Human, Knowledge, and the Word: Reflecting on Sylvia Wynter," in *Caribbean Reason: After Man, Beyond the Human; Critical Essays on Sylvia Wynter* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2005), e-book, n.p.

25 Norval Edwards, "'Talking about a Little Culture': Sylvia Wynter's Early Essays," in Eudell and Allen, "Sylvia Wynter: A Transculturalist Rethinking of Modernity," 14. For more on Wynter's "epistemic turn" see Henry, *Caliban's Reason*.

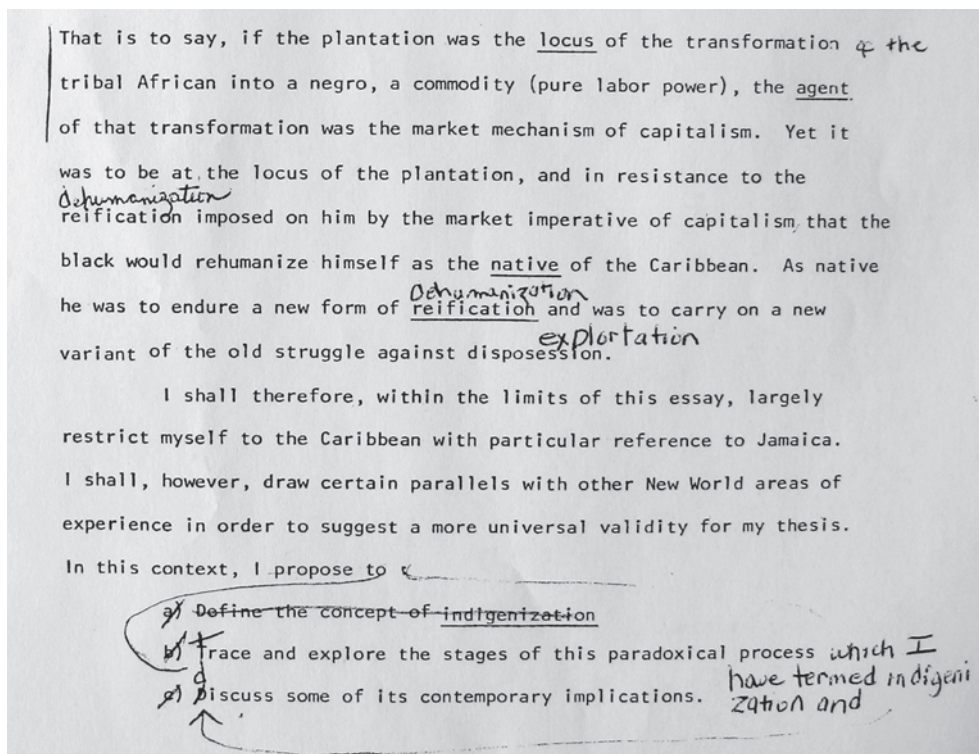
more relevant to our discussion as he situates the text within the horizon of Wynter's future critique. White's analysis of "Black Metamorphosis" is invaluable because of the impressive range of his archival research; however, as the title of his essay suggests, his approach is structured by a developmental schema that requires the text to be read as an anticipation of Wynter's later theory of the human. As a result, "Black Metamorphosis" is not only depicted as a "prelude" to her more recent theoretical endeavors, but the manuscript is also characterized as bridging two seemingly disparate phases of Wynter's intellectual career:

Like many Caribbean scholars of her generation, Wynter was a Marxist, because the analytical frame confidently explained colonial exploitation in the Caribbean and proposed an alternative, revolutionary, model of change. Wynter's early interests could be located in the understanding [of] Black cultural production, religious and secular, and connecting this production to proletarian consciousness. *Black Metamorphosis* is a key document because it is a blueprint for Wynter's ever evolving thinking on culture and ideology. In *Black Metamorphosis*, Wynter starts with a project of reconciliation between Black culture and Marxist analysis and ends with the seeds of her theory of the Human.²⁶

In White's narration of Wynter's scholarly evolution, the manuscript carries seeds of thought that would become more sophisticatedly developed in her later work. In this way, the manuscript comes to figure into White's progressivist account of the intellectual development of one of the most influential Caribbean scholars as the bridge that connects one phase of her career to the next. Depicting it as a "blueprint for Wynter's ever evolving thinking," White reduces the tremendous rigor and scope of the manuscript and renders it into an early iteration of her more celebrated work. As such, White invites us to approach "Black Metamorphosis" with an eye toward the Wynter we already know and focus on the recognizable elements of her critique of humanism as they are found in an embryonic form in the pages of the text. Yet, such an interpretive approach implicitly diminishes and obscures aspects of the text that fall outside of the horizon of critique.

Instead of thinking of "Black Metamorphosis" as bridging disparate phases of Wynter's intellectual career or as a key to her thought, we should focus on the manuscript's more rickety and unreliable structure. From the opening pages we are confronted with a text that resists interpretation and develops counterintuitively by virtue of its draft form. While for some, this might simply be a circumstantial point, I believe that it is significant that "Black Metamorphosis" remains unpublished but at the same time circulates within fields of academic research. This ambivalent status of the work opens up a range of questions regarding concepts of writing, access, authorship, reproduction, intertextuality, and citation, just to name a few, that complicate the interpretation of the words on the page. On the occasion of this special section dedicated to this understudied work, it is crucial that we not only analyze Wynter's

²⁶ Derrick White, "Black Metamorphosis: A Prelude to Sylvia Wynter's Theory of the Human," *C. L. R. James Journal* 16, no. 1 (2010): 132–33.



Page 2 of the unpublished manuscript "Black Metamorphosis: New Natives in a New World" (n.d.). Courtesy of Sylvia Wynter

manuscript in light of her far-reaching insights and scholarly contributions but that we also attend to the ways the text unsettles generally held assumptions regarding both the development and significance of her thought.

If "Black Metamorphosis" offers any insight into the background of Wynter's critique of humanism, it demonstrates that she arrived at this critique after groping for coherence over an extended period. The question to ask is, then, about what aspects of the manuscript fail to fall in line with her later critique and, in doing so, point to different conceptual horizons.

The provisional character of the document and the recursive quality of its draft form reveal a sense of indeterminacy that structures the text and troubles the vision of Wynter's confident movement from a Marxist paradigm to a poststructuralist critique of Western humanism. In fact, when we look at the text and notice the different types of writing that materialize on the surface of the page, it becomes evident that interpreting this document involves a level of decision making on the part of the reader that goes beyond conventional modes of critical engagement. Note, for instance, the commerce between the typed words and handwritten annotations in the following passage on the plantation and the commodification of the black body:

If the plantation was the *locus* of the transformation [of the] tribal African into a negro, a commodity (pure labor power), the *agent* of that transformation was the market mechanism of capitalism. Yet it was to be at the locus of the plantation, and in resistance to the reification [dehumanization] imposed on him by the market imperative of capitalism that the black would rehumanize himself as the *native* of the Caribbean. As native he was to endure a new form of *reification* [dehumanization] and was to carry a new variant of the old struggle against dispossession [exploitation]. (2)

If, for instance, the handwritten words “of the” inserted in the first line of the passage are meant to correct a grammatical error or omission, it is unclear if the same can be said about the other marks on the page. Can we say that “reification” and “dispossession” are simply overwritten, respectively, by “dehumanization” and “exploitation”? Do these terms clarify the argument typed on the page? Does the term *dehumanization* amend some aspect of “the market imperative of capitalism” that the term *reification* otherwise obscures? What happens when the struggle against dispossession turns into a struggle against exploitation? Does capitalist exploitation supersede dispossession? Is one a derivative of the other? While I am not trying to suggest that it is impossible to interpret this document, I am arguing that there is no way around the inconclusiveness and undecidability that structure the manuscript. Some scholars might object to my suggestion that the text is incomplete and, instead, insist that the annotations and marginalia are negligible in comparison to the spirit of the argument that moves through the document. However, the provisional character of “Black Metamorphosis” is not so much expressive of a deficiency in the argument or ideas developed in the pages of this text as it is a constitutive feature that conveys a more general indeterminacy that structures the document and forces us to think about the stakes involved in reading a work in progress. The open-endedness, repetitions, and annotative marks are elements of the manuscript that complicate the reading of what is already a challenging text. These aspects of the document interrupt conventional modes of interpretation and attempts to retrieve an image of the Wynter we already know. What we encounter in the pages of “Black Metamorphosis” is a constant struggle to grasp something that escapes comprehension.

Dead-Time/Life-Time

The title of this essay, “The Resistance of the Lost Body,” is a take on the title poem to Aimé Césaire’s 1949 collection *Corps perdu*, translated into English as “lost body.” There is a notion of striving and vitality that gets obscured in the title’s English translation. Césaire’s title can be read as a subtle allusion to the expression *à corps perdu* that describes a kind of impetuosity or desperation similar to the idea of throwing yourself fully into something or to lose yourself or “to lose [your] body.”²⁷ The poem enacts the expression of this striving as the

27 Aimé Césaire, “Lost Body,” in *Aimé Césaire: The Collected Poetry*, trans. Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 245. The epigraph to this essay quotes the last line of the poem.

deconstitution of its speaking subject. The voice of the “I” in the poem articulates a desire to descend “into the live semolina of a well-opened earth,” where, in this subterranean realm, it will discover “a star or a hope / or an underwater retreat.” Yet, neither hope nor the possibility of an underwater retreat will quiet the tormenting wind, its sounds of “nigger nigger nigger from the depths / of the timeless sky,” or the “crazed howling of dogs and horses / which it thrusts at our forever fugitive heels.”²⁸ The poem closes with the description of a defiant scream that “shall shatter the whole sky” and a declaration: “I shall command the islands to be.”²⁹ The subtle displacement of the “I” by the possessive pronoun “our” signals a fleeting pluralism that emerges as the singular being becomes undone. In addition, the uncertainty as to whether the voice that speaks in the poem is that of an individual person (“me the street porter”) or a tree with its “branches torn to shreds” further highlights the ambivalent status of the life it represents and the perpetual fugitive movement that brings the Caribbean (“the islands”) into being.³⁰ To think about resistance in relation to the morphing vital presence that we find in Césaire’s poem demands an expansion of the parameters through which notions of agency and life are defined. The resistance of the lost body, however, does not simply stand as a critique of the racial logics of Western humanism but rather gestures to the practices of living and social activities that unfold outside its domain.

I have argued that the prominent status of Wynter’s theory of the human within the contemporary discourses of anticolonial and black radical politics obscures the complex and dynamic sociopoetic force she intimately engages with in an earlier period of her intellectual career. In order to work against this overly presentist outlook of black radicalism and anticolonial thought and the progressivist vision of Wynter’s intellectual development, I have attempted to draw attention to what I describe as the daemonic character of black social living that finds its expression in the provisional nature and open-endedness of the text. I argued that the manuscript’s inconclusiveness and self-reflexivity is illustrative of how Wynter gropes for coherence as a way of approaching potentialities that assemble within obscured realms of existence. Moving in the spirit of Césaire’s poem, I will focus on how the question of resistance takes shape in “Black Metamorphosis.” However, rather than simply draw attention to Wynter’s argument about the meaning and operations of black cultural resistance, I am interested in the ways her theorization of blackness takes her beyond the normative conceptions of human life and political agency.

In a chapter titled “Inscription and Counterinscription: Frederick Douglass, Mr. Covey, and the Nigger-Breaking Model of Exploitation,” Wynter theorizes what she terms “the factory model of exploitation” and its relationship to modalities of racial violence and subjugation that generate surplus labor-power within the system of plantation slavery (567). According to

28 Ibid., 243.

29 Ibid., 245.

30 Ibid., 243.

Marx, “The value of labour-power is determined, as in the case of every other commodity, by the labour-time necessary for the production, and consequently also the reproduction, of this special article. So far as it has value, it represents no more than a definite quantity of the average labour of society incorporated in it. Labour-power exists only as a capacity, or power of the living individual.”³¹ On the one hand, Wynter argues that “factory model of exploitation” fails to account for the ways racial subjection not only informs but is constitutive of the organization of labor: “The creation of the ‘negro’ was the social code necessary to the homogenization of labour-power, which resulted from the bourgeois constitution of a single activity, *productive activity*, in relation to which all other activity was constituted as lack” (472). On the other hand, she also demonstrates how practices of living nevertheless persist under the rubric of a purported lack of capacity. Rather than dwell on the limits of the “factory model of exploitation” or further develop critique of this Marxist paradigm, Wynter deepens her analysis of the relation between racial subjection or “nigger-breaking” and the homogenization of labor. In a particularly long but exciting passage, Wynter turns to the question of work as she continues to grapple with the logics of capitalist exploitation and attempts to illuminate the underlife that has been subsumed within the processes of value production.

“Work” as labour-capacity, is the central inscription, the sign that proves one’s belonging to the universal class—to the symbolically-saved. But this work must be undertaken “freely” by the individual’s “free will.” By his “free choice” of work, he thereby legitimates and sanctifies work as the sign of man’s redemption. And secular redemption—to belong to the freely self-driving-to-work-class—is itself the index of the man predestined for salvation in the deferred due date of eternity. Lifetime must be accumulated here and now as labour-time so that the goal of the accumulation of the eternal time in Heaven can be attained. Heaven itself ceases to be a place of paradisiacal enjoyment, and becomes an eternal extension, an accumulation of time. Heaven is the supreme symbol of an endless accumulation of capital. The “enjoyment” of this accumulated time will be reserved for those refused to “waste” a single minute of time here on earth—who did not waste time on living but decoded (and resisted) all the cultural representations that tempted the Satanic suggestion that salvation could be had for free without exacting payment of one’s life, (without) *a lifetime converted into labour time*. Salvation—in the representation of the culture of production—depends on this conversion; on this self-sentencing to hard labour in exchange for the heaven of accumulated time—i.e. of *capital*. Capital is above all else the accumulation of life-times converted into labour time. This is the central social exchange of capitalism as a system. The struggle against its hegemony is finally the struggle between two groups—those who freely or unfreely accept this conversion—of those who refuse—the outlaws, outliers, lumpen, outcasts. The “roots” of Sandy, the “reading” of Douglass, the *underlife* of black culture and the counter-life of some aspects of Western art, literature, poetry, and some aspects of its intellectual thought as well as the myriad forms of counter inscriptions of all the marginal life to the system, are the signs, symbols and actualizing forms of the Great Refusal. Labour time is *not* life-time. (598)

31 Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Ben Fowkes, 3 vols. (New York: Vintage, 1976), 1:274.

So much can be drawn from this brilliant passage. For example, there is the resonance between what Wynter terms the “Great Refusal” and the “refusal of work” developed by the Italian workerist reinterpretation of Marx.³² And, if there were the opportunity to do so, we would also have to address some of the omissions in Wynter’s reading of Frederick Douglass’s autobiographical slave narratives; for instance, the status of Sandy’s nameless wife and what Maurice Wallace describes as the “gynophobic retreat” that structures Douglass’s confrontation with Covey, the slave driver.³³ However, in order to get after the sociopoetic force that Wynter attempts to render coherent in this passage, let us focus on the distinction she makes between “labor-time” and “life-time.”

Building on Marx’s understanding of labor-time as the measurement of productivity, Wynter argues that work functions as an expression of “free will” and a signification of a mode of “secular redemption.” By selling his labor in exchange for a wage, the worker identifies himself as belonging to the “freely self-driving-to-work-class” and affirms his claim to salvation. This salvation is the permanent deferral of an end to work which, in turn, subsumes all dimensions of life into the accumulation of capital. One’s status as liberal human subject requires a “conversion” into the universal class produced as a byproduct by work’s subordination of life.³⁴ For Wynter, the selling of labor for a wage is equivalent to the conversion of “life-time” into labor-time, where “life-time” refers to realms of existence that fall outside of the parameters of productive activity.³⁵ If the “negro” was a necessary invention for the homogenization of

32 See Franco “Bifo” Berardi, *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy*, trans. Francesca Cadel and Giuseppina Mecchia (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009). See also Christopher Taylor, “The Refusal of Work: From the Postemancipation Caribbean to Post-Fordist Empire,” *Small Axe*, no. 44 (July 2014): 1–17. Taylor argues, “Caribbean histories of slavery and emancipation constitute the political unconscious of antiwork Marxism” (2). Taylor’s historical backdrop to antiwork Marxism is extremely illuminative and provides entryways for thinking about the resonances between Wynter’s post-Marxism and that of the Italian workerist. However, Taylor’s reliance on C. L. R. James’s “creole eye” should cause some hesitation in light of Wynter’s understanding of creolization.

33 Maurice Wallace, *Constructing the Black Masculine: Identity and Ideality in African American Men’s Literature and Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 73. There is some semblance of a queer potentiality bound up in this flight that might allow us to consider the anxieties around vulnerability and degeneration that structure Douglass’s account. Here, I can do little more than point in the direction of a recent special issue of *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, “Queer Inhumanism,” edited by Dana Luciano and Mel Y. Chen, while pointing more directly to Zakiyyah Iman Jackson’s discussion of the persistence held in the “outer worlds.” See Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, “Outer Worlds: The Persistence of Race in Movement ‘Beyond the Human,’” in “Queer Inhumanism,” ed. Dana Luciano and Mel Y. Chen, special issue, *GLQ* 21, nos. 2–3 (2015): 215–18.

34 Wynter’s consideration of work can be read in anticipation of what Saidiya Hartman describes as the “burdened individuality of freedom” and the ways in which, in the context of the postbellum United States, emancipation served as a pretext to new forms of domination and the fortification of abstract notions of equality that bestowed racial terror and subjection as “the gift of freedom and wage labor.” Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 119.

35 Considering the significance of “life-times” within the analysis of post-Fordist capitalism, Neferti Tadiar argues that the term might enable us to “account for the productivity of social practices of life and experience which appear to lie outside of the formal sites of labor exploitation. It is a concept that contributes to the broadening of the parameters within which ‘productive activity,’ and therefore political agency, is defined.” Neferti Tadiar, “If Not Mere Metaphor: Sexual Economies Reconsidered,” *Scholar and Feminist Online* 7, no. 3 (2009), sfonline.barnard.edu/sexecon/tadiar_01.htm, para. 9 under “Labor and Life.” Elsewhere, Tadiar offers a rich formulation of the concept of life-times that highlights the complex arrangements of the capitalist order and illuminates forms of social reproduction that fall outside of that order: “Beyond the moment of simple reproduction, within which the ‘free’ work of slaves, colonial peoples, and subordinate women served to augment the surplus labor-time expropriated from labor through formal processes of capitalist exchange, I am also speaking of the arena of not only this kind of hidden *labor-time* in the reproduction of the worker but also forms of remaindered *life-times*, the time of social reproduction that lies beyond contemporary modes of exploitation of life as living labor. Such life-times consist of a diverse array of acts, capacities, associations, aspirations in practice, experiential modes, and sensibilities

labor and signifies a lack that is constitutive of notions of productivity, then we might be able to think about black social living as “the Satanic suggestion that salvation could be had for free without exacting payment of one’s life, (without) *a lifetime converted into labour time*.” This “Satanic suggestion” that emerges out of the distinction between labor-time and life-time gestures in the direction of an alternative mode of salvation that diverges from the redemptive horizon of work. In other words, those who refuse salvation—“the outlaws, outliers, lumpen, outcasts”—do not simply stand in opposition to the universal class of the “symbolically saved” but enact practices of living and constitute alternative social forms through the collective refusal of the terms of salvation. Here, we might contemplate the possibility that black social living might be more than a suggestion, but, instead, the ongoing realization of the “Satanic” idea that “salvation could be had for free.”

We only have to travel a short distance from the satanic to arrive at the concept of the daemonic. What guides our way is a sense of the redemptive possibilities harbored in the “cipher” or the underlife that both seem to represent.³⁶ Put differently, both the satanic and the daemonic attune us to practices of living that are either obscured by liberal-humanist accounts of modernity or rendered into the ethical grounds of the critique of man. However, what unfolds beyond the domain of man is constitutive of social forms that manifest as a constant escape or flight of lost bodies from the normative’s regulatory embrace. This is what Wynter gropes toward in the pages of “Black Metamorphosis”: a salvation that is not deferred onto any horizon but is always available in the here and now of black social living. Perhaps, then, groping for coherence is less about providing an explanation for black social living or trying to contain its sociopoetic force than it is a mode of criticism that remains attuned to the potentialities—what Marx referred to as the intrinsic capacity and power of living individuals—that gather amongst the hopeless ones and point to an altogether different *kind* of hope.

By way of concluding, it is important to take note that while Wynter attempts to valorize practices of living that exceed humanist conceptions of agency and selfhood, much can be said about the limits of the scope of her analysis as she gropes for coherence in the pages of “Black Metamorphosis.” This is especially the case in relation to the ways the plot/provision ground operates in the text as a realm evacuated of sexual difference. While seen from the perspective of capitalist production as the representation of nonvalue or “dead-time,” Wynter describes the plot as a zone of subsistence and the regeneration of life.³⁷ Due to the paradoxical status of the plot, while it formally resided outside of the production process, it also maximized the

that people engage in, draw upon, and invent in the struggle to make and remake social life under conditions of their own superfluity or disposability.” Neferti Tadiar, “Life-Times of Disposability,” *Social Text*, no. 115 (Summer 2013): 23 (italics in original).

36 Here, Agamben’s description of how the figure of the demon functions as cipher in Benjamin’s essay on Karl Kraus is instructive: “In the face of the lies of the false, dominant humanism, the demon is the cipher of a guilty humanity that denounces its own guilt to the point of accusing the very legal order to which it belongs” (“Benjamin and the Demonic,” 150).

37 I borrow “dead-time” from Sidney Mintz’s “Was the Plantation Slave a Proletariat?,” *Review: Fernand Braudel Center 2*, no. 1 (1978): 81–98.

amount of resources on the plantation that could be dedicated to the production of capital instead of consumed in the maintenance and replenishing of slave labor. Wynter is mindful of this paradox. For her, what is crucial is how the hidden surplus labor generated on the plot revealed the limits of Marx's "factory model of exploitation." Though its hidden status helped to generate surplus on the plantation, Wynter contends that the plot also functioned as a site of preservation. As Wynter writes, "In relation to the plot where the slave grew food for himself, his relationship with the land remained that of the peasant. Since house, plot, and woman were provided, the African converted into the negro remained, to borrow Senghor's phrase, 'obstinately peasant.'" With her reference to the figure of the peasant, Wynter combines Léopold Sédar Senghor's vitalist conception of work and Russian Marxist theorist Alexander Chayanov's formulation of peasant economy in order to make the assertion that "the plot/provision ground existed in world of concrete use value" (51).³⁸ While the plot provided the material condition for the production of use-value and the regeneration of life, the condition of possibility for the preservation of this "obstinately peasant" status is the sexual economy of plantation slavery and the implicit naturalization of socially reproductive labor as the intrinsic capacities of the "woman" provided to the slave.³⁹ We have to ask what it means to be "provided" as part of the plot and bear the weight of a counternarrative to slavery and its afterlife. What does it mean to be a subplot to this story of resistance? Certainly, this oversight of the gendered and sexualized labor on the plantation marks the limit of Wynter's conception of the underlife as "a form of sustained resistance to the dominant code" (615). However, perhaps this oversight is merely an example of how the text calls upon us to grope after the unverifiable existence of the hopeless ones it can never name who just might forever escape our embrace.

Acknowledgments

I express my sincerest thanks to David Scott and Aaron Kamugisha for making this occasion possible and for their unwavering support. I am equally grateful for the thoughtful feedback and suggestions provided by Scott, Kamugisha, Kelly S. Martin, and the anonymous readers. This essay is dedicated to the memory of Derick Anthony "Pick" Marriott.

38 For a more succinct example of Wynter's engagement with the Chayanov's theory of peasant economy, see Wynter, "Novel and History, Plot and Plantation." For Senghor, the figure of the peasant embodied a conception of work that is posited against the mechanization of life and falls in line with the vitalist notion of rhythm: "For working the earth permits the concord of man and 'creation' that is at the heart of the humanist problem. For it is done to the rhythm of day and night, of the seasons, which number two in Africa, of the plant that grows and dies. And the Negro, feeling himself in unison with the universe, rhythmically orders his work through song and the tom-tom. Negro work, Negro Rhythm, Negro joy that is freed through work and that is freed from work." Léopold Sédar Senghor, "What the Black Man Contributes," trans. Mary Beth Mader, in Robert Bernasconi and Sybol Cook, eds., *Race and Racism in Continental Philosophy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 293. For recent discussion of Senghor's vitalism, see Souleymane Bachir Diagne, "Bergson in the Colony: Intuition and Duration in the Thought of Senghor and Iqbal," *Qui Parle* 17, no. 1 (2008): 125–45; and Donna V. Jones, *The Racial Discourses of Life Philosophy: Négritude, Vitalism, and Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

39 See Tadiar, "If Not Mere Metaphor," sfnline.barnard.edu/sexecon/tadiar_04.htm, para. 1 under "Division of Labor, or It's Gender, Race, and Sexuality, Stupid!"

The Black Experience of New World Coloniality

Aaron Kamugisha

It was the pain, the angst of those posited as Non-Norms that compelled examination of the functioning of the Symbolic Order itself.

—Sylvia Wynter, “Black Metamorphosis”

Sylvia Wynter commences “Black Metamorphosis: New Natives in a New World” with the declaration of its intention “to explore . . . the historical process, the socio-economic sea-change, the cultural metamorphosis by which the multi-tribal African became the native of that area of experience that we term the New World.”¹ The daring and breathtaking scope of this statement announces a text devoted to wide-reaching sociohistorical transformation across centuries and a cultural history of the African presence in the New World. The wonder that this might be attempted at all by Wynter can be partially explained by the historical conjuncture during which the work started—within five years of the first programs in black studies at US universities, in which the responsibility to disenchant the fictions of the Eurocentric academy and produce new knowledge in the pursuit of human freedom was the urgent task. “Black Metamorphosis” will undoubtedly give scholars of African diaspora studies much to consider based simply on two of its central themes—Wynter’s theories of cultural transformation in the Americas and her related perspective on the process of indigenization, through which people of African descent became native to their new lands. Yet what gives this text its enduring

¹ Sylvia Wynter, “Black Metamorphosis: New Natives in a New World” (unpublished ms., n.d.), 1; hereafter cited in the text. The quote used as an epigraph is found on 428.

power is the idea that black experience matters—it is decisive to comprehending that the New World constitutes a distinctive “area of experience,” unparalleled in the past history of humankind, a central point to which Wynter would return in her later work.² Black experience is crucial here, since without it the ideological fictions of the contemporary world order that consign the vast majority of its population to a subhuman status remain uncontested and grow every generation in weight and power.

Wynter initially intended to “restrict” herself to the Caribbean, “with particular reference to Jamaica,” with the caveat that she would “draw certain parallels with other New World areas of experience” (3).³ The expansion of the text resulted in something quite beyond the author’s original intent: “Black Metamorphosis” stands as one of the major interpretations of American society by a West Indian intellectual in the twentieth century. A reflection and brief comparison of the text and another similarly expansive study of America, C. L. R. James’s *American Civilization* (1950), is a detour worth taking because it highlights the specific conjuncture in which “Black Metamorphosis” emerged in the 1970s.⁴ The lifework of Sylvia Wynter has been immensely influenced by C. L. R. James, and Wynter’s three essays on James are the most she has written on a Caribbean (or any other) thinker.⁵ James and Wynter, coming to America in 1938 and 1974, respectively, were aghast at a new experience of racism for which their previous worldliness was an inadequate preparation.⁶ James’s text languished for almost forty years before critical attention and publication and Wynter’s for more than thirty, with their insights available only to a later generation of scholars, particularly lamentable since *American Civilization* and “Black Metamorphosis” contain perspectives on the popular that would have made these works arresting contributions, and potentially decisively influential, at the time of composition. James’s turn to a study of popular culture was part of a decade-long reorganization of his outlook on the world, occasioned by his disenchantment with Trotskyism and his disappointment that the end of World War II failed to usher in a socialist

2 See especially Sylvia Wynter, “1492: A New World View,” in Vera Hyatt and Rex Nettleford, eds., *Race, Discourse, and the Origin of the Americas: A New World View* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian, 1995), 5–57.

3 Wynter still refers to the text as an “essay” at this point, and it is clear that this introduction was not rewritten subsequent to the addition of the majority of the text.

4 C. L. R. James, *American Civilization*, ed. Anna Grimshaw and Keith Hart (London: Blackwell, 1993).

5 These three essays are “In Quest of Matthew Bondman: Some Cultural Notes on the Jamesian Journey,” *Urgent Tasks* (Summer 1981): 54–69, republished in a slightly different form in Paul Buhle, ed., *C. L. R. James: His Life and Work* (London: Allison and Busby, 1986); “After the New Class: James, *Les damnés*, and the Autonomy of Human Cognition” (paper for the International Conference “C. L. R. James: His Intellectual Legacies,” Black Studies Department, Wellesley College, 19–21 April 1991); and “Beyond the Categories of the Master Conception: The Counterdoctrine of the Jamesian Poiesis,” in Paul Buhle and Paget Henry, eds., *C. L. R. James’s Caribbean* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992).

6 For Wynter’s comments on this, see David Scott, “The Re-enchantment of Humanism: An Interview with Sylvia Wynter,” *Small Axe*, no. 8 (September 2000): 171–73. For James’s anger after he had traveled in the Jim Crow South for the first time, see Scott McLemee, introduction to C. L. R. James, *C. L. R. James on the “Negro Question”* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1996). Long after his fifteen years in America, James would say the following: “In America, a West Indian learns for the first time what the race question really is.” C. L. R. James, “A Convention Appraisal—Dr. Eric Williams, First Premier of Trinidad and Tobago: A Biographical Sketch,” in Selwyn Cudjoe, ed., *Eric Williams Speaks: Essays on Colonialism and Independence* (Wellesley, MA: Calaloux, 1993), 338. In an interview, Wynter stated, “Had I not come to the United States, I could have never have come to think like this.” Greg Thomas, “*Proud Flesh* Inter/Views: Sylvia Wynter,” *ProudFlesh*, no. 4 (2006): 27.

revolution in America and instead led to the intensification of the bureaucratic totalitarian state.⁷ Popular culture became for him a means through which he understood the instinctive self-governing activities of the masses in their most daring revelatory form, which in James's writing would reach its zenith in his 1963 *Beyond a Boundary. American Civilization* is a particularly intriguing text because it represents James's ideas in motion, and one cannot help but be perplexed by what Timothy Brennan astutely terms James's "overestimation of American promise."⁸ *American Civilization* represents an original contribution by James to the Marxist interpretation of the politics of culture and presents a subtle argument that "popular culture provide[s] documentary evidence for an American 'happiness'—an uncompromised hunger for what socialism alone could provide."⁹ It is also shadowed by simultaneous contradictions throughout the text—America as a fulfillment of human promise and the absence of a critique of American imperialism.¹⁰

The quarter century that separated the writing of James's and Wynter's texts appears as a chasm rather than a generation, with the civil rights movement, Black Power, and the advent of black studies creating conditions of possibility for Wynter that James could not have dreamed of in 1950. It is in audience and theme, however, that these texts part company in the greatest terms. James's concern in *American Civilization*, the working title of which was "The Struggle for Happiness," was part of his decades-long fascination with the Old World and the New, and he wistfully thought his book might become one read by the leisured class of America.¹¹ Wynter saw hers as part of a creative uprising by a black studies newly present within the academy; indeed it was her attempt to create a major theoretical text for that movement. Further, despite its discussion of black cultural transformation in the Americas, Wynter's text was less concerned with the old/new distinction of tradition/modernity than with the black *experience* of coloniality.¹²

"Black Metamorphosis," seen from the perspective of Wynter's entire oeuvre, is the most comprehensive rendition of "Wynter's black struggle for life itself."¹³ What Wynter manages to achieve in this text is one of the most compelling, sustained renditions of the black experience of New World coloniality in African diasporic letters. And even saying this is not quite enough.

7 C. L. R. James, *Beyond a Boundary* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), 19, 151.

8 Timothy Brennan, "Cosmopolitanism's American Base: C. L. R. James in New York, 1950," in *At Home in the World: Cosmopolitanism Now* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 219. Brennan's chapter remains the best reading of James's *American Civilization* to date.

9 Brennan, "Cosmopolitanism's American Base" 221, 233.

10 Andrew Ross, "Civilization in One Country? The American James," in Grant Farred, ed., *Rethinking C. L. R. James* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996).

11 See Brennan, "Cosmopolitanism's American Base," 221, 231; C. L. R. James, "The Old World and the New," in *At the Rendezvous of Victory* (London: Allison and Busby, 1984).

12 Scholarship on black modernity has been central to the intellectual production of Africana intellectuals in the Euro-American academy over the last two decades. Wynter's work allows us to consider the idea that debates on black modernity are merely a subset of an inquiry into black experience—and likely not the most productive one.

13 Greg Thomas, "Sex/Sexuality and Sylvia Wynter's *Beyond . . .*: Anti-colonial Ideas in 'Black Radical Tradition,'" *Journal of West Indian Literature* 10, nos. 1–2 (2001): 111.

Black Experience

Sylvia Wynter's meditation on black experience spans more than nine hundred pages filled with theoretical speculations on the social, political, and aesthetic features of black life in the Western hemisphere, and it inaugurates key terms and extends other ideas vital for comprehending black existence. These terms include "nigger-breaking," the "underlife," "indigenity," "non-Norms," "plantation archipelagos," "marginal archipelago," and the "colonization of consciousness," which are rendered into a manuscript with a conceptual reach across centuries, leaving no sphere of modern existence—political, social, economic, religious, cultural—untouched.

In a discussion of the limits of the scholarship of Harold Cruse and E. Franklin Frazier, and their assumption of the nonexistence of an African cultural presence in North America, Wynter states that African culture did not disappear in the New World; instead, it metamorphosed (455). With this succinct comment, Wynter announced her position on a debate that had commenced generations before her time and to which she was to make a signal contribution. In her essay "Jonkonnu in Jamaica," the published piece bearing the heaviest responsibility for "Black Metamorphosis," Wynter had already declared her interest in describing the self-fashioning of blacks in the Caribbean as a process of "indigenization" rather than "creolization," in which indigenization represented a "secretive process by which the dominated culture survives and resists," while creolization is little more than a false assimilation.¹⁴ "Black Metamorphosis" represents a considerable extension and clarification of Wynter's argument for indigenization and stands as the central theory of her early 250-page version of the manuscript.¹⁵ In making her argument that blacks consider themselves natives of the Americas on an "unconscious level," Wynter turns to Jean Price-Mars, whose declaration of black experience—"Our presence on a spot of that American archipelago which we have 'humanized,' the breach which we made in the process of historical events to snatch our place among men"—Wynter sees as indicative of how the process of indigenization manifests itself.¹⁶ Price-Mars's evocative lines recall the importance of the Haitian Revolution and its aftermath for black freedom in the Atlantic world, agency against the tide of history, and the sociohistorical features that have fashioned contemporary Caribbean existence. The sheer disruption of the Middle Passage is figured here as the event that creates a new indigenous experience: "The extra-African's cultural response to the dehumanizing alienation of the capitalist plantation system of the New

14 Sylvia Wynter, "Jonkonnu in Jamaica: Towards the Interpretation of Folk Dance as a Cultural Process," *Jamaica Journal* 4, no. 2 (1970): 34–48. For more on this argument, see Carole Boyce Davies, "From Masquerade to *Maskerade*: Caribbean Cultural Resistance and the Rehumanizing Project," in Katherine McKittrick, ed., *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 203–25. In "Black Metamorphosis," Wynter states, "Creolization leads to the philosophy of integration. Marronage leads to the principle of separation. Indigenization must lead to the principle of liberation" (228–29).

15 For more on the development and different versions of "Black Metamorphosis," see my introduction to this special section, "'That Area of Experience That We Term the New World': Introducing Sylvia Wynter's 'Black Metamorphosis,'" this issue of *Small Axe*, 37–46.

16 See Wynter, "Jonkonnu in Jamaica," 35, and "Black Metamorphosis," 17.

World, was to re-root himself, making use of the old cultural patterns which had undergone a true sea-change, in order to *create* the new vocabulary of the new existence” (18)—a process that created a new human in a new land.¹⁷ New World African culture is one “whose crucible of conversion was exile,” not just from its original home but from “what was defined as the human condition,” resulting in a culture “native to exile” (56).

Yet it is how Wynter theorizes both cultural and political transformation in her text that highlights her distinctive contribution to knowledge on black life. The range of the final text of “Black Metamorphosis” encompasses the transformation of culture wrought within the Caribbean plantation experience and concludes with lengthy meditations on the possibility of social change in the United States. Her early chapters, in which the question of cultural change is omnipresent, are contemporaneous with the well-known scholarship of Kamau Brathwaite, Sidney Mintz, and Richard Price, work enmeshed in a series of debates on the African presence in the Americas.¹⁸ In “Black Metamorphosis,” however, perhaps in part because of the restless lavishness of its range, Wynter manages to transcend what David Scott terms a “sustained preoccupation with the corroboration or verification of authentic pasts,” which he considers a dominant and limiting feature of African diaspora anthropological thought.¹⁹ It is, in my view, Wynter’s resolute focus on black experience that allows her to avoid the narrowness of a vision solely concerned with providing a guarantee of black cultural presence through anthropologically determined traces—and it is this that gives the text its power and lasting value. “Black Metamorphosis” turns on the uniquely black experience of embodying the non-norm and on the determined struggles to refuse that signification that constitute the history of the black presence in the Americas.

“Ontology . . . does not permit us to understand the being of the black man. For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man. . . . The black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man.”²⁰ These words are recognizably those of Frantz Fanon, from the fifth chapter of *Black Skin, White Masks*; the literal translation of the chapter’s title reads, “The Lived Experience of the Black.” Fanon’s journey of feeling

17 See also 243–44. Wynter’s use of indigenization has recently come under criticism by Shona Jackson and Melanie Newton, who have both shown, relying on “Jonkonnu in Jamaica,” that this essay assumes native absence in order to claim black nativity to the land. The more extended argument on nativity in “Black Metamorphosis” will undoubtedly be a prominent feature of future discussions of this theme in Wynter’s work but is not my focus in this essay. See Shona Jackson, *Creole Indigeneity: Between Myth and Nation in the Caribbean* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 43–44, 244n7; and Melanie Newton, “Returns to a Native Land: Indigeneity and Decolonization in the Anglophone Caribbean,” *Small Axe*, no. 41 (June 2013): 117–18.

18 The wider body of work here is substantial. To restrict myself to two key texts and three critical responses to Brathwaite, Mintz, and Price, see the following: Kamau Brathwaite, *Contradictory Omens: Cultural Diversity and Integration in the Caribbean* (Kingston: Savacou, 1974); Sidney Mintz and Richard Price, *An Anthropological Approach to the Afro-American Past: A Caribbean Perspective* (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1976); David Scott, “That Event, This Memory: Notes on the Anthropology of African Diasporas in the New World,” *Diaspora* 1, no. 3 (1991): 261–84; David Scott, “An Obscure Miracle of Connection!: Discursive Tradition and Black Diaspora Criticism,” *Small Axe*, no. 1 (March 1997): 19–38; and Richard Price, “The Miracle of Creolization: A Retrospective,” *New West India Guide* 75, nos. 1–2 (2001): 35–64.

19 Scott, “That Event, This Memory,” 278.

20 Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 110.

and event in an antiblack world is one of the most searing descriptions of its kind in Africana letters, a reflection on invisibility/hypervisibility and black embodiment rarely surpassed in poignancy or influence. The journey of this idea of “lived experience” to Fanon, as Lewis Gordon has recently shown, came through Simone de Beauvoir, who in turn was in debt to Richard Wright, a path not without significance for Wynter.²¹ Of the many texts Wynter consulted, it was Wright’s *Black Boy*, a book she persistently returned to throughout “Black Metamorphosis,” that allowed her to theorize a transition away from a Marxist-determined theory of black liberation toward an illuminating (albeit unfinished) schema in which black experience determines any conceptualization of black pasts and futures.²² The moment of *Black Boy* that captured Wynter’s attention was the terrible scene of repression and victimization of the young Wright by his white coworkers, Pease and Reynolds. In her initial discussion of this scene, Wynter suggests that Pease’s and Reynold’s racism is secured by economic considerations given force by colonization—“devalued black labor meant a relative over-valuation of theirs” (38). Later in the manuscript, in a development of her argument, the economic motive becomes secondary to a consideration of the “pathology of whiteness,” itself a cousin of the pathology of the colonizer and the bourgeoisie (407). The behavior of Pease and Reynolds is an illustration of their desire for racial mastery that demands recognition from blacks, recalling G. W. F. Hegel’s ideas about lordship and bondage but only if threaded through a Fanonian gaze. While not disputing Irene Gendzier’s assessment of the influence of Hegel’s work on Fanon, Wynter argues, “If Hegel’s influence is central, even more central is the ground of Fanon’s *experience* of being black in a white world” (428; emphasis mine).²³ The “non-reciprocity of signification” is the foundation of the settler-native division: “The master-slave model is essentially the Norm/non-Norm model” (393, 421).

The way out of what Fanon called this “infernal cycle” is not the security of Negritude, as he so well showed in “The Lived Experience of the Black.”²⁴ Writing in the 1970s, Wynter recognized this well, but insisted on the productive resistance Negritude proffered to global “cultural blanchitude,” and consequently a subversion of the norm/non-norm model, since “it was the pain, the angst of those posited as Non-Norms that compelled examination of the functioning of the Symbolic Order itself” (428). This constant fashioning of blacks as the non-norm, what Richard Iton would call their persistent status as outliers in the modern state, demands centering the *experience* of coloniality rather than class domination as key to the othering practices of societies in the Western hemisphere.²⁵ Black suffering is an overlooked phenomenon of our contemporary world, angrily denied by many, a victim of a version of

21 Lewis R. Gordon, *What Fanon Said: A Philosophical Introduction to His Life and Thought* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 47. See also Ato Sekyi-Otu, *Fanon’s Dialectic of Experience* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

22 For Wynter on Wright’s *Black Boy*, see “Black Metamorphosis,” 37–38, 404–8, 415–25, 778.

23 See also Wynter’s reading of Hegel and Fanon on the desires of the master, *ibid.*, 425.

24 Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 116; on Negritude, see 122–40.

25 Richard Iton, *In Search of the Black Fantastic: Politics and Popular Culture in the Post-Civil Rights Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 30.

historical amnesia and bad faith that we give the term *antiblack racism*. This “long and sustained agony of black experience” would find its zenith in a contemporary site combining terror and captivity.²⁶ “The ghettos and prisons of today’s North America are the new forms of the plantation archipelago,” Wynter claims. “The new forms of the plantation archipelago are not, as were the old forms, the sites of a system of industrial colonization, but rather are reservations, where those now inscribed as expendable by the system of production can be herded, to repeat in contemporary terms the protracted agony of the American Indian” (372). Wynter’s anticipation of what would two decades later become known in academic and activist circles as the “prison industrial complex” is as prescient and revelatory as her search for a radical anticolonial praxis that could hasten its demise: “It is the natives, all the wretched of the earth, who, breaking out of their reservation, are now called upon to reinvent the very concept of the human, through a restructuring of the world system created by the discovery and conquest of the New World by the West” (249–50).²⁷

We now know only too well that this uprising Wynter saw as possible in the mid-1970s when those words were written never came to pass. The specter of the neocolonial dominance of forty years later was close to unimaginable at the time, and the dreadful reversals in the socioeconomic conditions of people of African descent throughout the world are known too achingly well to rehearse. Wynter had a suspicion of the impending gloom to come, seen in her references to the 1978 *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* decision of the US Supreme Court, an important early salvo in the reactionary response to civil rights that would reach a crescendo in the following decades.²⁸ However, “Black Metamorphosis” also gives its readers Wynter’s understanding of just how challenging the struggle to effect radical change would be—and central to that is the social dominance of the bourgeoisie.

The Bourgeois Sublime

In the process of writing “Black Metamorphosis,” Wynter gave up on her earlier conviction that the primary factor in the consolidation of white supremacy in America was a series of economic forces unleashed by colonization and transatlantic slavery. Early in the text, white terror on black bodies is figured as the disguise through which an ideology based on super-exploitative labor relations masked itself: “Racism was, in the last instance, determined by the profit motive” (37–38).²⁹ This preliminary analysis of racism, in which Wynter could state that “cultural racism thus plays an *economic* role” (39–40; emphasis in original) was still filled with

26 Ibid., 627.

27 Amid a now voluminous literature, for an important early statement on this, see Avery F. Gordon and Angela Davis, “Globalism and the Prison Industrial Complex: An Interview with Angela Davis,” *Race and Class* 40, nos. 2–3 (1998): 145–57.

28 For Wynter’s mention of the decision by the US Supreme Court in *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*, see “Black Metamorphosis,” 391, 393, 782, 824–25.

29 See also the convictions expressed on 33.

caveats—the dialectic of the African as native labor, the status of blacks as property rather than a class excluded from bourgeois property rights (43–44, 46).³⁰ Midway through the manuscript, in an arresting paragraph, Wynter repudiates her earlier convictions, moving from a theory of the black stereotype as a mechanism to facilitate the production of a superexploited population to this stereotype as intrinsic to domination throughout the system.³¹ This requires more than slightly stretching Karl Marx in the colonial situation, as Fanon once observed.³² Yet Marx is decentered but not abandoned, since he is key to the target of Wynter’s critique in the last half of her text—the bourgeoisie.

While Wynter cites approvingly Marx’s famous dismantling of the legitimization tactics of the Western bourgeoisie—in Marx’s words, the “insipid childishness . . . preached to us in defence of property”—the drama of coloniality requires a critique beyond even that imagined in Marx’s exposure of the social reorderings and upheavals unleashed by capitalism (710–12).³³ “The power and effectiveness of the bourgeois order was that ultimately, it allowed for the self-expression of no other group except on the condition that that group expressed itself in bourgeois forms,” Wynter states. “Its guaranteed freedom of expression was limited to the freedom of bourgeois expression. That is to say, it imposed the form of its expression on every other form in its vicinity” (535).³⁴ Bourgeois hegemony is not an idle phrase, since “by its nature, the bourgeoisie must be culturally totalitarian or cease to exist” (572–73). Comprehending race means appreciating that “all racisms are finally bourgeois. It is the bourgeois social order which needs the fixed rigid individualized, separated self” (846). The tactics of force and consent, co-optation and “vicarious identification” (578), result in blacks, workers, and women being “intimately interlocked” in a system in which their other—respectively, white, middle class, and male—constitutes the normative identity, a central feature of the “bourgeois mode of domination” (773–74).³⁵ The aspirational quest for whiteness, and attendant betrayals of the black bourgeoisie within this system, are to be expected. By the conclusion of the text,

30 See also Paget Henry’s careful reading of Wynter on this question. Paget Henry, “Wynter and the Transcendental Spaces of Caribbean Thought,” in Anthony Bogues, ed., *After Man, Towards the Human: Critical Essays on Sylvia Wynter* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2006), 258–89, esp. 274–80.

31 The passage reads as follows: “I would like at this point to contradict an earlier formulation. At the beginning of the monograph, I defined the Sambo stereotype as the mechanism by which more surplus value could be extracted from relatively devalued labour. . . . I would tend now, however, to see the Sambo stereotype as a mechanism which is far more central to capitalism’s functioning as a mode of domination. That is, I would see its function in extracting surplus as secondary to its function of permitting a mode of domination to be generalized at all levels of the system” (“Black Metamorphosis,” 429).

Wynter later states, “Earlier on in this manuscript, I had accepted the Marxist . . . privileging of the economic. . . . But that was to take a central effect for a cause. . . . Nigger-breaking was directed towards an essentially social purpose” (589). See also Demetrius L. Eudell, “From the Mode of Production to the Mode of Auto-Institution: Sylvia Wynter’s Black Metamorphosis of the Labor Question,” this issue of *Small Axe*, 47–61; and Derrick White, “Black Metamorphosis: A Prelude to Sylvia Wynter’s Theory of the Human,” *C. L. R. James Journal* 16, no. 1 (2010): 127–48.

32 I refer to Fanon’s well-known comment: “Marxist analysis should always be slightly stretched every time we have to do with the colonial problem.” Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (London: Penguin, 1990), 31.

33 The passage by Marx is from chapter 26, “The Secret of Primitive Accumulation” in *Capital*. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (New York: Random House, 1906), 785.

34 See Wynter’s argument about how bourgeois expression discursively legitimated itself in the West, in “Beyond the Categories.”

35 The journey from Wynter’s thoughts here to her theory of the human after Western man can be clearly seen. See especially Sylvia Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation; An Argument,” *CR* 3, no. 3 (2003): 257–337; and White, “Black Metamorphosis: A Prelude.”

Wynter's position is practically reversed: "The particular wrong of the Black—his total social exploitation—cannot be fought except it is fought as the general social—rather than merely economic—wrong that it is" (919).

Rather than as an "area of experience" that might give a universal paradigm similar to the proletarian experience, dominant understandings of the black experience in the US represent it as a "racial experience." This Wynter would argue against, since the black experience shows the "inextricability of the infrastructure and the superstructure" and "the black revolt . . . is the most radical of all revolts as it aims at the code" (691, 615). The black presence in the New World is subterranean but omnipresent, fugitive but hypervisible, condemned as the non-norm and nonperson but the foundation for the concept of free citizenship in the Americas. The monumental importance of "this area of experience that we call the New World" is that "the black/white code is the central inscription and division that generates all the other hierarchies. The secret of capitalism is to be found not in the factory but in the plantation" (582). This allows Wynter not only to resolve a theoretical tension within her argument but to extend her thoughts deeper into the meaning of black experience mediated through culture. She would "propose that we substitute the concept of colonization of consciousness for alienation," since "the black who accepted himself as a *Negro* was not alienated. He was colonized" (571).³⁶ Here the essential theoretical model for comprehending that "dynamic dialectic of terror and hope" (225) that constitutes the history of blacks in the New World must lie in black experience itself.

Desire plays a crucial role here, both as an analysis of colonization and in presenting the pathways of assimilation and resistance which in different iterations remain the hallmarks of black sociopolitical traditions.³⁷ The "carefully cultivated sentimental passion of the bourgeois cult of feelings" (765) is the corollary in the realm of desire of the "European humanism" that Frantz Fanon would denounce in his conclusion to *The Wretched of the Earth*. Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* "opened theory to the exploration of the central strategy of bourgeois domination—its strategy of the imitation of desire" (578). The coloniality of power through desire is revealed through the following statement: "It is through the totalitarian colonization of desire that bourgeois hegemony activates its strategy of power" (439).³⁸ Simultaneously, though, black culture would produce heretical ways of being capable of dismantling the entire bourgeois mode of being. The yearning of the spirituals that awakened W. E. B. Du Bois to the gift of black culture to humanity is a "powerful expression of uncolonized desire" (476).³⁹

36 In the original text, *Negro* is underlined.

37 See Bernard Boxill, "Two Traditions in African American Political Philosophy," *Philosophical Forum* 24, nos. 1–3 (1992–93): 119–35; and Peter Hudson and Aaron Kamugisha, "On Black Canadian Thought," *C. L. R. James Journal* 20 (Fall 2014): 1–18.

38 See also Wynter on the "colonization of black desire" (798) and "the central strategy of the system is the colonization of desire" (402). The latter line, along with other parts of this section of "Black Metamorphosis," were directly incorporated into Wynter's one publication taken from this manuscript; see Sylvia Wynter, "Sambos and Minstrels," *Social Text*, no. 1 (Winter 1979): 152.

39 Let us listen to Du Bois: "The Negro folk song—the rhythmic cry of the slave—stands today not simply as the sole American music, but as the most beautiful expression of human *experience* born this side of the seas. . . . It remains as the

Black music in the late twentieth century would become a “commercial anodyne, but with its Janus face of subversive desire” (607):

It is in this decolonization of consciousness, this “degradation” of social fictions that links the collective popular black culture and the theoretical formulations of black intellectuals. Black music from blues to jazz to soul, and its multiple derived variants counters the social fiction of “managed” organizational capitalism that the consumption of more and more consumer goods is the goal-seeking activity of man, one that diminishes pain and increases pleasure.

Rather black popular music sings as it has always done of an absence, a lack, of happiness, an absence, lack, felt in the flesh, and occasioning a radicalization of desire that secularizes utopian longings, the kind that cannot be satisfied by the dominant social order. Under the commercialization of the music it infiltrates this radicalization of desire; and exists as the leaven of the society at a mass-popular level. (817)

Wynter’s observation that “it is the ‘enthusiasm’—in the religious meaning of the term—secularized by black music and dance that most profoundly undermines bourgeois utilitarianism, and the instrumental rationality of the dominant order” (545) is echoed thirty years later in the work of Timothy Brennan. In a discussion of the “social allegory” that he suggests is fundamental to most New World African music, Brennan states that black music’s overwhelming popularity resides in the fact that it “offers its listeners a coded revenge on the modern, and that . . . is *why it is popular*.” This popular music, based on neo-African forms, “constitutes nothing less than an alternative history of Western civilization.”⁴⁰ Wynter knew this only too well, as for her “when the black moves out of his place, the entire universe of identity is shaken” (646). The black popular, particularly in the form of music, is where we might see intimations of the human in our present antiblack world. Black music is an “underground reservoir of cultural heresy” (245) through which black reinvention, constitution, and transformation both express themselves and become possible (666–67). It engenders the “psychic state of feeling” necessary for black revolt: “The black oral culture in the Americas . . . has functioned as a sustained and prolonged attempt to reinvent the black as human . . . in the face of intolerable pressures, material and psychic” (245). Yet the secret of black music lies beyond its subversive value. “Out of another dispossession, out of another Middle Passage of the spirit,” Wynter writes, “Reggae, like the blues, like jazz, articulates the *revolutionary demand for happiness* on the part of the wretched of the earth—the global natives of all races disrupted from their traditional cultures into twentieth century terror” (205; emphasis mine).

Black music is an ethical blueprint for black life. It provides spaces of imagination for other forms of being, and is central to the making of the new person beyond coloniality. Black happiness in an antiblack world is an achievement in itself, or, as Nikki Giovanni once said,

singular spiritual heritage of the nation and the greatest gift of the Negro people.” W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Signet, 1995), 265 (emphasis mine).

40 Timothy Brennan, *Secular Devotion: Afro-Latin Music and Imperial Jazz* (London: Verso, 2008), 2, 4 (italics in original), 9.

in a slightly different accent, “Black love is black wealth.”⁴¹ At its best, the politics of black culture demand a continual critique in the third world of all “secular Messiahs,” exposed as the “new class of the skilled bourgeoisie.”⁴² There is simply “no revolutionary praxis without revolutionary counter-representation” (917).

Radical social change is inconceivable without anticolonial thought and praxis. Neither Marxism nor black cultural nationalism is the answer, since neither can fully address the stigmatization of blackness and deviance as the epitome of the non-norm. Because it is inequality *itself* that defines the non-norms, it is constitutively fruitless to advance integration, this “most terrible form of black alienation,”⁴³ as the solution to problems of racial apartheid in America and beyond (824). The weight of coloniality on black lives is both an unbearable burden and responsibility. “The chain of innovations by which blacks had reconstituted new social identities, new social bodies,” writes Wynter, “has reached the limit of its counter cultural *underlife* existence. Either blacks will be destroyed or blacks will be compelled to impel the social transformation of a chaotic and disintegrating social order” (849).⁴⁴ Here Wynter echoes James’s reflections on Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth*, a passage she knew well, from a January 1967 speech James made in Detroit:

Fanon calls his book *Les Damnés de la Terre*; it is translated as “The Wretched of the Earth,” but I prefer “The Condemned of the World.” I want to end by saying this: the work done by Black Intellectuals, stimulated by the needs of the Black people, had better be understood by the condemned of the earth whether they’re in Africa, the United States or Europe. Because if the condemned of the earth do not understand their pasts and know the responsibilities that lie upon them in the future, *all on the earth will be condemned*. That is the kind of world we live in.⁴⁵

The stakes for Wynter and James could not be clearer. The colonial condemnation that has been the lot of blacks will extend to encompass humanity if the wisdom and experience of African diasporic populations, those forced “to pay the most total psycho-existential price” for the Euro-American West’s victory, are ignored.⁴⁶ This was the simultaneous warning and hope that James and Wynter could announce at the end of the 1960s and 1970s, respectively, before the advent of global neoliberalism and the environmental questions concerning human survival on this planet that would be omnipresent a generation later.

41 Nikki Giovanni, “Nikki-Rossa,” in *The Collected Poetry of Nikki Giovanni, 1968–1998* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 53.

42 Sylvia Wynter, “We Know Where We Are From: The Politics of Black Culture from Myal to Marley” (paper presented at the joint meeting of the African Studies Association and the Latin American Studies Association, Houston, Texas, November 1977), 45.

43 Wynter, “The African Transformation in the Americas,” 30.

44 The wonder of this text is the abundance of paragraphs of a similar power. For example, “Blacks by the nature of their experience must delegitimize the cultural signification systems; the cultural hegemonic imperialism, by which all modes of expropriation of wealth and power are legitimated and carried out” (918).

45 C. L. R. James, “C. L. R. James on the Origins,” *Radical America* 2, no. 4 (1968): 29 (emphasis mine). This document is an excerpt from the 1967 Detroit speech. See “Black Metamorphosis,” 251, for Wynter’s paraphrase of this quote.

46 Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality,” 306.

How can one give voice to the terror and agonizing reversals of the last thirty years since the conclusion of “Black Metamorphosis”? Wynter’s portrayal of the “long black agony” of New World experience has never been more prescient and bitterly evident than in the last generation, with its state terror, comprador complicity, the accelerating transfer of wealth from the poor to the elites, and the environmental destruction of the planet (315–16). Amid this, one wonders, is there anything more that needs to be—or can be—said about the theft of black people’s lives in the New World? It is this legacy of trauma, alienation, and disempowerment, and the anguish it produces, that forces black women, according to Marlene Nourbese Philip, to “manage the unmanageable” and confronts black subjects of the West, as James Baldwin put it, to be “always in the position of having to decide between amputation and gangrene.”⁴⁷ It is not merely the memory of slavery and the indignity of colonialism that troubles me here. Rather, as Jamaica Kincaid once had one of her characters utter, “I did not mind my defeat, I only minded that it had to last so long; I did not see the future, and that is perhaps as it should be.”⁴⁸ The despair here is less over past injustice than over the coloniality of the present and our seemingly potential futures.

Wynter’s reply to this moment, in her writings after “Black Metamorphosis,” continues the radical daring of her unpublished manuscript and renews the terrain of intellectual struggle with each succeeding decade, with pressing insights for her Caribbean. In her tribute to C. L. R. James, “Beyond the Categories of the Master Conception: The Counterdoctrine of the Jamesian Poiesis,” Wynter utilized *abduction* as a conceptual tool to assess the nature of existing coloniality.⁴⁹ Wynter’s use of the term is borrowed from Gregory Bateson, for whom it is the “lateral extension of abstract components of description. . . . Metaphor, dream, parable, allegory, the whole of art, the whole of science, the whole of religion, the whole of poetry, totemism[,] . . . the organization of facts in comparative anatomy—all these are instances or aggregates of instances of abduction, within the human mental sphere.”⁵⁰ In her reflections on the lifework of James, the idea of abduction for Wynter becomes a way to account for the shifting guises of systems of domination that have created the modern colonial world. The phrase “abduction system” is used to refer not merely to the dominance of the West (if we consider the West here, following Edouard Glissant, to be a project and not a place)⁵¹ but to the “semiotic foundations of bourgeois thought” and the colonial polis and its system of social

47 M. Nourbese Philip, “Managing the Unmanageable,” in Selwyn Cudjoe, ed., *Caribbean Women Writers: Essays from the First International Conference* (Wellesley, MA: Calaloux, 1990); James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son* (Boston: Beacon, 1955), 112.

48 Jamaica Kincaid, *The Autobiography of My Mother* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1996), 139. The entire passage reads as follows: “For to me history was not a large stage filled with commemoration, bands, cheers, ribbons, medals, the sound of fine glass clinking and raised high in the air; in other words, the sound of victory. For me history was not only the past: it was the past and it was also the present. I did not mind my defeat, I only minded that it had to last so long; I did not see the future, and that is perhaps as it should be” (138–39). See also Saidiya Hartman, “The Time of Slavery,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 101, no. 4 (2002): 757–77, where this passage serves as the epigraph to the essay.

49 See Wynter, “Beyond the Categories.”

50 Gregory Bateson, *Mind and Nature* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1979), 142.

51 Edouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989), 2.

rewards and punishments.⁵² Abduction systems create “abduction elaboration(s)” that rely on “a differential ratio of distribution of goods and of rewards, which in turn provides additional legitimacy” and simultaneously engender “abductive extension(s)” to keep their founding tropes alive.⁵³ James’s radical journey simultaneously within, through, and beyond coloniality was a “constant and sustained attempt to shift ‘the system of abduction’ first of colonial Liberalism, later of Stalinist and Trotskyist Marxism, and overall, of the bourgeois cultural model and its underlying head/body, reason/instinct metaphors.”⁵⁴

Sylvia Wynter’s use of the term *abduction* to signal our entrapment within the systems of domination that have been the result of the colonial project is not limited to this essay but spans her corpus of writings after “Black Metamorphosis” and appears in her thought on subjects as diverse as the pitfalls of Western feminism and Marxism-Leninism, her speculations on cognitive science and human consciousness, and the condition of the condemned of the earth. Phrases such as the “abductive order of discourse,” “abductive terms of inference,” and the “abductive schema of Marxism-Leninism” are consistently used to indicate a disquiet with existing coloniality and a concern with the inability of liberation movements in the past to adequately disenchant the schemes by which it asserts its hegemony.⁵⁵ When Wynter’s concerns move beyond what she terms the “abductive logic of the systems of representation,” the potential for abduction as a more universal theory of the colonial condition becomes clear.⁵⁶ The offer of assimilation to francophone Caribbean *départements* saves them from the condemnation that is Haiti’s lot but is little more than another form of imprisonment.⁵⁷ The condemned of the earth, who live in “Caribbean slums, Brazilian favelas, inner city ghettos of the US, all now reoccupy the place of the slave ships, quarters of new barracoons no less cramped.”⁵⁸ The power of abduction systems necessitates, for Wynter, radical disruptions of our hegemonic Western order of knowledge, acts of daring towards which she gestures in her call for heretical knowledge beyond that of Western bourgeois man.⁵⁹

How, then, might we begin to think of abduction as a concept to describe Wynter’s Caribbean, to comprehend the black experience of New World coloniality? A starting point might be the inception of the colonizing mission with Columbus and the Spanish invasion of the Western hemisphere. Historian Anthony Pagden’s book *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian*

52 Wynter, “Beyond the Categories,” 65.

53 *Ibid.*, 82, 82, 66.

54 *Ibid.*, 67.

55 See Wynter, “After the New Class,” 14, 16; and “Beyond Liberal and Marxist Leninist Feminisms: Towards an Autonomous Frame of Reference” (unpublished paper, prepared for the session “Feminist Theory at the Crossroads,” American Sociological Association, San Francisco, September 1982), 18. See also Wynter’s use of *abduction* in “The Ceremony Must Be Found: After Humanism,” *boundary 2* 12/13 (1984): 44, 48, 49, 55, 56, 64n54.

56 Wynter, “Beyond Liberal and Marxist Leninist Feminisms,” 15.

57 Wynter, “Beyond the Word of Man: Glissant and the New Discourse of the Antilles,” *World Literature in Review* 63, no. 4 (1989): 638.

58 Wynter, “A Different Kind of Creature,” 154.

59 See especially Sylvia Wynter, “Afterword: Beyond Miranda’s Meanings; Un/Silencing the ‘Demonic Ground’ of Caliban’s ‘Woman,’” in Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido, eds., *Out of the Kumbia: Caribbean Women and Literature* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World, 1990), 364; and “The Ceremony Must Be Found,” 21, 25.

and the *Origins of Comparative Ethnology* opens with a quote from the eighteenth-century priest Father Pedro Alonso O’Crowley—“The conquest of the Indies . . . filled all the vague diffusion of the imaginary spaces of man”⁶⁰—an incredible comment rich in insights on the nature of the invention of categories of “man” in the Americas, as well as a reminder of the power of imagined spaces and geographies in the colonial project. Pagden’s description of the shifts in perspectives on Native Americans—from theories of Aristotelian natural slavery to those that caricatured them as “nature’s children”—and the attempts to find an “epistemologically persuasive” interpretation of persons under Spanish dominion signals the importance of the conquest of the “New World” for European understandings of the nature of humanity. In what Wynter might call an abductive elaboration, native people are held within the body of the newly emergent European state for the purpose of clarifying its own relationship to its subjects and what it would now consider its colonial (anti)subjects.⁶¹ Stephen Greenblatt would argue in his *Marvelous Possessions* that “from the very first day in 1492, the principal means chosen by the Europeans to establish linguistic contact was kidnapping,” a prison house of language far beyond that imagined by Frederic Jameson.⁶² Kidnapping, slavery, guerrilla warfare, and genocide all figure prominently here, as well as the movement of native people throughout the Caribbean and beyond both under forced labor conditions and in search of homes more easily defensible against European aggression.⁶³

Abduction as concept also immediately evokes memories of transatlantic slavery—truly theft on the greatest scale in human history. Any reflection on slavery, the pained bodies of the enslaved, and the indignity of the indentureship of South Asians that followed reminds us that Caribbean realities are constituted by the experience of living within the shadow of genocide and unfreedom. Abduction thus centers as a critical philosophical concern the theft of labor from Africa, India, and the Caribbean and the consumption of these countries’ wealth, people, and natural resources in an ongoing imperial project.⁶⁴ When we consider the kidnapping of Toussaint Louverture by Napoleon Bonaparte, and then recall the spiriting away of Jean-Bertrand Aristide on the 200th anniversary of his country’s birth, the tragedy

60 Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 10. This comment by O’Crowley was made in 1774. Pagden goes on to note of travelers from Europe at that time: “[They] went to America with precise ideas about what they could expect to find there. They went looking for wild men and giants, Amazons and pygmies. They went in search of the Fountain of Eternal Youth, of cities paved with gold, of women whose bodies, like those of the Hyperboreans, never aged, of cannibals and of men who lived to be a hundred years or more” (ibid.).

61 I allude here to the title of Joan [Colin] Dayan’s essay “Held in the Body of the State: Prisons and the Law,” in Austin Sarat and Thomas R. Kearns, eds., *History, Memory, and the Law* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999).

62 Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 106. Greenblatt later states, “In the absence of any secure grasp of the native language or culture, the little that the English learn from their captive seems overwhelmed by all that they do not understand, and when they do not understand, they can only continue to entrap, kidnap, and project vain fantasies” (117).

63 Luis N. Rivera-Pagán, “Freedom and Servitude: Indigenous Slavery and the Spanish Conquest,” in Jalil Sued-Badillo, ed., *Autochthonous Societies*, vol. 1 of *General History of the Caribbean* (Paris: UNESCO; London: Macmillan Caribbean, 2003).

64 See Mimi Sheller, *Consuming the Caribbean: From Arawaks to Zombies* (London: Routledge, 2003).

of the Western-facilitated third-world debt crisis, and the exploitation of Caribbean migrant populations in Europe and North America, the fiction that abduction has ended is made clear.

But is abduction, with its inevitable emphasis in its popular definition on coercive force devoid of agency, anything more than an arresting though misleading metaphor? If every entry into the symbolic order is via abduction—as Bateson seems to suggest—can abduction be wedded to a specific property called coloniality? As concept, abduction itself has been the scene of incredibly poignant reworkings and mistranslations. In *Representations of the Intellectual*, Edward Said describes the ethical rewards of speaking truth to power as abduction, citing the philosopher C. S. Peirce on the origin of the term and Noam Chomsky on its further elaboration.⁶⁵ Yet Peirce's inferential logic and concern with deducing pragmatism as the “logic of abduction” seems far removed from Said's concerns, as does Chomsky's consideration of its merits for the “acquisition of knowledge of language” fifty years later.⁶⁶ In the English-language edition of Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, Charles Markmann translates Aimé Césaire's famous line from the *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* as “Those who never knew any journey save that of abduction,” while standard translations of that line read, “Those who knew of voyages only when uprooted.”⁶⁷ Further, if the coloniality of citizenship is key to understanding the contemporary Caribbean predicament, what is the yield of abduction, as a description of a global colonial formation?⁶⁸

The innovation of Wynter's turn to abduction as concept is its *evolution* in concert with the hemispheric conception of black experience articulated in “Black Metamorphosis,” toward a global theory of coloniality. Wynter's use of abduction both historicizes black experience in the West and the concomitant agonizing self-fashioning of identities, appropriation, deforming, and claiming of a modernity believed by the “west” to be sole preserve. What kinds of insights into black experience result if we consider Jan Pieterse's comment that the “west” did not absorb “non-western” cultures, but “was constituted by them”; Fanon's observation that “Europe is literally the creation of the Third World”; and Hortense Spillers's statement, “My country needs me, and if I was not here, I would have to be invented”?⁶⁹ Here, abduction prompts a consideration of colonial condemnation, its consequences of epistemic and physical violence—and the problem of existence posed by the condemned of the earth—manifestly, that these humans *presume* they have the *right to exist*.⁷⁰ These bodies, given the moniker

65 Edward W. Said, *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures* (New York: Vintage, 1993), 99–100.

66 Noam Chomsky, *Language and Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 79–81.

67 Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 123. The original reads, “Ceux qui n'ont connu de voyages que de déracinements”; Aimé Césaire, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1968), 95. Similarly to Markmann, Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith translate the line as “Those who have known voyages only through uprootings”; Aimé Césaire, *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*, trans. and ed. Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2001), 32.

68 For the term “coloniality of citizenship,” see Aaron Kamugisha, “The Coloniality of Citizenship in the Contemporary Anglophone Caribbean,” *Race and Class* 49, no. 2 (2007): 20–40.

69 Jan Pieterse, as cited in Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London: Routledge, 1994), 14; Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 81; Hortense J. Spillers, “Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (1987): 65.

70 I borrow this formulation in part from Elaine Brown, *The Condemnation of Little B* (Boston: Beacon, 2002), 9.

“no humans involved” by North America’s white supremacist state apparatus, as Wynter knew too well, suffer the ultimate dispossession—*condemnation* in our modern antiblack world.⁷¹ At stake, then, in our contemporary neoliberal world order is the very legitimacy of colonized persons’ lives and the right of their bodies to *exist*. At a time when America may be headed to a culmination of racial insurrection and state-sponsored violence witnessed only in 1919 and 1968 in the last century, Wynter’s articulation of the black experience of New World coloniality, written, revised, and extended throughout the 1970s, appears even more prescient and of lasting value.⁷² In her later texts, the invocation of the beyond presses us to disenchant the legacy of coloniality, toward the human *after* Western man.⁷³ Somewhere between abduction as constant and the “beyond” as possibility lies the black experience of New World coloniality.

Acknowledgments

Thanks to David Scott and Todne Thomas for their insightful comments on this paper. This paper is dedicated to my niece and nephew, Asha and Tega, and their American futures.

71 Sylvia Wynter, “*No Humans Involved: An Open Letter to My Colleagues*,” *Voices of the African Diaspora* 8, no. 2 (1992): 13–16.

72 This essay was completed in July 2015.

73 For Wynter’s use of the idea of the “beyond,” see “Afterword: Beyond Miranda’s Meanings,” 355–70; “Beyond the Word of Man,” 637–47; and “Beyond the Categories.”



Sylvia Wynter on her birthday, Crogan's Restaurant, Oakland, 11 May 2015. Photograph by Jack Dresnick. Used with permission

The Idea of Hispanophone Caribbean Studies

As part of a larger initiative to integrate the hispanophone Caribbean into our preoccupations, *Small Axe* is organizing a discussion on the theme of “The Idea of Hispanophone Caribbean Studies.” Our aim is to invite scholars who specialize in this region to help us think through the question of Hispanophone Caribbean studies, both as a geopolitical area, and as an object of intellectual history, past, present, and future. We are all well aware that the Caribbean is fragmented along linguistic and other lines derived from the colonial past and present, and this has resulted in the emergence of different and sometimes conflicting intellectual traditions and cultural-political identities.

Our project is to explore the implications of this history for the construction of the distinctiveness of a field called Hispanophone Caribbean studies. What are the geographical frameworks and analytical trends that have defined this field? What scholarly paradigms, social imaginaries, and conceptual maps frame its preoccupations? What is the place of diaspora and more broadly transnational movements in these concerns? What ideas about race and citizenship, what assumptions about sex, sexuality, and gender, and what figurations of the popular, of music, and of the visual define its self-understandings? These are some of the questions that will shape this *Small Axe* discussion.

Participants include:

Ginetta Candelario

Ada Ferrer

Sibylle Fischer

Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel

Silvio Torres-Saillant

**Guest edited by
Vanessa Pérez-Rosario**

The essays will appear
in *Small Axe* 51, November 2016.



a caribbean journal of criticism