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Brooklyn Bedroom: An Ethnodrama on Female Sexuality, Third World Feminism and Performance Ethnography

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BROOKLYN BEDROOM: AN ETHNODRAMA ON FEMALE SEXUALITY, THIRD
WORLD FEMINISM AND PERFORMANCE ETHNOGRAPHY

A Dissertation Presented

by

AYSHIA E. STEPHENSON

Submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2018

Department of Communication

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A Dissertation Presented

By

AYSHIA E. STEPHENSON

Approved as to style and content by:

Leda Cooks, Chair

Anne Ciecko, Member

Priscilla Page, Member

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DEDICATION

To my loving mother.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my husband, my sisters, Leda Cooks, Anne Ciecko, Priscilla Page, Martin Norden, Gilbert McCauley, and Willow Cohen. I would also like to thank the UMass Arts Council, Brian Moore-Ward and Performing Fusion Theatre.

ABSTRACT

BROOKLYN BEDROOM: AN ETHNODRAMA ON FEMALE SEXUALITY, THIRD
WORLD FEMINISM AND PERFORMANCE ETHNOGRAPHY

MAY 2018

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Directed by: Professor Leda Cooks

Brooklyn Bedroom is a performance that interrogates societal perceptions of race and sexuality. I have utilized the writing of the performance as my method; the performance is an act of Third World feminist resistance and liberation. Storytelling is the type of research preferred by many black female playwrights. A type of qualitative inquiry, ethnodramatic work forms a bridge between individual stories and social issues affecting society with the goal of socio-political change. The source of reality for this ethnodrama is the Rose family, their history was a catalyst for the writing of *Brooklyn Bedroom*. I have explored their stories to investigate the relationships between women, sexuality, desire and healing. This ethnodrama integrates elements of both screen and stage and it is a performance which resists hegemonic representations of sexuality (see video of live performance). This narrative carves spaces for women who have experienced trauma to move beyond pain. The play and its rationale are theoretically rooted in Third World feminism and performance ethnography, including research from the likes of Audre Lorde, Gloria Anzaldúa, Norman Denzin, bell hooks, Jonny Saldana, and D. Soyini Madison, and the creative cultural production of Julie Dash, the women filmmakers of *Filming Desire: A Journey Through Women's Cinema* (here-in-after *Filming*

Desire), Lynn Nottage, Adrienne Kennedy, Ntozake Shange, Zeinabu Irene Davis, Trinh Minh-ha, and Hye Jung Park.

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CHAPTER I

BROOKLYN BEDROOM

Setting: Now. A bedroom. Tally's bedroom. There's a queen-sized bed center stage and a projector screen upstage. There is a dressing screen on the other side of the bed. In some instances, the projector screen is a window to the past. Otherwise the screen is a window that indicates the time of day and passage of time; it shows either an image of the same Brooklyn brownstones during the day, dusk, or night.

Characters

Tally Rose: Black woman. Dark skinned. 25. Slender. Shoulder length (or longer) afro/natural hair. Puts care into her appearance. Loves pearls, blazers and jeans.

Family:

Mother: (Josephine), dark skinned. 65, short natural hair, she looks soft and is in shape for her age. She loves to dress comfortably, often wearing color coordinated sweat pants/shirt (that fit her and are never baggy) or a turtle neck and jeans.

Lisa: Tally's sister. Dark skinned. 40. Petite body. Big smile. Likes long wigs/weaves, flashy jewelry. Shows a little cleavage, likes tight fitting clothing.

Jacqui: Tally's sister. Dark skinned. 45. Overweight but shapely figure. Wears dresses, could have big breasts or a large derriere or both, veers to the conservative side (i.e. doesn't show cleavage)

Eric Smith: 32, white, tall, lean, handsome in a Western sense.

Worker (in film and live performance): Jamaican. Male. Muscular or stocky build. 19.

Man (John): 45, white male, lean/muscular/gorgeous in a Western sense.

*The scenes are in parenthesis because they only function as markers, the action in this one-act play should be continuous.

** There is no nudity in this play, brassiere/underwear are fine.

(Scene I)

The bedroom lights flicker, then go dark. Somewhere a girl is screaming. Light slowly comes up from the center of the screen and expands slowly for a silent film: there's a little black girl with pigtails laughing, full of joy. She's sitting at a lunch table with other little girls. They are wearing pink and burgundy uniforms. Fried dumplings are in their hands, they are stuffing it with the salt fish and ackee on their plates. Lights come up on the bed. TALLY is tossing and turning. On screen, the little girl gets up to take her tray to the back of the cafeteria. The rack is full. A kitchen worker calls to her from the side door with his index finger. She walks over. He must be pointing to something and she steps into the small storage room. He locks the door behind her. He pushes her onto the dusty floor. The tray and food in her hand splatter and then we get a close up of her big brown eyes. Screen out. The bedroom lights flicker.

TALLY: No! No, please no! (Jumping out of the bed)

Beat.

It's night time in Brooklyn. The bedroom door opens slowly. LISA's head pokes in. MOTHER pushes by her, swings the door open, and turns on the light. The Family rushes to the bed.

FAMILY: Tally!!

MOTHER hugs TALLY and JACQUI and LISA join for a group hug.

TALLY: Heyyy...I must have dozed off (*wiping eyes*)... Didn't see you guys when I came in...

JACQUI: We were out shopping for you!

MOTHER: Damn Jacqui! Get out the way so I can hug my daughter.

TALLY: Hi mom!

She picks her mother up and squeezes her.

MOTHER: Hello!

TALLY: How are you?

MOTHER: Well, you know, so so...(she steps back).Wow, damn Tally you're getting fat. Lawd god, don't get like Jacqui, slow down.

JACQUI: Stop it mom. I'm not fat, I'm chubby.

LISA: (to Tally) you look so pretty! Doesn't she look pretty mommy? I love those jeans. Doesn't she look pretty Jacqui?

FAMILY: yes very pretty

TALLY: (blushing) Thank you...

LISA: Master's degree, whaat?!

TALLY: Whaat?!

LISA: So how's Boston? It's so cold. Don't I look good? (twirling)

TALLY: Girl, you look so good!

LISA: (fanning Tally) I know.

JACQUI pushes LISA. Everyone laughs.

LISA: Your tities look bigger. Don't her tities look bigger Jacqui?

TALLY: Yeah?! So do your nipples!

TALLY reaches for a squeeze. LISA crosses her arms and laughs out loud.

JACQUI: Oh! I have a new dancehall album! (*she searches on her iPhone*)

*Lady Saw sings "It's Raining"
Lisa gets up and starts whining to the music.*

*"It's raining my body's calling
I'm in need of my darling"*

*TALLY gets up and joins her. JACQUI claps, and dances
with her shoulders.*

*"Mi well want di fire under mi airing
Baby come and bake mi puddin"*

LISA: C'mon Jacqui, come on mom!

JACQUI gets up. MOTHER shakes her head.

*"Under pina colada
I get laid in the rain uh"*

MOTHER: What are you—that's nasty. I didn't raise you like that.

JACQUI: Oh we're just dancing.

MOTHER: Hey Tally, did you hear about that rape?

JACQUI: Mom.....We're--

TALLY: Why? What happened?

LISA is still whining, now lower to the ground.

MOTHER: This young girl, about your age, right Jacqui? She met some guy at a club, left with him and he raped her and slashed her throat in some parking lot. It's all over the news. Pretty college girl.

TALLY: (*taking a seat*). My gosh...

JACQUI: I know, it's so sad.

LISA: (*singing song*) “It’s raining, my body’s calling, I’m in need of my darlin’”

MOTHER: But she was a slut, cmon, look at what she was wearing.

TALLY: What does it matter what's she was wearing?

MOTHER: She asked for it

TALLY: Wait, she said no, right?

MOTHER: She asked for it

TALLY: No one wants to be raped.

MOTHER: What do you know about rape.

TALLY: What do you know about rape.

MOTHER: I've had a hard...

The music stops. A girl screams. TALLY holds her head.

LISA: (*To TALLY*) You okay?

TALLY: Yeah. Yeah, I'm okay.

The bell rings.

MOTHER: Lawd, Jesus. At this time of night!

TALLY: It must be Eric.

LISA: Who's that?

TALLY: Just my guy friend.

LISA: Mmhm

MOTHER: Uggggh...Damn Tally. You're just coming home. I never get to see you. I never get to see you. Okay, okay (*she gets up*) good night.

TALLY: It's my first night back, he's just stopping by...

The FAMILY hugs TALLY and they exit. TALLY looks in the mirror, puts on some lip gloss and sets her hair before lying down. Beat. ERIC knocks. He opens the door and leans against the frame.

ERIC: Baby girl.

TALLY: Eric!

They hug and kiss on the mouth.

ERIC: You're as beautiful as ever.

TALLY: It's great to be home.

ERIC: How's Boston?

TALLY: It's Boston.

ERIC: How do you stand those trashy accents.

TALLY: This coming from a native New Englander?

ERIC: Vermont's different. We're gonna be our own country.

TALLY: Is that right?

ERIC: I brought something for you...

TALLY: What is it?

ERIC pulls out Jamaican beef patties and hands her one.

TALLY: What! Yes!

She opens it up and bites into the crisp crust.

TALLY: Delicious.

ERIC: Thought you might be cravin it. *(biting)* Damn, these *are* good.

TALLY: They're just not the same in Boston!

ERIC: That's because Jamaicans shouldn't be so far north.

TALLY: We're everywhere...

ERIC: Well, I know where this one's staying.

He caresses her cheek. They kiss slowly with their mouths open.

ERIC: Do you remember our first night?

TALLY: Yes, of course. Freezing hail hit the streets of the Houston. I was clenching my umbrella handle to my chest, but the wind was relentless. It was Valentine's Day. I just finished eating lobster and crab with my OKCupid date. We left the restaurant, went our separate ways and I wanted to catch a cab but—

ERIC: None in sight that night.

TALLY: I turned my head and saw this fancy hotel with a dim lounge...plush couches...a cozy bar. I ran inside. And there you were. Tall—

ERIC: Dark and handsome.

TALLY: A deep smile. You made me a special raspberry martini...It was like summer and winter both settling on my mouth. You were telling me about Buddhism and—

ERIC: That I'm—was—a vegetarian. You told me about you and poetry...

TALLY: The long verses I'd write at night when it was bitter outside...

ERIC: You looked freezing, you're black but your nose was red...

TALLY: *(amused)* Yeah, last year's winter was *rough*.

ERIC: Feels like I've known you longer.

Beat.

ERIC: Come back. Let me take care of you. You belong right here, in the best city in the world.

TALLY: I love New York. It's my hometown, with all the wonders of the world, the people, the smells, the colors even when it's cold outside... But I love the program I'm in, it's great Eric, just great.

ERIC: But why Boston? There's too much snow, then there's Tom and his flat balls. There are schools here! NYC has too many to choose.

TALLY: Only one more year. Let's just. Enjoy the break. Spring is in the air, I can smell it.

TALLY puts her head on his lap and looks up at him.

TALLY: I miss your face.

She yawns.

ERIC: Sleepy already?

TALLY: *(nodding)* I need to get up early and work on this paper.

ERIC: Yeah. Guess your fam's probably wondering what I'm doing here so late.

He slips his arm underneath her knees and lifts her up.

ERIC: Dinner tomorrow, right?

TALLY: Chinese!

ERIC: You got it.

He lays her on the bed.

ERIC leaves.

(Scene II)

It's morning in Brooklyn.

The bedroom is bright.

TALLY gets up and gets dressed for the day.

She lies in bed studying.

The MOTHER and sisters enter. Her MOTHER is holding up a DVD.

TALLY: Heyyyy! Is that the one where he's at the Kingston airport decked out in ski gear and "ears-muffins"?

MOTHER: Yeah, that's it, yeah. Oliver 007!

JACQUI: “Oliver At Large”!

TALLY: That’s great, it’s been forever!

MOTHER: I like him ‘cause he’s funny yuh know. Das one funny man! Dressed in a winta coat at a Jamaican airport. Unbelievable.

TALLY: He’s hilarious...you think he’d take it off when the sweat’s rolling down his face, but he’s too concerned with looking like he travels all the time and knows what he’s doing.

MOTHER: Exactly. See *you* get. Lisa, I don’t know why you didn’t get it. Jacqui, could you put on this movie for me please, I haven’t seen Oliver in a long time, yeah, c’mon na man. I’m dying to see it.

JACQUI gets up.

MOTHER: Would you please, thank you.

TALLY: (*To LISA*) So, sexy, are you seeing anyone?

LISA: (*coughing*) I was for a while but then he tried to get money from me to buy gifts for his kids. What the fuck do I look like? A bank?

MOTHER: Oh, they’re such losers.

TALLY: He should be buying gifts for his own kids. I don’t know why black men always want something from you.

LISA and JACQUI: I know...

LISA: (*coughing*) But the white men aren’t any better. Mom, remember Gary?

JACQUI: Oh...(disturbed look on her face)

MOTHER: Yeah, he was crazy Lisa. Just straight up white boy crazy. He just wanted a pretty black girl, so he could say to everyone oh look what I got.

LISA’s phone rings.

LISA: Oh this guy...

TALLY: What guy?

LISA: We’ve been chatting for about a week.

TALLY: Pick it up.

LISA picks up the phone.

LISA: Hello?...Hi..I'm good, I'm— *(she coughs and sounds like a man with a deep voice)* I'm in New York.

Beat.

LISA hangs up the call.

LISA: Oh my gosh, what the hell happened to my voice!

TALLY: You sounded like a man.

JACQUI: I didn't want to say it but...

MOTHER: And why not Jacqui, we're family and we're supposed to keep it real. *(to LISA)* He'll never talk to you again. The man wanted a woman and got a man.

LISA: Whatever, he sounded cheap anyway, talking about meeting at Dunkin Donuts.

MOTHER: Gosh Lisa, you'll never get a man. Tally, how come you told her to pick up the phone? You know she's had that cough. My god, don't you all think. You've been coughing like a man all night, why would it change when you try to speak to him. And he's calling long distance. My god, what were you thinking? And Tally tells you to pick up the phone. Well, you lost that one for her Tally, I'll tell you that. What a friggin shame. Lord have mercy what a shame.

TALLY: I didn't make her pick up the phone.

MOTHER: Yes, you did. Cmon I heard you. Jacqui didn't you hear her?

Beat.

TALLY: Did you even like this guy?

LISA: I don't know, we've just been emailing. And then he asked me for my number. That shit –

MOTHER: Will you watch your mouth.

LISA: That crap was so funny. Oh my gosh. *(emphasizing raspy man voice)* "I'm in New York." *(laughing)*

TALLY: *(in her best raspy man voice)*. "How you doin?."

MOTHER: This *isn't* funny. My god. You'll are sad. What kind of man wants to be with a man?

Beat.

MOTHER: Well, none of them aint no good anyhow.

The MOTHER and sisters exit.

(Scene III)

It's dusk and the lights are mellow.

ERIC enters.

He meets her by the window and they smoke a joint.

TALLY: So first the chicken had a head and then it didn't... and it started chasing you without a head?

ERIC: Yes!!! It's mostly ugly... Working on a farm is tough, especially as a kid. I cut its head off and then the poor darn thing started chasing me!

TALLY: *(hitting off the joint)* So, let me get this straight... You were chased by a headless chicken? I don't think they can do that...

ERIC: City girl. *(releasing smoke)*

TALLY: Hey hey blow it out the window! My mom will kill me, she'll think I'm some drug addict or something...

ERIC: Geez...

TALLY: I swear she's a nun, she's Jamaican and has never touched the stuff!

She gets up and does a chicken dance. He throws a pillow at her and they end up play fighting on the bed.

TALLY: So, how about you... how are you? Look at you in your sexy suit! How's it at The Roxy?

ERIC: It's good babe. Just hired some new people 'cause we're expanding.

TALLY: Really?

ERIC: Yes ma'm. We bought the building next door, so we're adding about 20 more hotel suites.

TALLY: Excellent...

ERIC: Sure is babe, I love it. Meet new people every day, never a dull moment. I'm just on my toes, there's always some shit that pops up. And who do they call? Me.

TALLY: My sexy farmer's gone all N.Y.C.!

ERIC: What can I say. I was traumatized by what happened with those chickens anyway. I just can't believe people eat meat.

TALLY: People eat meat because it's good.

ERIC: Oh yeah, well why don't I just go ahead and take a bite out of you!

He tackles her playfully.

TALLY: So how are the new hires?

ERIC: They seem cool enough. We all walked over to Tribeca Tavern last night after the first training.

TALLY: I love that place! Must be the most low-key spot in the city. Love the dim red lights, just sexy. Oh and those buffalo wings are insane, just insane. So good.

ERIC: Can we lay off the chicken?

TALLY: Sure... hey, remember at the first sign of Spring last year? We took the Q out to Murphy's in Coney Island, sat on the roof, drank wine and talked under the moon all night?

ERIC: How could I forget? You had on that red dress that made my palms so damn sweaty.

TALLY: I miss Brooklyn.

ERIC: Then come home. Besides, I like keeping you close.

Beat.

TALLY: I'm in a great place.

ERIC: Sure but what about Columbia or NYU, they're even better. Didn't you get into NYU before?

TALLY: Yeah but that was undergrad and there's no way I was staying here for undergrad. I mean I needed my freedom I've told you how my mother is. Anyhow, even if I did...what about my fellowship. You think a master's is cheap, and money's still tight.... Are *you* gonna pay for it?

ERIC: Yeah! What's the damage monthly?

Beat.

TALLY: This is important to me.

ERIC: Am I important to you?

Beat.

ERIC: Also, what's up with your family?

TALLY: Nothing much, what's up with yours?

ERIC: I mean, well I've been coming over here.

TALLY: To see *me*.

ERIC: Yes, but...I don't really see them.

TALLY: Oh they're just old school but they're, they're good people.

ERIC: So I don't care that you're black...

TALLY: Good.

ERIC: Do you care that I'm white? Is that why—

TALLY: No. No. What? No. It's not *that*. If we get serious of course I'll—

ERIC: Oh.

TALLY: Are you ok with that?

ERIC: Oh no yeah I was just wondering... Yeah, when we are serious... thought we were *serious*.

He mounts her and plays as if he's making love to her.

He puts the covers over them and it gets real.

Lights out.

The audience can hear them touching and kissing. TALLY orgasms. ERIC orgasms.

Mellow lights rise.

TALLY and ERIC cuddle asleep.

TALLY gets up and gently rushes ERIC out the door.

(Scene IV)

It's morning.

The bedroom lights flicker.

The audience can see TALLY's head but her body is behind the bedroom screen.

The MOTHER walks in, her hair is big and curly. She's wearing bright makeup and parachute pants.

MOTHER: What are you doing?

TALLY: Good morning, mommy.

TALLY steps from behind the screen wearing pigtails and a school uniform.

MOTHER: *What* are you doing?

TALLY is buttoning a shirt of delicate pink.

TALLY: I'm...I'm uh... getting ready for school.

MOTHER: Take those clothes off and get your times tables out. I'm going to test you at noon.

TALLY: Why? I want to go to school.

MOTHER: Sluts don't go to school.

Beat.

MOTHER: I found your letter to that boy, that's what you're doing in school?! You're nasty. Get your times tables out.

TALLY: Please mommy, I want to go to school.

MOTHER: Sluts don't go to school.

LISA: Hey! Good morning!

MOTHER exits.

TALLY: Hey.

The bedroom lights flicker.

TALLY loosens her hair and puts on blazer. She grabs a book and begins to study. There's a knock at the door and LISA enters.

JACQUI and MOTHER also enter. MOTHER looks in her 60s again. TALLY kisses LISA and JACQUI. MOTHER reaches to embrace her but TALLY turns and walks towards the headboard.

JACQUI: (proudly holding a large dish) I made codfish cakes.

TALLY: (turning around) Oh my gosh. Yes.

The FAMILY sits on the bed and starts eating.

JACQUI: How are they?

LISA: (mouth full) mmm-hmmm. You put your back into this one Jacqui.

TALLY: Dee-licious. Thank you, this is just what I needed. I feel like...It's barely noon and my brain, my muscles hurt.

MOTHER: A little more salt, yes, a bit more salt. Otherwise delicious.

JACQUI exits.

LISA: What are you up to today?

TALLY: Think I'll head up to the Brooklyn library, I love that place, the smell—the smell of all those books.

LISA shakes her head.

TALLY: I'm just finding it hard to concentrate, always these stories, in my head. One of them comes again and again, it plays like a movie.

LISA snuggles next to TALLY and plays with her hair.

LISA: Well do something fun. Jacqui – put on Lady Saw! (to TALLY) You *are* on vacation.

Lady Saw's "No Long Talkin" plays:

"Baby are you up for dis"

LISA grabs TALLY to dance.

*"Give me all dat slammin
So dat I can turn and twist
Me na in a no long talkin
I am feelin hot 2nite"*

TALLY gets into it and calls for JACQUI.

*"Me ready fi de bump and grind
Put me on ya big ninja bike (yes yes)"*

JACQUI gets up to dance with her sisters.

*"Bwoy seh him a stallion but me a champion
Always ready fi a good combination
Seh him wan me and him couldnt please me
He musse tink dis a DJ Easy"*

MOTHER: Ya'll are nasty. I didn't raise you like this, Jesus Christ.

JACQUI: Don't call the Lord's name in vain mom. Come dance.

LISA: Yeah mom, c'mon.

MOTHER: Dance to what? That's not music.

The sisters keep dancing.

At the end of the song, LISA plops down onto the bed exhausted.

LISA: So what's your plan for some fun?

TALLY: I might have a drink with Denise and the girls later.

MOTHER: Denise? Denise and who? Isn't that the one who had the baby? And the man's gone. I told you he was no good.

TALLY: Yeah...

MOTHER: Well, *I* only trust the family.

TALLY: I love my friends, I miss them.

MOTHER: And my own kind.

TALLY: Your own kind.

MOTHER: You got that right. I like watching them on screen, too. You know that Jamaican runner...right, I tell ya he's good! So damn fast, the white people can't believe it.

LISA: (*To TALLY*) Hey, hey, how's Eric?

MOTHER: Date your own kind. He's weird.

TALLY: Own kind, you mean like a human? If he's weird it's not because he's white.

MOTHER: Oh really.

TALLY: C'mon mom, it's 2016. It's not like--I mean--Lisa dated Gary for years--

MOTHER: His crazy ass!

LISA: I couldn't believe it. When he called me a nigger. After all those years, and we travelled all over together. I brought him home, you know, to my family. I was so hurt. I was really, so hurt.

TALLY: He called you a...

MOTHER: Those white men just want to use you. You know, like you're an experiment.

TALLY: They're not all--

MOTHER: No. Really, you have to respect yourself.

TALLY: I do respect myself.

JACQUI enters with more fish cakes. Everyone takes one.

MOTHER: *(biting into it)* Jesus Christ. It's too salty! I told her just a little and look what she went and did.

TALLY: It's delicious. MOTHER:
It's way too damn-- TALLY: Why
are you so miserable?

Beat.

MOTHER: C'mon Tally. Men are no damn good anyway you swing it. Some women ain't either.

LISA: Mom please.

MOTHER: That's the truth. Some women ain't either. Look at my dropper. That woman never raised me, she didn't care at all about me.

JACQUI: But you have us and we--

MOTHER: All she did was put me into boarding school and wipe her hands of me. She never wanted me. The things that happened to me at that place, I can't even tell you all. I can't even tell you.

The FAMILY exits.

The bedroom lights flicker.

The little girl comes up on the screen. She walks into the storage room again. The man locks the door behind her. He pushes her onto the dusty floor. The tray and food in her hand splatter and we get a close up of her big brown eyes.

Screen out.

(Scene V)

A girl screams.

The bedroom lights flicker, then go dark.

A spotlight forms over TALLY's body, she's holding her head. She walks over to the window and takes a deep breath. Beat. She lies down on her bed and stretches her arms. She sighs and massages her breasts.

On the screen, a huge pine tree sits on the coast of the Atlantic. The sun is going down on its dark green leaves.

TALLY puts her hands in her pants and arches her back.

On the screen, TALLY gets up from her sleeping bag and approaches the tree whose branches touch the ground around it. She parts the leaves and steps into its cove. She presses onto the bark and kneels down to pee under its leaves. She closes her eyes and lets her piss run along the grooves of the soil. She moans to let out the last drips and looks up to where the bark meets its first leaf. She presses both of her palms against the brown bark and works her body upwards. She brushes its skin with the tips of her nose, grazing it with her lips. She touches its roughness with her fingers, admiring the ancient ripples of a constant peel.

All we see is her back, as she takes off her t-shirt. Brown skin against a mis-en-scene of bark. She palms it, leans forward and teases her nipples against it.

We come out of the cove to a longshot of the tree. It sits on the rocky sand of a vast ocean. The moon falls on its leaves and the water.

TALLY moans, her voice fills the room.

Beat.

ERIC enters.

(Scene VI)

It's night time in Brooklyn. The bedroom lights are mellow.

ERIC walks over to the bed. They hang out and eat the beef patties he brought.

ERIC: Look Tally, I've only known you since last year but I know we belong together. Here and now.

Tally: *(as she's eating the beef patty)* That Chinese was the business. Can't get chicken and shrimp fried rice like that in Boston. And those soy sauce scallions on top, I--

ERIC: Are you listening to me?

TALLY: Yes, baby, I hear you.

ERIC: Why don't you just leave and--

TALLY: Leave and what? *(she stands up)* Leave and what Eric?

ERIC: Hey, why don't we talk about this another time. I'm sorry I...

TALLY: There's no good time to have this conversation.

ERIC: I just want you here. You're mine and when you're gone, it's like I--

TALLY: There's no good time to--

ERIC: So you won't even consider it?

TALLY: Consider what? Leaving school? Are you absolutely out of your mind?

ERIC: Well, I--

TALLY: We're not even together. And even if we were, what I'm doing is for me.

ERIC: Yes we are.

TALLY: Yes, we are what?

He stands up.

ERIC: Together.

Beat.

ERIC: And you're not going back, over my dead body, I love you too much... TALLY: Eric. My world is—I barely have time for myself and I live--

ERIC: We can fix that.

TALLY: And I live hours away. I thought we decided to just enjoy each other's company and see where things go. I'm just... *(she touches his face)* happy to be around you.

ERIC: So, there's somebody else. TALLY: What? No.

ERIC: What is it that you're studying up there again?

Sex? TALLY: What? No... Women, gender and sexuality.

ERIC: Sexuality?

TALLY:

Sexuality.

ERIC: *(Holding his head.)* Whatdya need to study that for? Sex 101. You and I have it. It's damn good. That's all you need to know. You're mine. That's all you need to know.

TALLY: It's not about sex!

ERIC: Sexuality is not about sex. Well the word is in there Tally. It's in there. So I don't know how you can just take it--

TALLY: It's about desire... Identity. What is it that gives me pleasure? Not what I've been told is supposed to please me. Not what I've been told *should* please me. But what *does* please me? My body, my mind. What really...

She stands up and cups his jaw with her hand, stroking it forward towards her, close to her.

TALLY: Pleases me inside and outside...

She rubs his chest with wide firm strokes. He takes his shirt off. She goes behind him, caresses him with her arms, burying her head into the center of his back. Into the center of his back, feeling the heat from his body against her cheek.

She massages his back, licks it.

She sucks on the skin.

Licks and sucks on the skin.

He turns around and reaches for her breasts. She takes his hands and stretches them to the corners of her face.

He caresses her hair.

She puts his fingers in her scalp. He rubs her scalp with his fingertips, she arches her back and moans.

He rubs her scalp with his fingertips, she arches her back and moans.

He lies her onto the bed and looks at her whole body.

From her hair to the tips of her toes.

He runs his nails down her thighs.

TALLY: Eric. ERIC:

Yes, baby. TALLY:

Lick my knees. ERIC:

Lick your...

TALLY: Yes...my knees. Rub them first.

He rubs her knees.

TALLY: Yeahhh. Soft. Yeahhh.

He rubs her knees from the center to the sunken bones.

TALLY: Yeahhh.

He licks and kisses her left knee.

He licks and kisses. Her eyes close.

He licks and kisses her right knee.

He licks and kisses.

And licks and kisses.

He rests his face on them.

She reaches for him.

He lies his head on her belly.

Silence.

She caresses his hair.

Silence.

TALLY: I'm finding out.

ERIC: Finding out...

TALLY: Finding out more about who I am.

Beat.

TALLY: What it means to be a woman, a woman, a black woman. What it means to be a human being, a sexual being.

Beat.

ERIC: So what does that—what are you working on?

TALLY: I've been, I've been working on this piece... about a woman.

ERIC: What woman?

TALLY: Roberta. Busby. Roberta Busby. The exotic dancer... who was set on fire outside of a club in Cali.

ERIC: I heard about that stripper. Shit.

He rubs her leg.

TALLY: Yeah.

ERIC: But being a stripper is a risky business.

Massaging her muscles.

TALLY: Risky.

ERIC: She had to know...

TALLY: Had to know.

ERIC: It's a downright dangerous environment.

Massaging her muscles.

TALLY: Is it.

ERIC: It is.

She pulls herself up, her back against the headboard.

TALLY: Does it have to be.

ERIC: It is.

TALLY: She was a mother.

ERIC: She had to know it's a downright dangerous environment.

TALLY: She asked to get burned.

ERIC: Well, she--

TALLY: She fucking asked to get burned.

ERIC: Calm down, look--

TALLY: I can't believe you!

On her feet.

TALLY: She didn't sign up for that. She signed up to dance. For years she was a bill collector but she got laid off. She was also raising those kids alone. Turned to dancing. Who else was going to feed her kids? Were *you* going to feed her kids? *She* had to feed her kids.

ERIC: Calm down! Look.

TALLY: *You* calm down!

Beat.

ERIC: Let's take a walk.

Beat.

TALLY: No.

ERIC: Down by the promenade.

TALLY: No one deserves that.

ERIC: You love the promenade.

TALLY: No one deserves that.

ERIC: I know.

ERIC: It's still pretty quiet at this time. I know a spot these new assholes haven't taken yet.
Tally?

TALLY: What?

ERIC: We could get some ice cream? Look out at the East River.

TALLY: Alright.

ERIC: Alright?

TALLY: Alright, yeah...a walk (*deep breath*) air. (*getting up*) That sounds good.

ERIC: Rock n' roll

TALLY: But I can't stay out too-too late, doing a private in the morning.

ERIC: Doing who?

TALLY: My tutoring, didn't I tell you I--

ERIC: Oh, right. That's right, you're tutoring for extra cash. That's right, my little hustla.

He slaps her butt.

ERIC: Keep it in your pants!

They exit.

(Scene VII)

It's morning in Brooklyn.

TALLY enters in a robe. She lies on the bed reading. She gets up to change and puts on a cotton blazer and blue jeans. It thunders outside. There's a knock at the door, MOTHER enters.

TALLY: Mom

MOTHER opens up the door and stops there.

MOTHER: Morning, morning.

MOTHER walks over and sits next to TALLY on the bed.

TALLY: Come. Sit.

MOTHER: I don't get to see you much, thought I'd stop by, see how you're doing...Oh lord, I miss you, yeah.

TALLY: I miss you too.

MOTHER: It's hard for you to find the time. I know. You're busy. Damn, I'm so proud of you, Tally.

TALLY: Thank you mom.

MOTHER: I want to go to school too, you know.

TALLY: You should, mom. You'd be great.

MOTHER: I'm gonna do it, just have to get my mind ready for it.

TALLY: What do you want to study?

MOTHER: Oh you know, I don't know, maybe writing. I have a lot to say, just don't always – don't really know, how to say it. But I'll get there. You'll see.

TALLY: I know you will. I wouldn't be able to do this if it weren't for you.

MOTHER: Oh yeah?

TALLY: You always told me there are two things in life no one can take from me, I'm black and I'm educated.

MOTHER: No, no, honey, they can't take that. No they can't. No matter how much they try. 'Cause in the grave you'll still be black and educated. Mark my words. Sure as hell, no they can't.

TALLY: And I won't let them.

MOTHER: Naw, don't do it. But I come from a long line of teachers, you know. Black and smart. Hardworking, yeah, very hard working.

TALLY: You know Jamaicans, we have all ten jobs --

MOTHER: And still a look! Yeah man.

She slaps her hands together.

MOTHER: Proud of you, yeah...

Beat.

TALLY: So, you all are off today, huh

MOTHER: Yeah.

They laugh together.

TALLY: You gonna go shopping too?

MOTHER: Oh yeah.

TALLY: Where you gonna go?

MOTHER: Where you think.

TALLY: Mandalls.

MOTHER: You damn right.

MOTHER: Every time I go in that store, I can't get out of it. And the truck comes today, you know. And forget about Jacqui, when we're in there, you can't even find her ass. She's cuddled up with the shoes.

TALLY: What is with her and--

MOTHER: You wanna come?

TALLY: You know I hate shopping.

MOTHER: Yeah, I know. But sometimes I wish you'd join us, especially when I don't see you often.

TALLY: We'll go before I leave.

MOTHER: Are you *sure*?

TALLY: For you, definitely. I need to work today though.

MOTHER: Okay, we'll pick you up something today. What size do you wear?

Beat.

MOTHER: Damn Tally, you're getting fat. What are you eating up there?

TALLY: No I'm not. It's the shirt. (pulling the sleeves) Not your curry chicken.

MOTHER: You got that right.

TALLY: You headed to the doctor's too right? For Jacqui.

MOTHER: I'm so sick of these doctor's and appointments. Every fucking week. That's all we do. Tell her to stop eating, it's all about proportions, it's not what but what but how much!

TALLY: I've tried to get her to go running with –

MOTHER: She just won't stop eating. Don't get big like her Tally, don't do it, don't do it. Lord have mercy, be my witness, they gone cut off her leg, like my uncle Bishop. I'm just sick of it, you know. Oh well, I probably shouldn't complain 'cause I'm here, but lord have mercy.

TALLY: Well, you all don't have to always go together.

MOTHER: But that's how we do it.

TALLY: You're still kickin, anyhow (*she playfully jabs her mother's arm*) and strong, you should be happy for that. You look good, mom. You have a...good life.

MOTHER: Yeah, you sure are right. I just...can't forget.

TALLY: What?

Beat.

TALLY: Is there something you've been thinking of?

MOTHER: Some nights I just lie, I swear to God and I just can't sleep, no matter how much I try I just...I just...lie awake at night and wonder why. Why me. Lord have mercy why me. How could people be so wicked.

TALLY: Tell me.

MOTHER: I just can't sleep, no matter how much I try I just...I just...lie awake at night and wonder. Why couldn't he have mercy on me? Was I that bad. Lord. I just—

There's a knock on the door. LISA walks in.

LISA: Hey hey!

MOTHER stands up.

TALLY: Mom... Wait...why can't you sleep?

MOTHER shakes her head.

LISA: Mom?

LISA touches her arm. MOTHER lowers her head and begins to exit, stopping at the door:

MOTHER: I'll be downstairs, whenever you all are ready.

She exits. LISA sits on the bed. Her and TALLY hold hands.

TALLY: One day--

Deep breathing.

LISA: Maybe she'll--

TALLY: Yes.

LISA: How's school? How's Boston?

TALLY: The people are angry and genuine.

She walks over to the window, looks outside.

LISA: I always see them on the Yankee games. *(laughing)* Sore losers.

TALLY: *(at the window)* Cambridge is beautiful... My favorite place to sit is on the Mass. Ave. Bridge, it goes right over the Charles River and connects Boston to Cambridge. What a skyline. Sometimes I just watch the cars zipping by, the people walking, the reflection of all the lights in the water. I wonder where they are going, where they came from. And I am happy to be invisible.

LISA: Oh they see you. They see us. They use our shit and like our bodies, and don't mention black. But they see you.

TALLY: I know, sometimes too much. White people are always staring at me, especially the women. Their looks last too long. Anyway, it's not just that...I don't always want to be seen. I don't always want to hear either. Like... the screaming. Sometimes I want to disappear into the wind.

LISA: Who's screaming?

Silence.

LISA: Who?

TALLY: I don't know yet, if I did I would've asked them to stop.

LISA: Tally?

LISA: *(getting up)* Tally, come back. *Beat.*

LISA stands behind her and wraps her arms around TALLY. They both face the window.

LISA: I've gotta come up and see you.

TALLY: Yeah, right, you won't make it 'til graduation.

LISA: You're right, shit who am I kidding. New York is where it's at girl!

TALLY: Isn't it.

LISA: What else is goin' on?

TALLY: Just happy to be home. I feel like a human being in this city. All the faces, the colors, the attitudes. My body feels things here. This is what the world was meant to be.

LISA: They're racist up there aren't they?

TALLY: Oh gosh yes.

LISA: No matter. Just walk right by them and get your shit!

TALLY: Real talk, think I'm just still beat from the days before I came down, I was up almost all night doing midterm papers. And I still have work to hand in. I can't wait to just write, you know what I mean, just live and write and get the things I need, do the things I love to do.

LISA: You need anything? Here, look what I got for you yesterday.

She reaches for the shopping bag by the bed.

LISA: Try this on.

TALLY tries on the leather jacket and looks into the mirror.

TALLY: I love it!

LISA: You do?

They laugh.

TALLY: Yes!

LISA: Okay, now give it back!

TALLY: What? You just gave it to me.

LISA: So?

TALLY: Me think not! Your eyes too red!

LISA: Damn! Ah wicked she wicked! Really though, you need anything?

TALLY: No. Not in that sense of it.

LISA: What sense of it?

TALLY: Money's tight, but I'm not worried about it.

LISA: Well if you do just--

TALLY: I know. Thank you. But between the scholarship and working my privates, I'm okay.

LISA: Working who?

TALLY: I tutor students privately, we meet wherever. I posted ads for Boston and down here too, since I figured I'd be here, why not. Have one this morning...I miss your face.

LISA: I know, isn't it pretty!

LISA touches her face, while TALLY shakes her head.

LISA: So, have you ever met this student? What's their name?

TALLY: Jon.

LISA: Tally, don't let any crazy ass white people in this house!

TALLY: I'm not, I'm not, I've worked with him before.

LISA: Mmmhmm, well I'll see you later, mom is waiting. Love you.

TALLY: Love you too.

LISA exits.

(Scene VIII)

TALLY goes behind the screen. She steps out and is in a white teddy. She takes out a red bag from underneath the bed. She pulls out white-lace thigh highs, a garter belt, and white heels garnished with pearls and feathers. Sitting on the edge of her bed, she extends her legs to put them on. TALLY takes out oil, a warmer and tea candles from the red bag and places them on the nightstand. She neatly refolds a red towel from the bag and places it next to the oil. She takes out a red top sheet and covers the bed, before placing the bag back underneath.

TALLY lights the candles. She walks over to her dresser and we can see her reflection in the mirror. She puts on matching pearl earrings, necklace and bracelet. She brushes on a bit of face powder and

puts on red lipstick. She steps back to look at herself with her hands on her hip. She smiles. Beat.

She reaches for her cell phone on the night table, checks the time and puts on Sade's Diamond Life album. The audience hears "Smooth Operator" as TALLY dabs Versace on her wrists and behind her ears. Her cell vibrates and she picks it up. She puts on a long beige trench coat and exits the room. She returns shortly smiling and whispering with a handsome middle-aged gentleman.

MAN: Hey, I'm not sure if I turned the latch on the front door... is that okay?

Beat.

TALLY: Yeah...yeah, that's okay.

MAN smiles broadly and shuts the bedroom door behind him.

TALLY: No need to worry... it's just you and me.

TALLY touches his chest and helps him with his coat. She hangs it behind the door and glances at her cell phone, which is lighting up.

She faces MAN again, they stand in front of her bed.

MAN: Good to see you, Crystal. You look beautiful.

TALLY: *(Blushing)* Good to see you too.

Beat.

TALLY: And thanks... So...how's your back been?

She steps over and rubs his shoulder.

MAN: A bit better. But I miss your magic touch...

TALLY: Oh, I know you do.

TALLY winks at him, she reaches over to the night stand and lifts up the red towel. She hands it to MAN.

TALLY: Why don't you get ready and I'll check on the oil.

MAN: Sounds good.

MAN goes behind the divider.

MAN: Well. Well. Well. You just—

TALLY fiddles with the warmer and takes the bowl of oil out, setting it on the stand. MAN walks out with nothing but a towel around his waist. TALLY drops her trench coat. Beat.

MAN: Keep getting better.

TALLY: Why don't you lie down and see.

Beat.

MAN lies down on his stomach, with his hands under his head and his face turned towards the audience. TALLY removes the towel and spreads his legs. She reaches for oil and begins to massage it into his shoulders with her fingers.

MAN: So how's school been? The last time I saw you it was freezing outside! No break in frigid weather for the holidays.

TALLY: I know right! I had to make sure that oil was real hot. How's it now?

MAN: Oh yeah....it's good...still chilly out there. This is... nice...

TALLY is pressing into his back.

TALLY: School's been great, just busy...

MAN: Yeah, I remember those days, how they pile the work on you. I was so happy to be done with it.

TALLY: My thoughts exactly.

Beat.

TALLY: So how's it been at the firm?

MAN: I got a promotion after the holidays actually.

TALLY: Congratulations!

MAN: Thank you, thank you. But you know what that means? A little more money and a lot more work.

TALLY: Isn't that the truth, still wonderful though.

TALLY's phone lights up again.

She's working her palms into the love handles of his lower back.

MAN: Looking forward to Spring?

TALLY: Oh, yes, it's my favorite, when the world comes back to life. I'm happy to see the trees starting to bloom. I love trees.

MAN: Uhhh... Do you feel that knot there..uhh..it goes down a little lower.

TALLY: Yeah...I got it (*pressing*), just gonna work it out.

Beat.

TALLY begins to massage MAN's butt. He grunts loudly.

ERIC: TALLY!! What the hell are you- *The door swings open.*

It's ERIC.

TALLY: ERIC?! Why aren't you at work? *MAN turns his head from the audience to look up at ERIC.*

Man: Shit.

ERIC: I don't think you're the one who should be asking the questions!

ERIC: To our fucking song?! *(Looking her up and down)* Jesus...

She takes her hands off MAN's ass.

TALLY: Eric...I'm so sorry!

She jumps off the bed.

TALLY: It's not what you think, I'm just—

ERIC: It's everything that I'm thinking.

MAN raises his raises his index finger.

MAN: If I could—

ERIC: If you could what? Huh, what?

TALLY and ERIC look down at MAN.

MAN: Hey, this isn't all the way dude *(talking with his hands)* all she gives is a hand job.

ERIC: What?? Who the fuck are you?

MAN: *(He throws his head back at ERIC, looking confused)* I'm John.

ERIC: You son of a—

ERIC tries to punch man. MAN rolls off the bed and ERIC's fist hits the mattress. ERIC chases MAN, MAN runs out of room.

TALLY: Eric, leave him alone, I can explain—

ERIC: So now you're defending him?

Beat.

ERIC: *(Pointing at her, walking towards her.)* You're a cheating. Lying. Fucking whore!!

TALLY: Get out! Get out now you fucking bastard!

ERIC: So, we have a bump in our relationship, and you turn into a prostitute?

TALLY: Relationship? Bump? You *are* clueless. This has nothing to do with you.

ERIC growls and pounds his fist against the window frame.

ERIC: Really? Nothing to do with me even though, he's, and god knows who else, is getting to see you like only I should see you!

TALLY: Since when do you own me? Men have seen me before you came along, you know. I'm not your fucking property. And I'm not a prostitute. And if I was, let me tell you, there *are* worse things in this fucking world. Much worse.

ERIC: How can I *ever* trust you again?

ERIC turns for the door.

TALLY: Eric, wait...I--

She holds her head.

TALLY: I didn't mean for you to see that. I didn't mean for that at all. I'm sorry you...I'm sorry if I hurt your feelings.

Beat. His back is still turned.

TALLY: Eric!...It's because of school-I-I-

He turns around.

ERIC: Since when do sluts go to school?

TALLY steps back.

ERIC exits.

(Scene IX)

It's nighttime in Brooklyn.

The bedroom lights flicker, then go dark. Somewhere a girl is screaming. Light slowly comes up from the center of the screen and expands slowly for a silent film: there's a little black girl with pigtails laughing, full of joy. She's sitting at a lunch table with other little girls. They are wearing pink and burgundy uniforms. Fried dumplings are in their hands, they are stuffing it with the salt fish and ackee on their plates. Lights come up on the bed. TALLY is tossing and turning. On screen, the little girl gets up to take her tray to the back of the cafeteria. The rack is full. A kitchen worker calls to her from the side door with his index finger. She walks over. He must be pointing to something and she steps into the small storage room. He locks the door behind her. He pushes her unto the dusty floor. The tray and food in her hand splatter and then we get a close up of her big brown eyes. Screen out.

TALLY: No! No, please no! (*Jumping out of the bed*)

It's morning.

The bedroom lights flicker.

The audience can see TALLY's head but her body is behind the bedroom screen.

The MOTHER walks in, her hair is big and curly. She's wearing bright makeup and parachute pants.

MOTHER: What are you doing?

TALLY: Good morning, mommy.

MOTHER: *What* are you doing?

TALLY steps from behind the screen wearing pigtails and a school uniform.

TALLY is buttoning a shirt of delicate pink.

TALLY: Tally: I'm...I'm uh... getting ready for school.

MOTHER: Take those clothes off and get your times tables out. I'm going to test you at noon.

TALLY: Why? I want to go to school.

MOTHER: Sluts don't go to school.

Beat.

MOTHER: I found your letter to that boy, that's what you're doing in school?! You're nasty. Get your times tables out!

TALLY: Please mommy, I just want to go to school!

MOTHER pushes TALLY to the floor, she drags her to the bed rail and handcuffs her to it.

MOTHER steps back behind the bed and out of TALLY's sight. ERIC enters. MOTHER disappears behind the curtain. ERIC stands where MOTHER stood.

TALLY: Jesus! Get me out of here. I'm not a fucking child anymore. Did you hear me? Get me out of here.

ERIC: How's my favorite slut?

ERIC walks over to her.

TALLY: You're the slut. And I'd rather be a slut than some controlling fucking psycho.

ERIC: The thing is Tally--

He takes small steps.

ERIC: I just can't forgive you.

TALLY: Get me out of these handcuffs.

He reaches the bed and kneels down. He caresses her legs.

ERIC: You know, the thing is. I trusted you.

TALLY: What? You think you own me. I don't belong to you. I don't belong to anyone but me.

ERIC: Is that so...how many dinners and gifts did I spend on you...I deserve the right to have it just like they had it...

He spreads her legs apart. She cringes.

ERIC: How's my kitty doing? Hmm.. Think I need to give it to her like I've been meaning to.

TALLY: I don't owe you anything...You sick fuck.

He reaches for her groin area and she kicks him and locks his neck in her legs. He struggles until his body is lifeless. A girl screams.

The bedroom lights flicker.

TALLY goes behind the screen.

ERIC exits.

(Scene X)

It's morning. The next day.

TALLY comes from behind the screen and lies on her bed in pajamas reading.

ERIC enters.

TALLY: How do you keep getting in here?

ERIC: You could've asked me for the money.

TALLY: You need to go.

ERIC: You need to apologize.

TALLY: I did.

ERIC: The back door was unlocked...Where's your mom and sisters?

TALLY: Where do you think.

ERIC: Shopping.

Beat.

ERIC: You could've asked them...You could've asked me.

TALLY: How many times have I even seen you? What...we've been seeing each other for about a year, but for most of it I've been away in Boston.

ERIC: But we—

TALLY: I told you that I couldn't do this. I told you. I never kept that from you. I told you that I needed to just date and have fun and see where things go.

ERIC: Don't put this on me.

TALLY: Where's it supposed to go.

Beat.

TALLY: I'm not, I never wanted you to see...and...get hurt like that. What were you even doing here? Why did you just show up here? Unannounced?

ERIC: I wanted to surprise you, I got out early.

TALLY: Well you did.

ERIC: So it's my fault, that you didn't come to me, that instead you decided to—

TALLY: I know I could've asked you, but I'd rather figure things out myself and I—you'd want something, everyone wants something. When I massage, I do it, and it's over and I've made someone feel good, and I've earned good money. That's it. It's simple. It's *very* simple.

ERIC: You could've asked me, your mom your sisters.

TALLY: I could have.

ERIC: I know those women, you're not one of those women.

ERIC: You're not one of *those* girls. *Beat.*
Walking towards her.

ERIC: I know those girls Tally...

TALLY: What girls?

ERIC: Working girls. I work at a bar. I spent time in the scene. I have nothing against them really. But you are *not* one of those girls. (*stopping before her.*) You were my little girl.

TALLY: I'm a grown woman.

ERIC: You're not one of *those* girls.

TALLY: And what if I am?

ERIC: (*stunned*) What??

TALLY: And what if I am. (*pacing*) Would that change who I am? Would that change the good times that we've shared together? Would that change how much you care for me? Are whores unlovable?

ERIC: But you're not a—

TALLY: I was last night.

ERIC: I was upset.

Beat.

TALLY: So that gives you the license to talk to me like that? To call me those words, those words that injure, those words used over and over again to degrade women for being something being can't deny.

ERIC: Tally, this isn't..this isn't easy. I was upset.

TALLY: You know what?

ERIC: What?

TALLY: Whores are human beings.

ERIC: Oh come on Tally, what does this matter? I thought I knew you.

TALLY: And how well do I know you...Do you mean to say that you've *never* paid for sex?

ERIC: This is not about me.

TALLY: Do you think I'm going to live in handcuffs?

ERIC: This is not about me.

TALLY: Do you think I'm going to *live in handcuffs*?

ERIC: This is not about—

TALLY: The hell it's not...

TALLY: Do you mean to say that you've *never* paid for sex? That you've never looked under "casual encounters"? You've never had a lap dance? Or taken a girl out for a really fancy night because you wanted to impress her, because you wanted to sleep with her?

ERIC puts his head down. She steps in his face.

TALLY: Aren't we all whores? What gives you the right to stand here and judge me? Whores are human beings. Women and men who wake up and face the world, just like we do. They eat, they shit, they shower, they try to make a living. They have birthdays, Eric. Memories, good ones, bad ones. They want someone to love them just for being them. They probably wore pigtails once and their mom or dad brushed their hair for school. They probably had big dreams, and still do...maybe a small part of them still has those big dreams to take this world on. Like it feels when we age, and life goes by and we wonder what happened...Forgive me.

Beat.

TALLY: Eric, I want to be loved for who I am, where I am and what I want to be, I want to be with someone who makes me feel like I can do anything.

ERIC: You *can* do anything.

TALLY: As long as it's where and when *you* want me to do it?

Beat.

ERIC: Why'd you do it Tally? Why...

TALLY: I just got so behind on money, with school fees, the apartment...food. And I-I didn't know what to do.

ERIC: Why didn't you waitress?

TALLY: Why didn't I—

ERIC: Yeah.

TALLY: Maybe I wasn't doing it for just...I guess I kind of liked it...I...

ERIC: Liked what? Having your hands on some strange guy's ass?

TALLY: It's sensual.

ERIC: It's dirty.

TALLY: But not when I do it to you.

ERIC: You (tears)...You broke my fucking heart.

ERIC exits.

(Scene XI)

It's dusk in Brooklyn.

TALLY writes in her bed.

There's a knock on the door. MOTHER walks in.

MOTHER: I can't rest.

She sits down next to her daughter.

TALLY: Neither can I...

Beat.

TALLY: How was Mandalls?

MOTHER: Oh yeah good, it was good. Hey, do you need boots? I wasn't sure, you know for the weather up there.

TALLY: That's sweet of you, yeah, guess I could use some. I think last winter ran mine ragged. But don't worry about it.

MOTHER: Well, you know I already got 'em.

They laugh.

An awkward silence falls.

MOTHER: So where have you been? Didn't see much of you last night or today.

TALLY: Upset.

MOTHER: Upset? Why?

TALLY: Do you remember calling me a slut...when I was little?

MOTHER: Oh god Tally... Why do you make me feel so bad?

TALLY: I can't get it out of my head. I think about it all the time.

MOTHER: You wrote a letter. To a boy. It was a pretty graphic letter. But I shouldn't have made so much of it, you always had a bright imagination, you know.

TALLY: I can't get it out of my head. I think about it all the time. I hate you for saying that to me. It broke my heart. It broke my fucking heart. I've carried those words with me everywhere. My back hurts from carrying them around. They dried my throat, cut my confidence, made me feel dirty.

MOTHER: I'm sorry... I'm so sorry Tally.

TALLY: Why does the world see us like that? It's a burden I can't live with. I hate you for saying that to me. You were supposed to protect me. Protect me from the things I'd eventually get called.

MOTHER: I wanted you to keep your eyes off those boys and on your future.

TALLY: I was ten. I was curious about them, they were growing hair on their faces, they smelled different. Their noses perspired when they spoke to me.

MOTHER: I was all f'ed up Tally. I didn't know what I was doing. My mother was never there.

JACQUI and LISA walk in, quietly and sit next to MOTHER.

MOTHER: Nope, she wasn't. Just thinking about the bad days, ya know. The bad days, she wasn't there. No one was, to protect me. *(crying)* He took everything I had. I was so tiny. He took everything I had.

TALLY: *(Taking her mother's hand)* It's not your fault.

MOTHER: I was eight. There was blood everywhere, I didn't even understand what happened... It was everywhere, oh god.

They hold her up and kiss her.

TALLY: Start from the beginning.

LISA: *(crying)* Bastard.

JACQUI: Yes, mom, the beginning.

MOTHER: I was born in St. Thomas, Jamaica. It's a great country, ya know. Show me somewhere prettier in the world, I haven't seen it. St. Thomas, Jamaica. It's the country, yeah mon, country. Mountains and rivers and waterfalls. So much fruit. I used to love to climb the fruit trees. I'd get in so much trouble, ya know. Cause we lived on a farm, so we had lots of trees. When I was done with ours, I'd climb the neighbors then the neighbor's neighbors! And all the country people dem knew my aunt, she was a teacher. Thank God for her, oh what a kind woman, she raised me. She did. My dropper didn't want me. She loved my father though. She did. He wanted me. She did it for him, but then he died in a car accident when she was pregnant with me. And that was that. I was off to boarding school, I was very little since I didn't eat much, just fruit, oh so delicious, we have so many different apples in Jamaica, my favorite was the rose.

Beat.

MOTHER: She put me in boarding school, yuh know because she didn't want me. Some of the workers were nice, some of them were cruel. I didn't belong to anybody, but I had my friends, we were close. Played together, did mischief together, took up for each other...It was a beautiful day though. Nice, not too hot, it had rained that morning. We couldn't wait to go out and play after lunch. I ate very little, and I finished my fruit and my friend's fruit too. So, I was going to get rid of my food. It was okay, but not like my aunt's. Oh jesus, she could cook. Remember Jacqui?

JACQUI: Oh yes—

MOTHER: Just lick your fingers when she came out of the kitchen.

Beat.

MOTHER: He called me into that room, that concrete floor was so cold. He was so big. It happened so fast.

TALLY: I'm so...sorry...

Beat.

TALLY: What would you do to him? If you could see him again.

MOTHER: Probably cut his thing off.

TALLY: Cut it.

JACQUI: Yes mom! Cut it! And see his dick go rolling down the stairs. And the balls too!

LISA: Burn it, put a torch to it and let the shit go up in flames!

TALLY: Mom.

MOTHER: Yes.

TALLY: You are so brave. You are so brave and beautiful. Thank you for everything you've done for me. I'm a good woman because of you. We all are.

LISA and JACQUI: Thank you.

MOTHER: You're welcome. You're my children. Everything I did, I did for you all. All the hard jobs after my aunt brought me to this country. I was 14 when I came and fell in love with this city. My aunt sent for me and I lived with my dropper on Carroll St., but it didn't work out and I left her house at 16. I worked so hard caring for white people. Everything I did, I did it for you all.

LISA: I remember going to her salon.

MOTHER: Yes, and she got us this house. She signed for me. I was lucky to get that. She was ambitious, got to give her that...shrewd, knew her money, that's for sure.

TALLY: I don't remember.

MOTHER: You were too young Tally.

JACQUI: Yeah, too young but we used to go there. Sometimes after school before mom would pick us up. Her clients always had good thick hair.

LISA: Mhhmm, they sure did. Grandma had magic—

MOTHER: I'm naturally hungry.

TALLY: What would you like?

MOTHER: Jacqui keeps eating all the food.

JACQUI: I just like to snack.

LISA: Curry chicken is not a snack.

JACQUI fans her off.

TALLY: Anything you want mom.

MOTHER: Escovitch fish. With those onions and peppers. And not the one from around the corner. But Charlotte's over there on Flatbush.

JACQUI: Oh! She puts those carrots—

LISA: And green peppers.

TALLY: More onions too...

MOTHER: And the fish is so fresh, I think she catches them when the boats come in at the East River.

TALLY: Okay! Fish, let's do it.

TALLY gets up and reaches for her mom's hand to pull her up. TALLY puts her arms around her shoulder. The FAMILY exits and

reenters from the other side of the stage, laughing and chatting with their hands full of paper bags of food. They all sit on the bed and take out the fish, rice and peas and plantains.

LISA: Can't believe tomorrow is your last night!

JACQUI: Don't talk about it!

LISA: So, how was your tutoring?

TALLY: Eric caught me massaging some guy's ass.

MOTHER and LISA look at each other.

LISA and MOTHER: What?

TALLY: Eric caught me massaging some guy's ass.

LISA: Here?

MOTHER: Tally, what the – c'mon. Did I raise you like that?

JACQUI: Mmmm, damn this fish is good. Charlotte's is the best.

TALLY: Yes. Here.

LISA: Didn't I ask you not to bring strange white people here?

TALLY: Yeah, look I'll explain later, but—

MOTHER: Look, life happens, he'll get over it. Or move on. It's just a man. But c'mon. You shouldn't be massaging old white ass Tally. What are you thinking. The diseases.

TALLY: Well they're not usually—

MOTHER: Think of your future, you have too much to lose.

LISA: Was he good looking?

TALLY: Body like a god.

LISA: Mhmmm. Tall?

TALLY: Yes. Like 6' 3"

LISA: Mm, damn. What about the shoulders?

JACQUI: Are you going to eat that dumpling?

TALLY: Broad, so broad, you'd want to rub them all night.

LISA: Damn! (*gyrating*) I missed it. Jacqui can never leave Mandalls. Otherwise, we would have caught your ass and I would've had a peak at that fine specimen.

*LISA's body turns away to her imagination,
eventually she remembers TALLY.*

LISA: Well girl...how do you feel about him?

TALLY: His buns are so tight.

MOTHER: She meant Eric.

TALLY: I think. I hurt his feelings.

MOTHER: Well most grown men are like babies.

TALLY: I miss him.

MOTHER: If he has a good heart, he'll forgive you, people are doing worse things.

JACQUI: That's true.

MOTHER: See you all don't watch the news, I watch the news. Every day there is another white person out there with a gun goin' crazy!

Jaqui: I know, I know, what's wrong with them?

MOTHER: Anyhow, Tally, just ask. Whatever you need. If I don't find it now, ask Lisa, I catch it on sale next month. Wait a minute, when Macy's have their sale, I clean up, you understand me? And I have no interest 'til the end of dis year. Forget the card, I believe in cash. Even all now I carry money all over. You don't believe me? Check me.

*The MOTHER takes a small bag from her bra.
Then her sock.
Then reaches to her waistband.*

TALLY: Mom, mom, okay, I believe you...It's not just—

LISA: the money? You like it, don't you.

JACQUI: Don't say that. No, she doesn't.

TALLY: Yes, I do.

MOTHER: Someone put something on her.

JACQUI: I know, that's what I was thinking.

LISA: Why?

TALLY: They look at me like a goddess. They come in stressed and leave looking and feeling so relaxed, like someone took bricks off their shoulders. I like the feel of the skin on my hands. There is so much power in my hands. And I like that's it's on my own time. I like giving the pleasure, the healing. It makes me feel good.

LISA: You're healing them alright. You're not—

TALLY: No. Well, not.

TALLY gyrates with her hands.

TALLY: And I like dressing up and being someone else. I'm Crystal, sometimes Lola.

LISA: Oh I like Crystal, (*laughing*) sounds like a hoe.

TALLY gives LISA the hand.

MOTHER: This is raising my pressure.

JACQUI: Lisa.

JACQUI shakes her head.

LISA: What I said I liked it?!

TALLY: Women give it up for free all the time.

MOTHER: That's true. Even when we don't want it.

LISA: I thought you weren't—

TALLY: That's not my point. Sometimes people pay for things that make them feel good.

TALLY gets up and starts looking through her

MOTHER: Where you going? *wardrobe.*

TALLY: Dancing.

MOTHER: At this time of night? I never got into clubs.

TALLY: Lisa, Jacqui, want to come?

LISA: No, I'm tired, I just like to talk to men online.

JACQUI: Next time sweetie, my sugar's up.

MOTHER: At this time of night?

TALLY: Yes mom, this is the time of day when people go out to drink and dance.

MOTHER: What do you see in it. It's so late, Jesus Christ.

TALLY: It makes me feel good to dance and sweat and be around other people who are dancing and sweating. It's pure.

MOTHER: But I don't want you to get into any trouble, I don't want for a guy to take you and rape you, you know.

TALLY gets onto the floor and rubs her mother's knees.

TALLY: No one's going to rape me, I stay with my friends. And I'll also carry my mace.

JACQUI: Get them in the eye Tally.

TALLY: I need to go out mom. I'm visiting. It's New York City. When my friends and I are at the bar laughing and talking and sipping wine. I love the noise. The beautiful sounds of other people laughing and drinking and eating. It makes me feel good, like dancing, oh don't get me started with dancing, the beats go right through my body and I have to respond.

LISA: Get it girl!

TALLY: It feels right. It makes me feel good and complete.

The MOTHER nods.

TALLY: What makes you feel good?

MOTHER: Oh sex, oh no. I don't do that anymore.

LISA: Mom (*laughing*) nobody was talking about sex but you.

TALLY: But my sexuality isn't just about men!

LISA: Mine is.

TALLY: I mean it. It's not just about men or sex with men.

LISA: Do you like women? I told you mom.

TALLY: What? No, I mean I love to dance, and write, and read, and swim, and get to the top of mountains. I love being around black people. I love walking the city and looking through windows. I mean, men are great, but I also like to touch myself.

MOTHER: Tally, listen I—

TALLY: Just look right here, or out the window, pleasure is everywhere. Sometimes I just feel so horny! Or excited, whatever you want to call it when I get to do the things and be with the people I love. Like you—

LISA: Please Tally, I'm strictly dickly.

MOTHER: Well, I like the news. And I like shopping. I love it, really (*getting excited*) just being in the store and seeing the things I want and then buying it, you know, it feels good, and then I come home with something pretty or something that I need. Sales are my favorite. Those corporations have a lot of money, I like when they give it away! Now I like shopping online too, if I don't like it, I just send it back.

JACQUI: I like good food, like fish and rice and curry.

MOTHER: You're a real yardy Jacqui, god damn.

LISA: I love buying pretty shoes, stilettos.

TALLY: You never wear them.

JACQUI: She just likes to look at them, like her wigs.

LISA: Shut up Jacqui.

MOTHER: I like being with the family and eating and talking and watching Oliver or Tyler Perry. That guy's a genius, a true genius.

LISA: I like reading romance novels.

JACQUI: I like going to church.

LISA: I like reading fashion magazines and sewing and making dresses.

TALLY: I remember that! You made me a pencil skirt for my internship when I was in high school. You're so talented. Why don't you make clothes again?

LISA: I don't know, I...

TALLY: Well I just want to do the things that make me feel like me, the things that I love to do, the things that make feel whole and sexy and alive and free.

TALLY is changing her clothes.

LISA: I hear that!

MOTHER: She's right life is short, too short.

TALLY: Don't we deserve it?

LISA: Well, I like when a brother licks my back. Mmmm, damn.

JACQUI: Please stop.

TALLY: Why can't she talk about it?

JACQUI: Well then, she's gonna get herself worked up and be ready to grab somebody's nipples. And it's not gonna be mine, I've had enough.

LISA gestures towards JACQUI.

JACQUI: Stop!

TALLY has on a sequin dress.

LISA: Oh you look so pretty Tally!

TALLY: Thanks! I've been so excited to wear this!

TALLY walks over to hug and kiss her mom.

MOTHER: Okay, have fun.

TALLY: I will, you too (*caressing her face*).

TALLY exits.

MOTHER: Well, she's young.

JACQUI: Yeah, mom.

MOTHER: Well she was always like that though. When she was a toddler she would get dressed up in Lisa's things and say she's taking a trip. I caught her several times by the front door, with luggage.

LISA: And you wouldn't keep her out of my things mom.

MOTHER: She was a baby.

JACQUI: Let's drive to Burger Queen.

MOTHER: Okay but I only want one or two, a lot of that outside food is no good.

LISA: I'm ready, don't take forever Jacqui.

They begin to exit.

LISA: Got to get dolled up for everything, right mom?

JACQUI: Really? I like to bathe. You should try it!

(Scene XII)

It's morning. TALLY enters from the shower, wrapped in a towel. She starts to pack for Boston.

TALLY: *(singing)* It's not fair... it's not fair... it's not fair... if you want me I'll be here.

It's not fair...it's not fair... it's not fair...if you want me I'll be here.

I'll be dreaming my dreams of you, I'll be dreaming my dreams of you, and there's no other place where I'd lay down my face, dreaming my—

She notices ERIC standing by the door.

ERIC: The back door was open.

Beat.

ERIC: Headed back huh?

TALLY: Tomorrow. I feel like I just got here and never left...all at the same time.

ERIC: I hate it when you're gone.

TALLY: There's some good but not as good as NY Chinese, up there. You might like the lobster specials...

ERIC: Maybe...

Beat.

ERIC: Was thinking I could score some ahh Yank/Sox tickets... Still early in the season.

TALLY: Oh yeah?

ERIC: Yeah, thought it might be fun to see the other cheaters in action, since I missed that dick Republican deflate his balls.

They laugh.

ERIC: Maybe if you're not too busy—

TALLY: Maybe if you don't mind me wearing my Red Sox cap—

They kiss with longing and gentleness, as if their bodies are fragile.

ERIC exits.

She packs more, a luggage bag and clothing are spread over the bed.

(Scene XIII)

It's morning.

The bedroom lights flicker.

The audience can see TALLY's head but her body is behind the bedroom screen.

The MOTHER walks in, her hair is big and curly. She's wearing bright makeup and parachute pants.

MOTHER: What are you doing?

TALLY: Good morning, mom.

TALLY steps from behind the screen, buttoning up her blazer.

MOTHER: *What* are you doing?

TALLY: I'm getting ready for school.

MOTHER: Take those clothes off and get your times tables out. I'm going to test you at noon.

TALLY: I'm going to school and there's nothing you can do to stop me.

MOTHER: Sluts don't—

TALLY: I FORGIVE YOU!!

Beat.

TALLY: I forgive you.... Okay?! I forgive... myself. I do. There's no need to come back... like this... I forgive you. I know you did... I know you did the best you could. The very best you could with what you had. I forgive you.

Go and never come back like this again. If you do, when you do, I'll tell you the same thing, I'm going to school and there's nothing you or anyone else can do to stop me.

MOTHER walks backwards. She stops in front of the screen. Somewhere a girl is screaming. TALLY faces her and turns her back to the audience.

Light slowly comes up from the center of the screen and expands slowly for a silent film: there's a little black girl with pigtails laughing, full of joy. She's sitting at a lunch table with other little girls. They are wearing pink and burgundy uniforms. Fried dumplings are in their hands, they are stuffing it

TALLY: No, I can't let you!!

with the salt fish and ackee on their plates. The little girl gets up to take her tray to the back of the cafeteria. The rack is full. A kitchen worker calls to her from the side door with his index finger. She walks over. He must be pointing to something and she steps into the small storage room. He locks the door behind her.

Screen goes black and little girl and Man appear from behind the curtain.

TALLY: *(looking at the Worker)* I can't let you...

Sisters enter with a candle in their hands from opposite ends of the stage. MOTHER walks little girl out.

JACQUI: We know what you did.

LISA: We can't let you do it.

JACQUI: We know what you did.

LISA: We can't let you do it.

LISA: Your penis is for your pleasure and to please women.

JACQUI: Not to hurt women or boys.

Man: I—

MOTHER: You *don't* get to speak.

Sisters: Mom.

MOTHER repeatedly tazes Man. He hits the floor.

Sisters: Your penis is for your pleasure and to please women. Not to hurt women or boys.

MOTHER walks over to him, kneels down and snaps his neck.

The FAMILY exits.

The bedroom lights flicker.

(Scene XIV)

It's nighttime.

The FAMILY enters TALLY's bedroom, coming back from Mandalls with bags, chatting about clothes.

LISA: Those jeans are sexy Tally.

JACQUI: Try them on.

*The FAMILY sits. TALLY tries on the jeans.
Beat.*

LISA: Oh those look great. Don't they look great mom?

MOTHER: Oh yes, perfect fit.

JACQUI: Love them!

LISA: I can't believe it's your last night!

JACQUI: Did you finish your writing?

TALLY: Yes, I did yesterday before bed.

LISA: What was it about?

TALLY: Roberta Busby.

LISA: Roberta who?

TALLY: Roberta Busby.

MOTHER: Never heard of her. Who's that?

TALLY: The exotic dancer... who was set on fire outside of a club in Cali.

JACQUI: Oh god.

TALLY: For years she was a bill collector but she got laid off. She was also raising those kids alone. Turned to dancing. She had to take care of her kids.

MOTHER: Yeah, who else was going to feed her kids? I know what that's like. When you're a mother, that's all you are concerned about, taking care of your children.

LISA: Who could do such a thing?

JACQUI: Just evil.

Beat.

MOTHER: They burned her huh... Well, I ain't burned. No, I'm all here. Most days. Lord, some days.

They hold her hands.

MOTHER: Damn Tally, I'm really going to miss you. You know that?

TALLY: I know. I'll dream of your smile. And all of your beautiful faces.

Beat.

TALLY: Let's make our last night better than ever.

JACQUI: Yes! I'll make codfish cakes! And I've got some music for you!

MOTHER: All you all do is dance. Don't your hips hurt?

JACQUI puts Lady Saw's "Hice It UP"

*“Through a bwoy nuh know
How wi hot yah now
Getting fat yah now
We are ready to rock, ready to roll”*

“On the floor

*TALLY gets up and starts whining to the music.
LISA gets up and joins her.*

Have dem screaming and crying and begging for more

*When mi fling it up from the left yaah
Fling it up from the right
We know how fi fling it up”*

*JACQUI and MOTHER clap and dance with their
shoulders.*

TALLY: Oh no, not tonight!

TALLY tugs on her mom's arm.

TALLY: Come on mom!

MOTHER: *(tugging back)* I didn't raise you—

TALLY: Yeah, yeah, you're moving your shoulders, I know you want to.

MOTHER: Okay, okay, jesus, then pull me up then.

LISA and JACQUI help to pull their mom up.

*“Wi kow how fi fling it up, yeah-eaah
Wi know fi hice it up from the left
Heist it up from the right
Wi know how fi hice it up
Wi know how fi hice it up, yeah”*

TALLY, LISA & JACQUI: Go, go, go mom! Go mom!

*MOTHER spins to the middle of their circle
showing off her dance moves. She dips her hips left
and right, smiling.*

Lights out.

The End.

CHAPTER II

LETTER

Dear Rose Family,

I write to record what others erase when I speak, to rewrite the stories others have miswritten about me, about you.^{1 2} I write this to you in my underwear, leaning against propped up pillows on my bed. I don't think that I can thank you enough for the stories that you have shared with me. I hope that this performance honors you and your experiences. After coming out of this performance, I realized that moving beyond pain is not easy to do. Healing is not a whole number. It is not linear. Writing this, I often looked at the screen taking deep breaths. I laughed. I cried. I walked in broken and came out broken, but hopeful and connected to the kinds of stories I want to tell. Performances from injury do something to us. You shared your story with me many years ago because you wanted it told, because you couldn't bear the silence. Sometimes writing it, I couldn't bear the speaking. No, moving beyond pain is not easy to do.

I admire you. The women of the Rose family, the self-respect in the sways of your hips, the old stories in your dimples, the years of giving in your laughs. I couldn't imagine addressing this reflection to anyone but you. Your family history was the catalyst for the writing of *Brooklyn Bedroom*: a process where I used your stories to investigate the relationships between women, sexuality, desire and healing. Josephine, Tally, Lisa, and Jacqui – you have touched my heart in ways that make it vital for me to attempt to represent my interpretation of your stories to

¹ I use footnotes throughout the Letter and Reflection sections exclusively. I prefer in these sections to give the source information upfront, and I also prefer not to interrupt the flow of the text.

² Moraga & Anzaldúa, "Speaking In Tongues," *This Bridge Called My Back*, (Third Woman Press), 2002, 169.

the world, with the hope that others might also be inspired by the strength and resilience of your family.

This reflection is to meditate on the themes that arose for me having gone through the performance and coming out on the other side. First, I plan to give background on the play, and then share the things that keep me up at night. I must share what keeps me up because it explains why I needed to do this project. There are factors that drew me to your story, factors that made me feel I had to write *Brooklyn Bedroom*. I will discuss performance ethnography and the importance of storytelling as they speak to the ways that I have structured this project as a scholar and artist. I will also discuss what is meant by “ethnodrama,” and connect it to the child abuse crisis in Jamaica because it is important to breaking the silence about the violence against the female body. Black women telling our own stories is a method for liberation, and I will speak frankly about the power in writing and the themes of sexuality and eroticism in *Brooklyn Bedroom*. I also hope to speak on Third World Feminism and how it has shaped my perspective as a performance scholar and practitioner because black women write together. Last, I want to uncover why the bedroom means so many things, in this performance and in the world.

You can read as little or as much of this as you’d like, just know that it is for you, that you have shared your story with me and I’d like the chance to express to you how much it has meant to me. Your stories and my interpretation of them has changed my life. I do believe now that pleasure is mine. Not just for my staged performances and writing – but in my everyday life, in my bedroom, in my kitchen, in my intimate relationships. We women write to save lives, and this time it was my own.

In Love and Sisterhood,

Ayshia E. Stephenson

CHAPTER III

REFLECTION

I've come out of this performance knowing that I do not exist without the Rose family, or other black women whom I look to and see myself. Rose family, you raised me. I too was reared by a matriarch. I was raised by women, women who walked with attitude and grace in their hips and demanded respect. When I was a child, black beauty and power was everywhere. There was black art around the house, the only magazines to be found were *Essence* or *Ebony*. Black music was everywhere, from my mother's old school Reggae, to Motown, to Disco, to my generation's music – the beginnings of rap. I went to a private Christian school in Brooklyn with all black people. The only show I could watch at night was *The Cosby Show* and as I got older, *A Different World*. But the truth of it is that black stories and black faces are not as common as they should be, on stage or on screen. W.E.B. Dubois comes to mind when he stated that black people need to make black theatre for black people in black communities. As filmmaker Haile Gerima states, the modern taking of people of color's stories is a genocide. I need to see the everyday performance of black bodies, I need to see that on stage. I needed to see *BrooklynBedroom*. My upbringing and intellectual stance on black pride, beauty, and value has made me the kind of researcher who is excited about representation and putting black bodies on stage.

The writing of *Brooklyn Bedroom* was frequent but slow, sometimes so slow. From word to word, I was reminded of why I was writing. Women must speak back to claim power, to self-define³ and redefine ourselves by writing to historicize what others eagerly try to make invisible. Performance is a political act, the presentation of culture and identity is a collaborative production. The researcher cannot ride alone, over time, I shed parts of myself...the Roses

pressed upon my bones and skin and heart, and it is not just me any longer, it never was.⁴ I also produced and directed the first scene and video clip of the performance. Through these processes of writing and production, a visceral longing occurs. The process has awakened something dormant in me –a black African female diaspora. I realized that my art and scholarship is diasporic, I am often split and compensating inside for the stereotypes of black women in media, in American cultural performances. After the Rose family shared their stories – years later – it was keeping me up at night. I realized that I had so many feelings about it that needed to come out. I realized that my interpretation of the story needed to be told live and on stage. My performance could be the listening. It could be the way that I am an ally, here to witness black female testimony, our stories of joy and trauma.⁵

³ See the writings of black feminist, Patricia Collins, "The Power of Self-Definition," *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, (New York: Routledge), 2000, 97-122.

⁴ See D. Soyini Madison, critical ethnographer, and "The Dialogic Performative in Critical Ethnography" for more on research and co-performance, *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 26.4 (2006): 320-324.

⁵ Anne Sexton, Audre Lorde and Gloria Anzaldúa all possibly teach us "how to witness our own and bear witness to others' traumatic histories," Steele, *We Heal From Memory*, 2.

A. *Brooklyn Bedroom: An Ethnodrama*

Tally is a young black researcher and artist who has come home from school only to be retraumatized by flashbacks of her mother's childhood rape. The narrative is further complicated by her white boyfriend who catches her giving massages with happy endings and slut shames her. The impact of this event on Tally gives rise to memories of being slut shamed by her mother when she was a child. She has to navigate the memory of trauma that also exists in her body and the body of her sisters, while coming to terms with her own sexual identity. In the end, Tally and her mother have an opportunity to speak back and find a space where their sexual history and identity are at peace with their memories and lives. Tally uses her unique sense of eroticism to locate pleasure and satisfaction in her experiences. The performance is an example of how everyday women can face their trauma and find liberation in sisterhood and confronting the men in their lives about moving beyond pain and embracing female sexuality.

Like Mary Weems, Audre Lorde and Gloria Anzaldúa, I want to speak the truth about my lived experience, about the women who have impacted my life and *Brooklyn Bedroom* is an ethnodramatic way to do that. An ethnodrama is a form of qualitative inquiry that links personal stories to social issues to promote radical change.⁶ The Roses are fictionalized because the actual family is not interested in being identified, yet their family history of sexual violence and their recovery can still rise from the dark. I also am not interested in writing an autoethnography

⁶ Norman Denzin, *Performance Ethnography: Critical Pedagogy and the Politics of Culture*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage), 2003.

or autobiography because as Soyini D. Madison states, “The most difficult, the most risky, the most awe-inspiring gift of performance and what holds the ethical imperative in its nervous embrace is what some have referred to as the dialogic performative.”⁷ I do not and “cannot ride alone.”⁸

Brooklyn Bedroom is a performance text where women of color speak back to the pain that has been inflicted upon their emotions and bodies. It relies on Third World feminist ideology to be brave, face the past and be hopeful about the future of female sexuality. It uses the erotic to reduce binaristic thinking and provide new ways of dealing with trauma and exploring sexual liberation. Furthermore, its intersection with race seeks to complicate archaic ideas of race and sexuality. The play questions societal notions of gender and sexuality, the mystification of interracial relationships, and asks the audience to re-imagine boundaries of female identity. As a way of “materializing (a) historical reflection,” *Brooklyn Bedroom* is a “catalyst of social action.”⁹ It is an enactment of witnessing and validating women of color trauma and sexuality – to speak back to colonialist and male oppression. It speaks with U.S. Third World feminists and their strength to break the silence and love women of all races, classes, abilities, nationalities and sexualities (etc.) unconditionally. Because it is an enactment of culture and the writing of culture: it has the potential to expand the actors’ and the audience’s perspective of female liberation and eroticism.¹⁰ The politics of oral history performance that this ethnodrama presents

⁷ Madison, “The Dialogic Performative,” 320.

⁸ Ibid, 323.

⁹ Della Pollock, “Remembering,” *Remembering: Oral History Performance*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan), 2005, 1.

¹⁰ Dani Snyder-Young, “Beyond “an Aesthetic of Objectivity,” *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16.10 (2010), 944.

has the potential to be “critical, intimate, and felt” and enact what Madison calls a “politics of the near.”¹¹ This story and research frame new ways for women to be conceptualized, and to renegotiate language, experience and meaning within the cultural transaction of race and gender.

Brooklyn Bedroom is a dramatic text influenced by the love I have for cinema. The U.S. is a cinematic society and people come to understand the world through frequent contact with the big screen. Yet people trust theatre; I trust theatre. I decided to write the Rose story as a play because theatre is live and alive, and the power of body-to-body witnessing is instrumental to social change. Flashbacks are an important part of the performance because I think it’s vital that narratives produce complex women, women who remember, women who have memories and histories. Women need to be able to take charge of how our memories and pain affect our present. This is why Tally confronts her flashbacks and decides that her choice to forgive her mother was important to her own stability, happiness, and healing.

It was very important to me that Tally not be slut-shamed by the reader/audience. In order to do this, I attempted to make Tally a likeable character. Not just that, I tried to deeply examine her circumstances so that the audience can understand her predicament and want to empathize with her choices. All too often women are shamed for exploring their sexuality, for making the decisions that they make about their bodies. I realize that at times the dialogue might be didactic, but I feel that really represents Tally’s character and that she has a tendency to bring that reflective thought out in others. I have created and developed scenes where the mother talks

¹¹
Pollock, “Remembering,” 8.

about her trauma. The audience also finds out she is the little girl on camera, and I deal with the physicality of change from memory, to alternate reality, to present time (I.e. Tally present time vs. as a child). Eric is white and I don't feel like I should have to explain his whiteness within the narrative because interracial love/issues is not the purpose of the play. Furthermore, not explaining his race or making the story about the difference of his race normalizes interracial intimacy. They are just two people who care for one another who happen to be of different races and I wish more stories introduced interracial romance like that. However, because of Tally's family language and potentially perceived prejudice, I spend a considerable amount of time contextualizing the relationship between Tally and Eric.

In the writing of *Brooklyn Bedroom*, I had to protect the Rose family and re-work the real. The performance text is ethnodramatic because even though it deals with real family history, scenes are re-created to capture the family's experiences, protect their anonymity, and to illustrate the content in the most effective and time-efficient way. According to Saldana, this recreation is legitimate because writers must use their "imagination and language to reconstruct the culture and events portrayed on stage,"¹² and also the concept of "ethnotheatricality" means that the performance may be imaginative in order to demonstrate themes of the real world.¹³

B. What Keeps Me Up At Night

¹² Johnny Saldana, *Ethnotheatre: Research from Page to Stage*, (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press), 2011, 99.

¹³ Ibid, 133.

Seeing it completed, I know that *Brooklyn Bedroom* was a process of emotional and political labor. But it was labor that felt so good to do because it made me feel free of the socio-political confines placed upon the black female body. The body politics in this country disturbs me and I am committed to dismantling what whiteness has said about black female bodies. The black female built this country. My body's ability to procreate was used as a device to create wealth for the United States. Black people's work gave this country the capital and resources to make its mark in the world economy. Slavery in this country was a lot more than a system of economic and political injustice, it was a system fueled by unwelcomed sexual advances by white men upon black and bi-racial women. Black female hypersexuality is a fallacy. Black women have been hypersexualized in stereotypes as a justification for white male sexual relations with, and violence towards, Black women during slavery. Black female sexuality was and is used to make white female sexuality seem pure and superior, when in fact sexual purity is an impossibility.¹⁵

There is no way out with the expectations of female sexuality: whore or pure are dichotomies that are not sustainable in the lived experiences of women.¹⁶ Much of the U.S.' epistemology regarding female sexuality has been contextualized by a fabricated historicity of the slave/master phenomenon. The slave/master binary manifests in the stereotypes of race and

¹⁵ See Jennifer DeVere Brody, Professor of Theatre and Performance Studies at Stanford University, in her book *Impossible Purities, Blackness, Femininity and Victorian Culture* (1989), she discusses the vastly different expectations of masculinity and femininity that are compounded by racialized understandings of gender.

¹⁶ See my article on Sara Baartman, "A Co-Performance of Radical Change," *Qualitative Inquiry*, 2018.

sexuality in the U.S. Challenges with race are embedded in archaic constructions of sexuality that are dominated by fear and ambitions to control female sexuality – black women have our own ambitions and are done fulfilling the ambitions of a fragile western masculinity. This country’s intolerance for color is tangential to recurring challenges with sexuality and the divergent and superficial constructions of what it means to be a woman versus what it means to be a man. What I wrote in *Brooklyn Bedroom* resonates with me as a performance that speaks to and with all women but is especially for women of color battling to fend off the imprints of colonization.

Tally’s mother called her a slut as a child; Tally’s love interest, Eric, also uses this language with Tally. The word is very heavy for Tally, as it is for me because it represents an attack on female sexuality. All women who are perceived or accused of being “loose or promiscuous” face institutional backlash. There are social and cultural expectations that society has placed upon the role of female. If a woman is an open participant in her own sexuality, then she’s dirty. If she is not sexual, then she is pure and set up to fail against impossible standards of purity.¹⁷ Sure, Eric is upset because he feels that they have something special and that they should be monogamous. But Tally has made it clear that she has a lot going on and they are not in a relationship. The problem that surfaces is ownership. Everyone but the woman whose body it is, has ownership over it. It is symptomatic of reproductive legislation in this country.

Growing up as I child, I was made to feel like I wasn’t supposed to be attracted to boys or even

¹⁷ Brody, *Impossible Purities*.

explore my own body. When I found pornography in the house, somehow, I was looked upon as though I should feel ashamed for finding and looking at it. Tally's story reminds me of how my body felt under chains from a young age.

Language is a vicious part of this policing. Language that is demeaning to women is hurtful and is also hard to avoid. Women are expected to watch images and engage stories that injure our sense of self. By the time a girl becomes a teenager she has already been addressed with language that is demeaning to women.¹⁸ Slut shaming and violent language is common to American everyday conversations and is used as both comedy and insult. Tally senses this, she senses it is being used to control her and wants to break that cycle of manipulation. Violence towards and control of the female body is enacted by the demeaning language so common to American vernacular. This violent language incites aggression against women and most women will experience sexual and/or physical abuse during her life.¹⁹ Women are killed every day by men in their lives who claim to love them.²⁰ Violent language is used to manipulate women and make us susceptible to fulfilling male cravings in every facet of our private and public lives.

¹⁸ "Dear daddy, I will be called a whore," 2015. *Addicting Info*. Retrieved from <http://addictinginfo.org/2015/12/14/dear-daddy-i-will-be-called-a-whore-her-devastating-video-is-breaking-the-internet-video/>

¹⁹See Madison Park. (2013). WHO: 1 in 3 women experience physical or sexual violence. *CNN*. Retrieved from <http://www.cnn.com/2013/06/20/health/global-violence-women/>

²⁰ The accuracy of Steinham's numbers are backed by James A. Fox, a Northeastern University criminology professor, and the 2013 U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics report. See Sanders 2014 & Bureau of Justice 2013.

The violence and oppression against the female body keeps me up at night, but women who engage their own sense of power do not surrender their sexuality.²² When I was writing the performance and to this day, I see Audre Lorde's face in my bed at night. Reading her work on eroticism produced the buds of my self-liberation. Lorde was a feminist, poet, essayist, and humanist born in 1934 in New York City, we lost her body to breast cancer in 1992. She worked relentlessly to reject the political and sexual hegemony that binds the minds and bodies of women of all ethnicities and nationalities.²³ Lorde (1965-75) was a Black Arts Movement writer who committed her career and personal life to challenging racist, sexist and homophobic inequalities in society.²⁴ As a U.S. Third World feminist,^{25 26 27 28} she was among the first to say that our silences will not protect us.²⁹

²² See Audre Lorde, black lesbian feminist mother warrior: "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," *Wild Women Don't Wear No Blues*, Ed. by Marita Golden, (Marita. New York), 1993, pp. 53.

²³ Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic", 47.

²⁴ Lorde, "Litany for Survival," *The Black Unicorn: Poems*, (New York: Norton), 1978.

²⁵ U.S. Third World Feminists are women of color who utilize oppositional practice to define ourselves and ask audiences to join us in critical performances of female subjectivity and agency. The terminology "Third World" is not an outdated term, it is terminology that is still relevant to the world as it is understood. For more information, see Chandra Mohanty "'Under Western Eyes' Revisited," *Signs*, 2002.

²⁶ Third World feminism came about in the U.S. post-WW II and was created by subjugated peoples in the U.S. speaking up for their rights. For more information, see Dani Snyder-Young, "Beyond "an Aesthetic of Objectivity," *Qualitative Inquiry*, 2010, 883-893.

²⁷ For women of color, the Third World experience is encountered everywhere, and oppositional consciousness is vital to resist monolithic representations of our bodies and experiences. See Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 2000, 42.

²⁸ U.S. Third World Feminism is feminism focused upon Third World women's historical relationalities of race, class, gender and nation. See Ranjoo Herr, "Reclaiming Third World Feminism," *Meridians*, 2014.

²⁹ Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, 1984, 42.

The violence against the female body is inevitably an attack on our sexuality. Women can take our sexuality back by claiming our stories. According to Lorde, eroticism is simply “living with the knowledge that satisfaction is possible”.³⁰ Tally realizes that satisfaction is possible when she decides that she will no longer live in the confines of her mother’s childhood trauma. Eroticism is crucial to female liberation because it is an innate power that women already possess – we can use it to embrace the yes within ourselves and increase satisfaction in our daily lives. That yes within our bodies is the erotic – knowledge from our most primal source, a knowledge that women have been taught not to value within masculine articulations of power. This commonly unused cradle of knowledge represents the tensions between female sexuality and self; embracing our internal knowledge ensures that pleasure feels possible.

Josephine realizes that satisfaction is possible through interactions with her adult daughters and through finally breaking the silence about her trauma. Although some feminist works would explore the significance of power through silence, I agree with Lorde that our silences make us vulnerable to patriarchal threats. Silence cannot connect us to the erotic. Embodying our capacity to live in satisfaction happens with using our voices.³¹ Erotic power belongs to women when we listen to our bodies and recover our experiences. And our sexuality and spiritual power as women will feel stronger if we begin to heal by acknowledging our

³⁰ Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 42.

³¹ Dani Snyder-Young, "Beyond "an Aesthetic of Objectivity": Performance Ethnography, Performance Texts, and Theatricality." *Qualitative Inquiry*. 16.10 (2010): 883-893.

histories of violence. Wholeness comes with knowing that we are survivors.³² Let us find peace through our voices, share our stories, and be witnesses and allies for our sisters.

The black woman's womb no longer belongs to the United States – the woman of color's body no longer belongs to the colonizer. The black woman must reclaim her sexuality in every facet of her life; all women must take their bodies back. No, we can never take the night back. Or in Josephine's case, the afternoon in the lunchroom. But we can take our lives back by speaking back and realizing that no matter how connected women are – only an individual can decide to do what satisfies her. The violence against us ends when we put power in danger. Women must create stories on paper and in our lived experience that resist violent power, white power, and colonialist power. Writing *Brooklyn Bedroom* made me realize more than ever that there are black women and there is the black woman: there is rich variation among women in our communities, yet we must stand in solidarity because we do face particular singularities with our history of resilience and oppression. The black woman cannot be held down. Centuries of insults and we hold our heads up and demand respect because we are all too accustomed to defining ourselves for ourselves.³³ When Josephine spoke of her pain, I was speaking nearby³⁴, so was Lorde, Sanchez, Minh-ha, Anzaldua, Collins and many other Third World sisters. We can call upon that history of strength and survival and unconditional love to perform the possibilities of liberation.

³² Cassie P. Steele, *We Heal from Memory*, (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave), 2000.

³³ Collins, "The Power of Self-Definition," 98.

³⁴ For more on speaking nearby, see Gwendolyn Audrey Foster, "Trinh T. Minh-ha: An Empowering Notion of Difference," in *Women filmmakers of the African and Asian diaspora: decolonizing the gaze, locating subjectivity*." Also see Minh-ha's film *Reassemblage* (1982).

C. Performance Ethnography & The Call to Narrative

Much of American cultural production is a joke to the black women. I can rarely go to the movies without watching a white man take the glory, even when the film is supposed to be about me, like Kevin Costner in *Hidden Figures*. *Brooklyn Bedroom* is mostly live performance, but in the writing, I was motivated by resisting the hegemonic dissemination of storytelling in western cinematic society. Now I see how much Adrienne Kennedy's play, *A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White*,³⁵ inspired my writing of *Brooklyn Bedroom*. It is actually a drama about a young black intellectual named Clara, who only plays a minor role. The movie stars, including Bette Davis, Paul Heinreid, Jean Peters, Marlon Brando, Montgomery Clift, and Shelley Winters, perform the events of Clara's life for her and sometimes for her family members. Premiering in 1976 at the New York Shakespeare Festival, Kennedy, who often writes about black identity, agency and resistance,^{36 37} uses the plot to criticize the disturbing history of white bodies representing black lives. *A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White* condemns white

³⁵ Adrienne Kennedy, "A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White," in *The Adrienne Kennedy Reader*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 2001.

³⁶ Georgie Boucher, "Fractured Identity and Agency and the Plays of Adrienne Kennedy," *Feminist Review*, 84.1 (2006): 84-103.

³⁷ For more on Kennedy and black identity, see bell hooks, "Critical Reflections: Adrienne Kennedy, The Writer, The Work." *Intersecting Boundaries: The Theatre of Adrienne Kennedy*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota).

hegemonic power and illustrates how black female representation in this country is fraught with incompatible dualities.³⁸ Every black American women has experienced watching movies where the characters are all white. The protagonist Clara, like Kennedy, is actually a playwright who is writing her own drama based upon her experiences with film. Clara's performance functions as an act where she claims agency through creative production.³⁹ Performance ethnography is a paradigm steeped in this kind of storytelling. It is critical theory aiming to create, analyze and advocate for creative cultural production that is subversive to colonial power.

The paradigm of performance ethnography has been crucial to the writing of *Brooklyn Bedroom*. Performance ethnography was first postulated by Dwight Conquergood, theorist and filmmaker.^{40 41} Performance ethnography is concerned with identity and culture; it embodies storytelling generated by a range of media – the stage, the screen – modes of communication where identity is articulated and where culture comes alive. Under the labor of Norman Denzin, Dwight Conquergood, Mary Weems, and D. Soyini Madison, performance ethnography speaks to a critical paradigm with a moral imperative for social action and change. Culture is significant in the Rose story and Tally yearns for social change. Everywhere she turns Tally (and her family) have to resist colonial power. Somehow dancehall dancing is dirty, writing letters to boys

³⁸ For more on Kennedy and double consciousness, see "Funnyhouse of a Negro" in *The Adrienne Kennedy Reader*.

³⁹Gabriela Toth, "The Interplay of Film and Theatre in Adrienne Kennedy's *A Movie Star Has To Star in Black and White*," *Americana E-Journal of American Studies in Hungary*, VIII, 1, 2012.

⁴⁰ See Lorne D. Conquergood, 'Performing as a moral act: ethical dimensions of the ethnography of performance'. *Literature in Performance*, 5(2): 1–13, 1985.

⁴¹ See also Conquergood & E. P. Johnson. *Cultural Struggles: Performance, Ethnography, Praxis*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013.

is dirty, massaging for money is dirty. She cannot settle for this and neither can I. It's because of her resistance to colonial power that stirs healing in and redemption for her family. In the writing, I found myself liberated by her strength to be her own hero.

Brooklyn Bedroom made me realize that performance ethnography can be a powerful tool to create self and cultural image. Black women, women of color, all women, are in a self-representational crisis because of dissemination that favors white male stories. For example, African women filmmakers face the challenge of taking back power for women and self-defining through self-representation.⁴² I'm glad that I was able to infuse film into my live performance. Movies educate people, they create culture. Most mainstream films create pain for the black female spectator. The images on the big screen, such as the caricature "mammie", are often so stereotypical that they are harmful, in other words if the black female spectator looks too deep then her meeting with the screen hurts.⁴³ To avoid pain, we often choose not to look or deny the use of our vision's full capacity. But all women must leave themselves behind when encountering the big screen and this is a result of a long history that deems women as insufficient. So, in going to the movie theater, we women must often reject own sex.⁴⁴ Even the female protagonist in films are afraid to look, there are many narratives where females of all ages

⁴² Gwendolyn A. Foster, "Third World Women's Cinema: If the Subaltern Speaks, Will We Listen?" in *Interventions: Feminist Dialogues on Third World Women's Literature and Film*, (New York: Garland), 1996, pp. 213-226. Print.

⁴³ bell hooks, 'The oppositional gaze: black female spectators,' *Film Theory: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies*, vol. 3 (2004), pp. 238 and 233-248.

⁴⁴ Mary A. Doane, 'Woman's stake: filming the female body' in *October*, vol. 17 (1981), 22.

cover their eyes or disappear behind men.⁴⁵ The hegemonic state of films is emblematic of the fact that black women are confronted with the problem of narrative. People come to know the world through representations.⁴⁶ I am proud to use film in an honest way, resist stereotypes and portray the women in *Brooklyn Bedroom* as remembering bodies – women with histories and experiences that matter.

By writing *Brooklyn Bedroom*, I've been so reminded of why I do theatre, the power of the words and the stage are unquantifiable. Creating and sharing this play is a way for me to resist and recuperate for damage done by mainstream cinema. Filmic dissemination might be overarching in its message sending – but local work changes lives too. For there is no match for body-to-body contact to witness women's stories, build empathy and inspire social change. Theatre is a defense; its power comes from its shape as well as its substance.⁴⁷ People trust theatre; when presented with authentic human experiences audiences report on how theatre made it seem so true.⁴⁸ The everyday language common to theatre also allows for me to engage my black community and the general public. As a researcher who wants to uncover and illustrate the subjectivity and realism of black culture(s) I've dialogued with and witnessed, theatre is the medium best suited to share my discoveries and interpretation.

⁴⁵ Linda Williams, "When the Woman Looks," in *Re-vision: Essays in Feminist Film Criticism*, ed. Mary A. Doane, Patricia Mellencamp, and Linda Williams, (Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1984), pp. 83-97.

⁴⁶Norman K. Denzin, "The Reflexive Interview and a Performative Social Science," *Qualitative Research*. 1.1 (2001): 23-46.

⁴⁷ Dani Snyder-Young, "Beyond "an Aesthetic of Objectivity."

⁴⁸ Saldana, *Ethnotheatre*.

This project has shown me how critical both film and live performance are for the diasporic work that I do and engaging black women's stories. The moral aims of performance ethnography support the fact that black women need control over black women's culture and cultural production.⁴⁹ In this way, more than ever I agree with Denzin when he calls for the social sciences to embrace performance's narrative turn. Storytelling in the literary tradition of poetics and drama is essential to social science research. By narrative turn, Denzin is referring to performance studies' theatrical and literary roots in storytelling with characters, scene and plot – which epitomizes the work I have done with *Brooklyn Bedroom*. Writing this play has been a way for me to address the crisis of self-representation, using narrative to dismantle archaic constructions of blackness and womanhood. Furthermore, storytelling is the type of research preferred by many black female playwrights⁵⁰ and honors my history.

D. Exploring the Real: Ethnodrama & Cultural Specificity

I wrote *Brooklyn Bedroom* as an ethnodrama rooted in performance ethnography because as a researcher articulating culture, paradigm comes first. Ethnodrama is the scripting and performance of ethnographic research and although the integration of ethnodramatic works may

⁴⁹ Frank Ukadike, "Reclaiming Images of Women in Film in Africa and the Black Diaspora" in *Redirecting the Gaze: Gender, Theory, and Cinema in the Third World*, (Albany: State University of New York Press), 1999, 127-141.

⁵⁰ See Eleanor Amico, *Reader's Guide to Women's Studies*, (New York: Routledge), 1998. Print. Also see Elizabeth Brown-Guillory, *Their Place on the Stage: Black Women Playwrights in America*, (New York: Greenwood Press), 1988. Contributions in Afro-American and African studies: no. 117.

be new for the social sciences,⁵² there does exist historically a wealth of dramatic works based upon real events and experiences that go as far back as the Shakespearean era.⁵³ It is clear that qualitative researchers have felt the need to justify the academic validity of theatre as a tool for research, yet it is a method that any woman could use to interrogate the policing of female sexuality and shed light on the erotic. Ethnodrama seeks to communicate in a way which makes sense to broader audiences and that is crucial in a time where more and more culture is being seen as performance.⁵⁴

A part of exploring the real through performance is to expand the concept of real. In the writing of *Brooklyn Bedroom*, the urge for alternate spaces arose more than I expected – spaces with the potential for more pleasure or interior subjectivity brought me to surrealism. Yet, embodying reality is not mutually exclusive from embodying possibilities. Yes, I wanted to tell a true story, and it is true that although not everything happened I must call upon Madison and the performance of possibilities.⁵⁵ This play echoes how the imagination is crucial to the construction of our realities. The story that *Brooklyn Bedroom* tells comes from the Rose family history, but I couldn't tell everything. Scenes were re-created to capture the family's

⁵² Johnny Saldaña, "Performance: Ethnodrama and Ethnotheatre" in *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research: Perspectives, Methodologies, Examples, and Issues*, ed. by J. G. Knowles and Ardra L. Cole. (Los Angeles: Sage Publications), 2008, pp. 194-204.

⁵³ Jaime Beck, George Belliveau, Graham Lea, and Amanda Wager, "Delineating a Spectrum of Research-Based Theatre," *Qualitative Inquiry*, 17.8 (2011): 687-700.

⁵⁴ Jim Mienczakowski, "Ethnodrama: Performance Research – Limitations and Potential" in *Handbook of Ethnography*, ed. by Paul Atkinson. (London: SAGE), 2001, pp. 468-476.

⁵⁵ Madison, "Staging Ethnography and the Performance of Possibilities," *Critical Ethnography*.

experiences, protect their anonymity, and to illustrate the content in the most effective and time-efficient way. This reconstruction is appropriate because writers must use their creativity and expression to rebuild the culture and events depicted on stage. Also, the concept of “ethnotheatricality” means that the performance may create fictions in order to illustrate reality.⁵⁶

In retrospect, I am glad that I relied upon Lynn Nottage’s methodology in the actual scripting of the play. Documentary theatre’s translation process is too literal to engage the dramatic tension that *Brooklyn Bedroom* needed. As Saldana stresses, ethnodramatists or playwrights of reality theatre, need to think theatrically even as they attempt to describe reality. Nottage, Pulitzer Prize winning black female playwright, is a U.S. Third World feminist. Associate Professor of Theater at Columbia University and a Lecturer in Playwriting at the Yale School of Drama. She is author of many plays and scripts, including *Intimate Apparel* (2003), *Fabulation, or The Re-Education of Undine* (2004, OBIE), *Ruined* (2008, Pulitzer, OBIE), *By The Way, Meet Vera Stark* (2011), and *Sweat* (2015, Pulitzer). As ethnodramatic work aims to do, Nottage dramatizes personal stories. She states, “I found my play *Ruined* in the painful narratives of Salima and the other Congolese women, in their gentle cadences and the monumental space between their gasps and sighs.”⁵⁷ She traveled to Central Africa to speak with Congolese women seeking refuge in Uganda.⁵⁸ Nottage says that in listening to the stories of the Congolese, she came to terms with the degree that the women’s bodies became a place to

⁵⁶Saldana, *Ethnotheatre: Research from Page to Stage*, 133.

⁵⁷ “Lynn Nottage on *Ruined*,” *La Jolla Playhouse*. N.d.

⁵⁸ Michael Schulman, “The Listener,” *The New Yorker*, no. 6 (2017).

fight the war. The topic being discussed was difficult, but rape had become part of the language of war in Congo, and therefore it became salient to her play.⁵⁹ From reading details about how *Ruined* came about, what Nottage calls interviews seems to mean that she went into the Congo and listened to the women. Ultimately, the Rose's shared their stories with me, just as the Congolese did with Nottage.

After years of listening to the Rose stories, I decided to write my interpretation of their experiences and create a work of art. When Nottage listens to people's stories, her process is to immerse herself in the research, then walk away and write the play. I also did not want to make *Brooklyn Bedroom* testimonials from the Rose family. As Nottage states about the brave women in the Congo, "they told me their stories—they didn't give me their stories."⁶⁰ Upon going into the Bedroom, I also knew the story I wanted to tell. This is very important because the ethnodramatist must have a vision as a theatre practitioner.⁶¹ Nottage wants to listen to people's stories and attempts to depict the spirit of the individuals and how she experienced them.⁶² This is the co-performance that Madison speaks of and the potential for unity around which Conquergood built his work; this co-performance is the basis of the *Brooklyn Bedroom* script. Instead of verisimilitude, I wanted *Brooklyn Bedroom* to capture the climaxes of the Rose Family past with sexuality and my understanding of that past – people are co-performers in our life

⁵⁹ Enough Team, "Lynn Nottage: 'Why did I go to Africa to collect their stories? Because I had to,'" (2012).

⁶⁰ Randy Gener, "On Lynn Nottage's *Ruined*" in *Critical Stages/Scènes Critiques: The IATC webjournal/Revue web de l'AICT*. Issue No 3 (Autumn 2010).

⁶¹ Saldana, "Reflections on an Ethnotheatre Aesthetic," *ArtsPraxis*, 2 (N.d.).

⁶² Rob Weinert-Kendt, "How Lynn Nottage, Inveterate Wanderer, Found Her Way to Reading and 'Sweat,'" 2015.

experiences.⁶³ I hope the Rose family will see the performance in the same context as the public. This forum could provide an opportunity for co-performance, inviting their family, other black women and the general audience to participate in the human subjectivities of female sexuality.

It was difficult to decide what to do with listening to a story from a beautiful old woman about being raped when she was a child. Nottage also listened to very specific stories of rape, gang rape, and brutalization and decided not to translate that into the work literally.⁶⁴ She states, “I’m trying to find a human way of dramatizing these women’s experiences that will provoke thought.”⁶⁵ I was trying to find a way of dramatizing the Rose family’s experiences that illuminated agency, pleasure, and healing. Therefore, I did not want graphic recounts of rape or abuse, and ethnodrama does not necessitate literal translation. Nottage does not speak specifically about her work being ethnodramatic. Yet I consider her work to be ethnodramatic because she takes pride in the fact that her work is based upon real issues, current problems, and the realities and subjectivities of the black female experience.

Brooklyn Bedroom has much relevance to the realities and subjectivities of the Jamaican American female experience. The importance of using cultural specificity was important to the writing of this performance. I tried to use the play to show Tally's life, from food to music to really paint a picture of the family’s world. This is also a technique that I noticed in *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* by Martin McDonogh which really made the play more enjoyable. In my play,

⁶³ Mienczakowski, “Ethnodrama: Performance Research.”

⁶⁴ J. Howard, “Interview with Lynn Nottage,” *PMLA*, 2014, 129(4), 847-849.

⁶⁵ Gener, “On Lynn Nottage’s Ruined.”

the family's Jamaican heritage experiences tension with being "black" in America and with whiteness in America. The play explores facets of culture, in an inbetween space: Jamaicans, as Josephine the mother, or Americans with Jamaican heritage as the Rose sisters – both living in the United States. The Roses bring with them cultural artifacts necessary to their heritage, happiness and survival.

Brooklyn Bedroom illuminates the beauty in Jamaican culture, the connection to the food and dancing and comedy and vibrant colors. The magic of ethnotheatre, the staged version of an ethnodrama, is its ability to take research about human experiences and turn it into a dramatic illustration for audiences.⁶⁶ Because of this, the distinctions between performer and audience become less identifiable and "culture itself becomes a dramatic performance."⁶⁷ Furthermore, in this dialogic oral performance the author and actors are not just storytellers they are witnesses and so are the audience members.⁶⁸ The possibilities for fresh ways of thinking is probable with ethnodrama because it is interested in the connections possible within performances.⁶⁹ I expect more insights on the social contract when I have been through the rehearsal process, but I've realized that food is a motif in the play that affects the reader and sheds light on the black female subjectivity of the characters. Those who have read the play thus far have mentioned the theme of food to me – the eating, the smells – even writing it made me hungry. For these reasons, I believe that food should be an integral part of the presentation of this play where the audience can partake and share Jamaican culture with the Rose women.

⁶⁶ Saldana, *Ethnotheatre: Research from Page to Stage*.

⁶⁷ Denzin, "The Reflexive Interview."

⁶⁸ Pollock, "Remembering," pp 4.

⁶⁹ Edward Schieffelin, "Performance and the Cultural Construction of Reality," *American Ethnologist*, 12.4 (1985): 707-724.

Brooklyn Bedroom also has much relevance to the real issues and current problems facing society. Jamaica is such a small country to have had such an amazing international influence on culture and (often) revolutionary music. The island was upfront in the Reggae led global movement for equality, peace and justice. Jamaica also played a lead role in the global movement against apartheid in South Africa and influenced the Global Civil Rights Movement. Furthermore, Jamaica has many feminist attributes that illustrate on the ground equality between men and women. It is a country where female independence is expected,⁷⁰ career women (in managerial positions) is a norm, a woman keeping her maiden name after being married is also normal, and the country (unlike the U.S.) has been governed by women. Jamaican women are highly literate and educated, even when compared to the United States.⁷¹ Furthermore, women in Jamaica have easy and free access to birth control,⁷² while in the U.S. these resources are still not widely or conveniently available to all women. Although abortion is still illegal in Jamaica (unless the child poses a serious health risk to the mother), women and young girls can purchase oral contraceptives over the counter at any pharmacy; including the morning-after pill. Oral contraceptives and condoms are also distributed for free at local clinics. Despite all the above, *Brooklyn Bedroom* tells a story that is bigger than the Rose family. A story that needs to die.

Child sexual abuse in Jamaica is epidemic; adult women report being raped and/or sexually abused repeatedly by uncles, pastors, doctors, even their own fathers.

Tally's mother, Josephine, was a victim of this brutal cycle of violence against the female body. In 2017, Jamaica experienced an unprecedented pitch in violence against women and

⁷⁰ Edward Schieffelin, "Performance and the Cultural Construction of Reality," *American Ethnologist*, 12.4 (1985): 707-724.

⁷¹ For more information on Jamaican women and education see "Jamaica literacy" <https://www.indexmundi.com/jamaica/literacy.html>

⁷² For more information regarding birth control in Jamaica and the National Family Planning Board see Shari-Ann Palmer: <http://jis.gov.jm/jamaican-women-using-contraceptives/>

children. This beautiful island puts many born with a vagina at risk. After writing a draft on the play, I was curious and so I started to investigate this epidemic. According to the World Health Organization, over one third of the women of Latin America and the Caribbean report incidents of intimate or sexual violence.⁷³ As with the women in Tally's family, haunted by the violence inflicted upon their mother's body, when women experience violence their children suffer.

“According to the Caribbean Vulnerable Communities Coalition, 40 percent of Jamaicans say that their first experience of sexual contact was forced and while still under the age of consent.”⁷⁴ Consent is 16 years old in Jamaica and the victims of child sexual abuse are

⁷³ Georgia Platman, “Violence Against Women in Latin America and the Caribbean: An Overview,” 2014.

⁷⁴Al Jazeera, “Jamaica's Silent Children.” To see the documentary:
<http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/peopleandpower/>

overwhelmingly female.⁷⁵ According to Amnesty International, the occurrence of sexual violence against Jamaican females is very high.⁷⁶ Mostly the abuser is someone whom the child knows well and is close to their home, such as a family member, teacher, religious or community leader. In poor neighborhoods, gangs and gang leaders (or “dons”) are said to demand adolescent girls from homes in the area, and these children are sexually assaulted. Early in 2015, “Breaking Silence” was started by the Jamaican government; it is an awareness campaign encouraging those affected to speak out. It has been heralded as an important step in combating the cycle of abuse. But it is culturally prohibitive to speak of incest, rape and/or abuse of power by older men, and this is entrenched in the minds of thousands of young Jamaicans – mostly female – suffering in silence.

Jamaica's silent children no longer have to be silent. Women are coming out and speaking the truth about their experiences. Julie Mansfield, a Jamaican woman and author, was having a perfectly normal childhood; her days growing up in beautiful St. Thomas, Jamaica, were spent “running barefoot across the rich soil and clay caked terrain, climbing trees to pick the sweet fruit, and playing with handmade toys with the neighborhood kids.”⁷⁷ Her childhood was playful and innocent until her uncle took that away from her at the age of eight. During the rest of her childhood, she was repeatedly abused by four of the eight uncles that visited her household.

⁷⁵ “Jamaica Civil Society Report,” 2016,

http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CCPR/Shared%20Documents/JAM/INT_CCPR_CSS_JAM_25472_E.pdf

⁷⁶ Amnesty International, “Sexual Violence Against Women and Girls in Jamaica,” *Stop Violence Against Women*.

⁷⁷ Kiah McBride, “Author Julie Mansfield Speaks Out Against Child Sexual Abuse,” 2014.

Where was her mother? In my play, Josephine was in boarding school, so her mother was not physically even there – it was her aunt who eventually sent for her and brought her to the U.S. Women must not protect their husbands and brothers at the expense of their children.

On her YouTube channel⁷⁸ and elsewhere, Julie Mansfield speaks out about what happened to her. One of her uncles actually called her up and asked her not to say anything. Mansfield, author of the book *Maybe God Was Busy*, told him that she “cannot not say anything because then I’m complacent with you in my own abuse.”⁷⁹ Despite the threats that Mansfield has received, she continues to courageously speak out against child sexual abuse. I want to dedicate this Audre Lorde poem to Mansfield, Josephine, and other women who have been hurt in this way:

For those of us who live at the shoreline
standing upon the constant edges of decision
crucial and alone
for those of us who cannot indulge
the passing dreams of choice
who love in doorways coming and going
in the hours between dawns
looking inward and outward
at once before and after
seeking a now that can breed
futures
like bread in our children's mouths
so their dreams will not reflect
the death of ours:

For those of us
who were imprinted with fear
like a faint line in the center of our foreheads

⁷⁸To find out more, watch a Julie Mansfield video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oA2mS9rfpP0&t=55s>

⁷⁹ McBride, “Author Julie Mansfield Speaks.”

learning to be afraid with our mother's milk
for by this weapon
this illusion of some safety to be found
the heavy-footed hoped to silence us
For all of us
this instant and this triumph
We were never meant to survive.

And when the sun rises we are afraid
it might not remain
when the sun sets we are afraid
it might not rise in the morning
when our stomachs are full we are afraid
of indigestion
when our stomachs are empty we are afraid
we may never eat again
when we are loved we are afraid
love will vanish
when we are alone we are afraid
love will never return
and when we speak we are afraid
our words will not be heard
nor welcomed
but when we are silent
we are still afraid
So it is better to speak
remembering
we were never meant to survive⁸⁰

In her poem "Litany for Survival", Lorde demonstrates the importance of breaking the silence, using writing as cultural practice, and as communication for survival and female solidarity. I don't want to investigate why the men are doing it, I don't want to talk to them, I don't want to research them, let a man do that labor. I am focused on women, with

⁸⁰ Lorde, "Litany for Survival," 31-32.

Brooklyn Bedroom I am telling Jamaican women that they don't have to be silent. That it is better for women and our children if we are not silent, if we speak and open the door to pain, pleasure and wholeness. Speak up, speak out, break the silence and expose the system, hold your brothers, husbands and sons accountable for hurting people of all genders. The lives of Jamaican women and children are at the highest risk for sexual abuse. Women don't have to hold the trauma in their bodies for decades, the shame is not on us. Speak to heal, speak to change, speak the truth in solidarity with other women. You are not a victim, you are a survivor.

All women need to take part in the war against silence.⁸¹ For this reason, I do not feel guilty about breaking silence about some of the issues that black women face. *Brooklyn Bedroom* is not "airing out dirty laundry" or betraying black culture. For women, it is a betrayal to ourselves and to our children not to speak up about what is happening to our bodies. White oppression isn't the only type of oppression faced by black women and other women of color. Sexist oppression by our own men is a reality that my performance work needs to confront. Woman-hating in the black community and within black performances must stop: black women will no longer be the pursuits of black male rage. Black women do not rape black men. Abuse is no longer acceptable for pseudo racial solidarity and as Lorde states, "Any dialogue between black women and black men must begin there, no matter where it ends."⁸² It is the black male responsibility to come forward and tell black women why their masculinity is so threatened by

⁸¹ Lorde, *Sister Outsider*.

⁸² *Ibid*, 65.

black women. Women are always forced to pay for insecure masculinity with our bodies. Black women should not be silent to protect sexist and violent practices against women.

The writing of *Brooklyn Bedroom* has really inspired me to look further into what is being done to save Jamaican women and children. Beyond “Breaking Silence”, orchestrated by the Jamaican government, there is also Jamaicans for Justice and the Jamaica Youth Advocacy Network, but it’s hard to tell what else is being done to organize locally. There are organizations such as CVC (Caribbean Vulnerable Communities Coalition),⁸³ a coalition of community leaders and non-governmental agencies advocating and providing HIV and healthcare services to vulnerable populations in the Caribbean. There is also the Save The Children Resource Center.⁸⁴ However, it is hard to tell if there is a local chapter and/or what they are doing to save Jamaican children. But this is not just a health issue, the prevention lies in culture. To spread awareness, Julie Mansfield has travelled the country on her own and with People & Power, the Al Jazeera’s investigative team who makes documentary programming that looks at the use and abuse of power. Mansfield has met with government officials, victims, and law enforcement to achieve better protections for the island’s children.⁸⁵ After almost 30 years of hiding her secret from friends and family, she finally sought help through therapists, but eventually found solace in journaling.

⁸³ For more on this organization, please go to: <http://www.cvccoalition.org>

⁸⁴ Julia O’Connell Davidson & Jacqueline Sanchez Taylor, “Tourism and Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in the Dominican Republic and Jamaica,” *Save The Children Resource Center*, 2001.

⁸⁵For more information on People & Power, see <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/peopleandpower/>

I know now that I need to go to Jamaica. Perhaps I could go during summers and work with Mansfield and also the “Breaking Silence” campaign. It would be great to do culturally relevant theatre that speaks to the issue of child abuse but also empowering stories that foster the knowledge that satisfaction and pleasure for women is possible and tangible. I also feel like *Brooklyn Bedroom* should be performed in Jamaica. My theatre work in Jamaica could especially reach out to mothers and daughters to have dialogue about how to be an ally and a witness, and how to access the erotic.

E. Writing as Resistance & Female Sexuality

I am a sexual being, I am an erotic being. I see, smell, taste, and feel things and people I desire. I’m a human being. When I write no one gets to claim my body, my pleasure, my sexuality; my struggle with the words coming out of my body onto the screen is mine. Resistance is necessary to liberation. Pleasure is necessary to liberation. Women writing is a crucial tool for liberation, power and representation. With *Brooklyn Bedroom*, I tried to create a performance space of female sexuality where the potential for women to thrive is sustainable. The performance communicates stories about the lives of ordinary women who carve possibilities for resistance, liberation and desire in their lived experience. The methodology for *Brooklyn Bedroom* was writing as resistance.

The search for sexual liberation through writing is a moral philosophy enacted by U.S. Third World feminists to be subversive to power. The subversive performance as resistance put forth by performance ethnography was already embedded in U.S. Third World feminism – the paradigm relies heavily upon the theory and practice of these women. From the early 1960s, works by Audre Lorde, Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherrie Moraga, Paula Gunn Allen, Nellie Wong, Toni Morrison, Mitsuye Yamada, and bell hooks have interrogated hegemonic power by

humanizing women experience and subjectivity.⁸⁶ Women speaking back about our lived experiences is the methodology of the oppressed and it is fundamentally resistant to the power of destructive masculinity.

There are dangers that the Rose family, that I and all black women and women of color writers must face that are different from white women. I have to face the dangers of writing a performance that calls out men for their violent behavior, that shows the power women have within themselves and with each other. But speaking the truth is liberating and nothing good comes from a caged bird. Anzaldúa states that we must speak up and be brave for "we can't transcend the dangers, can't rise above them. We must go through them and hope we won't have to repeat the performance."⁸⁷

Anzaldúa was a writer/poet/ essayist /novelist, feminist philosopher and cultural theorist. Born in southern Texas to Mexican parents, Anzaldúa had an uncommon disorder that marked her as physiologically distinct from her classmates. In 1949, her sense of estrangement increased with being subjected to racist behavior when she entered Texas' segregated educational system. Anzaldúa used her experiences and her identity between borders to develop a strong sense of

⁸⁶ Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed*, pp. 1-11.

⁸⁷ Moraga & Anzaldúa, "Speaking In Tongues," 165.

understanding and support for those who are considered outsiders. Women who write and direct, and break the traditional boundaries of female sexuality by actually exploring what sexuality means to and for women, regularly engage in the dangers of such a performance.

When Anzaldúa states, “The danger in writing is not fusing our personal experience and world view with the social reality we live in, with our inner life, our history, our economics, and our vision,” she is affirming her humanity, she is affirming in a textual performance that her experience matters.⁸⁸ These U.S. based feminist and activists of color were decolonial writers “whose apparatus was love in the post-modern world” and they were a part of the decolonial connections that made late 20th century critical theory possible.⁸⁹ These speech acts from a deep place of resistance were ripe with desires to decolonize sex, gender, race, ethnicity and identity and liberate the lives of women. These women developed an oppositional consciousness⁹⁰ – a rhetoric of resistance—that is still needed today by women of color to give rise to our erotic nature and internal sense of satisfaction.

For Anzaldúa like Lorde, writing is a performance for survival and resistance: “Yet in that very act lies our survival because a woman who writes has power.”⁹¹ The mission of colonization is to silence us, to silence woman of color, including U.S. Third World women and Third World women around the world. For Lorde, poetry was a methodology for speaking back and to being subversive to power – the poetry in *Brooklyn Bedroom* comes from the repetition,

⁸⁸ Moraga & Anzaldúa, “Speaking In Tongues,” 170.

⁸⁹ Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed*, 10.

⁹⁰ *ibid*

⁹¹ Moraga & Anzaldúa, “Speaking In Tongues,” 170.

of words and memories that are metaphors of black female subjectivity. My play rejects the projection of the discursively constructed woman who is created by white male hegemony. Anzaldua saw through the misinformation and racist ideology that circulates about women and people of color and her writing believed in Third World feminist resistance:

The Third World woman revolts: We revoke, we erase your white male imprint. When you come knocking on our doors with your rubber stamps to brand our 'faces with DUMB, HYSTERICAL, PASSIVE PUTA, PERVERT when you come with your branding irons to burn MY PROPERTY on our buttocks, we will vomit the guilt, self-denial and race-hatred you have force-fed into us right back into your mouth. We are done being cushions for your projected fears. We are tired of being your sacrificial lambs and scapegoats.⁹²

Strong emotions echo from her words – anger, hurt, guilt and sadness all work to illustrate Anzaldua's feelings of frustration. Yet there is power and immediacy in her voice. In "Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to Third World Women Writers," Anzaldua states, "Dear mujeres de color, companions in writing – I sit here naked in the sun, typewriter against my knee trying to visualize you."⁹³ Her language and the tone are so provocative; there is such eroticism in writing. What pleasures lie beyond pain? What do the possibilities for the liberation of female sexuality even look like? Now I know why masturbating brings me the same joy as writing poetry. For Lorde, there is deep sexual pleasure to be found in the mind and body. Looking back on life and pleasure, she states, "And there is, for me, no difference between writing a good poem and moving into sunlight against the body of a woman I love."⁹⁴ When a woman touches

⁹² Moraga and Anzaldua, "Speaking In Tongues," 165.

⁹³ Moraga and Anzaldua, "Speaking In Tongues," 165.

⁹⁴ Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 59.

herself for pleasure, she resists the sexist ideology that pleasure of the body must be stimulated by men. Tally knows it's her pussy and no one else's.⁹⁵ When Tally touches herself it is for her and her alone, her pleasure in it does not feed into some pseudo concept of the sexually liberated woman who gets pleasure from pleasing men. I too masturbated every morning while in the process of writing this reflection. Writing that resists sexist ideology and embraces pleasure is a process—a method—which embodies my black female sexuality and identity. Eroticism is not sex, nor is it pornographic where the other becomes an object. As pornography rejects gratification of the human soul; it rejects the possibilities for deep fulfillment.⁹⁶ Eroticism is living in ways that give women pleasure and fulfillment. The world needs more women to recognize and perform their innate erotic power. Women need to dismantle the many spaces where female sexuality is not permissible because those very spaces restrict female identity in general.

As a first step, we must expand our cultural conception of what qualifies as erotic – writing, masturbation, motherhood, good sex – depending upon the woman—those endeavors of pleasure in which the whole self comes alive. Eroticism must be distinguished from sexuality and desire: sexuality is identity, and human beings are sexual beings. Because sexuality is identity, it can and often does include a history of pleasure and pain, including trauma related to sex. Desire, on the other hand is what a human being wants at any given point in time. Eroticism is when a woman says yes to that want and that want is satisfying and healthy to the physical,

⁹⁵ See bell hooks, “Whose pussy is this?” *Reel to Real*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 1996b), pp. 227-235.

⁹⁶ Lorde, “Uses of the Erotic.”

emotional, and spiritual development of that said woman. Women need to embrace this wholistic definition of eroticism as a way to free their sexuality. Eroticism is experiencing life knowing that satisfaction is a real possibility, seeking out and doing those things in which we find pleasure and completion.

Eroticism calls for an embodiment of love, imaginative power, and harmony in all of their qualities. Simply stated, eroticism is experiencing life with the belief that gratification is achievable.⁹⁷ Women listening to and not denying our inner thoughts and feelings is erotic. Eroticism is the innate power and energy of womanhood.⁹⁸ Living life by what others dictate for us, as opposed to listening to our deep sense of pleasure and fulfillment, keeps women from the erotic. This interior sense of epistemology is often in dialogue with society, yet it is unique to every individual woman's body. Women need to listen to our internal ways of knowing to avoid being susceptible to the demands of a society not listening to human needs or individual needs. "Once we know the extent to which we are capable of feeling that sense of satisfaction and completion, we can then observe which of our various life endeavors bring us closest to that fullness."⁹⁹ A woman needs to figure out what it is that brings her pleasure and do it, seeking those things in life which makes her feel satisfied. Eroticism exists when a woman loves herself unconditionally and acts upon that love.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 50.

⁹⁹ Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 57.

The erotic can work in various ways, for example, accessing the power that comes from sincere interactions with other individuals. Lorde discusses how the sharing of physical, spiritual or intellectual delight can form links between participants which can be the basis for mutual understanding and decrease the threat of fearing difference. Another function of the erotic is the “open and fearless underlining of [the] capacity for joy.”¹⁰⁰ Like Lorde and me, the Rose daughters also find much pleasure in dancing. It makes Tally feel satisfied, whole, and connected to her body. The sisters love to dance to Lady Saw and other Jamaican female singers because reggae is a male dominated artistic expression, and the sisters take much joy in hearing a woman speak frankly about sex and what pleases her.

Pleasure erupts in many ways in for the women of *Brooklyn Bedroom*. Our cinematic society teaches Americans that women get pleasure from the stimulation of their erogenous zones or sexual reproductive parts of the female body. However, this is a very limited view of the possibilities for pleasure within sexuality. For example, Tally’s knees have been a site of trauma and although she has healed, she loves them kissed and rubbed and licked. So that scene with Eric is erotic in ways which resists mainstream articulations of female pleasure. Eroticism is existing and navigating the world knowing that pleasure is tangible. I feel like the women of the Rose family share things that make them feel joy and satisfaction, such as dancing together, eating together, laughing together, and sharing deep personal histories with one another. The mother is preoccupied with a burden. Until she shares her story and engages what pleasure

¹⁰⁰Lorde, “Uses of the Erotic”, 55.

means, she finds it difficult to let herself enjoy life. The mother's shift is partially realized through the action of her participating in dancing towards the end.

Women in Jamaican culture are not supposed to speak openly about sexual pleasure and therefore to do so or to dance to that expression, can become a liberating act. As mentioned earlier, the sexual music by Lady Saw is important to the play; it resists slut shaming – it is creative cultural production meant to dismantle gendered binaries of sexuality. The creative expression is by no means a way to legitimize violence against the female body, for women should not have to apologize for being simultaneously sexual and sexualized. Also, this type of fast reggae, called dancehall, is considered undesirable by the older generation because explicit talk about sex and pleasure (from men or women) is taboo. This is why the mother is initially turned off, in many ways she is slut-shaming her daughters for participating in this kind of dance. The mother's sense of eroticism opens when she shares her trauma in a safe space and later attempts to experience joy with her body by joining her daughters in dancing. Josephine's attempts towards wholeness and satisfaction were supported by her daughters but could only come from her; this is because the erotic already lies within and can only erupt from within. Eroticizing keeps women from straying from ourselves, this in turn elevates the potential for sharing joy.

Women can also feel visual pleasure by watching and creating stories that defy the hypersexuality of black women. Tally is not the monolithic subject nor is the mother.

Hegemonic feminist texts discursively dominate the physical and historical variability in the lives of women looked upon as Third World woman, producing singularities about women like me.¹⁰¹ If women of color are to listen to the yes within and explore pleasure, they must refuse to see themselves as they are portrayed by hegemonic feminisms and be skeptical about whose story is actually being told. I hope that the Rose family and other black women experience visual pleasure by watching and reading *Brooklyn Bedroom* and seeing the world through our own eyes.

The unconditional love between mother/daughters is also erotic. Tally expressed that she wanted to save her mother, wishing she could have been there to stop her from getting hurt. Therefore, in the play, I have Tally interrupt the memory of her mother's tape that torments her day and night. I wanted to explore this area of pleasure, I wanted Tally to feel some of that gratification of saving her mother. I also wanted her mother to feel that unconditional and magical love only shared between mother and daughter – love that knows no sense of time. As Lorde states, women of American society learn to divide the erotic impulse from the most spirited areas of our experiences other than sex. This is done to control and destabilize female agency, making many women feel that eroticism is only embodied in the bedroom for our male partners.

Going in to this work, I originally anticipated more to say about moving beyond pain, and to portray how the characters had done so. But there is no fixed state of moving beyond pain;

¹⁰¹ See Chandra Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes," *Boundary 2*, 1984.

there's living with it, living with it in ways that make room for so much more. And when I say more, I mean pleasure. Tally's mother attempts to make room for pleasure by confronting her pain; Josephine shows herself to be a character in the play with a high level of need and is arguably the story's protagonist. At the same time, Tally has a very strong need not to be controlled. Tally's sexuality is ever flowing and over flowing; it's part of the complex web of her life. She finds pleasure in graduate studies, her love of dancing and grinding to Jamaican music, her passion for theory and social justice, laughing with Eric, eating and laughing with her family. She finds pleasure in massaging, in the dressing and rubbing and knowing the power of pleasure coming from her hands. *Brooklyn Bedroom* explores this broader idea of sexuality as identity. What pleases a woman in the bedroom and what pleases a woman in other spaces of her life, also satisfies our identity. In this way, sexuality becomes who we want to be and how we want to remember ourselves in the world. Writing as resistance has helped me to uncover these multiple layers operating within black female bodies, and this is necessary to deconstruct the colonial history that tries to mark our self-value and identity.

I wrote this performance with particular research questions in mind, which are also addressed organically throughout this reflection. I asked: How can women use performance ethnography to intervene in archaic constructions of race and female sexuality? How can women use performance ethnography to embody the liberation of their sexual identity? What do possibilities for the liberation of female sexuality even look like? I used performance ethnography to write *Brooklyn Bedroom* and resist stereotypical representations of race and

female sexuality by telling a story of ordinary black women who engage eroticism in their daily lives. Embodying female liberation in performance work happens through exploring how real women seek pleasure and imagining the ways that women can cultivate the erotic within themselves. Through female solidarity, memory and healing, the Rose family explore liberation in ways that are motivating for other black women to see. *Brooklyn Bedroom* has taught me that the liberation of female sexuality comes in many forms: writing and performing with other black women, tapping into my deep sense of erotic satisfaction and possibilities for pleasure, and figuring out what makes me feel good. It feels good to go back and read *Brooklyn Bedroom*, to see it coming alive in rehearsals, to embrace a story for and about black women.

These questions also ultimately point to a question important to this reflection: How/do I feel differently about my sexuality? I have been so inspired by the Rose story that I feel like I want to address this notion of the erotic with my own family. I'd like to have more conversations about what makes me feel good, what makes my sisters and mom feel good. Because of this work, I've already started to address my feelings of my own sexuality with my performance work. For example, in "Touching Myself: A Tribute to Audre Lorde," the co-writer and I sat down for weeks discussing what makes us feel good from nipple stimulation to camping under the stars. Audre Lorde laid down an ultimatum when she said the erotic means satisfaction is possible, in every aspect of life. In a culture that throws up road blocks to every angle of a woman's satisfaction, it was liberating to see what happens when two friends see this possibility when they look at each other.

On a personal level, writing this play has made me reflect on satisfaction in my own life. I realized that the things that make me feel whole are dancing, writing, social justice theatre and art, being around black people, being around women, travelling, kissing (for long periods of time), and foreplay. I've come to understand more about myself through writing *Brooklyn Bedroom* and I've come to expect more from others whom I let into my heart and life. I've realized what my relationship needs are. I need to be able to make my art in peace and not have to defend my artistic decisions to my partner. I need to go out and have drinks and wild dancing with my female friends. I need my partner to trust me and only call me by my name or a term of endearment. I need a partner go out with me and my friends and have fun not just because he's doing it for me but because he actually enjoys it. I need my partner to work out our problems with me and not with my mother and sisters. I need a partner who wants a fair chore schedule that is not based upon gender but ability and availability. Realizing my expectations and needs has changed my life because I know that pleasure can be mine if I express my needs and interact with those who act in ways that fulfill them.

F. Reflexivity: U.S. Third World Feminists Write Together

With *Brooklyn Bedroom*, I am not just speaking to – but *with* and nearby black women. “Black feminists speak as women because we are women and do not need others to speak for.”¹⁰² But my sisters are not just only black, they are from a lineage of women of all colors who write to dismantle structural sexism and racism. My sisters are also white women who put being a woman before being white. As bell hooks states, there can be no feminism with racist oppression, exploitation and superiority.¹⁰³ *Brooklyn Bedroom* seeks to pay tribute to Lorde, Anzaldua, hooks, the cinematic work of Julie Dash, Zeinabu Irene Davis, Trinh T. Minh-ha, and Hye Jung Park, and the dramatic work of Lynn Nottage, Adrienne Kennedy and Ntozake

Shange. Despite the fact that these women are from different cultures with distinct challenges who create work in different forms, they are creative cultural producers of African and Asian diasporas. They connect through their involvement in the U.S. Third World feminist mission to recuperate and envision subjectivity, and perform a liberation from the gaze.¹⁰⁴

I called upon all of my sisters to help me write when I didn't want to, when it was hard, when I felt angry and violent about the sinister things that have been done to Josephine's body, to our bodies. I called upon my sisters when it felt good to go through the danger and come out satisfied. I write with the Roses, I write with Julie Mansfield. I write with all other black women who have written, all other black women who have put their lives on the line so that I may exercise my right to speak and be heard. I cannot deny my influence on the work, particularly the lexical history that is always operating in my mind. I also cannot deny my power as a writer and researcher. As Anzaldua states, writing is power and power, in a woman's hands, is

¹⁰²Lorde, "Sexism: An American Disease in Blackface," in *I Am Your Sister: Collected and Unpublished Writings of Audre Lorde*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2009, 60.

¹⁰³ bell hooks, *Feminism Is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*, (Cambridge, MA: South End Press), 2000.

¹⁰⁴ Foster, *Women filmmakers*.

dangerous in all the best ways necessary to dismantle the system. I am happy that I have been so personally connected to this work; I have not listened to the Roses just to study them. As Trinh T. Minh-ha states, western intellectual knowledge is often for its own sake and that is a “sickness.”¹⁰⁵

Furthermore, it matters that I am dedicated to honoring the Rose story, not by translating everything literally but honoring the stories they told me and illustrating what I think are salient themes of their experience. By doing so, as D. Soyini Madison states, I can only hope that they find justice and satisfaction in my interpretation of their lives.¹⁰⁶ What is important are my motivations to embody performance ethnography and the Rose stories as approaches to utilizing writing as method for black female sexual liberation. Within ethnodrama, the researcher is confronted with an ethical dilemma when she constructs the stories of other women.¹⁰⁷ For me, what matters is paradigm and creating performances that shift power. Concerns such as this surface with all ethnographic performances and can be mediated by the paradigm of performance ethnography¹⁰⁸ whose resolve is to put the voices of subjugated peoples at the foci while being subversive to colonial power. Women can bring eroticism as a daily life to our stories and break binaristic thinking – using the history and resistance of Third World feminism to put dominant

¹⁰⁵Trinh Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 1989, pp. 2.

¹⁰⁶ Madison, *Critical Ethnography*.

¹⁰⁷Hanbery Mackay, “Performing Historical Figures,” *Voices Made Flesh*, (University of Wisconsin Press), 2003.nt.

¹⁰⁸ For my guiding definition of paradigm, “basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator,” see Guba & Lincoln, “Competing paradigms in qualitative research,” in Denzin & Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. IN), 1994, 105.

power at risk. Like playwright Lynn Nottage, “I remain committed to telling the stories of women of the African diaspora, particularly those stories that don’t often find their way into the mainstream media.”¹⁰⁹ *Brooklyn Bedroom* was a strike to shatter the discursively constructed woman, whom many women find hard to recognize within herself.

As a black woman who is writing about other black women, I am not motivated by objectivity. In traditional academic research, my lack of enthusiasm for objectivity might be perceived as a limitation. However, as Trinh T. Minh-ha states, to engage objectivity “one must practice to forget oneself (and) for a woman, such a distance easily takes on the face of Alienation.”¹¹⁰ I have not attempted objectivity at the expense of ignoring myself in my own work about my own people. Objectivity in ethnographic work is often an illusion, researcher and participants both participate and are susceptible to the ideology of their culture. I write with other Third World feminists and I am motivated by stimulating black female power.

G. Liminal Spaces: The Bedroom, Poetry & Film

The world of the play resides in the bedroom. The bedroom represents a liminal space where it is a metaphor of how sexuality influences all aspects of our lives, sexuality is not just about sex. Liminality illustrates a state which is located in between other, often more clearly or traditionally defined, spaces, periods or identities. Therefore, a liminal space is ambiguous or

¹⁰⁹ Howard, “Interview with Lynn Nottage,” 3.

¹¹⁰ Trinh Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other*.

ambivalent boundary area between two customary zones. Tally's bedroom becomes a liminal space where she can explore and celebrate her sexuality, where the women in her family laugh and talk, share secrets, eat and argue. Liminal spaces can also become disruptive; for example, the bedroom was disruptive to the mother's slut shaming and Eric's slut-shaming. Tally uses it to disrupt the family trauma that tries to consume her and exhaust her potential for the erotic. The bedroom also disrupts privacy. It places the audience close to the lives of the character and allows for potentially uncomfortable positioning, as the bedroom is typically seen as a space for undressing, sleep or sex – private activity.

The bedroom also represents possibilities of the new, it operates as a location for the performance of possibilities.¹¹¹ The possibilities exists when the bedroom becomes a space of intercultural communication. The mother as a woman actually born in Jamaica sometimes has a different cultural take from her daughters about men, sexuality, dancing, and gender expectations (i.e. how a woman should act).¹¹² The performance of possibilities is also apparent with the integration of arts in the play. My interaction with arts other than theatre informs my aesthetic stance. I want music on the stage. I want dancing. I want poetry and metaphor. I want the psychological aspects of character so easily portrayed on film. I grew up as a dancer and tend to choreograph short dance scenes in my performance work. I see why I enjoy Suzan Lori-Parks

¹¹¹ Madison, "Staging Ethnography."

¹¹² For a useful source on liminality, culture and gender, see Rosa Holman, "Holding a Mirror to Iran: Liminality and Ambivalence in Shirin Neshat's *Women Without Men*," *Screening the Past*, 2013.

work, her writing gives directors the foundation for music, dance and play. It's important to note that the rich Jamaican cultural world allowed me to put these different artforms in conversation.

The liminal world of *Brooklyn Bedroom* also becomes apparent in the symbolism and ambiguity of poetic technique. My sense of poetry comes from the poem being my longest genre of expression. Because of my background in poetry, I decided to use repetition in my work. For this play, I used some of the repetition techniques I found in *Cloud Tectonics* by Jose Rivera. I enjoyed how place and language returned in order to ground the audience in the alternative world that Rivera set up. I also enjoyed Rivera's use of mixing the stylistic with the naturalistic and I loved how the past and present are melted. I attempted to replicate that in my play where Tally's struggles are of memories living in the present. Repetition for me doesn't just come with language, it also comes with image. With the repeated memory of Josephine's painful experience, I'm making it so the audience must engage the family's trauma. I was also very influenced by the poetic technique in *Death of the Last Black Man...* I felt like Suzan Lori-Parks did this to me at its staging in NYC, the characters would repeat certain phrases that eventually broke me and made me realize the emotional magnitude of the Black Man's death. I enjoyed the strategic use of repetition in *Death of The Last Black Man...* because it really brought a strong level of poetics to the table textually and visually. For me, poetry comes into play with the use of repetition and metaphor.

The bedroom is a “multi-dimensional and responsive space.”¹¹³ Tally and Eric eat there and they talk there, often with laughter but sometimes seriously with an undertone of sadness. Part of me wanted to make Eric, Tally’s love interest, the white devil, but his character held inevitably more dimensionality than that. People are rarely the binaristic archetypes that racist ideology and practice assumes them to be. A part of what I wanted to do with *Brooklyn Bedroom* was to demystify race and resist black/white constructions of identity that perpetuate racial tensions. Eric is not the white devil. I do not regret fleshing out their romance in terms of interracial love/issues because that is not the point of the story. I believe the world that I’ve set up with the bedroom shows how Tally and Eric’s connection works. Eric is a real person. Representing Eric as a white devil would not have been resistant to power. I tried to develop Eric more so he doesn’t feel like a device, making his relationship with Tally one that an audience could root for in a liminal space where many things are possible.

The multi-dimensional space also becomes related to the potential for men to be violent towards women. In the U.S. and beyond, men are often taught that a significant portion of their masculinity is wrapped up in the control of women. The relationship between Tally and Eric is mostly playful, yet it is contextualized by the tension of him wanting her to stay in Brooklyn and the anger and pain that erupt when he finds out she is massaging. Eric is still a man shaped by oppressive constructions of masculinity and sexism. In Scene IX, Eric replaces the mother and tries to get sexual with Tally without her consent. The scene shows the relationship between

¹¹³ Holman, “Holding a Mirror,” pp. 4.

injurious language, sexism, and the policing and ownership of the female body. Tally has become “a slut” who should be available for anyone, including Eric’s whims, because she chose to be sexual with other men without Eric’s knowledge or consent. This scene illustrates the dangers present in understanding female sexuality as a thing that belongs to men or to anyone else for that matter. The bedroom is a multi-dimensional space because it represents a departure from Eric’s “normal” behavior but alludes to the dark place possible for the nicest of guys to participate. Eric’s potential to control is foreshadowed by his constant desire for her to return despite her professional goals. Scene IX represents a “countersite” in the world of liminality: it could happen, could have happened, or could be happening in an alternate reality for him and Tally.¹¹⁴

Memory is both dilemma and possibility in the world of *Brooklyn Bedroom*. It’s world invites women to develop our identity and history in personal and collaborative ways.¹¹⁵ The performance does not isolate trauma and memory to individual psychological events but illustrates the realities of collective experience. The challenges and triumphs of sexuality posed by the Rose family explore broader conceptualizations of collective trauma of the family, the female body, black women’s sexuality, and Jamaican culture. Sexual pleasure is therefore linked to how we understand and cope with our memories; sexuality is inextricably linked to memory, identity and agency. Decolonized trauma theory represents a movement in the field most relevant

¹¹⁴Ibid, pp. 5.

¹¹⁵ Steele, *We Heal from Memory*, 2.

to my work with *Brooklyn Bedroom* because it deals with the representation of minority group suffering.¹¹⁶ This critical theory allowed me to understand more about how trauma, often experienced individually, is linked to power, identity and group struggle.

The memory and lived experience of trauma in this work are multi-layered in the liminality of the bedroom. Memory and trauma occupy the walls of the bedroom, the dialogue spoken, and the relationships between the characters. Memory and trauma in the bedroom both dislocate and reclaim sexuality, pleasure, and identity. Through the close bonds of the women, interior trauma and group trauma become connected. The liminality of the bedroom is necessary because the past rarely comes down to individuals purely and simply from “eyewitness accounts and tangible artifacts.”¹¹⁷ Memory is vulnerable to time, to the body and to emotion. For many humans, memory can be laborious – it is difficult terrain for the Roses to navigate because it comes with trauma. How the Roses choose to handle their memories also becomes political because the trauma is linked to sexuality, violence, culture and healing.

This performance speaks to my belief that film can be a useful technique to illustrate the interior emotions of a character on stage. The bedroom also becomes a liminal space because of how memory interacts with the present – a memory that Tally could not even have because she was not even born yet. The memories represent her interior dialogue – an interior dialogue that

¹¹⁶ Irene Visser, “Decolonized Trauma Theory,” *Humanities*, June 23, 2015.

¹¹⁷ Janet Walker, *Trauma Cinema: Documenting Incest and The Holocaust*, 2016.

holds true to what actually happened to her mother. Memory only reaches perfection through the unconditional bond and love between mother and daughter.

The filmic aspect also illustrates Tally being called a slut by her mother when she was a child. The cinematic memory is an important part of the play because the discursively constructed woman often comes without history. It's important that narratives produce complex women, women who remember, women who have memories and histories because that's the nature of womanhood.¹¹⁸ Narratives should embody remembering women because women remember – through generations we hold on to identity and culture even when we weren't supposed to survive. Furthermore, I believe it possible for women to take psychological control of ourselves, this is important to how memories and pain affect our present sense of satisfaction and joy. This is why Tally confronts her visceral memories and decides that her choice to forgive her mother was important to her own stability, happiness, and healing.

H. Conclusion

I have gone through the performance of *Brooklyn Bedroom* and come out on the other side. It is a family story that is rooted in the ideology of Third World feminism and seeks to use performance ethnography to present the survival and liberation of female sexuality. It builds on the theoretical and artistic research of Audre Lorde, Gloria Anzaldúa, Norman Denzin, Dwight Conquergood, bell hooks, Jonny Saldana, and D. Soyini Madison. I have used the work of

¹¹⁸ Mary A. Doane, "Remembering women: psychical and historical constructions in film theory," *Continuum*, 2009.

female storytellers, resistant to mainstream creative cultural production, to highlight women's point of view and expression of desire, paying close attention to what women want to see on screen, on stage and in our daily lives. *Brooklyn Bedroom* was also greatly influenced by the creative cultural production of Julie Dash, the women filmmakers of *Filming Desire: A Journey Through Women's Cinema*, Lynn Nottage, Adrienne Kennedy, Ntozake Shange, Zeinabu Irene Davis, Trinh Minh-ha, and Hye Jung Park. Jose Rivera, Suzan Lori-Parks, Joanna Murray-Smith, and Martin McDonogh are other dramatic influences that have consciously operated in this work.

I've come out of this performance knowing that I do not exist without the Rose family, or other black women whom I look to and see myself. My performance is the listening. It could be the way that I am an ally, here to witness black female testimony, our stories of joy and trauma. The truth of it is that black stories and black faces are not as common as they should be, on stage or on screen. The modern taking of people of color's stories is a genocide. I have come to realize that my art and scholarship is diasporic, I am often split and compensating inside for the stereotypes of black women in media, within American cultural performances. I need to see the everyday performance of black bodies, I need to see in all of its imagination and reality on stage.

The body politics in this country disturbs me, and I am committed to dismantling what white men have said about black female bodies. Black women have been hypersexualized in stereotypes as a rationalization for white men to have sexual relations with Black women during slavery. American representations of black sexuality have been designed to solidify racism, for

white male desire and wealth, for white women's sense of security and false ideology of purity. Black sexuality has been used for everyone except black women. What keeps me up is the weight of this labor for the white gaze and the male gaze and how to resist it. Although writing *Brooklyn Bedroom* has been a lot of emotional labor, it felt so good to construct sexuality on black women's terms. Writing it made me feel free of the socio-political confines placed upon the black female body.

Brooklyn Bedroom pushes the colonizer off, it is a performance that speaks to and with all women but is especially for women of color who resist centuries of colonization marked on our bodies. Tally has been slut-shamed, I have been slut-shamed – everyone attempts to control the female body and violent language is a viscous cycle. Tally resists the male mark on her body. *Brooklyn Bedroom* resists violence against women, it resists injurious language against women, it advocates for an exploration of the black female self, erotic nature, and sexuality. Josephine realizes that satisfaction is possible through interactions with her adult daughters and through finally breaking the silence about her trauma. *Brooklyn Bedroom* is mostly live performance, but in the writing I was motivated by resisting the hegemonic dissemination of storytelling in western cinematic society. Performance ethnography is the depiction and bodily awareness of human stories; it manifests in multiple forms of communication, including theatre and cinema. Human stories are spaces where self and society are articulated and where there exists possibilities for culture to be expressed and transformed. At the core of performance ethnography is the objective to engage in moral research that is dangerous to hegemonic power.

People have faith in theatre; when presented with authentic human experiences audiences report on how theatre made it seem so true. Storytelling in the literary tradition of poetics and drama is essential to social science research. An ethnodrama is a form of qualitative investigation; it connects personal storytelling to socio-cultural challenges to promote social justice and transformation. The story that *Brooklyn Bedroom* tells comes from the Rose family history, but I couldn't tell everything. Scenes were re-created to capture the family's experiences and protect their anonymity. Also, the concept of "ethnotheatricality" means that the performance may create fictions in order to illustrate reality.

Brooklyn Bedroom also has much relevance to the real issues and current problems facing society. Jamaica has had such a cultural, political and artistic influence internationally, yet the island struggles with a child abuse epidemic. Women, such as Julie Mansfield, are speaking out about being preyed upon as children. Audre Lorde and other U.S. Third World Feminist speak to the importance to breaking the silence. U.S. Third World Feminists know that writing saves lives and speaking out dismantles male and colonial power. This performance has inspired me to do ethnographic theatre work in Jamaica that helps women to speak out about their experiences of childhood sexual abuse. I want to work with locals to create shifts in the culture that protect and cherish children, and value the female body.

I am a sexual being and I am an erotic being. My performance uses cinematic theory to assume and explore the idea that what pleases women in the bedroom also satisfies our identity: who we want to be and how we want to remember ourselves in the world. I know that pleasure is necessary to liberation. *Brooklyn Bedroom* creates a living space where the stories of ordinary black women are important, where female sexuality takes over the stage, offering possibilities for resistance, liberation and desire. With this work I hope to honor the experiences of the Rose family and the black female experience. With this performance, I am not just speaking to – but *with* and

in close proximity to black women. Black women are women so we speak as women without the need for others to try and speak for us.

The world of the play resides in the bedroom. The bedroom is many things as a liminal space; it is a multi-dimensional and responsive space that opens up for intercultural communication. The bedroom represents a world of symbolism, for example, poetry comes into play with the use of repetition and metaphor. *Brooklyn Bedroom* presents a world where memory is both a “problem and a promise” and works to unfold the characters’ sexual trauma and desire. Narratives should embody remembering women because women aren’t just discursive constructions, we have histories that matter to how we see the world. The bedroom represents a liminal space where it is a metaphor of how sexuality influences all aspects of women’s lives. Tally ceases to let family trauma control her body, the mother shares her story of childhood abuse – both move towards a space where satisfaction is possible.

APPENDIX A

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

- A. **Project: Summary of Performance & Research Questions**
- B. **Statement of Significance**
- C. **Oppositional Gaze and the Pain of Looking**
- D. **False Projections of Female Sexual Liberation**
- E. **U.S. Third World Feminist Creative Production**

A. Project: Summary of Performance & Research Questions

I am interested in the performance ethnography of ethnodrama, in the dramatizing of ethnographic inquiry (Saldana 2008, 204) and *Brooklyn Bedroom* is a performance that interrogates societal perceptions of race and sexuality. Ethnographic research is the investigation and description of everyday life and culture. As a black female intellectual and artist, I feel a strong personal connection to the writing of *Brooklyn Bedroom* and performances which shatter the cultural and hegemonic constructions of black female sexuality. I have utilized the writing of the performance as my method; the performance is an act of Third World feminist resistance and liberation. Storytelling is the type of research preferred by many black female playwrights (Amico 1998; Brown-Guillory 1988).

The source of reality for my ethnodrama is based upon stories I know well – from a Jamaican American family who I've been close to for years. I will not disclose their identity to protect their anonymity and have referred to them as the Roses. The Roses have touched my heart in ways that make it vital for me to attempt to represent my interpretation of their stories to

the world, with the hope that others might also be inspired by the strength and resilience of this family. The Rose family history is a catalyst for the writing of *Brooklyn Bedroom*: a process where I have used their stories to investigate the relationships between women, sexuality, desire and healing.

This dissertation project seeks to demystify race and asks for a re-imagination of boundaries of female sexuality. The performance also deals with interracial romance as Tally has a love interest in Eric. I did not focus their relationship on the theme of interracial love/challenges. They fell in love, they are working things out – race comes up but does not consume their performance. However, because of the family’s potentially perceived prejudice and the mother’s (Josephine) animosity towards men, I have spent some time framing their relationship because in some ways Eric functions as a narrative device. His character demonstrates the negative effects of slut-shaming and illustrates some of the possibilities within Tally’s concept of sexuality.

The ethnodrama integrates elements of both screen and stage. A type of qualitative inquiry, ethnodramatic work forms a bridge between individual stories and social issues affecting society with the goal of socio-political change (Denzin, 2003). The performance resists hegemonic representations of sexuality and carves spaces for women who have experienced trauma to move beyond pain. The presentation of the narrative and its rationale are theoretically rooted in Third World feminism and performance ethnography, including research from the likes of Audre Lorde, Gloria Anzaldúa, Norman Denzin, bell hooks, Jonny Saldana, and D. Soyini

Madison, and the creative cultural production of Julie Dash, the women filmmakers of *Filming Desire: A Journey Through Women's Cinema* (here-in-after *Filming Desire*), Lynn Nottage, Adrienne Kennedy, Ntozake Shange, Zeinabu Irene Davis, Trinh Minh-ha, and Hye Jung Park. *Filming Desire* is a documentary that explores the works of women film directors, specifically the differences explicit in women's point of view and expression of desire as articulated in films by women (Mandy et al. 2000). My research questions are: How can women use performance ethnography to intervene in archaic constructions of race and female sexuality? How can women use performance ethnography to embody the liberation of their sexual identity? What do possibilities for the liberation of female sexuality even look like? My intention was to organically address these questions throughout my Reflection, Theoretical Framework and Methods and also explore them with the characters and storyline of my dissertation performance. I wanted to explore the idea that what pleases women in the bedroom also satisfies our identity: who we want to be and how we want to remember ourselves in the world. My dissertation performance uses cinematic theory to take a closer look at what gives women visual pleasure and to illustrate a broader connection between women, sexuality and desire that reinforces Lorde's concept of eroticism. I do also pay attention to live performance, utilizing ethnodrama and theatre examples to contextualize the methodological facet of my dissertation project.

My ethnodrama was not written solely for an academic audience, but to engage the general public. This means that the theoretical and methodological elements of this dissertation show through in the ethical depths of my performance but I did not attempt to use theoretical or

methodological language in my ethnodrama. I wanted to write an ethnodrama that doesn't sound like theory but is informed by it. I wanted to write in such a way that the Rose family or any black women in the audience could connect to my performance. As such, the ethnodrama refrains from being didactic and is accessible to the public. My intended audience with this performance is black women. I hope that women of color and all women will be able to connect to the cultural specificity of *Brooklyn Bedroom* and to the themes of resistance and liberation of the female body. I would like to, in further detail, discuss why this project is an important one in which I wanted to embark. In doing so, I want to address the socio-cultural significance of women, sexuality and representation because these themes are salient to the dissertation work I have done.

B. Statement of Significance

Background

The United States was built upon the black female's womb. My body was used as the reproductive tool for our economic and political advancement; free labor gave the United States the funds and infrastructure to become a world contender. Slavery was not just an institution of labor or injustice, it was an institution of sexuality where consensual and non-consensual intimacy between white men and black women sustained the system. "The hypersexualized stereotype of Black women was used during slavery as a rationalization for sexual relations between White men and Black women, especially sexual unions involving masters and slaves"

(Rhymes 2007; 2016). White female sexuality exploits black female sexuality to make itself appear was and is used to make white female sexuality seem wholesome and better, however the idea of sexual purity is a fallacy (Brody 1998). The double-edged sword of expectations of female sexuality, slut or angel, is an impossibility (Stephenson 2017). Much of America's contemporary knowledge about female sexuality has been understood by expressions of the slave/master binary – it is this duality that defines the archaic nature of race and sexuality in the U.S. The major cultural, communicative and political problem facing society today is race; however, many racial attacks are rooted in fear of the sexuality of the other. It was W.E.B. Dubois who said "the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color line" (1903, 9). Yet, that line does not operate uninterrupted by sexuality and the polarity of what it means to be a woman compared to a man.¹¹⁹ ¹²⁰ Therefore this work speaks to and with all women but is especially for black women and our plight to seek freedom for our bodies – a freedom that resists a long history of dealing with whiteness and hegemonic masculinity.

The attack on black female sexuality is really a broader issue. All women who are perceived or accused of being “loose or promiscuous face the ire and consternation of a (predominantly white) male-dominated society” (Rhymes 2007). When “gender” is indicated in

¹¹⁹ See Brody, *Impossible Purities, Blackness, Femininity and Victorian Culture*.

¹²⁰ See bell hooks, well known professor and cultural critic, in her article “The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators” where she discusses how men and women's sexuality is viewed very differently. Furthermore, men and women have a vastly different relationship to looking, despite the fact that we see predominantly male orientations of visual pleasure in mainstream media. Even black women and black men are polarized by sexual expectations of their gender, despite having both experienced slavery (hooks 2004, 235-236).

this work, I am referring to the social and cultural expectations that society has placed upon the roles of female vs. male. Any woman actively engaged in her own sexuality is considered a whore. There is no space for female sexuality within these parameters (Brody 1998). I didn't grow up thinking it was okay to touch my body or like boys. When I found my brother's pornography under the bathroom sink, somehow, he was normal, and my family looked at me like I was filthy. Everyone tries to police the female body. Where do we even begin to answer the question of what women want? Women cannot even turn on the television or watch a movie without seeing images and stories that injure us – yes, sexist language is painful. By 14, a young woman will probably have already been called a “‘bitch’ or a ‘whore’ by her male classmates” (Dear Daddy 2015). Slut-shaming and violent language is used against women by a variety of men and women in a variety of tones from humor to anger. Most of the curse words we use in American vernacular are violent towards the female body; they degrade and slut shame women in order to control us. Regardless of context, the language is dangerous because it can and often does lead to violence or aggression against women. 1 in 3 women will encounter sexual or physical abuse in her lifespan (Park 2013). According to Gloria Steinem, writer, lecturer, editor, and feminist activist, more women have been killed at the hands of their husbands and boyfriends since 9/11 than Americans died during 9/11 and in all terror attacks and wars since (“Dear Daddy”, 2015). The accuracy of Steinem's numbers are backed by James A. Fox, a Northeastern University criminology professor, and the 2013 U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics report (Sanders 2014; Bureau of Justice 2013). Violence against females is used as a means to

control our sexuality – once our sexuality is under control we are vulnerable to the physical, emotional, political and socioeconomic desires of men.

The violence and oppression against the female body, the same sexual violence and oppression that this country was built upon – still permeates our society. But there is hope in our voices and through our writing. As Lorde states, "empowered women are dangerous" and empowered women do not relinquish their sexuality (1993, 53). Lorde had a voice central to the development of contemporary feminist theory – her work is still "at the cutting edge of consciousness."¹²¹ U.S. Third World feminists were among the first to say that our silence will not protect us (Lorde 1984, 42). Lorde worked relentlessly to reject the political and sexual hegemony that binds the minds and bodies of women of all ethnicities and nationalities (1993, 47). Lorde dedicated both her life and her creative talent to confronting and addressing the injustices of racism, sexism and homophobia (1978).

The violence against us, which is inevitably an attack on our sexuality, can only end if we fight back with eroticism and take back our stories. According to Lorde, eroticism is simply "living with the knowledge that satisfaction is possible" (1984, 55). Eroticism is crucial to female liberation because it is an innate power that women already possess – we can use it to embrace the yes within ourselves and increase satisfaction in our daily lives. That yes within ourselves is the erotic – knowledge from our most innate and nonrational source, a knowledge

¹²¹ Nancy K. Bereano stated this about Audre Lorde in the Introduction of *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* 1984

that women have been taught to devalue living within male orientations of power. This widely unused source of knowledge is symbolic of the division of female sexuality and identity, which tears the lives of women into two and makes pleasure irreconcilable. According to Nikki Young, queer and sexuality studies scholar at Bucknell University: “[while] viewed in some feminist circles as overly reductionist and even anachronistic, Lorde's erotic innovation has established itself as a political, social, and academic tool of deconstruction, subversion, and imagination” (2012, 301). Women can use our erotic power to reclaim our bodies and experiences. The black woman’s reproductive rights are her own – she must reclaim it from colonial power. The black woman must reclaim her sexuality; all women must take their bodies back. The violence against us can only end if we are dangerous to power – dangerous to violent power, to white power, to male hegemonic and colonialist power. In this dissertation, I use *black women* and *black woman* interchangeably as a reminder of the rich variation among women in our communities and the fact that we stand in solidarity and do face particular singularities with our history of oppression and resilience.

Although it has been contested in some feminist literature on silence and the power to resist patriarchal violence, I agree with Lorde that our silences make us weak (1984). Connecting to the erotic – connecting to the “freedoms of our sensualities”—doesn’t happen in silence (Young 2012). Yes, we can take the night back and take our lives back by speaking back. And our sexuality and innate power as women will also remain unfulfilled as long as we don’t face our histories of violence. In doing so we can realize that we are not victims – we are survivors

(Lorde 1978; Steele 2000). Let us find strength from speaking back, telling our stories, and calling upon our sisters. Women also have a history of resilience, therefore we can call upon that history to perform the possibilities of US Third World feminist resistance.

Anzaldúa (1942-2004), like Lorde, writes for the possibilities of eroticism, liberation and power. Her theories are grounded in lived experience and work to unite third world women in celebration of and despite our differences. Anzaldúa relied on personal experience to theorize and act upon the world for the improvement of the female condition. Born in southern Texas to parents of Mexican heritage, Anzaldúa had a rare hormonal disorder that brought about a very early puberty, having her period at only six years old. She wrote about the smell of it, the uncomfortable nature of this experience that she didn't understand at that tender age. She was marked as physiologically different from her peers and her sense of alienation increased with exposure to racist behavior when she entered Texas' segregated educational system in 1949. Anzaldúa used her experiences and her identity between borders to develop a strong sense of empathy and advocacy for those who are considered outsiders. Her work is important to *Brooklyn Bedroom* because it performs a departure from the whore/pure gender binary and embraces broader possibilities for sexual and cultural identities. Anzaldúa's work is also important to *Brooklyn Bedroom* because her writings speak to the importance of self/alternative/cultural representation in the possibilities for eroticism, liberation and power. Furthermore, *Brooklyn Bedroom* speaks more broadly to women writing as a crucial tool for liberation, power and representation.

Because the battle for female liberation must address representation, performance ethnography (discussed in further detail later in Appendix IV: More on Method) is a practice critical to interventions in race and sexuality. For, as Madison states, “people are treated how they are represented” (2005, 4). Performance ethnography is not necessarily formal or academic research. Briefly stated, it is the presentation of culture and representation of people; it is the construction, embodiment and enactment of their lives. Under the work of Norman Denzin, Dwight Conquergood, Mary Weems, and D. Soyini Madison, performance ethnography answers to a critical paradigm with moral, reflexive, and radical politics. Performance ethnography communicates the representation and embodiment of identity and is essentially storytelling; it produces a variety of media – the stage, the screen – all means by which identity is expressed and where culture is (re-)created, represented, enacted and embodied.

Despite the fact that there has been some cultural and historical uncertainties regarding cinema as performance because of its recorded trace, cinema still performs because it communicates culture and identity and is used to reproduce boundaries of gender, race, and female sexuality (I discuss this more in “Contribution to The Field”). Performance theory needs to stop conceptualizing cinema and live performance as oppositional forces, for there has “been an erosion of the differences between them” and they have a growing history of mutual dependence (Auslander 2008, 11). According to Madison, film and drama as practices of ethnography and representation are important to the "doing" or performance of critical theory (Madison 2005, 1-3, 13) and, for Denzin, dramatic and filmic works are "situated in (the)

complex systems of discourse" to which performance ethnography speaks (Denzin 2003, x, 81). *Brooklyn Bedroom* speaks to this complex web of representation by using both theatre and film as performance to narrativize female sexuality in the Rose family history. The vast amount of media women encounter in American culture can be painful, and it is the obligation of all women to oppose those archaic constructions of race, gender and sexuality pushed upon women of color.

C. Oppositional Gaze and the Pain of Looking

Mainstream media dehumanizes women. And it is really not just Hollywood, as Gayatri Spivak states, "global ambitions do not embrace women sincerely" (1988, 308). Therefore, having an oppositional gaze is an important tool for the survival and resistance of women of color. When cinema and television first began, it became a way of maintaining white supremacy. But blacks who were no longer slaves could now watch, without fear, engaging "in the negation of black representation." The suppression of the black gaze produced an overwhelming desire of black people to look as a tool of resistance and it politicizes the look to resist what we see. But historically speaking, due to institutionalized discrimination, black people have been concerned with race and racism, not necessarily gender roles or manifestations of female sexuality.

Black female sexuality can be very burdened, even in narratives constructed by black men. For example, early black filmmakers like Oscar Micheaux, the pioneering black filmmaker of the 20s-30s silent era, did work to create realistic and complex portraits of black people and

relationships on screen (hooks 2004). Yet, even in his inspiring storytelling, the treatment of the black female body is troubling – both Sylvia and Alma of *Within Our Gates* (1920) are manhandled and Sylvia is actually choked. Furthermore, Sylvia is the mulatto and the object of male desire, a motif quite consistent in Micheaux's work. For example, in *Ten Minutes To Live* (1932), women play central characters, yet scantily dressed female dancers are displayed frequently and the women who men are "mad about" are light-skinned or mixed race as if dark skin actresses were unavailable. Some contemporary films by black male directors have taken a turn for the worse. In *Straight Outta Compton* (2015) directed by Felix Gary Gray, women are little more than objects of sexual violence. The movie is a brilliant visualization of black agency, hip hop identity, free speech and resistance to police brutality. Yet black female sexuality is severely oppressed in the storytelling.

Most films create pain for the black female spectator. The images on the big screen, such as the caricature "mammie", are often so stereotypical that they are harmful, in other words if the black female spectator looks too deep then her "encounter with the screen hurts" (hooks 2004, 238). To avoid pain we often choose not to look or deny the use of our vision's full capacity. But all women must leave themselves behind when encountering the big screen: "This state of affairs-the result of a history which inscribes woman as subordinate... the female spectator, who, in buying her ticket, must deny her sex" (Doane 1981, 22). Even the female protagonist in films is afraid to look; there are many narratives where "little girls and grown women cover their eyes or hide behind the shoulders of their dates" (Williams 1984, 83).

The oppositional gaze is also important in queer spectatorship, for most mainstream cinema focuses on heterosexual romance as normative. Most films have a heterotopic love affair, based upon heterosexual characters, with an ending that provides some sort of mending of a coupling or marriage. Yet, gays are not allowed to show similar romantic emotions (Wheeler 2003). Films that do not participate in “straight” culture receive fringe releases, unless they illustrate “sexual difference itself as an untenable and unstable concept”, as in such films as *The Crying Game* (1992) and *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (2000). Gays rarely represent stable families in cinematic narratives, despite the fact that people of different sexual orientations can constitute a happy and healthy family. Although these roles are changing, lesbian and gay characters have been habitually reduced to the roles of violent serial killers, drug dealers, hit men, sadistic siblings or parents, traitors— in other words, every form of human wreckage. Furthermore, transgender people are typically represented as freaks or novelties. The performance of straightness is strict: hetero-centric performativity makes straight women feel guilty for their own sexuality and attractiveness. We must use our sexuality only to reproduce, not to have pleasure. Even white heterosexual men will find it difficult and/or repulsive to match themselves against often violent standards of cinematic masculinity. Under the hegemonic gaze, all sexualities suffer due to the fear of the other (Wheeler 2003, 1).

When looking at the relationship between female sexuality, race and the gaze in film history, the picture is both clear and disturbing. Laura Mulvey’s (1975) groundbreaking article on narrative cinema and the gaze was really about male spectatorship because of its focus on the

woman as signifier of the male other. However, we know from her work that phallogentrism means nothing without the image of the castrated woman – “it is her lack that produces the phallus” (Mulvey 1975, 7). It is apparent that the history of cinema in the United States – and in the world – is dominated by males and the stories they want to tell about other men and women (hooks 2004). Film history is comprised of decades of mostly seeing the world through a male lens, seeing what gives them pleasure. Women, regardless of race, are spectacles and there to be looked upon. Mulvey (1975) spelled out for us the active/passive sexual dichotomy happening in film where the woman is the spectacle on display and the man has the position of looker. The female protagonist often fails to look or, according to Mary Ann Doane, she is punished for looking. We are on the screen as objects of male desire because they are the agents of the gaze and looking is power (Williams 1984, 83-85).

For black people, the denial of the gaze is much deeper. According to bell hooks (2004) in her article, “The Oppositional Gaze,” black people were punished by slaveholders for looking; we might have been afraid to look but were fascinated by the gaze because "there is power in looking." Actually, attempts to repress the black gaze, "produced (an) overwhelming longing to look" but with eyes of resistance (hooks 2004, 233). "Not only will I stare, I want my look to change reality" and therefore gazing under the dominant structure opens up possibilities for agency (hooks 2004, 233-234). In looking to change reality, the woman of color, in particular, must be wary of false projections of female sexual liberation that set them up for sexual dissatisfaction.

D. False Projections of Female Sexual Liberation

Even films that claim to speak to the liberation of female sexuality are falsely framed in terms of male pleasure and based upon the male gaze. Most films construct woman as an object to male desire "not as mirror to female desire" (Humphreys 1992, 65). In bell hooks (1996b) essay, "Whose Pussy Is This?" hooks asks black male directors to reflect on this question as they make work which involves black female sexuality. Spike Lee's *She's Gotta Have It* sparked a conversation among black folks about feminist issues wondering if Nola, the protagonist, is liberated or "just a whore" (hooks 1996b, 228). Although the film was refreshing because it is soulful and uses familiar images like many narrative films, it doesn't break patriarchal representations of female sexuality because "it is the men who speak" (hooks 1996b, 231). Nola is not a sexually liberated woman, she is a hegemonic projection of a liberated woman. Only "bad" straight girls and women embrace their sexuality; "good" straight women repress their carnal desires (Dixon 2003, 11). She expresses her eagerness to be sexual with men as well as her right to have numerous partners, which is a superficial embodiment of the desiring subject, although it is a representation that does challenge sexist notions of female sexual passivity (hooks 1996b, 229).

Furthermore, Nola's sexuality is not depicted as an autonomous gesture of independent longing for sexual expression, instead she is made to use her body as a reward for men or as means of manipulating men. As Dash states in "Not Without My Daughters," Spike Lee's work

may have changed black independent filmmaking by reintroducing sex and making it bolder, but the narrative needed more insight from a woman "who knows something" (161). As hooks argues, "Her sexual fulfillment is never the central concern" instead she is pleased from pleasing and this indicates that the film is not about female sexuality but male pleasure (hooks 1996b, 230). Most disturbing, the narrative involves a rape scene where the male perpetrator says to Nola, "Who's pussy is this?" and she says "yours" – this restores male domination and reinforces the falsity that women enjoy being violated (233). On the big screen there's a refusal to let or encourage woman to look, yet we are asked to bear witness to our "own powerlessness in the face of rape, mutilation and murder" (Williams 1984, 83).

False projections of female sexuality are detrimental to racial and gender progress, yet the oppositional gaze is not enough, looking to resist is not enough; it is political and feminist but unsatisfying. Women are unlikely to get satisfaction from the Hollywood screen if we are watching closely. Cinema is the most widely distributed entertainment media in contemporary society – and people come to know the world through filmic dissemination. Therefore the oppositional gaze raises further issues about the quality of female and black female spectatorship. Contrary to what Mulvey (2015, 51) states in her reflection of her 1975 article, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Hollywood film is still sexist no matter how much one reads "against the grain". Furthermore, where's the pleasure in looking with opposition? Refusing what Mary Ann Doane (2009, 6) calls "the apparatus" or the construction of generalized female desire as fully adequate is to also refuse the construction of the Woman

which it produces. In feminist literature, there are theoretical concerns about what constitutes resistance. Although I acknowledge the often personal nature of resistance and that its manifestation isn't and shouldn't be without variation, I must ask how satiating repeatedly saying "no" can be? The power and agency in saying no and having that no respected is certainly vital for women's bodies, rights, and spirits. Yet, more opportunities to say yes, to accept pleasure in its multiple emotional, material and physical forms, not just to refuse, is critical to women's sense of desire and sexualities.

We live in a world where female sexuality is still regulated and under a microscope; it's rarely women looking through the lens. We live in a world where black female sexuality, in particular, is grossly distorted and projected as hypersexual. What gives a woman pleasure? What is it in life we love to see? The Hollywood worlds in our living rooms are absent of how women see. This dissertation speaks to performing desire with the understanding that seeing is crucial to the progression of human rights – as seeing is desire (Williams 1984, 83). This project is committed, in part, to encourage the longing for an expanded horizon of female desire on screen and to honor those who've committed their lives to that expansion. Decades ago, Linda Williams (1991, 22) stated, "To those who still ask 'What do women want?' the cinema provides no answer" and the majority of commercial cinema still doesn't. Stories on the big screen show women through the eyes of men.

The world deserves to see how women see. "Movies make magic, they change things" and make culture; cinema teaches people how to navigate the world (hooks 1996a, 1).

As Mignon, the black female film producer, says in Julie Dash's *Illusions* to her white male co-worker, "I am here for the same reasons you are...people want to make movies about themselves." So then the questions must be posed: when women do take the power of the look, what do we do with it? What are the cinematic spaces where the female gaze illustrates visual pleasure and desire? These spaces where women are free of false projections of female sexuality are important. Where women are free of being slut-shamed, free of only wanting sex to be attached to emotional neediness, free of having our bodies cut and dissected for the camera – these are the spaces storytelling needs to watch and create and build upon.

U.S. Third World filmmakers and creative producers have made an effort to put forth performances as counter to traditional Hollywood filmmaking and hegemonic performances of women around the world. The goal for this counter cinema is to use anti-colonialist feminist film criticism to take up the media as a place of interrogation and to subvert the concept of what it means to be a woman of color. A strong rhetoric of resistance has come from U.S. Third World filmmakers using an oppositional practice as a means to self-define our womanhood. For the woman of color, "the third world is everywhere" and "oppositional political consciousness" is necessary to humanize us in the face of destructive singularities about our lives and bodies (Sandoval 2000, 42). These women filmmakers illustrate the complex ways in which the audience can understand and participate in female subjectivity. This project acknowledges Third World feminist creative production who create: who get behind their stories against all odds because seeing is desire and power, both of which are crucial to female pleasure.

In the play, I used *Filming Desire* and the work of auteur American filmmaker Julie Dash to highlight women's point of view and expression of desire, paying close attention to what women want to see on screen. Julie Dash's work is sensual, revisionist and oppositional to western film practice. I pair Dash's work with *Filming Desire* to take a closer look at what gives women visual pleasure and to illuminate a more expansive conceptualization of women and desire, to illustrate desire not only as lust but as the power to seek pleasure. I discuss the filmic performances of Zeinabu Irene Davis, Trinh T. Minh-ha, and Hye Jyung Park to strategize how feminist filmmakers and everyday women can find ways to move beyond pain. I utilize the work of these women filmmakers to explore the mysterious question of what is sexual pleasure, suggesting its link to memory and identity in *Brooklyn Bedroom*. In these ways, desire functions as an important facet of sexuality as identity, leading back to Lorde's theory on erotic satisfaction and how *Brooklyn Bedroom* can speak to that practice. Tally and her family's experience with sexuality illustrates that traumatic events and memory exist on socio-cultural levels, in other words the experiences of trauma, healing, and liberation can be individual and collective.

Julie Dash, black American filmmaker from the LA Rebellion, makes films illustrating the thoughtful ways in which women see and the kinds of stories we want to tell the world that resist false projections of female sexuality. The L.A. Rebellion is a group of African, Caribbean, and African American independent film and video artists who formed at the University of California, Los Angeles, in the 1970s and 1980s (Horak n.d.). The students rejected

Hollywood's destructive representations of people of color (Best 2015). They were a generation of filmmakers, including Haile Gerima, who decided that they wanted to create independent film that does what Hollywood misses – constructs complex and humanistic representations of people of color. In the play, I pair Dash's work with *Filming Desire* to take a closer look at a woman's point of view and to illustrate a broader coupling of women and desire, to show desire not just as lust but as the power to see and to show sexuality as a manifestation of identity. This broader concept of desire is a theme discussed by the women filmmakers in *Filming Desire* despite the fact that the documentary's cinematography focuses on love scenes. I also build upon Dash's work here because it is deeply revisionist, very understudied, and as bell hooks (2004, 246) states, it is "profoundly oppositional to Western film practice." Dash's work deserves attention because it "reveals what no other Hollywood filmmaker had done in the past – namely that black women possess physical and spiritual beauty, as well as a psychological diversity" (Donalson 2003, 180). Her work constructs women as a mirror to black female desire, not as an object of male desire.

E. U.S. Third World Feminist Creative Production

Creative cultural producers who resist hegemonic Third World "woman" constructions are important to the health of female sexuality. Using the rationale of Third World feminist artists like Julie Dash is important to the theoretical landscape of this work precisely because hegemonic dominance has yielded a gaze of liberation from women of color. Looking is desire

and desire is human nature – women must continue to recreate our multiplicity on screen and through other performances, and show those facets of the world which we find exciting, those facets of ourselves which we passionately want to see. Commercial film rarely allows the spectator to see women as full human beings – as people who see, have memories, and whole bodies. Female sexuality, and black female sexuality in particular, is policed on screen and grossly distorted and projected as hypersexual or for males to enjoy. Women can also be guilty of reinforcing hegemonic oriented perceptions of other women. For example Safi Faye discusses *Mossane* (1996) as a representation of the “pure” African woman, but dichotomies of pure vs. dirty have been used to degrade women and police our sexuality. What does pure mean? As Lorde states, using the master’s tools will never dismantle his house. So, even female filmmakers devoted to telling women’s stories are susceptible to using the tools of hegemonic masculinity. Representation is important and the difficulty in finding ourselves in the prevailing culture as we experience ourselves is still problematic. The deciding factor will ultimately be seen in the ways Third World feminists, by in large, invest in creative production that is subversive to white hegemonic power, that is subversive to storytelling that dehumanizes women.

Film isn't the only mode of production vital to visual pleasure and the representation of women of color – other areas of performance, such as theatre and music videos, are also ways in which identity and culture are enacted. With independent film, theatre, poetry, and personal narrative, U.S. Third World feminist women have used performance to counteract hurtful media storytelling about women of color for decades. My dissertation builds on the work of U.S. Third

World creative cultural producers – women of color scholars, activists and artists living in the first world with African/Asian diaspora – who utilize performance to narrativize female humanity. Within the context of this dissertation, performance analyses are primarily concerned with intent, message and self-definition – the representational dimensions of storytelling. For example, I am not concerned with the differing aesthetic specifications or technical parameters of any of the performances spaces I discuss, such as film, drama and poetry. I am focused on the mechanisms of self-definition within representation and subjectivity that are crucial to women of color (generally) and black women (specifically) (Collins 2000). After all as Denzin states, "we know the world only through our representations" (2001, 23) and as Madison reminds us, "people are treated how they are represented" (2005, 178).

In the mode of other U.S. Third World feminist creative producers, this dissertation looks to a variety of media to theorize sexuality and eroticism as resistance. With artists such as Audre Lorde (poet and essayist), Gloria Anzaldúa (essayist, fiction writer, and poet), Sonia Sanchez (poet, essayist, children's books author, and playwright), Trinh T. Minh-ha (filmmaker, writer, composer, and poet), and Cherríe Lawrence Moraga (poet, essayist, and playwright), U.S. Third World feminists have challenged the one-dimensionality of a Western resistance. These women teach us a lesson about breaking the hegemonic boundaries of gender and sexuality. These women also teach how film should be in conversation with other performance work. All of the resistive spaces of creative production are a type of critical performance because they are presentations of cultural life, as Norman Denzin states, with the potential to be subversive to

dominant power. Performance should "criticize the world the way it is, and offer suggestions about how it could be different" (Denzin 2001, 24). The work of playwrights Adrienne Kennedy and Ntozake Shange, like filmmaking, explores cultural phenomena and puts the survival of the woman of color at the forefront. Their work is based upon true stories – at the very least their performances deal with real issues of race, class, gender and sexuality.

Spivak may think that the “female intellectual has a task” (1988, 308), yet, with counterintuitive embodiments of feminism, how is it that women embrace ourselves? Spivak does not see herself as one of the subaltern that her theory postulates; this embrace of feminism aids patriarchal power. Women do not have the time, nor the luxury, of separating ourselves, of theorizing and developing a feminist consciousness in which the theorist does not see herself included. Mainstream media is engaged in the *practice* of dehumanizing women – *all* women – regardless of race or socio-economic status. This is why it is not just the female intellectual who has a task, it is the female practitioner who also has a task and it is up to both of us to sustain a conversation about the future of women.

Hegemonic feminism regards Third World women as the same powerless subjects; similar narratives about women of color are being unjustly constructed (Mohanty 1984, 333). Yet, even our own stories as women of color tend to focus on pain. Our stories of pain and memory are vital to our survival in the present, but embodying our stories of liberation, of sustained happiness and freedom is vital to the possibilities of improving our lives, engaging the erotic, and merging a common front for feminist theory and creative production. Looking at the

filmic performance work of *Filming Desire*, Julie Dash, Zeinabu Irene Davis, Trinh T. Minh-ha, and Hye Jung Park, and the dramatic work of Adrienne Kennedy and Ntozake Shange, the dissertation and play seeks to pay tribute to their creative production and address the questions so important to the representation of women. How is feminism expressed within and across the works of these women? How do their performances of resistance converge and diverge and how does it move beyond pain? Despite the fact that these women have disparate identity concerns and produce within different genres, both African and Asian diasporic creative cultural producers converge with their participation in the Third World feminist project of recovering and visualizing subjectivity and performing a decolonization of the gaze (Foster 1997, 6). For this reason, Third World feminist creative production is important to the theoretical landscape of my dissertation.

APPENDIX B

BACKGROUND ON THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

- A. **Visual Pleasure: What Women Want**
- B. **Julie Dash and Revisionist History**
- C. **Sexuality and Identity**

A. Visual Pleasure: What Women Want

Surely desire is unlikely to be found in refusing Hollywood cinema and more likely to be enjoyed through creating and watching our own stories by and about remembering women.

From looking at *Filming Desire* and the work of Julie Dash, it has become clear that women want to see more story, more history that informs bedroom scenes, more history that informs the lives of complex female protagonists. Desire, sexuality and seeing aren't detachable from being human. This disconnection leads again to the query: what is sexual pleasure? This question is still a mystery and goes largely unexplored. But what if what pleases women in the bedroom also satisfies our identity, who we want to be and how we want to remember ourselves in the world?

"What woman hasn't dreamed of seeing the world through her own image or has never wished to see the world in her own eyes?:" This question begins the documentary *Filming Desire* (Mandy et al. 2000). The film shows women directors, mainly of Francophone heritage, discussing how their depictions of sexuality and relationships "reflect the basic differences between the sexes--as revealed by image, shot, and story". Although most of the filmmakers in this documentary are not women of color, their work speaks to the importance of articulating female pleasure and sexuality. The filmmakers and their films express feminist debates about sexuality, representation and image, and the body "that have raged since the first woman picked up a camera, determined to claim her identity and find her voice" (Mandy et. al 2000).

Women are often reduced to body parts that are perceived by males as sexual. The filmmakers discussed not cutting women and men up, giving the spectator the opportunity to see the whole body in its “thought, memory, pain and regret” (Mandy et. al 2000). When women see it gives us pleasure to see ourselves in whole bodies because, according to Agnes Varda, "we women are in a woman's body". Varda, who came before Godard and is arguably the real founder of Nouvelle Vague (French New wave), says that "men cut women's bodies." On the big screen, we see breasts or follow a woman's butt. Varda is fascinated by seeing women in their entirety, "the complete body not just erogenous areas". In her work, she wanted to show a “woman alone and naked" and portray the existence of the body as a whole.

Women can feel visual pleasure by watching and creating stories that defy the hypersexuality of black women. Breaking down stereotypes about women of color is beneficial to all women whose sexuality is policed. Women of African descent are often represented as hypersexual whores. Safi Faye, Senegalese born filmmaker living in France, wanted to use her 14th film *Mossane* to give an ode to the beauty of rural Senegalese women. According to Faye, she wanted to show the world how “pure and clean and beautiful” African women are. Despite the fact that Faye uses the representation of her characters as “pure” loosely, the film has a very inspiring depiction of sexuality. In *Mossane*, young girls talk to one another very intimately about sexuality – conversations about sex become normal and unfetishized. An older married woman tells her younger friend that her boyfriend can "turn you on by rubbing his penis on your clit...forbid him one thing, to fall into your shell." The sex education through friendship and female solidarity is striking. After this talk, the women go off to shower together and play in the water together – they are unashamed of their bodies. Faye says she "wanted to show that the most beautiful woman in the world is from Africa" (Mandy et. al 2000).

Visual pleasure for women can also come from filmic representations of men that show the male's limp penis. All too often, the penis represents a double standard for masculinity, either strong (violent, threatening and compared to guns and other objects of violence) or weak (limp, useless, impudent and therefore feminine). Women love to see men with their penises at rest and love scenes where the physicality of the scene is informed by subtext. Jeanne Labrune discusses how film was so crucial to feminist struggle in the 70s and how commercial film has hidden the male sex organ. The double standard of penis in film is problematic – women making films want to see men as they are. Penis is either represented as pathetic (at rest) or magical (erect). Male actors whose penises are at rest are often filmed above the waist but that takes away the integrity of the body by cutting the body. Because it is cut, the shot leads to an imagination of outrageousness of objects that could represent the penis. According to Labrune, "as long as male filmmakers don't show the penis, it continues to represent offensive male power that never gets silenced," such as bombs, guns and aggressive authority (in Mandy, 2000).

What is the depth of the story? What is the woman's identity and history? This context is very important to exploring pleasure, as women's bodies come with the woman's experience outside of the bedroom. This context within the storyline gives us insight into the question, "what gives women sexual pleasure"? And as the filmmakers stated, this is a question that is largely unexplored (Mandy 2000). But is visual pleasure not integral to sexual pleasure? For Sally Potter, the love scene expresses inner dwellings of the character's bodies and the subtext is important. She's not so much interested in nudity but "showing the invisible through images". In her film *Orlando*, we get to see the woman's body from the side; she becomes a landscape as the film questions historically constructed gender roles. Similarly, for Cristina Comencini, "what comes before and after" a love scene is very important.

In conclusion, women can experience visual pleasure by seeing the world through our own eyes. The filmmakers of *Filming Desire* explore women's sexuality and what we want to see on screen and in the world – they take risks and avoid the hegemonic tendencies of mainstream cinema. Their theoretical standpoint on visual pleasure shows themes relevant to the exploration of female sexuality and desire. These filmmakers' ideology about sexuality and pleasure is not to say that all women will enjoy the visual world they bring to us, but the filmmakers multiple intersections on sexuality can give insight into what many women might enjoy. For example, women are apt to appreciate seeing the penis when it is not threatening or magical. How about seeing the male body when he is not aroused, just as he is? Penis is either symbolized as pitiful (at rest) or miraculous (erect). Women can also feel visual pleasure by seeing and constructing stories that dismantle the myth of the hypersexual black woman. All women's sexuality is placed under microscope and thus it seems many of the filmmakers showcased in *Filming* have a vested interest in breaking stereotypes about women in general. Also, mainstream cinema tends to cut women and men to emphasize on the typically sexualized body parts. Women, in particular, are most often represented by body parts that men are supposed to find sexual. Furthermore, it's just the actual act of sex that is represented in most films, and this is what Lorde refers to as the superficial and pornographic. There is nothing wrong with consensual sex, actually good sex encourages improved mental, spiritual and physical health. Yet according to Comencini, what matters more to women when we are being represented sexually in cinema is that sex scenes are about subjectivity, rather than the female body consistently as an object (Mandy et. al 2000). In other words, the physical nature of the situation should be supplemented by subtext. The story around human bodies is what women are more likely to enjoy because of its capacity to stimulate women inside and outside of the bedroom. Furthermore, the story around the body can give us

more insight into what sexual pleasure means for women: Julie Dash's work speaks to this visual contextualization of the holistic female body.

B. Julie Dash and Revisionist History

Julie Dash's work on revisionist history is central to the theoretical landscape of this project – her performances magnify the potential of remembering women and telling the story around the body. Dash is a black American auteur filmmaker who attended UCLA's film school, and work is often referred to as “making history” (Mellencamp 1994). Dash's work may not speak explicitly to the definition of sexual pleasure, but her films are meditative, spiritual and sensual. Above all, they often celebrate the body. What makes Dash so interesting is her philosophy on the relationship between film and history – in her perspective film *is* history (Robin & Jaffe). Dash is said to make “movies that matter,” and she feels strongly about using images of African American women, depicting visually complex and multi-layered characters and revisiting specific historical moments to repossess and revalue black women's lives and contributions (Martin 2007, 1). She often makes fiction/narrative films because of her mother who was often tired after work and wanted to see a movie, not a documentary (Martin 2007, 7).

Dash's involvement with the LA Rebellion has also had implications for her work (Best 2015). Their works sought to reflect the full complexity of black experiences and as a member, Dash has unwavering affection for independent film as political and aesthetic expression. Dash does not feel like humans understand the world in a binary way, she says that our articulations have rhythms and they are circular in shape. Her work is distinctly feminist, as most of her protagonists are women, and she tries to illustrate the complexity and human subjectivity in her characters – characters who are motivated by and celebrate their histories.

There is liberatory power in women making movies. As Mary Ann Doane (2009, 2) states, the "gaze is the possession of the camera." *Illusions* (1972) is a prime example of using revisionist history to write women into the formations of Hollywood and to value females using their power to help other women. The main characters are Mignon Duprée (Lonette McKee), a black woman studio executive who appears to be white, and Ester Jeeter (Rosanne Katon), a black woman and aspiring star who dubs the singing voice for a white Hollywood star. Dash sets out to set history straight, to tell the untold stories of black women and write us into history U.S. WWII filmmaking. Mignon's blackness is revealed through the kindness that she shows Ester. Dash wants to nurture and protect younger black women, and the looks of recognition between the two black women is a "shared gaze that establishes their solidarity" (hooks 2004, 246). Like the women filmmakers of *Filming Desire*, Dash wants to defy what the world typically shows and illustrate the visuality of beauty between women. *Illusions* is filmed in black and white and the time is 1942, a year after Pearl Harbor when the U.S. is engaged in WWII. Dash's rationale is that "the influence of the screen can't be overestimated," and she actually has the protagonist, Mignon, say this in the film to a WWII lieutenant working at the studio. When people see engaging stories onscreen, they believe it.

The film problematizes the issue of race and spectatorship (hooks 2004, 245). Mignon claims space of knowledge production in Hollywood, so she can subversively imagine us inside of "filmic discursive practice". For Dash, pleasure comes from writing black women into history and showing how we can support each other and have our stories told on screen. I hope to utilize this perspective in the writing of *Brooklyn Bedroom*. Dash stays away from the trope of "Everybody's Lady" or signifiers of a generalized desire because this discursively constructed woman is an annihilation of women's memory and history (Doane 2009, 6). The work instead

points to the frustration in trying to “parlay visibility, opportunity, or institutional access into actual change” (Davis 2014, 150). After all, Mignon is in a position of power but how much is it worth? Furthermore, Dash captures Mignon’s gaze on Ester and Ester’s gaze on Lila Grant (Gaye Kruger), the white actress to which her studio time is giving a voice. These camera shots propose how spectatorship, in all its convoluted rules on gender and race “always entails a mix of identification with and estrangement from an image (Davis 2014, 150). In many ways, Dash is saying that looking is always beyond a matter of black and white.

Whole Bodies

As is the case with all the women of *Filming Desire*, Dash wants to depict whole women with whole bodies. In *Four Women* (1975), Dash uses a woman of color dancer to perform the lyrics of Nina Simone's song "Four Women" (1966). The film won Best Women’s Film at the Miami International Film Festival (1975). The dancer’s body, in its entirety, flows within the mis-en-scene and her body seems to connect black women of different phenotypes despite the exploitation of the black female body from slavery and beyond. In many ways, the dancer enacts the misery of double consciousness as the film opens with her dancing within a sheet creating shadows. The viewer can feel the dancer’s pain and resilience in every move. As the song states, "My skin is black/My arms are long/My hair is woolly/My back is strong/Strong enough to take the pain/inflicted again and again." The pain of the four women is embodied by the light skin dancer and Dash insinuates that the pain lives in all women of color regardless of what we look like. In many ways, the hurt and resilience that lies in the dark woman’s body can be perceived as a source of solidarity. The dancer’s body – her hair and arms and legs – is all of our bodies.

In *Praise House* (1991), Dash brings us back to the dance as a metaphor for the complexity and wholeness of the female body. This film combines elements of theater, dance

and music based on the rhythms and rituals of Africa. Dash collaborated with Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, founder and choreographer of Urban Bush Women, to investigate the foundation of creativity and its influence on three generations of African American women. *Praise House* shows the emotional penitentiary numerous people inhabit, even as it celebrates the perseverance of belief and creativity, and the magnificent heritages African Americans have sustained against all odds. “Draw or Die” is believed by the painter and the heroine of *Praise House*, Hannah, who is being taken care of by her Grandmother but manipulated by her practical and no-nonsense mother. When her grandmother’s spirit shouts “Draw or Die” to Hannah, she embodies her choice for personal desire in a dance piece that celebrates a future in creativity and imagination.

In *Subway Stories: "Sax Cantor Riff"* (1997), Dash explores unexpected emotion pouring out of the body. It was written and directed by Dash and began as a contest among New Yorkers who submitted stories about their experiences within the New York City Subway. Starring Taral Hicks, and with a short appearance by Sam Rockwell, this film celebrates the unanticipated musical presents that a subway can impart. In overlapping duets between a saxophone player (Kenny Garrett), with a gospel singer and then a Jewish singer, the spectator finds the subway to be an underground symphony. It all begins with a young African American girl on a payphone making a call to her dying mother in the hospital. In this film, strangers of the metropolis connect their bodies via sorrow and hope in an extraordinary emotional outpour in what can be a very ordinary place.

The hegemonic male lens often makes women represent nothingness, either a deficit of the penis (Doane 1981, 30) or a lack of sexual experience – a zero – which must be made visible for audiences on screen to assume virginity (McDonald 2010, 2). As with Varda and others in *Filming Desire*, Dash is fascinated by the magical nature of full bodies, by seeing women in their entirety. For Dash, women as whole bodies also carry figurative meaning. Dash repositions

black women as narrative agents – as women who speak with passion in their mouths – placing them at the center of films (Mellencamp 1994) and she has characters who allow black women to take pleasure in seeing themselves. Whereas commercial films use virginity as a vehicle for misogyny, representing heterosexuality and false femininity (McDonald 2010), Dash shames slut shaming. As *Daughters of The Dust* main character states when the film opens, "I am the whore and holy one, I am the whore and the virgin, and many are my daughters". Women as human beings are whole women; we are plural, complex, and ambiguous – like men are often afforded the privilege to be. We are multifaceted and autonomous beings, not zeros.

Remembering Women

As Doane (2009, 6) remarks about the work of creating stories about and for women, the task must be to "produce remembering women. Women with memories and hence histories." Remembering woman defies mainstream media's discursive constructions. Creating women with memories and histories resonates with what many in *Filming Desire* stated about the importance of building up to and around love scenes – in other words what makes a love scene sizzle is subtext and subtext is memory. In *The Diary of an African Nun* (1977), Dash illustrates herself as a remembering woman by building her first narrative film from a short story by Alice Walker, an African American novelist, short story writer, poet, and activist most known for *The Color Purple*. The film is about Gloria Dione, wife of Christ, wife of the Catholic Church. Gloria is a nun in Uganda and she weighs the void she finds in her assumed relationship with Christ. Gloria is particularly conflicted over the idea of devoting her life to a white god. In *Daughters of the Dust* (1991), Dash gives us even more of women with histories with the visually spellbinding ethnographic work on the Gullah people living on the Sea Islands off the South Carolina-Georgia coast at the turn of the 20th century. The Gullah women recall and remember much of what their ancestors brought with them from Africa because of their isolation. All of the main characters are

women – women with histories, memories and stories, women with whole bodies who carry their ancestry in their strides. Dash states that Toni Morrison and Kathleen Collins were her 1960s/70s influences for making *Daughters of The Dust* (Dash and Baker, 1992, 151).

Dash's *The Rosa Parks Story* (2002) tells the story of Civil Rights activist Rosa Parks (Angela Bassett) from her time as a child in private-school to her public fight in opposition to racism and segregation. Parks advocates for children in the community who have suffered racial discrimination as a secretary for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. However, when she is taken into custody after upon refusing to give up her bus seat for a white passenger, Parks stirs the 1955 Montgomery Bus Boycott. Dash was asked by Angela Bassett, one of the film's producers, to direct the film and revise the script. Dash depicts an important historical event but doesn't just represent Parks as an historical icon of the Civil Rights movement.

Rosa Parks is portrayed as a remembering woman who heeds several acts of discrimination against her and the people she knows and loves in the community. She isn't just a woman who decided not to give up her seat, she is intelligent, fierce, vulnerable and loving. At times, Parks' husband thinks she's looking for trouble but she tells him "if we don't take a stand now, what's to stop them from continuing to degrade us?" Because she is a woman who stays close to her memories, her behavior strongly desires to meet her ethical vision and eventually the husband sees her wisdom. The film illustrates the complexities of family dynamics for Parks when she needs the support to find the courage to fight back and Dash shows Parks as a woman with a family, a child, and a husband. She is also portrayed as a woman with sexual and sensual needs – the scene where the husband handles her hair in their bedroom is intimate and strikingly soft.

After decades of filmmaking, Dash continues her meditation on history with the short film, *Standing at the Scratch Line* (2016). The film is an elegy for the Great Migration, the long journey many African Americans took from the South to the North at the onset of the 20th Century. With its mesmerizing flute and striking photographs, it is no wonder Dash describes the film as a “celebration of sacred spaces”. It opens and closes with the narration of a woman delivering part of Guy Johnson’s novel *Standing at the Scratch Line* and Dash gives an impressionistic illustration of the large-scale emigration of African Americans. Dash’s work suggests the sense of community and connection to spirituality and many images focus on a pair of AME (African Methodist Episcopal) churches—Mt Zion AME in Charleston, SC, and Mother Bethel in Philadelphia. The film is a short meta-narrative that mixes archival footage and film Dash shot herself, along with the visual motif of a worn suitcase. The suitcase travels from place to place and from black and white to color; this illuminates the suitcase as a metaphor for all of the people who made this great migration. Dash’s work gives generations of ordinary black Americans visibility and is hopeful about a historically difficult time for many making a new home and for black Americans today still living in alienation.

The world awaits Dash’s upcoming documentary, *Travel Notes of a Geechee Girl*, where she continues her ethnographic work on the Gullah Geechee people of coastal South Carolina. It is set to focus primarily on Vertamae Smart Grosvenor, a writer (four books), actor, storyteller, broadcaster, grandmother, griot, culinary anthropologist, and significant figure in five watershed cultural movements that aided in the definition of American history: Beat Literary Movement, Black Power Movement, Black Arts Movement, New Black Cinema, and Food as Cultural Memory. As a Gullah Geechee, Grosvenor is one of many who retained several facets of their African heritage because of the geographical isolation of the coastal landscape and the resilient sense of place and family valued by the community members. Dash intends to tell

Grosvenor's story, making known her place in American history to broaden the memories of cinema goers and depict yet another complex woman who acts in remembrance of and connection to her history. Dash's sensual and imaginative work moves beyond the discursively constructed woman, it moves beyond Third World women as victims. Her work shows that a practice of opposition is important but not enough – as opposition in itself cannot bring satisfaction to the woman of color desiring freedom in her life and in representation. As a black woman who gives voice to the history and subjectivities imbedded in women's bodies, Dash is a Third World Feminist filmmaker – a positionality vital to the representation and liberation of female sexuality. Dash illustrates how the history and subjectivities imbedded in women's bodies calls for a re-imagination of sexuality.

C. Sexuality and Identity

Society needs broader conceptualizations of eroticism and sexuality, for as “symbol making creatures we're influenced, guided and constituted by sexual identity” (Madison 2005, 64). Lorde's definition of the erotic opens doors for a female sexuality that includes and transcends the act of sex. As she states, “we are taught to separate the erotic demand from most vital areas of our lives other than sex” (1984, 55). This is done to control and undermine female autonomy, making us think that eroticism is only performable in the bedroom for our male partners. Of course, women so empowered with the knowledge that the erotic is always present within them put hegemonic structures at risk. French filmmaker, novelist and Professor of Auteur Cinema at the European Graduate School, Catherine Breillat, states that the search for sexuality is not a search for lust because sexuality is more than lust, it is identity (Mandy et. al 2000). Breillat's films provide explicit depictions of sexual acts which some might consider pornographic. Although *Brooklyn Bedroom* is not interested in the performance of explicit sexual acts, Breillat's concept of sexuality as broader than lust is ideology important to the theoretical

framework of my dissertation.¹²⁸

¹²² There is much debate about the distinctions between what is erotic and what is pornographic. See “Eroticism as a Way of Life” on pg 81 of this dissertation. For general information on this debate, see Dillon (1988), Maes (2011) and McDowall (2008) in the reference section of this document. For more on this debate in reference to Breillat, see Murphy (1999) and Williams (2001) in the reference section of this document.

Eroticism is about performing our lives inside of our own bodies. As Lorde states, "We have been raised to fear our deepest cravings" (Lorde 1993, 53). Yet the erotic cannot be claimed through other people, women must touch their creative selves, doing what is "self-affirming in the face of a racist, patriarchal, and anti-erotic society" (Lorde 1984, 60). As women, we have somehow come to doubt that power which surfaces from our innermost and nonrational knowledge (1984, 55). We have come not to listen to our own bodies. Yet, "performance invites us to understand the body as its own evidence" (Madison 2009, 196). In many ways, eroticism is an epistemology. As Trinh T. Minh-ha states, western intellectual knowledge is often for its own sake and that is a "sickness" (Trinh 1989, 2). Ethnographers operate in worlds which they are uninvited, "profane on a sacred land" (Trinh 1989, 1), yet there is not invitation needed to listen to one's own body. As Madison argues, critical ethnography doesn't leave the body behind, "representation and identity are largely mediated through the performer's body – what it does and says" (2005, 178).

For Denzin, performativity (or our everyday practice of doing) and performance (what's already done) is a way of revealing agency (Denzin 2003, 4). He reminds us about Butler's discussion of gender "reality" and how it only gets reconstituted through social performances (Denzin 2003, 10). In her everyday life, a woman can listen to herself and do what brings her pleasure, and seek her innermost yearnings: this behavior has the potential to change gender realities for women from one of subjugation to spaces of power and self-love. Eroticism as a way of life, as performative practice of everyday life is crucial to dismantling archaic ideas of race

and sexuality. Eroticism uses the body as the first line of defense, as the site of resistance. The theoretical landscape of my dissertation relies on the idea that the body and the mind are a site for sexual satisfaction, and that writing is an erotic expression of resistance. Also, the work of revisionist history, as exemplified by Julie Dash, and exploring what brings women visual pleasure is important to conceptualizing sexuality as identity and the liberation work I want to do with my dissertation. On a daily basis, women need to reconstitute the social performance of embracing their sexuality, for human beings are constructed by their sense of sexuality; it is our source of strength and identity. In this embrace, women of color mustn't leave behind Third World feminism behind because it constitutes our historically situated oppression and resistance and therefore, expands possibilities for liberation.

APPENDIX C

LITERATURE REVIEW

- A. In Defense of Third World Feminism**
- B. Hegemonic Representation: Powerlessness and Victimization**
- C. Whose Story?**
- D. Resistance**
- E. Shattering the "Discursively Constructed Woman"**
- F. Moving Beyond Pain**
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A. In Defense of Third World Feminism

Women of color still need to perform the consciousness of Third World feminism. In Ranjoo Herr's article, "Reclaiming Third World Feminism: or Why Transnational Feminism Needs Third World Feminism," she argues for the importance of nation-states and nationalism for transnational feminism and the timely need to take Third World feminism back (2014). Third World feminism and transnational feminisms came about to resist white second-wave singular considerations of gender (Herr 2014, 4). Transnational feminism is critical because it marks the experiences of women and girls from around the world affected by global capitalism (Mohanty 2002, 514). Yet, Third World Feminism is important to transnational feminism because it pays close attention to Third World women's subjugation and resilience in women's historically contextualized intersections of gender, race, class, and nation (Herr 2014, 18). Third World feminism emerged during the U.S. post-WW II period, built from the voices of subjugated peoples. The terminology "Third World" is not anachronistic, its language is still applicable to "most clearly approximate the features of the world as we understand it"

(Mohanty 2002, 506), particularly if feminists are interested in the eradication of colonialist structures and performing narratives that speak to that goal (Herr 2014, 25).

Woman of color still need Third World feminism. Both Third World feminism and transnational feminism employ the analyses of Third World women's historically situated oppression and resistance, and Third World women's autonomy and expression should be respected (Herr 2014, 5). Third World feminism and transnational feminism should work together and be redefined as partners to make liaisons of "noncolonizing feminist solidarity across borders" (Mohanty 2002, 503). Such a partnership is important, not just to comprehend the material conditions forming women's lives in various locations, but also "to adequately account for Third World women's oppression and resistance in their historically situated intersections of gender, race, class, and nation" (Herr 2014, 18). In many ways, transnational feminists need to participate with nation-states, so their behavior aligns with their core principles.

U.S. born Chicana Chela Sandoval puts forth the theory of oppositional consciousness in her book *Methodology of the Oppressed*. She speaks about oppositional consciousness as a strategy, a method, used to resist colonial structures and false representations. Pointing to decolonial writers such as Anzaldúa, Moraga, Franz Fanon, Derrida, Foucault, Lorde, Roland Barthes, Sandoval makes the argument that their work greatly influenced the post-modern world as mechanisms of love (2000, 10). These writers, among others, formed the de-colonial bridges that created late-20th century critical theory: their writings participate in the theories, hopes, desires, and ambitions to decolonize sex, gender, race, ethnic, and identity. Sandoval uncovers the hidden by discussing the oppositional consciousness that so "quietly influenced the history of U.S.-Euro consciousness throughout the twentieth century. Exposed is a rhetoric of resistance,

an apparatus for countering neocolonizing postmodern global formations” (2000, 1). Sandoval’s “differential consciousness” is a referent to Anzaldúa’s workings of the “soul” and Audre Lorde’s description of the “erotic” as a place where “our deepest knowledges” are found (2000, 5). It is a method of remaking, of self-definition and resistance which provided new modes of thinking that emerged during the U.S. post– WW II period, built from the voices of subjugated peoples (Sandoval 2000, 7).

B. Hegemonic Representation: Powerlessness and Victimization

All feminism isn't created equal. The Third World woman is often represented "as a singular monolithic subject" in western feminist text (Mohanty 1984, 333). In what follows, I elaborate on the extent of the “monolithic subject” as problematic discourse detrimental to female sexuality and liberation, especially for women of color. White second wave feminism was born of false universalism preventing the exploration of the complex and multiple oppressions experienced by women all over the world whose cultures experienced colonization. Furthermore, hegemonic feminism tends to focus on demonstrating the powerlessness of Third World women. Hegemonic feminists choose not to focus on the “material and ideological specificities” that form women of color’s diverse experiences nor acknowledge the various subjectivities present in Third World women’s life (Mohanty 1984, 333). This is also what is problematic about transnational feminism; there is a tendency to ignore women’s local experience and the variation operating in their stories. According to Mohanty, the western feminist texts in which she analyzes “discursively colonize the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in the Third World, thereby producing/re-presenting a composite, singular "Third World Woman"” (1984, 335). Somehow, within western feminist

texts, Third World women are always oppressed regardless of their location, and this false premise produces a singularity of storytelling because it ignores the intersectional identities of the Third World. In many ways, western feminism's representation of Third World women is colonizing, as it subjects women to further structural domination and oppresses their human subjectivity. Mohanty mentions *Women of Africa: Roots of Oppression* by Maria Rosa Cutrufelli, who is called an Italian writer, sociologist, Marxist and feminist. Mohanty marks her curiosity as to whether anyone would write a book in 1984 by the name: "Women of Europe: Roots of Oppression"? So Mohanty asks, "what is it about cultural Others that make it so easy to analytically formulate them into homogeneous groupings without regard for historical specificities?" (1984, 340). That's an important question, but I must also ask why particular writers and scholars think they have the right to homogenize women in this way? And although my question is not the specific scope of this work, it is an underlying curiosity for my interrogation of racist feminism.

Being coded as non-white somehow translates into subordinate – if women of color internalize this and are treated like this, then sexual liberation becomes harder to achieve, if not out of reach. When Mohanty discusses "the production of the 'Third World Woman' as a singular monolithic subject in some recent (Western) feminist texts", she illustrates how women of color are coded as non-Western (333). Codifying women of color around the world as "others" covertly produces the binary of us vs. them and reinforces hegemonic feminist writers as "Western" (Mohanty 1984, 334). As Spivak notes, "it's a violent project to constitute the colonial subject as 'other'" (1988, 281). Despite the fact that Third World women are illogically constructed as the "Third World Woman," it is still authoritative and to that extent violent towards the world's perception of non-white women. Because Third World women are posited as the other, they become homogenized and categorized as an object of examination (Mohanty

1984, 337). This objectification is stimulated by a desire to paint Third World woman as victims, in particular, as victims of male violence. Gender difference becomes falsely synonymous with “female subordination” and power therefore gets conceptualized in simple binaristic ways: “people who have it (read: men), and people who do not (read: women). Men exploit, women are exploited” (Mohanty 1984, 344). For example, the African women are portrayed as dependent and married women who are sufferers of the colonialism. What’s especially problematic about this portrayal is that it “assumes an ahistorical, universal unity between women” and solidifies the concept of female subordination (Mohanty 1984, 344). If women of color are to listen to the yes within and explore pleasure, they must refuse to see themselves as they are portrayed by hegemonic feminisms and be skeptical about whose story is actually being told.

C. Whose Story?

Storytelling is a type of cultural and social technology; it conveys ideas, history and is used as a pedagogical tool in society. The Third World Woman’s homogenization is an implicit way to differentiate narratives of the first vs. the Third World, hence the Third World Woman is often constructed as feeble and defenseless within their country’s socio-economic systems. So, whose story is being told? As Mohanty describes, “It is time to move beyond the Marx who found it possible to say: They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented” (1984, 354). What Mohanty describes as western feminism and what Spivak (1988) describes as hegemonic feminism, steal subjectivity from Third World women. “What happens when this assumption of ‘women as an oppressed group’ is situated in the context of Western feminist writing about Third World women?” (Mohanty 1984, 351). It is there that the colonialist strategy can be detected. By concentrating on the portrayal of women in the Third World and representing western interests while doing so, western feminists present themselves as the real subjects in the world’s historical narrative. It is important to

place western intellectual production into perspective, as it is in partnership with western international economic structures and interests (Spivak 1988). Within this paradigm, Third World women can never escape the sweeping generalizations projected upon the colonial object.

According to Frank Ukadike, “African women filmmakers are facing the challenge of regaining for women the power of self-definition and self-representation” (1999, 127). Because of generalized representations perpetrated by the colonial project, all women of color are actually confronted with a (self) representation crisis (Foster 1996). As Susie Tharu states, “at every turn we are confronted with the problem of narrative” (1986, 864). The woman of color intellectual must deal with representation (Foster 1996, 214) and the power of representation should be in the hands of those being represented. As Ukadike states, there should be “black control over black culture and its products” (1999, 129). But there is always the variable of gender, for even black men who have been colonized tend to see through the hegemonic male gaze (hooks 2004). In Africa and other Third World regions, female subjectivity has been largely conceptualized by men and not women. Third World feminist media producers have the capacity to reorganize investigations of the “other” and move them “toward the center” as a type of “cinematic decolonization” (Ukadike 1999, 128). There is a lineage of the media creating misleading images of the African woman in the history of international cinema (Ukadike 1999, 127). African women filmmakers such as Safi Faye (*Selbe: One among Many*, 1982) and Salem Mekuria’s Sidet (*Forced Exile*, 1991) have produced documentaries subverting the hegemonic media’s idea of African women (Ukadike 1999, 132). Resistance is necessary to liberation.

D. Resistance

In Spivak's article, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", she offers an interrogation of Western ways of knowing that do not allow for oppressed peoples to use their voice. In Derrida's description of deconstruction the sign must be questioned – the language that we use must be investigated. Women of color film and media makers have rejected the language of traditional cinema (Spivak 1988, 308). Pratibha Parmar, who identifies as a lesbian Kenyan-born Indian Black British activist, states that her work begins with "an assault on racism, sexism, and homophobia" (103). In *Queer Looks: Perspectives on Lesbian and Gay Film and Video*, Parmar does not speak from a place of oppression but from one that challenges that oppression (Foster 1996, 73). So, yes, the subaltern can and do speak: Third World feminists invert the gaze and the spectator.

Women filmmakers of the African and Asian diaspora seek spaces of agency and creative energy where "cultural agency opens up-and holds together-the performative and pedagogic" (Foster 1997, 155). According to Manthia Diawara, these spaces of agency allow women of color filmmakers to reveal and bridge the black spaces which have been disconnected and overwhelmed by white colonialism (Foster 1997, 128). Despite the fact that decolonizing the gaze and the reconstruction of diaspora is challenged by hegemonic western distribution structures, oppositional practice still persists historically. During the early 20th Century, filmmakers such as Elope Gist, (a contemporary of Oscar Micheaux who was also black) wrote, directed, and "self-distributed revivalist spiritual films, exhibited as traveling evangelist during Great Depression" (Foster 1996, 123). Lita Lawrence, Zora Neale Hurston (also a playwright), and Alice B. Russell were also making films in the early 1900s. These media makers attempted to illustrate diverse sides of black life and culture.

According to Gwendolyn Foster, Third World women filmmakers continue to resist harmful images and produce counter cinema into the late 20th century. Zeinabu Irene Davis,

discussed more thoroughly later in this essay, states clearly the importance of using an oppositional gaze to reclaim Black female subjectivity through lyrical (re)creations of “time, the body, and an exploration of spatial configurations” (Foster 1997, 16). Black British filmmaker, Ngozi Onwurah, pushed the boundaries of storytelling and ethnographic cinema by positing the body as the main central site of an antiimperialist cinematic communication, perceiving the body as the set. Onwurah made *And Still I Rise* (1993), a short film inspired by Maya Angelou, which opens with her inspirational quote: "We must encounter defeats but we must not be defeated, but in fact it may be necessary to encounter defeats so that we'd know who the hell we are." The film is an intense consideration of popular culture's exoticization and loathing of black women's sexuality. It is a documentary portrait of the real and devastating effects that these representations have on the experiences of actual black women. It uncovers the violence in hegemonic media representations and by doing so resist those images as authentic constructions of women.

E. Shattering the "Discursively Constructed Woman"

In Spike Lee's *She's Gotta Have It*, Nola is the discursively constructed woman and so are the little girls and grown women who hide behind men in mainstream cinema. According to Sheila Rowbotham, representation is important and the "inability to find ourselves in existing culture as we experience ourselves" is still problematic (Humphreys 1992, 35). Since film and tv maintain male supremacy and white supremacy, the gaze of resistance has ultimately formed; however what's crucial is how that dominance has yielded a gaze of liberation from independent cinema by women. This is what revisionist history in feminism is all about – women speaking back by salvaging and creating our own moments and memories. As Linda Williams and Adrienne Rich state, seeing the past with fresh eyes is an act of survival for women. Williams

defines revision as “the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes” and this act is vital to any gaze of liberation for women (Williams 1984, 83). Human beings are walking memories, we need to have a past in order to move forward.

Revisionist history is about creating alternatives in the world for what we want to see. The power of representation should never be underestimated. Every woman's psyche inextricably bound to "this discursively constructed woman" (Humphreys 1992, 66). According to Rowbotham, "in order to create an alternative, an oppressed group must at once shatter the self-reflecting world" of the discursively constructed woman and, “at the same time project its own image into history” (Humphreys 1992, 27). As Adrienne Rich states, women must engage in a "project of describing our reality as candidly and fully as we can to each other" (Humphreys 1992, 65). A woman can't continue to refuse herself and to look when she knows she won't like what she sees, so it's better that we look elsewhere for our pleasure, to women who create media to tell our stories.

F. Moving Beyond Pain

In "Femme Feminista," bell hooks discusses Beyoncé and how white supremacist definitions of beauty tends to inform the way that the popular artist presents herself to the public. However, hooks still acknowledges Beyoncé's beauty. hooks feels strongly that there is an indisputable beauty present in black women everywhere, and that is precisely why an idealization of white beauty has been institutionalized – to deny the reality of black beauty. There is much historical evidence for this suppression of black female beauty, including the 18th Century banning of black women's hair in Louisiana – apparently the styles were too elaborate and attracted white men (hooks 2010). According to hooks, “In the original language of the

Bible, boastful testimony declares: “How right they are to adore you! I am dark and comely. O ye daughters of Jerusalem.” That simple “and” was changed to a “but” (hooks 2010¹²⁹). Despite this, there is a resilience present in the self-definition and self-love of black women, for example there is a global resurgence, in Brazil and elsewhere, of “I am dark and comely”/“black is beautiful” and black pride in general. This is to say that to truly touch liberation, black women, Asian women, and other women of color must not just resist but must create lives of sustained health and joy and that satisfaction must also be performed and represented in our media. For as bell hooks states, “The function of art is to do more than tell it like it is-it’s to imagine what is possible” (hooks 2016).

In her essay, “Moving beyond Pain,” hooks examines the importance of moving our lives beyond adversity, beyond survival, to a space where we “dare to create lives of sustained optimal well-being and joy” (2016). hooks uses Beyoncé’s highly popular music video, *Lemonade*, in order to illustrate her point. Depictions of ordinary everyday black women are highlighted, composed as though they are royalty. The visual mis-en-scene is unique and it builds a strong symbol of black female sisterhood that rejects invisibility and refutes silence. Although the video “positively exploits” images of black female bodies by moving them to the center, representing

¹²³ This is an electronic source (blog), so no page numbers are cited, please see reference list for more information.

them as the norm, it is still all about the body. The body is still being used for transaction and despite the fact that this is not the intent of the video, which hooks believes is to “seduce, celebrate and delight”, it still uses the black female body as a commodity. However, the commodification is different from hegemonic representations because the video challenges “the ongoing present-day devaluation and dehumanization of the black female body” (hooks 2016).

At the same time, this media representation of women of color does not really surpass or reconfigure the traditional sexist designs of black female identity. The black woman is still a victim because of the celebration of rage that occurs in the video. Based on Beyoncé's life and with her as the lead character, the story is of the pain and trauma of being betrayed by a man. As hooks states, "She wreaks violence" with a baseball bat in her hand; she walks around smashing cars (hooks 2016). Her sexualization gets attached to emotional acts of violence as she demolishes without shame. Subliminally, the video points to the fact that underneath anger is pain – pain born of violence of lies and betrayal. However, this is not a productive feminism because gender equality and female power will never come about through acts of violence; there needs to be a focus on self-love and self-esteem. As Patricia Collins asserts, the black woman is "irrepressible. She is insulted, but she holds up her head; she is scorned, but she proudly demands respect"; this is the power of self-definition (2000, 98). The type of feminism that will end patriarchal domination begins inside women of color. Furthermore, for emotional violence against women of color to cease, our men must engage in the internal and external work of change.

Violence is a phenomenon that affects many women, and the women in *Brooklyn Bedroom* do not escape its reach. Feminist resistance and decolonizing how we see the world is crucial to the writing of this performance and exploring how it is that women can move beyond pain. Feminist resistance is vital to my work with *Brooklyn Bedroom* because it is a performance which uses women's histories and experiences to question the cultural ideology and practice of race and female sexuality. Recovering and imagining what women of color experience and telling our own stories is an act of decolonization vital to moving our subjectivities towards the center. Decolonizing the gaze with feminist resistance is important to understanding what gives

women visual pleasure, and *Brooklyn Bedroom* explores what sexual pleasure means and its association with identity. My dissertation project is an decolonization which recovers and reimagines women and their family history. The ability to move beyond pain and seek sustainable happiness is important to fully embracing a woman's already erotic nature. How do the women of *Brooklyn Bedroom* move beyond pain and explore the possibility that satisfaction in their lives is attainable? As a black woman, I wrote *Brooklyn Bedroom* to speak about how ordinary women can move beyond pain and touch a sense of sexual power and liberation – because indeed that liberation must extend beyond the bedroom and that's what Lorde's concept of eroticism makes clear. Third world women need not aim for a calculation of our abilities to survive pain but must look for and perform ways that celebrate moving beyond it (hooks 2016) and this is what *Brooklyn Bedroom* attempts to do. By paying tribute to Adrienne Kennedy, Ntozake Shange, Zeinabu Irene Davis, Trinh T. Minh-ha, and Hye Jung Park, this project also attempts to move beyond pain and celebrate Third World women's subjectivity in the world.

G. Creative Cultural Producers

In this section, I hope to provide biographical information for Kennedy, Shange, Davis, Minh-ha, and Park before I discuss their work in detail. The biographical information sets a foundation for the discussion of how I have used their creative cultural production to inform my dissertation project.

H. Women with Histories and Writing Resistance

Adrienne Kennedy

Kennedy's work makes important contributions to my performance because I relied significantly on it to develop the haunting psychological interiors of my central characters. Also, I utilized techniques of surrealism and magical realism to make the impossible possible and to

displace time. Kennedy, playwright, professor and Black Arts Movement artist, was born Adrienne Hawkins in Pittsburgh in 1931. She spent her childhood and youth in Cleveland and spent time growing up in Georgia, where she had both black and white relatives. Kennedy writes from 1964 to 2008 and is very inspired by African writers, including Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka. Kennedy was motivated by Lorraine Hansberry when her work *A Raisin in The Sun* made it to Broadway in 1959. Kennedy's work is known as avante garde and surrealist; her characters often revealing haunting interior dialogues. At once, her performance evokes the work of Sam Shepard, Amiri Baraka, Ntozake Shange, Arthur Miller, Edward Albee, and Wole Soyinka. *Funnyhouse of a Negro* is probably the work she is known most for, where the protagonist summarizes the underlying tension in Kennedy's work: "These are the places I exist in. I know no places. That is, I cannot believe in places. To believe in places is to know hope and to know the emotion of hope is to know beauty. It links us across a horizon and connects us to the world. I find there are no places, only my funnyhouse" (2001, 16). Kennedy struggles with her own racial identity and feels strongly that wearing the mask causes psychological turmoil – in her work, both the white and black worlds of the protagonist are uninhabitable.

Kennedy's plays are a communicative medium where women's historical intersections of gender, race, class and nation are explored and I developed my ethnodrama using this type of intersectionality. For example, *A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White* is a drama about Clara, a young Black intellectual woman grappling with the crisis of representation and this "ontological apocalypse is linked" to images of Hollywood women. Premiering in 1976 at the New York Shakespeare Festival, Kennedy uses the narrative to criticize white hegemonic power. The play identifies the history of "double consciousness" and speaks to the historical experience by black American women who watch movies where the characters are all white. The 1960s

and 1970s in the U.S. is a time where colonized groups are speaking back and the American theatre was being infiltrated by an array of works/voices from the borders. Therefore, an honest portrayal of the African American experience was of vital significance, and this portrayal is also of great significance to *Brooklyn Bedroom*.

As Manthia Diawara states, spaces of agency give women of color filmmakers the opportunity to uncover and connect those spaces trampled upon by white colonialism (cited in Foster 1997, 128). Kennedy also does this with her playwriting and is able to use resistance in these works to bridge the representational spaces of theatre and film. This is my goal with my dissertation performance. Clara herself only plays "a bit role," while the movie stars, including Bette Davis, Paul Heinreid, Jean Peters, Marlon Brando, Montgomery Clift, and Shelley Winters, "play out" the events of Clara's life for her and sometimes for her family members (78). Yet, Kennedy doesn't solidify the concept of female subordination. Clara, like Kennedy, is actually a playwright who is writing her own drama based upon her experiences with film. Clara's "performance thus turns into a performative act in which she becomes an agent through artistic creation", for example, she ends up choosing writing over her husband and family (Toth 2012, 1). *A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White* interrogates the sinister history of white bodies portraying black lives. The minstrel show, or minstrelsy, was an American custom of performance developed in the early 19th century. Each show contained music, comic skits, dancing and variety act. The acts were performed by white people in make-up or blackface trying to portray black people. *A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White* also interrogates the oppressive and inauthentic nature of Hollywood film. I resisted this inauthenticity in *Brooklyn Bedroom*, by using theatre and film to tell a story about black people written by black people and performed by black people.

Kennedy avoids the woman of color as a "singular monolithic subject" within her performances of the female experience, and my dissertation also explores more complex ways to dramatically represent women (Mohanty 1984, 333). *Funnyhouse of a Negro* (1962) and *The Owl Answers* (1963) remain crucial because of their conversations about "African American identity, resistance and agency" (Boucher 2006, 84). Kennedy pays particular attention to multi-racial female characters or mulattas who experience physical and psychological traumas which "demonstrate the traumatized psyche of the oppressed 'racial' identity" (Boucher 2006, 84). In *Funnyhouse*, Sara, born of a White mother and a Black father, has four aspects: Lumumba, Christ, Queen Victoria, and the romantic Duchess of Hapsburg. Each of her selves embody contradictions such as black and white, male and female, colonialism and independence. The selves are also strangely identical, speaking and repeating the same lines, at times in unison, Greek-chorus fashion. At the play's open, Sara's room is at center stage and her selves are around her. Ultimately, Sara's Negro self is ashamed of her black heritage while her white self and friends are not trustworthy. Sara commits suicide not because she is black but because her world is destroyed by the fictions of her projected white self. Because mainstream media focuses on white beauty, many women of color have a projected white self; this is why dramatic work, such as *Brooklyn Bedroom*, which embodies cultural pride and embracing of one's own sexuality, is important to create.

The "material and ideological specificities" (Mohanty 1984, 333) of Sara's world reject white as good and black as bad – my dissertation also complicates these binaries (for example Eric does not become the white male villain). Kennedy immerses us in a world where whiteness is a thing of "terror" (Kennedy 2001, 13). For Sara, "The quality of white light is unreal and ugly" while "blackness (is) unnatural" (12). Wherever the black father goes, "he carries black masks and heads" (16) and the white mother ends up being the "the poor bitch"

who hung herself– the liar. As a tormented Sara explains, her father “is a nigger who eats his meals on a white glass table”; he “didn’t hang himself but married a white whore” (26).

Kennedy uses these complex and contradictory understandings of identity to complicate black female subjectivity as a mode of resistance to traditional representations of identity and meanings of black and white.

According to hooks, Kennedy deals with racial hybridity of African American women’s history in the U.S. She avoids generalized representations perpetrated by the colonial project, and her women of color characters are actually confronted with a (self) representation crisis (Foster 1996). Kennedy deals specifically with women protagonists – these women’s stories are marked by a struggle for self-actualization (hooks 1992, 184). As Dubois states, “The plays of a real Negro theatre must be: One: About us” (Toth 2012, 1). hooks points out that Kennedy is fascinated by white culture, but despite this element of her work, her storytelling defies white constructions of blackness and unapologetically confesses about the crisis of identity operating in the spirits of the black female body. Kennedy’s writing served as a template in my dissertation project for performing black women’s own constructions of racial, cultural and sexual identity. Tally and her mother go through a process of self-actualization, and the world of the play gives the audience insight as to the authentic ways that black womanhood, Jamaican American culture, and sexual trauma and pleasure are embodied.

Ntozake Shange

Shange’s use of poetry with performance was instrumental to the writing of *Brooklyn Bedroom*; I used poetic devices such as metaphor and symbol to recreate the Rose family history. In what follows, I will give examples from her work that I have emulated. Shange’s performances are genre defying; she is a poet, novelist, essayist, screenwriter, and writer of children’s literature. Born Paulette Williams, Shange is from Trenton, NJ and was born in 1948.

She is from an upper middle-class African-American family; her father was an Air Force surgeon and her mother a psychiatric social worker. Shange has been very inspired by cultural icons like Dizzie Gillespie, Miles Davis and W.E.B. DuBois who were regular guests in the Williams residence. She was educated at the University of Southern California (1970–1973) and Barnard College. She is most known for her play *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow Is Enuf* (1977) and the feature film *For Colored Girls* (2010), she has also written

An Evening with Diana Ross (1977 television movie), the television special *Whitewash* (1994), and the play and film (2010), *For Colored Girls*. She has also written several collections of poetry and created other theatrical pieces that use poetry, dance, and music – known as “choreopoems”.

As a self-proclaimed black feminist, Shange creates women with histories and her work is critical to my project because I too have created women who speak of their past. For example, *Whitewash* creates a story through animation about a black child, Helene-Angel, who comes across white racist thugs on her way home from school. After yelling “hey niggers” at them, they beat up Helene’s brother and spray paint her face white. For quite some time Helene is haunted by what happened to her and is afraid to go outside. She is eventually able to return to school after dealing with the pain of the event and having the help of her grandmother. Shange based *Whitewash* on a true story and engages the history of black American women attacked by racist violence. Helene’s brother states, “what could I do?” and his statement is illustrative of centuries of racist violence inflicted upon the bodies of black women without rescue from the black man. On television, the local sheriff calls what’s actually a hate crime an act of “random violence” and a reporter asks if there is actually any proof as to whether a crime was even

committed. Here Shange interrogates the media and the misinformation often spewed about black people on television – we are rarely represented as the victims and often as the perpetrators. News reports say “white for a day” which could never be true. As Helene’s grandmother states, “we came up from the south to get away from this”, yet the history of black women in the United States reveals our perpetual immigrant status. Like Helene’s grandmother, I doubt that Tally’s mother is racist or hateful of white people, she is cautious and untrusting, knowing that there’s a clear American history of violent behavior by those who fear the evaporation of white supremacy.

For the Rose family, food is an important factor in their black American and Jamaican culture. In Shange’s 1982 novel, *Sassfrass, Cypress, & Indigo*, black women’s challenges, resilience and solidarity are illustrated through our recipes which have shown to be a gender-specific “indigenous knowledge system”. Certainly, these recipes exhibit the lineage of “trans-regional and transgenerational oral transmission of traditional food preparation among African women during the slave trade” (Clark 2007, 150). In confronting the suffering of historical loss, recuperating what was violently seized from African women in the New World, Shange reassures the reader that “[w]e are blessed, since we can find our ovens and stoves and make up for some of what we long for” (Clark 2007, 151). Shange engages a consciousness of recovery of an eradicated history and participates in the practice of the myriad number of complex ways in which women of color write their histories and recover the present. I think that food in *Brooklyn Bedroom* also works as a recovery mechanism – recovering the self, happiness, and pleasure.

Shange is interested in much more than sharing the pain of racism as experienced by women of color and so is my proposed project. In *Whitewash*, the potential for beauty

and redemption does surface. When Helene is having a difficult time facing the world, her grandmother tells her to bring her “pretty little face back”. She goes on to tell Helene,

you got to stand up and keep on living, you are just as beautiful on the inside as you are on the outside" when I was in your age kids in Georgia stood up to dogs, firehouses and police just so we could do what everyone else did, go to restaurants, ride buses, try on clothes in the stores, worship without being bombed, and believe you me, how much can I stand, people calling us horrible names, beating on us, as young as we were. I heard Dr. King speak in that church and I know I couldn't give up because if I gave up what I believed in I would end up with nothing...Those boys hurt you but they are the ugly ones, you have to see that and always remember that. (Shange 1994)

While the grandmother is expressing this to Helene, images of King and civil rights play in the background. Shange and the grandmother are calling on a particular legacy of black people's self-definition, resistance and survival. Furthermore, the lesson here is the importance of the family – in particular matriarchs – to provide a safe space for black children and to reinforce a sense of beauty and pride in the minds of our future. After her grandmother shares this with the little girl, letters from her classmates come in the mail. Soon, her entire class is outside of her door, telling her not to be afraid and that they are on her side and will walk to school with her for as long as it takes. Now this might seem utopian, but belief in Utopia is exactly what it will take for the U.S. to win the battle against racism. Multicultural solidarity isn't just a phrase, if one chooses to support the oppressed then s/he walks upon the humane side of history. Moving beyond the pain of racism and sexism must start with black women, yet should be in collaboration with black men, white women and other allies.

The female character who opens *Colored Girls* (Shange) talks to a baby girl cradled in her arms: “what would little colored girls say if we could get them all to talk?” This is what the play and film are about – voicing the subjectivities of colored women. The group of women in the performance do each other’s hair and talk about things in their lives that are affecting them. Each with poetic monologues, they talk about hair, sex, abuse, abortions, men; they talk about dancing to keep from crying. All of a sudden a bedroom turns into a liminal space of black female subjectivity. Each woman has a lingering loneliness and a strong sense of desire to say something, and they wear their sexualities on their sleeves. They are “colored girls who have considered suicide but moving to ends of our own rainbows” because they’ve chosen not to be silent, they’ve chosen to create a space of resistance in the safety of other colored women. As one woman states as a “requiem for myself”, she wants “love without the deep scars of bitch, whore” and other offensive words that attack women. She wants to be with a man and be herself, she states that even though she is sad sometimes, “let me love you just like I am, a colored girl...my love is too beautiful to have thrown back in my face”. She proclaims that she is no longer interested in hearing sorry. Shange uses *Colored Girls* as a way for women of color to speak back about what they no longer have to find acceptable – the women in the Rose family also have this to say as it is an important facet of embodying liberation.

Shange’s performances are masterpieces of women of color speaking to other women of color – the audience for *Brooklyn Bedroom* are women in general and black women, in particular. Shange’s performances recover a truth in the black female body, many times often refusing to acknowledge the idea that there is an audience at all (Mahurin 2013, 330). Her stories occur between the black female body and black female body. Through poetic language and movement, Shange allows her characters to exist in more symbolic spaces, and their physical bodies are proof of their being. The colored girls are not merely understood by what they say

but also “what their bodies do” (Mahurin 2013, 330). She gives us a world inhabited only by black women and it is through their bodies that the performance is given the ups and downs of life. With song and dance, there is always the material reality of the body and that body is continually re-affirmed and self-defined as woman and as colored. I want to create the kind of space that Shange does with my dissertation project, where the Rose family is just being themselves and not putting on a performance for whiteness.

Zeinabu Irene Davis

Davis is an independent filmmaker and Professor of Communication at University of California, San Diego. I incorporated the revisionist elements of her ethnographic work and utilized her motif of the black mother as a source of strength, knowledge and power. Davis was born April 13, 1961 in Philadelphia, PA. She works in both film and video and has completed projects in narrative, documentary and experimental genres. In 1989, Davis received her MFA in film and video production at UCLA and has produced many award-winning works since. Her award-winning works include but are not limited to *Mother of the River* (1995), a drama about a young slave girl, *A Powerful Thang* (1991), a love story set in Afro-Ohio, and *Cycles* (1989), an experimental narrative looking at the emotional and spiritual journey of a woman. *Compensation* (1999), her dramatic feature film, depicts two connected love stories that offer a portrait of Black deaf culture; it received the Gordon Parks Prize for Directing. She has dedicated her career to documenting black female subjectivity and her last project, *Spirits of Rebellion* (2011), is a documentary which brings fellow L.A. Rebellion filmmakers to explore topics in African American film.

Davis’ work shows the power of black motherhood, and this theme was important to the telling of the Rose story. Davis’ *Mother of the River* reaches back to slavery and does revisionist

history work telling the story of a young slave girl who wants her and her father to be free. It is set in the 1850s. A young girl's mistress threatens to "sell you like your mammi, so you'll never see your papi again". Walking along the river, she meets a magical woman called Mother of the River. The girl and her father were separated from their mother by slavery and is shocked that the river has a mother; the mysterious woman replies "everything on this earth has a momma." *Mother of the River* becomes a good friend and saves the young girl from receiving repeated lashes. The magical woman gives the little girl a beautiful memory of re-uniting with her mother in a sunlit field, so that there in her heart the family is together. The Rose family has a strong sense of family, they are multiple characters within the character The Family. The Rose family women illustrate there is much value and respect for mother figures within the black family and the community. *Brooklyn Bedroom* also shows, as *Mother of the River*, the very important role that black mothers play in the resilience and self-definition of the black woman and the black family.

Davis, like many other black female filmmakers such as Julie Dash, is "engaged in a battle of ethics of ethnographic representation" (Foster 1997, 23). My dissertation project was up against this battle as well; it also rides the line of studying culture and using black women's stories to have our own saviors. *Mother of the River* is strikingly resistant to the typical narratives we see about slavery – the film is an uncommon representation of slavery from a young black girl's perspective. Hollywood continues to make movies about slavery, yet our history of oppression is rarely told through the eyes of black women, let alone a child. The young girl is well spoken and very clever, when all too often portrayals of the dumb slave are recycled in American cinema. *Mother of The River* is an intriguing character as the world rarely gets to see an angelic black woman with magical powers. *Mother of The River* is a hero and so is Josephine. She makes the blood on the little girl's hand disappear and, in many ways,

saves the child from losing herself. In doing so, *Mother of The River* offers hope, “we always have something to give even when you think you have nothing.” The mother in *Brooklyn Bedroom* offers hope to survivors of sexual abuse and represents that hero who is present in the everyday lives of black women.

Mother of the River points to the importance of motherhood, and that the power of the imagination must have been and still is important in black dreams of survival and liberation. The film also shows a rare portrait of a black male being the sole provider during slavery. We often get portrayals of the women being alone with their children or of another female family member taking care of the children if they have been split from their mother. Yet Davis reaches back to show us what fatherhood could have looked like during slavery. The little girl’s father is very concerned with her safety. He is also very gentle with her, after she is beaten for ridiculous reasons of child mischief, he gently cleans her wounds and kisses her on the neck. It is a very striking portrait of black fatherhood that is rarely seen in any type of cinema. Furthermore, the portrayal has implications for the contemporary black family and the importance of black girls turning into black women with black fathers in their lives. Fatherhood has not been of any specific focus in my dissertation project, yet I thought that this ethnodrama could deal in some way with fatherhood. However, the writing of *Brooklyn Bedroom* did not reveal elements of paternity and I did not want to add it in artificially. Beyond that, the use of fatherhood in Davis’ work was useful for me in terms of thinking of ways to extend mainstream portraits of the black family.

Love, particularly self-love, is stronger than hate: this is an important philosophy to my dissertation project and Davis’ work can be useful in the development of my story. Davis’ *Compensation* tells a black love story between a deaf woman and a hearing man. It uses the poetry of Paul Laurence Dunbar to resist the death of black intimacy and show the

possibilities of black love. The film shows us the main character's struggle to overcome racism, discrimination and disability and uses silent film techniques to make the story accessible to the hearing impaired. The performance symbolizes the myriad of possibilities that exist within language, love and communication. There is an uncommon love story that developed in *Brooklyn Bedroom*, and *Compensation* was useful in terms of how I explored the possibilities for love in an environment of fear.

Davis is very inspired by depictions of the hopes and dreams of African American women from the past and in the future and this was motivational to my work. The love story *Compensation* is told from the perspective of a black woman who is hard of hearing. *Mother of The River* is a rare interpretation of slavery from the eyes of a young woman. According to Gwendolyn Audrey Foster, "Davis has been working to reclaim lost spiritual legacies, and to change Black women's images since her very first films" (1997, 22). *Cycles*, for example, gives the spectator a visual and musical language that reflects the lives of black women. Displacing notions of time and alterity, Davis is able to give us a poetic metanarrative created from the specific storyline of a black woman waiting for her period. An extradiegetic clock ticks loudly as utterances of music from Africa comes in with voices of Miriam Makeba, Orisha chanting, and blues by Clora Bryant. Davis' work illustrates a move from the traditions of the colonial white gaze to a performance of the black woman's complex and diasporic gaze as subject, rather than object of hegemonic cinema (Foster 1997, 10). *Brooklyn Bedroom* utilizes the diasporic gaze, specifically the use of visual and musical language that reflects the lives of the black women in the Rose family.

Trinh T. Minh-ha

There is much to learn from Minh-ha's cultural and syncretic work, where she pays tribute to women as I did in my dissertation project. Born in Hanoi, Vietnam in 1952, Trinh T.

Minh-ha has lived most of her life in the U.S. and attended the University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign (1977). Professor of Gender & Women's Studies and of Rhetoric at the University of California, Berkeley, her background is in music, literature and ethnography. Her research experience in Senegal led to her first film work, *Reassemblage* (1982), a poetic film that surpasses the boundaries of cinema. Minh-ha is writer, composer, filmmaker, and theorist; her films also include *Surname Viet, Given Name Nam* (1989) *The Fourth Dimension* (2001), *Night Passage* (2004), and *Forgetting Vietnam* (2015).

Above all, Minh-ha's performances strive to be culturally specific and this was also my aim with *Brooklyn Bedroom* – using the women's Jamaican American heritage to center the narrative. In *Surname Viet, Given Name Nam*, Minh-ha speaks back to the idea that Third World women are all the same, i.e. subjects of oppression. The film portrays Vietnamese women (actors) giving a performance about Vietnamese female interviewee's experiences after the Vietnam War – the women are articulate and thoughtful. In *Forgetting Viet Nam*, Minh-ha also resists the monolithic Third World woman and through a performance collage of text, images, video, singing/poetry, and music, women from the community get to speak. In this way, women are having a conversation and as a female narrator states, "if women could trust women, then we could talk about liberation". Minh-ha's *Reassemblage* portrays the oral foundations of Africa's historical aesthetics; the fragmented structure of the film challenges the "linear and monolithic mandate" of western filmmaking (Gueye 2008, 15). Its reliance on historically oral African philosophy places the Senegalese women, who the film portrays, within their own culturally contextual way of understanding life. Minh-ha uses this technique to respect Senegalese culture but also for the film to encourage reflection and interpretation, as opposed to exoticizing the women as the "other" – the foreign commodity. In my ethnodrama, I wanted to portray the Rose

family within their own way of living life and seeing the world. And I wanted the project to embrace pluralistic voices, where black women of Jamaican and American ancestry get to speak.

Central to Minh-ha's work and the performance I created is focusing on women as the essential elements of life. In *Forgetting Viet Nam*, Minh-ha uses Vietnamese myth culture to explore the relationship between land and water. The film's visual and textual philosophy is based upon a myth of an ancestor whose tears flooded the river, and it is said that the country's floods are a way of remembering her. For the viewer, Vietnam becomes a woman. We see women in their market, eating and talking and selling; a woman plays traditional music; a woman orchestrates traditional Vietnamese water puppetry and we hear: "the survival of culture: women's prayer". She asks the audience to remember women in Vietnam's ability in forgetting the war with dignity. My dissertation project asks the reader to remember women, as women command the space of the performance and become the story.

Minh-ha's work questions "traditional anthropological intentions" and also perceives the idea of truth as a positivistic fantasy. Therefore, her work resists western narrative interest in making the reader/viewer satisfied with the way things are, and she challenges the traditional structure of story-telling with an "end" (Minh-ha 1989, 36). She also resists the western binary of mind/body and states, "we do not have bodies, we *are* our bodies...We write-think and feel- (with) our entire bodies rather than only (with) our minds or hearts...Women must write through their bodies" (Minh-ha 1989, 36). For Minh-ha, writing is a way for women to resist research as a colonial project, and in *When the Moon Waxes Red* she insists that our writing must dismantle the boundaries of public and private life (1991, 163). I strongly adhere to Minh-ha's perspective, and despite the fact that my dissertation has some traditional narrative linearity, I still challenge traditional concepts of time and reality with the use of film and the liminality of "counter-site." Also, my project does not have a traditional resolution made to

make the reader/viewer satisfied with the way things are in the world – I hope that many women in the audience will seek the erotic in their own lives.

Minh-ha feels that women of color can and should tell one another's stories, and this is important to my work as I have written about the lives of a family. Her feminist philosophy is that "otherness" is counterproductive and she depicts difference as the interconnectedness of difference and similarity, rather than difference as polarizations. She challenges the idea that Asians should make movies about Asians and Africans about Africans when Euro-Americans can try and represent the world. She also acknowledges that "Third World" does not sound negative when it comes from "Us members of the Third World" (Foster 1997, 98). Minh-ha is interested in being subversive to dominant western power and utilizing the "speaking nearby" paradigm as a way to connect the stories of Third World women from disparate cultures and identities. "Otherness" is counter-productive and, although my work does not speak for another culture, I still apply this idea of "speaking nearby" as a Third World woman writing about Third World women.

Hye Jung Park

Park is a first generation Korean-American independent filmmaker and film curator; her work is important to my dissertation research because of her focus on memory and breaking the silence about sexual violence. She was Co-Producer/Director of Third World Newsreel from 1988 – 2013 with J.T. Takagi; together they've produced several documentaries, including *Homes Apart* (1991), *The Women Outside: Korean Women and the U.S. Military* (1995), *The # 7 Train: An Immigrant Journey* (1999), and *North Korea: Beyond the DMZ* (2003). She has also co-produced the documentary *Until Daybreak* (1990) and *Pico Korea Workers*. Park earned a Master's degree in Media Studies from The New School for Social Research. She has been an Adjunct Professor at New York University, Hunter College, and The New School for Social

Research. She has also been Associate Director and Program Manager at Scribe Video Center, an organization dedicated to artistic media tools for social change. Park is currently the Program Director of Downtown Community TV Center, a media access center. Hye-Jung Park creates documentaries which hold a particular type of memory for Korea and the U.S.

Government sanctioned sexual slavery has a long history in South Korea and Park's work with *The Women Outside: Korean Women and the U.S. Military* (1995) highlights this often unspoken issue. Her experience as a first generation Korean American lends itself to a discourse of "particular haunting of representation and subjectivity" – memories of "our mothers speak with new force saying something about our lives here" (Kim & Choi 1998, 292-293). For example, it took 50 years to finally break the heavy silence surrounding the issue of Korean women being used as sexual servants for the Japanese military. In 1944, Japanese colonial teachers began to recruit girls 12-14 yrs old for comfort stations in Chongsindae, which the Japanese government stated as a necessity to avoid rape. The predicament of these women was ignored and silenced by the U.S., whose objective was to use Japan as an Asian base for capitalist expansion (Kim & Choi 1998, 126). The Korean War may have ended in 1953 but American military are still there in camp towns (180 in 1995). Clubs and brothels remain where over a million Korean women have worked in sex industry to service American soldiers. Many Korean women in the US can trace a marriage to a soldier who made their American life and dream possible, but many of these women brought here end up being abused by their husbands and/or some divorce and end up being poor and working in US clubs. The documentary is narrated by comfort women and demonstrates the colonial control over women's bodies still present in South Korea and the U.S. Like Park's work, *Brooklyn Bedroom* is interested in women of color who have experienced trauma speaking back about their experiences.

My performance resists the cultural normativity of gender, resisting what it means to be a woman under the hegemonic lens, and Park's work has helped me to illustrate this aspect of sexual liberation. In *The Women Outside*, Park begins with what South Korean women have been told by the government and the media makes a good woman: a woman "serves father first then husband and son...(she has) virginity until married." This is what the government and media has defined as a "good woman," despite their complicity in offering women jobs with minimal social mobility and offering very few alternatives for women who are trapped in the comfort industry. Yet the very women the government and media has attempted to silence speak in Park's film, they tell their stories of how they got into the business and the difficulty and familial shame they face which makes it hard to get out. Colonial history for the Korean government may have been "matters of the past", yet it was important for women to come out and tell their story (Kim & Choi 1998, 123). One survivor stated, "I am telling my life story so that no one else will have to go through the same things I did" (Kim & Choi 1998, 134). That comment is testimony to women using their histories to resist violence against the female body and produce better futures for other women. Although the film shows the many atrocities of this industry, the woman who begins the film also ends the film. She is pregnant and in with her soldier husband in Hawaii and states, "I think a good woman is someone who loves herself". She shares her intentions to go to school and get job skills and also states that she has every intention of telling her daughter about her past because "it's me, so there is nothing to hide." In this way, Park's work is empowering and lets the woman who has experienced social isolation and trauma redefine what it means to be a "good" woman. This concept of a good woman being a woman who loves herself is used in *Brooklyn Bedroom* as it is crucial to personal and socio-cultural redefinitions of sexuality. Tally illustrates this concept when she resists being controlled.

I have used Park's work to connect the stories of Third World women of Jamaican and American heritage. Although Hollywood cinema tends to miss cultural specificity in the lives of Third World women (Kim 2005, 187), Park's work attempts to specify detail *and* connect the stories of Third World people. For example, *The 7 Train: An Immigrant Journey*, illustrates how every day 550,000 people commute on the 7 train from Flushing to Times Square from 117 countries. The film follows the commute of a few passengers and gives them the opportunity to speak about their daily lives living in the U.S. Although the immigrants are coming from all over the world, it is striking how similar their experiences are – in many ways Parks uses the documentary to connect the stories of Third World women and people to the lives of people of color in the U.S. One family who Park follows is from Ecuador; their daughter tells us that they came to the U.S when she was 15 to avoid the many problems in Ecuador yet “people say you can make money here but they never say” how dangerous it is with drugs and prostitution and death around every corner. They never told her of the discrimination: “especially if you're black or Hispanic, for that reason we think they are kind of racist.” Racism, poverty and crime are issues that average hard working people of color, born in the U.S., face every day as well. Park's work with this film identifies the Third World status of American people of color and illuminates a space for shared understandings about our experiences. The story of a Third World woman does not come without her family and her culture and her history; this is why Tally's relationship to her family was important to developing her story.

I. Countering Mainstream Media

Although Zeinabu Irene Davis, Adrienne Kennedy, Ntozake Shange, Trinh T. Minh-ha, and Hye Jung Park may not identify as U.S. Third World feminists, their work speaks to this unifying identification. With theatre, film and poetry, they have created media that

communicate women of color's subjugation and resilience in their historically contextualized intersections of gender, race, class, and nation. The woman of color is in a self-representational crisis and allies are welcome, but only her feminist vision will end colonial patriarchy. For women of color, we must reclaim interpretations of our bodies and minds by remaking, self-defining and being resistant to Hollywood constructions woman of color identity. New modes of thinking have emerged since second wave feminism to speak back to the media and the world about the experience of U.S. Third World women. This representation of experience does not come without paying particular attention to women's histories, resistance and subjectivity.

U.S. Third World feminist creative cultural producers have made an effort to put forth women's stories as counter to traditional Hollywood filmmaking and as counter representation to hegemonic representations of women around the world. The goal for this counter performance is to use anti-colonialist feminist criticism to take up the media as a place of interrogation and to subvert the concept of what it means to be a woman of color. Furthermore, Adrienne Kennedy's work shows how theatre can be used as a forum to interrogate Hollywood cinema. This work celebrates women who use film and theatre to decolonize the gaze and self-define the woman of color. As African and Asian media producers, these women create a diasporic resilience possible for the decolonized subject. They have and continue to do the work in the process of recovering and visualizing subjectivity and agency. In Adrienne Kennedy's *A Movie Star Has To Star in Black and White*, Clara chooses her desire to write her own stories despite what others and society might expect of her. In *Whitewash* Ntozake Shange shows how a little girl can be saved by the practice of self-love that her grandmother instills in her. In *Mother of the River*, Zeinabu Irene Davis shows how a smart and beautiful slave girl can find peace in a river goddess and the unborn memory of reuniting with her mother. In *Surname Viet*,

Given Name Nam, Trinh T. Minh-ha gives us a visual celebration of women as Vietnamese culture from dancing to drums to the body as musical instrument. In Hye-Jung Park's *The Women Outside: Korean Women and the U.S. Military*, a pregnant mother, who used to be a comfort woman, takes us to a place of hope as she tells us how she is improving her life and that of her future daughter. Unlike their representation in hegemonic western feminisms, these Third World feminist women have not stopped at pain.

J. Eroticism as a Way of Life

What pleasures lie beyond pain? What do the possibilities for the liberation of female sexuality even look like? To radically change our lives, women must speak back and take hold of the erotic as a way of life. Eroticism is not sex, it is living in ways that give women pleasure and fulfillment. The world needs more women to recognize and perform their innate erotic power. Women need to dismantle the many spaces where female sexuality is not permissible because those very spaces restrict female identity in general. The cultural definition of what erotic means must be redefined as those behaviors of joy that allow the complete self to thrive. Eroticism is not the same as sexuality or desire: our identity is our sexuality because human beings are sexual beings. Because sexuality is identity, it includes a past of joy and suffering. What a human being wants is desire. Eroticism is when a woman agrees with that want and that want is satisfying and healthy to the overall growth of that particular woman. Women must practice this new definition because eroticism is the vehicle through which the liberation of female sexuality can occur. Eroticism is experiencing life knowing that satisfaction is a real possibility, embracing the people and activities in our lives where we find a sense of gratification and wholeness. Women must transcend slut-shaming language and other oppressive behavior of sexist discourse by creating and telling stories that destroy Western binaristic thinking (Anzaldúa

1987; Lorde 1984; Madison 2005). Women need to locate a viable performance space for female sexuality and tell stories about the lives of ordinary women who carve possibilities for resistance, liberation and desire in their lived experience.

Brooklyn Bedroom is not interested in graphic or pornographic illustrations of sexual acts. Society misuses the word erotic; it does not refer to the pornographic. Can women really feel complete in the superficial sphere of pornography? This work perceives of pornography as Lorde does when she states that pornography can be a denial of spiritual pleasure, a denial of “the internal sense of satisfaction” (1993, 50). “Erotic” has roots in the Greek word “Eros,” which means the embodiment of love in all its characteristics, formed from chaos and representing creative power and peace (Lorde 1973, 51). Simply stated, eroticism is experiencing life with the belief that gratification is achievable. Eroticism is when women listen to our inner being; it is what Lorde describes as a “life force of women” (Lorde 1993, 50). Eroticism is not suppressing one’s true feelings (Lorde 1993, 55). When women live our lives by external controls only, rather than listening to our internal know-how and desires, then we stray from the erotic forces that live within us. This internal know-how is constantly in conversation with the environment and external forces, yet it is always primal to that woman’s body. Not listening to one’s internal knowledge production leaves women vulnerable to tend to the needs of a structure that is arguably not driven by human need, let alone personal needs. A woman needs to figure out what it is that brings her pleasure and do it, seek those things in life which makes her feel satisfied. A woman has tapped into her eroticism when she loves herself no matter what and lives her daily life engaging that love.

The erotic can function in a variety of ways: for instance, in yielding the power that comes from genuinely participating in activities with another person. The delight of eroticism is available from many activities depending upon the woman. For Lorde that joy also came

from dancing, "my body stretches to music and opens into response, hearkening to its deepest rhythms, so every level upon which I sense also opens to the erotically satisfying experience" (1984, 58). She also found erotic pleasure in writing a poem, building a bookcase, or examining an idea. When humans stray from the significance of erotic development, when we stray from ourselves and attempt to fulfill eroticism only with others, there is more potential to use one another as objects of pleasure as opposed to participants sharing joy (Lorde 1984, 60).

K. The Erotic & Dismantling Dualistic Thinking

Since Lorde's definition of eroticism shows that satisfaction is attainable, women must cleanse our lives of stark inconsistencies that interrupt the peaceful existence of our sexuality. In order for women to tap into their full erotic potential, there must be harmony between the spiritual (psychic and emotional) and the political because that dichotomy is false (Lorde 1993, 53). "The white western patriarchal ordering of things requires that we believe there is an inherent conflict between what we feel and what we think -- between poetry and theory. We are easier to control when one part of our selves is split from another, fragmented, off balance" (Lorde 1984, 9). Western culture needs a "massive uprooting of dualistic thinking" (Anzaldúa, 1987, 80). Every individual, male or female, should be aware of her conflicting and meshing identities and use a hybrid angle of vision: "a new consciousness...a new mythos" with a "tolerance for contradiction" and "ambiguity" to challenge binary thinking in the Western world (Anzaldúa, 1987, 79-81). A new mythos would help us to transform the way we perceive reality. Anzaldúa reminds us that the "future depends on paradigms, on the straddling of two or more cultures" (Conquergood 2013, 60).

In order for women to tap into their full erotic potential, we must shatter the boundaries of gendered possibilities. Binaristic thinking is an excuse to separate us – gays from straight,

black from white, white women from women of color, women from men. Women cannot be sexual because men are. Men are expected to hunt for sex, to experiment with multiple partners to see what they like and to have sex as a normal part of male identity. A woman's sexuality, however, should be confined to one partner and be confined to the act of sex – it is *not* supposed to consume her being or define her as a woman. Telling stories that destroy western binaristic thinking will inevitably help women to transcend slut-shaming language and other oppressive behaviors that follow from sexist discourse by creating spaces of pluralism (Anzaldúa 1987; Lorde 1984; Madison 2005).

Instead of focusing on human difference, the future will be marked by our abilities to take those differences and make them assets. Divide and conquer is the colonialist strategy yet, as mentioned before, “the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house” (Lorde 1984, 113). As Roland Barthes proposed, in order for us to move forward with knowledge, both artists and scholars must see beyond archaic rationalizations to initiate fresh inquiries (Zurbrugg 2004, x). As Tamy Spry comments in an autoethnography about coping with her mother's death, “I began creating a self in and out of academe that allowed an expression of passion and spirit I had long suppressed” (2003, 174) That suppression of her spiritual and intellectual selves was devastating for her identity and she felt more liberated when she began to mesh previously polarized worlds. Lorde did diagnose the error embedded in divisive resolutions (2009, 61). It's important that women, in particular, be brave and not “hide behind the mockeries of separations: ‘I can't possibly teach Black women's writing -- their experience is so different from mine.’ Or ‘She's a white woman and what could she possibly have to say to me?’ Or ‘This woman writes of her sons and I have no children.’ And all the other endless ways in which we rob ourselves of ourselves and each other” (Lorde 1984, 45). Speaking back about our experiences is an important way for women to engage ourselves and other women.

L. Speaking Back

Speaking back is being dangerous to power. Women invested in creative cultural production and everyday women must speak back by questioning hegemonic stories and creating stories that defy injurious images/language of powerless and pain. Women must speak back with our histories, stories of ourselves where we recognize ourselves. Injurious language threatens the sexuality and humanity of women (Stephenson 2017); as Butler discusses, language has the potential to hurt because we are "linguistic beings" (1997, 1). Ontologically speaking, humans are vulnerable to language and language is a part of what it means "to be" human, therefore language would not have the capacity to hurt us if it didn't define who we are. According to Toni Morrison, "oppressive language *is* violence" (cited in Butler 1997, 8-9). One has to wonder if the woman of color's protest to having been injured is heard, for within hegemonic ideology a "black person is always and only endangering, but never endangered" (Butler 1997, 59). Despite the multiple oppressions that women face, women of color are not without power because language is a type of agency – every woman must be a feminist and speak for our justice. Language has the power to injure or empower and a type of freedom exists within language as an act. Speaking back claims power because one indicator of a lack of power is the reduced ability to perform talk in ways that one would like to perform it (Butler 1997, 86).

As Lorde realized, black feminists do not need anyone else to speak on our behalf – we are women and speak as women (Lorde 2009, 60). All women must participate in the battle against silence (Lorde 1984; 42). Memory poses difficulty and potential and enables women to shape our "individual and collective identities and histories" (Steele 2000, 2). Women of color must face our histories of colonial trauma, yet find strength in our history of resistance and call

upon our Third world feminist sisters who teach us how to survive and recreate ourselves. “We are not responsible for our oppression, but we must be responsible for our own liberation” (Lorde 1984, 145). Women must speak back to claim power, to self-define (Collins 2000) and redefine ourselves by "writing to record what others erase" (Moraga & Anzaldúa 2002, 169). If we do not speak back we risk extinction, as "injurious language calls into question the linguistic survival of the one addressed" (Butler 1997, 163). According to Denzin, performance and performativity meet in a "speaking subject, a subject whose body is gendered and racialized" (2003, 14). Speaking back is necessary to the process of dismantling archaic ideas of gender, race and sexuality. Du Bois felt it important for black performance to be made by black people in black neighborhoods for black audiences. And yes, we must speak back to ourselves to avoid the progression of internalized domination and maintain a prideful self-image, but also to the public in general, who may hold close to them racist and sexist grand narratives full of pre-conceived notions of who we are.

In “El Paisano Is a Bird of Good Omen,” Anzaldúa shares an excerpt from *Andrea*, a novel in progress. The lead character, Andrea, is fearless, self-confident, and erotic; in her family’s backyard she straddles the bark of a large tree and "sways back and forth" gently to "bring herself to orgasm" (Anzaldúa 1983, 154). She is satisfied but states that it was “not as good as the orgasm possible riding a female horse (Anzaldúa 1983, 153). Unfortunately, her uncle tells her “saying truths is not the thing to do, hija. People won't stand for it...” (Anzaldúa 1983, 160). But because Andrea has a strong sense of pleasure and identity, she doesn’t accept the male oriented pressure to be silent. When her family has a wedding at the house and a guest brings a caged bird, Andrea states, "a caged thing never brings anyone luck, least of all the one who captures it” (Anzaldúa 1983, 167). For a woman, silence is prison and

we must speak precisely because we are expected not to. As Lorde states, “our differences don't separate us, our silences do” (1984, 45).

Women must start with women and we must start by (and continue the act of) speaking back; "we must make our own writing and that of Third World women the first priority" (Moraga & Anzaldúa 2002, 168). But how else can we speak back in a methodical way? Is it enough to write with love and justice and mercy for oneself and other women? What does that mean? Women and men must be subversive to hegemonic power and interrogate the lines of power that try to exclude our humanity. Women speaking up and speaking back about their daily lived experience is crucial to the interrogation of domination; this is the importance of third world feminism because it makes living better lives more than an abstraction. When a woman of color writes, she stays closer to herself and other women. As I see it, the project of liberation must involve the rewriting of our histories for its value in the moment, this will lead us into a future with more agency, self-definition, and greater possibilities for sexual liberation. Speaking back is an act of resistance and performance ethnography is a method I utilized to illustrate ways in which the Rose story is subversive to hegemonic power.

APPENDIX D

MORE ON METHOD

- A. Positionality as Writer
- B. Writing as Method: Sexuality & Resistance
- C. Performance Ethnography
- D. Ethnodrama and Interrogating Power
- E. Nottage & Ethnodramatic Method
- F. Performance Criteria & Linkages to Theory
- G. Dramatic Technique and Influences
- H. Conclusion

A. Positionality as Writer

With *Brooklyn Bedroom*, I am speaking back and so are the black women who are represented in the performance. *Brooklyn Bedroom's* ability to speak back has much potential to be meaningful to me, the Rose family, and other black women precisely because of its dialogical nature. The Rose family's stories are mediated through my mind and body, through the way that I understand their history. At the nature of performance is interpretation, orchestrated by self and others. As the writer and researcher, what matters is that I have been reflexive about my performance, consistently engaging how my subjectivities might be influencing the project. Furthermore, it matters that I am committed to honoring the Rose story, using some figurative interpretation but honoring the stories they told me and illustrating what I think are consistent themes of their experience. By doing so, as D. Soyini Madison states, I can only hope that they find justice and satisfaction in my interpretation of their lives (2005). Finally, what also matters were my intentions: to engage the Rose stories and performance ethnography as ways to use writing as method, resist oppression and speak back about the deep nature of black female sexuality.

B. Writing as Method: Sexuality and Resistance

For Lorde, there is profound sexual gratification to be found in our thoughts and physical being. Looking back on life and pleasure, she compares writing poetry to being intimate with a woman (1984). When a woman touches herself for pleasure, she resists the sexist ideology that pleasure of the body must be stimulated by men. When women of color write, it gives us the mindset and the “opportunity to erase who the colonizer has told us we are and define ourselves” (Moraga and Anzaldúa 2002, Collins 2000). Writing as resistance, as liberation for one’s mind, spirit and body, is an action that forms a worldview and an understanding of the power present within women to use in this world. Writing that resists sexist ideology and embraces pleasure is a process—a method—which embodies black female sexuality and identity.

The search for liberation through writing is the performance of U.S. Third World feminists to reject colonial power. Women speaking back about our lived experiences is the methodology of the oppressed and it is inherently subversive to the hegemonic power that attempts to control and dehumanize women. Anzaldúa states that the danger in writing is not engaging personal experience and perception of the word with the socio-political realities, history and economy. Her work affirms women of color humanity by saying that her/our experience matters (Moraga and Anzaldúa 2002, p. 170).

These speech acts from a deep place of resistance were ripe with desires to decolonize sex, gender, race, ethnicity and identity and liberate the lives of women. These women developed an oppositional consciousness (Sandoval 2000, 4) – a rhetoric of resistance—that is still needed today by women of color to give rise to our erotic nature and internal sense of satisfaction.

For Lorde and other Third World feminists, speaking back is not a luxury, and "poetry is not a luxury"; her writing is still saving lives and helps women of color to see our resilience as survivors (1984, 38). The mission of colonization is to silence us, to silence woman of color,

including U.S. Third World women and Third World women around the world. For Lorde, poetry was a methodology for speaking back and to being subversive to power: "when we speak we are afraid/our words will not be heard/nor welcomed/but when we are silent/we are still afraid/So it is better to speak/remembering/we were never meant to survive" (1978, 31-32). Her poetry is performance ethnography, the "reflexive performance narrative forms" of which Denzin speaks (2003, 14). Lorde was known for being clear about her black feminist warrior stance, as Denzin states about important criteria for performance ethnography, she made her own moral and political values clear and, just like politically engaged theatre, Lorde always took a side. As Madison states, "the critical ethnographer resists domestication and moves from 'what is' to 'what could be'" (2005, 6-7). Lorde pays close attention to these non-superficial deep and dark places of possibility within the female body, which she calls "ancient and hidden" because they have survived and become strong through the history of that darkness. In other words, the power and imagination for female liberation already exists within us: women hold a "creativity and power, of unexamined and unrecorded emotion and feeling" (1984, 37).

Anzaldúa asks for Third World women to reject the projection of the self who is created by white male hegemony. Strong emotions echo from her writing – anger, hurt, guilt and sadness all work to illustrate Anzaldúa's feelings of frustration when constantly having to resist the destructive definitions of the white man. She recognized the hurtfulness of violent anti-female language perpetrated by colonialism and is clear about using writing to speak back and be subversive to power. She speaks to the dangers of writing and its importance for women of color, asking us to "write in the kitchen, lock yourself up in the bathroom. Write on the bus or the welfare line, on the job or during meals, between sleeping or waking" (Moraga and Anzaldúa 2002, 170). Writing can be dangerous to white male power and women of color may be afraid of

what our writing might reveal, our weaknesses and strengths as human beings under multiple oppressions.

There are dangers that women of color writers must face that are different from white women, yet Anzaldúa states that we must speak up and have courage. We must face these dangers and hope we never have to face them again. Women who write and break the traditional boundaries of female sexuality regularly engage in the dangers of such a performance. Performance ethnography can be utilized by Third World feminists as a specific way to help other women resist those dangers.

C. Performance Ethnography

Women can bring eroticism as a way of life to storytelling and dismantle dualistic thinking – using the history and resistance of Third World feminism to be dangerous to power. The subversive performance as resistance put forth by performance ethnography was already embedded in U.S. Third World feminism, including the work of Audre Lorde and Gloria Anzaldúa. The politics of resistance which Denzin discusses as integral to performance ethnography (Denzin 2003, 114) was at the core of early articulations of women of color activists, artists and intellectuals. Yet, everyday life is not the only site of struggle for eroticism – there's also the importance of representation. Performance ethnography is not just a useful paradigm for stories by and about women of color, it is a tangible means within the field of performance by which we can represent ourselves and strike back. When I think about the societal limitations inflicted upon female sexuality, in addition to the violence against women, I realize that any ethical storytelling must understand our freedom as a human rights battle.

Performance ethnography relies heavily on pragmatism and critical theory and is a type of critical ethnography where researchers "feel a responsibility to make a difference in the

world" (Madison 2005, 83). With the social science's turn to narrative, performance ethnography could be key in the production of stories that humanize women and complicate our subjectivities, and these stories are in fact dangerous to the powers that attempt to regulate female sexuality. After all, "we know the world only through our representations" (Denzin 2001, 23) and Madison reminds us that how an individual's group gets portrayed is how s/he will be treated (2005, 178). Since representation has consequences, "critical ethnography begins with an ethical responsibility to address processes of unfairness or injustice within a particular lived domain" (Madison 2005, 5). Grounded in critical ethnography, performance ethnography has the possibilities through ethical responsibility and aesthetic technique to intervene and use the performative moment to move marginalized groups, such as women of color, to the "political center" (Madison 1998, 284).

Third World feminist resistance provides us the history, strength and language to fight back and reclaim our sexuality. Together, Third World feminism and performance ethnography act as vital methods for women representing eroticism. Performance ethnography obscures the perimeters dividing "text, representation and criticism" (2003, 14). Performance ethnography is a method by which women of color can continue to be dangerous to power and reclaim their sexuality. Stories that are dangerous to power give hope and hope is what it means to be human – storytelling is essentially ontological. Humans come to understand and give meaning to our lives and to the lives of others through story (Andrews et al., 2013; Denzin 2003; Miller 2006). Under the paradigm of Third World feminism and performance ethnography, women (and men) can tell stories that save lives and help women to locate their inner erotic power (Lorde 1978). Researchers can tell stories in ways to enhance the freedom of women: to tell people of all "racial" backgrounds about the places we've been and never want to go again and the places we can visit together, as Americans, as women and men, as people

who believe in multiple embodiments and interpretations of race, gender and sexuality. Performance ethnography wants social scientists and ethnographers to tell stories that move toward “a radical, progressive politics of a performative cultural studies”, which intervenes socio-politically to break and remake power (Denzin 2003, 3). I am going to add the organic intellectual, who is an everyday person, to telling stories that move toward radical politics because that participation has a long history in the black community and is core to the inclusivity of Third World feminism. Performance studies, a branch intersecting many borders, can work with Third World feminist methodology to offer women the “possibilities for speaking with” other women (Conquergood 2013, 27) and speaking back to oppressive power.

I am drawn to the extraordinary stories of every day black women. I feel an emotional connection to the Rose stories because of the history of abuse inflicted upon the black female body – because of the history of patriarchy and white colonialism which shows the control, exploitation and repression of black female sexuality. As Soyini D. Madison states, what about putting power in danger? "What if we were dangerous to the force of these dangers?" (Madison 2009, 191). A central position of performance ethnography is the emphasis on having a critical perspective and the importance for writing and research to embody moral action. Performance ethnography is necessary for my work because it articulates the importance between research and morality. The Rose story embodies moral action, inviting ordinary black women to continue to tell their stories because our experiences matter and so does asking the audience to interrogate racist and sexist constructions of sexuality.

Even with the best intentions, ethnographic performance work can often fail to break archaic ideas of race and sexuality. In the following, I will go into some detail regarding a show I saw because it is useful to discuss a marker for what I have tried not to do with my

dissertation's ethnodrama. In 2016, I went to Signature Theatre in New York City to see *Death of the Last Black Man in The Whole Entire World AKA The Negro Book of the Dead* by Suzan-Lori Parks. The play is a tour de force on race and mourning where Black Man with Watermelon's (Daniel J. Watts) life is plagued by repeated death, he dies over and over again. He is electrocuted in the town hall and lynched – Black Man with Watermelon keeps getting murdered. Black Woman with Fried Drumstick (Roslyn Ruff) is by his side as they narrate the pains of his existence. The collection of figures from history and popular culture who “help” or participate in his executions are not easily identifiable, yet they are meant to represent historical and cultural caricatures as opposed to characters. The actors weren't actors, they were agents of a metanarrative – but the grand story did little to shatter stereotypes. Figures in positions of power are mixed-race, for example the news figure is light-skinned and Cleopatra is light-skinned and dressed beautifully. At the same time, darker skinned characters play figures traditionally mocked, such as the character who represents a raggedy black doll whose hair and make-up is a mess. Why couldn't Cleopatra be played by a dark-skinned woman? Why is the doll to be mocked played by a dark-skinned woman while dark skin beauty is already devalued historically and in popular culture? In this way, the play reinforced archaic ideas of race and sexuality while it had an opportunity (as all plays by black authors and women do) to subvert standards of light-skin/white beauty and illustrate how beauty also emanates from dark-skinned bodies. Suzan-Lori Parks meant well but her work was not grounded in what is at the heart of performance ethnography – being dangerous to power. The act of being dangerous to power is a moral act.

Performance should "criticize the world the way it is, and offer suggestions about how it could be different" (Denzin 2001). Performance is most effective when it is in the kinetic phase, where performance is struggle and intervention to break and remake "sedimented meanings and

normative traditions" (Denzin 2003, 4). According to Norman Denzin, in this mode of operation performance has the possibilities to become a "sociopolitical act" and this is the radical politics in which he invites social scientists and ethnographers to participate (2003, 3). As a political act, performance ethnography must call upon others to participate and be dialogical – where the presentation of identity is a collaborative production. Madison urges the importance of doing body-to-body fieldwork:

over time, you will shed parts of yourself...others press upon your bone and skin and heart, and it is not just you anymore (it never was). Some of your co-performers you will love, some you won't even like, some will forget all about you, some you will not remember, some you will never forget, but one thing I know for sure, in the dialogic performative of fieldwork, all that happens there will fill a caravan. You cannot ride alone (Madison 2006, 323).

The world lost Dwight Conquergood too early but his work illustrates the possibilities of human unity and understanding; he dedicated his life to the interrogation and production of "performance as cultural practice" and "performance as ethnographic praxis" (2013, 16).

According to Madison's introduction to his text, *Cultural Struggles: Performance, Ethnography, Praxis*, Conquergood grew up on a farm and could not stand when it was time to kill the animals. From early in his life he decided to make a commitment to the "lives of the disenfranchised" and based his academic career on "social responsibility" (2013, 1).

Conquergood's idea of "performance as a moral act" is crucial to work that breaks oppressions and remakes the world with a practice for "a universal human resource for deepening and clarifying the meaningfulness of life" (2013, 65). Madison describes the fact that many in the academy who were black and unapologetically so, tended to forget that Conquergood was white (2013, 314). This is the cultural promise of unity possible with performance ethnography that can break down binaries of race and female sexuality and ultimately provide an orientation of the other as essentially human. Because "culture cannot be grasped as much as it needs to be felt

and engaged," women must produce cultural performances which resist colonial representations, acknowledge their lived experience and invite the audience to participate in our human subjectivities as sexual beings (Conquergood 2013, 18). Inviting the audience to participate must come with understandings of how theatre works to engage the needs of people.

D. Ethnodrama and Interrogating Power

Theatre lives in human beings (Saldana 2008, 396). As Dani Snyder-Young reminds us, Augusto Boal believes ““theater is a weapon;” its power comes from its form as well as its content”” (2010, 891). Ethnodrama is the writing and staging of ethnographic work, and although the integration of ethnodramatic works may be new for the social sciences: "Historically there exists a rich body of plays based on real events and experiences" that date as far back as Shakespearean times (Beck 2011, 687). Jaime Beck and others give an historical overview of research based theatre to legitimize its place as a viable method for presenting data in the social sciences (2011, 687). There is no doubt that ethnodrama is an important technology through which women can interrogate archaic constructions of race and sexuality and expand eroticism to liberate women's lives. Ethnodrama at its best is performance ethnography for the everyday person and enacts Denzin's interests for a "public ethnographic theatre that embraces racial diversity and social difference" (Denzin 2003, 83). Within ethnodrama, the voice of participants' experiences or the researcher's understanding of the story can be heard. It allows ethnographers the opportunity to study a “particular facet of the human condition for purposes of adapting those observations into a performance medium” (Saldana 2008, 195).

The magic of ethnotheatre, the staged version of an ethnodrama, is its ability to take research about human experiences and turn it into a dramatic illustration for audiences (Saldana 2011, 12). Because of this, the distinctions between performer and audience become less identifiable and “culture itself becomes a dramatic performance” (Denzin 2001, 26).

Furthermore, in this dialogic oral performance the author and actors are "not just storytellers" they are "witnesses" and so are the audience members (Pollock 2005, 4). The potential for new ways of thinking is possible with ethnodrama because it isn't just concerned with symbols as communicators of meaning but also with the idea that within performances meanings are renegotiated in social contact (Schieffelin 1985, 272). People believe theatre; this is why I decided to write a live performance. Theatre also provides a live forum for witnessing the stories of resilient women. When presented with authentic human experiences, audiences report on how theatre "made it seem so real" (Saldana 2011, 15). Ethnodrama seeks to communicate in a way which makes sense to broader audiences and that is crucial in a time where more and more culture is being seen as performance (Mienczakowski 2001, 468-469).

If the researcher's objective is to uncover and depict the glaring realisms of the people we've conversed with and witnessed, then the medium of theatre appears to be the best-suited choice for "sharing our findings and insights" (Saldana 2011, 15). With any attempt in the performing of people's personal histories, like performing women's autobiography, ethnodrama is also confronted with an ethical issue "when a woman represents another woman's life" (Mackay 2003, 157). Issues such as this arise with all ethnographic work and can be mediated by the paradigm of performance ethnography whose intent is to put the voices of marginalized peoples at the center while being subversive to dominant power. The art form has the capacity and power to amplify the "representation and presentation of social life" in its multiple complexities *and* uncover that which is obscured by (white) male power. For example, in Mary Weems and Randolph A. Ward's piece, "Speak Truth and Shame the Devil: an Ethnodrama in Response to Racism in the Academy," they use ethnodrama to examine how two African American women (themselves) experience racism as faculty in academia. Their ethnodrama speaks to breaking the silence, "as two Black women in the academy, our

experiences are usually kept in the dark (Ward and Weems 2010, 310). They were able to share their experiences in a dialogical performance and be brave – take the risk of speaking back about the traumas in their lives. Like Weems, the ethnodramatic work of Trinh T. Minh-ha and Anna Deavere Smith questions power (Denzin 2003). Questioning power is crucial to my project and so is writing in such a way that engages the public. After I conceptualized ethnodrama and engaged examples of the method, I utilized Lynn Nottage’s work as a model for the type of ethnodrama I wanted to create.

E. Nottage & Ethnodramatic Method

I perceive Lynn Nottage’s work as being ethnodramatic. This is because Nottage takes pride in the fact that her work is based upon real issues, current problems, and the realities and subjectivities of the black female experience. Furthermore, as Saldana states as ethnodramatic criteria, Nottage’s work narratizes personal stories (2008). There are elements of Nottage’s method that I want to build upon and others where we depart. Like Nottage, I want to deal with the realities of the Rose family in a “bold and direct way” (Enough Team 2012), and I have also found my play in the narratives of the black women of the Rose family, like she did with the women of the Congo.

Her play *Ruined* takes place in the Democratic Republic of Congo and tells the story of female rape victims living in a brothel (“A Conversation” 2014). Nottage says, “In listening to the narratives of the Congolese, I came to terms with the extent to which their bodies had become battlefields. I felt that my play had to deal with the reality in a bold and direct way (Enough Team 2012).” When Nottage writes plays, she tends to “sit down, experience it in the moment, then push it aside.” She likes to “feel the energy in the space in the moment, and then interpret that and make it into a piece of art.” This is the same process I have used for my dissertation. As Nottage states, “Now that I have heard the stories, even though I am passionate

about the subject, the play won't be testimonials from these women...those stories are sacred (Gener 2010).” This is very important, as Saldana reminds us that the ethnodramatist must be able to visualize the story: “An ethnotheatre aesthetic emerges from theatre artists’ creative approaches to stage productions of natural social life (Saldana n.d.).” After having listened to the Rose stories, I walked away to write the performance and make it a piece of art that holds their experiences as sacred.

Nottage is not interested in “absolute verisimilitude, in replicating those moments and those interviews” and neither was I with *Brooklyn Bedroom*. Nottage wants to listen to people’s stories and attempts to depict the spirit of the individuals *and* how she experienced them (Weinert-Kendt 2015): this is the co-performance that Madison speaks of and the promise of unity around which Conquergood built his work. I also wrote *Brooklyn Bedroom* based upon how I experienced the Rose family stories. Nottage states, “*Ruined* is nurtured by the connection she has made as an African American woman to the continent of her ancestry” (Gener 2010). As I stated in my reflection, I also feel that my performance was nurtured by my connection to the Rose family, as black women who have experienced trauma and yearn for pleasure. I was also not invested in exact translations or “the appearance” of truth. I wanted this performance to portray the highlights of the Rose family history of sexuality *and* my interpretation of that history – “we are all co-performers in each other’s lives” (Mienczakowski 2001, 468). I expect that one day the Rose family will see the play I have written and that interaction will provide further opportunity for co-performance.

Where Nottage and I depart may be a matter of discourse, a matter of how we talk about listening to people’s stories. Her latest work, *Sweat*, is a play about the woes of the American working class, based upon interviews she conducted in Reading, Pennsylvania, where she spent two and a half years interviewing residents (Schulman 2017). *Brooklyn Bedroom* is not based

upon interviews. Yet, I am not sure that Nottage's concept of an interview has the same connotation as it does for the production of research in institutions, such as academia. What separates "interview" from the act of talk/conversation or listening to what one has to say is that the interview itself turns into a product of commerce. Interviews, in the traditional sense are hegemonic tools and produce knowledge for consumption in postmodern societies (Kvale 2006). In academia, the terminology calls upon a long history of research as the colonial project. As a black woman intellectual and artist writing in academia, I am not interested in interviews because naming my work as storytelling respects the traditional epistemology preferred by many black female playwrights and has a long history in the African American community (Amico 1998; Brown-Guillory 1988). Nottage states that she has "committed her career to interpreting and amplifying the untold stories of culturally underrepresented minorities" ("A Conversation" 2014). She does not write-up research or even go into depth about her methods process; the intentionality of her work is not to sell the interview as knowledge production but to create social change and honor the stories told to her. When discussing her work in *Ruined*, a play that is similar to my dissertation performance because of its focus on women and trauma, Nottage actually tends to use the words "narrative" and "stories". She explains that what she really did was to go into the Congo and listen to women's stories.

Like Nottage, I also felt strongly about avoiding a verbatim interpretation or explicit images in my ethnodrama. Nottage states that she wanted to find a way to narratize the women's stories that would illustrate the humanity of their experiences and also make the audience think deeply about what happens with women and war (Gener 2010). Documentary theatre projects such as *The Laramie Project* or Anna Deavere Smith's work, does not work with my aesthetic as a scholar/artist. *The Laramie Project* is a play by Moisés Kaufman and partners of the Tectonic Theater Project about the reaction to the 1998 murder of University of Wyoming gay

student Matthew Shepard in Laramie, Wyoming. The play is based on more than 200 interviews they conducted, it follows and re-enacts the chronology of Shepard's story and mixes real news reports with actors portraying friends, family, cops, killers, and other Laramie residents in their own words. *The Laramie Project* is a verbatim account (Magagna 2016, 200), but even Kaufman takes authorial leverage in choosing how to arrange the interviewee's response, using quotes of contrast to heighten dramatic tension. I realize Kaufman may have provided a forum where voices without access to mass dissemination could be heard, yet there seems to be something unethical about building a script with the exact language of others and calling oneself the author.

As for Smith, she may question hegemonic power in her work, but her method of translation from source to performance is too prescriptive and did not resonate with my aesthetic. Smith has created the production of a series of one-woman performance pieces about race in the USA. Smith has constructed these performances using actual events in a series entitled *On the Road: A Search for American Character*. She states that each of the performances comes from interviews she facilitated with individuals. Basing her scripts exclusively on the interview material, she performs the interviewees on stage using their own words' (Denzin 2001, 33-34). She has asked interviewees, 'If you give me an hour of your time, I'll invite you to see yourself performed' (Smith 1993, xxiii). But can one really see herself being performed by another's body? Is it really the interviewee being performed or is that an illusion? Smith has a different body, therefore the enactment and embodiment creates multiple shifts in source and perspective. And what gives her or any other researcher the right to use the words of others verbatim as if those words are the researcher's? I cannot help but to feel as though there is something hypocritical and unimaginative about the verbatim translation, which appears to be the process of documentary theatre. Authors always have an agenda, in many ways, it seems more ethical to

try and be upfront about what that agenda is. Nor do I think that documentary theatre uses a method of interpretation which could meaningfully take an extensive family history and translate it into a one act play. The process of documentary theatre showed itself to be too verbatim for the multiple frictions existing with the Rose story. As Saldana stresses, ethnodramatists or playwrights of reality theatre, need to think with a mind for the stage while they engage in the reconstruction of reality (2005). In the next section, I outline the source of reality for my project and the criteria for linking the family's stories to theory.

F. Performance Criteria & Linkages to Theory

Over the course of several years, the Roses have shared bits of their family history with me. I experienced a wealth of emotions when I heard the mother's story, including sadness, anger, and wanting to rewind the clock and change things. All I could think is how it seemed to explain so much about Josephine (the mother), like her tendency to discuss men in negative contexts. Hearing her story also shed light on my friendship with Tally and her sisters. I have had a long, close and unique relationship with the main character, Tally Rose. For this reason, her perspective is quite privileged in this work and the audience will be asked to embody different layers of her consciousness.

Performance work is interpretive (Denzin 2001) and I could not tell the entire Rose family history in one play. I implemented a process of selection, in terms of what I would chose to take from their story and what I would chose to leave behind. Sexuality as identity, a major theoretical theme of this dissertation manifests in the location of the performance. The entire story of the Rose family is told in a bedroom, Tally's bedroom. Their lives, memories, expressions of intimacy – everything happens in the bedroom, and in that way, the bedroom is a metaphor for the complexities of women's lives and engages my theme of sexuality as identity.

Elements of their story that speak to the theme of trauma, sexuality and liberation, are the basis of the performance and these are the themes which drew me to their family story in the first place.

As Nottage stated about *Ruined*, I also came to know what story it is that I wanted to tell. In particular, I focused on the events and themes which show how the family has already enacted principles of Third World feminism. Also, I was interested in how their coping mechanisms and lifestyle contributed to elements of satisfaction and eroticism, as outlined by Lorde and Anzaldúa. How the women of the Rose family use each other and their inner strength and resilience to battle abuse, deal with the memory of abuse, and engage (sexual) satisfaction in their lives is what eroticism is about. Furthermore, it became an imperative to tell the story of the mother's trauma and illustrate how her daughters are affected by it and how the family has found ways to live with and move beyond pain.

It's also important to discuss how other themes from my theoretical rationale and literature review manifest in the actual final product of my dissertation. The theoretical framework is embedded in the act and my approach to telling the story. For example, the process of me writing the story about sexuality and freedom in itself carries the Third World feminist torch of resistance. In many ways, just telling the story, is an act of revisionist history because the performance explains who these women are and the importance of what they bring from their pasts. Visual pleasure is another dimension important to the rationale of this performance, and I hope that it is apparent in the textual (and eventual fully staged) performance. The images that I evoke speak to visual pleasure for black women and potentially all women. For example, *Brooklyn Bedroom* illustrates women with their whole bodies, in their "thought, memory, pain and regret" (Mandy et. al 2000). Hopefully, this will help women in the audience to make broader connections between women, sexuality and desire. The Rose family history shows how

ordinary women “shatter the discursively constructed woman”. I wanted to use the performance as a representation of black female sexuality that is honest and doesn’t hurt black women and other women of color because of its stereotypical constructions. These are some ways in which I aspired to give women pleasure who read and see the performance. Making pleasure and other theoretical themes clear and accessible in my performance involved the use of creative technique. Next, I speak to playwrights whose craft influenced the creative technique I have used to write my dissertation.

G. Dramatic Technique and Influences

Beyond Lynn Nottage, Ntozake Shange and Adrienne Kennedy; Jose Rivera, Suzan Lori-Parks, Joanna Murray-Smith, and Martin McDonogh are other dramatic influences that inform my performance. For example, I used some of the repetition techniques I found in *Cloud Tectonics* by Jose Rivera. I enjoyed how place and language returned in order to ground the audience in the alternative world that Rivera set up. Rivera's use of mixing the stylistic with the naturalistic and how he makes the past and present melt as one manifest in *Brooklyn Bedroom*. I attempted to replicate his techniques in my ethnodrama where Tally’s struggles are of memories living in the present.

I have been also very influenced by *The Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World AKA the Negro Book of the Dead*. In *Brooklyn Bedroom*, I tried to use metaphor and repetition to make the audience uncomfortable and make them realize the weight of the story. I enjoyed *Death of The Last Black Man...* because it really brought a strong level of poetics to the table textually and visually. It also infused integrated arts from singing to dancing within the storytelling; I explored these techniques of multi-media in my dissertation and they add to the musicality already ingrained within Jamaican American culture.

I also took tips from *Honour* by Joanna Murray-Smith; I really loved the natural feel of conversation, the hesitancy of the dialogue. I used natural dialogue like this in my ethnodrama and attempted to replicate some of the dialogue style. The use of cultural specificity was another goal of mine. I tried to illustrate this with Tally's life: from food to music to really painting a picture of the family's world. This is also a technique that I noticed in *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* by Martin McDonagh which really made the play more enjoyable because the playwright immerses the audience in cultural specificity in rural Ireland and the tensions they have with Britain. In my ethnodrama, the family's Jamaican heritage experiences tension with being "black" in America and with whiteness in America.

H. Conclusion

My performance is based upon the stories of the Rose family, told to me over the course of years. Features of the Rose family history that speak to the themes of trauma, sexuality and liberation, is the basis of *Brooklyn Bedroom*. I believe that film theory and creative cultural production are important to articulations of live performance, as the U.S. is a cinematic society. However, I decided to make my dissertation a play informed by film because the power of live body-to-body expression cannot be overestimated. I did not create documentary theatre and to inform my process, I used Lynn Nottage's practice of letting the performance capture the experiences told to me. The writing of the performance was my method. As a Third World feminist, I used the act of writing to resist oppression and explore possibilities of black female sexual liberation. As Conquergood, Denzin and Madison remind us, the nature of performance work is dialogical. I attempted to continuously analyze my positionality with the themes arising from the Rose family story. I attempted to remember my intentions as a Third World feminist, coming from a long history of women using storytelling to be dangerous to power. Any woman

can use storytelling to bring possibilities of eroticism to the surface and interrogate dualistic thinking about race and sexuality. The ethnodrama *Brooklyn Bedroom* provides a public forum for me and other black women, including the Rose family, to speak back. As a black woman who is writing about other black women, I am also whom I write about. In many ways, my mind and body – my writing – acts as a medium for the Rose family’s story as I interpret how it is that I have understood their experiences.

Performance ethnography was also critical to my method because, as Denzin explains, humans understand life through representation. Ethnodrama is a form of performance ethnography and, as described by Saldana, is the writing and presentation of ethnographic information. I chose to use theatre as a way to resist hegemonic constructions of sexuality because it is a medium which allows people to feel culture, which was Conquergood’s understanding of ethnography. My methodological intentions are to increase black female power, and this is why I called upon the long history of storytelling in the black community to do so. Furthermore, I wanted my ethnodrama to avoid the mistakes of particular dramatic works which reinforce stereotypes. Also, I used techniques from playwrights such as Jose Rivera, Suzan Lori- Parks, Joanna Murray-Smith, and Martin McDonagh, to use repetition, poetry and natural dialogue in meaningful ways to help the audience connect with the Rose story and surface theoretical themes of this dissertation. The following section will provide more depth about what my storytelling can bring to the field of performance in relationship to the Rose family.

APPENDIX E

CONTRIBUTION TO THE FIELD

- A. Dismantling the Theatre/Film Binaries in Performance**
- B. Sexuality: Trauma, Healing, & Memory**
- C. Combining Theory and Practice Between the Disciplines**

A. Dismantling the Theatre/Film Binaries in Performance

This project also uses performance ethnography to dismantle binaristic thinking between the fields of film and theatre because both mediums represent people's lives. When more ethnographers perceive film and theatre as modes of performance that warrant interrogation, then the possibility of using both in ways to ethically represent lived experiences will broaden. Performance ethnography must take up both theatre and film as sites of interrogation and promise that can ethically represent lived experiences and reduce racist and sexist ideologies and practices. Arts-based approaches such as theatre are increasingly employed as a method and methodology for conducting and disseminating research in scholarly settings (Beck 2011, 687). For Denzin, theatre is the "most powerful way for ethnography to recover yet interrogate the meanings of lived experience" (Denzin 1997, 94-95; Beck 2011, 688). Conquergood recognized the importance of film as performance; trained and hired at Northwestern University, he was a filmmaker who made *A Heart Broken in Half* which is an ethnographic film about the Latin King street gang in Chicago. Conquergood envisioned performance as a "border" discipline that rigorously challenges positivism and privileges embodied research; the integration of film and theatre dismantles the disciplinary boundaries reinforced by positivistic research (2013, 6). According to Denzin:

performance ethnography enters a gendered culture in which nearly invisible boundaries separate everyday theatrical performances from formal theatre, dance,

music, MTV, video and film. Performance text are situated in complex systems of discourse, where traditional, everyday, and avante-garde meanings of theatre, film, video, ethnography, cinema, performance, text, and audience all circulate and inform one another (Denzin 2003, x, 81)

Denzin notes that performance ethnography already calls upon a syncretic legacy: the merging of pragmatism and critical theory, including George Herbert Mead, Herbert Blumer, bell hooks, Cornel West, and W.E.B. Dubois. According to Denzin, social science has taken the narrative turn and for me this narrative turn must embrace film as it has theatre. Because film is performance, Denzin analyzes filmmaker Trinh T. Minh-ha's work, *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* (1989), in his discussion of the reflexive interview. He analyzes *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* as a performance subversive to power, as it challenges mainstream film (Denzin 2003, 73-75). Madison also takes up analysis of cinema with her discussion of ethical representation in documentary filmmaking, pointing to Ghanaian film in particular in the introduction to *Critical Ethnography*.

Since there is much tension between film and theatre – as individual fields which need to remain recognized for their distinctions – it is important to state that the two can and should complement each other. As Denzin states, "the meanings of lived experience are inscribed and made visible" through cinema as a means of communication – film is about the performativity of the already done (Denzin 2003, x). Like theatre, film is a cultural practice and it is important for performance to examine the "representational practices in film, music, literature, sculpture, video, vaudeville, fashion, and theatre and explore how they have fleshed out political struggles" (Crémieux, Lemoine and Rocchi 2013). After all as Denzin observes, "we have become... a society which knows itself through the reflective gaze of the cinematic apparatus" (2001, 23). At the same time, theatre expands at the core of human interaction. Coupled with film, theatre can give us a more holistic insight into culture and liberation. Next,

I address how film works to inform my ethnodrama by helping the narrative to interact with trauma, healing and memory.

B. Sexuality: Trauma, Healing, & Memory

I use cinema as a way to further illustrate with live performance the complicated nature of sexuality, healing, memory, and trauma. My work attempts to address healing and resistance through memory that lives in the body of the women in the Rose family, the interruptions of Tally's daily life comes through the screen. The themes of rape and sexuality can be difficult topics of which to write. However, my dissertation illustrates how abuse translates to other bodies and how the memory of rape has implications for the survivor and her family. With that, I have gone beyond painting a black/white portrait of the Rose family. It is an empathetic performance where people aren't necessarily good or evil but succumb to unethical ways of thinking. For example, I didn't want Eric to turn into some white male villain; the audience must see his capacity to care and love. And I wanted the mother, even though she has participated in the abuse of her own children, to have the room to grow and heal. I wanted her to heal and the family to heal and in real life, they are healing. The memories needed to be faced. Tally even takes control over the memory and there is potential for empowerment in that performance.

Traumatic experiences speak to the connectedness and disconnectedness of the body, and healing is necessary for women to move beyond pain, tap into our erotic power, and engage our sexualities. Trauma studies in performance and media studies is quite a broad field; this dissertation doesn't even attempt to address the scope but to locate it in terms of my ethnodrama and the importance of using film to magnify the psychological and cultural complexities of women in families dealing with trauma and exploring their sexuality. Much debated in trauma studies in cinema is the position of traumatic events: are they phenomenon in the world or a

combination of internal and external localities? Ongoing questions in the field of trauma studies and cinema include the extent to which “trauma” is a suitable tool for the investigation of collective experience, the perceptibility or hiddenness of traumatized groups, and the applicability or validity of trauma paradigms beyond the West (Radstone et al., 2013).

Decolonized trauma deals with representation and minority group suffering (Visser, 2015). Under a critical paradigm, trauma, no matter the fact that it is often experienced individually, is linked to power, identity and group struggle. A psychological notion of trauma can be used to explain traumatic memory and traumatic events as a type of collective rather than exclusively individual experience. I wanted to explore Tally as a way to make broader comments about collective trauma of women, black women, sexuality and the family. There is, already, trauma embedded in the black experience – an experience often dehumanized or represented as inferior in American storytelling. I use my dissertation performance to destroy stereotypes while proposing nourishing and complex narratives about what it means to be a black woman and what it means to seek and touch erotic fulfillment as a woman. The filmic work and theoretical landscape of *Brooklyn Bedroom* explores Tally’s character to comment on group versus individual suffering. Tally’s struggle with her sexuality and the trauma embedded in her family history is not just a personal trouble – it’s a socio-cultural issue linked to abuse of the female body, archaic constructions of race and sexuality, and the importance for women to connect with their sexuality and possibilities for pleasure and satisfaction.

Trauma doesn’t become a binaristic experience in this work, but layered and unfolding and complex; it is located in Tally’s mind/body/culture, her family, her interactions with others and interacts with the displacement and reclaiming of sexuality and identity. *Brooklyn Bedroom* links psychological trauma and what trauma media theorists have called “social suffering.”¹³¹ But as Janet Walker, author of the book *Trauma Cinema: Documenting Incest and The*

Holocaust argues, memory does not come back to humans with the perfection of an eyewitness account (2016). Memory is frail and Tally's past/present is not always tangible for her or the audience. Memory, however, rarely is and does not need to be represented as perfect, it needs to illustrate trauma, healing, agency and multiplicity of the human sexual experience – it needs to be political. In this way, *Brooklyn Bedroom* reconstructs trauma at the intersections of sexuality, culture and healing.

According to Cassie Steele, author of *We Heal From Memory: Sexton, Lorde, Anzaldúa, and The Poetry of Witness*, culture carries a history of traumatic violence (2000). Steele feels that compassion must come from the head and the heart, and believing the survivor and witnessing their emotions is crucial to that compassion. Steele's ideas about trauma, healing and memory have parallels with Visser's theory on decolonized trauma theory. *We Heal From Memory* discusses collective silence and individual silence as the results of traumatic histories. Work that deals with women and trauma necessitates being understood in a historical context. For Tally, silence and speaking seem to connect to the silence related to black women's sexuality – after all, marriage was made illegal during slavery, making it impossible to be a "respectable woman" (Steele 2000, 29). Steele states that the difference between narrative and poetry is crucial; initial reactions to trauma are recorded as images and feelings. It may be possible later but quite difficult at first for the survivor to speak/write in any linear way about their experience. This is why in *Brooklyn Bedroom* I use image, metaphor, sound, rhythm, and emotional impact. The play gives voice to having survived and “turns trauma into poetry of witness,” creating a space for agency (2000, 5). According to Steele, “For Sexton, Lorde and Anzaldúa, the healing power of the goddess comes through love—through the connection of sex and spirit, through the

blessings of women's bodies—that heals the wounds of history” (2000, 112). My work here attempts to visually expand upon the sexual nature of this spirit of healing and love.

C. Combining Theory and Practice Between the Disciplines

My contribution to the field has been to also close the gap of division between the humanities and social sciences. I have put forth ways that communication scholars can combine theory and practice in performance, and I have reiterated the importance of narrative to communication. And I make this statement, unlike others, including Denzin, as a scholar *and* artist. My work seeks to use performance to produce cultural change, so both thinking and doing are important aspects of my creative cultural production.

Today, the field of performance studies is faced with the ongoing challenge of intensely rooted separation of task and division of knowledge; this operates inside the academy as the “difference between thinking and doing, interpreting and making, conceptualizing and creating” (Conquergood, 2002, 153). The separation of task between theory and practice, and concept and expression, is counterproductive. 20th Century critical theorists such as W.E.B. Dubois, Cornel West, and bell hooks, and early symbolic interactionists such as Erving Goffman and George Herbert Mead, have been an integral part of the articulation of performance ethnography as put forth by Denzin. My particular stance in the field of performance ethnography is without the separation of theory and practice because it is a binary that comes with the harmful trap of participating in unethical research. In 1985, with *Performing As a Moral Act: Ethical Dimensions of the Ethnography of Performance*, Conquergood began to develop the lens of performance ethnography as a political theory *and* practice. Conquergood advocated for dialogue between methodologies from creating the question to the work of research reporting.

I am a 21st century performance studies theorist and practitioner who believes in

performance's narrative turn, and *Brooklyn Bedroom* is my contribution to that shift. I have tried to be ethical with my storytelling. "Performance as a moral act" is crucial to work that breaks oppressions and remakes the world with a practice for "a universal human resource for deepening and clarifying the meaningfulness of life" (Conquergood 2013, 65). Since representation has costs, critical ethnography begins with the researcher feeling a moral obligation to address systems of inequality within particular lived domains (Madison 200). According to Madison, performance ethnography is a type of critical ethnography where researchers "feel a responsibility to make a difference in the world" (2005, 83). The critical ethnographer must be defiant and move from how things are to the possibilities of how they could be (2005, 6-7). I am hoping that this performance breaks the international silence about what is happening in Jamaica and change things for the better. I hope that Jamaican American women and Jamaican women living in the U.S. will see it and speak up about their experiences. Furthermore, I hope to bring the performance to Jamaica.

In my body, I do not see these divisions between social science and humanities. Although I am well aware intellectually that they exist in varying degrees, I believe that these rigid boundaries are counterproductive to the good work that many in the field of performance are doing. As Denzin explains, social science has taken a shift to storytelling, and narrative work has a long history in literature and humanities. Theatre is no longer an aesthetic endeavor for theatre departments; it is used in prisons, creative sociology, in composition courses, in education. These critical theorists have earned much academic admiration: Anzaldúa, feminist, activist, poet, novelist; Trinh Minh-ha, filmmaker, feminist; Lorde, feminist, activist, poet, theorist; Mary Weems, author, poet, playwright, educator; Conquergood, filmmaker, educator, theorist; Anna Deavere Smith, professor, playwright, ethnographer. These are my people, they are in-betweeners. And the fact that we use their work in social science classrooms says that

their work (art and research) however hybrid is important and has the potential to save lives. I have my people and this performance is to further their political work and practice. As artist and researcher, my work aims to bring harmony between theory, practice and creativity. And I don't feel like these identities need to be mutually exclusive because when they are in harmony, amazing things can happen.

APPENDIX F

CONCLUSION FOR THE PROJECT

The violence against women attacks our identity and sexuality. Audre Lorde proclaims that women who embody their power threaten the system. Women who embody their power embrace the authority of their sexuality and refuse to surrender it to the demands of patriarchal power (Lorde 1993). Women can gain inspiration from our long history of resilience and the (U.S.) Third World feminist tradition of honoring our stories. Women of color must embrace eroticism and erotic activity as a way of life to find peace, pleasure and satisfaction against all odds. Eroticism is not without chaos, but it allows women to tap into their deepest strength and capacities for joy.

Third World feminism and performance ethnography share a history of threatening the stability of colonial power. Performance ethnography is a method by which women (of color) can touch the erotic, embody the possibilities of freeing our sexuality and address the misrepresentations of our bodies and experiences. My dissertation work comes from my interest in the performance ethnography of ethnodrama, in the dramatic performance of ethnographic research and *Brooklyn Bedroom* is a performance that interrogates societal notions of gender and sexuality. It is a family history rooted in the ideology of Third World feminism and seeks to use performance ethnography to present the survival and liberty of female sexuality. It uses cinematic theory to assume and explore the idea that what pleases women in the bedroom, also satisfies our identity: who we want to be and how we want to remember ourselves in the world.

Because the battle for female liberation must address representation, performance ethnography is a practice critical to interventions in race, female sexuality and gender. Despite the fact that these women have distinct concerns, both African and Asian diasporic creative

cultural producers contribute to the Third World feminist project of recovering and visualizing subjectivity and decolonizing the gaze (Foster 1997). Looking at the work of *Filming Desire*, Julie Dash, Zeinabu Irene Davis, Lynn Nottage, Adrienne Kennedy, Ntozake Shange, Trinh T. Minh-ha, and Hye Jung Park, this dissertation uses their ideas and methods of presenting women's lives to investigate how performance ethnography can be used to liberate female sexuality and locate ways for women of color to move beyond pain.

I use the work of female storytellers, resistant to mainstream creative cultural production, to highlight women's point of view and expression of desire, paying close attention to what women want to see on stage, on screen, and in our daily lives. Trauma and memory can be perceived as not just psychological events but collective experience. The challenges and triumphs of sexuality posed by the Rose family explore broader comments about collective trauma of the family, the female body, and black women's sexuality. *Brooklyn Bedroom* illustrates ethnographic inquiry that explores the mystery of sexual pleasure and its link to memory, identity, and liberation.

The black woman deserves to see complex representations of herself in American performances of identity and culture. As a black female intellectual and artist, I feel viscerally hurt by white and male articulations of history. I feel personally committed to act in ways which resist the perversions constructed by a legacy of racist oppression. Much of America's current comprehension about female sexuality and gender is contextualized by stereotypes institutionalized during slavery. So, I write to document what others have historically attempted to make invisible when I open my mouth. I write to undo the stories others have miswritten about black women, about me, about Josephine and her daughters (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2002). I write for survival, I write as an erotic practice. This work speaks to and with all women, but I particularly speak to black women and other women of color engaged in the difficulty of

releasing the colonizer's grip on her body. None of us women are alone in our quest for liberation from current and historical exploitation. In our quest to make our problems voiced and visible, black women cannot forget to celebrate ourselves. The Rose family helps us to celebrate ourselves and our indestructible capacity for healing and joy.

APPENDIX G

PRODUCTION CREDITS

UMass Amherst Department of
Communication Presents
Ayshia Stephenson-Celadilla's
Dissertation Defense Performance

Co-Sponsored by The UMass Department of
Theater, The UMass Arts Council & Performing
Fusion Theatre

*Special Thanks to my Mother & Family, Leandro
Celadilla, Leda Cooks, Anne Ciecko, Priscilla
Page, Gilbert McCauley, Brian Moore-Ward,
Willow Cohen, & The Roses.



“BROOKLYN BEDROOM”
A Multimedia Performance
Monday 4/2 6:15pm-8:15pm
ILC 3rd Fl HUB

Live Performance TALENT

Sabine Jacques
Sabrina Victor
MarHadoo Mickey Jones
Afrikah Smith
Callum LaFrance

Casting Director

Brian Moore-Ward

Video Editor

Rachel Keating

Video TALENT

Zion Lamb-Wilkins,
Ayotide Baptiste, Adelomo Baptiste, Ololara
Baptiste, Samuel Castro McCauley,
& Lela Rose Zucker

Film and Media Crew

Simeon Kala Brown, Angus Brownrigg,
Leandro Celadilla, Tristan Donahue,
Rachel Keating, Michee Mande,
Corey Sullivan, & Blaire Tiernan

**“*Brooklyn Bedroom: An Ethnodrama on Female
Sexuality, Third World Feminism and
Performance Ethnography*”**

**-Written and Directed by
Ayshia Stephenson-Celadilla**

- I. Scene I: *Brooklyn Bedroom*
- II. Theoretical/Methodological Context
- III. Questions from Committee
- IV. Questions from Public
- V. Committee Deliberation
- VI. Enjoy Jamaican Food! 😊

Website: www.PerformingFusionTheatre.com
Facebook: www.facebook.com/PerformingFusionTheatre
Twitter: @PfusionTheatre
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