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On Living the Privileges of Empire

I did not awake this morning to the deafening noise of sirens or the rocketing sound of nonstop bombs. I did not awake to the missiles that fall like rain from the sky, exploding on contact with land, staking out huge craters within the earth, collapsing people into buildings, trees into rubble, men into women, hands into feet, children into dust.¹ Two thousand tons of ammunition in three hours. Forty-two air raids in one day. Twenty-seven thousand air raids in a decade.² I did not awake this morning to the taste of desolation, nor to the crusts of anger piled high from decades of neglect. I did not awake to the familiar smell of charred flesh, which sand storms use to announce the morning raid. I did not awaken in Basra to the familiar smell of hunger, or of grief for that matter, residual grief from the last twelve years that now has settled as a thick band of air everywhere. Breathing grief for a lifetime can be toxic. Breathing only grief simply kills. I did not awake in Falluja, symbol of the post-election settlement wager: votes in exchange for bombs. I awoke this morning from a comfortable bed, avoiding the interminable queues for rations of fuel or food, because I have the privilege to choose to live, unlike many who have lost their lives in the insatiable service of imperialism.

What do lives of privilege look like in the midst of war and the inevita-
bile violence that accompanies the building of empire? We live the privilege of believing the official story that the state owns and can therefore dispense security, that war is over, that silence is a legitimate trade for consent in the dangerous rhetoric of wartime economy; the mistaken belief that we can be against the war yet continue to brand this earth with a set of ecological footprints so large and out of proportion with the rest of life on the planet that war is needed to underwrite our distorted needs; to consume an education that sanctions the academy’s complicity in the exercise and normalization of state terror; to continue to believe in American democracy in the midst of an entanglement of state and corporate power that more resembles the practices of fascism than the practices of democracy; to believe that no matter how bad things are here they are worse elsewhere, so much so that undermining the promises of American democracy is an eminently more noble and therefore legitimate undertaking, more so than the undermining of democracy in any other place in the world; to assume that the machineries of enemy production pertain to an elsewhere, not operating within the geographic borders of the United States of North America. One of the habits of privilege is that it spawns superiority, beckoning its owners to don a veil of false protection so that they never see themselves, the devastation they wreak or their accountability to it. Privilege and superiority blunt the loss that issues from enforced alienation and segregations of different kinds.

Pedagogies' central metaphor is drawn from the enforced Atlantic Crossing of the millions of Africans that serviced from the fifteenth century through the twentieth the consolidation of British, French, Spanish, and Dutch empires. At the time I conceived of the book in 2000, the world had not yet witnessed the seismic imperial shifts that characterize this moment. In one sense, then, Pedagogies functions as an archive of empire’s twenty-first-century counterpart, of oppositions to it, of the knowledges and ideologies it summons, and of the ghosts that haunt it. The book has assumed such a consciousness, and necessarily so since we are living witnesses or casualties of empire’s egregious practices. None of us now alive lived that first round, at least not in a direct way, but we can fill in the outlines provided by these contemporary excesses: in the return to a Republican-led militarized Reconstruction that polices the national body as it amplifies its global reach;4 by the U.S. state’s cynical deployment of tradition in a way that upholds the heterosexualization of family and of morality so as to eclipse any apprehension of the immorality of empire; in the recirculation and rearticulation of myths of (American) origin and destined might through an ideological force-field that manufactures and feeds an enemy made increasingly by the day more grotesque, while purveying a faith-based politics tied to the oxymoronic “armies of compassion”;5 in the disappearance of immigrants and the increased incarceration of women and people of color, drawing sharp fault lines that continue to make of citizenship a more fragile, highly contingent enterprise—the requirements of citizenship for empire are disturbingly antithetical to those requirements of citizenship for collective self-determination;6 by the way this moment presses up against what democracy has been made to mean, since empire requires sacrifice—the sacrifice of consent—unable to function, as William Pitt suggests, within the slow, cumbersome machine of constitutional democracy on its back;7 by the fact that this moment not only challenges but also undermines epistemic frameworks that are simply inadequate to the task of delineating these itineraries of violence that are given other names such as democracy and civilization; by probing our function and location as radical intellectuals (and I intend the term intellectual in the broadest sense of a commitment to a life of the mind whether or not one is linked to the academy) along the lines that Stuart Hall suggests—that is, our ethical commitments, the contours and character of our class affiliations and loyalties, and the interpretive frameworks we bring to bear on the histories to which we choose to be aligned; and, importantly, how we assess the size and scope of the wager involved in displacing collective self-determination with corporate institutional allegiances. We can fill in the outlines of empire since its multiple contradictions are everywhere seen in the hydra-headed quality of violence that constitutes modernity’s political itinerary as its ideological cognates, militarization and heterosexualization, are exposed. We can fill in the outlines of empire since we have seen the ways in which freedom has been turned into an evil experiment—that is, in George Lammings’s words, “the freedom to betray freedom through gratuitous exploitation.”8 We can fill in the outlines when we see how empire’s ruthless triumph demystifies the corruptibility of the self, without respect for those who believed themselves incorruptible. Perhaps empire never ended, that psychic and mate-
rial will to conquer and appropriate, twentieth-century movements for decolonization notwithstanding. What we can say for sure is that empire makes all innocence impossible. 9

Why Pedagogies, and Why Pedagogies of Crossing?

This book spans what feels like a lifetime compressed into a decade. It is an inventory of sorts of my multifaceted journey with(in) feminism, an inventory that is necessarily pluralized by virtue of my own migrations and the confluence of different geographies of feminism. In this volume I am concerned with the multiple operations of power, of gendered and sexualized power that is simultaneously raced and classed yet not practiced within hermetically sealed or epistemically partial borders of the nation-state. I am also concerned with the unequal diffusion of globalized power variously called postmodernism or late capitalism, yet understood in these pages as the practice of imperialism and its multiple effects.

Put differently, one of my major preoccupations is the production and maintenance of (sexualized) hegemony understood, in the Gramscian sense, as a map of the various ways that practices of dominance are simultaneously knitted into the interstices of multiple institutions as well as into everyday life. To understand the operation of these practices I traveled to various sites of crisis and instability, focusing to a large extent on the state, whose institutions, knowledges, and practices stand at the intersection of global capital flows, militarization, nationalisms, and oppositional mobilization. While differently located, both neo-imperial state formations (those advanced capitalist states that are the dominant partners in the global "order") and neo-colonial state formations (those that emerged from the colonial "order" as the forfeiters to nationalist claims to sovereignty and autonomy) are central to our understandings of the production of hegemony.10 The nodes of instability include heterosexuality’s multiple anxieties manifested in the heterosexualization of welfare and the defense of marriage in the United States and the criminalization of lesbian and gay sex in Trinidad and Tobago and in the Bahamas; the consolidation of the military-industrial-prison complex that both promotes the militarization of daily life and the most contemporary round of military aggression and war; the ideological production of various hegemonic identities: the soldier, the citizen patriot, the tourist, and the enemy on the part of state institutions and corporate capital; the integration of the corporate academy into the practices and institutions of the state at this moment of empire and therefore made integral to the machineries of war; knowledge frameworks, particularly those that bolster and scaffold modernity’s practices of violence that signify as democracy, such as cultural relativism; the global factory and its naturalization of immigrant women’s labor; and the moments and places where apparently oppositional social locations and practices become rearticulated and appropriated in the interests of global capital, as is the case of white gay tourism. These nodes of instability form, as well, the base for the thematic organization of the seven chapters in this volume.

In this book I am disturbed by these products of domination and hierarchy, particularly the psychic products that fossilize deep in the interior, forcing us to genuflect at the altar of alterity and separation, the altar of the secular gods of postmodernity, experienced as hypernationalism and empire. Physical geographic segregation is a potent metaphor for the multiple sites of separation and oppositions generated by the state, but which are also sustained in the very knowledge frameworks we deploy and in the contradictory practices of living the oppositions we enforce: the morally consuming citizen versus the morally bankrupt welfare recipient; the patriot versus the enemy; the loyal citizen versus the disloyal immigrant; "us" versus "them"; the global versus the local; theory versus practice; tradition versus modernity; the secular versus the sacred; the embodied versus the disembodied. And disturbance works as a provocation to move past the boundaries of alienation, which explains why Pedagogies is centrally concerned with the promise that oppositional knowledges and political mobilizations hold and with the crafting of moral agency.

If hegemony works as spectacle, but more importantly as a set of practices that come to assume meaning in people’s everyday lives (that is, the ways in which ordinary people do the work of the state and the work of war), then all spaces carry the potential for corruptibility. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and two spirit-communities, transnational feminist constituencies, women of color political mobilizations, and subordinated knowledges within the academy that have traded radicalism for
institutionalization all carry these reciprocal antagonisms and contradictions. Thus, for this reason, but not for this reason alone, the stakes are quite high. Building oppositional practices within and across multiple simultaneous sites is imperative in political struggle as is the cultivation of the discipline of freedom and collective self-determination in terms that supercede those of free-market democracy. Yet, oppositional consciousness is a process rather than a given before the fact of political practice. And further, we cannot afford to be continually, one-sidedly oppositional.

Pedagogies is intended to intervene in the multiple spaces where knowledge is produced. I have deliberately chosen to interrupt inherited boundaries of geography, nation, episteme, and identity that distort vision so that they can be replaced with frameworks and modes of being that enable an understanding of the dialectics of history, enough to assist in navigating the terms of learning and the fundamentally pedagogic imperative at its heart: the imperative of making the world in which we live intelligible to ourselves and to each other—in other words, teaching ourselves. Because within the archaeologies of dominance resides the will to divide and separate, Pedagogies points to the reciprocal investments we must make to cross over into a metaphysics of interdependence. In the same way in which Paulo Freire narrated our ontological vocation to become more fully human, these pedagogies assemble a similar ontological imperative, which pertains to learning and teaching. And since there is no crossing that is ever undertaken once and for all, this ontological imperative of making the world intelligible to ourselves is, of necessity, an enterprise that is ongoing.

Since the central metaphor of this book rests in the tidal currents of the Middle Passage, we should want to know why and how this passage—The Crossing—emerged as signifier. If here I am concerned with embodied power, with the power derived from the will to domination, I am simultaneously concerned with the power of the disembodied and the stories that those who forcibly undertook the Middle Passage are still yearning to tell, five centuries later. One such story is that of Kitsimba, who numbered among those who through the door of no return were shuttled from the old Kongo kingdom to the Caribbean, circa 1780. Kitsimba unexpectedly showed up in this collection, so unabashedly bound up with materialism, that my aim is not so much to tell the story of her capture but to convey a particular meaning of pedagogy. Indeed, her emergence is pedagogy in its own right: to instruct us on the perilous boundary-keeping between the Sacred and secular, between dispossession and possession, between materialism and materiality—the former having to do with the logics of accumulation, the latter with the energy and the composition of matter. She has traveled to the heart of feminism's orthodoxies to illustrate that the personal is not only political but spiritual, to borrow Lata Manglam's felicitous formulation. She is here to meditate on the limits of secular power and the fact that power is not owned by corporate time keepers or by the logics of hegemonic materialism. As I show in chapter 7, within Kitsimba's universe reside the very categories that constitute the social, the most crucial of which is Time. Yet in the world she inhabits, dominant corporate, linear time becomes existentially irrelevant. Indeed it ceases to have any currency at all.

Put differently, pedagogies that are derived from the Crossing fit neither easily nor neatly into those domains that have been imprisoned within modernity's secularized episteme. Thus, they disturb and reassemble the inherited divides of Sacred and secular, the embodied and disembodied, for instance, pushing us to take seriously the dimensions of spiritual labor that make the sacred and the disembodied palpably tangible and, therefore, constitutive of the lived experience of millions of women and men in different parts of the world. Once Kitsimba appeared to claim the book's closing chapter, the title of this entire collection surfaced. Thus, I came to understand pedagogies in multiple ways: as something given, as in handed, revealed; as in breaking through, transgressing, disrupting, displacing, inverting inherited concepts and practices, those psychic, analytic and organizational methodologies we deploy to know what we believe we know so as to make different conversations and solidarities possible; as both epistemic and ontological project bound to our beingness and, therefore, akin to Freire's formulation of pedagogy as indispensable methodology. In this respect, Pedagogies summons subordinated knowledges that are produced in the context of the practices of marginalization in order that we might destabilize existing practices of knowing and thus cross the fictive boundaries of exclusion and marginalization. This, then, is the existential message of the Crossing—to apprehend how it might instruct us in the urgent task of configuring new
ways of being and knowing and to plot the different metaphysics that are needed to move away from living alterity premised in difference to living intersubjectivity premised in relationality and solidarity.

Pedagogies cannot be adequately assembled, however, without attention to the social relations of teaching in the multiple makeshift classrooms we inhabit, and so it is no accident that the gestation period for this collection coincides with much of my life as a teacher. Pedagogies thus pertain to what we are prepared to teach, the methodologies of our instruction and the particular challenges that arise in the task of de-mystifying domination. Still, the classroom is Sacred space. In any given semester a number of Souls are entrusted into our care, and they come as openly and as transparently as they can for this appointment. To be sure, resistances develop as serious engagement morphs into confrontation with inherited nationalisms and their conceptual and identity structures. But outside of courses for which there is mandatory matriculation, the desire to show up stems from our curriculum that brings a promise to satisfy some yearning, as faint or as well-formed as it might be, to imagine collectivities that can thrive outside of hegemony's death-grip. I have not always been successful in simply teaching in order to teach, to teach that which I most needed to learn. More often I intended my teaching to serve as a conduit to radicalization, which I now understand to mean a certain imprisonment that conflates the terms of domination with the essence of life. Similar to the ways in which domination always already confounds our sex with all of who we are, the focus on radicalization always already turns our attention to domination. The point is not to supplant a radical curriculum. The question is whether we can simply teach in order to teach.

The Crossing is also meant to evoke/invoke the crossroads, the space of convergence and endless possibility; the place where we put down and discard the unnecessary in order to pick up that which is necessary. It is that imaginary from which we dream the craft of a new compass. A set of conflicntual convergences of my own migrancy, rendered more fragile under empire, and the genealogies of feminist, neocolonial, and "queer" politics that are simultaneously transnational, all reside here. It is a place from which I navigate life, using the foot I keep in the Caribbean, the one I have had in the United States since 1971, the arithmetic of which conver-

tinually escapes me, and yet a third foot, desirous of rooting itself deep in the forest of Mayombe in the Kongo. Living and thinking this dialectic means refusing to insist on two feet, which would be the recipe for sheer imbalance. It means turning my three legs into the legs of the deep, round cooking pot used to prepare medicine on the open fire. Three feet make the stretch more necessary, more livable, more viable. Yet none of the preoccupations of these pedagogies could have surfaced in the absence of these very genealogies: a regional feminist movement in the Caribbean, which by the mid 1980s had begun to chart the failures of anticolonial nationalism, implicating capitalism and colonialism in the unequal organization of gender, and by definition, charting the terms of how feminism would be understood and practiced; a movement of black women in Britain whose political consciousness as excolonial subjects produced a series of political campaigns that implicated the British state in colonialism at home (practices around immigration and racism in housing and hiring) and colonialism abroad ("we are here because you were there"); and the political movement and theory of collections such as This Bridge Called My Back, Home Girls, and Sister Outsider, which squarely brought dominant U.S.-based feminism to its own crossroads, challenging it to a personal and epistemic self-reflection out of which feminism has never been the same. These same texts provided some of the context in which I came to lesbian feminist consciousness as a woman of color in the mid-1980s. As Chandra Talpade Mohanty and I wrote in Feminist Genealogies, we were not born women of color but rather became women of color in the context of grappling with indigenous racisms within the United States and the insidious patterns of being differently positioned as black and brown women. Thus, the analytical elements that comprise this volume intimate my own intellectual and political history, marking its convergence with cross-curricular of different feminisms and belatedly with "queer" theorizing both inside and outside the academy, both elsewhere and here.

If I Could Write with Fire: A Word on How to Read

Heuristically speaking, each chapter in this book possesses its own analytic integrity and as such could be made to function and be read on
its own. Intersecting thematics are restated under apparently different frameworks in the hopes of sharpening the analytic agility we bring to understanding a world, an event, a life that is infinitely encrusted and layered and that ultimately demands different modes of intelligibility. For instance, all of the chapters that critique capitalist and state practices foreground the ideological imperatives that are deployed to function as truth or otherwise naturalize violence. Yet in chapter 4, there is a particular insight I gleaned from using apparently normative categories, such as speech and rights, to trace the ways in which the putative race-neutral market of diversity discourses of the corporate academy masked coercions of different kinds and how speech became acts that carried the capacity “to rank, legitimate, discriminate and deprive.” It was instructive to put this formulation to work, so to speak, so that it could attend to the interstices of power and show that the vocabularies of rights and truth could be made to disrupt dominant regimes, particularly when the claimants are not the ones imagined to formulate the operating discourses of power.

With essays written at different times, spanning the ten years from 1994 to 2004, the organization of this book is not necessarily linear. For instance, a version of chapter 3, “Whose New World Order? Teaching for Justice” was first delivered as an address to the Great Lakes Women’s Studies Association in 1994. Its discursive sensibilities, however, bring it into closer ideological proximity to the contemporary imperatives of empire-building that have been engineered by the ideologies of the U.S. national security state apparatus. The Gulf War of 1991, one of the immediate precursors of “the new world order,” staged a cynical dress rehearsal for the invasion of Iraq in 2003, and even that starting place is contingently arbitrary. Furthermore, the methodological template for the book as a whole unfolds not in chapter 1 but in chapter 5. Yet the preoccupation in chapter 5 with modernity’s traditions and violences would have been nearly impossible had I not waded through the points of confluence between the neocolonial and the neo-imperial, the hegemonic and the oppositional, and the reciprocal traffic among them, or had I not understood cultural relativism’s analytic and political intransigence—the thematics of earlier chapters. Thus, the placement of chapter 5 is intended to bring methodological rather than chronological coherence to the book’s framing. In what follows I touch briefly on the content of each chapter, after which I discuss what is at stake in assembling these particular pedagogies.

Three interlocking themes frame this collection. In part 1, “Transnational Erotics: State, Capital, and the Decolonization of Desire,” I include two chapters to serve as a foreground to the sexualization of subjectivity on the part of the heterosexual neocolonial state and white gay capital, both of which mobilize lesbian and gay bodies for their sex: one in the service of the heterosexualizing imperatives of nation-building and imperial tourist consumption, the other in the service of a sexual economy of gay desire where “native” bodies are made to assume, as in satisfy, the anxieties of colonial scripts and gay capital accumulation simultaneously. The meeting ground occupied here by the hegemonic and the oppositional is a troublesome one. Chapter 1, “Erotic Autonomy as a Politics of Decolonization,” which was first published in 1997, focuses on the ideological rescue of heterosexuality through the passage of the 1991 Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Act in the Bahamas. This legislation criminalized lesbian and gay sex, while ostensibly protecting some women against domestic violence, rape in marriage, and different forms of sexual harassment. I examine in this chapter how citizenship is premised in heterosexual terms and how lesbian and gay bodies are made to bear the brunt of the charge of undermining national sovereignty, while the neocolonial state masks its own role in forfeiting sovereignty as it recolonizes and renaturalizes a citizenry for service in imperial tourism. In the process of this examination I map the profound crisis of legitimation, which the feminist movement provoked for the state, and I chart what was at stake in the heterosexualization of the nation and the lengths to which the state was willing to go to protect itself and heteropatriarchy at the same time.

In chapter 2, “Imperial Desire/Sexual Utopias,” first published in 2000, I shift the site of analysis from the neocolonial state to the practices of white gay corporate tourism, while I attend to the conditions of miscegenation between heterosexual and gay capital. Here neocolonialism is made to assume a form different than that premised in chapter 1. Its agents are not the indigenous, anticolonial, nationalist class but the heirs of imperialism residing in imperialism’s centers, who are involved in
rewriting the colonial script that sexualizes and fetishizes the “native” back into tradition. I provide a sobering note on the dangers of offering up sexual freedom alone on the broken platter of U.S. democracy in order to secure or ostensibly guard the boundaries of modernity, and ultimately I urge queer studies and queer movements to take up questions of colonialism, racial formation, and political economy simultaneously.

In part 2, “Maps of Empire, Old and New,” I illustrate how the itineraries of empire are organically linked by virtue of the substantial amount of ideological trafficking that occurs among them. The political economies of corporate capital within the global factory and those of the state in which the academy figures centrally draw a great deal of sustenance from each other. The ideological fodder for both is provided by analytic traditions developed within the academy itself. In chapter 3, “Whose New World Order? Teaching for Justice,” I interpret the manufacture of the “new world order” as a mechanism on the part of neo-imperial states to manage the global crisis of the 1980s and 1990s. If neocolonial states managed internal rupture by using heterosexuality in defense of nation, as I show in chapter 1, neo-imperial states covered their own internal ruptures by managing what they produced as the new world order, deploying it as an ideological and material anchor to secure a range of corporate and state interests, particularly interests in militarization. In this chapter I point to corporate restructuring in the shift to a service economy and to the processes through which the academy becomes one such industry by participating in its own kind of downsizing and in the rewriting of knowledges that comport with the imperatives of empire. What is the academy’s role in an era of globalization? The genealogies of consciousness and political organizing among women workers in global factories in places ranging from Mexico and the Caribbean to India and Canada, who foreground the fact of their hunger for justice (“tienen hambre de justicia”), are juxtaposed with the urgency of teaching for justice in the academic factory, thus challenging us to develop radical pedagogies that do not erase the knowledges of these very women who redefine “survival” to mean collective self-consciousness.

In chapter 4, “Anatomy of a Mobilization,” I build on chapter 3 as an archaeology of just what transpires in the academy when downsizing and fiscal conservatism morph into curricular conservatism. The site of this examination is the New School for Social Research (now the New School University), which is renowned for its traditions of progressivism. The moment is 1997, when a political mobilization that involved a coalition of faculty, staff, and security guards challenged the hiring and epistemic practices of the School that produced a climate of exile—the very circumstance that prompted scholars to flee European fascism and American anti-Semitism and establish the School in the first place. Because my own temporary position there sharpened the contradiction between hyper-visibility and a rotating-door policy that erased the knowledges of women of color, this chapter charts the failures of normative multiculturalism, liberal pluralism, and the eclipse of the white liberal Left in the context of the schism that emerged between the School’s liberal public identity and its regressive internal practices. In light of this, I track the sizable stakes that are attached to the diffusion of radical transnational feminist frameworks in a corporate context that requires an instrumental diversity so as to better position white bodies only as knowledge producers.18

In chapter 5, “Transnationalism, Sexuality, and the State,” I provide the analytic grounding for the first four chapters. To do so I exhume the ghost of cultural relativism and the traditions that mark the itineraries of modernity by offering a way to theorize violence that does not fix violence in tradition alone. By taking the regulatory practices of heterosexualization within three social formations—the colonial, the neocolonial, and the neo-imperial—I push up against the limits of linearity by arguing instead for the ideological traffic (in the words of Payal Banerjee) that occurs within and among them. In conjoining discourses that have been internally segregated and temporalities that have been simultaneously distanced—the colonial is oftentimes never imagined to traffic within the neo-imperial, for instance—I make it possible to see that there can be no good heterosexual democratic tradition over and against a bad heterosexual primitive tradition. There also can be no false deduction that democratic heterosexualization is simply more benign in its alignment with modernity than traditional heterosexualization, which in its alignment with backwardness is simply more pernicious. Within this frame it is analytically impossible to position heterosexualization and the attendant discourses and violences of homophobia as imbricated within tradition
only—in the presumably cordoned-off geographies of sexuality in the Caribbean. This chapter shows how they are simultaneously constitutive of the practices of modernity as well.

The third and final theme is charted in part 3, "Dangerous Memory: Secular Acts, Sacred Possession," where I position memory as antidote to alienation, separation, and the amnesia that domination produces. Chapter 6, "Remembering This Bridge, Remembering Ourselves," which was first published in 2002 in This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation, is an excavation of the costs of a collective forgetting so deep that we have even forgotten that we have forgotten. Twenty years after the initial publication of This Bridge Called My Back, this chapter returns to the moment of my first encounter with that book in order to weave a discontinuous thread to the present through the examination of several questions: Who are we now as women of color twenty years later? Have we lived differently? Loved differently? Where do we come to consciousness as women of color and live it, at this moment? Have we crossed into a new metaphysics of political struggle? Did This Bridge get us there? Did it coax us into the habit of listening to each other and learning each other’s ways of seeing and being? Who are we now, twenty years later? Why do we need to remember?

In this chapter I focus on certain contentious relationships between African American and Caribbean women who share a similarly fractious history of racism, but whose differentiating forgetfulness of colonization and slavery has occasioned a contemporary politics of blame. I deal explicitly with heterogeneity within the seemingly homogeneous category of woman of color by seeking to determine what residency in adopted homes might teach us about the continuities between home and exile. In doing so I confront the challenge of using rememory to take account of the effects of suspicion and betrayal. There is a great deal of urgency in reimaging wholeness as a necessary part of a pedagogy of crossing, the very point of the book's final chapter.

Chapter 7, "Pedagogies of the Sacred," gets squarely at the question of transgenerational memory. There I engage memory not as a secular but rather as a Sacred dimension of self. I examine how sacred knowledge comes to be inscribed in the daily lives of women through an examination of work—spiritual work—which like crossing is never undertaken once and for all. Spiritual work is different from the category of domestic labor or of cheapened migratory labor in the exploitative capitalist sense, although the spiritual workplace is usually constituted as home. Drawing on my own position of priest in two African-based spiritual communities of Vodou and Santeria, of mixed gender and sexualities, I trace the ways in which knowledge comes to be embodied and made manifest through flesh, an embodiment of Spirit.

All of the elements with which feminism has been preoccupied—including transnationalism, gender and sexuality, experience, history, memory, subjectivity, and justice—are contained within this metaphysic that uses Spirit knowing as the mechanism of making the world intelligible. But primarily because experience has been understood in purely secular terms, and because the secular has been divested of the Sacred and the spiritual divested of the political, this way of knowing is not generally believed to have the capacity to instruct feminism in the United States in any meaningful way, in spite of the work of feminist theologians and ethicists. It is a paradox that a feminism that has insisted on a politics of a historicized self has rendered that self so secularized, that it has paid very little attention to the ways in which spiritual labor and spiritual knowing is primarily a project of self-knowing and transformation that constantly invokes community simply because it requires it. In spite of the work of Gloria Anzaldúa, Cornel West, bell hooks, and the more recent work of Lata Mani, Leela Fernandes, and others, there is a tacit understanding that no self-respecting postmodernist would want to align herself (at least in public) with a category such as the spiritual, which appears so fixed, so unchanging, so redolent of tradition. Many, I suspect, have been forced into a spiritual closet. Ultimately, then, I argue that a transnational feminism needs these pedagogies of the Sacred not only because of the dangerous diffusion of religious fundamentalisms, and not only because structural transformations have thrown up religion as one of the primary sites of contestation, but more importantly because it remains the case that the majority of people in the world—that is, the majority of women in the world—cannot make sense of themselves without it. We would all need to engage the Sacred as an ever-changing yet permanent condition of the universe, and not as an embarrassingly unfortunate by-product of tradition in which women are disproportionately caught. Moreover,
many individuals would not have survived the crossing without it; many have been persecuted because of it. Pedagogies in this universe of the Sacred are ongoing.

On Writing, Memory, and the Discipline of Freedom

Different voices inhabit this text. The ideological "I" (to use a term by Sandra Paquet) that wrote “Erotic Autonomy” in 1997 is not the same "I" writing here in this introduction, nor the "I" that wrote “Pedagogies of the Sacred.” Rather, that “I” has shifted and transformed, so much so that different voices emerge. Audre Lorde would have us believe that this shift in voice is that of the poet bringing faint yet decipherable whispers of freedom, a conjunction of the aesthetic of creation, the beauty of the Sacred and the flight of imagination. Modulations in voice, therefore, are not solely speech—perhaps not about speech at all—but instead are about an opening that permits us to hear the muse, an indication of how memory works, how it comes to be animated. But whose memory, whose voice, and whose history?

In a fundamental sense Pedagogies of Crossing moves from the betrayal of secular citizenship and dispossession to sacred citizenship and possession, from alienation to belonging, from dismemberment to remembrance. And it does so not in any discrete, noncontradictory, linear way, not in any way that suggests that there is no traffic between and among them, but rather as a way to indicate that possession can be a guided, conscious choice. Perhaps that muse emerges at the cusp of the vise between dispossession and possession, but she would have been refused entry had surrender and stripping not occurred. Had I not been stripped to the elemental and made to see that the experience of wartime, for instance, at the seat of empire (whose effects are starkly divergent even as immigrant from the external casualties of war), made its own cumbersome demands including provoking the fear of deportation from a site of neglect; had I not been thrown up against the underbelly of capitalism’s insecurity in the absence of full-time employment; had I not been forced to enroll in the never-ending school where Spirit as teacher is determined to use a curriculum in which the syllabus is given at the end of each lesson and then, only partially so; and had I not been forced to enter fire to tap the roots of its capacity to change the shape of things the muse would have been denied entry, turned back at the border of self-pity, cowardice, and the knowledge of corruptibility—the borders of the self—to inhabit another, more receptive land. I was neither author nor mediator of that stripping even as I was being required to own it, to possess it and be possessed by it, to wear it as an indispensable something that belonged to me, yet not only to me. Stripping is a methodology in the most literal, perhaps mundane, sense of constituting the practices through which we come to know what we believe we know. At stake is not only whether emotion is made to count in the knowledge process, but how it is made to count. I leave it to Kitsimba’s narration in chapter 7 to fill in the details of that telling.

So what does possession mean after all at this time of empire in the United States? How would it be possible to annul the psychic legacy of an earlier contract that premised U.S. freedom and democracy in manifest destiny? To oppose freedom to violence is to sharpen the fault line where democracy butts up against empire. It begs also for new definitions of both freedom and democracy. What is democracy to mean when its association with the perils of empire has rendered it so thoroughly corrupt that it seems disingenuous and perilous even to deploy the term. Freedom is a similar hegemonic term, especially when associated with the imperial freedom to abrogate the self-determination of a people. How do we move from the boundaries of war to “the edge of each other’s battles”? How many enemies can we internalize and still expect to remain whole? And while dispossession and betrayal provide powerful grounds from which to stage political mobilizations, they are not sufficiently expansive to the task of becoming more fully human. I do not mean here the sort of partial, contingent humanism on which Enlightenment rationality rested, but rather one that dares to cultivate a moral imagination that encompasses the full, unromanticized dimensions of human experience. Some of us undertook that perilous journey of the Atlantic Crossing only to jump overboard to escape the intolerable. Others of us arrived at Ibo Landing in the Carolinas and intuited the conditions of our would-be capture, turned around and walked right back on the water. Still others of us have forgotten the call, choosing instead to be accountable to the imperatives of affirmative action, torn between the desire to build fleeting
careers and the practice of freedom. And still pedagogies that are derived from the Crossing are not chattel or moveable property to be selectively owned by Africa's descendants alone. Such ownership can only rely on use value to determine the structure of relationships to self and collectivity. We would have to practice how to disappear the will to segregation. The terms of this new contract will have to be divined through appropriate ceremonies of reconciliation that are premised within a solidarity that is fundamentally intersubjective: any dis-ease of one is a dis-ease of the collectivity; any alienation from self is alienation from the collectivity. It would need to be a solidarity that plots a course toward collective self-determination. Among its markers will be the knowledge that "all things move within our being in constant half embrace: the desired and the dreaded; the repugnant and the cherished; the pursued and that which [we] would escape." It will entail the courage to reimagine the patriot along the lines that Adrienne Rich suggests in An Atlas of the Difficult World, where a patriot is one who wrestles for the Soul of her country, for her own being; where a patriot is a citizen trying to wake from the burned-out dream of innocence to remember her true country. It will entail a freedom whose texture consists of honesty and discipline, the kind of which Howard Thurman speaks when he defines freedom as moral choice pertaining both to the character of one's actions and the emotional and spiritual quality of one's reactions. Accountability is indispensable to both. It will entail the desire to forge structures of engagement, which embrace that fragile, delicate undertaking of revealing the beloved to herself and to one another, which James Baldwin sees as the work of the artist. "The artist does at [her] best what lovers do, which is to reveal the beloved to [herself] and with that revelation to make freedom real." It will entail gentle determination and Pablo Neruda's idea of a burning patience to choose freedom so as to better build archaeologies of freedom, which, in the first and final instance, can only be lived. This is the Spirit in which I offer this book.
Erotic Autonomy as a Politics of Decolonization: Feminism, Tourism, and the State in the Bahamas

In 1994 Marion Bethel wrote the following tribute to the members of Developing Alternatives for Women Now (DAWN) and in memory of the women of the suffrage movement who severed the colonial connection between property ownership, respectability, and citizenship.

*And the Trees Still Stand*

We are here
because you beat back the bush
because you raked rocks and stones
because you pitched scalding tar
to make that road
You uprooted lignum vitae trees
to turn that uncharted road
into a journey with landmarks
And because you replanted
those trees of life
we are here

In this poem Bethel establishes a deliberate link with a particular history of women's political struggle in the Bahamas. Foregrounded in her incantation is a conscious political move on the part of women in the contemporary women's movement in the Bahamas to choose from particular
feminist genealogies and from particular histories of struggle, especially at a moment when the legacy of British gentility and respectability threatens to mold Bahamian identity. According to Bethel, the choice of a legacy is an uncharted road strewn with entangled brush; it is a tumultuous journey out of which a path must be cleared. But Bethel also suggests that the political and strategic work of movement-building involves danger, pitching scalding tar, simultaneously deploying tools that might entrap, ensnare, or liberate. These symbols of contradiction and liberation deliberately evoke the ideological dialectic in which the women's movement is now positioned.

The history to which the contemporary women's movement lays claim is one that contradicts the imperial legacy of nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century organizations, such as the Queen Mary Needlework Guild, the Women's Corona Society, and the Imperial Order of Daughters of Empire, all of which drew their ideological strength from the British imperial state whose fledgling infrastructure was established in 1718. These were organizations whose ideologies of “gentility” and femininity gave primacy to service—service to the queen and to the British nation, which in practice meant servicing white militarized masculinity as “daughters” during the Second World War. In essence, then, femininity was deployed in the service of, and out of allegiance to, British colonial norms. Women in the suffrage movement and in the National Council of Women, however, sought to contradict this imperial legacy of Britain as patriarch by attempting to reconcile the imposed epistemic opposition between woman and citizen that was characteristic of colonial relations of rule. This evolution—from daughter, to lady, to citizen—epitomized political contestation among women's organizations in the Bahamas, and ultimately emerged as a major point of contestation with the state. Should woman be perennial daughter raised as lady, always already defined by her relationship to men? Or, should woman and citizenship signify a certain autonomy—what we might regard as erotic autonomy—and sexual agency?

Women's sexual agency and erotic autonomy have always been troublesome for the state. They pose a challenge to the ideology of an originary nuclear heterosexual family that perpetuates the fiction that the family is the cornerstone of society. Erotic autonomy signals danger to the hetero-

sexual family and to the nation. And because loyalty to the nation as citizen is perennially colonized within reproduction and heterosexuality, erotic autonomy brings with it the potential of undoing the nation entirely, a possible charge of irresponsible citizenship, or no responsibility at all. Given the putative impulse of this eroticism to corrupt, it signals danger to respectability—not only to respectable black middle-class families, but most significantly to black middle-class womanhood. In this matrix, then, particular figures have come to embody this eroticism, functioning historically as the major symbols of threat. At this moment in the neocolonial state's diffusion of sexualized definitions of morality, sexual and erotic autonomy have been most frequently cathexed on the body of the prostitute and the lesbian. Formerly conflated in the imaginary of the (white) imperial heteropatriarch, the categories “lesbian” and “prostitute” are now positioned together within black heteropatriarchy as outlaw, operating outside the boundaries of law and, therefore, poised to be disciplined and punished within it.3

A great deal of analytic work has been done by feminists in different parts of the world on demystifying the state's will to represent itself as disinterested, neutered, or otherwise benign.6 We now understand how systems of sex and gender operate at the juncture of the disciplining of the body and the control of the population. Feminists have clarified the patriarchal imperatives at work within the state apparatus, making it possible to examine the ways in which masculinized gestures of normalization exert and deploy force, generate new sexual meanings, displace and reinscribe old meanings, and discipline and punish women in disproportionate ways for a range of imputed infractions, not the least of which has to do with being woman. Much less work has been done, however, on understanding how heterosexualization works within the state apparatus, how it is constitutively paradoxical, that is, how heterosexuality is at once necessary to the state's ability to constitute and imagine itself and becomes, at the same time, a site of its own instability.8

In this chapter, I want to extend an earlier analysis I made of the operation of these processes of heterosexualization within the state. Specifically, I want to combine the twin processes of heterosexualization and patriarchy—what Lynda Hart calls “heteropatriarchy”—in order to analyze the significance of a moment of crisis when state-sponsored violence
moved to foreclose desire between women. The passage of the 1991 Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Act, which criminalized lesbian sex and moved to reestablish primogeniture under the guise of protecting women against domestic violence, signals for me the mobilization of an unstable heteropatriarchy, reeling and reinventing itself at a moment of crisis. But why was it necessary for the state to shore up its inherited power? Why this reinvention of heteropatriarchy? What, to use Lynda Hart’s terms, are the productive breaks in this symbolic order that require the state to clothe itself, as it were?¹⁰ I want to argue here that heteropatriarchy functions in ways that supersede the sexual. At this historical moment, for instance, heteropatriarchy is useful in continuing to perpetuate a colonial inheritance (which is why I use the term neocolonial) and in enabling the political and economic processes of recolonization.

Before proceeding further, let me provide a brief synopsis of the relevant legislation in order to mark the terrain on which I interrogate the questions of recolonization, heteropatriarchy, and their contradictions in the face of feminist popular mobilization. The most crucial elements of the Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Act include the following provisions: (1) Sexual assault, sexual abuse, sexual harassment, and domestic violence are considered criminal offenses. A system of mandated reporting is to be used in the case of incest and sexual abuse of minors. Parents or guardians, teachers, employers, and medical practitioners are required to report suspected sexual abuse to the police, with a fine of $5,000 for failure to report; (2) Adult male sexual intercourse with another male, and adult female sexual intercourse with another female, are both criminal offenses, with a maximum penalty of twenty years imprisonment; (3) Prostitution is a criminal offense (before the passage of the act it was not); and (4) Anyone with HIV infection who has sex without disclosing their HIV status faces a penalty of five years imprisonment, if convicted.

In examining the state’s gesture of simultaneously “protecting” some women while criminalizing others, I offer a theorization of the shape and contours of sexual politics within the neocolonial state through the lens of heteropatriarchy. While the black nationalist party (the People’s Liberal Party) wrested power from an elite group of white owners in 1972, it seized ownership of some of the more popular symbols of the black working-class political struggle, such as the Burma Road rebellion and the right of women to vote, as its own benevolent achievement. This was one of its earliest attempts to erase the memory of popular struggle. It narrowed its own vision of popular nationalism, turning the mobilization of women, youth, trade unions, and churches, on which it relied for support, into a constitutional convention organized in Britain. There, the queen was retained as head of state. The imperial government retained control over foreign affairs and defense, while the Bahamas lost sovereignty over those portions of Bahamian territory that were negotiated away under the earlier leadership of the United Bahamian Party (UBP).¹¹ Thus, part of what I narrate here is the extent to which these early politics of compromise and erasure, the state’s desire to neutralize political struggle through its control over the instruments of co-optation and coercion, foreshadow the more contemporary politics of recolonization.

My use of the term recolonization refers to the ways in which political and economic strategies are made to usurp the self-determination of the Bahamian people. In this regard, heteropatriarchal recolonization operates on at least three levels simultaneously. At the discursive level it operates through law, which is indispensable in the symbolic and material reproduction and consolidation of heteropatriarchy, and in the elaboration of a cathartic structure based primarily in sexual difference. In light of this, I will demonstrate the ways in which the law forges continuity between white imperial heteropatriarchy—the white European heterosexual inheritance—and black heteropatriarchy. This unity is crucial to the creation of a marginal underground of noncitizens, historically figured around the “common” prostitute and the “sodomite” (killed by Balboa to mark the advent of imperialism), now extended by the neocolonial state to include lesbians and people who are HIV infected.¹² To the extent that citizenship is contained within heterosexuality, the state can produce a group of nonprocreative noncitizens who are objects of its surveillance and control—subjected to its processes of normalization and naturalization that serve to veil the ruses of power.¹³

Also at the discursive-juridical level, I establish continuity with white European inheritance by analyzing accounts of domestic violence. State managers recodified the text of this new law in terms of class-based symbols of the matrimonial home, in a way that continued the somewhat
orderly patrilineal transfer of private property under the most disorderly and injurious circumstances of wife beating, rape, sexual abuse, and incest. This literal resituation of the law of the father and the privileges of primogeniture through state domestication of violence not only distanced parliamentary patriarchy from domestic patriarchy, but also narrowed the definitions of violence that feminists had linked to the organizing episteme of heteropatriarchy itself. From the official story, we know almost nothing about women’s experiences of violence in the home, which were ideologically fragmented in the legal text. Women were made culpable for not reporting these acts (perpetrated against themselves and their daughters) and the burden of criminality shifted onto them, thus drawing them more tightly into the state mechanisms of surveillance—positioning them simultaneously as victim and manager—all under the ideological gaze of the heteropatriarchal state as “protector.” Finally, discursive recolonization occurs, as well, in the legal reinvention of normative, dyadic heterosexuality and in the mythic reellation of sexual decadence as the basis for the destruction of the nation of Sodom and Gomorrah, and now, by extension, the Bahamas.

Heteropatriarchal recolonization operates through the consolidation of certain psychic economies and racialized hierarchies as well as within various material and ideological processes initiated by the state, both inside and beyond the law. These actions can be understood as border policing; in this instance, the unequal incorporation of the Bahamas into an international political economy on the basis of serviceability—that is, tourism. Attempts to guard against the contamination of the body politic by legislating heterosexuality are contradictorily bolstered by state gestures that make borders permeable for the entry of multinational capital. Making the nation-state safe for multinational corporations is commensurate with making it safe for heterosexuality, for both can be recodified as natural, even supernatural. Thus, tourism and imperialism become as integral to the natural order as heterosexuality, and are indispensable in state strategies of recolonization.

Methodologically, I focus here on tourism because it has been the major economic strategy of modernization for the Bahamian state. It has now been transformed from its tentative beginnings as a leisure activity of an imperial elite, the domain of a primarily British foreign mercantile class, to a mass-based tourism dominated by North Americans and Canadians. Currently, approximately two-thirds of the gross national product of the Bahamas is derived from tourism. For our purposes, the significance of tourism lies in its ability to draw together powerful processes of sexual commodification and sexual citizenship. The state institutionalization of economic viability through heterosexual sex for pleasure links important economic and psychic elements for both the imperial tourist (the invisible subject of colonial law) and for a presumably “servile” population (which the state is bent on renativizing). It would seem that at this unstable moment of heteropatriarchy, socializing citizens into heterosexuality through legal mandate and through service in tourism is more urgent for the state than socializing them into self-determination, one of the major promises of anticolonial nationalism.

Psychic recolonization occurs, then, not only through the attempts to produce a servile population in tourism, but also through the state’s attempts to repress, or at least to co-opt, a mass-based movement led by feminists. Put differently, it seems that law—positioned as order—functions both to veil ruptures within heteropatriarchy and to co-opt mobilization of another kind, that is, the sort of popular feminist political mobilization that made the break visible in the first place. It would be necessary for the state to work, and work hard, to recast the official story, to displace popular memory of the people’s struggle with its own achievements (in this instance, the Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Act of 1991). But the fact is that Bahamian feminism, however ambiguously or contradictorily positioned, helped to provoke the political rupture by refusing the state conflation of heterosexuality and citizenship, and by implicating the state itself in a range of violences. In this regard, then, and as a prelude, I would like to locate myself within this narrative.

I write as an outsider, neither Bahamian national nor citizen and thus outside the repressive reach of the Bahamian state, recognizing that the consequences of being disloyal to heterosexuality fall differently on my body than on the bodies of those criminalized lesbians in the Bahamas for whom the state has foreclosed any public expression of community. Against the state’s recent moves to reconsolidate heterosexuality, I write as an outlaw in my own country of birth. Both in Trinidad and Tobago and in the Bahamas, state laws confound lesbian identity with criminality. I
write, then, against the “myth of lesbian impunity.”16 However, I am not an outsider to the region, for feminist solidarity crosses state-imposed boundaries. And unlike the Bahamian state, which almost entirely aligns itself with the United States and foreign multinational capitalist interests, a regional feminist movement, of which Bahamian women are a part, consciously chooses links with the wider Caribbean region and with diasporic women living elsewhere.

I live in the United States of North America at a time when the U.S. state is still engaged in reinventing and redrawing its own borders, engaged in the constant creation of categories of “noncitizen,” “alien,” “immigrant,” and “foreigner.”17 Although I am a “legal” alien, I am also subject to being convicted of crimes variously defined as “lewd, unnatural, lascivious conduct; deviant sexual intercourse; gross indecency; buggery, or crimes against nature.”18 I am simultaneously writing against hegemonic discourses produced within metropolitan countries, and even within oppositional lesbian, gay, and bisexual communities that position the so-called Third World as barbaric—in contrast to American civilized democracy—even in the midst of the daily escalation of racist and homophobic violence that the state itself legitimates, the sexualization of citizenship from both secular and religious fundamentalisms, and the consolidation of heterosexism and white supremacy through population control policies that link the terms of foreign aid (read imperialism) to the presence of nuclear families.19 I write also out of the desire to challenge prevalent metropolitan impulses that explain the absence of visible lesbian and gay movements as a defect in political consciousness and maturity, using evidence of publicly organized movements in the United States as evidence of their originary status in the West and their superior political maturity. These imperial tendencies within oppositional movements have occasioned a marked undertheorization of the imbrication of the imperial and the national, of the colonial within the postmodern.20 Such theorization might enable a more relational and nuanced reading of the operation of state processes between neocolonial and advanced capitalist states around their systematic practices of heterosexualization, for clearly both states, although differently positioned, are constantly involved in the reconsolidation of borders and the repressive deployment of heteropatriarchy in domains other than the sexual.21

In what follows, I analyze the ways in which the state reinvented heteropatriarchy within the Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Act by way of two examples: first, by analyzing the literal resitution of the law of the father and of primogeniture that preserves intact the transfer of property within disrupted heterosexual marriage; and second, by looking at the minute ways in which the state works to reinvent heterosexuality by, on the one hand, creating a class of loyal heterosexual citizens and, on the other hand, by designating a class of subordinated noncitizens including lesbians, gay men, prostitutes, and people who are HIV infected, thereby reviving the myth of the apocalyptic destruction of Sodom (and now by extension the Bahamas) by an overdose band of nonprocreative noncitizens. I will show how the state actively socializes loyal heterosexual citizens into tourism, its primary strategy of economic modernization, by sexualizing them and by positioning them as commodities. I end by foregrounding the contradictory location of Bahamian feminism, since it has been forced to rely on a corrupt nationalist state that continues to draw on imperial constructions of sexuality as it re-invents itself as the savior of the people.

Domesticating Violence: Feminists Publicize the “Private”

For many women in the Bahamas, the popular feminist mobilization of the mid-1980s recalled the time three decades earlier when the women’s suffrage movement agitated for—and won—the right for all women to vote. Then, the colonial state had made ownership of property, wealth, whiteness, and masculinity the primary conditions of citizenship. In fact, owners of real property could vote more than once if they owned land in several places.22 Universal adult suffrage, however, severed the colonial links among ownership of property, colonial respectability, manliness, and rights of political representation. It conceded the right to vote to the majority of black Bahamians (both men and women), the bulk of whom were working class. Not only did the contemporary feminist movement reach back and draw on earlier strategies of political education and mobilization such as public meetings, marches, rallies, petitions, and demands for legal protection, but like its progenitor it also refused the narrow
designation of “the woman question,” choosing instead to formulate its political vision in terms of a mass-based struggle for popular justice. In general, both the movement for universal suffrage of the 1950s and the political platform of violence against women of the 1980s and 1990s were formulated in terms that implicated sexual politics in the very organization of social relations, rather than seeing it as a peripheral category of significance only to women.

The recent mobilization based on violence against women functioned as a point of convergence for many different women’s organizations. Among them were the Women’s Desk, contradictorily positioned between the state machinery and the women’s movement; lodges with an active membership anchored within an African-based spiritual cosmology; the Women’s Crisis Center; professional women’s organizations such as Zonta; church-affiliated women’s groups; and autonomous feminist groups. All of these groupings had different, often conflicting theories about the origins of violence and the most effective strategies to combat it. Nonetheless, for the majority of them violence was both defined in terms of its social history and as “offenses,” such as rape, incest, battering, and sexual harassment perpetrated by men against women. The combined work of these organizations—particularly the Women’s Desk, which used workshops and seminars to help identify “violent crimes against women”—gave collective force to a political agenda that shaped a public conscience for more than a decade.

Prior to 1981 when the Women’s Desk was created, the Women’s Crisis Center had begun to document an increased incidence of rape and incest. After a major mobilization against rape, it turned its attention to the violence of incestuous familial relations. Most acts of incest were committed against girls under ten years old. Female victims of incest outnumbered male victims by a ratio of almost ten to one. Girls as young as five and even three were being brought to hospitals where they were diagnosed with spontaneous orgasms and sexually transmitted diseases. Combined cases of physical and sexual abuse were being reported to social services at a rate of three to five cases daily. Together, these data shattered the myth of the sanctity, safety, and comfort of the matrimonial home. Two marches to “take back the night” had underscored violence on the streets, where “strangers” committed at least 25 percent of all physical and sexual abuse. In addition, a series of radio and television broadcasts sponsored by the Women’s Crisis Center challenged the media’s partial silence on the issue of physical and sexual violence perpetrated against women. When the media did report these incidents, they gave the impression that the abuses were idiosyncratically imagined and enforced or simply irrational and, therefore, extreme.

But it was the widespread occurrence of incest that prompted the Women’s Crisis Center to turn it into a major organizational focus. In addition to insisting that it be removed from the colonial penal code and treated instead as a separate crime, the first petition, which the center drafted in March 1988, demanded that the proceedings against such crimes occur in chambers; that the names of survivors not be published; that some safe refuge be provided for girls taken out of homes; that the professional reporting of sexual abuse to the police be mandatory; and that court-mandated psychological evaluation and treatment be provided for the offenders. Besides organizational endorsement from the church (which sidestepped the question of violence against women to define incest as an infraction against the Divine) and some members of the medical profession (who worried that if incest continued, family groups would be extinct by the year 2000), civic groups, lawyers, and on the order of ten thousand other Bahamians who were not organizationally affiliated but who signed petitions agreed that evidence needed to be presented to the state about pervasive sexualized violence and that the state ought to do something that neither private organizations nor individual citizens felt empowered or had the capacity to do. Indeed, the mobilization pointed to something far deeper and far more profoundly disturbing than individual criminality or individual concupiscence suggested—that is, it gave official recognition to what many Bahamians knew, or suspected to be true: that the normalization of violent sex inside and outside of the family had produced a profound existential dilemma. Something had gone terribly amiss in the human organization of things. And in “a small place” like the Bahamas such a public, mass-based move to denaturalize violence could not help but infuse the fabric of daily life with a new, albeit contentious, vocabulary on sexual politics. It chal-
lenged inherited definitions of manliness, which had historically been based on ownership—sometimes as owner of property—but more often as owner and guardian of womanhood.28

Not all segments of the movement understood violence in terms of physical and sexual abuse. Once violence was denaturalized, however, it could be linked to the imperatives of the political economy whose logic was underwritten by heteropatriarchy itself. This is precisely what DAWN aimed to do by its act of refusing the inherited legal conflation of wife and mother and arguing instead that the existing legal mandate that required wives to cohabit with their husbands and, implicitly, to bear offspring did not necessarily require motherhood,29 and thus that women, those with “husbands” and those without, were free to engage in heterosexual sex for pleasure alone, without having to satisfy the patriarchal state’s desire for biological paternity or for reproduction.30

Within the broad framework of reproductive freedom, DAWN politicized the state’s recirculation of the modernization discourses of the 1950s, which had marked women’s bodies with a recalcitrant, unruly sexuality: a sexuality that reproduced so much that it posed a threat to the “body politic,” threatening ultimately “development” and “progress.” In its public mobilizations against the introduction of Norplant and other pharmaceuticals into the Bahamas, DAWN implicated the state, organized medicine, and Planned Parenthood in the imperial forfeiture of women’s agency. The state had acquiesced to the unexamined introduction and diffusion of Norplant, an invasive birth control procedure, without women’s knowledge or consent. Thus, it helped to reinforce a metropolitan pharmaceutical ideology of the Third World as a silent, willing receptacle for the technologies of development and modernity.31 Generally, then, DAWN challenged state enforcement of compulsory motherhood and, with it, the overall colonization of citizenship and subjectivity within normative heterosexuality. The organization expanded the definition of violence against women to include ongoing state economic violence and the “silent” destruction of “citizens” and “noncitizens” alike. In this regard, DAWN aligned itself with the regional feminist movement of the Caribbean in that it understood violence against women as part of a continuum of patriarchal violences expressed in different sites. Violence within the domestic sphere, then, did not originate there but drew strength from, and at times was legitimated by, organized state economic violence, which was itself responsible for the increase in sexual violence in the home.32

It was this larger feminist vision of the historicized violences of heteropatriarchy, only partially understood as “sexual offenses,” that the state co-opted, narrowed, and brought within its juridical confines as the Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Act. The passage of this legislation became a major symbol of victory for women and for feminists. Incest, sexual harassment, and sexual assault of a spouse (almost defined as rape) were introduced as new crimes. An act of incest by an adult on a minor or dependent carried, on conviction, the possibility of life imprisonment or a minimum sentence of seven years. But there were significant changes that the movement had not intended. Only the attorney general, not the women who were the victims of incest, sexual harassment, or assault, could be relied on to present true testimony to the court. And in the text of the legislation, sexual offenses were spatially separated from domestic violence, thereby contradicting what women had demonstrated: that almost all instances of violent sex were accompanied by violent physical coercion. In addition, the urgent popular demand for professionals to report on incest and sexual abuse of minors and dependents became legally diffuse. The legislation stated the following:

Any person who a) is the parent or guardian of a minor; b) has the actual custody, charge or control of a minor; c) has the temporary custody, care, charge or control of a minor for a special purpose, as his attendant, employer or teacher, or in any other capacity; or d) is a medical practitioner, or a person registered under the Nurses and Midwives Act, and has performed a medical examination in respect of a minor, and who has reasonable grounds for believing that a sexual offense has been committed in respect of that minor, shall report the grounds for his belief to a police officer as soon as reasonably practicable.33

The penalty for the failure to report was a fine of $5,000 or imprisonment for two years, which was the same penalty for an employer who sexually harassed an employee.

But precisely because there are significant disjunctures between what women demanded and what was conceded, and precisely because women
(and not just any person) are drawn into the state’s mechanisms of surveillance in ways they had not anticipated, we can argue that the state folded its own interests into a disciplining narrative that it could later claim as evidence of its benevolent paternalism. History was being constantly retold in the media in these terms: “Women’s crisis week proclaimed by Prime Minister Linden Pindling . . . [is] aimed at increasing public awareness of family violence”; “Bahamians in forefront of sexual harassment legislation”; “MPs pass sexual offences bill to provide greater protection for women on the job. . . . [This is] an important piece of social legislation, particularly [those] sections outlawing sexual harassment on the job and domestic violence.”

Parliamentarians thus invoked a Bahamas residing at the pinnacle of constitutional evolution: “We happen to have, unlike the British, a written constitution which has embodied in it . . . certain principles with regard to freedom of conscience and rights of privacy.” These statements illustrate the state’s desire to own the popular narrative of struggle, to convert it into a hegemonic narrative of deliverance, to be seen as initiated only by itself as benign patriarch. It is crucial, therefore, that we understand the uses to which “sexual offenses” and “domestic violence” were put. How were these social and material practices converted into categories that were deployed by the state to do its own work, the work of the state?

Ensuring the Law of the Father: Domestic Violence as Proxy

The law’s new provision relating to domestic violence made it possible for any party in the marriage to apply to the supreme court for an injunction that would restrain the other party from molestation or from using violence. Nowhere in the text of the law are there definitions of domestic violence, except in a single vague reference stating that the supreme court might consider attaching a power of arrest to the injunction, in cases where the court is satisfied that “the other party has caused actual bodily harm to the applicant”; instead, there are definitions of the following: “apartment,” “child of the family,” “dwelling,” “matrimonial home,” “mortgage,” and “mortgagor.” But why is property foregrounded along with its simultaneous conflation with marriage? How is it that domestic violence came to be narrowly codified as “actual bodily harm” in contrast, presumably, to imagined or psychic harm or fear of threat? Why is there a spatial distancing in the legal narrative between “actual bodily harm” as an element of domestic violence on the one hand and incest and rape in marriage on the other? Are these not enacted within the same sphere that has been ideologically coded as the “domestic”? Are they not undertaken by the same patriarch?

The conflation of property with marriage is not coincidental. The Bahamian legislation borrowed directly from the British Domestic Violence and Matrimonial Proceedings Act of 1976 and 1983, and in this way it inherited the underlying epistemological frame that immediately codified matrimony and coverture in terms of the obligations of the “wife” and the economic and fiduciary responsibilities of the husband. In almost all instances, the discussion of marriage was accompanied by a discourse on the disposition of proprietary interests, in the event of marital rupture. In fact, this is precisely what the law intervened to adjudicate. The legislation states:

On an application for a [restraining] order under this section, the court may make such order as it thinks just and reasonable having regard to the conduct of the parties to the marriage in relation to each other and otherwise, to their respective needs and financial resources. . . . [It] may not order a party occupying the matrimonial home or any part thereof . . . to make periodical payments to the other in respect of the occupation . . . [or] impose on either party obligations as to the repair and maintenance of the matrimonial home, or the discharge of any liabilities in respect of the matrimonial home.

Given the disproportionate gendered ownership of property in favor of men and the frequency with which financial paternity is adjudicated through the courts, the legislation guarantees only a promise of financial restitution for women during moments of rupture; clearly, here, this is not about any party in a marriage.

This framework of coverture, which has an explicit operating assumption that the “wife is her husband’s charge,” together with the historic link that has been drawn between property ownership and maleness, work to fix the notion of the propertyless housewife, of woman as non-

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owner, as a wage earner, perhaps, but not the owner of wealth. It is difficult to obtain statistics on the accumulation of wealth in the Bahamas, but an analysis of household income gives at least a partial sense of where wealth might reside, as well as some sense of whether the legal injunction to the “discharge of liabilities” and the promise of financial restitution might be fulfilled. As an individual moves up the income ladder in the Bahamas, the gap demarcating gendered earning capacity becomes significantly greater. At the highest earning capacity, women’s earnings become almost insignificant: 4 percent of men earn upwards of $60,000, as opposed to just over 0.5 percent of women. In contrast, approximately 58 percent of the population earned less than $20,000 in 1988, and 30 percent of those households earned less than $10,000 annually. Women’s changing relationship to marriage is indicated by the fact that about 40 percent of all households in the Bahamas are headed by women, the mean household income of which is $12,000. And thus being female is made into an index of poverty. The earning capacity of state managers, on the other hand, places them among the highest recorded earners, in class proximity, if not in class affiliation, with the white indigenous owning class, from whom they presumably distanced themselves in the anticolonial struggle. Indeed, this was the very class that disenfranchised the black Bahamian working-class majority by using property ownership and wealth as rights to political representation.

If we were to invest these statistics with some degree of authority, we would have to conclude that households are not the primary sites for the generation of wealth, and that the more likely site is in the profit generated by multinational capital. Eighty-five cents on every tourist dollar is returned to corporations that are based abroad. Thus, we can conclude that the state’s gesture of domesticating violence speaks to its ideological support for primogeniture—a system of property inheritance and transfer that rests solidly upon, and ultimately remains with, wealthy men. Not only does the neocolonial state protect the economic interests of its own state managers, but it also protects those of the small indigenous owning class, whose interests are often eclipsed by multinational interests. If, as the state purports, the law intervenes on behalf of women, it also intervenes on its own behalf to ensure that heterosexual disruption does not shift the fiscal responsibility of the matrimonial patriarch onto that of the public patriarch. And while in the contemporary Bahamas this may be somewhat of a misplaced worry—since the state is constantly eroding its share of the social wage to favor privatized multinational economic strategies—the state continues to draw on notions of women as nonessential wage earners in order to preserve this ideological disjunction between the public and the private, and it does so at the same time that it relies on women to compensate for severe state retrenchments. In practice, many women do not earn wages at all. Of those who are unemployed, more than 61 percent are women. Economic violence is thus enacted both publicly and privately. And domestic violence legislation, ostensibly framed to protect women’s interests, now works to continue primogeniture and to ensure property transfer within a small white upper-class stratum and the more recently constituted black upper-middle class.

The ideological production of primogeniture is even more starkly exposed in examining women’s relationship to these legal “protections.” For working-class and poor women, the dissolution of property (which emerges as the major trope in the legal discussion) is of no consequence in the face of violent masculinities, for these women own neither “dwelling” nor “apartment” and they are neither “mortgager” nor mortgagee. On “domestic” day (Friday), which is the day that many working-class women appear in the magistrate’s court seeking maintenance for their “natural and legitimate” children, or injunctions against their battering partners, it is not the ownership of property that has brought them there but, at least in part, the lack of it. Indeed, their lack of property ensures that at the day’s end their cases would not have been heard, nor would the summonses they had demanded been served. For middle-class and upper-middle-class women who may own property, one of the primary questions they confront is how to disentangle themselves from the web of well-established social relationships that protect their middle-class and upper-middle-class “husbands” from being defined, or accorded the same treatment, as criminals—a category that the law has apparently reserved only for working-class women, lesbians, gay men, prostitutes, and Haitians. The proximity of these middle-class men to the central domains of power that cross party affiliation ensures legal, cultural, and gender immunity from demotion in status, from the immediate popular
scourge of working-class resentment over the disjuncture between what upper-middle-class "husbands" profess to do and what they actually do—that is, the semblance of respectability and the disproportionate rewards they inherit and/or mobilize through it. Ultimately, they are protected from shame. For most women who stand outside the legal definitions of "party to a marriage," no such claims can be made for relief from the court. Domestic violence as a legal construct—or, more accurately, women's experience of physical, sexual, and psychic violence together in a space that has been designated as private—operates as a proxy to ensure the allocation of private property within a disruptive heterosexual marriage. However, the shift in women's relationship to, and dependence on, marriage (for the last three decades the percentage of children in the Bahamas born outside of heterosexual marriage has averaged 58 percentage of all live births) might well increase the state's anxiety around questions of heterosexual middle-class respectability. Moreover, the relative inability of indigenous classes to accrue wealth would not interrupt the continued gendered accumulation of private property. Thus, state support of primogeniture, of itself as benign patriarch, and of its interest in the property relations of heterosexual marriage all become much more urgent and significantly more fragile in the face of such threats.

By offering only minor allusions to the widespread occurrence of "domestic" violence in a legislative narrative that is ostensibly dedicated to eradicating it, and by making it possible for "any party" in the marriage to be perpetrator and "victim" of that violence, the legal text authorizes and flattens the asymmetrical exercise of power within domestic relations. This apparent gender neutrality or sexual democratization by fiat conveyed in the term "any party" is only possible, of course, because the state has detached sexual assault from physical violence, the very mechanisms through which male power operates, the very ones that feminists politicized. Indeed, the text arbitrarily recodes women's experiences of violence in the domestic sphere, within the confines of a class-specific and race-specific matrimonial home, recast with fictions of harmony, order, and shades of the sacred. In so doing, it works to mask the political terrain of the immediate feminist struggle against violence, attempting now to contain a broad, popular movement within the courts in terms that are largely antithetical to that popular memory. Now, women who are beaten or raped are rendered triply suspect: as woman, as "victim," and as possible imposter (even extortionist), positioned to retrieve their legitimacy by relying on the authority of the attorney general, who alone must determine the veracity of their complaints. Women seem to carry no legitimacy of their own. The legal mandate for women to report crimes of incest and the sexual abuse of themselves and their daughters reinforces the popular-cultural sentiment that women are culpable for the sexual "lapses" in heteromasculinity. This does not take into consideration the context in which women's lives are situated, especially when telling demands the confessional mode that law itself appropriates.

To the extent that the state as ideal typical patriarch chides women for wanting more (in light of the entanglements around implementing the law), or dismisses their demands for the transformation of the mechanisms of punishment (even as women's demands are being misnamed in the service of disciplining and criminalizing womanhood, while authorizing patriarchal violence), women are forced publicly to remain focused on the court system and its skewed, narrow definitions of violence in order to legitimate their broader claims. The gesture works to place women in the role of perennial supplicant, as permanently grateful, and as guardian of the minimal.

"Domestic" violence as a legal construct, in its capacity to be placed within the boundaries of law (albeit nominally, and simultaneously recodified as the disposition of property within the matrimonial home) and to be outside of the law (in the sense of the patriarchal refusal to legislate seriously against it), aims to discipline and even to foreclose an emancipatory praxis that might demystify patriarchal power within the home. Such a praxis might imagine the domestic sphere as a space where one form of patriarchal power coagulates yet disperses to produce different kinds of violence that include wife-beating, incest, rape, and the sexual abuse of girl children and young women, because both girls and women are figured as sexual property. Thus, the spatial separation of physical abuse from sexual abuse on which the legal text insists dissolves almost instantaneously in the face of pervasive practice, for it is the same patriarch within the boundaries of the same home who disciplines and terrorizes through physical and sexual force, turning daughters into women, women into wives, and both into mothers. It seems a travesty,
The confluences within the legal narrative are by now familiar: the systematic conflation of perverted heterosexual violence, such as rape or incest, with same-sex desire, which establishes a continuum of criminality in which same-sex desire is the apotheosis of a range of offenses including murder, robbery, dishonesty, lying, rape, domestic violence, adultery, fornication, and incest. Thus constructed, the psyche of criminality is the psyche of homosexuality. Moral weight—or, more accurately, “the logic of the narrative’s discrimination”—is established through the designation of penalties that are attached to these crimes. Both “unnatural crimes” of “adult male sexual intercourse with another male,” and “adult female sexual intercourse with another female” are second only to possible life imprisonment for rape. In fact, if minimum sentencing penalties were to be enforced (seven and fourteen years on first and second convictions, respectively), these “unnatural crimes,” with sentences of twenty years upon conviction (if committed in a public place), carry the most severe penalty of all possible sexual sins and crimes. Unlike other crimes, there are no mitigating circumstances to which one could appeal for mercy from the court, or presumably from God.

During the course of parliamentary debates, state managers drew from a motley assortment of symbols to displace the reflection on heterosexuality. There were brief moments when they directed the gaze at each other, but the confrontation foreclosed debate altogether. Instead, they pondered the weightiness of their task and whether their own moral caliber permitted them to attend to this most crucial of national tasks:

The real answer [to crime] does not lie with this parliament, except in so far as the example that we as parliamentarians give by the manner in which we live our lives . . . and because the lives we live shout so loudly that nobody listens to what we say . . . it becomes imperative that once we take on the mantle of responsibility and become public servants, we recognize that every aspect of our lives is a daily mirror.

The daily lives told another story, however. Corruption was widespread: “Officials [were] taking money left and right every day from people they [were] having dealings with,” and “since most of the complaints about sexual harassment were about ministers,” state managers were not quite sure whether a certain criminal element, most often associated with the
street, or the home, had crept into parliament’s own august halls. They wondered what to do with their own “sodomites” within parliament:

Buggery as it is called in this law is an absolute offence . . . But I can’t accuse honorable members of parliament of committing criminal offences . . . the rules prevent me from doing so, even if I wanted to . . . It is reasonable to assume that this place has its share of gays, even parliament is not excluded.

And what of the police force, one might ask, whose historic mission it was to fulfill the state mandate of surveillance? Who was going to arrest the police who are that way inclined? Did the homosexual “proclivity” of not telling on each other privilege sexual loyalty above loyalty to state and nation?

You will not have any homosexual who will consent to have, or carry on homosexual activities or sodomy with another homosexual making complaints against the other one. The only way you will be able to catch a homosexual and prosecute him is if you have informants . . . Separate from that you will never get them . . .

Were criminal penalties sufficient to reverse such unnatural proclivity?

When they go to jail, do they stop being lesbians, stop being homosexuals? Does the urge disappear?

Surely a distinction ought to be made between force and consent:

Shouldn’t the lesbian who has committed this crime by forcing herself upon somebody else be treated more severely than two lesbians, who are consenting adults? There should be a distinction between fondling, for instance, and the actual act itself. The actual abominable act!

State managers pondered aloud the implicit contradiction of criminalization for homosexual parliamentarians when adulterous heterosexual ones, while immoral, had not yet been treated as criminal. They wondered whether “normal” husbands and wives performed sex acts that resembled buggery. The answer was not clear-cut, however. Did God intend heterosexual buggery?

These acts which are made offences are not exclusive. Let’s check it out and see if it is what God intended for that offence to be between husband and wife.

In the end, the parliamentarians conceded their authority to medicine and science:

The doctors and the scientists will be able to tell us whether that causes any physical problems; obviously if it did cause much physical harm it wouldn’t be carried on.

Understanding for a brief moment the extent of the power of fiat that resided in the office of the attorney general regarding questions of sexual harassment, and assuming that the attorney general would always be male, they puzzled over the conflictual operation of fiat in his hands in cases when he was the sexual harasser. As state managers noted:

Many an attorney general has committed the offence of sexual harassment.

In the end, however, these confrontations were reduced to party disagreements and, as reported in the media, rested on the (then) opposition’s objection to the state’s desire to legislate the private lives of citizens. And because these disagreements were merely cosmetic, they were not sufficient to undo the underlying confrontations on which the heterosexual imaginary insists. Thus, it seems that the law continued to provide a “civilized,” presumably neutral, objective mode of escape from a major ontological conundrum: how to accord lesbians and gay men the respect of fully embodied human beings, not reduced to a perfunctory mind/body dichotomy, in which the dismembered body could be imagined only as a dangerous sexual organ. As one state manager put it:

Just because he is a sissy does not mean he might not go to heaven . . . I don’t believe his soul is a sissy . . . It’s only the body, his sissy body.

What about protecting the constitutional rights of bodies detached from their souls, which were not human beings after all? Once homophobia began to govern the disciplinary mechanisms, it seemed to matter little to state managers whether homosexual “sin” and “crime” could
be constitutionally sanctioned, or whether homosexuality was simply anathema to it.

Overall, no other kind of critique or interrogation was necessary because the law had presumably emptied the society, emptied heterosexuality of the chaotic, the disorderly, the criminal. Both the law and heterosexuality had been sanitized to function as the repository of order, returning each to an originary moral position. Thus articulated, the law presumably satisfied its civilizing mission, functioning silently, as early British mandates had commissioned it to do, while constructing and defending its own hierarchies. The parliamentarians put it well: “The laws we pass are intended to keep us civilized.” The law can dispense only what it has been destined to do and, simultaneously, it can provide a rationale for state intervention to ensure order, in this instance, for the viability of the nation. It could provide the “moral” ground to expunge anything that threatens that viability.

The state’s self-reflection on heterosexuality, although strained, is important at another level. It is enacted from a dual gaze: from a recognition of seeing itself, coupled with the pervasive worry about how it is seen—by Bahamians and by church pundits, but more notably by those who bestowed independence. The worry is buried in the discussion of constitutionality and the prerequisites of mature, civilized governance. This is how the question was posed as the government presented its case for the passage of the Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Act:

Does the state have the right to define dimensions of sexual conduct between its citizens? Does the government have the right to enter the bedrooms of the citizens of this country?

It then provided its own (un)ambivalent response:

The government has decided that it thinks, in its wisdom, that the state has the right to define the dimensions of social and moral relationships between men and women, and to define the dimensions which are lawful and thereby . . . the dimensions which are unlawful.

But the moral difficulty resided in the historical dilemma in which both the state and the church found themselves—in the very question that the Wolfenden Commission of England had debated three decades earlier:

the relationship between the sinner and sin, between illegality and immorality, the distinction between sin and crime. As state managers urged rhetorically:

Let us preach against homosexuality and preach against lesbianism as a sin, but should we put someone into jail for what we believe is an unnatural sex act?

Conducted in parliament under the symbolically watchful eyes of the British royal pedigree, this debate on sin and crime adhered to the very discursive parameters outlined by them—the same governors who had disciplined the oversexualized, infantilized “native.” Remember that the racialized psychic impasse of colonization reflected Britain’s own fictive construction: “They cannot govern themselves.” Nationalism may have contradicted the imperial discourse that used the fictions of science to explain “native” incapacity to govern in terms of biology, but the psychic residue of colonization continued to operate to convert double consciousness into a double bind. Acting through this psychic residue, neocolonial state managers continued the policing of sexualized bodies, drawing out the colonial fiction of locating subjectivity in the body (as a way of denying it), as if the colonial masters were still looking on, as if to convey legitimate claims to being civilized. As the parliamentarians reflected:

We have to be careful that we do not give the public, who still have to understand the functioning of this independent state of ours, the wrong impression, when we know the situation is entirely otherwise. That is one thing I respect the British for . . . although I didn’t want them to dominate my country. The true fact of the matter is that the Englishman would tell you what the facts of the situation are on one side and interpret the facts as his opinion somewhere else . . . I accept that that is the constitutional position.

Not having dismantled the underlying presuppositions of British law, however, black nationalist men, now with some modicum of control over the state apparatus, continue to administer and preside over these same fictions.

Moreover, no nationalism could survive without heterosexuality—
nationalism needs it no matter how criminal, incestuous, or abusive it might be. Heterosexuality still appears more conducive to nation-building than does same-sex desire, which appears hostile to it—for women presumably cannot love themselves, love other women, and love the nation simultaneously. As one state manager, in his haste to honor divine will, explained: “One thing God did was to give man an undying urge to ensure the survival of the human race.” But what is attributed to God is also avidly embraced by the state. We still need to understand the processes through which heterosexuality is reified, as well as the kinds of mythologies that the state recirculates to ensure its ideological longevity and to ensure that the moral boundaries that mark the closet will not in any way be contravened. It is to these questions that I now turn.

The State of the Closet, or the State and the Closet

The state has always conceived of the nation as heterosexual in that it places reproduction at the heart of its impulse. The citizenship machinery is also located here, for the prerequisites of good citizenship and loyalty to the nation are simultaneously housed within the state apparatus. They are sexualized and ranked into a class of good, loyal, reproducing, heterosexual citizens, and a subordinated, marginalized class of noncitizens who, by virtue of choice and perversity, choose not to do so. But there are additional ways in which the state works through law to position the nation as heterosexual. There are three primary gestures. The first, which I discussed earlier, is the normalization of violent heterosexuality and same-sex desire. The second gesture is the organization of an internal homophobic discourse on homosexual ontology, on the nature and origins of homoeroticism and its passion and desire, which operated through a contradictory, quasi-scientific discourse to present itself as truth about character. As noted by one state manager:

You see the lesbian, the natural lesbian and the natural homosexual, God created them the way they are . . . The good doctor from Garden Hills has said that homosexual tendencies are not inherited ones.

While intimately aware of its own ignorance (“I don’t have any scientific basis for what I am saying . . . but I think I am free to project my own views . . . I checked with the speaker of the house and he thought so too”), this homophobic utilizes systems of classification that are replete with minute details of physiognomy and anatomy, which, much like colonial discourse, function to interpret important dimensions of self. The legislative hearings overflow with convoluted pronouncements such as these:

Buggery is completed on penetration and we are being very candid so that we can understand. Penetration of the anus by any member I suppose. But if you are talking about the offence of buggery, then penis. That’s it . . . And in the case of lesbianism, then it is two women who have sexual intercourse. You see what I mean . . . What I am getting at here is that in the case of buggery, what we call homosexuality, the whole sexual act itself is penetration of the anus with the penis . . . In the case of lesbianism there is no penetration necessary. Stimulation of the vulva for anything would amount to sexual intercourse . . . They are not the same thing . . .

If you have a man who stimulates the anus of another man by any means, but does not penetrate, he is not guilty of buggery. Do you see what I mean? . . . The nature of the lesbian act is different from the male homosexual act. There is no anatomical comparison possible, so [with] the whole question of the homosexual, there is no anatomical comparison.

And it is in these spaces of open meaning—open, as well, to confusion and wide interpretation and arrived at without consensus, and where strands of “evidence” are culled idiosyncratically from science, medicine, and common sense—that homophobia comes to reside.

The third strategy involved in the legal resurrection of the heterosexual is a gesture that invoked nostalgia for an idyllic Bahamas, free from Western decadent incursions—a Bahamas not peopled by lesbians and gay men. The ideological scaffolding for these three moves was assembled through the twin paradoxical strategies of spectacularization and the erasure of lesbians and gay men, which served in the end to reposition and naturalize hegemonic heterosexuality.

Erasure is most immediately visible in the nostalgic invocation of sexual “purity,” imagined within a geography and a home that only heterosexuals inhabit.
It is true, as the honorable member of St. Michael has said, that as we grew up, as we developed, we knew nothing, or very little of these learned responses, or these alternative lifestyles ... Homosexuality was something that [in the past] was extremely rare ... In our communities, when I was younger, we probably knew, and could count on one hand, those people who engaged openly in homosexuality.

But what does it mean to invoke such nostalgia and to suggest that some originary, unambivalent moment for the heterosexual founding of a Bahamian nation could be immediately recuperated and collectively made intelligible? What is the historical time frame within which this contradictory memory is summoned?

Presumably the time in which there were no lesbians and gay men in the Bahamas coincided with the era of the consolidation of colonization, the period that provided the ideological moorings for anticolonial nationalism. Here it is important to counter the mythology of sexual purity. The nineteenth century witnessed an ongoing struggle for power among different kinds of white masculinities: the wrecker, the rogue, the pirate, and the white gentleman. The white masculine rogue and wrecker actually laid the groundwork for Ernest Hemingway's twentieth-century discovery of Bimini, which signaled the symbolic and material transfer of imperialism from British to American hands. With this transfer came the installation of tourism, the major site for the commodification of black women's bodies for sexual pleasure. It was in this period of the consolidation of the colonial nation that sodomy laws were introduced as one of the potential offenses against the white, male British person. The legal elimination of the sodomite, who at the onset of colonization was the indigenous Indian, helped to anchor the belief that white European heterosexual interests were best matched with those of the colonized, and that European civilization was necessary to conquer the savage sodomite, a point to which I return in chapter 5. Whether the contemporary Bahamian state can apprehend the continuities between its own gestures of violence and erasure and those of the colonial state is as significant as the fact that both are engaged in promoting and extending the heterosexual inheritance. "I am just a normal Bahamian male," said one state manager, "and a normal Bahamian male is not homosexual."

The belief in the perils of American imperialism and homosexuality—that "the whole concept of the acceptability of homosexual behavior between consenting adults is essentially an American phenomenon" that Bahamians have adopted—means, at least in the state's view, that there is no space for indigenous agency for lesbians and gay men, who presumably become homosexual by virtue of Western influence. There is no consensus among state managers about origins. Thus, the summoning of memories around heterosexual inheritance marks an attempt to foreclose any counterhegemonic memory of an insurgent sexuality that would have to be housed outside of state structures on account of the excessive sexualization, codification, regulation, and discipline exerted upon those very bodies. Communities of lesbians in the Bahamas, who claim neither Western decadence nor the protection of the white European father, in tandem with the work of many Caribbean feminists in Suriname, Curacao, Jamaica, Grenada, and Carriacou, elaborate such a counterhegemonic memory and subsequently form the bases of community around mati work, kachapera, manroyals, and zami, which interrupt the state's continued adjudication of heterosexual inheritance. The point here is one of the paradoxes of negation: "That which a culture negates is necessarily included within it." State managers are caught in a contradictory homage to the West as the harbinger of civilization and progress, on the one hand, and as the harbinger of sexual destruction on the other. Clearly, for feminists, a continued challenge lies in constructing a contemporary vocabulary for same-sex desire beyond the point where the hegemonic and oppositional meet.

The violent erasure of insurgent sexualities in the period of "flag independence" can be linked more directly to the state's activity in re-establishing the nation as heterosexual, in ideological and material terms, imagined and practiced through patriarchy and masculinity. It has meant drawing a fictive nation as masculine and patriarchal at this historical moment when popular masculinity has generated the belief that men would have to leave the Bahamas to keep their masculinity intact. In the wake of the passage of the Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Act, popular fears surfaced of a nation of women (read lesbians), who had rendered men homeless and nationless by exercising their newly bestowed power to report coercive sex as marital rape, to report the pimps
who sexually exploit them, to report the fathers, cousins, and uncles who incest them, and to report their bosses who sexually harass or exploit them. These fears dovetail with an overall state impulse to control and criminalize women.61

The legislative fiction of the nation as masculine means reasserting the foundation of masculinity in procreation so that same-sex masculinity is positioned as femininity engaged in sex purely for satisfying desire (sissies), presumably not in the interest of the nation. And same-sex femininity is really femininity in drag—that is, woman as man-hater who defies biology, medicine, and psychiatry, who anatomically, according to state managers, cannot be compared to homosexual man, heterosexual man, or heterosexual woman. She is a species unto herself, who engages in something approximating normal sex. In the absence of a penis, she can only “stimulate the anus or the vagina or vulva of another,” purely for satiating pleasure, presumably not in the interest of the nation.

In addition, the fiction of the nation as masculine masks the mass mobilization of women for the nationalist movement. Without women, state-generated popular nationalism could not have consolidated itself. The popular, mass-based suffrage movement of the 1950s, which was the vehicle for universal suffrage, provided visibility for an emerging black nationalist state, anxious to signal to Britain its newly acquired knowledge about citizenship, rights, and loyalties, and, therefore, its capacity for self-rule.62 In a real sense, this mass movement of the 1950s was disciplined through the accession of the vote, which state managers usurped and claimed as their own accomplishment. The official narrative would record the Voting Rights Act of 1962 as among the earliest and most significant of its achievements, erasing the memory of that popular struggle and the significance of the women involved: Mother Butler, Mother Donaldson, Doris Johnson, Eugenia Luckhart, Mary Ingraham, Mable Walker, U. J. Mortimer, Gladys Bailey, Georgina Symonette, and Marge Brown—the very women for whom Marion Bethel dedicated the poem cited at the beginning of this chapter.63 Ultimately, the fiction of the nation as masculine attempts to cancel out the economic when the state relies on tourism as its primary economic strategy and when it, in turn, rests on women’s bodies, women’s sexual labor, and the economic pro-

ductivity of women’s service work in this sector to underwrite the economic viability of the nation.

The paradoxical counterpart of erasure in the consolidation of hegemonic heterosexuality is spectacularization. State managers relied heavily on biblical testimony in order to fix this specter, using reiteration and almost incessant invocation to God and to Sodom:

As the legend goes, God destroyed a whole city because of corruption. In the nineteenth chapter of Genesis, it tells how the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed because of homosexuality. This is a very important defense to me. And I am now living in the Bahamas and I would not want the country destroyed because of homosexuality.

But how did same-sex love come to find itself in Sodom and in the Bahamas? How do sexuality and geography collide? Unfortunately, neither the biblical discourse nor the state-generated discourse on the origin of homosexuality are settled on these questions. State managers were not quite clear whether “homosexual tendencies [were] inherited ones,” whether “they were born like that,” or whether “the vast majority of them were induced or enticed into that condition by succumbing to the temptation of those homosexuals who [held] high office in the country.” But they did not require answers to those questions, for the power of Sodom rested in its capacity to provide “the most important defense” for state managers, to operate as truth, despite contentious ecclesiastical debate about the impetus for destruction. Sodom requires no point of reference other than itself; it can assert authority without comparison, evidence, or parallel.64 Its power lies in its ability to distort, usurp, or foreclose other interpretative frameworks, other plausible explanations for its destruction, or other experiential dimensions of homosexuality that oppose and refuse state constructions of the criminal, presumably reinforced by biblical authority. Such formulations would take the place of an over-determined state preoccupation with what lesbians and gay men do in bed and the ostensible power of our sex in destroying the nation. The myth of Sodom sexualizes and eroticizes and, in so doing, reduces ontology to the body, a contradictory move for black state managers, a “race” people for
whom the justification for slavery presumably carried biblical weight, to premise citizenship in physiognomy, the very basis of the colonial refusal to admit agency and self-determination.

The conflation of lesbian and gay sexuality with mass destruction and with ominous, apocalyptic visions of genocide spill beyond biblical legend into other domains. For state managers, no place was safe:

I thought the number of them was growing, and I thought they were engaged in various forms of activity . . . The atmosphere at Her Majesty’s prison is conducive to homosexual activity . . . This is where you take it when you can’t have it . . . Most of them are in influential positions; they use these positions to intimidate and corrupt young boys and young girls . . . Some of them have such influential positions that they control hundreds of people, sometimes thousands.

Sexualization and destruction are complete with the prostitute’s body and the “AIDS infested body,” spreading contagion and destruction:

They have one single commodity with which they deal, that is their body . . . with that AIDS-infested body, they seek to ply their trade to get the cocaine to feed their habit.

The significance of these parliamentary discussions on sexual practices is that they invest homosexuality with the power to corrupt otherwise loyal citizens of the nation, even those who are temporarily outlaws. Criminality does not forfeit heterosexuality or heterosexual citizenship. However, criminalized homosexuality forfeits citizenship, because within homosexuality inheres the power to dissolve the family, the foundation of the nation and the nation itself. Homosexuals occupy relative rather than absolute citizenship, or rather none at all, and would now have to earn rights in order to move outside the closet and regain entry into the moral heterosexual community they have presumably contravened. Because the requirement of citizenship is the requirement to be heterosexual, the state can now create a context for establishing its own secular narrative of salvation and deliverance. According to its understanding, only an act of God—not even that of state managers who can only legislate the unenforceable (“homosexuals will never tell on each other”)—might extend a gesture of mercy toward the Bahamas to save it from sexual destruction.

In the interim, however, the state can act as savior and deliverer. It can simultaneously claim a biblical pedigree and appropriate the powerful, foundational biblical narrative of deliverance in which Moses, God’s chosen deliverer, brings the Hebrews out of bondage. The Progressive Liberal Party appropriated a version of the theme from Exodus—“This land is mine, God gave this land to me”—as a mobilizing symbol. How this symbol was put to use in the service of the economic, to position the state as heterosexual patriarch and economic savior, is the subject I explore in the discussion that follows.

“This Land Is Mine”:
Tourism as Savior and Other Fictions

Earlier, we saw how the state eroticized the dissolution of the nation and produced apocalyptic (mythic) visions of disease and mass destruction premised in prostitution and in the practice of lesbian and gay sex. Several different bodies were called on for this task: the prostitute body (with potential disease, imagined as working class, and thus a perennial threat to middle-class respectability and femininity); the sodomite body (often imagined as white European, or white Bahamian, and financially well-off, objectified, and hypersexualized); and the immoral lesbian body (simultaneously spectacularized and hidden, lying somewhere outside of the heterosexual imagination, yet a perennial threat to domestic space). All of these bodies were conjoined in the state-constructed imperative to circumscribe boundaries around the body politic (making it safe for imperialism), or establishing quarantine within it (making it safe for loyal heterosexual citizens).

The eroticization of the dissolution of the nation is made visible by the state while it masks its own role in the eroticized production of citizenship and in the commodification of the nation as broker for multinational capital interests, so much so that even the notion of the nation-state is made unstable. Whose hands hold the power of national extinction when eighty-five cents of every tourist dollar made by state-supported multinational capital reverts to those corporations in their countries of origin? Moreover, sexual “symbolic” consumption practices provide a real base for the social processes of capital accumulation from which the state
disproportionately benefits. For whom, one might ask, is it “better in the Bahamas?”

In the discussion that follows, I examine tourism against the state narrative of its economic importance to citizens in order to foreground the processes of the commodification of sexual pleasure, the production of loyal sexualized citizens who service heterosexuality, tourism, and the nation simultaneously. There are profound, contradictory implications of socializing a population as “natives” five hundred years after colonial conquest, instead of socializing them for self-determination, the promise of anticolonial nationalism.

At the outset, we need to understand the state-managed semiotic system and its generative role in the excessive production of a tourist culture through which the Bahamas is inscribed and managed. Admittedly, the system functions differently for (imperial) tourists and has different implications for Bahamians, according to their racial or gender status; different implications for prostitutes whose sexual labor marks them as potential vectors of disease; different implications for women who do “legitimate” grossly underpaid work as chambermaids and cooks, or who otherwise service white femininity through more personalized services such as hair braiding and the like. For the tourist, the state-managed system adheres to the feminization of nature through symbols of unspoiled virgin territory, waiting to be transformed and possessed by imperial heterosexual design; the evocation of a land steeped in pathos and, by extension, mystery; a rewriting of history and the renovation of the narrative of colonization as a celebratory one of mutual consent, reminiscent only of imperial travel writing and rescue narratives. For Bahamians, it involves the excessive production of a tourist culture and the almost painstaking building of an ideology that premises loyal Bahamian citizenship upon loyalty to tourism.

While state managers in the Ministry of Tourism presented Bahamians to the outside as perennially willing, hardworking people, underneath they worried about how to turn a recalcitrant population into a band of “warm and genial Bahamians,” who were indeed ready and willing to serve. Every major throne speech delivered in parliament devoted substantial time and space to the benefits and rewards of tourism. Tourism promised civilization, modernity, and progress. According to the prime minister, “tourism and resort development [would] provide the main thrust for the vast program of economic expansion that [would] take the Bahamas to First-World status . . . it [would] make the Bahamas one of the finest, world-class tourist and resort destinations.” Further, tourism promised increased spending, “Some $400m . . . between 1988 and 1992 to provide new tourist facilities and upgrade existing ones.” Tourism also promised jobs, “at least 3,000 permanent jobs in the tourist industry alone,” and it extended a special invitation to Bahamians to join the international community in the rehearsing of history: “By 1992, the 500-year anniversary of Columbus’ landing in the Bahamas, the infrastructure and accommodations would be in place in San Salvador, thereby enabling us to host the international community at that historic island.”

Was this ideology generated in order to veil the economic difficulties in tourism? At the time, there were several media reports of a “big slump in tourism,” “sluggishness,” “layoffs in the hotel industry,” and a “general decline in the volume of tourist days.” Besides, what did First World status mean in the midst of unemployment? The state responded by accelerating its appeals to tourists: “Let a Bahamian introduce you to the Bahamas.” Tourists were promised “warm and genial Bahamians,” personalized services with a host family whose “leisure, occupational or religious interests [were] similar” to theirs. Advertising brochures displayed photographs of colorfully garbed black women with flowers in their hair. In practice, however, it proved difficult for the state to mobilize the “hundreds of volunteers” promised to tourists.

State managers faced additional problems. There were rumors of “poor attitudes,” “bad service,” and downright “rudeness” on the part of Bahamians. In response to this, the ministry initiated a major smile campaign in which Bahamians were urged to remind themselves to be courteous to tourists by wearing smile buttons. But Bahamians refused to smile. So each year thereafter, the ministry was forced to devise new strategies. The state could not quite accomplish such a formidable task on its own—this promised conversion of former sullen “slaves” into a contemporary band of smiling obsequious “natives”—so the Rotary Club, linked to the local Chamber of Commerce, which blamed the government for its own economic plight, took matters into its own hands. The
Rotarians wanted Bahamians to see that “tourism affect[ed] them too.” It produced a set of bumper stickers rhetorically asking ordinary Bahamians (including the 58 percent working in the tourist industry) “What have you done for tourism today?” The expectation was that Bahamians would come to see that their interests were inextricably linked to the tourist presence and that their daily duty as Bahamians rested in an ongoing consciousness of the tourist. That consciousness had material implications as well, for in any given month the number of tourists was likely to exceed the number in the total population.

In 1990, for instance, there were 3.6 million visitors, a monthly average of 302,000 in a population of 259,000. In public television broadcasts, the Rotarians maintained that “in almost all instances the dollar start[ed] with the tourist.” They hoped that Bahamians would adopt the Rotary’s own motto of “service above self”; that they would learn to adapt “even if the tourists annoyed” them; or, at the very least, that they would stop to help tourists instead of rudely “speeding past” in their cars. Unlike the Rotarians, the prime minister assured Bahamians that they were not to blame for their own poor attitudes and the bad service they gave to tourists. The blame rested, instead, at the door of “hard-nosed, high pressure, North American management techniques,” that were introduced insensitively into an island culture.

But what were the symbols on which the state relied? A major symbol in the state-organized system for the tourist depended on the organization and creation of paradise, with all of its comforts and contents. Paradise actually exists, of course, in the form of Paradise Island, the name given to what was previously, and most unattractively, called Hog Island. Paradise exists, as well, in an obsessive preoccupation with cleanliness and order. A case in point is the set of instructions developed by the Ministry of Tourism for use by those in the Straw Market, women are the major owners and sellers. The instructions state: “The stall and its immediate surroundings must be kept clean and tidy at all times”; “Goods must be displayed on or around the said stall only and in no other unauthorized location. They may not be hung from ceilings, on louvered, or anywhere except with the expressed permission of the Ministry of Tourism.” “Only the stall owners and two other helpers will be allowed at the stalls.” “Loud and boisterous behavior, as well as the use of obscene language will not be tolerated.” As Mr. Pindling, former prime minister and minister of tourism, admonished the nation: “People visit the Bahamas to relax and have a good time and they want to do so in a peaceful and clean environment.” The labor involved in creating such peace and cleanliness thus rested squarely upon Bahamians. There should be no beggars or homeless people in and around Nassau, for they might contaminate paradise. There should be no evidence of the sordid effects of economic decay that would suggest that paradise was not paradise after all.

From the advertisements, it seems that there is something for everyone in paradise. In the words of the Ministry of Tourism: “The law now says you can cruise the Bahamas duty-free; some people have been doing it for years”: cruising grounds, care-free, tax-free, sex and capital combined. “For those who believe wild life should be preserved”: nature and sex combined. “Come to Bimini . . . only 50 miles away from Hemingway’s hideaway—home of the Hemingway championship tournament”: the provision of “world-class” facilities, which is meant European facilities, for after all, underdeveloped paradise peoples by natives is quite different from imperial paradise inhabited by the civilized.

Columbus may have first landed in San Salvador, but it is Hemingway who owns the discovery of Bimini way after nineteenth-century tourism took hold and, as the irony of imperial history would have it, twenty miles from San Salvador, the site of the origin of “New World” colonization. Hemingway occupies an important psychic space in the American literary imagination, and in the imagination of Bahamian state managers as well—for they continue to market its attractiveness on the basis of its proximity to North America (particularly the U.S. South) and to the legend of Hemingway’s discovery of Bimini. It was there that Hemingway fashioned the narratives in which he commanded the presence of black people and erased them. It was there that he perfected the practice of having black people anticipate the desires of white people, even before whites gave voice to them. It was in Bimini, then, that he developed the trope of serviceability of black people, the serviceability on which tourism is anchored. In addition, it was in Bimini that Hemingway developed his prowess for shooting sharks and fish (the basis of current championships) recirculating the traditions of white, predatory, rogish (hetero)-
masculinity, daring and powerful enough to dominate nature. And in spite of claims that Hemingway was gay, his refusal to disaffiliate from whiteness bears all the markings of imperialism, linking him to what Toni Morrison identifies as “American Aficanism.” I am not making an argument here for marrying Hemingway’s presumed homosexuality with the contemporary homosexual, even if I were able to identify such a figure. I am interested, however, in foregrounding the imperial, for in the contemporary period the erotic consumptive patterns of white gay tourism follow the same trajectory as those of white heterosexual tourism (the subject of the chapter that follows). In his faithfulness to white masculinity as rogue and pirate, in his construction of the availability of Bimini as “a blank, empty space” and his view of the “serviceability of black people,” Hemingway continued the imperial narrative that preceded him. Accordingly, nature figures as raw material for American (European) creative expansiveness, positioned to collude in phantasmic representations of black people. These rhetorical strategies are the very ones that state and private corporations utilized to market Bahamians and the Bahamas to the rest of the world.

Of course, Hemingway’s “discovery” of Bimini also becomes a powerful signifier that later inaugurates the escalated transfer of political, economic, and cultural hegemony in the region from British to U.S. hands. Researchers at the North American Commission on Latin America have found that the Caribbean is perhaps more thoroughly dominated by transnational capital than any other region of the Third World. The Caribbean hosts the branches, subsidiaries, and affiliates of more than 1,740 U.S. corporations and an additional 560 companies affiliated with other foreign firms. The Resource Center in the United States reports that more than three-quarters of all hotel rooms in the Bahamas are owned directly or indirectly by North American interests, including Playboy, Resort International Britannia Beach Hotel, Sheraton, and ITT. Approximately 13 percent of all U.S. finance-related investment abroad is located in the Bahamas. In addition, there are U.S. military installations, missile-tracking stations, the U.S. Navy and Coast Guard, and an underwater testing and evaluation center there. Given what we know about the link between militarized masculinity and the growth of heterosexual prostitution elsewhere, it would be most plausible to assume that such prostitution exists in the Bahamas as well. Yet in the legislation it is the prostitute who bears the brunt of criminalization.

The organization of this psychic syntax of availability and serviceability is disturbing, both in the production of the tourist and in the (re)production of the “native.” The mass production of the imperial tourist psyche rests in the power of an ideology that summons an entire population (particularly women) into service; for the tourist it rests in the belief that the foreign currency spent is indispensable to the operation of the economy and vital for the local population. This, of course, results in another kind of psychic occlusion, the most significant being that the organization of tourism is presented so as to erase the role of the tourist in the production of tourism itself. What is kept invisible is the penalty for violating the rules of the Straw Market as well as the extent to which the state disciplines the population to ensure that it works to make things “better in the Bahamas” for tourists and not for itself. “Tourists are almost never aware of the perceptions ‘natives’ hold about them,” Jamaica Kincaid suggests. “It never occurs to the tourist that the people who inhabit the place cannot stand you . . . that behind the closed doors they laugh at your strangeness.” Nor are tourists aware that the well-practiced rituals of dissemblance that characterize friendliness have more to do with the rituals of asymmetry and survival, or the desire to keep a job when few are available, than with fictions of “native” character.

The state’s reliance on silence and invisibility tends to erase the work that women do to make it better for tourists and worse for themselves. I am referring here to the level of superexploitation in the workforce, the reductions in household income, and the increase of women-headed households in poverty at a time of excessive tourist production of the economy. Someone has to work to make it better in the Bahamas; 58 percent of the workforce works to do so, the largest percentage of whom are women. Simply put, Bahamian women are not the beneficiaries of tourism, and the erasure of this fact makes it possible for the state to impute a willingness on the part of women in the Bahamas to be complicit in the terms of their own exploitation and erasure in the same way that it made women complicit in and responsible for (heterosexualized) violence within the home. Still, there is a contradictorily ironic state reliance on women who do sex work. Everyone knows about the links
between prostitution and the hotel and soldiering business; there is no mistake that sex is what is being sold. What inheres within this mask of "respectability" is that all self-respecting black gentlemen know the rules of the game, how to buy and sell sex and how to maintain a guarded reticence about it; yet no respectable woman can sell sex to tourists and retain respectability. It is ostensibly the "common" whore who prostitutes her labor (in the service of the nation) to make Bahamas better for the tourist. State managers rely on the dubious boundaries the sex worker is made to inhabit, the boundaries of (im)morality and (il)legality, to maintain and consolidate the silence.²³

Sexual commodification and consumption are evident not only in the earlier trope of the imperial rescue of virgin land but also in other ways that women's bodies are commodified. White-owned private capital need not be as discrete as black masculinity, which must carry the burden of respectability for the world. A set of postcards designed by Charm Kraft Inc. (printed in Ireland and distributed by Island Merchants Ltd., which owns sole rights of distributorship) markets white femininity and the availability of their sex as part of tourism. An invitation to "Come to the Bahamas where summer never ends" is accompanied by photos of semi-nude white women with the caption, "Feeling Hot, Hot, Hot... in the Bahamas." In another, "Ooh, Bahamas: want to do something besides stroll along white sand beaches, swimming in aquamarine waters? Well there's always biking." All of these advertisements are accompanied by white femininity. The cards project such a surreal quality that it is difficult to ascertain whom they represent. Do they ultimately erase the women who trade in sex? Are they so homogenized, so hypercommercialized, and so generic (they could be on beaches anywhere) that their objectification becomes cliché? It would be important to determine the extent to which this sexual commodification pertains, at least, to the homosexual male body, and whether it enters another underworld, as it were, when the gay body, tourist or indigenous, turns prostitute, either as an extension of gay culture or exploited as another exotic part of the transnational trade in sex.²⁴

Black women are also sexualized and exoticized in this tourist drama. In fact, white imperial tourism would not be complete without eroticized blackness. The script finds expression in commercial advertising and in the production of certain fetishes that are signified as "culture." Bahama Mama (Bahama Papa has been recently added to complete the heterosexual ideology of family nuclearity) is a buxom, caricatured, hypersensualized figure that can be bought in the market in the Bahamas. She can also be consumed as "hot and spicy sausage" at any "Nice and Easy" convenience store in the United States. Upon their return home, tourists can continue to be intoxicated by the Bahamas by ordering a bloody Mary with Bahama Mama—alterity as instruments of pleasure. European fantasies of colonial conquest—the exotic, the erotic, the dark, primitive dimensions of danger, dread, and desire—converge here on virgin beaches and aquamarine waters, enabled by black state managers and their white multinational counterparts. Black masculinity is deeply complicit in managing phantasmatic constructions of black femininity, satisfying white European desire for restless adventure and for what is "rare and intangible."²⁵

Ultimately, tourism as a metasystem makes it possible for the state to circumscribe boundaries around the nation while servicing imperialism. The evidence for this is that the state simultaneously reactivates the dissolution of the nation through these political economic gestures, which it ideologically recodes as natural, as (super)natural, or as savior of the people. It presented itself as economic savior of the people through tourism, legislating against "disease-infested AIDS bodies," at a time when tourism was experiencing one of its worst slumps. The Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Act has made it possible to have imprisoned (for five years) anyone with an HIV infection who has consensual sex without disclosing their HIV status. Thus, tourism is not only an economic activity but also an important ideological site for the dissolution of the nation and for the construction of a national identity fashioned from the proclivities and desires of the imperial masculine subject, the invisible subject of the legal text. It has assisted in the production of a specific cultural form dutifully chiseled from a mold produced elsewhere. Five hundred years after the Conquest, girls as young as seven work in the Straw Market, offering songs to tourists in exchange for twenty-five cents. For whom is it "better in the Bahamas?" What does it mean to resocialize a generation into the benefits of rediscovery, to rewrite the history of Bahamians as one of "pirates and princes," and to prepare one's country,
one's identity, in the service of service, to argue that “as Bahamians we have many, many personalities . . . we can be whatever you want your vacation to be”? How precisely are citizens to be socialized for self-determination and autonomy through the tropes of rediscovery? How is it tenable for black state managers to insist on independence and yet adopt strategies that are diametrically opposed to it: to socialize citizens into heterosexuality and not into self-determination?

In whose interest is heteropatriarchy reinvented? Our discussion suggests that black heteropatriarchy takes the bequeathal of white colonial masculinity very seriously, in its allegiance to the Westminster model of government, in its belief in an originary nuclear family (which is not the dominant family form in the Bahamas), and in its conscientious management of law and the reproduction of its false ontologies. The legal subject of colonial law, which black heteropatriarchy now continues to adjudicate, was neither slave nor woman. Heteropatriarchal nationalist law has neither sufficiently dislodged the major epistemic fictions constructed during colonial rule, nor has it dismantled its underlying presuppositions. Nor has the (in)visible subject of imperial law been entirely replaced, not in nationalist law, not in any of the neocolonial state’s contemporary gestures to adjudicate the imperial through law, not within the political economy. The ideal typical citizen is still premised within heterosexuality and maleness. When citizenship is premised in these terms, all of those who occupy a marginalized status—working-class and poor women, sex workers, lesbians and gay men, and those who are HIV-infected—continue to be positioned as noncitizens. Yet, a retreat from demands for state accountability will make it more possible for the state to continue to premise citizenship in masculine and heterosexual terms, and to continue to make women irrelevant to the project of nation-building.

Central also to the reinvention of heterosexuality is the state’s attempt to foreclose lesbian desire, however voyeuristically imagined by state managers, in a manner reminiscent of the detailed surreptitious sexual narratives of Britain’s nineteenth-century Purity Society. There was never an organized demand to criminalize lesbianism during the political mobilization for the passage of the Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Act. The organized feminist demand coalesced around restraining violent domestic patriarchy. Behind closed doors, however, state managers sought to keep the erotic within the boundaries of the domestic heterosexual home, disrupted as it was by wife beating, rape, and incest. If husbands now had to rely on the consent of their wives for sex, if they could no longer resort to physical and psychic violence or coercion in the matrimonial home, if, in other words, domestic patriarchy were in perennial need of restraint, then heterosexuality itself was at risk and, therefore, needed to be defended. On no account could it be relinquished. Put differently, from the state’s vantage point erotic autonomy for women could only be negotiated within the narrow confines of a disrupted heterosexual. Autonomous eroticism could only go so far: it could not leave the confines of the matrimonial bed to inhabit a space that could be entirely oppositional to it, entirely unaccountable to it, or even partially imagined outside of it. Much like the colonial master narratives in which masters could not imagine or anticipate their absence (for power cannot predict its own destruction) so, too, does heterosexuality remain unable to imagine its own absence. The state as surrogate patriarch can distance itself from violent domestic patriarchy only temporarily, however, in order to appear more progressive than it. But ultimately the state comes to the defense of the domestic patriarch in legally recoup the matrimonial bed. While women and feminist groups may make demands on the state, undoing this historical, homosocial, and ultimately homophobic bonding is a formidable task indeed.

Despite differences in their ideological and material class base, women and women’s groups appear to have derivative access, if not direct access, to state power. Small size, in this instance, facilitates fluidity and, one might argue, a certain proximity to the halls of power. But at times, fluidity entangles women in the presumably open but largely coercive web of patronage from which the state draws loyalty, especially in a context where the state is the major employer. But there is a certain duplicity attendant with coercive power: there are risks and costs embedded in women’s decisions to engage, in their decisions to craft the very terms of engagement, or in their refusals to engage at all. Shifting political alignments among women’s groups and differences among working-class women’s organizations reflect shifts in situational power, although the
power of discursive definition is not insignificant. But this power is of a
different valence than state-coagulated power, sometimes permeable, at
times coercive, at times securing its own interests on behalf of patriarchal
nation. Given the fact that the state is able to contravene almost entirely
women’s own definitions of domestic violence and of sexual and physical
abuse, and that it can construct its own narrative of heterosexual deliv-
erance, it has at least partially created a defined space where women
struggle over situational power, while the state continues to exert its
inherited power. In this sense, then, the political-economic serviceability
of working-class women in tourism is matched by women’s serviceability
in another domain: the state can now draw on women’s political mobili-
izations as evidence of its own legitimate, advanced form of political
governance, as evidence of its mature evolution, and as evidence that
democracy is working. The establishment of the Women’s Desk provides
international legitimacy for the state, which is now seen as adhering to
international conventions of progress. The links that these groups have
established make it possible for the state to permit entry only to certain
women as symbolic representatives of women’s struggles while simulta-
neously continuing to diffuse narrow definitions of femininity. Can femi-
nists rely on a patriarchal state that draws epistemic fodder from sexual-
ized, imperial, regressive symbols, while making emancipatory demands
on it? Can feminists continue to lay claims on a corrupt state? What are
the responsibilities of feminists within the state apparatus to those on the
outside? Needless to say, major challenges remain for feminist organiza-
tions, for while they have provoked significant ruptures in heteropatri-
archy that have propelled the state into working harder to reconstitute
itself, those gains have not interrupted the dominant sexualized practices
within tourism in the Bahamas.

As feminists, we have understood the meaning and limits of state
repression. Yet we need a deeper appreciation of the nuanced ways in
which heteropatriarchy is indispensable to it. As the organizing episteme
within the state, heteropatriarchy is avidly mobilized to serve many fic-
tions. Most significantly, it enables a homosocial, homophobic, and, in a
real sense, bankrupt state to position itself as patriarchal savior to
women, to citizens, to the economy, and to the nation.

At this moment in the evolution of the Bahamian state, emancipatory
feminist projects are hard pressed to continue to draw legitimacy from
the state. It seems crucial for the feminist movement to reformulate a new
vocabulary for an understanding of domestic violence, for instance, in
terms that are not located within the state’s mechanisms of surveillance.
Instead of being premised within the state’s misrepresentation of domes-
tic violence and its deployment of the law of the father, feminists would
need an emancipatory praxis to dissolve the carefully programmed di-
ensions of the survivors’ internal psychic landscape that has taught “if
mih man don’t beat me, he don’t love me”; “is so man stop”; or that a
daughter is “too womanish for she own good and it can’t have two
women living in one house”; or that more generalized, internalized
shame that begets the silent conviction that women are women’s worst
enemies and only men are women’s best friends. There is an urgent need
for an emancipatory praxis that deconstructs the power of heterosexual
lore that positions women as their own worst erotic enemies and rivals,
that might explode mothers’ inherited discomfort with the emerging,
restless sexuality of their own daughters, a sexuality that is often viewed
as threatening or anxious to usurp. We might have to speak the unspeak-
able and name the competitive heterosexuality, an unnamed homosexual
desire between mother and daughter, its complicated, as yet unspecified,
origins, and its contradictory societal sanctions. It would be an eman-
icatory praxis anchored within a desire for decolonization, simulta-
neously imagined as political, economic, psychic, discursive, and sexual.

Thus a major challenge lies in crafting interstitial spaces beyond the
hegemonic where feminism and popular mobilization can reside. It would
mean developing a feminist emancipatory project in which women can
love themselves, love women, and transform the nation simultaneously.
This would mean building within these interstices new landmarks for the
transformative power of the erotic, a meeting place where our deepest
yearnings for different kinds of freedom can take shape and find rest.
comparative, and relational, yet historically specific and grounded. And because fragmentation is both material and metaphysical, and both epistemic and ontological, these frameworks would need to be attentive to the underbelly of superiority and the psychic economies of its entrails as part of an explicitly political project. The fiction of disappearing threat as a way to eliminate opposition has left a sort of residual psychic memory, the belief that physical removal ensures that that which has been expunged will never again reappear. And it leaves this memory precisely because it confuses the metaphysical with the material, believing that material removal is, simultaneously, a metaphysical removal. The metaphysical domain, however, cannot simply, easily, or arbitrarily be reduced to the material. So what appeared earlier in my discussion as purely materialized timekeeping is in reality metaphysical. Time as metaphysical is not disciplined by neat compartmentalizations of finance, the clock, the “here and now” and the “then and there,” nor is it even governed by the “here and there” of our model of palimpsest. Time transforms and, much like the serpent, that ancient figure of metamorphosis, returns to provoke the encounter with the lost double that memory makes impossible to forget. These metaphysical questions, then, are the focus of the closing chapters of this volume.
In March 2000, the Department of Gender and Women’s Studies at Connecticut College organized an event to honor a multiracial group of women poets of distinction and to mark the twentieth anniversary of the publication of This Bridge Called My Back. “Poets on Location” was a way to bring back to memory an earlier historical moment in which the vision of a pancultural radical feminist politics seemed more vigorous and more visible in the United States. All six of the honorees had combined the search for beauty with the struggle for social justice in their life’s work. As we wrote in the program notes: “These women poets have scrutinized their lives, wrestled with their different inheritances of geography, of place; with race, class, sexuality, body, nationality and belonging, and molded it all into sources of insight and wisdom. Among them, they have lived three hundred and sixty-three years, spanning continents, threading dreams, holding visions.” Honored were Chrystos, Dionne Brand, Cherrie Moraga, Sonia Sanchez, Adrienne Rich, and Mitsuye Yamada, three of whom were original contributors to Bridge. Audre Lorde, Toni Cade Bambara, and Pat Parker joined us in spirit. Donna Kate Rushin read “The Bridge Poem” and, on the right of that honoring—nestled in between the overgrown stems of the most radiant sunflowers—she and Papusa Molina recalled the names of all thirty-two women who, as Lorde would have said it, put their pens in the full service of what
they believed. The moment was electric: songs on drums; no land to light on; the heat of fire changing the shape of things; reminiscences of the desert and of the promise of oasis; listening for something: dreaming of a common language; moving radiance to trace the truth of history. On that evening in March, a “terrible beauty” had soaked the cadence of a playful flute and solemn drums and a not-so-silent hunger of a crowd, determined to smell the taste of a past now brought present. Yearning, memory, and desire. A powerful combination.

This past commemoration is not my only memory of This Bridge Called My Back. My earliest recollections were planted fifteen years ago as I was giving birth to myself in summer 1986. I navigated the passage in the waters of Bridge, Homegirls, Cancer Journals, and Sister Outsider, yearning, without knowing, for the company of lesbian women to help me swim in those gray Maine waters on Greenings Island, which appear to be strangers to their turquoise blue-green sisters thousands of miles away. Unrelated on the surface only, for down in that abyss their currents reach for each other and fold, without the slightest tinge of resentment, into the same Atlantic, the rebellious waters of which provided the path for a more violent passage, many, many centuries but not so many centuries ago. Secrets lie in the salted bottom of these waters. In that summer of a reluctant sun, incessant waves, and what seems now like an interminably full moon, I remember how much I have forgotten of that daily awakening. Stark outlines remain, to be sure, but the more tactile reminders have receded. There are no notes in the margins of my dissertation to indicate that, as I wrote those slow pages—heavy with the weight of the costs of medicine and the disproportionate brunt that workers bore at the hands of corporate and state managers—my heart was moving to a different rhythm. But I remember how my passion and love for a woman, a distant memory of a deep and necessary transgression, folded into a joy I felt on meeting the women in Bridge for the first time—women like me, bound in a collective desire to change the world. The experience of freedom in boundary crossing. I later went in search of Zami, but when these women “who work together as friends and lovers” announced a new spelling of their name under the section “Women of Color” at New Words Bookstore in Cambridge, my fingers became tentative with a memory of the harsh sound of the word Zami in Trinidad, and the whispers about two

women whom my furtive friends and I had climbed over a fence to see, on the way home, from the convent high school I attended.

I couldn’t live Caribbean feminism on American soil, and Caribbean soil had grown infertile to the manufacture of the needs of those to its north. Caribbean people had docked one ship too many; waved one goodbye too many to women recruited for the war in Britain or for work as domestics in Canada or the United States. They had grown one banana too many, thin and small—not Chiquita, not Dole—that would turn to manure before being eaten; heard one demand too many to smile for tourists because they presumably provided one’s bread and butter. I was not in Jamaica with Sistren as they documented the rage of women who worked in the sugarcane fields (Sweet Sugar Rage), using theater to score the unequal vicissitudes of their lives; I would read only much later CAPRA’s inaugural discussions. Nor had I joined the droves of women who left the Caribbean and the metropolis with equal discontent to build the revolution in Grenada. I was not in Boston in 1979, as the bodies of black women fell, one after the other, twelve in all, at least that time—the same year the People’s Revolutionary Movement came to power in Grenada—blood that defied the insistent rains and vowed to leave its mark on the harsh concrete, on the cluttered, winding corners of dark alleys. I was not in Pine Ridge, South Dakota, as the “red blood full of those arrested, in flight” flowed, as Sioux and Lakota alike occupied Wounded Knee. Nor was I part of the “primary emergencies” confronting different women of color living on the other side of structural inequities; of violence within the false safety of home; of the unnatural disaster of imposed invisibility; of passing across the lines of color, different shades of light and brown, wearing “exhausting camouflages”; negotiating the pathologies of racism. I had missed Nairobi completely, hidden in-between the stacks in the basement of Widener Library, forced instead to go in search of my blood sisters at one of the many post-Nairobi reports back to the community, which the Boston Women’s Health Book Collective had sponsored. It was there that I met Angela Bowen for the first time; a sister traveler come to sojourn only four blocks away from where I lived in Cambridgeport. We have walked these dusty tracks before.

By the middle of the 1980s, then, when at least twenty thousand people had read Bridge and shared it with at least another twenty thousand of
their friends, I had only begun the journey, and then only in text. For me, Bridge was both anchor and promise in that I could begin to frame a lesbian feminist woman of color consciousness and, at the same time, move my living in a way that would provide the moorings for that consciousness. Neither anchor nor promise could have been imaginable without the women in Bridge, who gave themselves permission to write, to speak in tongues.4

I was not a part of the sweat and fire that birthed a woman of color politics in this country in the 1970s and 1980s. This is why I want to remember that I have been shaped by it. It is why I am indebted to the women who literally entered the fire for me, on my behalf. What I found compelling was the plain courage and determination of a bunch of different women all tied to some kind of cultural inheritance, sometimes at a cost, sometimes isolated from it, at times yearning for it. The women were my age, many younger than I, saying so much about so many different things, gesturing to me about a forgetting so deep that I had even forgotten what I had forgotten.5 I had not known that a love letter could still be a love letter, to one’s mother no less, and deal with betrayal and wounds. I read Merle Woo’s “Letter to Ma,” my mouth open and aghast—and covered, of course. After all, I could not be caught staring at something, or someone, so impolitely, with my mouth open. I couldn’t imagine speaking in this way within my family, a family in which speech was such a scarce commodity, the trade in silence the value. A system of silence, my uncle calls it. How do I come out to family? To all of my five brothers? No sister to tell. She closed her eyes for good only nine days after she had opened them, when I was just four and barely able to see the eyelet bonnet that caressed her soft face in the coffin. To my mother? For years I would think that as a lesbian I had a cosmic duty to perfect my relationship with my mother. My father, by then, had died alone without even a word to me. Months afterward, in one of those early hours before dawn, he visited me as a wraith, propped up on a walking stick. He saw my partner and me lying in bed, but said nothing. At least he knew. Later, I would see that my own hesitation about “coming out” in Trinidad was laced with the fears of a dutiful daughter’s jeopardizing middle-class respectability. Anticolonial nationalism had taught us well about heterosexual loyalty, a need so great that it reneged on its promise of self-

determination, delivering criminality instead of citizenship.6 And yet my father’s death released a different desire: a different form of loving and a new kind of politic that I found first in Bridge.

In Barbara Cameron’s “Gee You Don’t Seem Like an Indian from the Reservation,” I saw reflected much of my first-year undergraduate experience in the United States where, for the first time in my life, the majority of people around me were white. Accented, foreign, and seen as friendly in this predominantly white environment, I had not yet known that I was being compared to black students (African American was not used then) and positioned in relation to the “unjustifiably angry” black American. I had not known until the slave auction, when white male students thought they could have fun by “hiring” white women as slaves for a day. And the campus exploded. In the midst of sit-ins and teach-ins, I was forced to confront the utter silence of white students who were my friends in the sudden shift to being a stranger. It was my most tactile experience of things of which I had only read or witnessed on television. It began to instill a daily awareness in me of seeing myself as black—and equally important—to begin thinking about what white people were seeing thinking as they saw me. I had not had to negotiate the daily assignment of racial superiority and inferiority, or its most egregious costs, as I grew up in Trinidad in the midst of an apparent black majority. It would take me six more years, and a walk down the streets of Williamsburg, Virginia, with my friend Beverly Mason, to really understand how racism distorts and narrows the field and scope of vision. “Do you see how they look at us, Jacqui?” “No, no,” I replied. “You don’t see how they look at us!” “NO,” I insisted, not knowing even intuitively what I was supposed to have seen. At that time I had not felt double-consciousness. I had known of its existence from Fanon’s Black Skins, White Masks, but I had not known its taste.7

Nor had I known that the texture of identities could be made into a theory of the flesh, as Cherríe Moraga outlined. This idea echoed consistently throughout the collection and in the Combahee River Collective statement: “The most general statement of our politics at the present time would be that we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression, and see as our particular task...
the development of integrated analysis and practice based on the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives. I had to work to understand this question of the conditions of our lives, how they are shaped daily through structures, and even how to use flesh-and-blood experiences to concretize a vision. I did not know how precisely the personal was political, since I had not yet begun to fully scrutinize much of what was personal.

The mobilization of Black Power in the mid 1970s in the Anglophone Caribbean spoke to the region’s subordinate economic position in the world economy. Foreign ownership of banks, for instance, had guaranteed jobs for whites, but much of the contextual history of slavery and colonization—how we came to be there and got to be who we were—was largely missing from an educational system (nationalism notwithstanding) that asked smart students to learn the history of imperial might—British history, U.S. history and geography—and nothing of Caribbean history. All of Dickens, Shakespeare, Chaucer. None of Jean Rhys, George Lamming, Louise Bennett, Ismith Khan. It gave no clues about the connections between the operation of systems and the behaviors of people, no clues about our social sexual selves, or about how we could be agents in those selves.

The processes of colonization in Bridge wore a face different from the ones to which I had been accustomed. Articulated by Chicanas, Puertorriqueñas, and Native women, it spoke to the internal colonies of the reservations; the barrios; the labor regimes of the cotton fields of Texas; the contentious inheritance of Malintzin, and the confusion between devotion and obedience, usually cathedect onto women in the secular sphere, or otherwise collapsed into the religious figure of the Virgin Mary, who had actually accompanied me throughout my thirteen years of Catholic school. I had longed to become a nun. Chrystos had learned to walk in the history of her people; she had come to know there were “women locked in [her] joints.”

Who were my people? How does one know the stories and histories of one’s people? Where does one learn them? Who were we as Trinidadians? We did not all come on the same ship, as the national(ist) myth held. Some of us, Indian, were captured/brought under indenture to work on plantations that had been evacuated after the “end” of slavery. We held in callused hands the broken promise of return to Calcutta, Bombay, Madras—a colonial betrayal consistently pushed under the surface in order to test Indian loyalty to Trinidad, the home of forced adoption. Some of us, Chinese, were smuggled/brought in as contract laborers, also to work on sugar plantations. Some of us, black, were captured/sold from a geography so vast, the details would daunt memory to produce a forgetting so deep, we had forgotten that we had forgotten. Missing memory. Who are my people? How will I come to know the stories and histories of my people? With Chicanas and Puertorriqueñas, I shared a nonbelonging to the United States. Mirtha Quintanales was Cuban lesbian, a Caribbean lesbian. Like her, I did not belong in the United States, and while I was not Cuban, there was a family connection in my uncle’s search for Oriente, Cuba, that place where the roots of trees travel without the need of a compass to the deep forests of Mayombe, Kongo, to Dahomey, Da-ha-homéy, and to New York. Trees remember and will whisper remembrances in your ear, if you stay still and listen.

Charting the Journey

It was this sensibility of a politicized nonbelonging, with a capacity to fuel an imperative about self-determination, that persisted in the sister companion to Bridge, titled Charting the Journey—a journey that black women in Britain had undertaken by navigating a different set of waters. Immigrant waters. Colonial waters. The material substance of the “idea” of blackness, and the creation of a life in Britain, “of three to four million people and their descendants from former British colonies,” worked as both scaffold and foundation to understand British imperialism, both outside and within, as it created “strangers at home” in an “Alien Nation.” The borders of that nation had been made porous long ago, so that when black women organized one of the campaigns, “we are here because you were there,” they stood at the confluence of a set of historical forces that tied together a politics of dislocation and migration (which made ample room for solidarity with politics “at home” in Ireland, Palestine, Eritrea, Chile, Namibia, and El Salvador) with a consistent critique of state practices and of Zionism, and systematically folded it into the praxis of being black women in Britain.
In one sense, the weaving of a transnational intention into Charting the Journey is but implicit in Bridge. Charting the Journey made room for a dialect of intersecting forces, splintered, as they constituted both the local (several localities simultaneously), and the global, across inherited maps but also within them. The bridge, in its first incarnation, is an internal one, crossing into different experiences of colonization, to be sure, but it largely assumes that the very borders of the American nation are intact, an assumption that is later dislodged and reimagined as a desire to be more explicitly international. As Moraga stated in the preface to the second edition, “The impetus to forge links with women of color from every region grows more and more urgent as the numbers of recently-immigrated people of color in the U.S. grows in enormous proportions.” These metaphors of links, charts, journeys, bridges, and borders are neither idle nor incidental, however, as we come to terms with the different cartographies of feminist struggle in different parts of the world; our different histories; where they change course and how they diverge. It seems crucial that we come to terms with, and engage, that confluence of the local and the global in order not to view the transnational as merely a theoretical option. The fact that our standard of living here, indeed our very survival, is based on the raw exploitation of working-class women, white, black, and Third World in all parts of the world. Our hands are not clean. We must also come to terms with that still largely unexamined faith in the idea of America, that no matter how unbearable it is here, it is better than being anywhere, elsewhere; that slippage between Third World and third rate. We eat bananas. Buy flowers. Use salt to flavor our food. Drink sweetened coffee. Use tires for the cars we drive. Depend on state-of-the-art electronics. Wear clothes, becoming of a kind of style that has called a pretense end to modernity, to colonization. We travel. We consume and rely on multiple choice to reify consumption. All of those things that give material weight to the idea of America, and which conflate capitalism and democracy and demarcate “us” from “them.” All of those things that give ideological weight to the idea of America, producing a constitutional fear, a fear of the disappearance of the very (American) self, of the erasure of the American nation, even as the borders of America become more permeable.

What might it mean to see ourselves as “refugees of a world on fire”?

“What if we declared ourselves perpetual refugees in solidarity with all refugees”? Not citizen. Not naturalized citizen. Not immigrant. Not undocumented. Not illegal alien. Not permanent resident. Not resident alien. But refugees fleing some terrible atrocity far too threatening to engage, ejected out of the familiar into some unknown, still-to-be-revealed place. Refugees forced to create out of the raw smithy of fire a shape different from our inheritance, with no blueprints, no guarantees. Some might die in flight: Palestine, Afghanistan, Rwanda, Kongo, Bosnia, Haiti, Sierra Leone. Some live a different death: Marilyn Buck, Silvia Baraldini, Debbie Sims Africa, Leonard Peltier, Mumia Abu Jamal. Political prisoners. And women and people of color shackled, in disproportionate numbers, at the height of their creativity in a privatized system of imprisonment. Many undergo daily trials by fire: Women in Vieques, Puerto Rico, who since 1941 have lived with aerial bombardment and military maneuvers by the U.S. Navy, now suffer the effects of carcinogens in growing numbers. Some die a different death: 40,410 of us, every single year, of breast cancer in the United States. Or the continuing deaths of African Americans from HIV/AIDS, in the face of reduced rates of infection in every other racial group; and the stunning increase in HIV/AIDS-infected babies to whom immigrant women give birth. A preventable phenomenon! And a general localized violence producing rapid dispersals of people, some one hundred million, mostly women and children seeking asylum. What are the different intolerables from which we desire to flee? And how do we distinguish between those sites to which we must return and those from which we must flee entirely? What becomes of those who cannot flee, no matter how intolerable the conditions? In order to wrestle with these questions we would need to adopt, as daily practice, ways of being and of relating, modes of analyzing, and strategies of organizing in which we constantly mobilize identification and solidarity, across all borders, as key elements in the repertoire of risks we need to take to see ourselves as part of one another, even in the context of difference. We would need to disappear the idiocy of “us” and “them” and its cultural relativist underpinnings, the belief that “it could never happen to us,” so that our very consciousness would be shaped by multiple histories and events, multiple geographies, multiple identifications.

And yet, we must remember the character of fire, its paradoxical
We Have Recognized Each Other Before

Who are we as women of color at this moment in history? Where is the political movement that calls itself a woman of color movement? Who mobilizes within it? On what terms? At the original writing of Bridge, women puzzled over these questions, even as they linked themselves to the emerging politic. Mirtha Quintanales got to the heart of the paradox of naming:

Not all Third World women are “women of color”—if by this concept we mean exclusively “non-white” . . . And not all women of color are really Third World—if this term is only used in reference to underdeveloped . . . societies (especially those not allied with any superpower). Clearly then it would be difficult to justify referring to Japa-
this contemporary moment comes not only from the massive dislocations in women’s labor that have by now become a permanent feature of imperialism but also in the destabilizing effects of the underside of capitalism, which communities of color and white working-class communities disproportionately suffer. This is partly what makes it politically, emotionally, and spiritually necessary for women of color to return to their geographies of origin. In addition, the movement that gave rise to Bridge, as well as Bridge itself, may well have helped to build a passing to the particularities of women’s particular histories. It would seem that at this moment many women of color have returned home, not necessarily to the homes they once vacated but to a new temporality, a new urgency, to the cultures we had not fully known. This is partially reflected in the growth of many culturally specific grassroots organizations, in aesthetic expression, as well as in more recent anthologies.

Clearly a new moment has emerged that has produced the need for a different kind of remembering—the making of different selves. I shall not call it nationalism here, although I felt it as such as a Caribbean woman at the Black Women in the Academy conference in 1994, when a small group of African American women asserted that they needed to sort out their own identity, on their own, before considering solidarity politics. I had made home within the African American community, among and with African American women. Where was my place in this new map of identity? Who were its cartographers? To whom do I flee and where? I have grown sensitive to the taste of exclusion, which as a girl I sucked from birth. You see in my face neither sister, ally, nor friend. Only stranger. Not even in my eyes can you read your yearning, or mine. A loss so great, there is no safety in home. To whom do I flee and where? To whom do you flee? Had I not already earned the right to belong? These are some of the urgent questions I believe we must confront as women of color: How do we continue to be rooted in the particularities of our cultural homes without allegiance to the boundaries of nation-state, yet remain simultaneously committed to a collectivized politics of identification and solidarity? How do we remain committed to its different historical complexions?

There is a difference, for instance, between black consciousness (and its differentiations) and a woman of color consciousness. At the very least the latter requires collective fluency in our particular histories, an understanding of how different, gendered racisms operate, their old institutionalized link to the histories of slavery in the United States as well as their newer manifestations that partly rely on the “foreignness” of immigrants who have not been socialized into the racial/racist geographies of the United States. If we were to bring a woman of color consciousness to the period designated as Reconstruction, for instance, at the very least it would cease to be qualified as black since the racial reconfiguration of the entire West and Southwest was at stake. Some of the most severe restrictions of Native autonomy were undertaken during this time, including the 1867 Treaty of Medicine Lodge that compelled more than one hundred thousand Apache, Arapaho, Bannock, Cheyenne, Kioka, Navajo, Shoshone, and Sioux to the militarized zones of the reservation. Where is home? How do we cultivate new medicine on the forced soil of displacement to make the taste of despair unfamiliar, and therefore unwanted? Where is home? Who is family when labor means men only? In 1870, Mongolian, Chinese, and Japanese women were legislated against as prostitutes, women without “correct habits and good character,” undeserving of forming family with their male spouses who were considered good enough to lay the base of the economy. How do we frame our analyses, our politics, our sensibilities, and our being through the chasms of those different, overlapping temporalities? What are the different consequences of Republican-led militarized Reconstruction? Then and now? We are not born women of color. We become women of color. In order to become women of color, we would need to become fluent in each others’ histories, to resist and unlearn an impulse to claim first oppression, most-devastating oppression, one-of-a-kind oppression, defying comparison oppression. We would have to unlearn an impulse that allows mythologies about each other to replace knowing about one another. We would need to cultivate a way of knowing in which we direct our social, cultural, psychic, and spiritually marked attention on each other. We cannot afford to cease yearning for each others’ company.

The expression in 1994 at the Black Women in the Academy conference was but a small episode in an ongoing choreography between African Americans and Caribbean people, oftentimes captured in fiction, all the time lived in the raucous seams of a predictable meeting, the
ground for which was set at the time of that earlier Crossing. It is predictable and more pronounced at this moment, four decades after the British, for instance, "announced" independence for certain parts of the Anglophone Caribbean region. They buried their antipathy for the United States without a single gunshot, a gentleman's agreement, the perfect foil; they conceded their imperial role to America, setting the stage for global capital to operate more fully and without regard for nations, their sovereignty, or their boundaries. In keeping with its logic, capital expelled large numbers of Caribbean women and men in successive waves, the majority of whom joined the ranks of an already disgruntled proletarian class on American soil, with its own peculiar brand of racial antipathies.  

Inscribed within these social relations is a set of tendentious claims that need to be named. Caribbean people have charged African Americans with a lack of political savvy—had African Americans been vigilant enough during slavery, they would not have fallen prey to its psychic traumas; they would not have believed themselves inferior. African Americans are charged, further, with mistakenly applying American plantation slavery and institutionalized racism to all forms of black experiences. The very use of the term African American, Caribbean people believe, contains and narrows the totality of black culture. Although African Americans have been rejected by white Americans, they continue to have a deep desire to be recognized by them, seeking validation from the very group that has engineered their dismissal. The experience of racism notwithstanding, African Americans believe in America, so Caribbean people say, and in America's superiority to any other black Third World country. And the unkindest cut of all: African Americans have squandered their economic chances and refused jobs that Caribbean people are more willing to take.

African Americans have charged Caribbean people with diluting the claims they have made about racism, by willingly participating in institutions that they have systematically critiqued. While feeling themselves superior to African Americans, they allow themselves to be used in a set of wedge politics between white Americans and African Americans, aligning themselves with white structures of power (with white women in the academy, for instance) wrestling economic gains and a level of legitimacy that African Americans rarely enjoy. Caribbean people refuse to understand that racism against African Americans has been formative of the entire structure of racism in the United States, or that they, and other black people, are better served by moving toward that analysis and its attendant politics.

Not far beneath the surface of these expressions lies a mirror refracting the twin companions of colonialism and slavery, their psychic and material legacies, their very historical antecedents, which have made this contemporary meeting possible. Neither one nor the other, but rather both, mutually aiding and abetting each other. The memory of slavery has receded in the lived experience of Caribbean people; colonization has greater force. The memory of colonization has receded in the lived experience of African American people; it is slavery that has carried historical weight. There is a cost to this polarized forgetting in the kinds of psychic distortions that both thought systems have produced: the hierarchies of inferiority and superiority and their internalizations; and the interminable struggles in a gendered, racialized political economy of global capital with its intrepid mobilization of race, gender, and nation as it manages crisis after crisis in this late stage of its evolution.

Racial polarization and contradiction is the face that decolonization wears in the United States at this moment. As black people and people of color in this country, we are all living witnesses to the largely unfinished project of decolonization, some say a failed project, in the United States, Britain, the Caribbean, Asia, and Africa.

The racialized squabbles between African American and Caribbean communities are also mirrored within the academy in the struggles between postcolonial and African American studies, sometimes ethnic studies more broadly, playing out the same dominant iterations of the first arrived and the newcomer, the stepchild and the favored one, intentionally forgetting that dual operation of colonialism and imperialism against what Anne duCille calls "the academic merchandising of different difference." Since the academy operates through its own brand of colonialism and imperialism, this unfinished project of decolonization is as urgent within these intellectual projects as within the relationships among intellectuals who continue to make theory out of studied myopia.

Of course, the failure of decolonization springs from different sources.
First, the avid embrace of new structures of imperialism, such as structural adjustment, that in essence adjust economic and political violence makes it almost impossible for the bulk of the population in “former” colonies, and for working-class communities and those of color in metropolitan countries, to live with dignity. Second, there is a fierce denial on the part of the state and other institutions, including the academy, that their own contemporary practices of racialization have been shaped by their refusal to admit and confront their historical complicity in racism against indigenous people of color on these shores. Third, the fierce revival of ethnonationalisms of different kinds has frustrated solidarity projects. Part of our own unfinished work, therefore, is to remember the objective fact of these systems of power and their ability to graft themselves onto the very minute interstices of our daily lives. It means that we are all defined in some relationship to them, in some relationship to hierarchy. Neither complicity (usually cathedeted onto someone else) nor vigilance (usually reserved for ourselves) is given to any of us before the fact of our living. Both complicity and vigilance are learned in this complicated process of figuring out who we are and who we wish to become. The far more difficult question we must collectively engage is to do with the political positions (in the widest sense) that we come to practice, not merely espouse; the mutual frameworks we adopt, as we live (both consciously and unconsciously) our daily lives. No matter our countries of origin, decolonization is a project for all.

It is no longer tenable for Caribbean people to continue to seek immunity from racialized internalizations. It is no mere accident that it was Frantz Fanon of the Francophone Caribbean who formulated Black Skin, White Masks. Caribbean people of African descent may well have claimed a premature victory, and comfort in a black majority, without having sufficiently wrestled with the racial inequalities in our own countries of origin—the positions of Indians, for example, in Trinidad, which I came to understand as one of second-class citizenship only after experiencing racism in the United States. This is perhaps why sometimes we continue to reenact within Caribbean organizations in the metropolis the same dominant repetitions that position us as most targeted vis-à-vis Indians and Chinese, who are now defined as Asian, not Caribbean, whom we believe benefit more from the racial hierarchy in the United States than do we of African descent. Given the fact that this advanced capitalist colonial nation is constantly redrawing its own national borders, creating insiders and outsiders, African American claims for citizenship can no longer be undertaken as if these borders of the nation-state were fixed, or as if the borders of a mythic Africa are the only others that exist. Are there not fissures of class, skin color, shades of yellow and brown, within our respective nation/communities? Linguistic and regional differences that have created their own insiders and outsiders? At what historical moment does heterogeneity become homogeneity—that is, the moment to create an outside enemy? Neither of us as African American nor Caribbean people created those earlier conditions of colonialism and Atlantic slavery. Yet we continue to live through them in a state of selective forgetting, setting up an artificial antipathy between them in their earlier incarnation, behaving now as if they have ceased to be first cousins.

We have recognized each other before. Blood flows, making a mockery of biology, of boundaries—within individuals, within families, within neighborhoods. One drop of blood is not sufficient to mark where one line begins and the other ends. Boundaries are never discrete. We have recognized each other before: in the streets of Harlem when we believed, along with six million black people worldwide, that Garvey’s Black Star Line would sail clear to the continent above the objections of the black middle classes, who had distanced themselves from Africa and refused its proximity, believing they had arrived. Or in the heyday of Pan-Africanism when, as Baldwin elegantly framed it, “we were concerned with the immensity and variety of the experience called [black],” both by virtue of the fact of slavery and colonization, but not only because of it. Neither of these movements were entirely free from exclusions, from sexism, from the contradictions and intrigue of class and color, from xenophobia. But they kept alive an idea that, for all of its fractiousness, lent public visibility and legitimacy to our humanity. We have stood in the same lines, under the El in New York, year after year, in the period after the Second World War, some reports say, to be chosen for work as maids in white wealthy households by the “Madames Jew and Gentile” alike. We have recognized each other before. We agreed with Audre Lorde when she said that we are part of an international group of black women “taking
care of business all over the world.” We have been neighbors, living in the raucous seams of deprivation. We have healed each other’s sick; buried each other’s dead. We have become familiar with the swollen face of grief that grows large in that stubborn space between love and loss.

To be African American and exiled on the spot where one is born. To be Caribbean and exiled on foreign soil producing a longing so deep that the site of neglect is reminiscent of beauty. We have grown up metabolizing exile, feeding on its main by-products—alienation and separation. We walk these foreign caves crouched in stealth, searching for the bitter formations of betrayal and mistrust, seeking answers to who has betrayed whom. Crumpling expectations and desire into half-written notes of paper, barely legible, now lying in overstuffed baskets, never delivered. Hieroglyphic markings to an estranged lover.

Caribbean women ought to have come forward when African American women mobilized in their own defense in the midst of the attack on Anita Hill when she brought charges of sexual misconduct against Clarence Thomas. I signed the petition along with thousands of other women, knowing I was not born on U.S. soil. But it was not the time to raise objections about geographic and cultural accuracy. Our identity as Caribbean women was not the historical point to be made at that time. That ought to have been made later when Orlando Patterson claimed that had Thomas “harassed” Hill in Jamaica, it would not have been called sexual harassment. Caribbean women in the United States ought to have entered the debate then to say that Caribbean women in Jamaica and elsewhere in the Caribbean, both within and outside the context of feminist movement, had, in fact, called a politics and a culture about sexual harassment and sexual violence in the region to counteract the very behaviors in which Thomas had engaged. Instead, silence worked on us like a vise, as we bought into the figment of ourselves that Patterson had constructed, and thus indirectly supported his and Thomas’s (mis)representations of Hill, in a larger context in which, as Kimberlé Crenshaw has shown, the scales against Hill had been tipped from the very start.

What kinds of conversations do we, as black women of the diaspora, need to have that will end these “wasteful errors of recognition”? Do we know the terms of our different migrations? Each others’ work histories? Our different yearnings? What is to be the relationship with Africa in the term African American? What is to be our different relationships with Africa? On this soil? New Orleans? New York? Or reincarnated in Cuba? Brazil? Haiti? Shall we continue to read Edwidge Danticat while Haiti remains, like the Pacific, on the rim of consciousness, or enter our consciousness only in relation to continued U.S. dominance? To which genealogy of Pan-African feminism do we lay claim? Which legacy of Pan-African lesbian feminism? These conversations may well have begun. If so, we need to continue them and meet each other eye to eye, black women born in this country, black women from different parts of the continent and from different linguistic and cultural inheritances of the Caribbean, Latin America, Asia, and the Pacific who experience and define themselves as black, for there is nothing that can replace the unborrowed truths that lie at the junction of the particularity of our experiences and our confrontation with history.

“Are You Sure, Sweetheart, That You Want to Be Well?”

Women of color. Who are we now, twenty years later? Have we lived differently? Loved differently? What has become of the thinking that linked the internal colonization of women of color born here with women of color who had experienced colonization elsewhere? What has become of the women who have stayed in their countries of origin? Where are the refugees? Where does one come to consciousness as a woman of color and live it, at this moment? Have we developed a new metaphysics of political struggle? Did Bridge get us there, as Toni Cade Bambara believed? Did it coax us into the habit of listening to each other and learning each other’s ways of seeing and being? Have we made the crossing? In what shape have we reached shore? In whose company? With what in hand? Do we remember why we made the Crossing back then? Other crossings before, or since? Or had a desire to do so? Who are we now, twenty years later? Why do we need to remember?

Remembering is different from looking back. We can look back sideways and not bring things into full view. We can look back to some past perceived to be wholly retrievable in the present, or some mirage of it, a gesture of nostalgia that can give rise to fascisms of different kinds. We
live in a country that seems bent on inculcating a national will to amnesia, to excise certain pasts, particularly when a great wrong has been done. The calls for this American nation to move ahead in the wake of the presidential election of 2000 rest on forgetting. Forget intimidation at the polls and move on. Forget that citizenship is particular and does not guarantee a vote for everyone. Forget that we face the state reconsolidation of conservatism as the fragile seams of democracy come apart. Forget that law and order can be invoked so that a court can act with supreme expediency and not supreme ethics. Forget that as the media make the presidential election in the United States the only news, Palestinians continue to struggle for a homeland and Haitians continue to struggle for a democracy. Forget that in the midst of a “booming” economy, more people are hungry in New York now than they were ten years ago. Forget that capitalism does not bring democracy. “Once a great wrong has been done, it never dies. People speak the words of peace, but their hearts do not forgive. Generations perform ceremonies of reconciliation, but there is no end.” This is partly why the desire to forget does not rest only in one place.

At times, forgetting stands in for never having known or never having learned something, the difference between staying in tune with the source of our own wisdom and relying on borrowed substitutes, fleetingly fulfilling. As Audre Lorde says in the poem “Solstice”: “We forgot to water the plantain shoots / when our homes were full of borrowed meat / and our stomachs filled with the gifts of strangers / who laugh now as they pass us / because our land is barren.” But, plantain shoots are tricky because the young can choke out the mother, or the mother can choke out the young, as my mother has instructed me. How do we learn the antidote to barrenness? And it may be not so much that we had never known about keeping things fertile and watered, the ancient sources of wisdom, but that at times the forgetting is so deep that forgetting is itself part of what we have forgotten. What is so unbearable that we even forget that we have forgotten?

“The scent of memory (our own and that of strangers)” can become faint, as faint as the scent of dried roses, when things become unspeakable and unbearable, when the terms of belonging get reshuffled. This was the case in the white working-class community of Southall in London, where waves of South Asian immigration upset “origin stories.” The memory of the turbulent Crossing, some of which still lies in the silted bottom of the deep, is a site of trauma and forgetting; a site of traumatized memory, as Elizabeth Alexander has called it. Such a memory of violence and violation begets a will to forget, to forget the innards of that violation. I remember Morrison’s Beloved, whose character went to the depths of that silt. Her mother, Sethe, did not dare remember why she sent her there; she could remember only when it was safe to do so, when Paul D. returned. “The last color she remembered was the pink chips in the headstone of her baby girl.” To trust and remember. Love inspires remembering. It caused “floods and floods of blocked memories” to break when Barbara Cameron returned to the reservation after an eighteen-year absence and rediscovered herself, “walking on the Lakota earth,” looking at the “cragged faces of her grandparents.”

So much of how we remember is embodied: the scent of home; of fresh-baked bread; of newly grated coconut stewed with spice (we never called it cinnamon), nutmeg, and bay leaf from the tree (not from the bottle). Violence can also become embodied, that violation of sex and spirit. Assimilation is another kind of violation that can be embodied, assimilating alienation, one’s own as well as others. We have to be sure we want to be well. “Are you sure, sweetheart, that you want to be well?” Minnie Ranson tests Velma Henry in the opening scene of The Salt Eaters, a necessary question, “just to caution folks,” “and not waste... time.” A question that makes conscious the yearning to be healed. Conscious and practiced. Conscious and embodied. “A revolution capable of healing our wounds.” Healing wounds by touch, where touching is part of the work of decolonization. It explains why Baby Suggs, holy, took her heart—she had nothing left to make her living with, but her heart—to the Clearing, “in the heat of every Saturday,” to deliver the weekly sermon:

Here... in this here place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, / laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it. Love it hard. O my people, / they do not love your hands. Those they only use, tie, bind, chop off / and leave empty. Love your hands! Love them. Raise them up and kiss / them. Touch others with them, pat them together, stroke them on / your face ’cause they don’t love that either. You got to love it... Out yonder, hear me, they do not love your
uncooched / and straight. So love your neck; put a hand on it, grace it, stroke it and hold it up.65

Practicing again and again the ways in which we want to be well.

Women don't want to forget in the pages of Bridge. Barbara Cameron "will not forget Buffalo Manhattan Hat and Mani."66 "When some lonely half-remembered place is reawakened in a sweat, Valerio remembers a past, a time before, before colonization."67 What brings us back to remembrance is both individual and collective; both intentional and an act of surrender; both remembering desire and remembering how it works.68 Daring to recognize each other again and again in a context that seems bent on making strangers of us all. Can we intentionally remember, all the time, as a way of never forgetting, all of us, building an archeology of living memory, which has less to do with living in the past, invoking a past, or excising it, and more to do with our relationship to Time and its purpose? There is a difference between remembering when—the nostalgic yearning for some return—and a living memory that enables us to remember what was contained in Bridge and what could not be contained within it or by it. What did it make possible? What else did we need? All are part of this living memory, of moments, of imaginings, which have never ended. And they will never end so long as we continue to dare reyearning for each other. There is a writing exercise that Natalie Goldberg, author of Thunder and Lightning, has popularized. For ten minutes, or some other designated time, the exercise participant is asked to write uninterrupted, beginning with "I remember," so as to bring to the present all things remembered. The exercise is then reversed with its supposed opposite: "I don't remember." As one participant negotiated the underbelly of her recollections, she observed, "It scares me that I remember what I don't remember."69

For me, remembering Bridge is a way of remembering myself, for even as I write I am aware that memory is not a pure act of access. I had not imagined, when I began Remembering This Bridge and named it after writing only three sentences, that it would require such excavation, such a rememory of deep forgettings, of feeding hungry ghosts.70 As I bemoaned the travails of this writing, my friend Chandan posed his version of the question with which Minnie Ranson confronted Vilma Henry:

“What archaeologies have you undertaken, Jacqui?” “And I had promised myself,” I continued by evading his question, “that I would begin to write in a different voice. But it is excruciating to keep that promise in the midst of impending deadlines.” “You know, Jacqui,” Chandan offered, “sometimes we can only authenticate our voice when we are up against a wall; if not, we are only an impostor in a new language, speaking in the name of populism.” Authenticating a voice comes through the rediscov-ery of the underbelly, literally unearthing and piecing together the fragmented members of existence.

Remembering the unrelenting vision of Bridge in the multiple ways that remembering occurs is crucial in these times. It is a generous vision that was gifted two decades ago. And I want to insist on its generosity, for in the midst of uncovering the painful fault lines of homophobia, culture, and class within different communities of belonging, and advancing critiques of racism within the women's movement, it did not relinquish a vision of interdependence, of interbeing, if you will. It was not a transcendent vision, but one that was rooted in transforming the mundane-ness of lived experience, the very ground on which violence finds fodder. Vision can only be as effective and as sturdy as our determination to practice. Novelist Toni Cade Bambara and interviewer Kalamu Ya Salaam were discussing a call Bambara made in The Salt Eaters through the Seven Sisters, a multicultural, multimedia arts troupe, a call to unite our wrath, our vision, our powers.

**KALAMU:** “Do you think that fiction is the most effective way to do this?”

**TONI:** “No. The most effective way to do it, is to do it!”71

It is the daily practice that will bring about the necessary shifts in perception that make change possible. Vision helps us to remember why we do the work. Practice is the how; it makes the change and grounds the work. A reversal of the inherited relationship between theory and practice, between how we think and what we do, the heart of engaged action. It is this that engages us at the deepest, most spiritual level of meaning in our lives. It is how we constitute our humanity.
El Mundo Zurdo and the Ample Space of the Erotic

If the gun and the cross have been used as instruments of oppression, we must learn to use them as instruments of liberation.
—Cherríe Moraga, Loving in the War Years

And yet to act is not enough. Many of us are learning to sit perfectly still, to sense the presence of the Soul and commune with Her. We are beginning to realize that we are not wholly at the mercy of circumstance... We have come to realize we are not alone in our struggles, nor separate, nor autonomous, but that we... are connected and interdependent.—Gloria Anzaldúa, "Refugees of a World on Fire"

The dichotomy between the spiritual and the political is false resulting from an incomplete attention to our erotic knowledge, for the bridge which connects them is formed by the erotic, the sensual, those physical, emotional and psychic expressions of what is deepest and strongest and richest within each of us being shared: the passion of love in its deepest meaning.—Audre Lorde, "The Uses of the Erotic"

Between 1997 and 2000 I participated in a series of meetings and discussions among a group of women and men—lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and heterosexual, of different nationalities and ages and with different cultural and spiritual affinities—to learn what sex and spirit (what sexuality and spirituality taken together) might tell us about who we are. As a group, early in this work we found that many “secular” activists were reluctant to come out spiritually. Some of that reluctance came from the historical ways in which the Judeo-Christian church operated as an instrument of colonization: enforcing heterosexuality and the nuclear family as the moral norm; attempting to erase the connection between sexuality and land (in Hawai‘i, for instance); splitting apart mind, body, and spirit into the particularities of (white) manliness, colonized “other,” and (Christian) religion, respectively. A more contemporary religious Right had mobilized globally to advance an antihuman agenda, mistakenly attributing its authority to God. But this dominant mythologized collapse of spirituality into religion was also operating among us, another indication of the subtle internalization of dominance. We found that we had a great deal of practice coming out politically, but many of us were timid about coming out spiritually as radical political people. It seemed that in combining the two we were on the brink of committing heresy of a different kind.

There was another kind of shared internalization that we identified as we moved to unite these powerful forces of sex and the spirit that belong together. As we grappled with the inherited division, we understood that it is sustained in part by an ideology that has steeped sex and sexuality in sin, shame and a general disavowal of the sacred. At the same time, this very ideology has attempted to contain all of what is of spirit and spiritual within the structure of religion, all with predictably devastating consequences. To this process of fragmentation we gave the name colonization, usually understood as a set of exploitative practices in political, ideological and aesthetic terms, but also linked in minute ways to dualistic and hierarchical thinking: divisions among mind, body, spirit; between sacred and secular, male and female, heterosexual and homosexual; in class divisions; and in divisions between the erotic and the Divine. We saw its operation, as well, in creating singular thinking: the mistaken notion that only one kind of justice work could lead to freedom. Presumably, organizing for a decent and fair living wage is not connected to antiracism work and to antihomophobia work. Such thinking always premised in negation, often translated into singular explanations for oppression. Breaking down these divisions and hierarchies, indeed making ourselves whole again, became the work that occupied us throughout our entire journey.

Since colonization has produced fragmentation and dismemberment at both the material and psychic levels, the work of decolonization has to make room for the deep yearning for wholeness, often expressed as a yearning to belong, a yearning that is both material and existential, both psychic and physical, and which, when satisfied, can subvert and ultimately displace the pain of dismemberment. Anticolonial and Left liberation movements have not understood this sufficiently in their psychology of liberation and, as a result, we have not made ample political room for it. This yearning to belong is not to be confined only to membership or citizenship in community, political movement, nation, group, or be-
longing to a family, however constituted, although important. Indeed, we would not have come to the various political movements in which we have been engaged, with the intense passion we have, had it not been for this yearning. With the help of Bernice Johnson Reagon, we recognized this yearning as a desire to reproduce home in “coalitions.” As a consequence, our political movements were being made to bear too much—too much of a longing for sameness as home, the limits of nationalism.79 But we needed to wrestle with that desire for home a bit longer, so as to examine a bit more closely the source of that yearning that we wanted to embed in the very metaphysics of political struggle, the very metaphysics of life. The source of that yearning is the deep knowing that we are in fact interdependent—neither separate nor autonomous. As human beings, we have a sacred connection to one another, and this is why enforced separations wreak havoc on our Souls. There is great danger, then, in living lives of segregation. Racial segregation. Segregation in politics. Segregated frameworks. Segregated and compartmentalized selves. What we have devised as an oppositional politics has been necessary, but it will never sustain us, for while it may give us some temporary gains (which become more ephemeral the greater the threat, which is not a reason not to fight), it can never ultimately feed that deep place within us: that space of the erotic, that space of the Soul, that space of the Divine.

“To sense the presence of the Soul and commune with her” is the job that excavation requires. It is a job of changing the self. And it is a job. It requires work. It requires practice. It cannot be someone else’s excavation that we easily appropriate as our own and use as our own. It cannot be done as spectator or ventriloquist. It requires the work of each and every one of us, to unearth this desire to belong to the self in community, as part of a radical project that is not to be confused with a preoccupation with the self. The one has to do with a radical self-possession, the other with self-preoccupation on which individualism thrives. Self-determination is both an individual and collective project.

There is an inevitability (which is not the same as passivity) in this movement toward wholeness, this work of the spirit and the journey of the Soul in its vocation to reunite us with the erotic and the Divine. Whether we want it or not, it will occur. The question is whether we dare intentionally to undertake this task of recognition as self-reflexive human beings, open at the very core to a foundational truth: we are connected to the Divine through our connections with each other. Yet, no one comes to consciousness alone, in isolation, only for herself, or passively. It is here we need a verb, the verb conscientize, which Paulo Freire used to underscore the fact that shifts in consciousness happen through active processes of practice and reflection. Of necessity, they occur in community. We must constantly envision this as we devise ways to practice the building of communities (not sameness) over and over again. We can continue to hold onto a consciousness of our different locations, our understanding of the simultaneous ways in which dominance shapes our lives and, at the same time, nurture the erotic as that place of our Divine connection, which can in turn transform the ways we relate to one another.

When we have failed at solidarity work we often retreat, struggling to convince ourselves that this is indeed the work we have been called on to do. The fact of the matter is that there is no other work but the work of creating and re-creating ourselves within the context of community. Simply put, there is no other work. It took five hundred years, at least in this hemisphere, to solidify the division of things that belong together. But it need not take us another five hundred years to move ourselves out of this existential impasse. Spirit work does not conform to the dictates of human time, but it needs our courage, revolutionary patience, and intentional shifts in consciousness so that we can anchor the struggle for social justice within the ample space of the erotic.74

One of the earliest lessons we have all learned from feminism is that the personal is political: the insight that some of the most infinitesimal details of our lives are shaped by ideological and political forces much larger than our individual selves. In the midst of the pitched battle in New York to transform the curriculum at the New School University, I came to appreciate another shade of this insight as the School’s administration sought to make me the entire political struggle. It was with a great deal of help and a deep level of self-scrutiny that I came to understand how a single individual could ignite a political struggle but ultimately had to be subsumed under it, simply be within it, if that struggle were to be successful. This interior work is indispensable in this journey to wholeness. In this conscious attention to the weaving of sex and Spirit that we undertook in the taskforce, and the spiritual political work I have undertaken in
my life, I have come to see that an inside change in the personal is not entirely complete if it remains at the level of a shift in ideas, or even in practice, although both are necessary. Desire is expressed most fundamentally where change takes place, at the root of our very Souls, the base of the internal source of our power, the internal source of our yearning—the yearning and power we have been taught so much to fear. So when Gloria Anzaldúa asks us to commune with the Soul, or Audre Lorde urges us to find something that our Soul craves and do it, our first task is to become attentive to the desire of the Soul and to place ourselves in its service. It is a necessary and delicate undertaking in Spirit-based politics, this joining of the sacred and secular—to have, as Sharon Day states, “the ethics of spirituality infuse daily life.” It requires intention, a revolutionary patience, courage, and above all humility. Once this work begins, the temptation to cross narrow boundaries becomes irresistible; connections, once invisible, come into full view. And I am assured that when the practice begins to bear fruit, the yearning itself is transformed.

There is an old man who has etched himself into an ancient slab of rock deposited in a park at the end of my street in Harlem. His face comes into view only from afar, with distance, with perspective. Close up, he simply folds himself back into the stones, disappearing or perhaps pretending not to be there. When I do not see him, does it mean he does not exist? Unlike the figures of Davis, Lee, and Jackson that are patiently chiseled into a mountain of stone in Georgia and pasted onto the tourist bus stationed opposite the park—figures that announce themselves from far and near—this old man works in stealth, through years of weather, bringing himself into my field of vision only by the angle of my gaze and the distance from which I stand. Although I lived for seven years on this same street that presumably goes in one direction, a one-way street leading directly to this slab of stone, I had never seen him before. Yet, he is there. The challenge for me is to see him in the present and to continue to know that he is there even when I cannot see him. Rocks hold memory.

Land holds memory. This is why the land and live oak trees rooted in the Georgia Sea Islands of the southern United States whisper in your ear when you allow yourselves to listen. The Georgia Sea Islands. The Ibo of Nigeria were captured and brought to these Islands. When they arrived and saw the conditions of their capture and homelessness, they turned around and walked to “wherever they was going that day.” The place, bearing the name Ibo Landing, holds the memory of that moment, which still lives in the heart of every Gullah child, and in the solid trunks of the live oaks. The live oaks will tell us these stories when we listen. And the mountains of Hawai’i will echo the ancient Kanaka Maoli belief that they are stewards of the land, eyes of the land, children of the land. Deep within their undulating folds, which drape themselves with the ease of velvet around the opulent embrace of mist and cloud, we will feel the ancient power of land to heal. Ocean will reveal the secrets that lie at the bottom of its silted deep. She requires no name before her. Not Pacific, not Atlantic, not Arctic, not Southern, not Indian. She is simply her watery translucent self, reaching without need of compass for her sisters whomever and wherever they are. She will call you by your ancient name, and you will answer because you will not have forgotten. Water always remembers.

Coda: Tribute to Gloria Anzaldúa . . .
Because Death Ups the Stakes

How many more must die before we internalize the existential message of our fundamental interdependence—any disease of one is a disease of the collectivity; any alienation from self is alienation from the collectivity? Your death was tragic, Gloria, not only because you died alone, but we relied on you as artist to provide our sanity, and we kept asking for more while you wrestled with terror day and night—the reality, as you said, of having a disease that could cost you your feet, your eyes, your creativity, the life of the writer you worked so hard to build . . . life itself. Indeed, we demanded more. It's quite a pact to make, to demand without accountability. Yet we demanded more not knowing that giving and receiving are part of the same pendulum, that having received increases our responsibility to return the gift. You had no health insurance. You who wrote the borderlands that we appropriate to signal how “queer” we were. There is no romance or seduction to living on the borders. You taught us about the need to shift consciousness, to build common ground, to move from the militarized zone to the roundtable, to view the artist as healer,
without separation. You taught us that our politics would not be effective without a spiritualized consciousness. Conocimiento. You taught us about Divine intelligence. But we consumed without digesting. You taught us; the question remains, What did we learn?

I did not know you, Gloria, although we worked together. I have only now learned to sense you through the grief of my beloved for whom you provided anchor. What might black women say to Chicana women to help ease the pain of this loss? We want to mourn with you the passing of your sister warrior. Your loss of her gentle footsteps is also ours. We feel your loss. We hold your pain. We did not accompany you to those fields in Texas as you faced the noonday brunt of the sun. I myself never paid attention to your diabetes. I never looked at the statistics before now: diabetes is the fifth-deadliest disease in the United States. Over nine million women live with this disease, and Latina, African American, Native American, Asian, and Pacific Islander women are two to four times more likely to have this disease than white women.78

What might black women say to Chicana women? We grieve with you and we want ceremonies of reconciliation that link our goddesses and gods to each other, patterning new codices of forgiveness and triumph, sisters of the cornsilk and sisters of yam as your comadre Cherrie Moraga put it.79 We petition the basket weavers to dream a new pattern of our knowing and loving that binds the permanent impermanence of our footprints in the sand.

One: The Memory of Mojuba: A Spiritual Invocation to Remember

For more than six of my preteen years, I crossed the intersections of Mojuba in St. James during clandestine visits to friends or the more legitimate attendance at the Catholic Church, St. Mary’s, not knowing that from Trinidad, Mojuba reached back to a lineage for which there were no signs, no visible ones at least. “Meet me at Mojuba Crossroads.” No one could plead ignorance as the excuse for arriving late since everyone knew where it was—Mojuba, not far from Bengal Street. There was no apparent need to demarcate itself from the other streets from which the crossroad drew its name. Mojuba simply claimed the entire space of the intersection, and we crossed it over and over again without even a hint of knowing its secret or needing to know from whence it came. It took thirty years and another set of crossroads to point me to a path straight to a basement in the Bronx, New York, where, at a home that assumed the bearings of a spiritual workplace, I learned the lineage of Mojuba in a community of practitioners—Puertorriqueño/as, Cubano/as, Trinidadian, African American, Salvadorean, Brazilian—living an ancient memory in a city overcrowded with errant spirits, teeming with yearning not easily satisfied in towering buildings or in slabs of concrete.
A Spiritual Invocation to Remember

Omi Tutu / Cool Water / Freshen the Road / Freshen this House / Death is no more / Sickness is no more / Loss is no more / Obstacle is no more / To be overwhelmed is no more / The immortality of our ancestors / I Salute God / I salute all Oriṣa / I Salute all the mothers of Oriṣa, fathers of Oriṣa who are citizens of Heaven / Homage to the Sun, the Moon, the Earth / I salute all ancestors who sit at the feet of Olodumare who have no desire to return to Earth / I salute all my ancestors whose blood run in my veins.

Mojuba. I greet you.

Mojuba: an expansive memory refusing to be housed in any single place, bound by the limits of time, enclosed within the outlines of a map, encased in the physicality of body, or imprisoned as exhibit in a museum. A refusal that takes its inheritance from the Crossing, which earlier prophets had been forced to undertake from the overcrowded passageways in a place called Gorée, the door of no return, still packed centuries later with the scent of jostled grief so thick that no passage of human time could absorb it. It hangs there, this grief, until today, an indelible imprint of the Crossing, fastened by a pool of tears below, constantly replenished by the tremors of human living.

Two: The Crossing

We lay in a dungeon. Many more of us lying in death, 21 times 21 times 21 and more. Crossing water on backs with sores and bellies empty except for those filled with air or swollen with child. Lying in rot and moon blood with skinless ankles and wrists, black skins turned yellow from chains acting like saws on our fearful flesh. Rocking. Wrecked bodies numbed from pain. Rocking the dark noise, the loud silence of trembling hands and feet and whole bodies turned cold and numb from shock and heat and longing for the rhythm of daily living. Rocking. Crossing that line where humans force the sea and sky to meet so that their vastness would seem more bearable. Back then we crossed the horizon over and over again. Crossing the vortex of thick watery salt greenish gray blush green turquoise spew of foam, only that time there were more of us on water. Some refused the Crossing, deciding instead to use their arms as wings, thousands of winged creatures flying free. Others simply kept each others company at the bottom of the Sea, becoming messengers from the spirits of the deep whose Souls had plunged there from the voyage before and the one before that. O Yeµaya, Achaba Peligrossissima / Haunting Sweet Verbena / Wise one / Hiding your age deep within the soft fold of waves, translucent / Amongst your treasures rest the captives shuffled through the door of no return / No longer imprisoned / You have restored their wings. No one knows the mysteries at the bottom of the Ocean. Crossing the line, the Kulanja line.

Once they crossed, they graced all things with the wisdom of Ashé. Wind. Sky. Earth. Fire. Thunder. They deposited it in otanes, stones, in the mossy underground of treacherous caves; in the caress of elegant waterfalls; in forests imposing enough to assume the name Mountain; in water salt and sweet to taste the opposite in things. In all winged creatures including the butterfly. All four-legged. And two-legged. And those who slithered on land, the color of coral, while their sympathies lived in Sky. And with those yet to be born. For once they intuited that the human will was long intent on capture, they all conspired to rest their Truth everywhere. And in the simplest of things. Like a raindrop. And therefore the most beautiful of things, so that Truth and Beauty would not be strangers to one another, but would rely on the other to guide the footprints of the displaced, and those who chose to remain put; of those only once removed and those who had journeyed far in the mistaken belief that books were the dwelling place of wisdom; those who thought that the lure of concrete would replace or satisfy the call of the forest; those who believed that grace was a preoccupation of the innocent and the desire to belong a craving of the weak. Being everywhere was the only way, they reasoned, to evade capture and to ensure the permanence of change—one of the Truths of the Ocean.

Not only humans made the Crossing, traveling only in one direction through Ocean given the name Atlantic. Grief traveled as well.

The dead do not like to be forgotten, especially those whose lives had come to a violent end and had been stacked sometimes ten high in a set of mass graves, the head of one thrown in with the body of another, male becoming female, female becoming male, their payment for building the best stone fortress that hugged a steep hill, reputed to be the most well-
secured in the Caribbean. Secure for the British, that is, who buried their antipathy for the French for one brief moment and killed off three hundred Indians in one day in the hope of proving ownership of the country. For months after the massacre, Indian blood usurped the place of mud and ran into the narrow channel that led to the Caribbean Sea, but not before depositing layers of bloody silt thick with suffering at the bottom of the river’s floor. The bloody river took the story to the Sea, the Wide Sargasso Sea, which absorbed the grief, folding it into its turquoise jade until it assumed the color of angered sorrow. It spun into a vortex, a current in the Caribbean. The Trade Winds. North, pushing clear to Guineau, close to the shores of the Old Kongo, Kingdom of the Bantu. Cabinda. Down, down Benguela Angola. Forced upward again. Dahomey. Trade Winds South. Brazil. Nago. Candomblé Jé. Jé. Swept into the Cape Horn up to Peru, Colombia, Ufaina. Spitting. Descending in the drift of the West Winding, climbing just underneath the dividing line that rests in the imagination. Equator. Kalunga. It joined the grief of those who had died emaciated, gasping for air in the two-storied house locked shut for months by the man who believed he could own flesh. Pain transforming their fingers into twisted scalpels that carved hieroglyphs on the walls. Reuniting with the current in Australia. Pacific. New Zealand. The Bone People. Washing over the Marrawuti. Sea Eagle. Dreamtime. Choosing a different route: Shanti, Bahini to India. Kala Pani. East? West? Monsoon. Mozambique. The bloodied vortex of angered sorrow plotting its way. Kuro Shio. The Pacific. Hawai’i Ascending. Arctic. Norwegian Current. Labrador. All the time announcing, spitting, grieving, as it washed itself up on different shores. The dead do not like to be forgotten.


Crossings are never undertaken all at once, and never once and for all.

Three: Cosmologies

African-based cosmological systems are complex manifestations of the geographies of crossing and dislocation. They are at the same time manifestations of locatedness, rootedness, and belonging that map individual and collective relationships to the Divine. The complexity derives in part from the fact that the Sacred energies that accompanied the millions who had been captured and sold for more than four centuries had indeed inhabited a vast geography. But they had also traveled internally as a result of wars of conquest, in the name of religion, and for the sake of capturing people and owning territory. Even before the depletion of Yorubaland in its bound “cargo” headed to Cuba, Haiti, Brazil, Trinidad, and points in between, art historian Robert Farriss Thompson tells us, “the deities of the Yoruba had already made their presence felt in Dahomey over hundreds of years. Yoruba deities were served under different manifestations in Allada before 1659 . . . transforming them into Ewe and Fon local spirits.” The pantheon of inheritance in what would come to be called the African diaspora collected itself on new soil through a combination of conditions: the terrain from which the trade drew its ambit; the specific and already transformed spiritual sensibility—the African provenance of belief structures and practices; the local pantheons that were encountered and transformed with successive waves of people; the degree of spatial autonomy that enslaved populations fought for and retained; and Osanyin, the ecology, a flora and fauna already inhabited by the Sacred. By the time these energies began to plant themselves on the soil of the Americas, bringing different consciousnesses of culture, language, and region, they had long undergone various journeys and transformations.

In general terms, the cosmological systems of Kongo Angola deposited themselves in the minkisi, medicines, of Kongo Angola systems in Brazil; in the Petro Lema of Haiti; the Palo Mayombe of Cuba; the Spiritual Baptist of Trinidad, St. Vincent, and Grenada, while they fused into the Winti system in Suriname. Those of the territories of West Africa, Dahomey, Yorubaland, Ghana, and Benin brought a varied and related spiritual lineage observed through Lwa Guinée, Spirits of Haiti, Lucumi of Cuba (more widely known as Santería), Shango of Trinidad, the Oríxás, minkisi (medicines), and Vodun of Candomblé in Brazil, the Winti system of Suriname, and Vodou of New Orleans and the southern United States. Four centuries later, destined for the teeming metropoles of North America—New York, Boston, Chicago—these systems effected another migration, another cosmic meeting, this time forced underground to inhabit the most curious of dwelling places: the basement of immigrant homes. But
the naming of place is somewhat misleading in light of the omnipresence of the Sacred, since naming implies that the Sacred has been cordoned off, managed, and made partial to a chosen geography, much like the invocation to God to bless America, while presumably leaving the rest of the world unblessed.

Migrations are one indication that these cosmological systems are marked by anything but stasis. Some energies have been fused; others apparently atrophy in certain places while becoming dominant in others. Yemayá, the goddess of the Ocean seems to have “disappeared” in Haiti, yet homage to Agwe the sea god and Mambo La Sirena, the mermaid sister of the two Ezilis, Freda Dahomey and Dantó, attest to the sustained metaphysical significance of water in both systems. Yemayá reigns in Candomblé and Lucumi, assuming the position that had been accorded her River sister Oshún in Yorubaland, the recognition that it would have been impossible to have survived the Crossing without her. Often there are multiple avatars of the same Sacred force, while collectivities develop different relationships to the same multilayered entity as Sacred energies engage the different inventions of the social. Not paradoxically within Vodou, Lucumi, and Candomblé is retained the manifest energies of Eshu/Papa Legba/Elegba/Elegbara, guardian of Divine energy and communication, guardian of the crossroads, the force that makes things happen, the codification of potentiality and its indispensable tool, choice, which is multiplied at the crossroads—the place where judicious vigilance needs always to be exercised. Still, who is remembered—and how—is continually being transformed through a web of interpretive systems that ground meaning and imagination in principles that are ancient with an apparent placement in a different time. Yet, both the boundaries of those principles as well as what lies within are constantly being transformed in the process of work in the present; collapsing, ultimately, the rigid demarcation of the prescriptive past, present, and future of linear time. Both change and changelessness, then, are constant.

Housed in the memory of those enslaved, yet not circumscribed by it, these Sacred energies made the Crossing. But they did not require the Crossing in order to express beingness. They required embodied beings and all things to come into sentience, but they did not require the Cross-
conditions do a people remember? Do spiritual practices atrophy? Or do they move underground, assuming a different form? What is the threat that certain memory poses?

What once seemed a legitimate set of questions to understand the plantation figure Thisbe were entirely inadequate to the task of knowing Kitsimba, who was waiting to be discovered. I first had to confront the limits of the methodology I had devised to know her. While legal and missionary documents gave me proximate access to daily life, they were unable to convey the interior of lived experience, the very category I needed to inhabit in order to understand how cosmological systems are grounded and expressed. Reading against the grain to fill in the spaces of an absent biography was simply not sufficient. I couldn’t rely on the knowledge derived from books, not even on the analytic compass that I myself had drawn. Moreover, I had to scrutinize my own motivations for embarking on the project, as well as to figure out why I had been delegated to go in search of Thisbe’s life. In short, I had to begin to inhabit that unstable space of not knowing, of admitting that I did not even know how to begin to know. Divested of the usual way of posing questions, I became vulnerable and experienced the kind of crisis that is named “writer’s block.” It was this that led me to examine the recalcitrance that masked an unacknowledged yearning for Spirit. Propelled to seek a different source, I began to undertake linguistic spiritual work with a Bakongo teacher so that I could follow Thisbe from a plantation located about seven miles from the Mojuba crossroads of my childhood back to the Mayombe region of Central Africa to discover Kitsimba, who refused to be cluttered beneath an array of documents of any kind, whether generated by the state, by plantation owners, or by me. It was in that basement in the Bronx, New York, that she manifested her true name, Kitsimba—not the plantation name Thisbe—and placed it back into the lineage that she remembered and to which she belonged. From then I began the tentative writing of a history that was different from the one I had inherited, knowing that I could no longer continue to conduct myself as if Kitsimba’s life were not bound inextricably with my own.

The idea, then, of knowing self through Spirit, to become open to the movement of Spirit in order to wrestle with the movement of history (as occurred in the process of how I came to know Kitsimba), are instances of bringing the self into intimate proximity with the domain of Spirit. It would make the process of that intelligibility into a spiritual undertaking. The manner in which Kitsimba emerged to render her own account of her life, including the narrative of the Crossing with which I began this chapter, was diametrically opposed to my research plan of using her body as the ground for an epistemic struggle. Kitsimba’s plan required my engagement with the texture of her living. If texture of living were to be felt and analyzed as not only memory but, importantly, voice and identity, all seeming secular categories in which subjectivity is housed had to be understood as moored to the Sacred since they anchored a consciousness that drew its sustenance from elsewhere: a set of codes derived from the disembodied consciousness of the Divine. With what keys are these codes activated? Of what is its labor constituted? What is the purpose of such labor? Does rememory sharpen itself in the context of work, and is this project of rememory aligned with the Sacred? What is the self that is made in performing labor with disembodied energies that are themselves poised to work? These are the questions that Kitsimba provoked, and they are the very questions I use here to pivot our thinking through the constitutive elements of living a life that is propell the Sacred.

Work—spiritual work—is the major preoccupation of this final chapter. Drawing on ethnographic work and my own involvement in two African-based communities as a priest—one of Vodou and the other the Lucumi house that provoked my rememory of Mojuba—I wish to examine how spiritual practitioners employ metaphysical systems to provide the moorings for their meanings and understanding of self—in short, how they constitute or remember experience as Sacred and how that experience shapes their subjectivity. Experience is a category of great epistemic import to feminism. But we have understood it primarily as secularized, as if it were absent Spirit and thus antithetical, albeit indirectly, to the Sacred. In shifting the ground of experience from the secular to the Sacred, we can better position, as Lata Mani has proposed, the personal as spiritual. But the designation of the personal as spiritual need not be taken to mean that the social has been evacuated for a domain that is ineluctably private. While different social forces may have indeed privatized the spiritual, it is very much lived in a domain that is social in the sense that it provides knowledge whose distillation is indispensable to
daily living, its particular manifestations transforming and mirroring the social in ways that are both meaningful and tangible. Indeed, the spiritual is no less social than the political, which we no longer contest as mediating the traffic between the personal and the political.

Not only have we secularized experience but we have also secularized labor, both in our understanding of the work process and of its ideological construction, that is, the naturalization of women’s labor. These formulations do not travel easily into the communities of the practitioners we meet here, communities that are marked by women’s leadership as priests and practitioners who are themselves largely women, immigrant women. It is thus difficult to understand either what these women do or who they are when work is solely understood in relationship to the disciplining imperatives of global capital, in the terms that I crafted in chapter 3. Thus, part of the analytic challenge we face in considering the spiritual dimensions of work derives from the very nature of the epistemic frameworks we have deployed. Another part of that challenge derives from the hierarchies that are insinuated within our knowledge-making projects and in the geographies we have rendered inconsequential to them. As we saw in chapter 5, one of the consequences of the cultural relativist paradigm that undergirds the feminist-as-tourist model is the production of a distant alterity in which tradition is made subordinate to, and unintelligible within, that which is modern. Yet, it is not only that (post)modernity’s secularism renders the Sacred as tradition, but it is also that tradition, understood as an extreme alterity, is always made to reside elsewhere and denied entry into the modern. In this context, African-based cosmological systems become subordinated to the European cosmos, not usually expected to accord any significance to modernity’s itinerary, their provenance of little value in the constitution and formation of the very categories on which we have relied. It is not that (post)modernity’s avowed secularism has no room for the Sacred (witness the Bush administration’s avid mobilization of faith-based initiatives in the service of renewing American imperialism), it is rather that it profits from a hierarchy that conflates Christianity with good tradition while consigning “others” to the realm of bad tradition and thus to serve as evidence of the need for good Christian tradition. If Africa functions largely as an epistemic gap, as spectacularized homophobia dressed up in tradition—

its brand of feminism qualified, not for reasons of historical specificity but for cultural alterity, its religions designated as pejoratively anist—then its cosmological systems cannot be made to figure legitimately in (post)modernity’s consciousness and, therefore, cannot be availed to assist in understanding the constitution and formation of self or the re-mapping of the major categories with which a transnational feminism has been engaged. And yet some of its most formative categories—migration, gender and sexuality, experience, home, history, and memory—can be made intelligible within these very systems.

Of what significance, then, is the body in the making of experience if it cannot merely be summoned instrumentally to serve or explain the axes of violence that stem from the crises of capitalism’s various plantations or from its attendant modes of financial timekeeping? Clearly the focus on spiritual work necessitates a different existential positioning in which to know the body is to know it as medium for the Divine, living a purpose that exceeds the imperatives of these plantations. Put differently, it is to understand spiritual work as a type of body praxis, as a form of embodiment about which Nancy Scheper-Hughes offers an illuminating formulation: “Embodiment,” she says, “concerns the ways people come to inhabit their bodies so that these become in every sense of the term ‘habituated.’ All the mundane activities of working, eating, sleeping, having sex, and getting sick and getting well are forms of body praxis and expressive of dynamic social, cultural and political relations.” Since the spiritual does not exist outside of these very social, cultural, and political relations, it too can be taken to constitute body praxis, and this, I believe, is what Karen McCarthy Brown means when she says that “religions such as Vodou inscribe [their traditions] in the bodies of the followers . . . the tradition, the memory of how to serve the spirits is held in the ritualized and ritualizing human body.” Far from being merely superficial, these markings on the flesh—these inscriptions—are processes, ceremonial rituals through which practitioners become habituated to the spiritual, and this habituation implies that requirements are transposed onto the body. One of these requirements is to remember their source and purpose. In this matrix the body thus becomes a site of memory, not a commodity for sale, even as it is simultaneously insinuated within a nexus of power. Body and memory are lived in the same body, if you will, and this mutual
living, this entanglement, enables us to think and feel these inscriptions as process, a process of embodiment.

The purpose of the body is to act not simply, though importantly, as an ensacement of the Soul, but also as a medium of Spirit, the repository of a consciousness that derives from a source residing elsewhere, another ceremonial ritual marking. To this end, embodiment functions as a pathway to knowledge, a talking book, whose intelligibility relies on the social—the spiritual expertise of a community to decode Sacred knowledge, since it is inconceivable to think about the Lwa or Orisha descending without a message to the collectivity gathered in their presence. Since body is not body alone but rather one element in the triad of mind, body and spirit, what we need to understand is how such embodiment provides the moorings for a subjectivity that knits together these very elements. How is a Sacred interior cultivated, and how does it assist practitioners in the task of making themselves intelligible to themselves? How does spiritual work produce the conditions that bring about the realignment of self with self, which is simultaneously a realignment of oneself with the Divine through a collectivity? These questions lead us to foreground practice (which is why I choose the term work) through which the Sacred becomes a way of embodying the remembering of self, if you will, a self that is neither habitually individuated nor unwittingly secularized.

Before proceeding further, I want to say a word about the coupling of Vodou and Santeria. Historically, it has not been customary to speak of Vodou and Santeria in the same sentence, but the problem is neither of a linguistic nor grammatical sort. Within the community of practitioners in New York, for instance, suspicion and recriminations abound, laced with a peculiar strand of racialization and racism that paradoxically dislodges Santeria from its African moorings and positions Vodou as bad witchcraft, thus mirroring popular cultural sentiments. Haiti still largely functions in the American imaginary as the accused for HIV infection, or otherwise as a projection for what Laennec Hurbon has called a feeling of “disquieting strangeness,” emerging primarily from phantasmagoric representations of Vodou, representations that have also been fandom by the American state. And while Santeria was thrust into public consciousness with the U.S. Supreme Court ruling that legitimized it, neither it nor Vodou are widely understood to be religions. To be sure, there are differences between the two systems. The elements of Vodou that are drawn from the Bantu Kongo cultural zone and housed in its Petro pantheon of “hot” Spirits are not found in Lucumi, nor do Fon elements appear to be present. But these apparent differences are rather difficult to ascertain since Yoruba-based cosmologies morphed into the Fon and Ewe cultural zone. How can we be certain that the latter did not travel back into Santeria once the Crossing was made? Yet similarities exist as well. Practitioners of both Santeria and Vodou used Catholicism as the subterranean mask to sabotage colonial attempts to annihilate them. They walked the same celestial geography as they implored Catholic saints then, and they continue to do so now. Within Vodou’s Rada rites and those of Lucumi are to be found the constitutive elements of both Yoruba and Dahomean ceremonial rituals. And it is this shared epistemological history that coheres around a similar set of foundational principles in which both systems are anchored—the most significant of which positions the energy force of the universe as a Sacred force emanating from God, Bondieu, Olodumare, the supreme quintessence of Ashé, the life force. Both attend to the idea of a multiply manifested or multidimensional god, avatars, that make the Sacred tangible, the most central of which are manifestations of Lwa and Orisha that inhabit physical elements as well as human beings. As healing systems anchored in the idea of the constant manifestations of spiritual power, they share the belief in the power of spoken medicine, the power of utterance, the literal understanding of Ashé, which means “so be it,” as well as in the Sacred healing power of physical elements such as water, fire, and plants, Òy—Osanyin who functions both as forest-bearing medicinal plants and Orisha within Lucumi. Indeed, the fundamental metaphysical principles in which each is based collude in ways that nullify the very segregations that are produced and maintained. My intent here in bringing them together is not, however, to compare, conflate, or suggest that they are the same but to examine how they both illuminate the cosmological underpinnings of a world that uses Spirit knowledge/knowing as the medium through which a great number of women in the world make their lives intelligible. It is at these crossroads of subjectivity and collectivity, Sacred knowing and power, memory, and body, that we sojourn so as to examine their pedagogic content to see
how they might instruct us in the complicated undertaking of Divine self-invention.

Four: Knowing Who Walks With You: The Making of Sacred Subjectivity

The Spirit is a wind. Everywhere I go they are going too . . . to protect me.—ALOUREDÉ MARGAUX IN BROWN, Mama Lola

Winti (wind) come upon you in your dreams, they give you the strength and push you in a particular direction.—RENATE DRUT-VENTAK IN WEKKER, “One Finger Does Not Drink Okra Soup”

Yo soy mis santos, y mis santos soy yo (I am my saints, and my saints are me).—MARÍA, IN PROSEK, “Boundaries Are Made for Crossing”

These statements, which reflect the spiritual sensibilities of practitioners immersed within the different practices of Vodou, Winti, Lucumi, and Espiritismo, encapsulate an understanding of self, knitted through a force—Spirit, Wind, Orisha—or through energies that are sacred. They are simultaneous expressions of mutual truths about both the self and that self’s relationship to those Sacred forces. In being constituted as truths, we can imagine them as principles that one arrives at and literally wrestles with, and that then deepen over the course of time. Since this coming to know is both process and outcome, there is a strong suggestion that we need to become attentive to the inside in order to see the ways in which its elements are constructed. In the classes on Spirit propensity in which I participated at the outset of my own journey, my Madrina (godmother) used the following phrase constantly: “You have to know who walks with you.” These practitioners illustrate that they have come to know themselves as accompanied and as nonindividuated—that Winti walk with them, Spirit walks with them, and Orisha walk with them. They would not have been able to manifest these reflections as sensibilities, however, outside of a complicated, ongoing process of coming to consciousness, or what Donna Daniels calls “spiritual consciousness.”

Thus, what appears at the outset: as a first statement, “I am my saints,” is actually the result of a series of moments of grounding one’s conscious-

ness in the idea and practice of Sacred accompaniment, Sacred guidance, and Sacred identity.

Taken together, the practitioners’ statements speak to an intimacy of a lived experience in which the Sacred is embodied. They are woven through five interrelated elements: the idea that Sacred energies intervene in the daily lives of human beings; they surround, protect, push, strengthen, and bring a sense of purpose so that the individual is attuned to the Soul’s purpose; they are present both everywhere, as in the Wind, and at specific moments, as in dreams; they mediate a process of interdependence, of mutual beingness, in which one becomes oneself in the process of becoming one with the Sacred; and they manifest their sacredness in nature as well as in their relationship with human beings, both of which take shape in a process of mutual embodiment. It would seem from these statements that Divine desire works to prod the self into believing that it does not exist of its own accord, free will notwithstanding. Such a formulation can be found in the cosmological anchor of the Bantu-Kongo, as explained to me in the terms of Kia Bunseki Fu-kiau, my Bakôngo teacher:

The same force that gave shape to the universe is the same force which resides within us. This force is Kalunga, a complete force by itself, the principle of God, the principle of change, vitality, motion, and transformation . . . There was nothingness, into which came this source of life, this energy, expressed as heat, cosmic fire after which there was a cooling that produced rivers, oceans, mountains. The world floated in Kalunga, endless water within subcosmic space, half emerging for terrestrial life, half submerging for marine life and the spiritual world. Kalunga is the ocean door between two worlds. 10

In one sense the body’s water composition seals our aquatic affinity with the Divine.

This idea of the intimacy between personhood and Sacred accompaniment is also signified in the formative character of Winti in the lives of working-class Surinamese women. Gloria Wekker’s ethnography, The Politics of Passion: Women’s Sexual Culture in the Afro-Surinamese Diaspora, hones in on this cosmological complex that, in her words, “shapes the ways working-class people think and talk about themselves and how they act from understandings of what a person is . . . It is the discursive
context in which notions of working-class subjectivity and gender take shape... and also offers emic understandings of the bridges between subjection and sexuality.” When Renate Druivenak says that Winti come upon her in her dreams, she is drawing from a cosmology that frames a relationship with Winti, (which literally means Wind, and like Wind conveys the swiftness with which Spirits and ancestors can take possession of human beings and natural phenomena like trees and animals), and simultaneously her own understanding of who she is in the world. We will come later to see the purpose of this dream sequence, but for now it is enough to go deeper into this complex as a way of threading subjectivity with cosmology. To do so, I begin with Wekker’s formulation:

Within this cosmological system human beings are understood to be partly biological and partly spiritual beings. The biological side of humans, flesh and blood, is supplied by the earthly parents. The spiritual side is made up of three components, two of which are important here: all human beings have a kro or yeaye (soul) and dyodyo (parents in the world of the gods). The kra and dyodyo together define a person’s mind... [they] both consist of a male and female being and both of these parts are conceived of as human beings, with their own personality characteristics. The female and male part of the soul are determined by the day of the week on which the person is born. Thus, somebody born on Sunday is “carried” by Kwasi and Kwasiba, and is believed, therefore, to possess different characteristics that make her different from a person born on Wednesday who is “carried” by Kwaku and Akuba. Likewise a person like Renate, who has Aisa as a female godly parent, will, regardless of gender, display nurturing behavior, while somebody who has Leba (Elegba) will be very clean and orderly.

The correlate of the dyodyo within Vodou and Lucumi is expressed in a parallel understanding of the Sacred energy that claims one’s head, one’s mèt tèt or guardian angel, who is itself gendered. We can understand this claiming as the Sacred recognition of a likeness with someone whose primary “personal” sensibilities resemble the metaphysical principles that a particular Lwa or Orisha embodies. This likeness can be divined in a range of ways: sensed or seen by a seasoned practitioner, presented in dreams to the person herself, ascertained through a lavé tèt, washing of

the head, in the case of Vodou, or through divination that relies on the Sacred corpus of the Ifa oracle, as is the case with Lucumi. The resemblance might be visible, but it might also be deeply hidden, or in need of reassembly, in which case the purpose of the lavé tèt, for instance, would be to activate latent or idle sensibilities so that they could steady the course of one’s life. Still, the sensibilities are never singular but rather always pluralized, not only because we as human beings are made up of multiple energies, but also because those multiple energies exist within a single Orisha or Lwa as well. Knowing who walks with you, then, becomes a spiritual injunctive to activate a conscious relationship with the spiritual energies with whom one is accompanied, and who make it possible, in the words of Audre Lorde, “to do the work we came here to do.”

But what are these energies or forces? What metaphysical principles do they codify? If we return to the Winti and to the figurative story of Kalunga, we see that these are forces of nature, the metaphysis of that which is elemental. Wind. Water. Fire. Thunder. Lightning. Volcano. The cosmic geography of Sky. Earth. Trees. Forest. Park. Mountain. River. Ocean. Rocks. Stones. They each have their own consciousness. They cluster at those places that the imagination fills with movement, upheaval, and contradiction: the crossroads, the railroad track, and the cemetery. Still, it is simply not possible to plumb their full depth, and we have come to know, through intuition and transmission, that there is a great deal of mystery constituting them, which explains why Vodou characterizes Lwa as Les Mystères. Finding the points of engagement is at once mystical, elusive, imaginative, and pragmatic, as Judith Gleason’s artful rendition of Oya, Yansa, the Goddess of Wind and Fire conveys:

Oya at her most awesome, untrammeled Oya, is a weather goddess. This is how she appeared before the “world” as we know it and how she continues to manifest herself beyond the reach of meddlesome technological devices set up to simulate, alter, and pluck the heart out of the mystery of her storms. Caught in her updrafts, the religious imagination without apparatus seeks, though threatened with annihilation, to meet the weather goddess halfway, where sensuous experience remains possible. By reconnecting ourselves to the elements through which her urgent temperament expresses itself in patterns recognizable in our
own swirls, inundations and disjunctive ardors, we come upon a language with which to invoke and reflect her power.

It was on a stormy winter evening in New York City, the fifth in a series of unexpected blustering storms whose origin meteorologists designated as the North Pole, that I posed questions to Ekundayo and Sonia (both priest and devotee of Oya) aimed at understanding just how they connected themselves to Oya’s convective currents—that is, what of her did they see in themselves. Although I had sat with Kitsimba’s narration of the movement of the Trade Winds, I was slow to realize that they had come into being through the force of the energy of the dead—that is, in her telling, the grieving dead instigate their global movement. And it was that realization that pointed the direction to Oya. With Kitsimba and Gleason’s updrafts buzzing in my mind, I posed those questions to both Ekundayo and Sonia. I explained Oya’s updrafts as her capacity to move within multiple domains, possessing àjé—the power to do good and evil—yet refusing to admit it, the same way in which she refuses capture. As shape-shifter she is the River Niger, buffalo woman, dual symbol of the carrier of fire and mother of the cemetery, and mother of nine. “How do you find balance in turbulence?” I asked, “What does being one with the Wind of transformation mean?”

My questions came as an unexpected barrage, which Ekundayo generously greeted by asking me to repeat them. Here is the torrent that poured forth from her:

It’s being in the eye of the storm, which is the stillness. Oya takes me to different levels of consciousness . . . into a different plane, knowing that something is shifting in my mind. I am there (in the vortex) [though I am] not spinning. She allows me a different perspective on what’s inside and outside of me and my role in it . . . Oya brings much peace, but will also move me when I am too still. You have to get up and do, hence the balance. She is also the gentle zephyr. [Here there was a long pause] Oya is also the first breath and the last breath . . . Oya moves people; moves the Ocean . . . moves me beyond fear, since movement is sometimes scary . . . moves us to grow as mother of transformation . . . She allows me to sit in the eye of the storm to grow.

As the world would have it, you can’t sit in it for too long, but without wind there is stagnation, things will die . . .

Oya is very protective, she protects with a ferocity . . . what will a mother do to save her child? . . . There is no limit . . . I did not know how to do battle. There was always, well, too much emotion . . . I had to learn to sit with her and tell her what was going on . . . What seemed like such a problem with emotional strain, she would show me, look, move things here, go here, and when I follow, because I know it isn’t me, when I follow I can take up my battle. She acts with a swiftness that is amazing. She does not like tears, so when I bring them the shift is even more immediate, more dramatic . . . She is equally as subtle; she can kiss you as a light breeze.

I really had a deeper sense of Oya going into Ifa. Everything was coming out right and then all of a sudden things started to go wrong, topsy turvy. I had to talk to Oya to say to her even though I was going into Ifa, I was still her daughter. And at the bembé for Oya this sister began doing this dance for her, swirling and swirling, and before I knew it I was brought into that swirl, saying “even though I am going to Ifa I am still your daughter . . .”

I had bronchial asthma that was killing me. Oya gave me life. She is the reason I am on this planet. She made it possible for me to breathe . . . Oya will call upon Yemayá to help her children . . . I know that some stories talk about the enmity between the two of them, but that is not what I experience . . . The dead are in the ocean, and the dead are also in the air . . . Oya teaches us to know the dance of life . . . We need to see the beauty of the dance . . . We can’t be afraid to move . . . that is a rejection of life . . . One leg in life and one in death . . .

What is striking to me even as I now write Ekundayo’s words is the degree to which they epitomize the sensuous intimacy, the ability to inhabit different planes of consciousness, that Gleason herself has conveyed. Clearly, she too has met the weather goddess halfway. But Ekundayo’s rendering also reflects an agile movement between the metaphysic and the anthropomorphic, evincing again an embodiment of principles that are meaningful principally because she has threaded them through
her daily life. The threat of death from asthma is no metaphor. The work of prayer, sitting with ebbo, offerings that Oya accepted, enables Ekundayo to say in just that matter-of-fact way, "[Oya] has made it possible for me to breathe," while her reflection on "one leg in life and one in death" pertains to a principle that has existential import. The challenge with which we are confronted here is how to move between death's clutches, and what Ekundayo suggests is that we do so by living in a particular way, by becoming still within Oya's multiple manifestations. It is no simple task.

And as shape-shifter, Oya could not be only one thing. Says Sonia, "She is an Orisha you have to deal with in the right way. I am still learning about her, still trying to understand her. I think I'm learning how to turn fear into power, like the power over darkness. I can sit and receive information...in the dark since darkness does not separate light for me."

There is a great deal to be understood about whether the character of the person and that of the Orisha or Lwa is indistinguishable; whether there is some degree of distance between that which demarcates person from Spirit; whether the process of being the ground in which the Sacred energies are planted fashions an entirely new self; and about the relative balance between the application of principles that are metaphysical or anthropomorphic in the living with these energies. These are indeed knotty issues that take the span of lifetimes to sort out. To be sure, the anthropomorphic mediates the distance between the physical and metaphysical as Ekundayo's reflection shows. But what is the context for learning? In places where Lwa, Orisha, and Winti are grounded in the soil, the multiple institutionalized instances of extended family yards that sometimes approximate small towns provide the sustained meeting place for the ceremonial rituals that school practitioners in the consciousness of the Spirit. But the fragmentation of urban living in places like New York City can sometimes make for what Gleason calls "a skittish pairing of the human and the divine."14 There are principles to be adhered to, but there are no written maps that contour precisely how the pedagogic moments for Sacred learning are to be structured. And because in many instances there are ruptures in the lineage of practice—there was no homage to ancestors or to Orisha in my biological family, for instance—learning assumes a particular kind of deliberateness in communities that are multilayeredly displaced. Donna Daniels was able to capture this slow process of deliberate embodiment that unfolded during her encounter with a West Coast community of Lucumí practitioners. She witnessed "a quality to spiritual learning [which women] described as a slow and deliberate coming to [spiritual] consciousness...predicated on vigilant observation of a sacred idea over time as it manifested itself in the devotee's life such that a personal understanding of its meaning was derived. Thus, spiritual knowledge...was acquired through a process of embodiment wherein understanding of a sacred idea was based on (in) the experience of living it or experiencing the idea in action, or 'seated' in one's life."15

In practice, the daily living of the Sacred idea in action occurs in the most simple of acts of recognition, such as pouring libations for and greeting the Lwa; attending to them on the days of the week that bear their signature; feeding ancestors first with the same meal we feed ourselves as a way of placing the purpose of our existence back with its source, as a gesture of mutual exchange and as a way of giving thanks and asking to be sustained; building an altar to mark Sacred ground and focus energies within the home, constructing a place to work, to touch down, discard, pull in, and practice reciprocity; and participating in collective ceremony. It is this dailiness that instigates the necessary shifts in consciousness, which are produced because each act, and each moment of reflection of that act, brings a new and deepened meaning of self in intimate concert with the Sacred. This idea to which Daniels refers of vigilant observation that rests at the heart of spiritual labor was also given form in these words of Kitsimba: "With careful attentive service and focused contemplation, the Divine is made manifest. It is why this work is never done." Thus, the cycle of action, reflection, and practice as Sacred praxis embodied marks an important reversal of the thinking as knowledge paradigm.

In the realm of the secular, the material is conceived of as tangible while the spiritual is either nonexistent or invisible. In the realm of the Sacred, however, the invisible constitutes its presence by a provocation of sorts, by provoking our attention. We see its effects, which enable us to know that it must be there. By perceiving what it does, we recognize its being and by what it does we learn what it is. We do not see Wind, but we can see the vortex it creates in a tornado. We see its capacity to uproot things that seem to be securely grounded, such as trees; its capacity to
strip down, unclothe, remove that which draws the sap, such as leaves; its
capacity to dislodge what is buried in the bowels of the earth. Wind
brings sound, smells, messages that can at times be directionally decep-
tive so that we can be prompted to go in search of truth. Its behavior can
be sudden, erratic; it can cleanse and disturb; provoke, destroy, caress and
sooth. We learn about and come to know Wind by feeling, observing,
perceiving, and recognizing its activity; in short, by remembering what it
does as bodily experience. But it is bodily experience that demands a
rewiring of the senses mirrored, for instance, in the aesthetic representa-
tions of figures whose ears, mouths, nostrils, and eyes assume a scale that
is larger than life, so that they might convey a heightened grounding of
the senses. Hearing is seeing and seeing is feeling. An unbroken bottle
with a thin elongated neck can contain a full-size wooden cross, challeng-
ing the naked eye. The feel of fire is strong, not hot.

That demand for the rewiring of the senses is even more provocative
when the cycle of action, reflection, and practice cannot be automatically
transposed to a curriculum whose learning requirements are sometimes
neither straightforward nor self-evident. The very how of the manifesta-
tion of the Divine is a practice to which we have to become attuned and
accustomed. This was brought home to me during one of the weekly
sessions of the mesa blanca—spirit mediumship with the white table—
when my Madrina was mounted by one of her main spirits, La Negra. La
Negra is a firm, sympathetic spirit, one of whose embodied lives unfolded
in Haiti. She spoke in the coded language of archaic Creole and Spanish
combined, a border language, one might say, of another time. She often
urged us: “Never be ashamed of your spiritual inheritance.” And unity
was a constant theme, a necessary one, in light of a good deal of racism,
misogyny, and heterosexism that reigned in the temple. One day, how-
ever, she left us with a message in the form of an unexpected riddle: “The
bourgeoisie sacrifice their children.” I still remember the numinous si-
ence enveloping the semidarkened room that encircled us. Those of us
who were not mounted did not readily know to which time frame La
Negra was referring, whether the bourgeoisie did so in the past, whether it
was doing so then—that is now—or whether it intended to sacrifice its
children in a time to come. Was/is sacrifice literal or metaphorical? “Bour-
geoisie” in human idiom carries the understanding of a specific class
extracting capital, not a term in popular currency at this moment. Its use
was, therefore, unexpected in that space and at this time. To which par-
cular bourgeoisie was La Negra referring? In which social formation?
Haiti, the geography of another of her incarnations, one we do not know?
Or the United States of North America? Or was she linking Haiti and the
United States in a mutual complicity with bourgeois sacrifice? How did
she come by that information? Did she experience it, that is, witness it, or
was she told about it as a common practice? And why was it being revisited
here and now? What modes of sacrifice was the bourgeoisie exacting from
members of their class, and could it be from members of a subordinated class?
If sacrifice belonged in a “past,” what key did it hold for decoding the
“present”?  

All of these questions press on our perceptions of, and relationship to,
time with a capital T. In thinking about that moment of La Negra’s
pronouncement, as well as others, I am learning that the embodiment of
the Sacred dislocates clock time, meaning linearity, which is different
than living in the past or being bound by tradition. The feeling conveyed
that afternoon of La Negra’s announcement was one of being somewhat
lost in time, of time standing still, the encounter with Time. Although the
voice is present in the now, it collapses that tense we call present into a
past and future combined. Notice that La Negra used the present tense.
Spirit brings knowledge from past, present, and future to a particular
moment called a now. Time becomes a moment, an instant, experienced
in the now, but also a space crammed with moments of wisdom about an
event or series of events already having inhabited different moments, or
with the intention of inhabiting them, while all occurring simultaneously
in this instant, in this space, as well as in other instants and spaces of
which we are not immediately aware. Spirit energy both travels in Time
and travels differently through linear time, so that there is no distance
between space and time that it is unable to navigate. Thus, linear time
does not exist because energy simply does not obey the human idiom.
What in human idiom is understood as past, present, and future are
calibrated into moments in which mind and Spirit encounter the energy
of a dangerous memory, a second’s glimpse of an entire life, of a dream or
a sequence of dreams, of a shadow lying under a village, of the vibration
of a feeling, of a letter to be delivered, a decision to be made, all penetrat-
ing the web of interactive energies made manifest. I can't say that I know in any definitive sense how the bourgeoisie sacrifice(d) their children, although the statement leaves me with a lot of possibilities to be decoded. Perhaps some historical record will, or perhaps already has, confirmed it. To be sure, confirmation in the historical record would be important only if we needed reassurance about Spirit truth-telling. Wrestling with the idea of Time, however, forces us to evacuate the desire for written confirmation, drawing us closer to observe and, therefore, to perceive how the mind of Spirit works. The demand is more exacting, for it would have us learn how to suspend inherited habits of knowing so as to better apprehend the very gestalt that is itself provoking the shifts in consciousness that scrambled time, turning its constructed fragments into one Time. Human beings are neither the guardians nor the owners of Time.

The work of rewiring the senses is neither a single nor individual event. Practitioners have to be present and participating in a community; they must show up, in other words, for this appointment, to the ceremonies that rehearse over and over again the meaning of Sacred accompaniment. To be sure, there is a compelling awe in the beauty of numerous ceremony, and there are no lengths to which practitioners will not go to bear its financial costs, but the bridge between that exterior and an interior, using what emerges from the contemplative and reflexive to shape exteriorized practice, whether in the form of ceremony in New York or in the form of hunting in Mali, has to be made. It is a crucial bridge, for without it we could indeed not address subjectivity of any kind.

The desire to cultivate this interior figured prominently among practitioners with whom Daniels worked. She found that “openness, poise, balance, alignment, clarity, humility, honesty and respectfulness [were] some of the spiritual principles and desirable inner states on which meaningfully living one's life and learning from life’s lessons [were] predicated.”17 But working to achieve that alignment is pure challenge, not only because of the cultural dissonances in daily living that can undermine the evolution of character, but also because the spiritual is lived in the same locale in which hierarchies are socially invented and maintained. Within the Lucumí communities in New York, this social is invented through the very hierarchies that constitute the secular: heterosexism in the midst of the visible presence of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and two-spirit people; a peculiar brand of racism that positions Cuba as the seat of the religion, freed from its African moorings; a variant of indigenous black nationalism that interprets these moorings to mean the exclusion of lesbians and gay men and the paradoxical positioning of women's priestly function as marginalized mother in spite of women's numerical predominance; and a brisk trade and commodification of the Sacred that confuse the instrument with the source.

Yet dissonance results not only from the effects that these various exclusions produce but also because the old self, if you will, comes under siege once it begins the slow, indeterminate move toward its own dissolution. As my Madrìna often asked rhetorically, as she linked the ego to a stone, “How would you know why the stone is there, whether you need to remove it, bury it, or ignore it?” The work, then, of traveling to the interior to unmoor, fracture, dislocate, and excavate those parts that are staunch in their defense of separation because they resist the idea of Divine guidance has to be intuited and projected as desire, injected into the very conviction of the choice of one's spiritual path. Knowing who walks with you and maintaining that company on the long journey is a dance of balance in which the fine lines between and among will and surrender; self-effacement and humility; doing and being; and listlessness and waiting for the Divine are being constantly drawn. This dance of balance is the work of healing, and it is to a discussion of the confluence between healing work and spiritual work that I now turn.

Five: Healing Work Is the Antidote to Oppression—

Kitsimba

The idea that the fire that constitutes the center of human beings also constitutes the center of the universe anchors a Sacred connection between the two. It provides a theory of equilibrium, and, implicitly, of disequilibrium, since we can rightly assume that the result of moving away from that center is imbalance. The symbols and symbolism of centering—that is, of the concentration of Sacred energies—are numerous. Such centering, as opposed to scattering, coalesces in Vodou in the djevo (the altar room), the poto mitan (the central pole through which the Lwa descend), and the vèvè (the Sacred ground etchings on which they
come to ceremonial rest, which are not to be displaced once ceremony begins). But since no illness has a manifestation that is only of the individual, this theory of disequilibrium applies to the social, that is, to the collectivity as well. The two are, therefore, entangled. And Kitsimba's particular formulation that healing work is the antidote to oppression not only implicates oppression in the production of disequilibrium but applies the solution—healing—at the point of the problem that everyone, it would seem, is called to address. She not only suggests that the work of healing is of various kinds, but also that it is at the very heart of spiritual labor, explaining why the healing instruments in Kikongo are called minkisi, medicines, why fey, leaves, in Vodou are also called medicament, medicine, and why in the Yoruba creation stories as told in the Ifa corpus medicines were allotted to Orisha as they were sent down to earth. To function as an antidote to oppression, healing work, that is, spiritual labor, assumes different forms, while anchored in reconstructing a terrain that is both exterior and interior.

For healing work to be undertaken there has to exist some understanding of cause, the precision of which is gained through a consultation of the Ifa oracle, or the Dilogun in the case of Santería, or the cards as in the case of Espiritismo and Vodou. As Alourdes, a mambo (priest) of Vodou, explained:

You do the cards for a person. In the cards you see the problem of the person. But when a person comes to see you he doesn't have anything to say. You have to read the cards. You going to spread out the cards to see what the person needs. You explain it. You tell the person... The cards tell you and then you speak with the person... And the person speaks to you and says, "What you say is true."

If you see something in his face, you say, "Did this happen to you?" "Did you have an accident?" You search to see if the accident was natural or not... You have people who have things "thrown on them" (voyé sou li) but you have others who don't have that. It is a natural sickness they have, but people imagine that it is other people who have caused it. If someone has a maladi of the imagination, you can't do anything for them. You can survey someone's house... go there, read cards... you don't find a thing, because they have nothing. It is a [medical] doctor's sickness they have. But they have an imagination and think that someone has done bad against them. There are people like that, but there are also people who really do bad. So you search to find where a malady comes from.

No medicine or treatment comes without a theory of the cause of disequilibrium, la causa. What is the violation that displaces balance with disequilibria? Some crisis acts as the instigator for the healing work, but crisis is not the cause, yet it pushes the question of which set of explanations will one accept as the reason for the fractures that produced the crisis—the ones with which one has been living or the ones soon to be disclosed—and through which set of explanations will one begin to intuit the faint outlines of the self that succumbed to being constantly pushed aside, held at bay. The crisis could be quite wrenching and deceptively self-evident, as in my earlier rendition of how I came to occupy that unstable space of not knowing in the pursuit of Kitsimba's life story. Might we think that writer's block could be the result of spiritual misalignment? Here is Kitsimba's version of my story:

She lived a mere four miles from one of her two best friends, the one who lived right on top of the Yoruba cemetery, she, her clairvoyant aunt, Tantie, a hoard of boys and her parents, all of them laying their heads every blessed night, unknowingly, on the heads and bones of the dead; the friend who lived only two houses away from where they disturbed Sophie and unleashed the restless energy of other dead in order to build permanence in concrete houses in which they dreamed they could live in peace and luxury, but never really could... She and this friend would pass through the cemetery, always in a rush, taking a short cut. If they taking short cut why leave Diego Martin and go all the way to America and then to London to find out she wanted to study the plantation where I lived, right in Diego Martin, a stone's throw from where she grew up. She went to London to find out what the British put in their records about the plantation with someone called a research assistant. I was assisting her all this time, yet I never got any recognition. Well the British didn’t put anything, and what they put was destroyed by fire. Fire destroyed records in St. Pierre too. What did the British have to do with snatching us from Kongo. Absolutely nothing.
The second night, this reluctant, or rather hard-head, arrived in London. While taking a bath, she asked someone for assistance in completing all the work she had to do. And it was really a lot of work. But you know the distant way these nonbelievers do, needing assistance but self-conscious and skeptical about calling the higher power. I told her I would help her and in exchange she made a promise she vowed to keep. Yet, while in London, she still continued to introduce Allison as her research assistant. She never found anything about me in the archives, but she developed this fancy idea of which she became quite proud that I was somehow co-implicated in the psychic economy of slavery—such fancy words that meant nothing—and that there was some relationship between myself and Luisa Calderón. She fabricated that relationship only because the British were fond of collecting, and so they collected pages and pages about the trial and torture of Luisa Calderón. These were the pages she found, but there was nothing about me. Incidentally, there was a relationship, but it was not in the records. She had this fancy book all outlined, and I was the prop, for she had planned to rely on a skewed account of my life from one Pierre McCallum who was determined to seek revenge against the British by painting a picture of the horrors of slavery with us as the abject victims. Ask her to go back and find the chapter outlines, for she keeps meticulous records, never throwing away anything before time, and you can verify my story yourself. It was then I decided to create a block, to make it that she couldn’t write what she had planned.

I told her she couldn’t write about me unless she came to know and feel my daily life. She had to feel what it was like to get up before dawn and implore the protection of the fading dark to move in stealth to do what you had vowed to do in another place, another time, for another reason under different conditions. You could die in stealth and determination to pay the debt you were chosen to pay. She had to feel what it was like to survive above ground while really living underground by fire. She had to come as close to the ground as I did, learning to depend upon the damp rain smell of earth to clean her insides, jar her senses and to bring her to the heart of the earth I had sworn never to betray: all life is shared with those at the bottom of the Ocean, the bottom of the river, the bottom of water—the meeting point of the encircled cross. She had to feel the folds and dips against those places where earth becomes level again. I wanted her to come to feel how folds and dips provided security even more so than level ground, which could be deceptively friendly. Too level. Too even. Hostile to change.

And she was not one of those who learned by feeling. “Those who don’t hear will feel,” her mother was fond of saying, but no one learns to feel on demand, by dint of sheer threat. She had learned quite early, and in a way that did not serve her, that feelings had to be buried since they did not belong in the world of the living, except on auspicious occasions as when somebody died. So the ordinary feelings of daily life always eluded her; they came as a surprise to her. She found them excessive, almost always unexpected, out of the ordinary, for what was ordinary for her was to live devoid of feelings, having learned well to quietly predict the order of events, never their effects. I wanted her to feel the textured tapestry of my life in the soft markings of her flesh and through this feeling come to know it intimately, feel it as if she were the one who had lived it. She could no longer rely on what was written in books to convey or even arrive at Truth. What was written in those books was not even a faint shadow of me; it had nothing to do with me. They knew nothing about who I was. Relying on only one way of knowing to point a path to the wisdom of the Soul. This learning could take at least the span of one life, and only the Soul could decide what would be left over for a different time, a different place. It took her seven years of skeptical fits and starts to feel the power of that early revelation which was given in that place called London; and it would take her even longer to come to have faith in it, to know that her answers needed to come from a source different than the ones she had mastered in books; to begin to feel the difference between knowledge and wisdom—one could save you in the kingdom of the dead, the other gave you only temporary status in the kingdom of the living . . .

To know that with careful focused attention and contemplative service, the Divine would be made manifest. The answer to many things lay in her hands, in her very own hands.

By the end of that day of being turned inside out, I had become convinced that Kitsimba’s singular desire was not to have me author her life, but for her to author mine and make public my guarded secrets.
"How much more," I demanded, in a tearful fit of dampened rage, "are you going to divulge?" Now I struggle against the powerful urge to edit.

The causa can also manifest in attempts to beat back what was intentionally left behind, an intentional forgetting that is not the same as not knowing that one had something to remember. In a scene reminiscent of Julie Dash’s “Daughters of the Dust” in which those bound for the city portend a misfit between the call of Spirit and the lure of concrete, Karen McCarthy Brown maps how Alourdes was jolted to remember the Lwa Kouzin Zaka, who was forced to leave his abode in the mountains of Haiti and appear on Forty-Second Street in New York City in the form of a relative’s dream. "Tell Alourdes," he said, "if she dresses like me, everything going to be beautiful." It was the call to the portal of initiation, kouché, and a simultaneous call to remember her own family lineage of a mother and grandmother serving the Spirits.²¹

If healing work is a call to remember and remembering is embodied, then we would want to situate the body centrally in this healing complex. Brown rightly notes that “the healer’s knowledge is carried in her body and it is addressed to the body of the client,”²² and given that body praxis has been central in our mapping of subjectivity, it follows that it would be equally central in understanding the structure of healing as well. But we would also want to know how this healing work on the body travels, as well, to the inner self. Here is my reflection on a healing session in which I assisted Mama Lola, my spiritual mother in Voudou:

Janice showed up to Mammie’s basement in Brooklyn, a successful middle-class professional, wearing the strong scent of her grandmother, the scent of asafetida. From reading the cards Mammie saw that people were jealous of Janice’s success and had consistently worked cbéah on her, which resulted in her inability to keep money in her hands. Janice confirmed that she had a number of projects pending, but she had been in a spiral in which nothing came to fruition. “Other people go to church,” she blurted with a twinge of lament and shame, “and they don’t need any of this.” Sensitive to the mixed scent of her grandmother’s asafetida and Janice’s own ambivalence, Mammie was quick on the uptake, “How do you know? You don’t know that as an African woman your answers come from a different source!” The cards indicated three cleansings, the first of which was to appease and activate Papa Legba, the guardian of doorways, the essence of choice. It began the very next day.

Standing on Legba’s colors of black, red and white emblematic of the crossroads, with a lit white candle in her right hand, Janice prayed the prayer asking for protection against her enemies:

… May the Peace of the Lord be with me! Divine Master, always accompany me, talk to me as you did to the disciples . . . walk in front of me and defend me against my enemies . . . May their eyes never see me, their hands never touch me, their ears never hear me, their wicked wishes never harm me and never overtake me on their way, neither on horse nor on foot, neither on earth, on the sea nor in the air. I beseech you, Lord, to spread your mighty arms to free me from unfair imprisonment . . .

“You finished?” With a limp nod from Janice, Mammie began the meticulous shredding of old clothes, snip, snip in a clockwise direction . . . snip, snip in a counterclockwise direction. The only sound was the snip snip of the new scissors and the sniffs from the steady stream of tears that mingled with the clothes discarded on the floor. Naked. Next came the food, cooked and uncooked grains, beans, ground provisions, cube sized, with two handfuls to be held for a different moment.

“I work on the outside, you work on the inside,” the clear matter-of-fact announcement instruction to Janice. Again, the cleansing began with the head, this time with meat.

“If something is too heavy for your head, where will you put it?”

Not knowing whether or not it was a real question, Janice hesitated until the prompt, “On your shoulders,” and so she repeated, hesitantly, “On my shoulders.”

“If it’s too heavy for your shoulders where would you put it?” Still hesitating, and again the prompt, “In your hands.”

“In my hands.”

“If it’s too heavy for your hands where would you put it?” This time with no need for a prompt.

“On the floor.”
Each time the same set of questions pleading the same responses to the four directions, each time Janice's responses becoming more sure.

Next came the bad bath, strong smelling, again moving from top to bottom. "As soon as I put the bath on top of your head, drop what in your hand," one of the last vestiges of that which weighed down. With the last drop of water drained from the basin, Mammie cleaned Janice with black, red, and white cloth, each piece of fabric offered to the four directions, placed afterwards under Janice's feet. Standing on white cloth, Janice was sprayed with gin and agua florida, incensed, first the outstretched hands then the soles of the feet and head, the grounding to the earth and the seat of the Soul. She was then dressed with a new camisette of red and black with an emblazoned white cross. All clothes were incensed, including the shoes, to bring mindfulness to the road she walked.

At a different time a second steadying bath would follow, accompanied by a third white bath, the cooling signature of Papa Danbala, a good luck bath of milk, malanguette, a miniature family of bay leaves, cloves, cinnamon and star anise to be administered by Mammie when she traveled to complete the work at Janice's home and her place of work. It was not Papa Legba who made an appearance at Janice's workplace but Avandra, the animal spirit, come to disturb, dispel and outwit the obeah that was put there, and to teach the power of the difference between good strong medicine of the right hand and obeah of the left. The healing cycle had completed its trajectory from the bitter to the sweet. But healing takes time. Its mystery does not belong to us. It is now five years since that first moment in the basement. Janice continues to work with Mammie as she deepens her own internal sense of possibilities, still living in a place that continues to define the work she now does as obeah.

With the appropriate invocations and medicinal applications, the healer's work involves navigating an uninterrupted flow between the behavioral self, the inner self and the world of the disembodied. To be successful, healing takes place at several levels, not the least of which is the symbolic—the peeling back of layers built up on the outside in order to get at that which resides on the inside, to which Janice had access. Temporarily, the body was unable to go the physical distance, but it could be prodded to go the metaphysical distance, within that space of the interior. Enemies lurked there, as well, not only on the outside. With the right prayer and concentration Janice could get to that inside while the body was being rid of burdens and blockages, its outer clothing, old, no longer required to adorn a body that needed to be rendered naked in order that it might be clothed differently—in the protective colors of Divine intermediary Papa Legba, guardian of the crossroads who opens the doorway to endless possibilities. The crisis had brought Janice to a crossroads, Legba's own domain, much the same way in which writer's block had catapulted me there. Invoking him was crucial to the success of this work.

"I work on the outside; you work on the inside," demanded the participation of Janice, since no matter what shape one is in, one is never entitled to abdicate responsibility for one's healing or to assume the role of the passive bystander to obstruct it. "I work on the outside; you work on the inside," marked the necessary division of labor between Mammie and Janice that is required to knit the interior and exterior. And since the corporeal, physical body is not only body but of mind (inner self) and Spirit, the purpose of this body work is to bring them into synchronicity, into alignment.

Misalignment, then, is another way of thinking about alienation, that movement away from the center of fire. The pathway between the scent of asafetida and a middle-class professional does not necessarily point to alienation, but the loss of that scent may well be a powerful predictor of it. Janice did not spell out all of what she encountered on that pathway, but from Mammie's incisive uptake, "You don't know as an African woman your answers come from a different source," she did not need to. The sharp (astute) response articulated the perils associated with the journey: there is a cost associated with taking refuge in the borrowed gifts of alienation that cultivate the practice of forgetting, the refusal to pull on the ancestral cord, denying ourselves life source. But it also brings one face to face with genealogy, whether or not one is willing or ready to engage it. And those borrowed gifts of alienation are not simply passive, for ingesting the belief in obeah, another way of ingesting a deep mistrust of our senses, or the shame of our spiritual inheritance as La Negra put it, confronts the internalization of dominant religion's institutionalized dis-
avowal of these practices, yet another form of oppression. The alignment of mind, body, and Spirit could be expected to assault the social practices of alienation wherever they may be practiced, whether within dominant religion, in the enclosure of the academy with its requirements of corporate time, or in day-to-day cultural prescriptions of disablement that call these Sacred practices into question and challenge their value. Ultimately, this alignment cannot but provoke a confrontation with history, both its Cartesian variant that produced the splits in the first place and the history that is being mobilized to displace it. This is what Kitsimba’s rendition of my experience of writer’s block so poignantly illustrates. Writer’s block, like alienation—or rather, writer’s block as an aspect of alienation—is a spiritual problem requiring a spiritual solution.

The knitting together of mind, body, and Spirit finds another pivotal anchor in the world of Spirit possession. Here, body becomes the means by which mind, which has fashioned itself as autonomous, is propelled outside of itself in order to invite the return of Spirit. Body, in this complex, becomes a means of communication, simply because Spirit requires it (although not only it) to mount its descent. There are many representations of possession that rely on exteriority to make the point about the visible transformation that takes place in outward appearance as a way of providing evidence for what practitioners take to be real. But that outside, visible dimension cannot be unmoored from an interior transformation that sets up the terms for the descent of Spirit. Crucial to those terms is surrender, a handing over of autonomy in the service of Spirit, without which that transformation, itself a struggle with surrender, would never occur.

I say that the body is only one of the media for the housing of Spirit because there is no single place where this knowledge resides. Within the context of Orisha ceremony, for instance, the Batá themselves, the Sacred drums, are invested with the energies of the Orisha who reside there, Anya. They evoke and provoke those Sacred energies, but they also express through rhythm their own belief in their release. Doubling. At bembés, ceremonies that rely on the Batá, practitioners dance their belief in the rhythm of movement to guide them toward the energies of Yemayá who will manifest: Hasta que muere, “until I die,” says Xiamara.

As she dances, soft waves begin to form a swaying circle, round and round, seduced by songs of praise and homage; skirts open, rise, and fall to a choreography aimed at the feet, tentative at first, mimicking the tidal way of the Ocean in search of a place to settle. Feet are the first to succumb to the shift in ground from concrete to water, throwing the dancer off balance until the body begins to rely on the weightlessness of water to sustain being upright. As the circle of movement widens, drums converse with the urgent plea of the bard. Waves become insistent, compelled by the roll of the drum call. Sharp. They crash as they reach shore. Sensitive to the spot where the water wants to settle, the bard moves closer, singing the resonance so that the eardrum would take the vibrations of its meanings to that meeting place: the vibrations of rhythm of drum beat released through Sacred energies; the vibration of song released through the rhythm of drum beat and movement.

As the rhythms complete the invitation by reminding the body of a prior promise of its ultimate surrender, darkness descends and a deep moan bursts through the artificial enclosure, rippling down the length and across the breadth of River, which, by this time, begins to remember. River assumes on its surface a delicate veil of moving tapestry, a rippled mirror flowing impatiently, yet revealing every manner of treasure: every tadpole ebony, shiny, slippery, every crayfish, each cowrie that had crawled into its protective spiral the color of ivory, each grain of silt hued to its finest having tumbled for eternity in this muddy vortex. The cry travels upward to Sky, downward again into the deep bowels of Earth until each molecule of air, each particle of soil, each sleeping star that planned to rise to brilliance later that night, each stone, each shard of leaf, each root of a tree that had crawled surreptitiously to lands grown distant from loss and from the fruits of its labor, the exploding scent of each flower, each expectant bud, each pig that had given life including those yet to be born, each fowl, each itinerant rooster, every drop of water including those hesitantly formed, they all, each one of them began to feel the desire of the cry and agreed to conspire to make its power manifest.

The Divine call to the Divine, inside of a meeting of self with self, a practice of alignment with the Divine. Yemayá, that broad expanse of
Ocean, who lives both on sea and on land has pushed past modernity's mode of reason and taken up temporary sojourn on the insides of this artificial enclosure, come to accept, to cleanse, to bless, to remind us that in the same way the breaking of waves does not compromise the integrity of the Ocean, so too anything broken in our lives cannot compromise that cosmic flow to wholeness. The body cannot but surrender in order to make way for this tidal flow. And this, too, necessitates practice.

Six: Beginnings

While my focus here has been on African-based spiritual practices, it should not be taken to mean, as I indicated earlier, that the precinct of the Sacred is any way partial. Within the metaphysical systems of Native American, Hawaiian, the I Ching, ancient Hindu, and Jewish mysticism are to be found correlates of Vodou and Lucumi that can be interpreted through Fon, Ewe, Kikongo, Yoruba, and Dahomean Sacred prisms. And since geography, culture, or religious systems cannot carry the capacity to annex the Sacred, we can safely assume that there must be multiple instances where its shades are inscribed. If it is to be found everywhere in the terrain of the everyday as part of the continuous existential fabric of being, then it lives simultaneously in the daily lives of everyone, in spiritual work that assumes a different form from those I have engaged here, but also in daily incidents, in those “things” we routinely attribute to coincidence, those moments of synchronicity, the apparently disparate that have cohesion but under another framework. It is to be found in direct revelation, in those domains that mystics routinely inhabit, but in work that in a purely secular realm would seem not to derive from Spirit. I am thinking here of Michael Cottman’s project to uncover the sunken wreckage of the Henrietta Marie, a slave ship, off the coast of Florida and his explicitness about the spiritual character of the project: “We go to the sea to explore the depths of our Souls... the call that beckoned us under water came from the sea.”24 It is also to be found in the meeting ground of the erotic, the imaginative, and the creative, which Akasha Gloria Hull addressed in what she called the “union of politics, spiritual consciousness, and creativity that gave rise to a new spirituality among progressive African-American women at the turn of the 21st century.”25 This fusion helps to explain why black female theologians use Baby Suggs in Morrison's clearing as Sacred text. And it is not surprising that Donna Daniels found that many Santeria practitioners in the Bay Area were artists, for in a larger sense there is no dimension of the Sacred that does not yearn for the making of beauty, an outer social aesthetic of expression whether in written or spoken word, the rhythm of drum, the fashioning of an altar, or any of the visual arts. The Sacred is inconceivable without an aesthetic. “We wanted to know God,” Mbūta Kusikila explained to me in my trip to the Kongo, “and that’s why we carved all of these figures, not because we worshipped idols.”26 In an even larger sense, the sacred precinct is at once vast, proximate, and intimate. In Kitsimba’s universe, the principle is quite simple: You human beings have this fancy word—syncretism—for something quite simple: everything in the universe is interconnected!

Interconnectedness, interdependence, and intersubjectivity as constructs or desire do not necessarily provoke resistance within the shared canon of materialist modernity. Indeed, we count on this for the making of successful political movements. It is not the fact of intersubjectivity, then, but the interjection of the Sacred in its matrix that renders it suspect. Let me examine the geographies of that suspicion. At times it is linked to the practitioner/believer, who ostensibly comes with a proclivity to disengage the world of politics. But that suspicion is simply not borne out in practice. There is a wide range of contexts that imbricate the Sacred with the political: the large-scale political movements that are based in liberation theology in Latin America; that phase of Indian anticolonial struggle inaugurated by Gandhi whose prayer life lay at the root of mass politics; and the political party in Suriname that was formed by Renate Druiventak, introduced earlier, based on the prompting of Winti in her dreams. Luisa Teish, who has been in a range of intersecting struggles, links the political to the spiritual in these terms: “We were political because we were spiritual,”27 a formulation echoed in Marta Moreno Vega’s apt sense of an intrinsic connection between the political and the spiritual: “The energy that naturally flows from initiation opens up inner channels, granting the initiate the ability to see, feel, smell, taste, and sense more acutely, and to be more present in the world. By combining my knowledge of the spiritual and the secular worlds, I have found a universe that unveils all of its wisdom and beauty before me. Like the great... goddess of the ocean,
Yemayá, who lives in the ocean and on the earth, we must avail ourselves of all the natural treasures of both worlds.” Indeed, the formulation of embodied praxis mounts a deep challenge to that suspicion of disengagement. Thus, to continue to argue from that suspicion not only denies the pedagogies derived from Sacred praxis but exposes an allegiance to that form of rationality that divests the secular of the Sacred in a way that both privileges and subordinates—privileging the former while subordinating the latter.

Or is the suspicion cathedeted onto women themselves whom feminism wants to cure of the desire to be consorts of many male gods? To be sure, many of the immigrant women in Vodou and Lucumí practices do not claim the name feminist or woman of color. However, negotiating the social relations of gender and sexuality occurs within complicated inheritances of anthropomorphization. Within the Yoruba system Olodumare, god, is not gendered, and in the Kikongo creation narrative what brings earth into existence is Kalunga, an energy force that is similarly nongendered. Thus moving from neutered conceptualization to the engendering of Sacred praxis maps a complex journey from energy to embodiment constitutive of a masculinization of the social organization of the Sacred, but it need not carry the immediate presumption of women’s subordination. Lorand Matory’s work is most instructive here, for in it he elaborates how cross-dressing and gender-bending in Oyo-Yoruba practices in Nigeria muddy the categories of male and female, husband and wife, in ways that carve a space for dominance by women. The Vodou god Gede, a preeminently masculine god, dances the balance among sexuality, trickery, and death by mounting Mammy with consistency at every fest, replete with oversized penis, re-enacting the sensuous rhythms of sex on women—lesbian and heterosexual alike. There are then at least two kinds of mounting taking place, a process of doubling that makes the question of gendered memory of Spirit appropriate for both the mounted and mountee (the same person) and the woman who rides the sexual advance of Gede. Short of us all becoming practitioners, the urgent requirement here is not to presume a priori how gender and sexuality work but to lean on ethnographic work to create the proximate categories that convey a sense of the meanings of these gender transmutations. The problematic here pertains to how we approach knowing when much of the service of that knowing emanates from being.

All of these questions heighten the importance of traveling within, of reaching on the inside of these cultural spiritual categories. In order to do so there are at least four areas we must examine. First, the critiques of patriarchal religions and fundamentalisms have, in some instances, kept us away from the search for Spirit. We have conceded, albeit indirectly so, far too much ground for fundamentalists to appropriate the terrain. And yet, the Sacred or the spiritual cannot be deployed as the ace in the political hole, that is, deployed only as a critique of fundamentalism.

Second, our legitimate repudiation of the category of naturalization as an instrument of domination ought not to be confused with the engagement of the forces, processes, and laws of nature, particularly because these forces of nature do not behave according to the terms prescribed by hegemonic thought systems. It is one reason that capitalist imperatives would have them “tamed” and “owned,” or otherwise reconfigured as (Christian) paradise in order to be secularly consumed. The animus and activities of nature and the hegemonic processes of naturalization that would have social inequity originate in the natural are, simply put, not the same.

Third, critiques of the shifting faces of hegemony do not automatically provide the maps for an inner life, for redefining the grammar of the mind, for adjusting the climate of the Soul (in the words of Howard Thurman). Those maps have to be drawn, and drawing them is crucial since one of the effects of constructing a life based principally in opposition is that the ego learns to become righteous in its hatred of injustice. In that very process it learns simultaneously how to hate since it is incapable of distinguishing between good hate and bad hate, between righteous hate and irrational hate. My point here is not to reduce radical political movements to mass psychologies of hatred. Rather it is to suggest that the field of oscillation between the two might be quite small. The good righteous hatred of injustice solidifies in the same way in which, for instance, we learn how to class by living in a class system. We learn how to hate in our hatred of injustice, and it is these psychic residuals that travel, sometimes silently, sometimes vociferously, into social movements that
run aground on the invisible premises of scarcity—alterity driven by separation, empowerment driven by external loss—and of having to prove perpetual injury as the quid pro quo to secure ephemeral rights.

Fourth, secular feminism has perhaps assisted, unwittingly, in the privatization of the spiritual—in the dichotomization of a "private" spiritual self from the corpus of work called feminism and from organized political mobilizations. There are personal, political, and epistemic ramifications here. Consider again Renate Druiventak. At the outset of her field project, Wekker was "wary of Winti, hoping that [she] might study the construction of gender and sexualities without having to get into it," to separate life from what she then thought of as the superstructure religion. As the evidence began to pile up, however, and "women frequently attended WintiPrey/ritual gatherings and consulted religious specialists in matters of love, sickness, health, and prosperity," Wekker admits that "it became inescapable." If political work among Afro-Surinamese working-class women is taken merely to illustrate that "Third World women have agency too"—in short, if we theorize outside of that which gave impetus to the political work in the first place—we would have missed something quite crucial about how Winti knitted together the interstices of selfhood and the relationship between that self and community. We would not know Druiventak, although we would know something of what she did—that is, political work. Clearly the "success" of the political party in the secular world is not the only important "outcome" of the life she lives. Ultimately, excising the spiritual from the political builds the ground at the intersection of two kinds of alienation: the one an alienation from the self; the other, which is inevitable, alienation from each other.

What would taking the Sacred seriously mean for transnational feminism and related radical projects, beyond an institutionalized use value of theorizing marginalization? It would mean wrestling with the praxis of the Sacred. The central understanding within an epistemology of the Sacred is that of a core/Spirit that is immortal, at once linked to the pulse and energy of creation. It is that living matter that links us to each other, making that which is individual simultaneously collective. But as I outlined in the previous chapter, its presence does not mean it is passively given or maintained. Of course, the idea of core or essence signals essentialism, but the multiple praxis of embodiment I have explored here indicate requirements for a work life beyond the mere presence of a body. In this sense it marks a major departure from normative essentialism. Yet core, like destiny, has been made to signal fixity and the unchanging, a move that opens the back door to conflate the Sacred with a primitive tradition that is resistant to change. Those who would characterize this world of the postmodern and the identities of its inhabitants as absent of this essence or core would seem to be at odds with the thought systems of a great number of people in the world who live the belief that their lives are intimately and tangibly paired to the world of the invisible. And this state of being at odds is to be expected since Enlightenment reason and its attendant psychologies have only a relatively short lifespan, coming into prominence as one mode of reasoning that achieved dominance, like any other hegemonic system, by beating out others. And although its diffusion as it accompanied imperialism in its quest to be imperial has, for the moment, promulgated some of its own essence on different shores, it need not follow that these are the only beings who can be produced, since each thought system has in fact its own attendant psychology, code of behaviors, and its own prerogatives to deal with impermanence that is not imagined as a recent by-product of modernity but as a permanent condition of the universe. Taking the Sacred seriously would mean coming to wrestle with the dialectic of permanent impermanence.

The constructs that constitute the praxis of the Sacred would thus have to be taken as real and the belief structure of its practitioners as having effects that are real. The constituents within its ambit, such as Truth, cannot be superficially positioned as multiple choice, contested situational claims, or lapses in communication, but as metaphysical principle. The knowledge derived from faith and belief systems is not uninformephenomena, lapses outside the bounds of rationality to be properly corrected with rationality, but rather knowledge about Sacred accompaniment, knowledge that is applied and lived in as consistent and as committed a way as possible so as to feel and observe the meaning of mystery, not as secret, but as elusive—hence the constancy of work. Faith could not then live without spiritual literacy or competence, a shade of competence that does not rely on the tired exertion of an individuated will but on the knowledge of Divine accompaniment and guidance, itself the essence of Truth. And grace, the quality that, as Lata Mani says, picks
us up and dusts us off over and over again, instills a sense, however faint, of its companion humility, since it comes through no merit of our own.\textsuperscript{53} But for these anchors of Sacred praxis to shake the archives of secularism, they would have to be removed from the category of false consciousness so that they can be accorded the real meaning they make in the lives of practitioners.

Taking the Sacred seriously would propel us to take the lives of primarily working-class women and men seriously, and it would move us away from theorizing primarily from the point of marginalization. In chapter 3 I argued against the analytic tendency of turning women’s indispensability in the labor market into narratives of victimhood, but that formulation remained narrowly materialist. Since in spiritual work inheres the lived capacity to initiate and sustain communication between spiritual forces and human consciousness, to align the inner self, the behavioral self and the invisible, we are confronting an engagement with the embodied power of the Sacred, collectivized self-possession, if you will. We can hardly think \textit{empowerment}, then, premised as it is in the notions of need, lack and scarce resources that have to be shored up by an exterior source, since it would mean conferring on “theorists” the power to confer power, a power, quite simply, that we do not have. At the very least it should make us wary about theorizing from the point of marginalization, for even the most egregious signatures of new empire are not the sole organizing nexus of subjectivity, if we manage to stay alive, and even in death there are commitments and choices about the when, how, and the kind of provisions with which we return.

Since the praxis of the Sacred involves the rewiring of the senses, the praxis for secular feminism would involve a rewiring of its most inherited concepts of home and formulations of domesticity, for instance. Home is multiply valenced, a space and place in which Time centers the movement of Sacred energies; a place where those who walk with you—Orisha, Lwa, Spirit—live and manifest (drop in) apparently improtunum, or when called to work. They are fed, celebrated, and honored there because they reside there. It is one of the many places where they reside, whereas it may be the only place that we reside. Home is a set of practices, as John Berger notes, and at the heart of those practices are those that mark its conversion into a spiritual workplace.\textsuperscript{34}

Of immediate importance to feminism is the meaning of embodiment and body praxis, and the positioning of the body as a source of knowledge within terms differently modulated than the materiality of the body and its entanglement in the struggle against commodification, as it continues to be summoned in the service of capital. But here again that materialism has absent Spirit, and so the contemporaneous task of a theory of the flesh, with which I think Cherrie Moraga would agree, is to transmute this body and the pain of its dismemberment to a remembering of the body to its existential purpose.\textsuperscript{55} There are Sacred means through which we come to be at home in the body that supercede its positioning in materiality, in any of the violent discourses of appropriation, and in any of the formations within normative multiculturalism. That being at home in the body is one of the meanings of surrender, as in a handing over not a sacrificial giving up. Bodies continue to participate in the social but their raison d’être does not belong there, for ultimately we are not our bodies, and this contract cannot be settled cheaply. Sacred energies would want us to relinquish the very categories constitutive of the material world, not in the requisite of a retreat but as a way to become more attuned to their ephemeral vagaries and the real limits of temporality so as to return to them with a disciplined freedom capable of renovating the collective terms of our engagement.

Kitsimba walks with me. She lives in springs, in water—that is, everywhere. She carves resistant rock. She lives in the roots of words: Simba, to bless, to grow into the gentle vibrations of our names. Simbi, the Soul of someone who holds the power of making community. Simbi, teacher, the Soul of someone who holds the power of touch. Simbi, healer, the Soul of someone who holds the power of words... Simba Simbi, hold onto what holds you up.

Yemayá holds the crown, having enabled the Crossing, Kitsimba’s as well as my own. She has assumed the task of transforming what we most need to learn from the Crossing into what we most need to learn about ourselves. Pedagogies of the Sacred are pedagogies of Crossing.
Seven: Prayer Poem in Praise of Yemaya Achaba,
Mediator of the Crossing

Without you I would not know life
I would not be
Myself/Yourself
In me/In you
Sin tú no hay vida
Mother/Teacher
I learn how to caress from the cadence of waves
Supple
Gentle
Tumultuous Enveloping

In the vastness of Ocean surrounded by your treasures
Which passion alone could not coax you to reveal
Inle
Wash me... mother of life
of water
One in the beginning when there was no beginning
No time
Take me to that underground home on top of the sand
To your mirror turquoise jade inlay
Known in the land of gods to shatter
Illusion, Maya
Peligrosisima
Take me
Desnuda
Without pretense
Sin nada
Rebithed in the cadence of waves
The end of your name is illusion
In another tongue
But there are no other tongues
For those who know your many names
Ancient names

You know you who love the ends of things
Who use them to sustain you
So that nothing may come to an end
Ashé

In the last cycle of Moon
We come paying homage
Gifts of Seven
No one mistakes your calm for weakness
When you tumble foam
Spew turquoise rage
No room for calm
In those times it is not weakness for which
We yearn but peace
That truth which passion alone
Could not entice you to divulge

O Achaba, Peligrosisima
Haunting Sweet Verbena
Wise one
Hiding your age deep within the soft fold of waves
translucent
amongst your treasures rest the captive
shuffled through the door of no return
no longer imprisoned
You have restored their wings
Bathe me
Goddess of Salt
Protector of the salt eaters
The salt pickers
Heal our wounds
You who rescued Lot's wife
Tongue-tied
From the scourge of generations
As I approach you in the early dawn
Wind whispers its welcome to the melody
Of the salmon violet horn
Moon rests from its full bloom
You in honor assume a stillness
Drape smooth in seamless silk
Awaiting a lover's return
In this early dawn
We coauthor
this day
of endless transformations
I rest my pen upon your altar
my Soul
orders that curtails political activity by public servants. The injunction reads as follows: “A public officer must, in no circumstances, become publicly involved in any political controversy, unless he becomes so involved through no fault of his own, for example, in the proper performance of his official duties; and he must have it in mind that publication either orally, or in writing of any material, whether of direct political interest, or relating to the administration of the Government, or of a Department of Government, or any matter relating to his official duties or other matters do not affect the public service.” Commonwealth of the Bahamas, general orders, “Utterance on Political and Administrative Matters, Statement 932,” 1982, Nassau, Government Printing Office. See also Commonwealth of the Bahamas, Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Act, “An Act To Amend the Law Relating to Sexual Offences and to Make Provisions in Respect of Related Circumstances Involving Parties to a Marriage” (date of assent 29 July 1991), Nassau, Government Printing Office.

11 Craton, A History of the Bahamas, 112.

12 Goldberg, “Sodomy in the New World,” 3–18. The move here is an important foundational one. Goldberg draws from a sixteenth-century document regarding Balboa’s entry into a Panamanian village, in which he ordered the killing of about six hundred “sodomic” Indians and fed another forty to the dogs. Goldberg argues that the gesture served to establish a link between heterosexual imperial interests and heterosexual “native” interests, suggesting that “native” heterosexuals had more in common with imperial heterosexuals than with “native” homosexuals.

13 Warner, Fear of a Queer Planet, 15.

14 The recodification of primogeniture here is somewhat paradoxical since from 1982 women’s groups have influenced the state to erase it.

15 Evans, Sexual Citizenship; Barry and Wood, The Other Side of Paradise, 259. This fact was also expressed to me in an interview with Michael Stevenson, College of the Bahamas, June 1993.

16 Hart, Fatal Women, 5.

17 This is one area that has been remarkably undertheorized in the understanding of the American state: the extent to which an advanced capitalist state can be simultaneously nationalist, or even hypernationalist, intervening abroad while vigorously engaged in the redrawing of its own borders at home. Unfortunately, nationalism has come to be more easily associated with the neocolonial than with the neo-imperial. The specific reference here is to the California mobilization in 1995, Proposition 187, against undocumented workers, whom the U.S. state defines as “illegal aliens.” The effect of this right-wing mobilization would have been to deny schooling, health care, and a range of social services to undocumented workers and their children.

18 Robson, Lesbian (Out)Law, 58.
The most significant gesture here is the convergence of right-wing mobilization inside the American state regarding family values and the deployment of foreign aid in its service. The United States Foreign Relations Committee has, for instance, formulated a policy that links the terms of foreign aid to the outlawing of abortions, while increasing sterilization programs in Third World countries. In other words, population control is being institutionalized at the expense of birth control.

Grewal and Kaplan, *Scattered Hegemonies*.


There is a plethora of women's organizations that range from Girl Guides and trade unions to business and professional women's organizations and feminist groups. A listing compiled by the Women's Desk reveals that there are approximately sixty-seven women's organizations (Women's Affairs Unit, *Directory of Women's Groups*, Nassau, Government Printing Office, 1991).

The Women's Desk, established in 1981, was upgraded in 1987 to the Women's Affairs Unit, but it is still located within the Ministry of Youth, Sports, and Community Development. It has been consistently plagued by a lack of funds. Constraints faced in 1993 included the following: inadequate funds for execution of program activities; lack of trained staff; inability to meet the demands of the public; no approved national policy on women; and generally unclear status (Women's Desk, internal memorandum, 1989). See also Roberts, "The Changing Role of Women's Bureaux in the Process of Social Change in the Caribbean."

Sandra Dean Patterson, director of the Women's Crisis Center, interview by author, June 1993; Sharon Claire and Camille Barnett, College of the Bahamas, interview by author, June 1993. Interviews were conducted with Linda Carty.

Marion Bethel, Michael Stevenson, Sexual Offences Unit, Criminal Investigation Division, Bahamas, interviews by author, June 1993.


Sears and Bethel, interview. Almost all Commonwealth Carribean countries have passed some type of domestic violence or sexual offences legislation. The countries are as follows:

Domestic Violence legislation: Domestic Violence (Summary Proceedings) Act 1999 (Antigua and Barbuda); Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Act 1991 (Bahamas); Domestic Violence (Protection Orders) Act, 1992, Cap 130A (Barbados); Domestic Violence Act 1992 (Belize); Domestic Violence Act 1997 (Bermuda); Domestic Violence (Summary Proceedings) Act 1992 (British Virgin Islands); Summary Jurisdiction (Domestic Violence) Law 1992 (Cayman Islands); Domestic Violence Act 2001 (Dominica); Domestic Violence Act 2001 (Grenada); Domestic Violence Act 1996 (Guyana); Domestic Violence Act 1995 (Jamaica); Domestic Violence Act 2000 (St. Kitts-Nevis); Domestic Violence (Summary Proceedings) Act 1995 (St. Lucia); Domestic Violence and Matrimonial (Proceedings) Act 1984, Domestic Violence (Summary Proceedings) Act 1995 (St. Vincent and the Grenadines); Domestic Violence Act 1999 (Trinidad and Tobago).

Sexual Offences Legislation: Sexual Offences Act 1991 (Antigua and Barbuda); Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Act 1991 (Bahamas); Sexual Offences Act 1992, Cap 154 (Barbados); Criminal Code (Amendment) Act 1999 (Belize); Sexual Offences Act 1998 (Dominica); Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Act 1991 (Bahamas); Sexual Offences Act 1998 (Dominica); Sexual Offences Act 1986, Amendment Act 2000 (Trinidad and Tobago). I thank Tracy Robinson for compiling this exhaustive listing.

See Commonwealth of the Bahamas, General Laws, "Personal Rights Arising from Marriage and Proprietary Rights During Marriage," part 3, subsection 2, relating to the rights of consortium and the duty of the wife to cohabit with her husband. It states: "It is the duty of the wife to reside and cohabit with her husband." There is no such requirement specified for a husband.


Therese Huggins, member of *Dawn*, interview by author, Bahamas, June 1993.

The link between domestic sexual violence and state economic violence has been made by *CAFRA*, the Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action, and by Sisteren, a women's collaborative theater group. See, for example, the article "Women and Sexuality," in *CAFRA News* 8, nos. 1–2 (January–June 1994). See also Sisteren, with Ford-Smith, *Lionheart Gal*.


Commonwealth of the Bahamas, Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Act, 3.

Marion Bethel, attorney general's office, interview by author, Nassau, June 1993. For the question of rethinking issues of coverture in relation to domestic violence in the United States, see Marcus, "Thinking and Teaching about Terrorism in the Home."
38 Commonwealth of the Bahamas, Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Act, 18–19.
40 Miller, *Family Property and Financial Provision*.
42 Ibid., x.
44 The point is excellently explicated by Williams, *The Alchemy of Race and Rights*; and Williams, “Attack of the 50-Foot First Lady.”
48 Stevenson, interview. Haitians occupy a marginalized status in spite of their work and the fact that they have lived for several generations in the Bahamas. The conflation of the Haitian body with the AIDS-infected body has served to further make Haitians the object of state surveillance and repression and of misguided popular disaffection.
49 Claire and Barnett, interview.
51 This gesture of gender parity was first made explicit by women, endorsed by Myrtle Brandt, the principal drafter for the Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Act, then enthusiastically endorsed by the state.
52 Mun Wong, City University of New York, conversation with author, May 1995.
53 The strictures of these surveillance mechanisms had already become clear to women and to women’s groups and social service agencies almost immediately after the passage of the act. Ruth Bower-Darville, Sandra Dean Patterson, and Zonta, interviews by author, June 1993.
54 Commonwealth of the Bahamas, Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Act.
55 All of the quotes that follow are taken verbatim from tape recordings made during parliamentary hearings. At the time of my research in June 1993, four years after the debates, the testimonies, except for the then-opposition’s statements, had not been transcribed. Thus we had access to information not yet known to many Bahamians.
56 Letter from Hunter to British Colonial Secretary, Trinidad and Tobago, 1804. British Museum Library, London.
57 Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*.
59 All of these terms refer to women loving women, but there are nuances to which we need to pay attention that are illustrative of heterogeneity in the seemingly homogeneous category of lesbian. Mati is the Surinam Creole word for friends of either gender. Mati work is an institution with its own rules and rituals in which Creole women openly engage in sexual relations with men and women simultaneously or consecutively. It is a behavior, not an identity and should not be configured as bisexuality. Wékker, “One finger does not drink Okra Soup,” 336–338. Zami is the Carriacou name for women who are friends and lovers. The term kachupera is historically situated in Curaçao, while manroyals can be read as lesbian bu: carries a connotation of cross-gender mixture in Jamaica. Manroyal suggests a kind of third space, which might have a nuanced association with the designation butch. I thank Honor Ford Smith for this latter insight. See, for instance, Wékker, “I Am a Gold Coin (I Pass through All Hands, But I Do Not Lose My Value)” ; Céleminia, “Women Who Love Women”; Silvera, “Man Royals and Sodomites”; Lorde, Zami; and Brand, *Sans Souci*.
60 Hart, *Fata Women*, 11.
61 The moment of transition from colonial rule to independence, symbolized by the new nation’s flag, is being contested here. The point is that flag independence belies the significant ways in which foreign, imperial interests are still folded into those of the nation. While in the field, we first heard of the specter of a band of nationless men from some policemen after an interview at the Criminal Investigation Division. We found the image quite pervasive, and it was later corroborated by other interviewees.
63 Bethel, “Where Do We Go From Here?”; Saunders, “Women in the Bahamian Society and Economy in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries.”
65 Evans, *Sexual Citizenship*.
66 The state, nonetheless, has to be careful of not entirely usurping the church’s own divine mission of salvation. It must, therefore, legislate against these passions, these sins of the flesh, as a restorative gesture.
67 Evans, *Sexual Citizenship*, 111.
68 Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*.
69 The quotes here are pulled from the series of throne speeches printed in the
Nassau Guardian over the period from 1967 to 1992. These discussions are conducted in a way that suggests that Bahamians are not in need of an infrastructure.

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, this incursion of the hegemonic into the oppositional can be found in neocolonial structures as well.

Gluckman and Reed offered one of the earliest analyses critical of the terms of this discursive formation. Their essay, “The Gay Marketing Moment,” first appeared in Dollars and Sense, 16–19. See also Gluckman and Reed, eds., Homo Economics, xii.

Chasin, Selling Out. See also Urvashi Vaid, Virtual Equality.


As the irony of heterosexism would have it, the thoroughly heterosexualized masculine Marlboro man died of AIDS early in the life of the epidemic.


This citation comes from a discussion about home economics that appeared in Witt, Thomas, and Marcus, eds., Out in All Directions, 574–75. For an excellent discussion of the biased assumptions embedded in these data, see Badgett, “Beyond Biased Samples,” 65–72.


These data were prepared by Affluent Marketers Alert. There is, as well, a significant growth of these instruments of the information industry. They come from both gay and heterosexual marketers, including the Strub Media Group, Simmons Market Research Bureau, Overlooked Opinions, and others.


Meyers, who manages the Meyers Sheppard Pride Fund, seeks companies whose portfolio of stocks return a good investment. She defines “gay friendly” as those corporations who are explicit in antidiscriminatory language against sexual orientation and those with health and other benefits for same-sex partners.


Hackett, Twenty-Million New Customers!

Lukenbill, Smart Spending.

There are some in the lesbian and gay community who believe that heterosexism has necessitated these services and that vaticans are in some instances underdeveloped. See Stone, “AIDS and the Moral Economy of Insurance.”

Windy City Times, October 31, 1996, 61.

See Reed Abelson, “Gay Friendly Fund Has Blue Chip Focus,” 7.

Davis, Blues Legacies and Black Feminism.


The Disney/Haiti Justice Campaign, “Fact Sheet Update,” 12 November 1996. For a discussion of the challenges of the union-based gay rights movement, see Moir,
strong reminder to participants that liberal feminists who placed these very questions on the political agenda are not the enemy. Milwaukee, June 2004.


127 A discussion of the national security strategy of the United States can be found at http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.html. All subsequent quotes are taken verbatim from this text.


129 These words are taken from Morrison, Playing in the Dark, 3.

130 Approximately four days after the attacks on the center of financial capital in the United States, the president remarked: "We will rid the world of evil doers... This crusade, this war on terrorism is going to take a while." The state alignment of the war on terrorism with the Crusades was stridently criticized and resulted in the retraction of the statement. My interest, however, lies in its psychic production—its nostalgic anxiety for an earlier historical moment and the psychic residues it deposits. See "Bush Pledges Crusade against 'Evil Doers,'" at www.recordonline.com/archive/2001/09/17/rdp16.html.

131 See Mauge, The Lost Orisha, 118-19; and Mohanty, "Cartographies of Struggle," 25.

132 Davies, "Half the World: The Transnational Black Socialist Feminist Practice of Claudia Jones." See also Nobles, Shades of Citizenship; and Torpey, The Invention of the Passport.

133 LaDuke, "Radioactive Colonization." See also Trask, "Self-Determination for Pacific Island Women"; laDuke, "Ninassian"; and Allen, Off the Reservation.

134 Women Working for a Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific, Pacific Women Speak.


137 Roy, Power Politics, 128.

138 Kaplan and Pease, Cultures of United States Imperialism, 14.


140 Shohat, Talking Visions, 38.

141 Cynthia Enloe, speaking at the conference of the National Women's Studies Association, Women in the Middle: Borders, Barriers, Intersections, gave a

142 Feldman, Universities in the Business of Repression.

143 The context here relies on a series of hearings in the U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Education and the Workforce, pertaining to Title VI funding for "International Programs in Higher Education and Questions about Bias." The bias in question is postcolonial studies and "its efforts to potentially undermine American foreign policy." The companion legislation that has been introduced to curtail Title VI funding is HR 3077; see http://edworkforce.house.gov/hearings/108th/sed/titelv61903/w161903.htm. These hearings can be considered part of what Kaplan and Grewal call "the backlash narrative" in their essay "Transnational Practices and Interdisciplinary Feminist Scholarship."

144 The consequences of this "backlash narrative" can be grave, particularly when immigrants are singled out for their "anti-American" politics. A statement by Stanley Kurtz, research fellow at the Hoover Institution, on 19 June 2003 cited the Hagop Kevoian Web site at New York University: www.nyu.edu/gsas/program/meareast, particularly the work of Ella Shohat. According to Kurtz, "Everyone that takes a stand sharply criticizes American policy." Note also that Shohat, in Talking Visions, criticizes America's "crimes" of "oil driven hegemony" and America's "murderous sanctions on Iraq."

145 Donaldson, Donaczy, and Illiman, Subversive Couplings; Dirlik, The Postcolonial Aura. Postcolonial studies most often imagines the subaltern as residing elsewhere, rarely in conversation with local subalterns or with the political movements that provoked decolonization. See also Wing, "Educate to Liberate"; Grewal, "The Postcolonial, Ethnic Studies and the Diaspora"; and duCille, "Postcolonialism and Afrocentricity: Discourse and Dat Course."

146 Alarcón, Snake Poems.

6. Remembering This Bridge Called My Back

1 See the video documentary Sweet Sugar Rage, available from the Sistren Theatre Collective in Jamaica. See also the work by Sistren (with Ford Smith) titled Lionheart Gal. The term CAFRA stands for the Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action. Since its inception in 1986, the association has been explicit in its commitment to examine "the relations between men and women in capitalist and socialist societies; to use a framework inclusive of race, class and sex; to demonstrate the ways in which exploitative relations between men and women are facilitated, maintained and reproduced by exploitative capitalist relations, and to show, as well, how capitalism itself benefits in the process."

2 Chryostos, "I Walk in the Shadow of My People." The occupation in South Dakota by the people of Pine Ridge and members of the American Indian
Movement lasted for sixty-nine days in 1973. The conditions that led to the occupation still continue (conversation with Sharon Duy, January 2001). See also Brown, Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee.


5 Walsh, Communion with God, 15.

6 See my argument in “Not Just (Any) Body Can Be a Citizen.”

7 Nationalist regimes in the Caribbean have constantly mobilized race in the name of popular nationalism to generate the idea of a seamless nation. The national motto for Jamaica reads, “Out of many, one”; in the case of Trinidad and Tobago, it is: “Every creed and race has an equal place.”

8 Du Bois’s earlier analysis of double-consciousness is pertinent in this context. See Du Bois, The Souls of Black Folk. These formulations lie at the heart of the concept of internalized oppression used within feminism.


11 See Powell’s Bagoda for a moving, complicated portrayal of Chinese migration to Jamaica and the different kinds of journeys it can represent.

12 Grewal et al., Charting the Journey, 1–6.

13 The politics of black women in Britain have always been infused with a more systematic critique of state practices than has been the case with women of color in the United States. The claim for black women’s citizenship was anchored on a subjectivity as colonials, hence the notion that the borders of the British nation had never been fixed. Gail Lewis, one of the original editors of Charting the Journey, believes (at the time of this writing) that black women are posing questions of belonging in ways that are changing the very character of Britishness. There is a fruitful set of transatlantic conversations that black women in Britain and women of color in the United States still need to have.


15 This is taken from the text of a song by Sweet Honey in the Rock, “Are My Hands Clean?” (reproduced in Enloe, Bananas, Beaches and Bases, 158).

16 Moraga, “Refugees of a World on Fire”; Jordan, Affirmative Acts, 94. There is an important distinction here between wealthy refugees who flee to protect privilege: for instance, the light-skinned/white Cuban refugees who fled to Miami with the triumph of communism in Cuba; the Asian Ugandans who were expelled by the 1972 edict of Idi Amin who had business interests in different parts of the world (see Brah, Cartographies of Diaspora, 35); and the comprador classes of many Third World countries who flee to metropolitan countries partly out of a refusal to rebuild civil society in their own countries of origin (this latter insight came from a conversation with Chanda Reddy). See also Bhattacharjee, “The Public/Private Mirage.”


18 Sudbury, Global Lockdown; Davis, Are Prisons Obsolete?


21 I learned about these disturbing data and their implications in conversation with Barbara Herbert. They refer primarily to African and Brazilian women in Massachusetts. African American women who have had this disease since it became visible in 1981 continue to suffer disproportionate morbidity and mortality rates, even with the advent of new medications. Clearly the question of the kinds of political interventions we adopt to make breast cancer, HIV/AIDS, and other diseases central parts of our organizing is an urgent one.

22 Freire, Pedagogies of the Oppressed, 31.


24 These lines are taken from the haiku of Ngo An, an eleventh-century Vietnamese Zen monk: “The jade burned on the mountain retains its natural color. / The lotus, blooming in the furnace, does not lose its freshness.” They also serve as the epigraph to Nhat Hanh’s Vietnam: Lotus in a Sea of Fire. Nhat Hanh traces the history of Vietnamese Buddhism and its engagement in the conflagration called the Vietnam War. I thank Mab Segrest for this reference.

25 Levins Morales, “... And Even Fidel Can’t Change That!” 53–56.


28 The sexual abuse of women in prisons is part of the violent sexualization of prison life: see Davis, Are Prisons Obsolete? 62–83; and ColorLines, especially the winter 2000 issue titled “Conferences on the Color of Violence.”

29 Brah, Cartographies of Diaspora, 242.

30 For an exceptional analysis of dominant postmodernism’s premature theoretical abandonment of the category of social location and identity, see Moya, Postmodernism, ‘Realism’ and the Politics of Identity.

31 Cherrie Moraga, “A Tuna Bleeding in the Heat: A Chicana Code of Changing Consciousness.” Moraga, the recipient of the CLAGS’s Kessler award, noted that her recent work has a stronger Chicana/o audience.

32 Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora,* 154.

33 Du Bou, *Black Reconstruction.*

34 The official period of Reconstruction is 1865–1877. Certainly the ideology of race was taking dramatic turns during this period, but it sets the stage for an even more vigorous legislation of whiteness in the 1880s and 1890s. See also Haney-López, *White by Law,* Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas,* Perdue, *Cherokee Women,* and Porter, *Black Seminoles,* 175. This was also the period of sustained guerrilla wars by the Lumbee in North Carolina, for instance, that heightened the threat of revolt and the Red River War (conversation between David Sartorious and Theda Perdue, research notes of David Sartorious, 2003).


38 There are, of course, different class migrations that are in turn linked to the categories and quotas deployed by the Immigration and Naturalization Service. For a comparison of South Asian migration to the United States, see Bhattacharjee, “The Public/Private Mirage,” 210.

39 Here I have benefited enormously from discussions with André Nicole McLaughlin, founder of the Black Women’s Cross-Cultural Institute, Gloria I. Joseph, Chandan Reddy, Tamara Jones, Gayati Gopinath, Judith Halberstam, and Liza Fiol-Matta.

40 I thank Chandan Reddy for this point. This polarization is also reflected in a theoretical schism between postcolonial studies and ethnic studies. A larger analysis is warranted here, which should also entail an analysis of hiring practices within the academy.


43 Our understanding of this American social formation would benefit enormously from analyses that do not automatically premise a democratic U.S. state. Such a refusal would help to reduce the anomaly of positioning the state as democratic at home and interventionist abroad. See Guerrero, “Civil Rights versus Sovereignty,” for an understanding of how the U.S. state negotiates a set of advanced capitalist and colonial relations, particularly in relation to Native peoples; and Cohen, *The Boundaries of Blackness,* for an astute reading of the “advanced marginalization” of African American communities. See also Lewis, “Race,” *Genre,* *Social Welfare,* for an exceptional formulation of Britain as a postcolonial social formation.

44 The fact of African complicity in the Atlantic slave trade is a different point from the one I am making here.

45 Baldwin, “Princes and Powers,” in *The Price of the Ticket,* 56. Of course Baldwin’s conflation of Pan-Africanism with royal manliness is not to be missed here.

46 Marshall, *The Fisher King,* 56. A closer analysis of the new racial composition of domestic labor needs to be undertaken.


48 I recall here the shared mobilizations in New York City around the death of Malvin Cató, the police torture of Abner Louima, and the police shooting of Amadou Diallo.


50 See Lord’s “Eye to Eye,” an important essay on which I lean heavily (in *Sister Outsider,* 145–75).

51 1.5.2.

52 David Rudder, a Calypsonian from Trinidad, has penned an exceptional Pan-African tribute to Haiti, titled, “Haiti I’m Sorry.” The last stanza goes as follows:

When there is anguish in Port-au-Prince
is still Africa crying
We’re out in far away places
when our neighbors are just dying
Dey say the middle passage is gone
so how come overcrowded boats still haunt our lives
I refuse to believe that we the people
will forever turn our hearts and our eyes away

Chorus: Haiti, I’m sorry, we misunderstood you
one day we’ll turn our heads and look inside you
one day we’ll turn our heads and restore your glory.

53 Nhât H’ănh, *Fragrant Palm Leaves,* 89.


56 Brand, *No Language Is Neutral,* 26. Brand is talking here about the sidelong glances that Caribbean people give to slavery.

57 Epigraph taken from the “Tiv of West Africa,” in Marshall, *The Chosen Place, the Timeless People.*


59 Brah’s excellent essay, “The Scent of Memory” plays on the title of an autobiographical account by a man named Lott of his mother’s suicide in Southall. In
the work, Brah reconstructs Lott's family genealogy in this white working-class community in the context of interviews that Brah herself conducted earlier with Lott's contemporaries, and she analyzes South Asian migration and the attendant violence against South Asians (which interrogate 'origin stories' of belonging) in order to understand how Lott's mother was implicated in Brah's world, and Brah in the mother's world. The essay is an excellent methodological piece that demonstrates how to think about identification across difference.

60 Morrison, *Beloved*, 38. Carole Boyce Davies makes the point that there is a heterosexu-alizing move at work here in the fact that it is the manly presence of Paul D. that makes Sethe's womanly remembering possible. Davies argues that after all Sethe went through she was compelled to "leave her breasts" in Paul D's hands, to entrust her womanliness to heterosexual manhood. Davies, *Migration of the Subject*, 130–51.

61 Cameron, "Gee, You Don't Seem Like an Indian from the Reservation," 52.


64 Moras, "And Even Fidel Can't Change That!" 56.


66 Cameron, "Gee, You Don't Seem Like an Indian from the Reservation," 46–52.


69 Natale Goldberg, "Writing the Landscape of Your Mind" (Austin, Writer's AudioShop, 1993, tape 1). Goldberg also discusses how the idea for this exercise of writing at the place of what is seen and not seen, and the space in between, comes out of her Zen practice.


71 Bambara, "Foreword," viii.

72 El Ñando Zerdo is the left-handed world as envisioned by the editors of *Bridge*. See *Bridge*, 195–96.

73 Reagon, "Coalition Politics."


75 I borrow the term "revolutionary patience" from Gloria Joseph.

76 mxm, *Praisong for the Widow."

77 Keating and Anzaldúa, *This Bridge We Call Home."


79 Moraga, "From Inside the First World," xxvi (foreword to the twentieth anniversary edition of *This Bridge Called My Back."

7. Pedagogies of the Sacred

1 Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit*, 166.

2 Murphy, *Working the Spirit*, 178, 179.

3 Prior, "Boundaries are made for Crossing," 7.

4 Mani, *Interleaves*, 73.


6 Brown, "Serving the Spirits," 216.

7 Hurbon, "American Fantasy and Haitian Vodou," 250. See also Farmer, *AIDS as Accusation*.

8 In 1963 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in the case of the Church of Lukumi Babalu Aye, Inc. v. City of Hialeah that Santeria could legitimately be practiced.

9 Daniels, *When the Living Is the Prayer."

10 Interview with author, 2000.

11 Wekser, *Serving the Spirits*, 236.


14 Ibid., 289.

15 Daniels, *When the Living Is the Prayer, 86.*

16 Fu-Kiau, *Serving the Spiritual Knot."

17 Daniels, *When the Living Is the Prayer, 95.*

18 Fu-Kiau, *Serving the Spiritual Knot."

19 Brown, "Serving the Spirits," 236.

20 See the following for different renditions of this crisis that provides the starting point for healing: Anzaldúa, *Borderlands, 46*, Fernandes, *Transforming Feminist Practice*, 43; and Hull, *Soul Talk*, 150.

21 Brown, "Serving the Spirits," 236.

22 Ibid., 260.


24 Cottom, *Soul Dive*, 255.


26 Interview with author, 1999.

27 Teish, "Still Crazy After All These Years," 507.


30 See Conner, with Hatfield Sparks, *Queering Creole Spiritual Traditions.*


32 See Fernandes, *Transforming Feminist Practice."

33 Mani, *Interleaves."


35 Moraga, "The Dying Road to a Nation." 36 Praisepoem composed at Punta Caracol, Puerto Morelos, México.