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Cartographies of Social Death: Abjection and the American Dispossessed

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CARTOGRAPHIES OF SOCIAL DEATH: ABJECTION AND THE AMERICAN DISPOSSESSED

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Cartographies of Social Death: Abjection and the American Dispossessed, argues that property violence acts as a nexus for social death and abjection in the United States. The project considers how nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century dispossessory U.S. legislation haunts late-twentieth- and twenty-first-century novels. Attending to the particularity of space and borders, *Cartographies* maps the legal, socio-cultural, and psycho-linguistic constructions of personhood in novels framed by these legislations. I propose an intersectional collective "American dispossessed" concatenated by their experience of property vulnerability as subjects formed in relation to death. I develop a theory of intersubjective abjection to posit an optimistic but not utopic heuristic for understanding fictional constructions of subjectivity through precarity as characters are forced to confront, inhabit, and live with abjection. Through this process, individuals belonging to the American dispossessed come to understand the denial of their personhood by property violence and construct radical forms of subjectivity in relation to that system of oppression. Each novel addressed in this project dissertation participate in and speak back to a discourse of humiliations by offering modes of resistant individualism not invested in possession as it is manifested in capitalism, heteropatriarchal kinship, and exclusionary citizenship.

to my mother
for teaching me how to read

and for April
for teaching me why to read

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INTRODUCTION

The daughter of a runaway slave; a time-traveling tribeless Indian boy; a white child from rural Appalachia; a displaced daughter of white Dominican immigrants: on the surface, they seem to have little in common – except, I assert, for an experience of precarity caused by dispossession at once unique and similar. These four characters from contemporary novels (1987-2014) exist in fictive worlds haunted by federal acts of state-sanctioned property violence. In some cases, the legislations materialize in the text, as in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) and Amy Greene's *Long Man* (2014). In others, the legislation tacitly frames the politics in the novel, as in Sherman Alexie's *Flight* (2007) and Julia Alvarez's *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* (1992). *Cartographies of Social Death: Abjection and the American Dispossessed* considers how nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century U.S. legislation manipulated dispossession as a nexus for systemic oppression in the United States. *Cartographies* maps junctures of the legal, socio-cultural, and psycho-linguistic constructions of contingent personhood. It charts an intersectional group I have designated the "American dispossessed," concatenated by property vulnerability across race, class, and space. By examining the macro-institutional investment in white possessive individualism and its denial to racialized others, this project theorizes the legal, socio-cultural, and psycho-linguistic construction of ethnic minorities in the United States. Attention to spatial displacements bridges the distance between geographical borders of the state and psychological borders of the individual, merging a theory of subject formation through precarity with a critique of dialectics of power and personhood in multi-ethnic American literature.

Entering into conversations about Afro-Pessimism and necropolitics, *Cartographies* answers the question posed by Jared Sexton: "what is the nature of a human being whose human being is put into question radically and by definition, a human being whose being human raises the question of being human at all?" (par 5).[1] I expand the "fungibility of blackness" as theorized by Hartman and the cynicism of facing inherent violence to ask a series of questions: what happens if we think dispossession across races; what happens if we think through the death of legal personhood intersectionally; what happens to those who are interpellated as expendable or, to use Lisa Marie Cacho's phrase, "ineligible for personhood"; what happens if we think of civic belonging as property than can be taken away? To grapple with these thought questions, I turn to contemporary novels with young people at their center. Novels provide a unique medium for theorizing subject formation, as their very form constructs subjects. The four novels in this project revise and reject the form of the bildungsroman as insufficient for understanding contingent personhood. The subjects in these novels are always already denied childhood and the right to growth. As opposed to social integration, I introduce a theory of intersubjective abjection to posit an optimistic but not utopic heuristic for understanding the construction of subjectivity through precarity. This theory dwells in the negativity of subjects of death; through this process, individuals belonging to the American dispossessed come to understand the denial of their personhood through property violence and construct radical forms of subjectivity in relation to that system of oppression.

[1] Afro-pessimism has been most significantly articulated to the American context by Frank Wilderson and Jared Sexton, who then incorporate scholars such as Saidiya Hartman and Hortense Spillers. Necropolitics arises in opposition to biopolitics through Achille Mbembe.

These novels participate in and speak back to discourses of humiliation by offering modes of resistance not invested in possession as manifested in capitalism, heteropatriarchal kinship, and integration into systems based on exclusionary citizenship. Reading this project as a literary study rather than an economic or socio-legal study highlights the capacious discourse of subject formation in the United States. The contemporary novel expresses both the institutional mechanisms of oppression and corporal, spatial, political, and linguistic definitions of abjection in order to theorize the individual's physical and psycho-linguistic experience of precarity. I chose the novels in this study not because they stand as representatives for their respective ethnic groups, but because they stand as salient examples that also undermine and deconstruct the spaces between ethnic groups. This work is at once a critique of neo-liberalism and American imperialism, as the novels continue to conjure up the neo-liberal states built by imperialist projects. These novels, both in their narrative temporality and in the historical moment of their publication, exist in and speak back to moments in which the United States was making itself, defining its purpose, allaying its anxieties, and deciding who would qualify as citizens. In writing back to these earlier periods from the contemporary moment, these novels create "historical touches" as defined by Carolyn Dinshaw in *Getting Medieval* as a "queer historical impulse … [to make] connections across time between, on the one hand, lives, texts, and other cultural phenomena left out of sexual categories back then [in medieval England and medieval literature] and, on the other, those left out of current sexual categories now" (1). Although not invested in sexual identity and politics, these novels certainly explore taxonomies of personhood as they are or are not represented by social, legal, and popular discourse.

Though organized individually, the project thinks comparatively and relationally to examine the simultaneity of the process of white possession to deny and refuse the right of possession to others perceived not economically and socially viable. This right of possession includes civil rights, human rights, kinship, and self-possession as well as material possessions. The project frames a long-standing history of using dispossession as a means of denying legal and social personhood to non-white groups. Theorizing through scholars such as Orlando Patterson, Saidiya Hartman, Hortense Spillers and others in the camps of Afro-pessimism (building on the work of W.E.B. DuBois and Frantz Fanon), I integrate these conversations with the work of psychoanalysis through Julia Kristeva (who builds on Jacques Lacan) and relational psychology through Jessica Benjamin (who revises Edmund Husserl). I also engage with the recent works on race and rights of cultural theorists such as Lisa Marie Cacho, Christina Sharpe, Angela Naimou, Crystal Parikh, Darieck Scott, Karen Shimakawa, and Grace Kyungwon Hong. These scholars bring together the contemporary political climate, legislative history, and cultural studies methodology to address the ongoing dispossession and disenfranchisement of people of color in the United States. I centralize property vulnerability through their critiques to parse out the connections and disconnections between ethnic groups in the United States as they experience abjection rendered by legislative property violence. The chapters of this project examine what has been dispossessed: the slave's self-possession; the Native American's kinship; the Appalachian American's home and way of life; the immigrant's name. They explore what happens when you are property, when you lose property, and when you never had property.

CONSTITUTING PROPERTY VULNERABILITY

Dispossessory legislations precipitate significant denials of legal personhood and citizen rights in contingent non-white groups in the United States. This project posits, through four significant legislations from the nineteenth and early twentieth century, that the U.S. government enacted state-sanctioned dispossessions rendered citizenship a property right that could be denied to favor white capitalism.

White racial capitalism emerged from early interactions in global colonialism that affixed property and race as constitutive elements. The rise of imperialism produced contact zones between developing Western ideals of individual property ownership and tribal and communal property relations in Africa and the New World, and these interactions generated a politics of exclusion, racialization, and domination. In "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," Hortense Spillers points to the fifteenth-century as perhaps the first racialization of black peoples in Africa by white Europeans, specifically the Portuguese. She quotes Gomes Eannes de Azurara's "Chronicle of the Discovery and Conquest of Guinea, 1441-1448" to find these early mid-fifteenth century exchanges:

> And so their lot was now quite contrary to what it had been, since before they had lived in perdition of soul and body; of their souls, in that they were yet pagans, without the clearness and the light of the Holy Faith; and of their bodies, in that they lived like beasts, without any custom of reasonable beings – for they had no knowledge of bread and wine, and they were without covering of clothes, or the lodgment of houses; and worse than all, through the great ignorance that was in them, in that they had no understanding of good, but only knew how to live in bestial sloth. (qtd in Spillers 71)

These Africans would soon become slaves, and Spillers reads de Azurara's rhetoric of Christianity that transforms these pagans into ugly bodies to differentiate a hierarchy of

melanin. She notes that de Azurara articulates three different levels of skin color: the white of the Portuguese, a mulatto in-between color, and those "'black as Ethiops, and so ugly, both in features and in body, …' that [stands] for the most aberrant phenotype to the observing eye, [and] embodies the linguistic community most unknown to the European" (Spillers 70). Where Spillers uses this moment to underscore the making of racial distinctions, I focus on the Africans lack of customs of food, clothing, and housing – all *things* that mark property ownership and wealth for the Portuguese by which they could interpret the Guineans' lack of property relations unrecognizable to the European colonizers. Obviously, the Guinean people established food customs based on the produce that the land could provide, dressed appropriately for their climate, and built housing that indicated their kinship constructions. The Africans' bestial sloth, which could not be true given the difficulty of subsistence, surely indicates that they did not colonize and settle the land in a manner similar to the Europeans. Therefore, de Azurara can easily dismiss the property constructions of the Guineans because they do not match European individual property ownership, wealth accumulation, and power dynamics. A hierarchy of melanin, in this instance, simply provides a visual regime to mark those who have and those who have not. This does not lessen the impact that racialization has made on constructions of self and citizenship globally, nor does it ignore the resulting enslavement of the Guineans and millions of other Africans which supported the spread of this visual regime all over the world. Rather, I suggest that centralizing property violence in racialized interactions of state-making and global capitalism mobilizes imbrications of race and property to ask how other groups might be caught up in this process of precarity.

Spillers historicizes colonial interactions to highlight the formation of blackness, and I propose that these interactions might also be used to understand the construction of white property and the process of dispossession, especially as it comes to shape imperialism in the United States. The common narrative of the United States' multiculturalism relies on the optimistic metaphor of the "melting pot" or the "salad bowl," but the actual history of oppression against ethnic groups is better metaphorized as a shelled lobster, in which the sweet, white meat is held up as a luxury and the leftover shell is discarded.[2] In the long view of American history, whiteness has clearly surfaced in a position of political and economic power. From the colonial period, the ideal citizen was imagined a white, male, capitalist, heteropatriarchal, Christian, and Anglo-British. In building nationalism and federal government, the United States embraced an investment in possessive individualism; Grace Kungwon Hong contends that the early nationalist phase of American politics

> endowed the abstract citizen with the right to property. The U.S. nation-state attempted to resolve the contradictions between state and capital from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century by systematically rendering racialized subjects vulnerable to labor exploitation, dispossession, and state-enforced violence by denying access to a privileged citizen-subject formation. … Yet these legal enfranchisements were mutually reinforced through a privileged subject position, established through culture: what political theorist C.B. MacPherson has called the "possessive individual." (xiii)[3]

Therefore, the authority of white power built property ownership into citizenship in the United States and developed laws that protected the individual's right to own property,

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[2] The OED cites Crevecoeur as introducing the concept of melting as assimilation and Israel Zangwill as popularizing the term with his 1909 play. "Salad bowl" has generally been accepted since the rise of liberal multiculturalism as preferable for the amalgamation without the dissolution of individual elements.

[3] C.B. MacPherson's *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* highlights specifically Locke's theory that "every Man has a *Property* in his own *Person*" from the *Second Treatise*. Essentially, possessive individualism breaks down collectivity in favor of narcissism and commons in favor of capitalist accumulation.

which included owning both material property, kinship property, and property in one's self, or self-possession. Athena Athanasiou adds,

> Land and property ownership has surely been at the heart of the onto-epistemologies of subject formation in the histories of the western, white, male, colonizing, capitalist, property-owning, sovereign human subject. In the political imaginary of (post)colonial capitalist western modernity and its claims of universal humanity, being and having are constituted as ontologically akin to each other; being is defined as having; having is constructed as an essential prerequisite of proper human being. Also, the definition of the ownership of one's body as property is a founding moment of liberalism. However, certain bodies – paradigmatically so the bodies of slaves – are excluded from this classic definition of the biopolitical, which forges a constitutive connection between life, ownership, and liberty. (Butler and Athanasiou 12-13)

Those included become citizens; those excluded become socially dead. The easiest way to create new property wealth was to take it away from others, so the history of the United States is the history of claiming that which belongs to Others or to "no one," including their right to self-possession.

The U.S. Constitution created a system of power to protect those citizens, and everyone else, the leftovers, fell away through various definitions and denials of legal personhood. At its ratification, only landed white gentry patriarchs had access to the full protections of the Constitution as citizens. To deal with the post-Revolution influx of new immigrants and the expansion of slave capitalism, the Naturalization Act of 1790 re-defined citizenship in the United States by granting naturalization to "any alien, *being a free white person*, who shall have resided within the limits and under the jurisdiction of the United States for the term of two years" (1 Stat. 103, my emphasis). By basing naturalization on residency, the law incorporated the concept of ownership into the very foundations of citizenship in the United States, since residency required proof of taxation

and taxation required ownership.[4] Matthew Frye Jacobson suggests that this legislation frames the understanding of race relations in the United States from the 1790s forward, and thus, race, citizenship, and property become inextricably imbricated. In this way, we can understand citizenship and the rights inherent to inclusion in the social order as a type of property achieved through whiteness. George Lipsitz highlights the "possessive investment" in whiteness and the conjunctions between these two constitutive elements, writing "white supremacy is usually less a matter of direct, referential, and snarling contempt and more a system for protecting the privileges of whites by denying communities of color opportunities for asset accumulation and upward mobility. Whiteness is invested in, like property, but it is also a means of accumulating property and keeping it from others" (2). Sherrow Pinder expands Lipsitz's figuration: "white privilege is incorporated into the very definition of property… [because] 'possession— the act necessary to lay the basis for rights in property— was defined to include only the cultural practices of whites. This definition laid the foundation for the idea that whiteness— that which whites alone possesses— is valuable and is privileged,' [Higgins 7]" (48-49). Athanasiou theorizes that the construction of an oppressor's subjectivity requires an Other who can be rendered the oppressed, writing, "such a subjectivity is

[4] The 1790 Naturalization Act was amended several times before the Civil War, but it still denied citizenship to Native Americans and slaves. 1795: offers naturalization to "any alien being a free white person" after giving three years notice and residing in US for five years (1 Stat. 414). 1798: requires five years notice and fourteen years residency. (1 Stat. 566). Included Alien and Sedition Acts that allowed presidents to imprison and deport aliens and criminalized making negative statements about the federal government. (1 Stat. 570, 1 Stat. 577, 1 Stat. 596). 1802: Registration and surveillance of aliens seeking naturalization (2 Stat. 153). Even in the Fourteenth Amendment, which conferred citizenship to anyone born in the United States, lawmakers intended to exclude Native Americans living on reservations because they were not taxed. All of these acts were meant to tighten restrictions on citizenship in order to shore up the boundaries of white power as expressed in property. Deportation of "aliens" legally rendered groups ineligible for citizenship no matter their property, while the exclusion of Native Americans, ostensibly in response to their nation's sovereignty, only served to continue to deny access to systems of power.

constituted through, and inhabited by, processes of desubjectifying others, rendering them usable, employable, but then eventually into waste matter, or of no use; always available, always expendable" (Butler and Athanasiou 27), in effect always abjected. Cheryl Harris historicizes the white power of property ownership and oppression that created privileged subjects and expendable non-citizens, remarking that "the parallel systems of domination of Black and Native American peoples ... created racially contingent forms of property and property rights" (1714), so that the Native Americans' communal property rights allowed for their ultimate displacement because whiteness dictated individual personal property rights staked on land settlement (1722). Grace Kyungwon Hong moves from the colonial into the post-Revolutionary period to note that the American progress narrative of the nineteenth century was used to create a construction of rugged individualism that came to define American identity to the world, and "by privileging the (white male) propertied subject, the US state legitimated and naturalized the dispossession of racialized subjects through such mechanisms as segregation and internment" (Hong 5). These scholars make clear the American construction of property through whiteness and open space to consider property that included and includes citizenship and rights, material belongings and real estate, raced social identity and kinship security, and state-recognized self-possession. These multivalent definitions of property expand the turn toward material culture to consider the intangible and relational aspects of ownership, in effect positing the mechanisms of social death – institutional neglect, natal alienation, and degradation – as problems of possession.

Beyond defining citizenship, property ownership came to shape subject formation in the United States. Hong notes, "subjectivity in this era is defined by the ability to own, and what the subject primarily owns is the self. That he 'owns' himself, or in other words, is self-possessed and self-determining, is demonstrated through exercise of will" (3). In other words, access to white power meant being recognized as a viable subject through property ownership, because subjects own objects. If one cannot define one's self in relation to an object, one cannot be a subject. Patterson writes, "the slave was a slave not because he was the object of property, but because he could not be the subject of property" (28). Patterson plays on the subject/object dichotomy, and I suggest, the syntactical and symbolic mark the political and cognitive: subject, noun phrase, subject, citizen, subject, recognized person, subject, consciousness. The American dispossessed cannot be subjects, only subjected.

The four legislations discussed in this project enact state-sanctioned dispossession against groups with property vulnerability that are not and cannot be incorporated into whiteness. Most importantly, these legislations passed in periods of American history in which the United States' anxieties about its global position rise to the surface. In a way, these legislations represent the subject formation of the United States itself. The Monroe Doctrine, passed in 1823 to cement US power in the Western Hemisphere against European colonial powers, reemerges in the twentieth century after the Cuban Revolution in 1959 to counteract the threat of Communism in the Caribbean Basin, and Russian interference at the height of the Cold War. As former colonial economies expanded into a global imperial republic, the Indian Removal Act of 1830 defined citizenship and rejected Native nations' sovereignty, directly investing in white property ownership and

establishing precedent for internment. The Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 was part of the Compromise of 1850, in part influenced by the federal government's desire to tax the California gold rush, in part by "manifest destiny" and the incorporation of new states, and in part as a measure to appease southern slave holding states and try to preserve the Union. Finally, the Tennessee Valley Authority Act of 1933 sought to push the central South out of the Depression and develop a regional project that would serve as a model for the world, as well as later be incorporated into the technological warfare of World War II. Each of these legislations illuminate a period of upheaval in American politics and show that the most expedient solution to this upheaval is to redefine citizenship and social value through dispossession of those not invested in whiteness. This project tracks the afterlives of these legislations as they manifest in contemporary novels' world-making resulting from the continued property violence enacted against ethnic groups in the United States.

Social Death and Abjection

Dispossession evinces ambiguity as both a foreclosure and a space of possible resistance, both a process and a state, both imposed and accepted. In many ways, dispossession is the state of humanity after experiencing the inaugural loss of the mother by differentiation. As Athanasiou states, "the subject comes to 'exist' by installing within itself lost objects along with the social norms that regulate the subject's disposition to the address of the other" (1-2). In other words, the subject forms by entering into the endless chain of substitutions seeking to fill the originary loss of the mother, and the subject comes to understand itself by internalizing the social norms that

differentiate the subject from the object or the subject from the other. Thus, dispossession (of the mother) is necessary for subject formation. However, physical and political dispossession violates that subject formation through "loss of land and community; ownership of one's living body by another person, as in histories of slavery; subjection to military, imperial, and economic violence; poverty, securitarian regimes, biopolitical subjectivation, liberal possessive individualism, neoliberal governmentality, and precaritization" (Butler and Athanasiou 2). This form of dispossession often manifests as "forced migration, unemployment, homelessness, occupation, and conquest" (Butler and Athanasiou xi). Subsequently, the dispossessed are complicit with their political and physical dispossession, because as Butler argues, "We can only be dispossessed because we are already dispossessed. Our interdependency establishes our vulnerability to social forms of deprivation" (5).

Using Orlando Patterson as a node of inquiry, this project makes two major claims to expand constructions of social death beyond comparisons through slavery and New World blackness. In his landmark monograph *Slavery and Social Death* (1982), Patterson defines social death through the state of enslavement, though unique across time and space, enacted by natal alienation, institutional marginalization, and degradation. Where Patterson underscores slavery, I argue that other social conditions of property violence mark groups as socially dead, slavery just one mechanism to establish vulnerability. Secondly, by mapping out the particularities of U.S. spaces this work traces a cartography of displacement that manifests institutional denial in the American dispossessed.

Social death produces a dialectic, not between master and slave, but between propertied and propertyless, between citizenship embraced and foreclosed, between subjects and contingent personhood. With this dialectical construction in mind, I stress that the mechanisms of social death in the United States manifest in property and whether one can make claims to property. Natal alienation and institutional marginalization revoke claims to property ownership – of one's things, one's family, even one's own body. This revocation in a society founded on the precepts of capitalism and property rights, creates marginalization, both political/institutional and physical. Hong also connects the state of dispossession and social death, observing the paradoxical interpellation as "not only the actual denial or lack of property, wealth, or assets, which is certainly the case, but the fundamental condition of not being able to own that is both produced by and legitimates the denial or lack of actual property" (8). Hong identifies through property a similar process of rendering others "ineligible for personhood." This circular construction produces a boundary between proper consumer/citizens and abject, racialized Others. For example, rather than being framed through racialization to appropriate land, white power's rhetoric of property deviance as poor citizenship uses disgust to marginalize those who do not participate in the consumerist economy. The abject poor become a scapegoat for the fears and repulsion of capitalist white power. Those who do not properly industrialize, commercialize, and monetize become worthless, thrust away to the margins of society to occupy the socio-political borders of non-citizenship. But these abstract borders become the material borders of inner-city neighborhoods, reservations, and rural isolation. Federal legislations enacting state-sanctioned dispossessions deny groups with property vulnerability access to possessive individualism, and thus access to

citizenship, and displace the American dispossessed into physical isolation and marginalization. These legislations have created a system of social death in the United States that continues to shape American politics, economics, and nationalism.

Property also becomes entangled in moral arguments of propriety and respect that reflect back in further legislation of non-white groups. In her 2012 monograph, *Social Death: Racialized Rightlessness and the Criminalization of the Unprotected*, Lisa Marie Cacho reads race and unprotected status in immigrants as it leads to both rightlessness and criminalization. As she examines the racism of the American legal system when applied to black and brown subjects, she concludes that "[i]n neoliberal ways of knowing, the value of life is subjected to an economic analysis ... Lives are legibly valuable when they are assessed comparatively and relationally within economic, legal, and political contexts and discourses" (Cacho 33). Cacho's work extends Patterson beyond the confines of slavery and revises the work of African American scholars to consider the comparative social death of black and brown peoples in the United States through criminalization. She writes, "permanently criminalized people are … *ineligible for personhood* … [because their] very humanity is represented as something that one becomes or achieves, that one must earn because it cannot just be" (Cacho 6). Thus, Cacho recognizes that racialization simply creates an expedient method for marking those with property vulnerability who then get denied access to possessive individualism and become part of the American dispossessed. However, Patterson's construction focuses too narrowly on the institutional rather than the individual. In a 2009 article, Vincent Brown argues, "the concept of social death is a distillation from Patterson's breathtaking survey—a theoretical abstraction that is meant not to describe the lived experiences of the

enslaved so much as to reduce them to a least common denominator that could reveal the essence of slavery in an ideal-type slave, shorn of meaningful heritage" (1233). Brown suggests that scholars who make use of the concept of social death, such as Saidiya Hartman and Stephanie Smallwood, foreclose much of the possibility for slaves' agency, a critique often leveled against Patterson himself. However, I would also expand this critique to suggest that, for the most part, those who theorize social death work within the confines of New World African slavery and its descendants. These constructions delimit the malleability of Patterson's original theorization. Patterson's theory occurs "in every clime and in every time," as Erna Brodber puts it, from Greek slavery to Pacific Northwestern indigenous tribes to New World slavery and racial capitalism. Indeed, the reason Patterson's construction of social death can be distilled is a result of the expansiveness of his study. Thus, I revise Patterson's expansive methodology to consider the forces that render groups socially dead, reframing the contemporary discourse beyond a focus on institutional racism to the denial of legal personhood through legislations of possessive individualism and property vulnerability.

Theorizing abjection as a result of social death opens the discourse to explore individual subjectivity constructed through this property violence. I draw my definition of abjection primarily from Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror*, in which she offers an expansive and dynamic definition of abjection that includes corporal rot and death (the corpse offers the perfect representation of death infecting life), physical and metaphorical boundaries (a border that one approaches but tries to avoid), and psychological third-space (the failure to establish psycho-linguistic subjectivity) (3-5). Rather than pathological, or the dangerous destruction and exploitation that most scholars assign to

abjection, I embrace reparative or optimistic abjection to suggest that the liminality can produce a space of political maneuverability. The abject stands outside of the subject/object dichotomy and outside an oppressor/oppressed dichotomy as a third space that makes resistance to capitalist subject formation possible. Occupying and traversing borders or existing outside of the legal structure of citizen and non-citizen destabilizes both the borders and the taxonomies of humanity. Abjection, even as it is theorized as a space of destruction, can also offer protection against the dehumanizing effects of social death.

Social death impacts more than just the construction of subjectivity in relation to the State; it is also a factor in the construction of psycho-linguistic subjectivity through intersubjectivity. Where Patterson theorizes degradation from the top-down, Kristevan abjection offers an understanding of the individual's experience of that degradation as the physical (garbage and refuse), corporal (rot and corpses), political (criminalization and marginalization), spatial (occupation and negotiation of literal and metaphorical borders), and psycho-linguistic (the result of the failure to differentiate as a subject). At its most basic, Kristeva writes that the abject is that which polite society thrusts away in order to maintain decorum: garbage, rotting food, corpses. This decay reminds the living that they will soon be dead. When a subject approaches the abject border, that space in which the refuse of life has been marginalized, the subject must come to terms with its own biological frailty. Moreover, the abject, according to Kristeva, degrades and is degraded. She notes that the perfect representation of the abject is the corpse – not a symbolic representation of death but a real physical manifestation of the reminder that every body is rotting towards death. I would add, in literary devices, the death-infecting-life

presence of ghosts and hauntings to the list of abject manifestations. Displacements frequently result in interactions with corpses, as in the large-scale loss of life in the Trail of Tears or the disinterment of cemeteries in the flooding of the Tennessee Valley, and thus the American dispossessed come to occupy spaces of death. Angela Naimou articulates the haunting "afterlife of property" in the biopolitical "detritus of lives" in which "the trope of waste not only binds the living to uselessness and consigns them to zones of disposal but also transforms them, unsurprisingly, into the material refuse of the dead" in order to "salvage" personhood in groups denied legal and social subjectivity (12;17). I employ Kristeva's theory of abjection to explore a similar trope of waste, and I suggest that Kristeva, when supplemented with relational psychology, offers a language for performing this salvage work.

Through their institutionally imposed social death, the American dispossessed are pushed to the borders and remain unrecognized by the State as agents. I contend that Kristeva's construction of abjection can be mapped on to the political reality of marginalization in the United States. Other scholars, such as Darieck Scott and Karen Shimakawa, have also recognized the political manifestation of abjection, though focused particularly in one single ethnic group rather than comparatively. Shimakawa uses abjection as a way of reading the political positioning of Asian Americans in relation to the white supremacist American identity: "Asian Americanness functions as abject in relation to Americanness. ... Asian Americanness thus occupies a role both necessary to and mutually constitutive of national subject formation -- *but it does not result in the formation of an Asian American subject or even an Asian American object*." (3, emphasis in original). The rhetoric of "Americanness" needs the outlier of Asian Americanness or

other hyphenated identities in order to understand itself by what it is not. Just as a subject positions itself in opposition to an object in order to establish a hierarchy that better defines the subject's unified understanding of itself, hegemony needs an oppressed antipode to shore up the boundaries of power. But as Shimakawa, citing Kristeva, notes, "[t]he abject … does not achieve a (stable) status of object ... [because] 'there is nothing objective or objectal to the abject. It is simply a frontier'" (3). The border/frontier of racialized identities in the United States provides an easily malleable boundary constructed by white power into the most convenient negation. This results in the non-citizenship of those who fall beyond that border. I revise Shimakawa's construction, however, to articulate property vulnerability in the racialization of Asian Americans and other groups of the American dispossessed. In my construction, the subject becomes those with political power whose citizenship rights afford them possessive individualism. They define themselves hierarchically to the objects that they own. Those who are not and cannot be incorporated into this construction as subject or object become abject.

The abject represents a constant reminder of the social construction of power and control. Thus, the subject must thrust away these abjects, must degrade, maim, and kill them in order to maintain social control. As Steve Martinot and Jared Sexton theorize, "The foundations of US white supremacy are far from stable. … [Thus], the social structures of whiteness must ever be re-secured in an obsessive fashion. … White supremacy is not reconstructed simply for its own sake, but for the sake of the social paranoia, the ethic of impunity, and the violent spectacles of racialisation that it calls the 'maintenance of order'" (179). The act of thrusting away to maintain order manifests in the institutional imposition of social death through marginalization by denying

citizenship and rights, natal alienation by refusing kinship claims, and abject degradation. Kristeva contends, "refuse and corpses show me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border. Such wastes drop so that I might live" (*Powers* 3). Kristeva's language of borders suggests that there are political fault lines between subject, object, and abject which cannot be crossed without one occupying that space. Those who are subjects avoid these fault lines. Those who are abjects haunt the edges, threatening subjects to keep away. I transfer this spatial theoreticization of the Other to the political reality in which the American dispossessed are physically and legally marginalized into "zones of disposal." These dispossessed become the refuse of American society which must be hidden away to maintain the status quo investment in white power. When structures of power are forced to recognize the dispossessed Other, those structures become immediately destabilized. The investment in white power only succeeds through the continued disposal of the dispossessed, who come to understand themselves as abjected through the mechanisms of social death.

However, abjection is also a grammar of subject formation in relation to precarity. The psychoanalytic construction of subjectivity relies on binaric gender differentiation to understand subject formation, which many of the American dispossessed cannot access because of the very mechanisms of social death. I argue, instead, for reframing the inaugural loss not with the mother, but with the *caregiver* – mother, father, mammy, or other. Eliminating the construction of the pre-Oedipal state and threat of castration in favor of the non-linguistic semiotic chora, the holophrastic thetic, and the emergence of

syntax degenders the process of subject formation. In *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Kristeva develops a linguistic construction of subject formation. Jacques Lacan theorizes that the child establishes its subjectivity by learning what is "I" from what is "not-I" in a hierarchy that establishes "not-I" as the object. Kristeva expands Lacan to argue that this process occurs linguistically through the appropriate implementation of syntax, as syntax delineates the subject from the object (*Revolution* 48). Linguistically, "syntax registers the thetic break as an opposition of discrete and permutable elements but whose concrete position nevertheless indicates that each one has a definite signification" (*Revolution* 55). Consequently, entrance into the Symbolic through the thetic phase depends on the ability to use syntax, instead of simply making holophrastic gestures toward language. Kristeva notes, "the *symbolic* – and therefore syntax and all linguistic categories – is a social effect of the relation to the other" (*Revolution* 29). This is the intersubjective construction of what I call psycho-linguistic subjectivity – subjectivity established and understood through language. Ultimately, subjectivity is a linguistic creation. The act of understanding one's self as an *I*, a political agent, and a subject, depends on language. By nature of being human and a social being, all people learn some type of language and all language has grammar; thus, psycho-linguistic subject formation presents a more universal and non-gendered heuristic for understanding subjectivity.

In this process of establishing a subject/object dichotomy a remainder haunts the borders of identification – the abject. Judith Butler calls this remainder the "'constitutive outside' – the *unspeakable*, the unviable, the *nonnarrativizable* that secures and, hence, fails to secure the very borders of materiality. … And in the case of bodies, those exclusions haunt signification as its abject borders or that which is strictly foreclosed: the

unlivable, the nonnarrativizable, the traumatic" (188, my emphasis). As the "unspeakable" and "nonnarrativizable," the abject "draws me toward the place where *meaning collapses*" (*Powers* 2, my emphasis). In other words, the abject stands outside of the subject/object dichotomy formed by internalizing the politics of language, occurring in that outside third-space of liminality that stands in opposition to hybridity both as the dissolution of bodies into corpses and in the breakdown of psycho-linguistic subjectivity. It is a border that one approaches but tries to avoid, and this border can be represented spatially, corporally, or psychically. When one crosses the border of abjection, "death infecting life" manifests the subject's inability to internalize the syntax of the subject/object break. Kristeva writes, "when the semiotic chora disturbs the thetic position by redistributing the signifying order, … the denoted object and the syntactic relation are disturbed as well" (*Revolution* 55), and, "[a]s a consequence, any disturbance of the 'social censorship' – that of the signifier/signified break – attests, perhaps first and foremost, to an influx of the death drive" (*Revolution* 49). The social censorship dictates the rules of the linguistic system that determine how subjects understand their position to others. Thus, abjection symbolizes the disruption of psycho-linguistic subjectivity by the intrusion of death brought on by the chaotic attempts of a contingent subject trying to build new subjectivity through and against precarity.

However, the legacy of psychoanalysis universalizes a white, middle-class, heterosexual, patriarchal experience; in effect, Lacan and Kristeva assume a propertied subject. In order to address some of the difficulties of traditional psychoanalysis's tendencies to universalization, patriarchal construction, and whitewashing, I problematize Lacan's and Kristeva's theories of the construction of subjectivity in which one

transitions from the pre-Symbolic to the Symbolic through the mirror phase and the threat of castration, thus forming a subject identity that defines itself in opposition to the object. Turning to both Kristeva's theory of subject formation through language acquisition and Jessica Benjamin's expansion of psychoanalysis through intersubjectivity, some of the theoretical erasure of people of color and ethnic groups can be ameliorated. With the influence of feminist theory, relational psychologists have moved away from the construction of the Oedipal Complex to the pre-oedipal, focusing more on the relationship between the child and mother instead of the threat of castration. Defined as "the field of intersection between two different subjective worlds," intersubjectivity revises traditional psychoanalysis to refocus the subject orientation to recognize other subjects rather than hierarchically differentiate subject from object (Benjamin 29). Intersubjectivity provides a way for psychoanalysis to update the construction of the subject/object dichotomy, rejecting the idea that identity forms in the isolation of a single mind recognizing its ego and instead insisting that subjectivity is formed in relation to recognizing others. Originating with Husserl, intersubjectivity makes a departure from Descartes statement “I think, therefore I am.” The subject cannot simply think itself into being, but must understand itself both in relation to objects (as in traditional psychoanalysis) and to other subjects (as in relational psychology). Thus, rather than always interpellating “not-I” as an object, the intersubjective recognizes the Other. Jessica Benjamin writes, "Intersubjectivity was formulated in deliberate contrast to the logic of the subject and object, which predominates in Western philosophy and science. It refers to that zone of experience or theory in which the other is not merely the object of the ego's need/drive or cognition/perception but has a separate and equivalent center of

self" (30). Intersubjectivity, then, comes with the recognition that not only is the syntactic subject different from the predicate and thus the psycho-linguistic subject from the object, but that there can be two subjects in the sentence. By framing abjection through relational psychology, intersubjectivity calls us to understand our own subject formation in relation to another's equal yet unique subject formation.

Intersubjective Abjection as a Heuristic

However, intersubjectivity is a horizon of futurity, intersubjective abjection a pragmatic present. In the case of intersubjective abjection, the "other" that one must recognize is not another individual, but one's own abject self. With this I seek to answer the problem laid out by Antonio Viego in *Dead Subjects*. He writes, "critical race and ethnicity studies scholars have developed no language to talk about ethnic-racialized subjectivity and experience that is not entirely ego- and social psychological and that does not imagine a strong, whole, complete, and transparent ethnic-racialized subject" (4). Intersubjective abjection offers a possible solution. Intersubjective abjection is in no way utopic; in its very design this subjectivity is formed through and against trauma, but the precarity of the state of social death and the individual abjection that causes must be held simultaneously with the desire to become a political actor. Intersubjective abjection manifests the very antithesis of unified subjectivity; it is, in effect, a kind of double consciousness always aware of dangerous interpellations even as those same interpellations provide for the possibility of subject formation.

By formulating a theory of intersubjective abjection, I seek to resolve what Butler and Athanasiou call the aporia of dispossession (91). Intersubjective abjection recognizes

both the political state of dispossession and the subjectivity and resistance of those occupying these states of being. When rendered part of the American dispossessed, the State refuses to recognize intersubjectivity, instead pushing the undesirable across political borders that deconstruct any opportunity at building psycho-linguistic subjectivity. Becoming an intersubjective abject means recognizing one's own psycho-linguistic subjectivity in relation to the precarity of property vulnerability. Though focusing only on black subjectivity, Sharon Holland asks the provocative question: "What if some subjects *never* achieve, in the eyes of others, the status of the 'living'? What if these subjects merely haunt the periphery of the encountering person's vision, remaining, like the past and the ancestors who inhabit it, at one with the dead" (15). With intersubjective abjection, the American dispossessed constantly question, undermine, and revise their position outside the status of the socially alive. The dispossession cannot be undone and the individual is always already interpellated by systemic oppressions, but intersubjective abjection offers the opportunity for political maneuverability by consciously inhabiting and transgressing these "zones of disposal." In some cases, intersubjective abjection can be redemptive, but in some cases, the identity crisis remains unresolved and the fight must go on.

Intersubjective abjects cross the fault lines of abjection with impunity and force the powerful to constantly re-evaluate their own positions. The individual intersubjective abject destabilizes the political construction of the subject/object hierarchy of possessive individualism. They serve as a reminder of the subject's tenuous power; any self can become abject. However, the key to political efficacy for the intersubjective abject arises from establishing an alternative to the subject/object political hierarchy. Crystal Parikh

examines the difficult work of minority subject formation in the state of precarity. She theorizes, “as the minority subject confronts (and is confronted with) the conditions of its own existence, it engages in acts of betrayal. This subject continually and necessarily returns to founding moments, reckoning with the literal and symbolic violence at the heart of its own being, and it risks the self in order to call for the others who haunt that being” (3). I add to Parikh’s construction by suggesting that which the minority subject constantly confronts is its own social death, which causes the subject to seek shelter in the paradoxical safety beyond the borders of abjection. The other that haunts the being is in fact its own abject self as it begins to build subjectivity within and against the precarity of denial. In confronting the self/other, the intersubjective abject can begin to seek out a community of other abjects and build a new syntax with multiple subject positions, not diametrically opposed, but collectively constructed. This group of intersubjective abjects understands the borders that they inhabit, recognize the system of oppression outside of their political position, find themselves constantly haunted by abjection, and yet still strive. Cacho cites Cathy Cohen, who argues that "individuals with little power in society engage in counter-normative behaviors" (30). These counter-normative behaviors include resisting the ever-present bildungsroman narrative of education, labor, and spending that capitalism must perpetuate in order to maintain the march of “progress.” Intersubjective abjects do not necessarily resist capitalism by Marxist revolution; instead, they participate in the market on their own terms, creating alternative economies, using entitlement systems to their advantage, and generally inhabiting their marginalization out of the “basic need to exist as a quasi-person, however marginal and vicarious that existence might be” (Patterson 46). This non-normative participation allows white power

to deny citizen rights and create a panopticon of surveillance and punishment without protection. The four novels that this project addresses present four possible avenues for this type of resistance: retrospection, reconciliation, refutation, and reformation. These are, of course, not the only methods of resistance or even the best methods of resistance, but they are options for the intersubjective abject who must recognize their own precarity and still move forward.

Cartographies of Social Death examines moments of legal dispossession across ethnic markers to study comparatively and relationally the similarities and differences in the abjection of African Americans in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), Native Americans in Sherman Alexie's *Flight* (2007), Appalachians Americans in Amy Greene's *Long Man* (2014), and white Dominican immigrants in Julia Alvarez's *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* (1992). Chapter one, "Property Violence and Matriarchal Resistance in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*," reads how Morrison uses *retrospection* as a methodology for framing a radical black subjectivity in relation to white violence. I argue that the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act destabilized the borders between slave state and free state and threatened the safety of runaways in the North and explore the violent rupture of the physical boundaries marked and the psychological boundaries metaphorized by the fence that surrounds Baby Suggs's house at 124 Bluestone Road. When that boundary is violently penetrated by the arrival of white slaveowner Schoolteacher coming to reclaim the runaway Sethe and her children, Sethe's daughter Denver must teach the ex-slave community intersubjective abjection. By reconstructing the fence through retrospection, they are able to come to terms with the violent history of slavery. Focusing on the

character of Denver establishes a lineage of mothers that directly denies the natal alienation of slavery and its afterlives. Chapter two, "Native American Social Death and Zits' Ghost Dance in Sherman Alexie's *Flight*," merges a critique of Cherokee removal from the 1830s and how the Indian Removal Act of 1830 established juridical precedent for genocide and forced tribes into reservations with Alexie's twenty-first century revision of the Sioux practice of Ghost Dancing. A homeless and orphaned Native American teenager without a tribe, Zits' juvenile delinquency escalates into murder, and the violence causes him to spiral back through time and space and into various other bodies to recognize the failure of violent revenge. Using time-travel as a structural formation of the Ghost Dance, Zits comes finds *reconciliation* between the relationship between historical cultural violence and his contemporary subject formation. Chapter three, "Responding to a Discourse of Appalachian Stigmatypes in Amy Greene's *Long Man*," provides a *refutation* of the lengthy discourse of Appalachian alterity and degradation manifested in corporate documents, governmental propaganda, and popular culture. I consider how the 1933 Tennessee Valley Authority Act, as a part of the New Deal promising economic progress and modernization to the piedmont surrounding the Tennessee River, displaced thousands of Appalachians from land already stolen from the Cherokee in favor of dams and nuclear power plants. This chapter deconstructs rigid definitions of whiteness in the United States by demonstrating how Appalachian whiteness experiences social death and abjection through the property vulnerability of the mountain folk forced from their homes when a TVA dam's floodwaters threaten to drown them. Greene's novel responds to this discourse to refute the dehumanization of Appalachian poor as criminal, individualistic, and fundamentally second-class whites.

Chapter four, “Translating Psycho-Linguistic Subjectivity in Julia Alvarez’s *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*,” interrogates the process of subject *reformation* in relation to immigration precipitated by CIA intervention in Rafael Trujillo’s regime in the Dominican Republic that reinforces the Monroe Doctrine of 1823. Forced to incorporate new linguistic systems, the García girls come to know themselves in relation to their self-possession as white, upper-class Dominicans and their new degradation as Hispanic immigrants in the US. Two of the García daughters are institutionalized during their difficult attempts at reformation of their psycho-linguistic subjectivity from Spanish to English. Each of these novels perform a temporal revision, both in the rejection of unificatory narrative time, and in the return to these earlier legislations and the worlds framed by them. They bring the state-making of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century into the contemporary period to ask how dispossession framed and continues to frame citizenship and subjectivity in the American dispossessed.

CHAPTER ONE
RETROSPECTION: PROPERTY VIOLENCE AND MATRIARCHAL RESISTANCE IN TONI MORRISON'S *BELOVED*

By the end of Toni Morrison's 1987 novel *Beloved*, the year is 1874. Slaves have been emancipated; the Civil War has ended; and Reconstruction has remade the United States. Although trapped in a prison controlled by the ghost of the crawling-already baby and her reincarnation Beloved, Denver stands on the porch of their home 124 Bluestone in Ohio, afraid of leaving the isolated house. She remembers her mother Sethe and her grandmother Baby Suggs arguing about the inescapable danger of the whitepeople outside their home. In this moment, Baby Suggs returns as another haunting presence and convinces Denver to "know [that the world is dangerous] and go on out the yard." Baby Suggs's postmortem reappearance harkens back to her Call for radically embodied self-possession, preaching that although the boundaries of black bodies can and will be violated, ex-slaves can subvert their degradation by loving those same bodies. During her life, the yard and the fence that surrounds it metaphorizes Baby Suggs's self-possession. Morrison uses a series of borders and boundaries to mark the ambiguity of attempts at kinship and property claims: the border between Kentucky and Ohio, the fence and yard of 124 Bluestone, the boundary between life and death. Traversing these borders creates space for destabilizing constructions of power that render slaves socially dead. Slaveowner Schoolteacher's breach of these borders to reclaim his runaway property dispossesses the ex-slave of her tenuous possessive individualism, signifying the property vulnerability of ex-slaves rendered by the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850. This penetration precipitates Sethe's violent act that aligns Denver with trauma and isolation, just as Sethe's maternal blood marks Denver as a fugitive slave, but Sethe's decision to run and

to refuse return also keeps Denver from enslavement at Sweet Home. The trauma of infanticide lies almost dead center in the novel, but Morrison plays with time and narration so that the action and the telling never seem to align. In many ways, the form of the novel takes on a meta-representation of the genre of the neo-slave narrative – the characters constantly look back, retell, and revise narratives of trauma related to slavery and its afterlives to fill in the gaps of the archive of their experiences. In this process of retrospection, Denver enters into a matrilineal line of resistance to white masters that includes her mother and grandmother; the whitegirl Amy Denver who helps bring Sethe's baby into the world and provides her name; and the mixed-race school tutor Lady Jones who reintegrates Denver into the community around Bluestone. As Denver becomes more visible in the community, she teaches other women how to embrace retrospection, and they return to 124 Bluestone to rebuild the border of the fence. This chapter maps the lineage of Denver's matrilineal resistance, through which Denver expresses a form of intersubjective abjection by which she comes to create radical black subjectivity in relation to her state of precarity, thus living up to her foremothers' influence.

If Beloved's story is not one to pass on (Morrison 323), then foregrounding Denver tells a different story. Often relegated to the periphery of *Beloved* criticism, a critical repositioning of Denver reorients the narrative away from moments of trauma to moments of resistance. Scholars who interrogate abjection center sexual violence and infanticide exclusively. A. Samuel Kimball notes that *Beloved* explores subjectivity but highlights the juxtaposition between the deathly maternal and infanticide. Lily Wang Lei also theorizes the trauma of slavery and the relationship of the death drive to truth and memory. Both Lei and Kimball focus on the rupture of the pre-oedipal bond of the

maternal between Sethe and Beloved and the abjection of Sethe's maternal body, rather than the relationship of the mother and the child who lived. Keith Mitchell uses physical trauma to consider black masculinity and sexual violation, suggesting that the threat of Sethe's and Paul D's rapes supports heteronormativity as safety in the black community. Darieck Scott conceives the violence of their rapes as deconstruction of black masculinity evidenced by Paul D's inability to form a "whole" identity. He concludes, "for wholeness, the black body must be recovered, revalued (as we see in Baby Suggs's sermon) … The dismembered parts of the black self torn apart in slavery must be healed and reintegrated by the self-love of unflinching memory" (Scott 149). I also read Baby Suggs's Call as a reclamation of the abject black body in self-love, but where Scott focuses on rape and sexual violence, I argue that the violence of dispossession manifests the precarity of Denver's psycho-linguistic subjectivity. Ultimately, each of these readings offer too negative a view of abjection caused by the social death of dispossession. Denver's occupation and crossing of abject borders creates a liminal space for the potential articulation of black subjectivity through intersubjective resistance.

Denver is initiated into social death and abjection even before she is born, simply by being the child of a slave. However, Patterson's conception of natal alienation, which he argues is the "loss of ties of birth in both ascending and descending generations … from all formal, legally enforceable ties of 'blood,'" relies too heavily on patriarchal understandings of family (7). Patterson too easily equates "blood" with power that for the most part follows a patriarchal lineage. He notes that slaves' descendants inherit the state of social death, but he does not consider what else might be inheritable. I would argue, rather, that kinship emerges as highly significant rather than alienated, both for the

institution and the individual, especially in the context of New World slavery. States held laws that dictated the child followed the condition of the mother into slavery, and because of serious taboos against white women having sexual relations with black men, this law in effect only addressed the mixed race children begat through the sexual exploitation of slave women by masters and the generation of new laborers through breeding. Though born on the border between the free state of Ohio and the slave state of Kentucky, Denver legally follows the condition of her mother and becomes a slave. Although Sethe's blood initiates Denver into the social death of slavery, Sethe also initiates Denver into a matrilineal line of resistance to white power. But by deciding to refuse the property claim of the master, both in running away and through infanticide, Sethe demands that her kinship claim be recognized.

Understanding Denver's retrospection requires mapping the property claims made by Sethe from Sweet Home to Bluestone; no one character both experiences or enacts property violence in Morrison's novel to the level that Sethe does. Sethe subverts Schoolteacher's ownership by making maternal property claims even while at Sweet Home, as well as making the decision to send her children ahead into to freedom and to maintain their freedom at the ultimate cost. After the Sweet Home slaves' original plan for escape fails, Sethe's decision to run away without Halle is triggered by the violent denial of her self-possession. The extreme sadism of Schoolteacher's categorization – a manifestation of the act of naming discussed by Hortense Spillers – and her rape and beating by the nephews – which requires burying Sethe's pregnant belly in the ground to avoid harming their future labor investment – leads Sethe to articulate her violation in the language of property. When she recounts her rape and beating to Paul D, she tells him,

> "those boys came in there and took my milk. That's what they came in there for. Held me down and took it. I told Mrs. Garner on em. She had that lump and couldn't speak but her eyes rolled out tears. Them boys found out I told on em. Schoolteacher made one open up my back, and when it closed it made a tree. It grows there still."
> "They used cowhide on you?"
> "And they took my milk."
> "They beat you and you was pregnant?"
> "And they took my milk!" (Morrison 19-20, my emphasis)

Although Paul D can only see the trauma of violence, Sethe's emphatic repetition of the violation of stealing her milk focuses the violence into a property dispute.[5] She claims her body and its labor in a way that Baby Suggs never does. Dean Franco points out, "[t]he trauma, Sethe tells [Paul D] and us, is not solely the beating, but especially the taking, not only the whipping but also the stealing of her milk. The operative word in the exchange in 'my' as in mine. Sethe lays claim to herself, and the product of her own body" (425). But one could also argue that the operative word is the taking. The transitive verb "take" contains semantic definitions of power, violence, consumption, sex, and possession: "to get into one's hands or into one's possession, power or control, to seize or capture physically, to get possession of by killing or capturing … to acquire by eminent domain; to grasp, grip; to catch or attack through the effect of a sudden force or influence; … to receive into one's body … to partake of; … to bring or receive into a relation or connection, to copulate with; to transfer into one's own keeping" (Merriam-Webster). The act of taking enacts a power struggle over possession, generally between two unequal participants in which one refuses the other, and for something to be taken, it must first *belong* to another. Significantly, Sethe lays claim to her breast milk, the biological manifestation of her kinship ties as a mother. In this way, the property claim

[5] See Mock for an extended discussion of milk and breast-feeding in *Beloved*.

extends beyond simple self-possession, which is ultimately a masculinist claim to freedom, to maternal, self-sacrificing self-possession. Like Sixo's shout "Seven-O," Sethe looks forward into the future to make kinship claims. However, this act of telling Paul D about her violation only occurs once, in direct opposition to the many retellings of Denver's stories. Sethe's narrative does none of the work of retrospection for her own subjectivity.

Fugitivity manifests the institutional investment in white property and, at the same time, the radical act of denying racial capitalism. Sethe becomes a fugitive of the law, although that law offers her no citizenship or protection from rape and assault. Recognized in the eyes of the law for punishment, slaves' lack of rights allowed them to be acted upon but not recognized as actors. Both Patterson and Saidiya Hartman recognize this paradox. Patterson writes "there has never existed a slaveholding society, ancient or modern, that did not recognize the slave as a person in law" (22). Hartman notes, "[I]t is a tricky matter to detail the civil existence of a subject who is socially dead and legally recognized as human only to the degree that he is criminally culpable" (24). Slavery and its legal representation through fugitive slave laws produce institutional marginalization denying legal personhood. Running away from Sweet Home, and taking her unborn child along in her womb, radically subverts the master's ownership without the benevolent authorization of Baby Suggs's purchased manumission, thus rendering Sethe a criminal. Sethe's act of resistance also renders her, and thus Denver, abject, as that which "disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. … [that which is criminal] because it draws attention to the fragility of the law"

(*Powers* 4). Sethe's fugitivity highlights the social construction of the law by embracing criminalization, even as it denies her personhood.

Slaves only appear in legal and social systems manifested as the property of their masters, and this includes masters' rights to pursue their property should it try to escape.[6] In the colonial period, most state constitutions dealt individually with regulating slavery and recognizing the ownership rights of masters.[7] As the colonies transitioned into states, the U.S. Constitution valorized white capitalism, weaving into the very fabric of American government a clause that protected investments in fugitive laborers. Although slaves were not mentioned by name, the intentions were clear.[8] One judge makes the inference that the fugitive slave clause in the fourth article was fundamental in convincing the southern slaveholding states to ratify the Constitution. The judgment explicitly states, "It is historically well known that the clause in the constitution of the United States, relating to persons owing service and labour in one state escaping into other states, was to secure to the citizens of the slaveholding states the complete right and title of ownership in their slaves, as property, in every state in the Union into which they might escape from the state where they were held in servitude" (Prigg v Pennsylvania). A second act, passed in 1793, expanded the rights of masters seeking the return of these fugitives but restricted the masters' recourse under the laws of the state into which the

[6] Both Patterson and Hartman recognize this paradox. Patterson writes that "there has never existed a slaveholding society, ancient or modern, that did not recognize the slave as a person in law" (22). Hartman notes, "it is a tricky matter to detail the civil existence of a subject who is socially dead and legally recognized as human only to the degree that he is criminally culpable" (24).

[7] See Finkelman and Tsesis.

[8] "No Person held to Service or Labour in one State, under the Laws thereof, escaping into another, shall, in Consequence of any Law or Regulation therein, be discharged from such Service or Labour, But shall be delivered up on Claim of the Party to whom such Service or Labour may be due." (U.S. Const., art. IV, sec. 2, cl. 3)

fugitive had escaped.[9] This second legislation facilitated the interpellation of blacks into slaves even in states that had abolished slavery, but ex-slaves could legally remain in free states if they avoided capture. These laws enacted dispossession by rejecting slaves' attempts to create possessive individualism by making self-possessive and kinship property claims.

As the power of the federal government expanded, slavery became a national issue, causing much of the states' rights tension that led up to the Civil War.[10] Other conflicts over boundaries, settler property rights, and rights to natural resources antagonized southern slave-holding states against the federal government. In order to maintain the Union, Northern lawmakers had to agree to make a series of concessions to Southerners, the most significant of which was the Compromise of 1850 that included the final iteration of the Fugitive Slave Act. The southern slaveholding states threatened secession when California petitioned for admittance as a free state, unbalancing the number of slave to free states. California's acceptance as a state was of the utmost importance to the federal government in order to begin taxing investors on the gold rush that was reaching its peak with the "forty-niners." However, the slave states needed to maintain the balance of slave states to free states in order for them to keep sufficient representation in Congress. The Compromise, engineered by Kentucky Senator Henry Clay, further divided the western territory of the United States (already supposedly ceded to Native American reservations): California entered as a free state, Utah established a

[9] "When a person held to labour in any of the United States, or in either of the territories on the northwest or south of the river Ohio, under the laws thereof, shall escape into any other of the said states or territory, the person to whom such labour or service may be due, his agent or attorney, is hereby empowered to seize or arrest such fugitive from labour" (1 Stat. 302). See also Levinson.

[10] For more on the conflict leading up to the Civil War, see Potter's *Impending Crisis.*

territorial government, and the act formalized the boundary between Texas and New Mexico so that New Mexico could also form a territorial government. In exchange for these boundary disputes, southern slaveholders got the right to pursue fugitives into any state or territory with no statute of limitations.[11] Beyond the rhetorical equation of border disputes and property ownership in slavery, the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 made no space in the United States safe for runaway slaves, creating an institutional imposition of social death as criminalization and non-citizenship. Sethe's escape, in 1855, falls at the height of tensions between slaveholders and Northern industrialists.

Sethe's criminal acts – running away and taking her child – render her a fugitive, but she is not the only runaway in Morrison's novel. The whitegirl Amy Denver, who helps Sethe give birth on the side of the river, also acts as a feminist progenitor for Denver's future resistance. The story of Denver's birth travels through many mouths in the novel; framed by Denver repeating the story she has learned from Sethe to Beloved, the events of Sethe's escape and labor move from Denver's narration and imagination to an omniscient focalization on Sethe. Morrison subverts realist form here in order to highlight the retellings and rememories that African Americans are forced to engage through lost history. Unlike Beloved's story, Denver's story is passed on many times, precipitated by Amy's demand. After the birth, Amy leaves Sethe with an injunction: "You gonna tell her? Who brought her into this here world? … You better tell her. You

[11] "When a person held to service or labor in any State or Territory of the United States, has heretofore or shall hereafter escape into another State or Territory of the United States, the person or persons to whom such service or labor may be due, … may pursue and reclaim such fugitive person, … by seizing and arresting such fugitive" (9 Stat. 462). The act allows for the prosecution of abolitionists helping slaves to escape or hiding them from slave catchers, making them "subject to a fine not exceeding one thousand dollars, and imprisonment not exceeding six months … and shall moreover forfeit and pay, by way of civil damages to the party injured by such illegal conduct, the sum of one thousand dollars, for each fugitive so lost" (9 Stat. 462).

hear? Say Miss Amy Denver. Of Boston" (Morrison 100). Sethe does indeed tell Denver the story of her birth, even as she keeps many other stories – the truth of the infanticide, the violence of Sweet Home, stories not meant to be passed on. In this originary gesture, Morrison invites readers to connect the conditions of the dispossessed across the racial divide.

Amy, because of dispossession of kinship, occupies a position quite similar to a runaway slave, allowing Morrison to explore the intersections of property vulnerability in poor whites and blacks. Amy's mother, presumably because of her extreme poverty, agrees to sign a contract of indentureship to pay for passage to America; Amy believes her mother was in Boston when she was "give to Mr. Buddy" (Morrison 95), suggesting the transfer of labor similar to the transfer of slaves. Amy suggests that Mr. Buddy, the white master, is her father, hinting at the sexual exploitation of Amy's mother like that of Baby Suggs and many other female slaves. When she dies giving birth to Amy, the child is forced to take over her mother's contract, once again following the condition of the mother (Morrison 40). Because she encounters Sethe on the Kentucky side of the banks of the Ohio River, we know that Amy comes from the South, running away and enacting a similar journey to Sethe's escape. Legally, Amy would fall under the cover of the Fugitive Slave Act, since the Act does not limit to slaves but to any "person held to labour," but she believes "[a]in't nobody after me but I know somebody after you" (Morrison 92). Amy marks out the racial division of labor and fugitivity tacitly understood in the law, but Amy's lack of kinship and her dispossession through indentureship that seems to have no contractual end places her in a similar state of marginalization, alienation, and degradation.

Amy represents the failure of poor whites to achieve possessive individualism. Unlike the masters and the Bodwins, Amy occupies a precarious state of vulnerability because of her poverty, her youth, her lack of family, and her gender.[12] Sethe describes Amy to Denver as "[t]he raggediest-looking trash you ever saw" (Morrison 38), even as Sethe lies in the grassy bank near death with breast milk running down her front and blood running down her back at their meeting. Terribly skinny and clearly uneducated, Amy briefly mentions that she has been beaten by her violent master and locked in a root cellar, which caused her to lose weight and muscle mass (Morrison 42). By demanding that Sethe remember her as "Miss" Amy Denver, she articulates herself into a different social class, with its inherent positioning of respectability and self-possession in whiteness.

Amy, in coming upon Sethe lying in the grass, approaches the abject. Sethe, almost ready to die, seems to have embraced abjection and the "border of [her] condition a living being" (*Powers* 3). Rather than turning away or colluding by turning Sethe in to a slave catcher, Amy stops and helps bring Sethe back to life, caring for her wounds and offering her strange comfort. Amy occupies and transverses the borders of abjection as a resistance to her own social death. She constantly repeats the phrase "my Jesus my" to express her sorrow and empathy for Sethe's pain. Rather than a replication of white benevolence like the Bodwins, Amy's assistance in Sethe's birthing aligns the two women in an act of feminist solidarity – even if fleeting by the very nature of their liminal status as fleeing criminals. When Sethe goes in to labor, she crawls in to an unstable dinghy full of holes. Amy pulls the infant free of Sethe's birth canal as water

[12] The precarity of white child indentureship is fully fleshed out in Isenberg's *White Trash: The 400-Year Untold History of Class in America.*

fills the bottom of the boat. Thus, Denver is born on the border: the border of abjection as the thrust away; the border of land and water on the riverbank; and at the border of slavery and freedom in the Ohio River marking the boundary between slave state Kentucky and free state Ohio. But she is also born on no land, as the flowing water of the Ohio River that feeds into the Mississippi constantly changes, moves forward, denies claims of ownership. In that boat, Denver is brought into the world by “two throw-away people, two lawless outlaws” (Morrison 100) and thus initiated into their state of abjection just as she is institutionally initiated into the state of social death. However, these mothers also initiate her into a state of resistance as runaways.

Amy gives Denver her name. Hortense Spillers makes clear the importance of naming in the creation of slaves and the continuation of oppression in her groundbreaking work "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book." She writes, "the captivating party does not only 'earn' the right to dispose of the captive body as it sees fit, but gains, consequently, the right to name and 'name' it" (Spillers 69). Spillers here signifies on naming as both interpellating the black body as a slave, a threat, a mammy, a jezebel, but also literally naming new slaves and their offspring both in daily practice and in official documents, denying their humanity and their kinship. Where Spillers focuses on the unrelenting institutional power of slavery, I turn to the individual’s ability to resist the naming of the master by rejecting their “slave names.” In naming Denver, Sethe subverts the master’s claims, performing a feminist revision of the naming practice by accepting the help of another oppressed runaway. Sethe appropriates Amy’s heteropatriarchal surname and reinvents it as a given name, establishing kinship both with her new baby and with the little whitegirl that saved her life. She takes the mark of

the master, the legal surname, absolutely denied to slaves' unions, primogeniture, and possessive inheritance, and repositions it as a claim of radical black female subjectivity. In this way, she reverses an institutional history of violent miscegenation to produce a matrilineal line of resistance through the futurity of Denver's subject formation.

Unlike Sethe's appropriation of Amy's surname for Denver, Baby Suggs's multiplicity of names illustrates the complexity of ownership claims over black bodies, and yet positions her as one of the head matriarchs of Denver's line of resistance. Baby Suggs still carries her slave name, Jenny Whitlow, officially recorded on her bill of sale, even though only whitepeople use it, because, as Garner says, "Mrs. Baby Suggs ain't no name for a freed Negro" (Morrison 167). In rejecting her chosen name, Garner rejects both the kinship of the surname Suggs and the affective work of a name like Baby. When she tells Garner, "I don't call myself nothing," Baby Suggs denies the white possessive claim over her identity. Furthermore, Suggs was her husband's name, "all she had left of the 'husband' she claimed" (Morrison 167), thus her name both subverts white claims and makes intimate kinship claims that are denied or unrecognized by white power. She rejects the slave laws that deny intimacy to dominate and control, creating radical self-possession by choosing her own affective alliances. Garner reveals that he did not know that she had taken a husband before she was sold to him. Her husband had run away from the plantation in Carolina, thus aligning his name with freedom. Baby Suggs thinks, "how could he find or hear tell of her if she was calling herself some bill-of-sale name?" (Morrison 142). Moreover, where Patterson argues that the state of slavery creates natal alienation in both directions, Baby Suggs calls forth paternity for her son Halle that directly refutes the master's claim, even though Suggs has no biological connection to

Halle. In calling Halle Suggs and not Whitlow, she claims not only her present but also her future. This radical act of taking possession of naming initiates Denver, from both her mother and her grandmother, into a subversive self-fashioning, a process of subject formation through matrilineal choice rather than patriarchal mastery.

By denying masters the right to name their children, Sethe and Baby Suggs oppose the claim of the captivating party and deny the unfreedom of slavery, but of all the characters in *Beloved,* only Baby Suggs achieves legal, contractual freedom. That contractual freedom sets the parameters, and the physical borders, of Denver's life at 124 Bluestone. As a slave, Baby Suggs becomes complicit in her own social death, to the point of possibly rejecting her chance for self-possession. Once Halle has worked for years to buy her freedom, Baby Suggs is caught between "two hard things – standing on her feed till she dropped or leaving her last and probably only living child – she chose the hard thing that made [Halle] happy, and never put to him the question she put to herself: What for? What does a sixty-odd-year-old slavewoman who walks like a three-legged dog need freedom for?" (Morrison 166). Even beyond the fact that in her own self-perception she compares herself to a dog, that she would consider remaining a slave at Sweet Home in order to stay with her only remaining child (now a grown man with children of his own) illustrates the depth of the terror enacted by white power. Paradoxically, slaves' kinship bonds, although not recognized by white systems of power, are at the same time fostered by slave owners in order to further entrench slaves in social

death through an intimacy that generated greater fidelity to the master, or at least lessened threats of rebellion and flight, making Sethe's decision even more radical.[13]

Once Garner takes Baby Suggs over the border of the slave state of Kentucky and into the free state of Ohio, she now occupies a space in which she should legally be able to make property claims. Miller notes that there is "no actual ontological difference between Ohio and Kentucky, but the Ohio River was a magical border between them" (28). Baby Suggs's embodied response to crossing over the border exemplifies the power of spatial interpellation through her recognition and attempt at self-possession. She "suddenly saw her hands and thought with a clarity as simple as it was dazzling, 'These hands belong to me. These my hands.' Next she felt a knocking in her chest and discovered something else new: her own heartbeat. Had it been there all along? This pounding thing?" (Morrison 166). The simple declaration of "[t]hese hands belong to me" marks the first instance in which Baby Suggs recognizes the possibility of possession. Morrison's sentence structure – "[t]hese [are] my hands" – emphatically states

[13] Only one slave on Sweet Home makes strong claims to self-possession: Sixo. Although the benevolent master Mr. Garner believes that he treats his male slaves like men, their own obeisance precludes their self-possession. The Pauls – Paul D, Paul F, and Paul A, all take and use Garner's surname, in effect replicating their own social death and degradation through naming. Halle, on the other hand, is forced to work within the confines of the master-slave relationship, renting his labor out at the permission of Garner and paying Garner his wages in order to buy his mother out of slavery, thus tacitly endorsing the master's property claim over Baby Suggs. Sixo, refusing any other name, stands out among the slaves at Sweet Home as a possessive individual, even in the face of his enslavement. He places value on his own labor, recognizing the return on investment, and thus takes the wages that he is owed. Sixo also seems to have connections to the Native Americans who had already been dispossessed of the land around Sweet Home by recognizing alternative property claims to the land. While leaving Sweet Home at night to meet the Thirty-Mile Woman, Sixo finds a "deserted stone structure that Redmen used way back when they thought the land was theirs. Sixo discovered it on one of his night creeps, and asked its permission to enter" (Morrison 29). By asking permission of the previous owners, the structure, and the land itself, Sixo denies the land claim of the white owner. Not only does he defend his own self-possession, he also radically rejects and subverts the property claims of whiteness. Sixo's greatest act of defiant self-possession arises in the moments before his death. Sixo, in this moment of violent interpellation back into slavery, rejects his degradation and defiantly makes kinship claims. Even as he is burned alive, he laughs and yells out "Seven-O," claiming kinship to the child that the Thirty-Mile Woman carries into freedom. In death, he frightens the institutions of white power until they are forced to silence him with a bullet.

Baby Suggs's ownership; the tacit linking verb equates the subject and predicate nominative, so that Baby Suggs's hands, as synecdoche for the rest of her body, occupy both the subject and predicate spaces. She becomes both the subject and the object of her own property claim.

And yet, Baby Suggs's freedom is tentative at best and her ownership little more than illusory. As Patterson shows, manumission was nothing more than an act of benevolence from the master; thus, Baby Suggs cannot escape the social death of being a former slave, thwarting her attempts to make property claims over Sethe and her children. Patterson notes that even in cases where slaves purchased their own or their family's freedom, as with Halle and Baby Suggs, the labor rented out and the wages paid always already belonged to the master (241). Garner's self-perceived benevolence becomes especially clear when he goes so far as to ask Baby Suggs to confirm his generosity as a kind slave owner. He asks her:

> "Tell em, Jenny. You live any better on any place before mine?"
> "No sir," she said. "No place."
> "How long was you at Sweet Home?"
> "Ten year, I believe."
> "Ever go hungry?"
> "No, sir."
> "Cold?"
> "No, sir."
> "Anybody lay a hand on you?"
> "No, sir."
> "Did I let Halle buy you or not?"
> "Yes, sir, you did," she said, thinking, But you got my boy and I'm all broke down. You be renting him out to pay for me way after I'm gone to Glory. (Morrison 171-2)

Baby Suggs's thoughts undermine Garner's munificence by exposing the systemic degradation of slave intimacy, especially for the slave mother. The *freed* slave never becomes a *free* person; the freed slave remains indebted to the master for his or her

kindness and thus still manacled by many of the strictures of the master/slave relationship. Garner makes this clear to Baby Suggs just after crossing the Ohio River into free territory. When she laughs at the thought of her freedom, Garner misreads the situation and replies, "[n]othing to be scared of, Jenny. Just keep your same ways, you'll be all right" (Morrison 167). He implies that as long as she continues to play the obedient Negro, she will not cause trouble for the white community in Ohio. She still experiences social death because she can never be anything but an ex-slave, and the system of manumission replicates the obedience of the slave into freedom.[14]

Moreover, Garner forces Baby Suggs to maintain her dependence on the benevolence of whitepeople even in Ohio. He obligates her to the Bodwins – "two angels" who agree "[i]n return for laundry, some seamstress work, a little canning and so on (oh shoes, too), they would *permit* her to stay [at 124 Bluestone]" (Morrison 171, my emphasis). These tasks replicate Baby Suggs's slave labor as the very same labor she was forced to perform at Sweet Home in exchange for "room and board." Even though she attempts to enter the free market when she asks about getting wage labor at the slaughterhouse, Garner and the Bodwins deny her right to participate in an economy invested in white power even where it is not invested in slavery.[15] Her safety as a freed slave depends on the magnanimity of the white community and her continued performance of obedience. The Bodwins represent white power because, even if they do not participate in the ownership of slaves, they collude in the protection of slavery both in

[14] This benevolence is ultimately taken to its extreme by Abraham Lincoln in the Emancipation Proclamation. Unlike a revolutionary casting off of slavery, American slaves are freed by the generosity of a white "master."
[15] This reproduction of slave labor in freedmen is similar to the sharecropping practice in the South developed during Reconstruction. Hartman makes a compelling argument for the "double bind of freedom" in *Scenes of Subjection*.

their material investment in slave-like labor and in their persistent subjection of freed slaves. Just as legislation like the Fugitive Slave Law undermines the safety of free territories, the complicity of the white community in free states, by reproducing black obedience, maintains social death as the status quo. This framing of white munificence and black compliance situates 124 Bluestone and its occupants within the precarity of dispossession extended beyond the state of slavery. Denver, like a refugee, crosses the border into what should be safety but what actually only introduces her into an illusory space of greater danger.

The boundaries that Baby Suggs establishes at 124, demarcated by the fence surrounding the yard, give the community a safe space to express self-possession outside of the benevolent gift of manumission or the fugitive unfreedom of escape. Baby Suggs both follows the strictures of her arrangement with the Bodwins in her labor and subverts their white power by opening 124 to the black community, including runaway slaves. Goods, shared communally or given without demands for reciprocation, juxtapose the Bodwins' "generosity." Sethe and Denver's arrival at 124 Bluestone authorizes the space as an assertion of kinship claims in opposition to the natal alienation of the slave. Life at 124 Bluestone offers Sethe a brief chance to experience the freedom of self-possession, as she learns, "how it felt to wake up at dawn and *decide* what to do with the day. … Bit by bit, at 124 and in the Clearing, along with the others, she had claimed herself. Freeing yourself was one thing; claiming ownership of that freed self was another" (Morrison 111-112). Sethe's first step to freedom established an ownership claim; living and working by her own choice manifests that claim. Moreover, with part of her family together again, Sethe and Baby Suggs can also begin to make assertions of property

relations. By loving them, Baby Suggs claims property rights over Sethe and the children: Howard, Buglar, the crawling-already baby, and Denver. The little baby Denver inspires an act of selflessness in Stamp Paid, and the spontaneous party instigated by Stamp Paid's blackberries becomes an expression of Baby Suggs's love, both for her family and for the community. The spontaneity of the party illustrates the excess of both goods and love in the safety of 124. However, this excess turns sour for the community, which has not been able to create self-possession and kinship claims:

> Baby Suggs' three (maybe four) pies grew to ten (maybe twelve). Sethe's two hens became five turkeys. The one block of ice brought all the way from Cincinnati – over which they poured mashed watermelon mixed with sugar and mint to make a punch – became a wagonload of ice cakes for a washtub full of strawberry shrug. 124, rocking with laughter, goodwill, and food for ninety, made them angry. Too much, they thought. Where does she get it all, Baby Suggs, holy? Why is she and hers always the center of things? How come she always knows exactly what to do and when? Giving advice; passing message; healing the sick, hiding fugitives, loving, cooking, cooking, loving, preaching, singing, dancing and loving everybody like it was her job and hers alone. (Morrison 161)

The repetition of loving explicates the community's struggle with Baby Suggs and her family. Her ability to love through natal kinship flies in the face of their continued experience of natal alienation. Moreover, she spreads her love around beyond her kinship ties and asks the community to love themselves, a self-possession that they fail to internalize when those property claims are threatened by the return of the master.

The problem with 124 representing Baby Suggs's possessive individualism stems from the fact that her occupation of the house only comes from the masterly benevolence of the Bodwins and Baby Suggs's continued obedience. Baby Suggs's property and kinship claims are circumscribed by the authority of white power, and her disobedience in harboring fugitive slaves results in the violent rupture of those property claims through

the penetration of the physical boundaries of the yard. Sethe's denial of Schoolteacher's right to own her children comes to its apex when Schoolteacher finds the runaways that Baby Suggs is harboring and seeks to regain his property under the auspices of the Fugitive Slave Law.[16] In a statement of property violence, Baby Suggs recognizes Schoolteacher's arrival at 124 Bluestone as the moment he "came into my yard" (Morrison 211), the moment he collapses the fence that metaphorically represents the boundaries of property and kinship claims Baby Suggs has constructed. The fence falls in the face of the overreaching authority of white power, just as the boundaries between slave state and free state fell with the ratification of the Fugitive Slave Law. Because of the fluidity of narrative time, the actual events of the infanticide are not revealed until the middle of the novel, but Schoolteacher's arrival at 124 Bluestone haunts the narrative throughout, as the ghost of the crawling-already baby haunts the house from the novel's opening sentence.

In the end, Sethe's decision keeps Denver from the horrors of Schoolteacher's Sweet Home, but "the Misery (which is what [Stamp Paid] called Sethe's tough response to the Fugitive Bill)" also pushes Denver past the radical borders of abjection (Morrison 201). Schoolteacher violates the borders of Baby Suggs's yard, and as an agent of white power, he expels Denver from the fragile freedom and ownership established at 124 and re-interpellates her as a slave.[17] The degradation of slavery becomes the individual

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[16] Agusti reads Sethe's decision to kill her children as madness, arguing that Sethe reproduces an investment in ownership, "Sethe reacts to the slave-owning economy and ideology by claiming ownership of another human being" (31). However, all kinship relations operate as a kind of property ownership; in English, we use the same syntax to express relations to people and to things. Sethe's ownership claims are not inflected with madness, but with desperation and subversion in the face of the overwhelming economic investment in white power. She decides her children would be better off dead than at Sweet Home with Schoolteacher.

[17] Keizer also recognizes Schoolteacher as an agent of interpellation in white hegemony, but she does not discuss the moment where Schoolteacher violates the border of 124.

experience of abjection when Denver takes the weight of her mother's decision into her body. After Schoolteacher and the slave catchers leave, Baby Suggs can only able to take the corpse of the crawling-already baby from Sethe by suggesting that Denver needs to nurse, which harkens back to Sethe's own property violation of the breast milk stolen by Schoolteacher's nephews during her rape (Morrison 19). When Baby Suggs leaves the room, Sethe

> aimed a bloody nipple into the baby's mouth. Baby Suggs slammed her fist on the table and shouted, "Clean up! Clean yourself up!"
>
> They fought then. Like rivals over the heart of the loved, they fought. Each struggling for the nursing child. Baby Suggs lost when she slipped in a red puddle and fell. So Denver took her mother's milk right along with the blood of her sister. (Morrison 179)

This scene is rife with death, from the crawling-already baby's corpse to the blood that covers both Baby Suggs and Sethe, but the conflation of mother's milk and sibling's blood especially marks Denver. In this moment, Denver sublimates her mother and her sibling by taking them into her body. If the abject is a border in which a person comes to understand "death infecting life" as Kristeva argues, then Denver crosses the border of life and death, becoming more than just a representation of death in life but a radical body that consumes the abject.

The rupture of 124 Bluestone forces Baby Suggs back into submission at the moment of her most significant property violation. As Sethe and Denver are carted off to jail, a whiteboy and whitegirl radically reassert the investment in black obedience. Baby Suggs is interrupted in her pursuit of Denver, trying to rescue her from her criminalization, by the children and their muddy pair of damaged shoes. Baby Suggs's skill as a cobbler sets her apart from other slaves according to Garner, and this labor becomes part of her agreement with the Bodwins. Therefore, the little children's

appearance at this moment, with "a half-eaten sweet pepper in one hand and a pair of shoes in the other" (Morrison 180), replicate slave labor. Their callous white blindness, forcing themselves through the crowd of black witnesses to demand the woman covered in blood fix their shoes by Wednesday, violates Baby Suggs as much as a child slave owner whipping a slave. She must give up her kinship claim to Sethe and Denver. When she says, "I beg your pardon. Lord, I beg your pardon. I sure do," she follows the script of black obedience, but she speaks to Sethe and Denver (Morrison 180). This economic investment in white power, not only through Schoolteacher's arrival and the subsequent infanticide, but also through the white blindness of benevolence and replication of slave labor, firmly interpellates Baby Suggs, Sethe, and the entire community around 124 Bluestone as expendable waste.

Unlike the boundaries of 124 Bluestone, which mark positive, if impossible, ownership claims, the walls of the prison cell violently dispossess, and Sethe's criminality escalates from fugitivity to murder. Either crime is a capital offense punishable by the social death of slavery or the physical death of hanging. Denver, implicated in her mother's escape, finds herself once again criminalized. She is physically trapped with her mother in the cell, where she remembers, "I've seen my mother in a dark place, with scratching noises. A smell coming from her dress. I have been with her where something little watched us from the corners. And touched. Sometimes they touched" (Morrison 243). Sethe's dress must be covered in blood and most likely breast milk, thus attracting the rats that thrive on refuse. The rat-infested jail mires Denver in both the physical abjection of death and also the radical expulsion and exclusion of criminalization. When they are released from jail, Sethe finds that the

community around 124 Bluestone has rejected her. Thus, Denver remains in isolation. In effect, the house and its occupants become that which the community must thrust away in order to maintain their own distance from death. The community's fear of association with abjection and criminality drives them to avoid Sethe and Baby Suggs.

Though living with her brothers and Baby Suggs, Denver so often feels alone that she craves interaction and she runs away more than once. In a way, Denver's little escapes from 124 Bluestone, which has already been implicated in the investment in white power, replicates Sethe's self-possessive escape from Sweet Home. Denver asserts her own agency, accepting the mantle passed on by Sethe and Amy by sneaking away to Lady Jones's house. Lady Jones, then, represents another woman embracing resistance in Denver's line of matriarchs. Lady Jones is a mixed-race woman with "[g]ray eyes and yellow wooly hair" (Morrison 291). Lady Jones's light skin marks both her mother's sexual exploitation and her own privilege through colorism. Lady Jones rejects this privilege by marrying the "blackest man she could find [and having] five rainbow-colored children" (Morrison 291). In this space between blackness and whiteness, she defies the replication of degradation by black illiteracy in teaching the black children how to read and write. At first, Denver stays outside of the boundaries established by the rejection of the black community and only watches from the window. Lady Jones, however, demands that Denver come in the front door and join the group, using her liminality to ignore the community's censure. Denver learns how to read and write "the capital *w*, the little *i*, the beauty of the letters in her name" (Morrison 120). These lessons illustrate the systemic construction of black identity in relation to whiteness, the white chalk on the black slates the children use signifying the dominant inscription on black

bodies by white economics and government. The w, for whitepeople, is capitalized, while the i, a statement of subjectivity, remains lowercase. And yet, the very act of literacy performs resistance to these narratives. Learning her name shows a developing understanding of Denver's psycho-linguistic subjectivity, her first attempts, in a liminal space beyond the purview of both white power and her mother, to establish self-possession.

However, this attempt is thwarted by the community's perpetuation of black obedience that rejects Sethe's criminality. Instead of welcoming her into their group, the children interpellate Denver through her mother's failed ownership claim. Nelson Lord forces Denver to confront the first years of her life and her mother's infanticide, asking her, "Didn't your mother get locked away for murder? Wasn't you in there with her when she went?" (Morrison 123). These questions require Denver to recognize, along with her brush with death at her mother's hands, her marginalization at the hands of both white power and the black community. This realization causes Denver to stop going to Lady Jones's house and never leave the yard of 124 Bluestone again. When she finally gets the courage to confront her mother about it, she is pushed to the extreme border of abjection where "meaning collapses" (*Powers* 2). Denver goes deaf for two years rather than hear her mother's answer. Her deafness manifests the dispossession of her nascent psycho-linguistic subjectivity and positions her as marginal even within her own home. Lynda Koolish calls this a "synesthesiac version of hysterical blindness" (169), but I avoid an attempt to diagnose Denver's psychological trauma, which in some ways pathologizes her oppression. Her deafness breaches her attempts at self-possession authorized by

whiteness, but I suggest that it offers a resistance to possessive investments in whiteness that caused the infanticide.

Traversing the borders of abjection allows Denver to create protection for her subjectivity, rather than breaking it down. Maurice Merleau-Ponty argues that subject formation requires the embodied act of perception to establish the boundaries of the self in order to understand the shape of the physical world that language describes. He writes, "I perceive with my body since my body and my senses . . . In perception we do not think the object and we do not think ourselves thinking it, we are given over to the object and we merge into this body which is better informed than we are about the world" (qtd in Scott 90). In choosing deafness, Denver disallows one of the elements of sensual perception. Moreover, hearing is uniquely tied to language acquisition and language acquisition to subject formation; therefore, in choosing deafness, Denver rejects language. If through perception, as Merleau-Ponty argues, the subject/object dichotomy becomes internalized, then Denver, without aural perception, moves outside of this bifurcation and into a liminal third-space. She draws in the borders of her own self-making to avoid incursions by those who would render her socially dead.

The state of abjection, however, remains paradoxical; although Denver finds a space for resistance to the dominant narratives that have framed her life, her isolation persists and even deepens. Moreover, 124 becomes every bit the prison as Denver's time in jail. J. Hillis Miller juxtaposes the physical borders of the living world and the border between the natural and supernatural, showing that the porosity of these borders in Morrison's novel demonstrates the fluidity of life at the borderlands. Nancy Jesser points out, "Safety and protection do not lie in constructing an iron façade, but rather in a porous

and open space. The most open of spaces, however, also offers the greatest danger of incursion" (326). I suggest that the Fugitive Slave Law exploded the protection of all borders between both freedom and slavery and between the natural and supernatural. The infanticide that Schoolteacher precipitates under the auspices of this legislation allows the supernatural to penetrate into the natural world, and haunting manifests the figurative intrusion of abjection into the lives of 124's occupants. The haunting of 124 Bluestone draws an abject border around the house to replace the fence that Sethe was glad to see gone when she returned from jail. The outbursts of the ghost of the crawling-already baby create fear of the supernatural in any who might pass by the house. Therefore, not only is the house haunted by the continuation of social death in freedom with the Bodwins' demand for black obedience, by the threat of white property claims with the Fugitive Slave Act, by the violence of a mother's desperate act, but also by the ghost of the child that died from these threats. The ghost does not respect the borders between life and death, disrupts the meaning that structures life with the supernatural. In this case, the abjection of the ghost still represents a rebellion to black social and physical death, but it does not produce fruitful resistance. The spiteful ghost does not offer another option to possessive individualism; in fact, the ghost makes its own property claims on the house and its occupants.

Through her own liminality, Denver has a unique connection to the haunting. Twice the ghost of Denver's dead sister both brings her back from the border of abjection and pushes her further toward it. First, Denver's hearing returns when she hears the ghost of the crawling-already baby going up the stairs of 124 Bluestone. Denver regains language and integration with the household in the return of her hearing, but that re-

integration seems for naught. The ghost's explosive antics drive away Buglar and Howard and push Baby Suggs into the keeping room. They lead Denver to seek solace alone in a hidden bower in the woods where "Denver's imagination produced its own hunger and its own food, which she badly needed because loneliness wore her out" (Morrison 35). The spitefulness of the ghost causes Denver to constantly be approaching and re-approaching her own almost-death. Denver must produce her own metaphorical food because her mother's nourishment of milk and blood led to this loneliness. Denver desires re-integration from her isolation, because "[a]nything is better than the original hunger – the time when, after a year of the wonderful little I, sentences rolling out like pie dough and the company of other children, there was no sound coming through. … She will forgo the most violent of sunsets, stars as fat as dinner plates and all the blood of autumn and settle for the palest yellow if it comes from her Beloved" (Morrison 143). The language of hunger, blood, and violence harkens back to the infanticide at the center of Denver's abjection, as well as the need for the integration she seeks at Lady Jones's house and the hunger that loss causes. While I focus on Denver's choice of deafness, Sharon Holland reads Denver's physical marginalization in order to show her connection to Beloved's death subjectivity, arguing that language fails since the characters "fall through the cracks ... Finding no apparent value in dominant language except in economic terms, the people in *Beloved* attempt to re-create a history from the living death of a brutal language and bodily violence" (56). Denver's deafness certainly shows how language fails, but only in an instance where subjectivity tries to replicate possessive individualism. We cannot equate Denver with Beloved, because in the end, Denver betrays Beloved and her claims of ownership over Sethe and 124 Bluestone.

Though rebellious, existence only within the state of abjection cannot be sustained, as evidenced by Denver's hunger for reintegration. Denver is seduced by the space of abjection to reject language, but Beloved is not the only ghost in the novel, and Baby Suggs's haunting also encourages Denver to cross the borders between death and life. Baby Suggs's reappearance leads Denver to the retrospection, asking Denver to remember her Call from the Clearing, to look back through retrospection, and to move forward even through the precarity of blackness. Baby Suggs does indeed ask Denver to understand her history through violence, as Holland suggests, but rather than "falling through the cracks," this act appropriates the space of abjection to create feminist intersubjectivity and collectivity.

When Sethe begins to waste away from hunger and malaise, Denver understands that she must seek help to break Beloved's claim. She realizes that "she would have to leave the yard; step off the edge of the world, leave the two behind and go ask somebody for help" (Morrison 286). In Baby Suggs's life, the yard both provided sanctuary and became the scene of the most horrific violation. In the only passage from the novel in Denver's voice, she thinks:

> I'm afraid the thing that happened that made it alright for my mother to kill my sister could happen again. … I need to know what that thing might be, but I don't want to. Whatever it is, it comes from outside this house, outside the yard, and it can come right on in the yard if it wants to. So I never leave this house and I watch over the yard, so it can't happen again and my mother won't have to kill me too. (Morrison 242)

From her personal experience, Denver has come to realize the social death of ex-slaves, the impossibility of possessive individualism and the vulnerability of property. She understands that the dangers of an investment in white power can come right into the yard. Her own, as well as the community's, memories of the infanticide have

marginalized her and ultimately kept her obedient to these systems of power. However, Beloved's greed drives Denver to seek re-integration, knowing that Beloved will kill Sethe in a reversal of the infanticide. Either way, the danger is always already in the yard. In this moment, Baby Suggs returns from beyond the grave to make one final kinship claim on Denver and Sethe. By crossing the boundaries between life and death, Baby Suggs redefines the porosity of 124 Bluestone. Rather than the violent penetration and destruction that Schoolteacher and Beloved perpetrate, Baby Suggs uses her self-love doctrine of the Clearing to help Denver seek new kinship bonds in the community.

In life, through her preaching in the Clearing, another space outside of the purview of whitepeople and white systems of power, Baby Suggs, holy, counsels the black community of Bluestone Road to become the subject of property by claiming ownership over their own bodies. This self-love and self-possession originates in the marginalized space of the Clearing, rather than the sanctioned spaces of churches authorized by white power, in order to subvert the unfreedoms of manumission. Her sermon signifies on the role of the preacher by denying the biblically-supported rhetoric that slave owners often employed to justify their practice. She tells the black community, "[I]n this here place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass" (Morrison 103). She inverts the language of slavery that traffics in flesh; Baby Suggs's flesh contains a heart and soul with emotions. Baby Suggs's doctrine of self-love attempts to build a community in the broken down bodies of freed and runaway slaves. Baby Suggs, holy, differentiates being interpellated as socially dead by the white hegemonic system of slavery through the violent destruction of black bodies and recognizing one's own humanity in abject bodies in order to subvert that social death. She

takes her embodied sermon straight from the physical and psychological trauma of the slave's scenes of subjection, subverting white power by drawing connections between violence and her Call to love those broken bodies. She calls out to each of the body parts that have been most exploited by slavery (Morrison 105). Loving and embracing their bodies in opposition to the continued investment in white power that unceasingly seeks to break them down and keep them obedient allows ex-slaves and freed slaves alike the possibility of a self-possession that does not replicate white possessive individualism. Instead, this self-possession builds collectivity through, within, and against abjection.

Baby Suggs returns from the grave to pass on the very story that Keith Byerman rejects, and rather than suffering becoming unending, retrospection in trauma creates a possibility for agency. Byerman suggests that her doctrine of self-love depends on the individual and does not build community because "her own joy and desire to express it" rankles the suffering ex-slaves (Byerman 199). He asserts that Baby Suggs gives up her work as a preacher because she realizes that "her ministry [was] ineffectual in preventing disasters from happening to her family and community, [and] her message itself exacerbated the problem" (Byerman 199). Reading the scene between Baby Suggs and Denver at the end of the novel as a negation of her self-love because she reads white people as demons in control of the universe, Byerman argues, "If she cannot urge and trust her own people to love one another on the grounds that whites will always take away the objects of that love, then the trauma and suffering will be unending. This, truly, is a story not to be passed on" (199). However, the marginalized space of the Clearing, and the chaotic, extra-linguistic way that the community worships in the Clearing, along with the doctrine of abject self-possession, deny the hegemony of a white Christian

"meaning" to life. This space, and the way that it is further manifested after Baby Suggs's death through Denver's retrospection, brings abjection into daily life. Instead of rejecting her role as spiritual leader, Baby Suggs sends Denver back into the black community as a model of collective self-possession and the community embraces her.

For Denver, intersubjective abjection means coming to terms with the violence in her past, rather than choosing deafness to avoid the truth. She must use retrospection to look back, as Nelson Lord asks her to do, to be able to move forward. As she stands on the porch, frozen in fear of the threat of whiteness outside the yard, she hears Baby Suggs's voice, saying, "You mean I never told you nothing about Carolina? About your daddy? You don't remember nothing about how come I walk the way I do and about your mother's feet, not to speak of her back? I never told you all that? Is that why you can't walk down the steps? My Jesus my" (Morrison 287-288). Baby Suggs repeats the invective that Amy Denver uses in caring for Sethe and the newborn Denver, reaching back into Denver's past to the originary matriarchs of resistance. Baby Suggs refers to the violations of Sethe's body to which Amy was a witness after the fact. At first glance, the violations that Baby Suggs invokes seem to be the very dangers that should keep Denver at home. However, when considered through the lens of her self-love doctrine, this embodied pain becomes the very subversive body that Denver should love – not just her own pain but the collective pain, and resistance, of her many mothers.

It is important to note that Denver still maintains fear well beyond Emancipation, just as social death replicates and regenerates well beyond manumission. The investments in whiteness through possessive individualism have not gone away, but Baby Suggs

returns to teach Denver a different way of achieving self-possession. Denver hesitates, asking her grandmother's ghost:

> But you said there was no defense.
> "There ain't."
> Then what do I do?
> "Know it, and go on out the yard. Go on." (Morrison 288)

Denver must recognize that white power will interpellate her as refuse, will destroy her body and her will, but she must still step off the porch. Going out the yard represents the desire for a new, redefined kinship claim not based on the heteropatriarchal white nuclear family structure always already denied to ex-slaves. Intersubjective abjection offers a feminist revision of self-possession as collectivity and community, as with Sethe and Amy Denver. When Denver steps off the porch, she leaves the yard as a political actor carrying the weight of her abjection with her. As she re-enters the world, the community sees her through the lens of her mother and her grandmother. Just as the blood of the mother marks a child a slave, the kinship of her matriarchs marks Denver as an abject; she becomes a representation of death infecting life, not as refuse but as remainder. Denver's act of feminist self-possession enacts the self-love doctrine of Baby Suggs's sermons in the Clearing, making her an ambassador who brings the community together in Baby Suggs's vision.

Denver returns to the site of her first self-possessive claim, and in Denver's face, Lady Jones sees innocence and the community's betrayal.[18] With "the word 'baby,' said softly and with such kindness, [Lady Jones] inaugurated [Denver's] life in the world as a woman" (Morrison 292), making an alternative maternal kinship claim, echoing Baby

[18] See Fowler, Smith, Rubenstein, Michael, and Christian for analyses on the community's role in helping or hindering subject formation in *Beloved*.

Suggs's kinship claims on her husband and his surname, that redefines the boundaries of kinship beyond the nuclear family, allowing the community to come together to support and make new kinship claims. Under Lady Jones's tutelage, Denver begins reading again, in juxtaposition to the negation of language her deafness caused. Nelson Lord's pronouncement for Denver to take care of herself brings the process full circle and reverses Denver's marginalization into integration through intersubjective abjection.

So long since Baby Suggs's sermons in the Clearing, the community collectively recognizes its own social death, not as a hierarchy of suffering, but as a collective memory of trauma. They deliver food to 124 Bluestone in a re-enactment of the party that first caused the rupture. Their return is haunted by the deaths of the crawling-already baby and Baby Suggs, and through retrospection, the women see themselves in the yard as they were years ago at the party, happy and loving before envy and fear got the best of them. They understand that they can all be interpellated by systemic white power because of its continued investment in black oppression, but instead of distancing themselves, they all "know it and go on out the yard." They rebuild the boundaries of love that Baby Suggs had created at 124 by metaphorically reconstructing the fence outside the yard with their encircling presence. Like Baby Suggs at the end of her life, they are angry at being used up and broken down and denied, and they reject the Word, because "[i]n the beginning there were no words. In the beginning was the sound, and they all knew what the sound sounded like" (Morrison 305). Rather than "falling through the cracks" as Holland suggests, Denver's, Baby Suggs's, and the women's rejection or revision of language places them in a space outside of rhetoric that denies self-possession. As with the sounds of the crawling-already baby's ghost and Baby Suggs's aural reappearance

after her death, the past lives of the thirty women haunt the yard of 124 until they find "the sound that broke the back of words" (Morrison 308). Rather than isolating and marginalizing, they reject language and come together. Finally, they have embraced Baby Suggs's doctrine of self-love, creating a feminist collective self-possessive community to spread their love around.

The historical revision that Morrison's re-memory work performs creates a temporal displacement, a haunting in the present by the abject and traumatic past. This narrative device replicates the act of writing the neo-slave narrative. Morrison's novel performs the retrospection that Baby Suggs calls the community to embrace. In *Extravagant Abjection*, Darieck Scott argues:

> In the development of *Beloved*'s narrative, the strategies which the characters Sethe, Paul D, and Denver pursue of living only for the present or future, of holding the past at bay, constantly fail and, moreover, prevent the characters from attaining the freedom and integrity of self which seems to insist on coming into being despite all their attempts to maintain safe, partially lived lives. … But in fact the "identity," if we can name it as such, to which the characters are driven to establish claim is never in the novel anything but divided and fractured from within, even when Sethe seems to glimpse a kind of coherence in the realization that she is herself her "best thing." (Scott 130)

However, rather than looking at Sethe, we should turn to look at Denver. Sethe and Paul D, who tells Sethe that she is her own best thing, remain divided and fractured. By using retrospection guided by Baby Suggs's Call, rather than holding the past at bay, Denver develops an identity through intersubjective abjection that brings the community together. This process creates new subjectivity that recognizes the precarity of being black in a world invested in whiteness. Rather than possessive individualism invested in property claims that alienate and oppress, the self-possession of intersubjective abjection embraces collectivity and a lineage of feminist resistance. And *that* is a story to pass on.

CHAPTER TWO
RECONCILIATION: NATIVE AMERICAN SOCIAL DEATH AND ZITS' GHOST DANCE IN SHERMAN ALEXIE'S *FLIGHT*

Sherman Alexie's 2007 novel *Flight*, published on the cusp of electing the first person of color as President of the United States, invites us to interrogate the history of racialized violence in the United States and the notion of revenge and reconciliation. The Indian Removal Act and Native Americans' subsequent social death and abjection haunts the canon of contemporary Native American writing in the United States. Even when not explicitly addressing historical dispossessions, novels about life on reservations, about the failure of social integration, and about the loss of tradition all stem from this early property violence. Alexie's novel tacitly addresses the ramifications of Native American vulnerability, though set outside of reservations, tribal identifications, and traditional time-space. Alexie asks us to think what it means that a boy of fifteen must traverse time and space in order to find connections to his ancestry. Collapsing the present and the past through the form of the Ghost Dance, Alexie creates an alter-history in which to evaluate and ultimately reject the affirmative capability of retribution. The Ghost Dance effaces the concept of a singular and coherent subject, but the act of telling the story through Zits' subjective "I" produces narrative as a form of reconciliation of subjectivity – a presentation to the world of the conflicted and opaque subject. Where in *Beloved* intersubjective abjection offers a method of resistance to white power, in Alexie's novel, intersubjective abjection provides a methodology to appropriate marginalization as a space of reconciliation through new kinship structures, though he maintains the cynicism of the impossibility of an unambiguous identity.

Alexie's novel's first line evokes Melville – "Call me Zits." – while its last line reclaims Zits' given name, Michael.[19] In the space in between, Zits becomes a series of different people. Zits is a fifteen-year-old orphan, the child of an Indian father who abandons him on the day of his birth and an Irish mother who dies of cancer when Zits is six. He shuffles through twenty foster homes before the beginning of the novel, habitually running away and living on the street. He often lashes out, resulting in his criminalization and frequent incarceration at a juvenile detention center in Seattle. He meets friends in jail, including Officer Dave, the white police officer who looks after him, and Justice, another delinquent who convinces him to commit murder. Justice and Zits squat in abandoned warehouses for a time, where Justice spouts dangerous rhetoric about the Ghost Dance and killing white people, though, ironically, Justice himself is white. Desperate to be loved, Zits buys in to Justice's brainwashing, enters a bank lobby, and sprays bullets into everyone there until a bank guard shoots him. Upon his death, Zits begins his Ghost Dance. Through time-travel, he enters into the bodies of several different men at different times. He becomes a white FBI agent in 1975; a young Sioux boy camped at the Little Bighorn River just before Custer's Last Stand; an old white cavalry soldier meant to lead the charge against an unsuspecting Indian village in the nineteenth century; a white pilot in a post-9/11 context; his own father back in 2007. The form of this time-traveling completes a chronotopic manifestation of the Ghost Dance ritual, and through the ritual, Alexie uses each moment in his alter-history to contemplate

[19] In a 2007 interview, Alexie said this about the literary allusion: "It's meant to be an interesting funny opening. I tried – and for some reviewers I failed – to point out that for teenagers the state of their complexion is at least as important as Moby Dick is to Ahab. As somebody who had really bad skin and still struggles with acne, I know it's of vital importance. Perhaps there was a better opening, another allusion to some novel or poem that might've captured it better, but that's what I was trying to do: to show how much for scars affected him and how much they changed his outlook on the world." (Weich 170)

politics of revenge and reconciliation.[20] At the end of the ritual, Zits returns to his own body in the bank, just before he pulls his guns. Rather than committing violence, Zits chooses empathy and turns himself in to Officer Dave. The end of the novel, after Zits' successful execution of the Ghost Dance, offers hope for individual reconciliation in a new kinship structure, as Officer Dave's brother and sister-in-law make plans to adopt Zits.

Heretofore, very little work has been done on the novel *Flight*; my work fills this gap by historicizing Native American social death, mapping the use of the Ghost Dance in Alexie's form, and developing an understanding of Zits' subject formation through intersubjective abjection. I employ a multi-tribal emphasis to mirror Alexie's own methodology in writing *Flight*.[21] Although Alexie himself comes from Spokane-Coeur d'Alene people and his protagonist Zits lives in Seattle, I suggest that Cherokee removal frames the trauma of the novel because the gold rush that pushed out the Eastern nations arrived in full force to the Western coast in the mid-1800s. Prospectors invaded from northern California to Alaska and stole Native lands, including the territories of the Spokane and Coeur d'Alene people. Moreover, Mark Rifkin notes, "The Cherokees are a particularly rich site for such analysis due to their centrality in the construction of early federal Indian policy" (39), suggesting that as the Cherokee go, so will other nations. Examining the particularities of the land that was stolen from the Cherokee provides evidence for the construction of Native American social death based on property

[20] Here I am referring to Bakhtin's theorization of the chronotope as he explores the relation between time and space and the genre of literature. I mean to imply Alexie's revision of the genres of the Ghost Dance, postmodern time-travel novel, and the Native American novel, in that the form of the Ghost Dance narrativized in the novel creates a time-space circle through which Alexie ruminates on violence and history.
[21] Scholars have noted that many of Alexie's works create a pan-tribal narrative that merges the histories of oppression and suffering in the United States. See Tatonetti, Hopson, Grassian, Sheffer.

vulnerability, not on slavery. The dispossession that the Cherokee experienced precedes that of the Spokane and Lakota in Alexie's novel and haunts reservation and registration politics that underlie the property vulnerability, kinship problems, and violence in the novel.

I begin with a discussion of Cherokee dispossession to frame the history of property violence against Native Americans into which Alexie writes. The Cherokee nation presented a paradox for the growth of the South and the influence of the federal government; it was at once a sovereign entity within the borders of several states and a dependent of the US government.[22] The solution to the Indian problem, the Indian Removal Act of 1830, rendered Eastern nations expendable and established a precedent for rounding up Western nations into reservations as "zones of disposal" later in the century. At one time, the Cherokee nation inhabited a large portion of the southern piedmont area, southern Appalachian mountains, and the Tennessee Valley – or about half of Georgia and South Carolina, north Alabama, mountainous segments of North Carolina, Virginia, and West Virginia, the eastern half of Tennessee, and the state of Kentucky. James Mooney's 1900 map of Cherokee lands published in the Nineteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology creates a palimpsest of the state-sanctioned theft that tightened the borders of the Cherokee nation from the early nationalist period up to removal, marking the borders clearly meant more to keep the Natives confined than to keep white settlers out.

This process of border encroachment, compression, and dispossession marks out the property violence enacted against Native Americans of many nations through state

[22] See Wilkins.

and local actors, and the codification of this long process as the Removal Act only serves to write it into history as a federal policy. The Georgia gold rush, though overshadowed by the California gold rush, illustrates the limits of Cherokee sovereignty and how white settlers were willing to trespass, connive, pillage, and steal to get valuable land. Historically, white settlers made greater and greater demands on the Georgia state legislature to open up Cherokee lands to gold and mineral prospecting, and the legislature in turn made greater demands on the federal government to do something with the Indians. By December of 1828, the state of Georgia passed a bill to seize and apportion Cherokee land in the north into new Georgia counties (D. Williams, Perdue).[23] The Georgia legislature also professed all Cherokee laws null and void "as if the same had never existed." Moreover, it declared unlawful any attempt by Cherokee leaders to regulate members of their own nation wishing to emigrate to the West or "to deter any Indian, head man, chief or warrior of said nation residing within the chartered limits of this State, from selling or ceding to the United States, for the use of Georgia, the whole or any part of said territory, or to prevent or offer to prevent any Indian, head man, chief or warrior of said nation, residing as aforesaid, from meeting in council or treaty, any commissioner or commissioners on the part of the United States, for any purpose whatever" (Worcester v Georgia). This article opened the door for any single Cherokee to cede land and make treaties for the whole nation, enticing those who sought to escape before the violence or those hoped to remain in Georgia on their own small tracts of land as a Georgia citizen. Without the knowledge or approval of most of the nation, a small

[23] "An act to add the territory lying within this State and occupied by the Cherokee Indians, to the counties of Carroll, De Kalb, Gwinnett, Hall, and Habersham, and to extend the laws of this State over the same, and for other purposes." (Worcester v Georgia)

group of Cherokee leaders resigned to their dispossession, led by John Ridge, his father Major Ridge, and Elias Boudinot, met in the Cherokee capital of New Echota at the end of 1835 to negotiate the cession of all eastern Cherokee lands. The men were hoping that their compliance would ensure them the government's assistance in the displacement and a monetary advantage in the new western reservation (New Echota). Chief John Ross, the rightful chief of the Cherokee, reflected on the act of dispossession and cultural degradation that the Treaty of New Echota enacted, writing,

> By the stipulations of this instrument, we are despoiled of our private possessions, the indefeasible property of individuals. We are stripped of every attribute of freedom and eligibility for legal self-defence. Our property may be plundered before our eyes; violence may be committed on our persons; even our lives may be taken away, and there is none to regard our complaints. We are denationalized; we are disfranchised. We are deprived of membership in the human family! We have neither land nor home, nor resting place that can be called our own. And this is effected by the provisions of a compact which assumes the venerated, the sacred appellation of treaty.

The Indian Removal Act positioned Native Americans as socially dead in a number of ways: by institutionally refusing citizenship, by denying kinship in rejecting Native traditions, and by physically marginalizing and degrading through the Trail of Tears.

The process of institutional marginalization – evidenced by the false and broken treaties and the actual physical marginalization – natal alienation – demonstrated through the criminalization of Native practices and the removal from ancestral lands – and degradation – enacted on both culture and bodies – can be traced in Revered Daniel S. Butrick's journal of the forced migration westward. Butrick, a white missionary from Brainerd, Tennessee (close to Chattanooga at the Tennessee-Georgia border) accompanied one of the Cherokee groups on their march west. Though ironic to use a white missionary's journal to examine the horrors committed by institutions of white

power, Butrick's work, as a written text, has survived in ways that many oral narratives of the Cherokee people have not. Butrick seems to be on the right side of history here; his affective and ideological judgment certainly lies with the Cherokee, not with his fellow white citizens, soldiers, or government agents. The fact that he takes the journey alongside the Cherokee makes his journal a valuable first-hand account.[24] Butrick bears witness as a Christian to the hardships of his parishioners. Although there seems to be no suggestion in the journal itself of Butrick's plans to publish it, the tone and address seem to indicate his ideal audience as white, perhaps Christian, and certainly sympathetic to his moral outrage at the Cherokee treatment.

The removal of Cherokee from the gold-rich land in Georgia in many ways mimicked the taking of African slaves from the Gold Coast. The Cherokee also were forced to leave behind their homes, their customs, and the graves of their ancestors. Although these groups were not being sold into slavery, the process of removal created a system of dependency in which the U.S. government became a kind of "benevolent" master providing room and board. It did not matter that the Cherokee people had developed a very advanced society modeled on and assimilated to Anglo customs. The thriving Cherokee capital, New Echota, close to the current city of Calhoun, Georgia and Interstate 75, disappeared after removal. The seat of government, the first printing press of the *Cherokee Phoenix*, the homes and graves of the city's inhabitants disappeared under a field of cotton until excavated by archaeologists in the 1950s and rebuilt by the

[24] This account is published and authorized by the founding chapter of the Trail of Tears Association. Butrick deferred to the valid Cherokee leadership, not the signers of the Treaty of New Echota, asking their permission and authorization before joining the march. Although Butrick and his wife were able, by nature of his position as a white minister, to rely often on the kindness of other white missionaries and homesteaders on the way west, they suffered much of the same abjection as the Cherokee.

Georgia Parks Service (New Echota). Removal began in the heat of a sweltering Southern summer and continued until Butrick's group left Tennessee in November at the beginning of a frigid winter. They were forced to leave the climate and landforms that they had known and successfully made profitable to enter a completely unknown climate and land poorly suited for their style of living.

Like slaves in the Middle Passage, the passage from east to west placed the Cherokee "in the hold," to use Christina Sharpe's cutting metaphor.[25] Butrick's journal reports that there were an estimated 8000 Cherokee people in Georgia and another 8000 at the Indian Agency in Tennessee (May 26), and by the summer of 1838 General Winfield Scott and Georgia militia troops corralled those 8000 southern Cherokees into newly-erected stockades close to the Alabama border in preparation for their removal (New Echota).[26] Butrick represents this scene in images similar to a slave coffle, writing, "In driving them a platoon of soldiers walked before and behind, and a file of soldiers on each side, armed with all the common appalling instruments of death; while the soldiers, it is said, would often use the same language as driving hogs, and goad them forward with their bayonets" (May 26). In his description of the stockade, Butrick repeats this bestial comparison, stating "they were obliged to live very much like brute animals, and during their travels, were obliged at night to lie down on the naked ground, in the open air, exposed to wind and rain, and herd together, men women and children, like droves of

[25] Sharpe examines the ontological violence that persists in the afterlives of slavery by which, even today, blacks and the blackened live "in the hold" of racial capitalism and social degradation. I employ this metaphor because the Cherokee find themselves literally in the hold of a boat, but also because the continued oppression and cultural humiliation that Native Americans expands Sharpe's formulation to explore, once again, the legacy of property violence as it shapes neo-liberal ways of being.

[26] According to a census published in the *Cherokee Phoenix* and transcribed on the Cherokee Nation website, the population of the Cherokee nation as of 1828 was approximately 14,972. The website also contains an 1835 roll of names as a census of the nation.

hogs, and in this way, many are hastening to a premature grave" (June 10). Butrick's repeated comparisons to swine echo many of the descriptions of the transport and sale of slaves in the New World. Ironically, his description of one group's water transportation mirrors that of the slave ship and the Middle Passage. Butrick reports,

> The first company sent down the river, … were, it appears, literally crammed into the … flat bottom boat, 100 feet long, 20 feet wide, and two stories high, … Twelve hundred, it is said, were hurried off in this manner at one time.
>
> Who would think of crowding men, women, and children, sick and well, into a boat together, with little, if any more room or accommodations than would be allowed to swine taken to market?" (June 10)

The answer, of course, is the same white capitalists and the same U.S. government allowing the sale of African slaves in the very same geographical area. Butrick records scenes of subjection like those Saidiya Hartman theorizes in relation to John Rankin's epistle on the slave coffle (Hartman 17): the representations of the horrors, the moral outrage, even the fantasy of identification. Like Rankin, Butrick puts himself in the place of the oppressed, though not through imagination but by embarking on the journey himself. The removal itself was designed to push the Cherokee and other nations off the resource-rich lands they had long inhabited, past the point of civilization, to concentration camps circumscribed by abject borders.

In denying the sovereignty and political power of the Cherokee nation, the U.S. government and its state actors first rendered the Cherokee socially dead by criminalizing their practices. Not only does criminalization create institutional marginalization, but Butrick points out how it manipulates generational tension into natal alienation, noting "The young people were not only almost compelled to disregard their own chiefs, but also taught to despise their parents and teachers" (July 1). Natal alienation, as theorized

by Patterson, permanently cuts off both ancestral and future kinship both by physically separating familial relationships and by institutionally rejecting the possibility of family structure, but this process is not unique to the institution of slavery. Rather, natal alienation as a form of dispossession of kinship does not rely solely on constructions of consanguinity; the kinship of culture as tribal citizenship can also be destroyed, resulting in the "loss of native status, of deracination" and loss of sovereignty of the nation (Patterson 7). Removal also ensured the Cherokee's natal alienation by denying ancestral kinship through the desecration of sacred rights and burial grounds. Mark Rifkin notes, "In addition to deauthorizing articulations of collectivity other than the officially sanctioned narrative of the nation-state, national discourse increasingly peripheralizes the clans, delinking Cherokee identity from kinship" (61). The federal denial of the legitimacy of the Cherokee way of life resulted in the breakdown of structures of authority in both the Cherokee government and the family, both markers of kinship. Finally, the destruction of kinship was complete through the very end of families in the thousands of deaths along the Trail of Tears. Butrick writes, "O how distressing to the Cherokees who think so much of the graves of their friends, to be now called to leave so many of their dear little babes in this land of enemies, where they can never hope even to drop a tear on their graves again" (August 8). Both institutional marginalization and natal alienation were meant to destabilize the authority of the Cherokee political leaders and family leaders, driving a wedge between factions and ultimately resulting in the treason of the Treaty of New Echota and the seemingly inevitable end of Cherokee cultural practices, making them easier to depose and dispose.

The rejection of Cherokee death practices and sacred sites highlights both the natal alienation and the cultural degradation of the Cherokee people, but pale in comparison to the thousands of deaths during the march westward. This physical and embodied degradation once again marks the Cherokee and other nations as socially dead, but also as radically abjected by the imposition of death and the death drive infecting life. Those on the Trail of Tears, including Butrick and his wife, traversed the porous borders between life and death. In almost every entry of Butrick's journal, he reports another sickness or death. He often lists the conditions of the sick and dead, and they include: exhaustion, exposure, starvation, heat sickness, dysentery, consumption, bloody flux, measles, ague, fever, influenza, and whooping cough. Even before the journey begins, Butrick writes, "Half of the infants six months or a year and all the aged over sixty had been killed directly, and one fourth of the remainder … [the removal] is only a most expensive and painful way of putting the poor people to death" (June 10), and asks "whether these thousand deaths may not be viewed in the light of deliberate murder?" (August 4). He often conveys the distressing scenes of families having to bury loved ones on the side of the trail or being forced to carry a corpse in the wagon through a day's travel because the white landowner would not consent to a burial. The sick and the dead become a literal death-infecting-life haunting every step of the trail. Moreover, as Butrick's journey goes on, more and more seem to be willing to give themselves to this fate. Kristeva writes that abjection is experienced when the subject is weary of the constant struggle of identification, and Butrick notes, "The grief, the anxiety, the distresses of body and mind, they have been obliged to endure, for these months past have broken them down, while their present exposures, and prospect of future sufferings,

are still urging their feeble steps to the grave" (September 3). Removal forced the Cherokee to constantly approach and accept the abjection of corpses along the Trail of Tears, and with their eyes turned to the west and their hearts turned east, they know that they are also marching to what will certainly be an abject future. Most scholars estimate that approximately 4000 Cherokee died on the Trail of Tears, or about one quarter of the 16,000 members of the Eastern Cherokee nation.[27]

The plight of the Cherokee and the property violence caused by the Indian Removal Act haunts the history of reservation and registration politics that lie beneath the surface of Zits' personal traumas. My inclusion of this narrative of dispossession approximates Alexie's own pan-tribalism. Specifically, Lisa Tatonetti notes how Alexie uses the form of the Ghost Dance as a "pantribal metaphor" in many of his works, drawing out how Alexie himself is a Spokane/Coeur d'Alene Indian from the Pacific Northwest and the Ghost Dance originates in the Sioux plains people of the Paiute and Lakota. In Alexie's canon she reads a "trajectory in which Alexie's Ghost Dance and Wounded Knee references progress from historical allusions and personal metaphors to politically charged sites of resistance. … Alexie capitalizes on the iconic power of the Ghost Dance" (Tatonetti 2). I suggest that the Ghost Dance, though from the Lakota people, contains resonances of the dispossessions begun by the 1830 Indian Removal Act and the subsequent reservation movements in westward expansion. These resonances, along with the episodes across time and space represented in the novel, create "historical touches" that resist false equivalencies and linear historicity but explore the palimpsests of racialized violence in the United States. The time-traveling chronotopic narrative

[27] See Wilkins, Ehle, Marks, Thornton.

shape of the Ghost Dance makes connections across time between different categories of identity within Zits' own consciousness. Moreover, the novel makes connections across time and space between many nations, which I have embraced in making connections to the Cherokee dispossession and Removal. In effect, Alexie imagines narratives for many lives, texts, and cultural phenomena left out of history, past and present.

Flight presents, rather than a pan-tribal perspective, what I call an alter-tribal option. The alter-history that Alexie creates in using the chronotopic form of the Ghost Dance to shape his narrative encompasses perspectives of various forms of whiteness, various Native nations, and various times. These palimpsests merge history and narrative to create a recognition of irony in both Zits and the reader, so that the time-traveling plot of the novel is always already framed through the outcomes of history. Moreover, Zits himself represents an alter-tribal model, because, according to him, "I'm not an official Indian. My Indian daddy gave me his looks, but he was never legally established as my father" (Alexie 9). Because he is orphaned and unregistered, his loss positions Zits outside of all patriarchal and tribal family structures, and he bounces around the foster system. Zits tells the reader, "I don't know any other Native Americans, except the homeless Indians who wander around downtown Seattle. I like to run away from my foster homes and get drunk with those street Indians" (Alexie 7). Thus, even in the very beginning of the novel, before his Ghost Dance begins, Zits seeks out community with other homeless and expendable individuals who have lost their tribe. During his Ghost Dance, Zits passes through bodies regardless of time and space, regardless of historical tribal demarcations, race, ethnicity, or age. He becomes a Sioux child, a white Cavalry soldier, a white American pilot, even his own father. These many manifestations indicate

the alter-tribal methodology of Zits' Ghost Dance and his subsequent intersubjective abjection. In effect, Zits creates kinship with these iterations of his self, so that when he returns to his own body in 2007, he contains multitudes.

I revise existing scholarship considering Alexie's uses of the Ghost Dance, arguing that the bank shooting does not explore Zits' Native American heritage, but perverts it into murder. Instead, I maintain that the chronotopic structuring of the novel constitutes the Ghost Dance and leads Zits to embrace Wovoka's original message of reconciliation. The two significant engagements with the Ghost Dance in *Flight* provide only glancing citations and, I would argue, mischaracterizations of the work of the Dance in the novel. Tatonetti's 2010 chapter on the Ghost Dance in Alexie only addresses *Flight* briefly in a footnote that also glosses Alexie's other twenty-first century works *The Toughest Indian in the World* (2000) and *Ten Little Indians* (2003). She writes, "the adolescent protagonist, Zits, is seduced into opening fire on unsuspecting bank customers by a homeless white boy named Justice, who repeatedly invokes the Ghost Dance as a way to incite him to violence" (Tatonetti 24). While Tatonetti's readings of the Ghost Dance in Alexie's other works offer a more complex and reparative reading, *Flight* suffers from a reduction to a single moment in the novel. Like Tatonetti, Tom Farrington also focuses an analysis of the Ghost Dance to one point in the novel. Farrington argues that Sherman Alexie uses the Ghost Dance to comment on exclusionary and separatist practices for urban Native American tribes, so that Alexie's Ghost Dance "results in violence that divides Indian communities, separating Indians from whites, and Indians from Indians" (524). Quickly glossing *Flight*, which is not the real focus of Farrington's close reading, he argues,

> The contemporary Ghost Dance of *Flight* is again hostile and divisive, taking the form of an indiscriminate attack upon those queuing at a city bank by Zits, a traumatized and delusional fifteen-year-old victim of sexual abuse. … [the violence is a result of] the crisis of origins that exacerbates Zits's psychological symptoms, and leads him to apparent sociopathy. … Zits's ethical development is directed not only by his experiences of abuse at the hands of family members and various foster parents, but also by the impossibility of his locating an acceptable Indian community through which to explore his cultural heritage. Unable to find a sense of belonging in his current social location, Zits conceives his performance of a contemporary Ghost Dance as a means of establishing his Indian ancestry and restoring his tribal identity. (537)

But Farrington seems too quick to diagnose Zits' criminality and to align sexual abuse as the nadir of Zits' struggle, and though Farrington rightly observes that Zits believes he is performing the Ghost Dance in the bank, even deciding "I know these people must die so my mother and father can return" (Alexie 35), Justice's violent interpretation of the Ghost Dance only precipitates the real ritual journey. Zits is not a sociopath, as the end of the novel clearly demonstrates. Zits' self-reflective narrative style and frequent expressions of remorse express a deeper understanding of the social construction of his identity and the violence he perpetrates, as well as his liminality. The bank shooting does not explore Zits' Native American heritage, but perverts the Ghost Dance into murder. In fact, the actual completion of the Ghost Dance ritual, when Zits returns to himself in 2007 right before he commits the bank shooting, has the opposite effect of Farrington's analysis. Zits finds empathy with a little boy there at the bank with his mother and chooses not to engage in an "indiscriminate act" of violence. By turning himself in to Officer Dave, he finds reconciliation in a new form of kinship not based on the impossibility of recovering his absent biological parents. In the end, he does not restore his "tribal identity" but reclaims his name in a new identity.

The ambiguity of Zits tribal identity underlines the natal alienation of Native Americans through the dispossession of sovereignty and cultural practices, as with the federal response to Cherokee sovereignty. Zits remains unregistered because of his abandonment from his father and his orphancy after his mother's death. His mixed racial background sets him apart, and he thinks that being Irish and Indian "would be the coolest blend in the world if my parents were around to teach me how to be Irish and Indian. But they're not here and haven't been for years, so I'm not really Irish or Indian" (Alexie 5). Alexie's rendering Zits' mother a green-eyed, red-haired Irish woman crosses boundaries to make connections between the colonial oppressions of the Irish and Native Americans. Her immigration to the United States echoes previous generations of Irish immigrants escaping famine and unrest, waves of people entering the U.S. concurrent to Native American concentration into reservations and slaughter on the plains. These narratives become embodied in Zits. However, Zits' mother's death in his childhood leaves him without any touchstone to his Irish ancestry, nor to his Native American heritage. Rather than a positive experience of hybridity, Zits experiences negating liminality, haunted by the absence of his parents and outside of all cultural associations.

The embodied representations of his ancestry become secondary to embodied manifestations of what he frames as his personal shame in the unique teenage hell of cystic acne; he is, in fact, named for his humiliation. Throughout the novel, until the very last page, the narrative calls him Zits. In proclaiming in the first lines of the novel, "Everybody calls me Zits. That's not my real name of course. My real name isn't important" (Alexie 1), Zits' indicates the erasure of his subjectivity, both in the loss of a surname and in the covering of his identity with zits. The novel, then, and the experiences

that Zits relates as the first-person narrator, are haunted by this experience of shame, and significantly, tied to his Native heritage as well. As an over-dramatic teenager, he represents his acne as a deadly disease, saying

> The skin Doctor tells me I have six months to live. I'm exaggerating. I don't have a skin Doctor and you can't actually die of zits. But you can die of shame. And trust me, my zit-shame is killing me.
> I'm dying from about ninety-nine kinds of shame.
> I'm ashamed of being fifteen years old. And being tall. And skinny. And ugly.
> I'm ashamed that I look like a bag of zits tied to a broomstick.
> I wonder if loneliness causes acne. *I wonder if being Indian causes acne.* (Alexie 4, my emphasis)

In this way, Zits constructs his shame as a kind of death-infecting-life, and his life as a kind of trajectory towards dying. In between the lines here, Zits also marks out his economic precarity – "I don't have a skin Doctor" – and his affective precarity in loneliness. And ultimately, he must "wonder" about being Indian because he has no kinship that can answer questions about his heritage, and his Native identity becomes wrapped up in shame.

Zits has his mother's eyes and his father's skin, but these genetic inheritances do little to relieve his natal anguish. Zits' orphancy leaves him with a deep desire to resolve the loss of any caregiver and the property claims inherent in those connections. Instead, Zits is institutionally marginalized and thrust away as the foster system fails him time and time again. Because of the Indian Child Welfare Act (1978), Zits is supposed to be placed with Native American families, but this rarely happens, and his few Native American foster families prove not to be demonstrably more caring that the white foster families. Because he is not registered in a tribe, he says, "the government can put me wherever they want. So they put me with anybody who will take me. Mostly they're white people"

(Alexie 9). Zits' placement in white foster homes echoes the late nineteenth and early twentieth century removal of Native American children from reservations to Anglo-assimilationist boarding schools.[28] With the Indian Child Welfare Act, Congress decided that the U.S. government, as a "trustee" of Indian welfare, should formally declare a policy that would "protect the best interests of Indian children [and] promote the stability and security of Indian tribes and families" by establishing federal guidelines by which a child could be removed from a Native American home and where the child should be placed for fostering or adoption (590). The law, as part of a resurgence of Native American education and cultural movements in the 1960s and 1970s, sought to ensure that Native American children, rather than losing cultural heritage through assimilationist governmental practices, could maintain their birthright by recognizing tribal family structures alternative to the patriarchal nuclear family structure. However, this law presupposes that tribal members will have affective relationships with the children in need of fostering and that the children will be able to attain some cultural identity by remaining with their tribe. Zits has no tribe and no tribal family to foster him, making the Indian Child Welfare Act a disingenuous way for Zits to learn about his Native American identity. The Indian families with whom he fosters have no natal investment in teaching him about his heritage.

Instead, for Zits the foster system, white and Indian, only provides institutional neglect. He tells the reader, "I've lived in twenty different foster homes and attended

[28] When Zits inhabits the body of the Sioux boy, he notes that "the children are going to be kidnapped and sent off to boarding schools. Their hair will be cut short and they will be beaten for speaking their tribal languages. They'll be beaten for dancing and singing old-time Indian songs" (Alexie 66). Zitkala-Ša provides a detailed account of her experience in a white boarding school in "The School Days of an Indian Girl" published in Atlantic Monthly in 1900.

twenty-two different schools. I own only two pairs of pants and three shirts and four pairs of underwear and one baseball hat and three pairs of socks and three paperback novels (*Grapes of Wrath, Winter in the Blood,* and *The Dead Zone*) and the photographs of my mother and father. My entire life fits into one small backpack" (Alexie 7). Unlike a typical American teenager in 2007, Zits has no capital accumulation through material things, and the ephemera of Zits' life give very specific clues to his marginalization. His limited wardrobe stands in direct contrast to the American consumer culture in which he lives. The three novels he chooses to carry with him from place to place also tell an interesting tale of his search for affiliation. John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* narrativizes the struggle of dispossession, homelessness, and criminalization. *Winter in the Blood* by James Welch (Blackfoot) features an unnamed narrator struggling with his Native identity while living on the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation in Montana. Foreshadowing and mirroring Zits' experiences, the unnamed narrator also deals with violence, alcoholism, and the loss of family members.[29] *The Dead Zone*, a Stephen King supernatural thriller, sees a man with a head injury (and later a brain tumor) arise from a coma with the clairvoyant ability to see the future. Each of these novels metaphorizes Zits' past, present, and future. The photographs of his mother and father illustrate his natal alienation, both from his primary family members, any secondary or extended family, and the tribal affiliations that his father might provide. These few possessions, which he abandons after running away from another foster home at the beginning of the novel, Zits carries on his back like a homeless person traveling from foster home to street.

[29] Alexie produced a film adaptation of the novel in 2014.

Zits' homelessness and revolving door of foster homes demonstrates the physical and spatial marginalization of his experience of property vulnerability, while the institutional neglect manifests his degradation. It seems no social worker especially cares for Zits or his predicament, and thus a child of fifteen is left to fend for himself in an ever-changing landscape of uninterested caregivers. One such social worker tells this young boy that he "never developed a sense of citizenship" because he could not tie a necktie or shine shoes, and thus, she told him, "You've never learned how to be a fully realized human being" (Alexie 6). The social worker's measure of citizenship and humanity – a performance of capitalist masculinity – imbricates white capitalism, gender, and citizenship in American institutions. Those who fail to properly perform these "small ceremonies" fall outside of the realm not only of the institution, but of humanity itself. Cacho writes that "[c]ertain populations' very humanity is represented as something that one becomes or achieves, that one must earn because it cannot just be" (6). It is no small point that a social worker deems Zits less than human, as she represents an agent of the very institution meant to protect and serve vulnerable populations. Instead, she passes judgment and precludes those same populations from entering not only the political landscape but also humanity itself.

Zits implicates the foster system and his neglect in his angst-ridden search for attention through petty crimes like shoplifting, fighting, and fire-starting. He tells the reader, "I read once that if a kid has enough bad things happen to him before he turns five, he's screwed for the rest of his life. So that's me, a screwed half-breed who can't do anything but spit and kick and bite and punch" (Alexie 17). Rather than recognizing the systemic oppressions that lead Zits towards a life of anger and violence, his incarceration

seems inevitable. Cacho connects social death, criminalization, and institutional racism, noting that "the criminal ... [is] treated as [an] obvious, self-inflicted, and necessary [outcome] of law-breaking rather than as effects of the law or as produced by the law" (4). On many levels, as a Native American, as an orphan and foster child, as a brown man in a white city, Zits occupies groups often criminalized and represented as incapable of law-abiding behavior. He finds kinship with the homeless and drunk Native American men wandering the streets of Seattle, and he thinks:

> Of course, those wandering Indians are not the only Indians in the world, but they're the only ones who pay attention to me.
>
> The rich and educated Indians don't give a shit about me. They pretend I don't exist. They say, *The drunken Indian is just a racist cartoon*. They say, *The lonely Indian is just a ghost in a ghost story*.
>
> I wish I could learn how to hate those rich Indians. I wish I could ignore them. But I want them to pay attention to me. I want everybody to pay attention to me.
>
> So I shoplift candy and food and magazines and cigarettes and books and CDs and anything that can fit in my pockets. The police always catch me and put me in juvenile jail. (Alexie 7-8)

Zits highlights the class disparity inherent in his precarity; because he has no property and no kinship that would tie him to the tribe, he therefore cannot access the benefits of community. Most of all, however, he recognizes his deep desire for attention from a caregiver, at once both teenage narcissism and the understanding of want that Kristeva marks out from the inaugural loss of the caregiver and the state of jouissance in subject formation. The use of the coordinating conjunction *so* demonstrates a causal relationship between his desire and his behavior. Placing it both at the beginning of the sentence and at the beginning of a new paragraph emphasizes the syntactic relationship; his tenure in juvenile jail is directly related to his need for attention, which is directly related to his lack of kinship and his institutional marginalization. The juvenile detention center, as

another "zone of disposal," occupies a part of Seattle that had been gentrified from a predominantly black neighborhood to an upper-class white neighborhood with a bougie coffee shop across the street (Alexie 19). Zits offhand remark about gentrification demonstrates the spatial abjection of black and brown communities as they are pushed further and further away from areas of commerce. The position of detention centers in urban areas also marks the racial and economic segregation of cities, where criminalization of black and brown communities result in higher arrest rates and thus nearby prisons. In jail, Zits meets Justice, and he thinks, "this white kid could save me from being lonely. I bet he could save the world from being lonely" (Alexie 24). Justice saves Zits from his loneliness, but leads him to murder by perverting the message of the Ghost Dance. Zits consumes Justice's rhetoric because he is "a fatherless kid who wants another teenager to be [his] father" (Alexie 26). Subsequently, Zits social death and isolation directly feed in to his acceptance of fighting as a way of being and as a pre-condition of his subject formation. The institutional neglect that ensures he remains natally alienated leads to his criminalization, his acting out, and his reliance on anger.

Zits' bank shooting does not and cannot fulfill the Ghost Dance in the way that Wovoka, the Paiute prophet whose vision led to the creation of the Ghost Dance practice, first related his message. According to anthropologist James Mooney, who interviewed Wovoka in 1892, Wovoka's Ghost Dance came to him in a vision during a solar eclipse in 1889, in which

> God told him he must go back and tell his people they must be good and love one another, have no quarreling, and live in peace with whites; that they must work, and not lie or steal; that they must put away all the old practices that savored of war; that if they faithfully obeyed his instructions they would at last be reunited with their friends in this other world, where there would be no more death or sickness or old age. He was then given

> the dance which he was commanded to bring back to his people. (Mooney 771)

Rather than an anti-white aggression, Wovoka's Ghost Dance encouraged cooperation, collectivity, and concord and spread to other tribes in the West. He asked his tribesmen to trust that if they performed this collective politics, then they would experience renewal even in the face of the dire condition that Native Americans were experiencing with a utopian hope for the future. His concept of bringing back the dead revises the Christian second coming of Christ at the end of days, while the other tenets approximate Christian theology.[30] Ethnographer Alice Kehoe notes, "It was a marvelous message for people suffering, as the Indians of the West were in 1889, terrible epidemics; loss of their lands, their economic resources, and their political autonomy; malnourishment and wretched housing; and a campaign of cultural genocide aimed at eradicating their languages, their customs, and their beliefs" (7). Alexie himself has an interesting interpretation of Wovoka's Ghost Dance, reporting in an interview in 2007 that, "Wovoka, who created the Ghost Dance, was a Methodist minister, so the Ghost Dance is actually very much a Christian apocalyptic thinking… It's really funny that the US cavalry massacred Indians for being Christians" (Mellis 182). Whether the Ghost Dance revised Christian teaching

[30] Gordon Fraser reads the use of images of apocalypse in Alexie's 1993 short story collection as a critique of Cold War politics and militarism in the United States, arguing Alexie "disrupts the Cold War's contingent time and replaces it with a slow temporality that remembers holocausts and notes their ongoing repercussions." (Fraser 602). He contends, "For a Spokane or Coeur d'Alene Indian, the apocalypse is not a potentiality; it is an ongoing reality and a remembered past. Alexie's work, then, critiques the fiction that nuclear weapons represent a moment of historical rupture, indicating instead that nuclear weapons are a continuation of the military logic that has historically privileged a fear of the future over an awareness of the past and present" (Fraser 601). However, Fraser's 2015 article does not address the 2007 novel *Flight*, even though I would argue it directly embodies the temporal shift and apocalyptic survivor narrative that Fraser analyzes in Alexie's earlier work. Zits himself represents the post-apocalyptic survivor potential, as he is reborn after each violent ending of the "ongoing reality and remembered past" and starts new at the end of the novel. Fraser's citations of examples of apocalypse as diverse as the Christian end times, H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine* resonate within *Flight* as well.

or not, it has become "a classic iconography" of Native American theology and cultural practices (Tatonetti 3).

Alexie uses the Ghost Dance ritual as a formal construction through which to interrogate violence and revenge in the United States. Justice convinces Zits to leave the halfway house where Officer Dave places him after the detention center, and his homelessness spatially marks him as both socially dead, since he has no property ties, and abject, since he occupies a third space that polite society refuses to acknowledge. On the exile Kristeva writes, "The one by whom the abject exists is thus a *deject* who places (himself), *separates* (himself), situates (himself), and therefore *strays* instead of getting his bearings, desiring, belonging, or refusing" (*Powers* 8, emphasis in original). Kristeva marks the physical and spatial constructions of abjection, as well as the way that abjection can be a political choice. She goes on, "Instead of sounding himself as to his 'being,' he does so concerning his place: '*Where* am I?' instead of '*Who* am I?' For the space that engrosses the deject, the excluded, is never *one,* nor *homogenous*, nor *totalizable*, but essentially divisible, foldable, and catastrophic. … the *deject* never stops demarcating his universe whose fluid confines … constantly question his solidity and impel him to start afresh" (*Powers* 8). Throughout the novel, within and without the time-travel, Zits constantly wakes up in new places trying to figure out when and where he is. He experiences this dissonance because of his propertylessness; he is constantly in a new place, a new foster home, group home, or jail cell, because he has no property claims or kinship ties that would provide spatial and material security. This allows him to be easily swayed by a boy who offers kinship, and while Zits and Justice wander the streets of

Seattle, squatting in empty warehouses and eating out of garbage cans, Justice incites Zits to violence.

Like Zits, Justice too seems to have little, although because of the first-person narration from Zits' point of view the reader never learns much about Justice's background. There is, of course, irony to a white boy in jail going by the name Justice when the prison industrial complex keeps black and brown bodies incarcerated at much higher rates. He tells Zits that he gave himself the name Justice but he wishes he could have "been given my name by Indians. You guys used to give out names because people earned them. Because they did something amazing" (Alexie 30). Justice has bought in to a narrative of othering and exceptionality in Native American culture, which he can only do because he occupies a hierarchical position of privilege. Zits has also chosen or been given his own name, but juxtaposing the two boys' names illustrates the disparities and ontological differences in their experiences of the world. Like Zits, Justice too has a set of texts that seem to define his experience; although unlike Zits, Justice speaks mostly through those texts' quotations. Justice quotes George Bernard Shaw from the "Maxims for Revolutionists" appendix to his play *Man and Superman*: "Beware of the man whose God is in the skies" (Alexie 22). Here again, Alexie inserts an Irishman into this Native American narrative, but Justice misreads and distorts the irony and satire of Shaw's original text, meant to be a social commentary on Nietzsche's Übermensch. Justice quotes Nietzsche too, or at least he thinks he does. He tells Zits that Nietzsche wrote, "The individual has always had to struggle to keep from being overwhelmed by the tribe. To be your own man is a hard business. If you try it, you'll be lonely often, and sometimes frightened. But no price is too high to pay for the privilege of owning

yourself" (Alexie 25). This quotation is often misattributed to Nietzsche and sounds very similar to section 199 of his work *Beyond Good and Evil*, but the actual citation lies in an interview between Arthur Gordon and Rudyard Kipling in 1935.[31] The irony of Justice's misquotation only serves to highlight the quote's inappropriateness, as Zits, in fact, longs desperately for a tribe. Justice, though he touts anti-white and anti-capitalist rhetoric, reaffirms the possessive individualism of American capitalism through this quote's economic construction of self-possession. The price for owning yourself that Justice seems to require is Zits' life, since he believes, according to George Santayana, "there is no cure for birth and death so you better enjoy the interval" (Alexie 24-5). Once again, Justice distorts his ur-text. In the same essay, Santayana argues, "What can save the world, without destroying it, is self-knowledge on the part of the world … such a philosophy established in society as shall recognize truly what the world is, and what happiness is possible in it" (96). Justice has no self-knowledge, only aphorisms, whereas Zits gains knowledge of both himself and the world through the Ghost Dance.

Justice represents a double agent of white America, spouting anti-white rhetoric while still turning Zits into a violent caricature of Native American resistance. In fact, Justice grooms Zits to represent a violent Indian stereotype. Justice produces a paint gun and a pistol, and the two boys practice shooting the gun without bullets, taking aim at images that represent governmental oppression and white capitalism: George W. Bush, Dick Cheney, Michael Jackson, Simon Cowell from *American Idol*, cars on the freeway. These images firmly situate Alexie's novel in the twenty-first century: Bush's presidency began in 2001; Michael Jackson experienced a comeback starting with his studio album

[31] Arthur Gordon, "Six Hours with Rudyard Kipling," *The Kipling Journal* (June 1967), p. 7.

Invincible in 2001 and several compilation albums released the following years; *American Idol* debuted in 2002 and had its highest-rated season in 2006. But these simulated killings bring to the Ghost Dance to Zits' mind, collapsing the twenty-first century into the nineteenth. Zits teaches Justice about the Ghost Dance, characterizing it as an anti-white movement, a "ceremony created by the Paiute holy man Wovoka, back in the eighteen-seventies. He said, if the Indians danced this dance long enough, all the dead Indians would return and the white people would disappear" (Alexie 31). The Ghost Dance itself has nothing to do with killing white people, and Zits' mother, as an Irish woman, would not be among the Indian ancestors returned in a successful Ghost Dance. He and Justice joke that the Ghost Dancers "didn't have the right kind of music" and "should have had Metallica," but Zits still thinks of the "millions of dead and dying Indians" (Alexie 31). The temporality of this statement – the dead and dying – performs the historical suturing that Alexie's novel explores; the violence is both past and present, concluded and ongoing. Justice's fascination with the Ghost Dance illustrates his ideological othering of Native Americans, inscribing Zits' heritage with his own agenda. Justice suggests that Zits should try to Ghost Dance, that he would be "strong enough to Ghost-Dance all by yourself … bring back all the Indians and disappear all the white people" (Alexie 31). The irony, of course, is that a successful Ghost Dance would also disappear Justice. But Zits thinks, "the only Indian I want to bring back is my father and the only white people I want to disappear are my evil foster families" (Alexie 31). For Zits, a fifteen-year-old with the customary narcissism of a teenager, the ancestral violence represented in the Ghost Dance exists alongside his personal violence. He seeks

retribution for his abandonment and neglect through this violent construction of the Ghost Dance.

Just as Butrick notes that the Cherokee sometimes willingly resign themselves to death, Zits experiences the weariness of the constant unfulfilled desire for belonging and of the constant approach and recognition of abjection and thus willingly succumbs to Justice and his dangerous brand of kinship in hopes of moving away from that border. Zits' characterization of the Ghost Dance, though, is not quite accurate, since he explains to the reader,

> Everything I know about Indians (and I could easily beat 99 percent of the world in a Native American version of Trivial Pursuit) I've learned from television.
>
> I know about famous chiefs, broken treaties, the political activism of the 1960s and 1970s, and the Indian wars of the nineteenth century.
>
> I know all this stuff because it makes me feel more like a real Indian. Maybe I can't live like an Indian, but I can learn how real Indians used to live and how they're supposed to live now. (Alexie 12)

Aitor Ibarrola-Armendariz and Estibaliz Vivanco note that Zits' time-travel to sites of historical trauma leads him to learn that "events have been heavily colored by interests and myths that provided them with a certain teleology" (33). Coming from the future, Zits embodies that teleology, which he learns through the television representations of history. Zits' knowledge of his ancestry is filtered through a lens of white capitalism and white-washed to tell a certain kind of story about Native American resistance in the West. Justice consumes this narrative just as the television programs are meant to be consumed, while Zits tries to turn popular culture into cultural identity.

Zits' representation of the Ghost Dance participates in a history of interpretation in which Wovoka's peaceful vision is redefined and reinterpreted towards violence. A Miniconjou tribe leader named Kicking Bear understood Wovoka's vision to suggest that

"next springtime, when the grass was knee high, the earth would be covered with new soil which would bury all the white men, … The Indians who danced the Ghost Dance would be … set down among the ghosts of their ancestors on the new earth, where only Indians would live" (Brown 433-4). Kicking Bear subsequently spread a story of the power of Ghost shirts, said to be impenetrable by American cavalry bullets, around from tribe to tribe (Kehoe 13). Thus, although the tenets of Wovoka's original message mirror Christian teaching and put forth a message of peace and collectivity, many tribes used his vision to imagine a supernatural righteous return of their way of life in opposition to the white settler colonial presence. The Ghost shirts and their militant connotation became a symbol perceived by the white Indian agents as violent resistance to the agents' attempts to move the tribes into smaller and smaller reservations. Justice embraces this distortion of the Ghost Dance through violence, even though Zits knows that "[a]ll the Ghost Dancers were slaughtered" (Alexie 31).[32] Justice repeatedly asks Zits if he believes that the Ghost Dance is real, in effect questioning Zits' authenticity as an Indian and his investment in Native American mythology, even as these mythologies have been misrepresented. As Farrington and Tatonetti note, Zits believes that when he enters the bank he will perform the Ghost Dance. Madalina Prodan argues, "Justice manipulates Zits into killing on the grounds of the perpetuation of racism against Indians in white society. But the location for doing so is important, since the bank represents the very core of white capitalism and most of the poorest people in America belong to various ethnic minorities" (180). In this way, Zits has incorporated Justice's false ideology against

[32] On December 29, 1890, near the banks of Wounded Knee Creek, fighting between small groups of Miniconjous, Oglalas, and Brulés and the U.S. Army with Hotchkiss artillery cannons resulted in 39 dead soldiers and 153 dead Sioux, including 44 women and 18 children (Kehoe 24).

capitalism into his own construction of the Ghost Dance, even if his motivation is purely personal. Notably, Justice is absent from the scene, as there can be no justice in these actions. Zits dances through the lobby spraying bullets both ballistic and paint in circles. But Alexie does not end his story here.

Instead, Alexie uses the form of the Ghost Dance ritual, the circular dance meant to bring about harmony, to shape the rest of the narrative. Mooney loosely translates Wovoka's ritual in this way:

> When you get home you must make a dance to continue five days. Dance four successive nights, and the last night keep up the dance until the morning of the fifth day, when all must bathe in the river and then disperse to their homes. … You must not hurt anybody or do harm to anyone. You must not fight. … The dead are all alive again. … When the time comes there will be no more sickness and everyone will be young again. (781)

Zits' five time-travel episodes (Hank, Sioux boy, Gus, Jimmy, his father) represent the five days of the Ghost Dance.[33] His journey approximates the circular form of the Ghost Dance through the construction of time, as he moves from his present in 2007, to the recent past of the 1970s, to the distant past of the turn-of-the-century, back to a post-9/11 past, and then back to his own present. As Zits begins his Ghost Dance, he moves from a fixed point in time and space to a liminal one, a third space. His experience of the past that he travels through is informed by his understanding of his own present and the television knowledge that he has gained in that present. Therefore, the distance between his present and the past collapses, creating an alter-history through touches of time-space. This circuity performs the Ghost Dance ritual and brings back the ghosts of the dead until Zits learns to live with them in the present. Wovoka's call against violence represents the

[33] Robyn Johnson also recognizes this five-pronged narrative structure in relation to the Ghost Dance ritual (363).

lesson Zits must learn about revenge and retribution. When he completes the Ghost Dance and chooses not to commit murder, Zits leaves the bank and wishes that it were pouring rain because he wants "to be clean" (Alexie 159), like bathing in the river. These elements recreate the Ghost Dance through narrative form and content, and rather than resulting in death and destruction, they offer one individual hope for reconciliation.

Once his Ghost Dance begins, time and space become foldable through the catastrophic violence of Zits' bank shooting and subsequent death. When Zits approaches the most real physical abjection, when he becomes a literal corpse after being shot in the head at the bank, Alexie sends Zits through time and space to bring back the ghosts of pasts he never knew. Zits' co-habitation in the body of each new time-travel iteration brings the dead back to life and re-energizes old and sick bodies with a young mind. Writing about the ritual of the Ghost Dance, Michael Martin argues, "As American expansion advanced westward, the supernatural ritual of the Ghost Dance had led to the mapping of private experiences of a postdeath world, that is, to the mapping of journeys and places seen in ritual-induced visions. For Native American tribes, the dance's rituals and songs conjured up their world of the dead" (108). Zits' Ghost Dance is a map of his own post-death world, passing through time and space in his own vision of the return of his ancestors. This fluidity throws into chaos all constructions of subjectivity, as well as time and space that are measured in relation to human subjectivity, and Zits starts a new subjectivity with each time-jump. This rendering of the Ghost Dance merges the physical violence and deathly haunting of abjection with new constructions of abject subjectivity, which ultimately creates intersubjective abjection.

The Ghost Dance form allows Alexie to deconstruct hierarchies of scale between historical violence and personal violence and ultimately reject the affirmative possibilities of revenge. Rather than a binary of Native American versus whiteness, Alexie uses the space of the Ghost Dance to consider the many justifications for violence both historical and personal and the ramifications for that violence. In a 2007 interview about *Flight*, Alexie states, "Whatever our politics, we always find ways to justify violence. For me, there's really no difference between the left and the right when it comes to justifying violence" (Mellis 181). Prodan suggests, "Alexie's main concern in *Flight* is to reflect on the banality of violence in everyday life and, most of all, on the pervasive complicity of all humans in its existence and perpetuation" (173). Although the instances of violence in the novel perform cinematic spectacularization, Alexie's use of the time-travel structure highlights the banality of violence rather than its exceptionalism. The time-travel defamiliarizes Zits from his own time and place with each new iteration, but the constant in each case is an experience of violence. And through these violences, Zits uses the historical moment to consider his own complicity in the bank shooting and the violence in his own life.

Alexie's time-traveling Ghost Dance places Zits into a literal double consciousness, through which he experiences intersubjective abjection. As he moves through different bodies, Zits begins to question his sanity, and his own subjectivity is thrown into flux. The further he moves through time, the more effaced Zits' subjectivity becomes, as he learns to share the bodies, actions, and emotions of those whom he occupies. Zits learns to manipulate the bodies and minds of those that he occupies, crossing the borders between subjectivities to experience a unique form of empathy.

Finally, when he returns to his own time and his own body, he experiences the bifurcation of his self into Zits before the shooting and Zits after the Ghost Dance. This experience of dual selves manifests the intersubjective abjection, as Zits come to understand his new post-Dance subjectivity in relation to the degrading violence that he has experienced.

In the first episode of Zits' Ghost Dance, he begins the circular chronotopic journey by going back to the recent past of 1975. He interrogates the justification of law and order by becoming white FBI agent Hank Storm stationed in Red River, Idaho, a fictionalized location for an event reminiscent of Pine Ridge and the 1973 Wounded Knee Incident. In 1973, traditionalist tribal members and Native American civil rights activists of the American Indian Movement (AIM) occupied the town of Pine Ridge and the Wounded Knee historical monument in protest of the failure of Native American civil rights efforts and corruption of tribal governments. Two activists were killed by federal FBI agents throughout the months-long occupation and firefights, and at least one activist disappeared and no body was ever found (Kehoe 84).[34] Gesturing towards this historical event without actually referencing it allows Alexie to revise and reinterpret conflict between Native Americans and the policing arm of the federal government, creating an alter-history that opens the possibility to Native collusion in anti-resistance movements. In Zits' timeline, Hank and his partner Art are FBI agents facilitating a conflict between

[34] Hendricks gives an in-depth account of the FBI's involvement in anti-indigenous politics in the period in *The Unquiet Grave: The FBI and the Struggle for the Soul of Indian Country*. Jan Johnson suggests this scene refers to the 1975 murder of Anna Mae Aquash. The interpretation would be fundamentally the same either way. The history of Wounded Knee recently made the rounds of social media after the despicable attack on a gay nightclub in Orlando in which 49 black and brown queer people were murdered. Most news outlets called the shooting the deadliest mass shooting of civilians in U.S. history, but scholars were quick to point out that such an account obfuscates or erases Native American history and the massacre at Wounded Knee particularly. In many ways, this historical erasure represents the very mechanisms of social death that Alexie writes against.

traditionalist Indigenous Rights Now! (IRON) activists and tribal government group HAMMER. In this scene, Zits does not achieve double consciousness; he is simply Zits in another man's body. He constantly refers to the bank shooting and his own knowledge of the 1975 events. Becoming Hank Storm fulfills some of Zits' embodied desires – he becomes strong and handsome with Anglo features and he has a beautiful wife and children – but he learns that these traits do not preclude someone from a life of violence. Zits relies on his television knowledge to situate himself in time and space, having seen a documentary about the conflict. He quickly learns that Horse and Elk, the two Native men he and Art meet in the dark, are not the IRON heroes the documentary makes them out to be, but murderers and double-agents. The three men torture and kill a young IRON activist, and Zits becomes a complicit bystander when Art forces him to shot the corpse. Art relies on the weight of the U.S. government to provide a righteous justification for his participation in this violence because, according to Art, he and Hank are "at war. We're soldiers. And soldiers have to do some tough things. … In order to fight evil, sometimes we have to do evil things" (Alexie 56). However, Art never provides any clear reason for the war's existence. Art's justification, as well as his badge as a symbol of the "law," approximate the "justice" that the boy Justice advocates, even if Art falls on the opposite side of the argument. Zits realizes, "Justice made killing make sense. But it doesn't make sense, does it?" (Alexie 50). The dissonance that Zits experiences in the face of such violence sheds light on Justice's tautological rhetoric. Both Art and Justice believe that violence can solve corruption and oppression, but neither articulates or defines the source or mechanism of this corruption. Zits cannot absolve himself of a similar process of

justification for the bank shooting. He understands the capacity for violence in himself and his own investment in the narrative of violent retribution.

Zits' next episode follows the curve of the Ghost Dance's chronotopic circle by taking him to the more distant past of the nineteenth century at the 1876 Battle of Little Bighorn. The Battle of Little Bighorn also represents a key moment in the Ghost Dance narrative; Sitting Bull led the charge against Custer, and Sitting Bull's death also spurred the massacre at Wounded Knee and the end of the Ghost Dance (Kehoe). In this scene, Alexie transitions from justifications of violence as war to examine the concept of revenge. Throughout the novel, Zits often tells the reader that he would like to get revenge on his abusers, and in this episode, Zits is given the chance to take a form of that revenge. Zits becomes a little Sioux boy, "an old-time Indian kid, maybe twelve or thirteen years old" (Alexie 63). Once again, Zits starts off differentiated from this little boy body, thinking, "There aren't any half-breed pale-beige green-eyed Indians here. Nope, unlike me, these Indians are the real deal" (Alexie 60).[35] Zits evokes his anxieties about subjectivity in these statements of his inauthenticity. In his own time, he feels disconnected from his Native heritage, but interestingly, because these nineteenth century Indians are "the real deal," he has also bought in to a commercialized and narrativized conception of "authentic" Native identity opposite of whiteness and stuck in a pre-

[35] Interestingly, in this scene Alexie introduces the warrior Crazy Horse, who he ahistorically draws to be "so white he gets sunburned" with light brown, almost-blonde hair and gold-colored eyes, so that Zits decides "this legendary killer of white men *is* half white, like me" (Alexie 67-8). This can be read as another iteration of Alexie's alter-tribal methodology, in which he revises one of the Sioux's greatest warriors to be mixed race in order to refute the blood quantum registration regulations and exclusionary politics of blood purity. Crazy Horse has already been a touchstone for Zits, when Justice evoked Native American naming practices in his own choice of names. Zits thinks "of the great Oglala Sioux warrior Crazy Horse, who was given his name after he battled heroically against other Indians. Yes, Indians have always loved to kill other Indians. Isn't that twisted? I think of how Crazy Horse was speared in the stomach by a U.S. Cavalry soldier while his best friend, Little Big Man, held his arms" (Alexie 31).

Industrial past. He investigates his time and place and body through the eyes of the twenty-first century, observing the many Native languages spoken, the overpowering "stench" of "tens of thousands" of people living in a small camp with their "dogs, and horses, along with what appears to be the rotting and drying corpses of hundreds of [animals]" (Alexie 61), and these sensory experiences further distance him cognitively from the banality of life in the nineteenth century. Life in the social censorship of the antiseptic twenty-first century colors his understanding of the embodied experience of an earlier era.

In this scene, Zits has his deepest desires realized, as becoming this Sioux boy has given Zits the nuclear family that he has always wanted – a proper "Indian" family. But Zits' excitement at his new family is short-lived when he realizes they are in a camp on the edge of the Little Bighorn River. Zits has prescient knowledge of the immediate past-future; he knows that "these old-time Indians are doomed. They're going to die of disease. And they'll be slaughtered by U.S. Cavalry soldiers. They'll be packed into train cars and shipped off to reservations. And they'll starve in winter camps near iced-over rivers" (Alexie 66). Alexie's images of train cars and reservations evokes both the ancestral violence against Native Americans and Nazi concentration camps, creating touches between global histories of genocide and destabilizes the singularity of white-Native violence.[36] Zits wants to warn the boy's father and the other warriors, but the little Sioux boy cannot speak because of damage to his vocal cords when a white cavalry

[36] See Peterson for Alexie's use of the Holocaust in other works. Interestingly, her 2010 article does not mention *Flight*, perhaps because references to the Holocaust are slight compared to some of Alexie's other works. However, in an interview regarding *Flight*, Alexie says this about reservations: "One of the things we forget as natives and non-natives is that reservations were created as concentration camps. They were created so Indians would be shipped there and die. I really think that still their purpose: to kill" (Weich 171).

soldier tried to slit his throat. Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull and "[t]housands of hot and angry Indian dudes ride out to meet Custer and his doomed soldiers [with repeating rifles]" (Alexie 69). Alexie repeats the sense of doom for the Sioux and Custer's soldiers; in this narrative of violence, everyone is doomed.

Dropping Zits into the Battle of Little Bighorn, rather than a fictionalized space like Red River, thwarts readers' expectations of history and the role of history and revises both the victorious narrative of the Sioux warriors and the white-washed narrative of the "dangerous Indian." The Native American victors of Alexie's Battle of Little Bighorn seem to justify their violence as both necessary warfare and revenge for previous atrocities. However, even with those previous atrocities embodied in scar tissue on the little boy's throat and destroyed vocal cords, Zits comes to understand the ambiguity of war and revenge through violence. After the battle, Zits thinks,

> there is nothing sexy or beautiful on Custer's Hill. There are hundreds of dead cavalry soldiers. Bloody corpses everywhere. They look like red and white flowers blooming in the green grass.
>
> I feel sick in my stomach and brain. I feel sick in my soul. I remember that in another life I killed people like this. I left behind a bank lobby filled with dead bodies.
>
> But this is war. The Indians were protecting themselves from the soldiers. Custer had ridden into camp to kill men, women, and children. He had to be stopped.
>
> I understand why he's dead. I understand why he had to be killed. It was self-defense. Wasn't it self-defense?
>
> I understand why the soldiers had to be killed, but I don't understand what is happening to the soldiers now. To their bodies.
>
> All around me, Indian men, women, and children are desecrating the bodies of the dead white soldiers. (Alexie 72-3)

Alexie's images, along with the previous descriptions of the Indian camp and Zits' own experience of the events through his television knowledge, create a cinematic quality to the violence. Zits, the Sioux, and the reader are forced to approach and experience

abjection in the form of the corpses that infect the life-building attempted in the Sioux camp and carry the historical weight of previous atrocities against Native nations. Zits describes in detail Sioux men, women, and children desecrating the bodies of the white soldiers, spectacularizing the violence and implicating both Zits and the reader as viewers and witnesses.[37] This cinematic quality approximates the twenty-first century's normalization of hyperviolence in everyday media and television. Through the two episodes, Zits subverts the romanticization of war, denying Justice's and Art's construction of war. The battle was righteous war because Custer reveled in violence and the glory of killing – which Zits knows because he saw a show about it on the History Channel (Alexie 71). But the question – "Wasn't it self-defense?" – subverts the justification. The hyperviolent desecration of the dead soldiers' bodies causes Zits to interrogate the narrative of self-defense and the clear-cut delineation between Indian good and white evil that Justice constructs. Alexie comments on this ambiguity in an interview with James Mellis, saying that the scene "offers a new vision as a different way to take lessons from it. … We did plenty of killing on our own and I think the sort of centuries-long effort to completely villainize and demonize white folks is very self-destructive to us" (181). In his alter-tribal alter-history, he requires Native Americans to look at their own practices of violence and to break down binaries of victim and victimizer, just as Zits uses the scene to consider his own act of violence and his role as a victim.

Zits employs this historical violence as a foil for his own personal trauma to interrogate the concept of revenge as nothing more than reciprocation. As the Sioux boy,

[37] I've chosen not to replicate the scenes of extreme violence through direct quotation of the text.

Zits experiences this violence first-hand; he is mute because the boy has recovered from having his throat cut. The loss of voice signifies the breakdown of Zits' linguistic subjectivity. He cannot speak and he has no name. Moreover, this scene is the first time Zits experiences real double consciousness, indicating a move towards the effacement of Zits' ego and a recognition of intersubjective abjection. Zits taps in to the memories of the little boy, where he *remembers* even though the even happened before Zits inhabited the body: "A white soldier cut *my* throat. In another camp on a different river, a white soldier grabbed *my* hair, lifted *my* chin, and slashed *my* throat with a bayonet" (Alexie 75). The constant repetition of the possessive *my* indicates the conflation of Zits and the boy. The boy's memory triggers another, in which Zits, in his own past, was sexually abused by a foster father; thus, Zits simultaneously registers his own memory of violence and the boy's memory, creating an empathic connection between them. In this way, the ancestral violence, the embodied violence of the other, and Zits' own embodied violence coalesce into an alter-history that does not create a hierarchy between violences, does not rank suffering, but instead recognizes the kinship between two helpless victims. Zits wonders whether he would take revenge on one of his sexual abusers if the man were there in this moment and concludes, "I don't know" (Alexie 76). Even with the violence of sexual abuse still raw in Zits' memory, he recognizes the failure of revenge to provide healing, and so he hesitates to cut the throat of a young cavalry man in revenge for the boy's own injury (Alexie 75). He knows that this soldier did not cut the boy's throat, and when Zits approaches the white soldier as a "kid, like me," he breaks down the border between white and Native that Justice would have him believe to be impenetrable. In a moment of empathic clarity, Zits recognizes the soldier boy's fear and his desire to live.

He also wonders if the bank shooting was supposed to be an act of revenge and asks, "Did they deserve to die because of my loneliness?" (Alexie 77). Zits deconstructs an affective hierarchy that places his desires over the lives of others and subverts Justice's justification for the Ghost Dance. Both the people at the bank and the white soldier stand in as proxy for the real perpetrator: institutions of systemic neglect. But Zits comes to understand that revenge against these proxies cannot offer a real solution, asking "If I kill him, do I deserve to be killed by this white soldier's family and friends? Is revenge a circle inside of a circle inside of a circle?" (Alexie 77). The circular logic of revenge, the endless cycle of violence, cannot fulfill the circular dance ritual of Wovoka's Ghost Dance because it never ends.

In the third episode of Zits' Ghost Dance, Zits remains in the distant past, in an unspecified time in the nineteenth century when the U.S. cavalry actively performed raids against Indian villages. This scene incorporates the concepts of justice and revenge by placing Zits in the body of an old white Indian tracker and cavalry soldier meant to lead the cavalry troops in an attack on an Indian village as a "swift and deadly blow of justice" for the murder of white settlers in Kansas (Alexie 85). Ironically, the man is Irish and speaks with an accent, once again fulfilling Zits' desire to connect to his Irish heritage. Zits has a deeper double consciousness with Gus. He believes, "I'm in control of Gus now so I'm just going to lead all these soldiers away from the Indian village … I'm just going to get on my horse and point it in a random direction, and get very, very lost" (Alexie 85). However, Zits has been slowly learning intersubjectivity by experiencing and incorporating the memories and feelings of those he inhabits into his own subjectivity. He realizes,

> Some part of the old Gus remains inside of me. … And even though I keep thinking, *I want to be lost …* I can't do it. … What it comes to is this: I can't completely control Gus. I can move his arms and legs. I can talk with his voice. And I can think my own thoughts. But Gus is stronger than I am. His memories become my memories, too. This is new. I couldn't see into the past of the other bodies I've inhabited. I'm scared that Gus might reclaim his body and drown me in his blood. (Alexie 86).

For the first time, Zits fears falling completely into this new body, indicating the effacement of his own ego and desires in the Ghost Dance. If Gus's memories become Zits' memories, then they share a collectivity unlike any of the previous iterations of the Ghost Dance. Zits experiences the embodied precarity of Gus's old body through arthritis and infirmity, and the affective precarity of Gus's emotions through Gus's memories of discovering the "slaughtered white settlers" (Alexie 86). Rather than objectively examining and understanding anger as with the little Sioux boy, Zits viscerally feels Gus's emotions, "and his grief and rage are huge, so my grief and rage are huge, too, and I scream as I lead one hundred soldiers down the hill into the Indian camp" (Alexie 87). Zits feels ambiguous about the attack on the village, trying to break through Gus's rage to establish intersubjectivity with the Native Americans in the village, but Gus's rage and the justification of violence overpower Zits.

All of the previous violence – the bank shooting, the FBI murder, the Battle of Little Bighorn, the murder of the white settlers, the impending death of the Native American village – accumulates in Zits' mind so that a boy of fifteen carries the weight of centuries of violence. The line, "This is what revenge can do to you," opens the chapter. It continues the narrative of the cavalry attack from the previous chapter, but the unclear antecedent for the pronoun *this* also signals to Zits' loneliness that sent him to the bank for revenge and then on the Ghost Dance. The use of the second-person creates a

didactic tone in which readers understand the "you" as Zits, as Gus, and as themselves. In this moment, Zits chooses to abstain from violence, having come to understand that there can be no real justification for it. With each step towards the camp massacre, Zits loses the anger and hatred that Gus felt, and he throws Gus's rifle away and rides unarmed into the camp, hoping to die in order to end this newest iteration, thinking, "I will gladly be a ghost, if I can be a ghost who can't see or hear" (Alexie 91). Ghostliness represents a crossing over from life to death to life again, and each iteration of the Ghost Dance renders Zits more ghostly by further effacing his own subjectivity.

Not only does he remove himself from the violence of revenge, but he actively chooses anti-violence by helping to save a little Native American boy and a young white soldier. In a scene of chaos and terror and extravagant violence, Zits watches a little Native American boy, no more than five years old, trying to shoot a bow and arrow, when a white soldier "a boy himself, maybe sixteen years old," chases the little boy down and scoops him up (Alexie 92). Zits realizes, "In the midst of all this madness and murder, one soldier has refused to participate. He has chosen the opposite of revenge. … I have to help him" (Alexie 93).[38] Zits jumps into action, finding a rifle and horse discarded by one of the Native Americans, and chases after the two children. He protects them against the Army general who takes aim at the "traitor." Zits experiences a perfect

[38] Just before Zits sees the white soldier rescue the little boy, his horse's head explodes from a gunshot and Zits gets covered in blood and thrown to the ground. This detail is secondary from the argument here, but suggests an interesting parallel to *Beloved* where Baby Suggs, covered in the blood of the crawling-already baby, chases Sethe and Denver on their way to jail. It represents another embodied experience of abjection to be covered in the hot life-blood of another and still be forced to face white power and violence. Later in the novel, after Zits becomes his own father, he stumbles out of an alley covered in his own blood and horrifies the people in the street, but he thinks, "I am covered with the same blood that is inside everybody else. They can't judge me for this blood" (Alexie 141). Here Alexie subverts the abjection of blood, or recognizes its extreme, by announcing that we all have the same embodied experience of abjection. Moreover, he once again subverts the concept of blood purity and blood quantum by arguing that we all have the same blood.

double consciousness in this moment, since "some part of *me,* the part that is Gus, wants me to stop, to turn around and re-swear my allegiance to the other soldiers. But I can defeat Gus now. I am doing the right thing. I am trying to save the soldier who is trying to save Bow Boy" (Alexie 95, my emphasis). Here, Zits and Gus are not separate; when he says that he can defeat Gus, Zits actually wants to defeat the rhetoric of revenge. Zits/Gus decides to make the ultimate sacrifice to save the two boys, recognizing the inherent ambiguities in all forms of violence:

> This journey started when I shot a bunch of strangers in a bank. A horrible, evil act. And now I'm lying in the dirt, getting ready to shoot a bunch of other strangers. This time in self-defense and in defense of the two boys who are riding farther and farther away from me.
>
> Is there really a difference between that killing and this killing? Does God approve of some killing and not other killing? If I kill these soldiers so that Small Saint and Bow Boy can escape, does that make me a hero?
>
> I don't know. How am I supposed to know? I don't even have a good guess.
>
> ……
>
> I take careful aim. I don't know if I have the heart to kill them. Isn't that odd? I once filled a room with bullets. I shot people who would never do me harm. And now I'm not sure I can shoot at the men who plan to kill me. (Alexie 106)

Zits has fully disassociated with Justice's rhetoric of justified violence through the Ghost Dance, coming closer to Wovoka's true vision of the Dance. Although he cannot lay down arms here, Zits understands that violence may be unavoidable, may even be in good faith, but that does not necessarily make it justifiable or justice.

In the first three episodes of the Ghost Dance, Alexie focuses on white-Native conflicts. However, in the penultimate episode that starts rounding the curve of the Ghost Dance circle back to the start, Zits begins the return to the present and Alexie introduces a new concept of violence that situates the novel firmly in the twenty-first century, as 9/11 arguably represents the threshold of the new century. Zits finds himself flying in a

small airplane and "I'm the pilot. I'm inside the body of the pilot. No, I have become the pilot. I don't feel separate from him. … It is my plane, the clouds, the ocean, and me. All of it is beautiful and interchangeable. All of it is equally important and unimportant. All of it is connected" (Alexie 107). The "I" of subjectivity oscillates between Zits, Jimmy the pilot, and a collective iteration. Rather than fearing his effacement, Zits thinks, "I can fall so far inside a person, inside his memories, that I can play them like a movie" (Alexie 112). Zits occupies a position as both bystander and participant, crossing and haunting the borders of subjectivity through the haunting time-travel of his Ghost Dance.

Zits returns to a post-9/11 period as a white pilot named Jimmy, and Alexie contemplates the rhetoric of justice and revenge in the new American war on the brown face of terror.[39] Incorporating twenty-first century terrorism into the form of the nineteenth century Ghost Dance returns the narrative to Wovoka's original call to lay down arms for peace and collectivity. Rather than placing Zits in the historical moment of 9/11, Alexie once again creates an alter-history by imagining a second attack on Chicago perpetrated by Jimmy's friend Abbad, who he taught to fly. Jan Johnson argues that this episode in the trajectory of the novel "shears away from the singular traumatic event (the suicide attacks on 9/11) in order to lay bare a catalog of collective traumatic events experienced both in isolated moments (such as the torture and murder of an American Indian Movement [AIM] activist) and as recurring horrors (an orphaned native child fostered by white families)" (124). Inserting 9/11 and terrorism into this rumination

[39] Coulombe contends, "In *Flight*, humor itself approximates violence. … Through *Flight* – and humor – Alexie prompts readers to reconsider events like 9/11, challenging them to reject formulaic responses that escalate violence, isolate people, and exacerbate trauma" (131). Coulombe also examines the ambiguity of violence in the novel, and I add to this conversation of form and violence, rather than focusing on the use of humor, by mapping the ritual of the Ghost Dance through Zits' experiences.

on violence and justification creates a long trajectory for racialized violence in the United States, rendering the ambiguous episodes of Native American violence and violence against Native Americans as terrorist threats. It requires the audience to interrogate the justifications for contemporary wars in the Middle East just as Zits has been. Throughout the Ghost Dance, Alexie has illustrated that terror can be perpetrated by anyone at any time; as with the references to the Holocaust, the violence in this episode highlights that this conflict exists not only between Native Americans and white power, but as a global conflict of racial capitalism. Abbad highlights the investment in white power that created social death in Native Americans and, in the modern era, has spread across the globe through neo-colonialism and capitalist conflicts to imbricate national violence and contemporary global violence. Steven Salaita argues that Alexie employs stereotypes of Muslims as terrorists, but considering that Zits' knowledge of Native Americans comes from television, there is no reason to assume that Zits' knowledge of terrorism comes from any source other than post-9/11 media treatments. As the novel's narrator, the representations of terroristic violence are vocalized through Zits' understanding. Thus, Abbad's proclamations against American capitalism rehearse Justice's arguments earlier in the novel, placing Zits' bank shooting and Abbad's hijacking in juxtaposition as acts of terror.

The apposition of mass murder and personal violence employs global violence to frame Zits' own life, so that betrayals of all scopes stand together, especially Zits' abandonment and the bank shooting. Alexie uses conversations about terrorism to punctuate Jimmy's argument with his wife, her destruction of his things, and her disposal of their kinship by tossing away her wedding ring; in effect, the personal and the political

cannot be disentangled because betrayal is violence no matter the scale. Jimmy experiences that betrayal from both sides – as betrayer and betrayed – because of Abbad's attack. Lost in despair, Jimmy decides to commit suicide by crashing his plane into the ocean, echoing Zits' earlier proclamation that he is nothing more than "a flaming jet, crashing into each new foster family (Alexie 11). As the plane hurdles towards the water, Zits thinks "about my mother and father. I think about the people I loved. I think about the people I hated. I think about the people I betrayed. I think about the people who have betrayed me. We're all the same people. And we are all falling" (Alexie 130). Zits has come to recognize the false narratives of justice, revenge, and violence, come to understand a collective investment and complicity in these narratives, and to displace his anger and loneliness. Zits has learned to find compassion for others through the effacement of his own ego, and in that compassion, he rejects violence.

Zits' lessons in revenge lead him to his final step in the Ghost Dance, completing the chronotopic circle by returning to Tacoma in 2007, but spatially distant from his body in Seattle. In the body of a homeless drunk Indian, Zits comes to reject outright Justice's anti-whiteness rhetoric and take ownership of his own culpability in the bank shooting. When Zits first awakens, he generally does not maintain a separate narrative of subjectivity; the "I" of the narrative and the "I" of the body are one. Moreover, this scene illustrates the abjection of homelessness, at once embodied, physical, and political. Zits rolls "through rotten food and dog shit and rank water and moldy newspaper," projectile vomits "half-digested food and booze [and blood]," and occupies a space generally unintelligible and invisible to the world around him (Alexie 131-2). When a white couple stops to help him, he yells at them,

> "White people did this to Indians. You make us like this."
>
> I don't even know if I believe that. But I think this homeless body believes it. I think this fifty-year-old guy wants to blame somebody for his pain and his hunger.
>
> But what if it's his fault? What if he made all the decisions that led him to this sad-ass fate?
>
> Fuck me, I think, and fuck this body I'm occupying.
>
> "And fuck you," I say to Pam and Paul. "And fuck your whiteness."
>
> Jesus, I wonder if this homeless guy understands the difference between white and whiteness. And then I wonder if I should be so condescending, considering that I am this homeless guy. (Alexie 136)

Before the Ghost Dance, Zits' beliefs in many ways mirror this homeless guy and his inability to take responsibility for his own loneliness and violence, and Justice convinces him to blame any white person. After the Ghost Dance, Zits recognizes the difference between systems of whiteness that produce institutional neglect and white individuals. By embracing the subjectivity of the homeless man – "I am this homeless guy" – Zits acknowledges the weight of his own decisions to "spit and kick and bite and punch" in the name of his loneliness and how those decisions led to the bank shooting. Through the Ghost Dance, Zits learns that a history of institutional marginalization, natal alienation, and degradation produces both ancestral and immediate social death. In this moment, Zits comes to realize that his own decisions affect the way that he experiences his social death. He can fight and punch and bite, or he can look for moments of reconciliation.

Alexie frames Zits' narcissistic humanism by returning to the personal through these many ancestral and global conflicts when Zits realizes that he now inhabits the body of his absent father. Zits' final deepest desire is fulfilled: he finds his father. He can finally come to understand why his father abandoned him. Having learned to manipulate the double consciousness, Zits forces his father's memory, even though he "can feel him fighting," back to the day of Zits' birth (Alexie 152). Like Zits' own experiences in the

Ghost Dance, the memory of waiting in the hospital for Zits to be born triggers another memory in Zits' father – that of his own abuse at the hand of his father, Zits' grandfather. Zits learns that his father abandoned his family because he has internalized natal alienation and degradation through his father's abuse. This memory reiterates Zits' realization that "we are all falling," and just as he recognizes Native American ancestral violence in a long trajectory of historical conflicts, Zits develops empathy for his father and perceives his own personal violence in a similar trajectory.

As Zits finally returns to his own body, Completing the ritual allows Zits the distance from his own angst to understand the trajectory that brought him to this point: his father's abandonment, his mother's death, his aunt's betrayal and her boyfriend's sexual abuse, the abuse of other foster fathers, his homelessness, his criminality and drug use, his loneliness. In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva writes, "Abjection is a resurrection that has gone through death (of the ego). It is an alchemy that transforms death drive into a start of life, of new significance" (15). When Zits' Ghost Dance ends, he has been resurrected from death and been transformed into a new intersubjective abject. He thinks, "I'm supposed to kill for Justice," but instead, he chooses not to participate in the violence. Zits looks at a little boy with his mother in the bank, and instead of envy, Zits finds empathy. He thinks, "Maybe we're all lonely. Maybe some of them also hurtle through time and see war, war, war. Maybe we're all in this together" (Alexie 158). But he chooses to change because he is "tired of hurting people … tired of being hurt" (Alexie 161). When he steps out of the bank, wishing to be washed clean by the Seattle rain, he lays down arms just as Wovoka demands, turning the weapons over to Officer Dave. Through the alter-history that Alexie has created in the form of the Ghost Dance,

Zits has resurrected ghosts of his people, both ancestral and natal. He has come to reject the justifications for violence that perverted Wovoka's original vision.

In making the choice not to hurt people, Zits learns to use his intersubjective abjection to destabilize his own propertylessness, shame, and social death. Early in the novel, he thinks about how he has "respect for [cops]. A tiny bit of respect. I think a lot of them had drunk, or shitty, or missing fathers, just like I did. I think many of them endured chaotic and brutal childhoods, so they become cops because they want to create order in the world. And those cops, forever reminded of their troubled youth, often try to rescue kids like me" (Alexie 18). Although he does not realize it, Zits is using intersubjective abjection to frame an affective and empathic relationship with the police officers, even if they represent agents of the white institutions. Officer Dave in particular offers Zits an alternative to the institutional neglect he has previously experienced. When he turns himself in to Dave, they discover Justice has disappeared, illustrating the illusory nature of Justice's kinship. Dave, however, establishes real kinship with Zits. When Dave visits Zits as he waits in jail, he tells Zits, "You matter. Everybody matters. You matter to me" (Alexie 168). This might be the first time that Zits has ever heard these words. Zits thinks, "I can't jump into Dave's body but I can feel and see and understand a little bit about his pain," while Dave tells him about responding to a call in which two babies have been scalded and killed in a bathtub while their parents were passed out in another room (Alexie 169). Dave, forced to approach the abject in this way, carries those babies and their natal alienation with him every day, and Zits can feel and understand his pain because of his own experiences. In this moment, he can establish intersubjective abjection with Dave, not because he inhabits his body and uses double consciousness, but

because Dave tells him the story, establishes the narrative that defines his own precarious subject formation through the experience of violence.

Even though Zits fears that he "might be unlovable," Dave helps to get him fostered with his brother and sister-in-law (Alexie 173), and this new kinship subverts the construction of a nuclear family and the institutional neglect of Zits' previous foster homes. Zits creates a new form of kinship with Dave and his brother and wife, all three in positions in which they must deal with social death and abjection as a police officer, firefighter, and nurse. At first, Zits assumes that Dave placed him in his brother's home because "[Dave] is scared of disappointing me," but when he awakens and finds Dave there at the breakfast table, he realizes that "Dave isn't leaving me to his brother. Dave is going to take care of me, too. … I need as many fathers as possible" (Alexie 174-6), in direct opposition to Zits' absent biological father and the abusive foster fathers. The family eats breakfast together, make plans to attend a baseball game, and Dave "tousles my hair … No father has tousled a kid's hair since 1955" (Alexie 177). These "small rituals" recreate and subvert the great American (white) family into a racially diverse, adoptive, alter-tribal family. Dave and his family invest in Zits and plan to make his placement permanent. Finally, Zits finds the affective community of kinship that he has craved for so long.

The end of the novel returns to Zits' acne and offers a new solution through intersubjective abjection. Earlier in the narrative, in jail, Justice stares at the acne on his face and tells Zits, "It doesn't have to be like that … They got all sorts of medicine now. I see it on TV. They got miracle zit stuff. Clear your face right up" (Alexie 21). Justice identifies a source of Zits' shame and a physical manifestation of his abjection, but Zits

understands, “I’d love to buy that stuff, but it costs fifty bucks a jar. These days, you see a kid with bad acne, and you know he’s poor. Rich kids don’t get acne anymore” (Alexie 21). Justice does not recognize the racial, economic and sociopolitical divide that Zits inhabits and thus offers no real solution. This scene foreshadows the false nature of Justice’s engagement with race and social death. Like Justice, Zits’ new foster mother Mary also recognizes Zits’ acne as a source of his shame, but as a caregiver, she offers him a solution when she comes home with a skin-care treatment regimen. In an inverse of the disinterested foster parents, Mary really looks at Zits and affirms him, telling him, “No, you’re not ugly. You’re handsome, actually. … we need to start working on your skin. You’ll be a lot happier if we do” (Alexie 179). Rather than ignoring Zits and his pain, Mary seeks a way to offer happiness to a child that no one else has. The scene does not try to make Zits conform to white capitalist standards of beauty or clear his skin because Mary feels shame about it. Rather, it represents a caregiver confronting Zits’ embodied abjection, saying this is where we are together, and offering a new maternal relationship.

Arguably, my reading falls into the camp of multicultural optimism with its emphasis on the stakes of critical empathy and intersubjective romance, even as my theory of intersubjective abjection resists utopic renderings of subject formation and takes a pragmatic view of the dangers of precarity. This stands in contrast to critics such as Kelly Boland, who indicts *Flight* and its “settler readers” (i.e. white) for embracing a narrative of multiculturalism that “allows readers to co-opt the history of Indigenous oppression into the workings of a multicultural state that recognizes Indians as a minority cultural group whose subjugation is a past injustice, one that has nothing to do with

contemporary America" (83-4). This results in an ending, because Zits is adopted by a white family, that "suggests the coercive power that the contemporary American settler state maintains over Indigenous bodies" (86). I believe that Boland demands too much of Alexie and Zits to represent all "Indigenous bodies." Though a charge often leveled at "ethnic" or "minority" writers, we do not ask white authors to represent all white people.[40] Although Alexie opens the space for Zits to recognize others' suffering, although Zits moves cross-temporally and cross-culturally, I do not believe that Alexie means for this novel to represent a universal narrative of racial reconciliation. Zits' new kinship with Dave and his family subverts the tribal and nuclear family structures that Zits was denied, but the reconciliation is individual. Alexie does not render the ending an afternoon special; he maintains the complexity, opacity, and ambiguity of Zits' intersubjective abjection – his understanding of his own identity through and against violence. After completing the Ghost Dance, Zits recognizes that the world is a violent place, that there has always been violence, and that unfortunately there will probably always be violence. Surrounded by people who face that violence head on every single day, those same people also surround him with love and affection, standing in opposition to the social worker who denied Zits' humanity. These lessons help Zits reclaim his true identity, not dependent on his Indianness or his Irishness, but simply on his own decisions, not a racial reconciliation, but a reconciliation with himself. The novel ends as Zits casts off his shame and reclaims his name: "My real name is Michael. Please, call me Michael" (Alexie 181).

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[40] Alexie himself has noted this problem in a 2005 interview in *MELUS*: "I guess the problem is that I'm labeled as a Native American writer, but that writers like John Updike and Jonathan Franzen aren't labeled as White American writers. They are simply assumed to be the norm, and everybody else is judged in reaction to them." (Nygren 153)

Chapter Three
Refutation: Responding to a Discourse of Appalachian Stigmatypes in Amy Greene's *Long Man*

Full of ambiguities, paradoxes, and unsettling histories, written over by popular narratives of peculiarity, violence, and, often, savagery, the eastern mountains of the United States have long been imagined as an impenetrable frontier since the days when the ancient hills and valleys actually marked the American frontier, and the people of Appalachia have seemed as impenetrable as the mountains themselves. Incredibly hard to define, as the range runs from Maine to Alabama, Appalachia has traded in stereotypes for more than a century. Appalachians at once achieve the possessive individualism of the white colonial frontier spirit and suffer the stereotypes of degradation of non-white exclusion. In this chapter, I seek to answer David Roediger's call for intersectional examinations of whiteness, but also to tease out a greater distinction that rural whites face through economic disability and property violence. Appalachia has been mapped out, through popular culture, institutional rhetoric, and literature, with the stigmatypes of monstrous alterity that set it apart from structures of whiteness. Not all white groups are incorporable in white power, and those that do not or cannot economically advance white power do not get absorbed. Appalachia represents the failure of whites to live up to the standards of whiteness, and thus Appalachians must be rendered as Other. My goal is not to create false equivalencies between the oppression of slavery, Native American genocide, and Appalachia. What I hope to conclude in this chapter is that whites, too, can experience social death and that Appalachians manifest what Patterson defines as the "fallen insider." White social death, I contend, stems from the conjunction of economic and cultural humiliation, producing a state of internal exile from white power, where a

raced and classed whiteness maintains pejorative supremacy over deeply oppressed people of color but fails to gain access to the superstructure of white biopolitics. Through discourse and history, we can see how Appalachia experiences social death, figurative rather than sociological. This chapter addresses that discourse, the institutional marginalization and natal alienation rendered by the government and TVA, and the degradation rendered by popular culture representations. Amy Greene's *Long Man* (2014) speaks back to this discourse through a politics of refutation. Greene uses the TVA legislation and the haunting of the Indian removal to frame the last family's resistance to the TVA takeover in her fictional town of Yuneetah even as the flood rises closer to their porch. Their dispossession constructs their homesteads as wasteland not properly industrialized and thus expendable. I claim that the work of Greene's novel builds intersubjective abjection as it refutes the horrific abjectification of Appalachians by focusing on their kinship and property claims in the face of precarity and many forms of death.

The source of Appalachian alterity, what Matt Wray calls *stigmatypical* representations, was framed by popular local-color literature in the post-bellum late-nineteenth century, in a similar political climate as the Monroe Doctrine, the Fugitive Slave Act, and Indian Removal. The United States, especially the South, was remaking itself after the Civil War, and Reconstruction served to re-define whiteness, blackness, labor, and property ownership in relation to Emancipation. Emily Satterwhite writes, "Beginning with the local– color literary movement (c. 1868– 1910), stories and essays published in middle and highbrow periodicals constructed and drew upon an imagined geography of Appalachia as a region of preindustrial white folk. Popular fiction played a

crucial role in perpetuating and molding assumptions about the supposedly irrevocable correlation between American nativity, American character, whiteness, frontier self-sufficiency, and national superiority" (94). Appalachia became, at once, a bastion for holding on to white nationalism without the dilution of cosmopolitanism and a symbol of backwardness and the failure to embrace political and technological progress. David Hunter Strother, writing in *Harper's Magazine* in the 1870s, quickly dismisses the Appalachian community by describing mountaineer upbringing as isolated and impoverished, without the civilization of commerce and society. He pretends to hide his criticism of the mountain way of life by arguing, "[s]imple but strong, uncouth but sincere, the man of the mountains knows nothing of the luxury and refinements of cities, and is equally protected from most of their attendant vices and miseries" (Strother 812). However, his tone and language indicate his disdain for the Appalachian people and he illustrates the ambiguities of naming Appalachia at once simpler and simpleton. At the same time, Appalachians' whiteness became inscribed into their bodies, not as a sign of their supremacy but of their isolation and idiosyncrasy. Will Wallace Harney's 1873 *Lippencott's Magazine* article "A Strange Land and a Peculiar People" offers perhaps the first media exposé on the otherness of Appalachia. Harney writes, "The natives of this region are characterized by marked peculiarities of the anatomical frame. The elongation of the bones, the contour of the facial angle, the relative proportion or disproportion of the extremities, the loose muscular attachment of the ligatures, and the harsh features were exemplified in the notable instance of the late President Lincoln" (431). He makes an interesting alignment of Lincoln, that great betrayer of white supremacy and country boy from backwoods Kentucky, Indiana, and Illinois, as an iconic image of the eugenic

anomaly of these harsh anatomical features, sounding remarkably similar to descriptions used to mark blackness. Lincoln provides a touchstone for readers to understand the Appalachian Americans' embodied abnormality when compared with Harney's implied whiteness. These articles represent the nineteenth century version of exploitation television. Like Zits' television documentary knowledge of Native Americans, most of what Americans believed and still believe about Appalachia comes from popular culture and mainstream media portrayals.

Popular fiction and media still play an important part in the naming and unmaking of the region today, and Appalachia has been something of a media fascination in recent years. In the last six years, mainstream media, especially with the rise of Hicksploitation television, has ventured into the mountains, primarily in the southern Appalachians, to see what they could find, producing "reality" television shows like History Channel's *Appalachian Outlaws* (2014), National Geographic's *Snake Salvation* (2013), and Discovery Channel's *Moonshiners* (2011).[41] Appalachia's peculiarity stands out from the depictions of other regions in the United States, even when those depictions primarily follow poor or working class whites. For example, unlike History Channel's other popular show *Swamp People* (2010), in which Louisiana alligator hunters compete in a state-regulated cull to be the "King of the Swamp," the "outlaws" of Appalachia, filmed as they harvest ginseng in the short fall season – a highly lucrative and legal business unless the sang grows on federal property – suffer from manufactured violence and toxic

[41] See von Doviak's *Hick Flicks* for more on hicksploitation as it occurs in cinema in the 1970s. Also see Harkins *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon* for a longer history of the many portrayals of poor white culture up to 2003. What is interesting about the contemporary films and television shows set in Appalachia is the sheer number of them arising in just the last six years. Those mentioned here are only a sampling.

masculinity. Instead of treating sang as the cultural product and practice that defines a way of life in which people live off of what the mountain provides, History Channel renders it a farcical illicit trade replete with guns and booby traps. Fictional representations in popular media use the same script for constructing Appalachia. History Channel's scripted *Hatfields and McCoys* (2012) – starring no less than Kevin Costner and Bill Paxton – employs the same territorial violence, as does FX's *Justified* (2010) and WGN America's *Outsiders* (2016), in which a clan of Scots-Irish descendants named the Farrells (seriously) defend their mountain and way of life from big coal. Oscar-winning and thrice-nominated actress Jennifer Lawrence's film career has been built on representations of Appalachian violence, from her Oscar-nominated performance in *Winter's Bone* (2010), to the overlooked *Serena* (2014) based on the novel by Ron Rash, to the wildly popular *Hunger Games* franchise (2012-2015), where her people's hero Katniss Everdeen rises from the impoverished coal producing District 12 – smallest, poorest, and furthest from the rich Capital. That the rebellion arises from this Appalachian district only further entrenches stereotypes of outlawry, government distrust, violence, and rebellion. These ambiguities and stereotypes persist in media culture because they are easier than unmolding and remaking the narrative of Appalachia. In Achille Mbembe's "Necropolitics" he argues that necropower works by establishing "territorial fragmentation" so that the land is "divided into a web of intricate internal borders" (175). The continuing portrayal of Appalachia as a violent and impenetrable frontier manifests these borders and dispossesses Appalachia of cultural practices and cultural citizenship. "This is appropriate, for Appalachia, more than most of the regions into which the United States is customarily divided, is a territory of images – screen upon

which writers, artists, and savants for several generations have projected their fears, hopes, regrets, and enthusiasms about America past and present" according to historian of Appalachia, John Alexander Williams (9). Appalachia has been bounded, pushed away, rendered a "zone of disposal."

Amy Greene's 2014 novel *Long Man* enters into the midst of this this popular culture obsession, pre-Trump but certainly not pre-dispossession. Greene considers the cultural and political subordination of Appalachians and how the institutional marginalization of their lands as waste(d)land also confirmed their expendability. In Greene's work, the TVA's dam has stopped up the Long Man river to flood the town of Yuneetah, a fictional town outside of Knoxville, Tennessee. The last holdout Annie Clyde Dodson must leave or be forcibly evicted by August 3, 1936. Annie Clyde resists the TVA agents because she wants to hold on to her daughter's inheritance to the land and wants to be able to tell her daughter that she did all she could to protect that inheritance. Only a handful of people remain in or around the town: Annie Clyde and her daughter Gracie, two old mountain women – Annie Clyde's aunt Silver and Beulah Kesterson, the sheriff Ellard Moody, and a drifter, Amos, returned to town just as it starts going under. Sam Washburn, a TVA agent from Knoxville, warns Annie Clyde that he will have her arrested and removed if she does not comply, but the TVA's timeline is stalled when Gracie Dodson goes missing. The novel's main narration takes place over four days in 1936 as Annie Clyde desperately searches for her daughter presumed dead or dying, even as TVA officials in Knoxville refuse to issue a draw-down and stem the rising flood. In reading this novel, I affirm that the 1933 Tennessee Valley Authority Act enacts necropower by evicting white Appalachians in favor of massive dams and nuclear

power plants because the Appalachians were perceived as expendable by nature of their socio-economic status. My archival research of TVA records indicates that at the Norris Dam, in eastern Tennessee just north of Knoxville, about 3000 families or approximately 14,477 people were displaced from their homes below the "taking line" between 1933 and 1937, although TVA officials contended that no community existed in the area because of the lack of incorporation and industrialization. This conjunction of property and political viability in constructions of power thus renders Appalachians part of the American dispossessed.

Parsing out distinctions in whiteness and white power depends on understanding disparities in economic and political access. This chapter takes up conversations about whiteness begun by David Roediger and George Lipsitz, and expanded by "white trash" scholars like John Hartigan, Annalee Newitz, and Matt Wray.[42] Rural America, especially Appalachia, is not the same as an urban and suburban white working class. Urban white ethnic groups, like Italian and Irish immigrants and later Jewish immigrants, were slowly incorporated into structures of white power to maintain the status quo, as illustrated by Matthew Frye Jacobson and Noel Ignatiev. Although immigrating to the United States most often in extreme poverty, these groups established urban neighborhoods that over time transitioned from slums to active units of ethnic pride. They built businesses and schools and began to invest in achieving the "American dream" of middle class life, whether they remained in the working class or not. These groups were incorporable because they represented an economic investment in whiteness marked out by George Lipsitz in *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*.

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[42] Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*; Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*; Hartigan, *Odd Tribes*; Newitz and Wray, *White Trash*; Wray, *Not Quite White.* See also Frankenberg, Allen, and Morrison.

If Roediger, from DuBois, notes the "wages" of whiteness – the perceived racial superiority that outweighs economic degradation – the problem in Appalachia is that there is little "wage" to be made. The level of poverty in Appalachia, exacerbated by the isolation and little opportunity that fills the mountains, means that they cannot add to the economic wealth of whiteness, a key factor in its continuing authority in the United States. Gael Sweeney notes, "Poor Black and White Trash are linked together in an almost symbiotic relationship of enmity and necessity while attempting to survive in the poorest states in the nation. In the mainstream media, racism among Poor Whites and other rural, lower-class rednecks is seen as universal, endemic, and inbred" (251). Thus, poor whites are rendered deplorables as a universal unit in which poverty, sexual illegitimacy, and racism are inextricably linked. However, unlike tidewater and piedmont Southerners who occupy spaces directly shaped by slavery and cotton colonialism, Appalachia, even today, has experienced very little racial mixing beyond Native American heritages, so there is little of the direct and embodied comparison to blacks that Roediger traces to offer Appalachians a status of superiority.[43] I do not overlook the histories of oppressions and violence against people of color in the Appalachian

[43] For reference, Anderson and Campbell counties in eastern Tennessee, where the real Norris Dam machinery lies, maintain 90% and 97% white (no Latino descent) population according to the 2010 census. For comparison, Lumpkin County, Georgia, central to the previous chapter, reported 91% white, while Knox County, TN – home of Knoxville, the largest city in east Tennessee and third-largest in the state, and the University of Tennessee, as well as the headquarters of the TVA, 83.9% white population. The percentages of black populations were respectively: 3.8%, 0.3%, 1.1%, and 8.8%. All data retrieved from census.gov. This is, of course, not to suggest that there is not a heritage and presence of African Americans in the Appalachian Mountains. See the work particularly of Frank X Walker, Turner, and Inscoe.

Mountains.[44] I simply argue that Appalachian Americans, with the binaric ambiguities of extreme poverty, racism, and degradation, and the rhetoric of self-sufficiency and model-Americanness, pose neither threat nor opportunity for the expansion of white power. Therefore, although these poor whites approximate and perform white power through individual micro-aggressions of racism, they do not have access to the systemic benefits of whiteness. Thus, they may hold on to the rhetorical work of the "wages of whiteness" but without integration into white power, and interrogating how a rich white elite can fool this beleaguered white populous into believing lies necessitates understanding the race, class, and gender of that populous, not only but in addition.

The state of whiteness became the center of national focus with the rise of Trump and a vocal, primetime return to white nationalism. After pundits were stunned by Trump's victory over Hillary Clinton, the media turned to the white working class for answers. Reading Roediger's *Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* after Trump creates incredible déjà vu. Roediger, in 1991, almost foretells the 2016 election in his analysis of the imbrications of working class whiteness and democracy. He notes:

> When US elections are won or lost these days, the voting patterns of the "white worker" receive considerable attention. In popular usage, the very term *worker* often presumes whiteness (and maleness) [and cisgender, heteropatriarchal, Christian], as in conservative Democrats' call for abandoning "special interests" and returning the party to policies that appeal to the "average worker" – a line of argument that blissfully ignores

[44] For example, the Confederate battle flag has been and continues to be a symbol of white supremacy hidden behind a façade of genealogical history. Interestingly, much of Appalachia held anti-slavery and unionist beliefs during the Civil War, so these images of rebellion, resistance, and anti-liberalism have been manufactured to align with the "redneck" persona written onto the mountains. Nevertheless, this narrative has been wholly embraced; a high school just up the mountain from mine still maintains the mascot Rebels and the emblem of two crossed Confederate scabbards. The next town over still commemorates Confederate Memorial Day in April. (They also hold a Scottish festival and Highland games annually, so the convoluted history of heritage in Appalachia is alive and well even today. And in the spirit of transparency, my high school mascot is the Indians.)

> the fact that the "average worker" is increasingly Black, Latino, Asian and/or female. (19)

Moreover, he writes of David Duke's 1989 election to the Louisiana legislature:

> When the outspoken racists and former Ku Klux Klan leader David Duke won a seat in the Louisiana legislature in early 1989, one expert commentator after another came on the morning news shows to announce that unemployment was high in Duke's nearly all-white district and therefore the election turned on economic grievances rather than racism. Viewers were treated to the exotic notion that, when white workers react to unemployment by electing a prominent white supremacist *who promises to gut welfare programs*, they are acting on class terms, rather than as working class *racists*. Such an argument is to be expected from the *Today* show, but a viable left must find a way to differentiate itself strongly from such an analysis. (8)

Roediger, of course, calls for an intersectional understanding of whiteness that would render these Louisiana voters both racists and fools voting against their best interests out of economic degradation. The left, however, as the 2016 election shows, certainly differentiated itself from the economic analysis, all the way to the other end of the spectrum so that Democrats could not address the white working class's economic concerns and Hillary Clinton could call them a "basket of deplorables." Now Hillary certainly meant to refer to the upper-class wealthy and ultra-conservative or alt-right supporters of Trump, but this only further illustrates the point. She and the Democratic party could not imagine a world in which a working class would support a billionaire. Roediger notes how the misrecognition of poor whites into working class whites establishes a sense of racial and economic superiority over newly emancipated blacks and incoming immigrants during Reconstruction. That this process of misrecognition continues today highlights the deep desires for poor or working class whites to find some kind of political efficacy.

Appalachia's coal towns and mountain folk became scapegoats for the liberal rage of the surprised who did not bother to examine the deep differences between urban and suburban working class and the rural poor, where little "work" is often to be had. The popularity of Trae Crowder, comedian and self-styled "Liberal Redneck" from Knoxville, Tennessee, during the summer of the election cycle highlights that the threat of Trump victory had always been there. Crowder's Youtube persona, in a lampoon of his own rural Tennessee upbringing, speaks directly to his own community of conservatives and Trump supporters labeled by liberals as "ignorant bigots [following the] King Bigot."[45] He reminds them of the region's long-standing deep distrust of government intervention and the hypocrisy of a billionaire spouting impossible and vague economic policies for the unemployed.[46] Crowder, whose Youtube fame translated into more mainstream media appearances with the *New York Daily News* and *Real Time with Bill Maher*, constantly claimed, before and after the election, that Trump's bigotry was only part of the equation for rural America and that a much larger desire for economic relief flavored the Koo-laid the rednecks drank. Crowder's comments, and the media's eventual appropriation of this narrative, illustrates the discourse of property violence and personhood. Liberal America was blinded to rural America because they could easily write them off as bigots. But Appalachian Americans' self-perceived economic degradation pushed them toward a maverick candidate who embodied, they were led to believe, the success of the American dream. Their anxieties mark the impossibility of true white supremacy in Appalachia,

[45] See Crowder's "Porch Rants" videos on Youtube, especially "The Truth About Trump," "Make America White Again?" and "Reaching Rural America."

[46] The de facto anthem of East Tennessee and University of Tennessee-Knoxville fight song "Rocky Top" includes a verse about the "disappearance" of federal revenuers who enter the mountains looking for moonshine stills.

harkening back to the many portrayals of non-whiteness or the failure of whiteness in mountain folk.

The discourse of Appalachia in popular culture and mainstream media, thus, often revolves around a narrative of degradation that dismisses the humanity of Appalachian Americans. A friend articulated these tensions in a December 1, 2016 Facebook response to an article from Deadstate.org titled, "Why would 'poor white people vote for someone with a golden elevator who will f*ck them over?'" that collected and reproduced a mid-November Tweetstorm by author and Twitter user @jpbrammer. My friend, who lives in the region of Appalachia I examine here, wrote,

> I live among families of Trump voters, and teach young Trump voters at a Big Southern U. They are not all poor, uneducated, and actively racist. The common thread between the classes here is cultural humiliation. … The "rural" citizen has endured mild degradation by dominant culture for years. … I would call the people I live next to, buy groceries from, and even teach, industrious, kind, and neighborly. They exhibit an outstanding kind of generosity for people they consider part of their "tribe" (see: donations for families affected by Gatlinburg wildfires – so much within 48 hours they had to start turning people/resources away[47]). The trouble is that their tribe has only gotten narrower as jobs have disappeared, and "making a living" in the places they love to live is a struggle to do. They don't have personal or impersonal relationships with different kinds of people very often and that is a problem. They also rely on stereotypes to define people they know nothing about, and feel the sting when "liberal" sources call them all ignorant (while this same tactic is applied to [the liberals]). I'm not excusing the extremes – the real racists, the religious leaders who use the pulpit as a club, the people in positions of power who spread fear through misinformation … but I'm also feeling annoyed with my own ideology that is supposed to prize objectivity, research, magnanimity, and empathy above all. How easy it has been to lump the "Trump voter" into a "basket of deplorables" and feel righteous about it. Shame has a way of erupting. I look at Trump winning as an eruption from a degraded group of voters who are happy their candidate is a nuclear bomb. They don't want the current system to succeed. They feel they have been left out of the game, have been forced to make social concessions,

[47] She references here the arsonist wildfires that burned in Gatlinburg, Tennessee and the Great Smoky Mountain National Forest from November 23-December 12, 2016 and at final count killed 14, injured 175, destroyed approximately 2400 structures and burned more than 17,000 acres (Conlon).

> and have received nothing in return. They are numb to the labels hurled at them – racists, xenophobes, misogynists – white noise next to a waterfall at this point.

My friend, a doctoral candidate and former Michigan legislative aid, here points out the very "cultural humiliation" and economic degradation that I examine in this chapter. She highlights the imbrications of race and class in the creation of the myths of Appalachia and the deep disturbance of social value for whites who do not have access to white power.[48] My own experience adjacent to local and state politics in Lumpkin County, Georgia confirms her assessment. Surrounded by Trump voters who I believe to be my friends, I understand that they are not all racist, are not all sexist, are not all deplorable. They are hard-working and yet never get ahead. They are descendants of the frontier, even as they are also descendants of those who subjugated the Cherokee. A possessive investment in whiteness gets Appalachian Americans nowhere in the systemic oppressions of white power, and yet the many representations of Appalachia to the greater American public call for them to maintain and hold on to that self-defeating position.

This chapter's intervention examines the discourse of Appalachian alterity in relation to a state of white social death produced by representations in corporate documents, government propaganda, novels, and film. I engage with the many calls to consider the role of whiteness in Appalachia in the 2004 issue of the *Journal of Appalachian Studies* entitled "Whiteness and Racialization in Appalachia." In discussing this chapter, a colleague asked, "How could Appalachians experience social death? Can't

[48] Here I don't mean white supremacy, which can be meted out in quotidian interactions, but the structures of white power as they occur in global capital, national government and politics, and discursive representation.

they name themselves?" This historian of New World slavery held an aversion to the possibility of white social death, I believe, because it could diminish the depth of oppression experienced by black slaves. Her question of naming rests on both Patterson's and Spillers's theorizations of the continued imposition of narratives of degradation on African Americans. Here I answer, of course Appalachian Americans can choose their own names; in the same way, black slaves could and did choose their own names over that given by the master, like Baby Suggs in *Beloved*. However, Appalachians still have the experience of "naming" from the outside master narrative in the many persistent representations of Appalachia as violent, bestial, unintelligent. The difficulty of whiteness studies, especially as it intersects with Appalachian studies, is the question of whether whiteness can be raced or only classed and whether disadvantage necessarily denotes oppression. These questions have been levied by scholars like Larry Griffin, Barbara Ellen Smith, Robyn Wiegman, and Barbara Fields. Rebecca Scott observes a "tension between theorizing 'whiteness,' as the unmarked center of American racial formations, at the same time as being able to focus empirically on specific examples of disempowered or marginalized whites" (804), while John Hartigan provides a most salient response, writing, "Certainly [whites] are not subject to the same forms of racial domination or subordination as peoples of color. However, they are, in certain contexts and social situations, confronted by the humiliations, hostilities, ambiguities, and charged discrepancies that constitute racial subjectivity" ("Whiteness" 65). In whiteness studies, scholars most often refer to the degrading stereotypes of poverty and illegitimacy as renderings of "white trash." Annalee Newitz and Matt Wray define the term thus: "most people understand white trash not as a clearly-defined socioeconomic stratum nor as a

cultural group, but rather as a complex set of social representations, an amalgam of well-known stereotypes [violent, incestuous, and criminal (58)]. White trash as we know it is both an economic identity and something imaginary or iconic" (59).[49] John Hartigan adds, terms like white trash and hillbilly perform a "rhetorical means of boundary maintenance work that whites pursue in stabilizing and reproducing the homogenizing practices that both occult these differences and project an ostensibly nonracialized (i.e., unmarked) social position of authority and dominance" ("Who Are These White People?" 96). Defining white trash connects both the economic and cultural humiliation that Appalachians and poor whites experience, which elucidates the conjunction of economic, cultural, and civic citizenship. Though I do not use the terminology of white trash in my own reading, I engage with the same labels of violence, sexual illegitimacy, and criminality as they pertain to social death and abjection.

I add to their work by addressing the imbrications of race and class in relation to a particular state of dispossession in which the state-sanctioned property violence of the Tennessee Valley Authority Act produces deep cultural and economic degradations evidenced in the corporate surveys of the valley's inhabitants. The trashiness of this interpellation connects Wray's and Hartigan's work on boundaries with my own reading of abjection. Trash is part of the refuse of life that civic and civil life must reject, push away. Hartigan, reading Mary Douglas on purity and refuse, notes both the material boundaries surrounding trash and the "means for categorically organizing and evaluating

[49] They also report: "Historically speaking, the earliest recorded usages of the term 'white trash' are found in references to 'poor white trash,' which date back to the early nineteenth century. Historical dictionaries of Americanisms typically ascribe origins of the term to black slaves. … and was rather quickly appropriated (by 1855) by upper class whites." (Newitz and Wray 58)

an internal hierarchy of cultural productions" ("Reading Trash" 8). In effect, interpellating Appalachians as white trash establishes the internal boundaries of necropower that allow them to be excluded from the political, cultural, and economic investment in whiteness. It is important to note that the most common usage of the concept of abjection is in relation to poverty; those who are in the absolute lowest state are always described as in "abject poverty."

Even after World War I and the growing cosmopolitanism of the twentieth century, Appalachia still suffered from these stigmatypical representations, and the agents of the Tennessee Valley Authority, like the twenty-first century television crews, went in to the mountains already knowing what they would find. The Tennessee Valley Authority Act of 1933 established a publicly-owned corporation for the management of power and water resources in order to allay some of the economic hardship of the Great Depression and enact the regional and national planning goals of FDR's New Deal.[50] The act is formally titled, "An Act to improve the navigability and to provide for the flood control of the Tennessee River; to provide for reforestation and the proper use of marginal lands in the Tennessee Valley; to provide for the agricultural and industrial development of said valley; to provide for the national defense by the creation of a corporation for the operation of Government properties at and near Muscle Shoals in the State of Alabama, and for other purposes." The language of the title sheds significant light on the government's perception and approach to Appalachian Americans in the Tennessee Valley, as the "proper use of marginal lands" echoes the general sentiment of white

[50] See John Williams 291-306 for a succinct overview of the history of TVA in Appalachia. McDonald and Muldowny give a brief summary of the available sociological studies and histories of the TVA administration and corporate development (5-6). I do not outline them here because the corporate structure and science behind the project is outside of the scope of my work.

settlers to Native American property claims and land use. Considering the numbers of families dispossessed by the TVA projects, the land purchased can hardly be considered "marginal." Traditionally, Appalachian Americans have lived off the bounty of the mountainous land that resists industrialization and large-scale farming. Small homesteads with cabins held multigenerational families who hunted and harvested the forests without formal bounding (J. Williams; Drake). Ironically, the government planned to revitalize the Tennessee Valley through agricultural development, even as it recognized the difficulty of farming with the Tennessee River's constant flooding. Of course, this could only be achieved by harnessing the rivers and tributaries with a series of dams and reservoirs that would flood "a large proportion of the valley's best farmlands" (J. Williams 302). At Norris Dam, the TVA justified their takeover because "property purchased by the Authority was rural, with no incorporated community and with little or no industrial or commercial development aside from an occasional store, gasoline station, or sawmill" (The Effects upon Local Finance 2). It is unclear what TVA officials expected to find in an area of 14,000 people spread over 151,000 acres in five counties; however, their investment in capitalist and industrialist wealth is clear, and a single store or sawmill occasionally spotted across the landscape did not measure up to the progressive narrative of possessive individualism. It was no matter that the subsistence form of farming, harvesting, and survivance created far less dependence than city life and approximated the self-sufficiency of the "American dream" myth.[51]

The system of dams on the valley's major rivers and tributaries promised to ameliorate seasonal flooding, but their secondary uses as hydroelectric power plants held

[51] This is not to dismiss the absolute hardship and difficulty of this type of life and the high "poverty" experienced by these families, but to point out the irony of the discourse.

less benevolent purposes. The "national defense" plan at Muscle Shoals, Alabama used dam power to make nitrates used in munitions construction in the 1920s. After the end of World War I, the plants, meant to create fertilizer with the nitrates, according to a 1926 report by the Joint Commissions Committee, went unused until it was folded in to the TVA act with the expressed possibility of returning the Muscle Shoals plant to making nitrogen for explosives (Section 4, Part I) and to open laboratories for experimenting with munitions (Section 5, Part G). After the ratification of the act and the rise of World War II, the dam power of the TVA projects was harnessed in one such laboratory for uranium enrichment at the Y-12 Oak Ridge plant just outside of Knoxville, where the atomic bomb was developed. Thus, the dispossession of Appalachians in the Valley is tied to the greater political imperialist projects of the United States in the twentieth century.[52]

In order to achieve their goals, the TVA needed to assess the families that lived below the taking line of the dam boundaries to facilitate land purchase and tenant removal, and so they devoted large departments of the corporation to surveying the Appalachians. Their internal documents produce a precis on the expendability of the inhabitants of the Norris Dam area. Both Matt Wray and Nancy Isenberg note the rise of eugenicist theory in the 1920s and 1930s as marking the white poor as lazy, disease- and disability-ridden, feeble-minded indigents, and I suggest that the TVA's internal documents, with their concurrent corporate and sociological purposes, contain haunting resonances of these projects. Analysis here will focus on archival material produced in surveying the area of the Norris Flowage, for the express purpose of providing background for Greene's fictional portrayal of the dam building, but TVA projects

[52]Jones notes connections between the globalization of market economies and larger American dispossession beginning in the nineteenth century.

ranged across eastern Tennessee, western North Carolina, and northern Georgia throughout the 1930s and 1940s. Documents vary in the estimates of the exact number of people removed due to the Norris Dam project, the first of the TVA's dam projects. A 1935 document states, "It was originally estimated … that 2841 families would be compelled to move in order to make way for the Norris Flowage and the protective strip of forest surrounding it. It appears now, however, with the more definite establishment of the reservoir taking line, that some 3250 families have been living in the area, and that if the Central Peninsula is included in the final Tennessee Valley Authority taking line, approximately 3775 families will have to leave the larger purchase area" (Relocation of 1834 Families 1). A 1938 document reports, "2841 families studied for relocation purposes in the Norris reservoir area. The aggregate population of these family groups, including members of the family as well as those living in the same household who were not members of the family was 14,477" (Social and Economic Characteristics 6). Finally, a 1944 document discloses that 2899 families were removed from 1933 to 1937 and that this was the "largest number of families displaced from any of the reservoir areas" (Family Case Records 7). These nearly 3000 families "constituted 14.4 per cent [sic] of all families reported by the 1930 census as living in the five reservoir counties" (Social and Economic Characteristics 7). The documents make it clear that though the homesteads are small and the farming mainly subsistence, most of the people in the flowage area have lived in the same county of their birth and have rarely left the immediate area. The researchers note the "permanence of family groups in their respective communities" (Social and Economic Characteristics 7), but rather than

recognizing this as kinship, investment in a particular place, and stability, their permanence only indicates their isolation and lack of progress.

Isolation and immobility presented a significant factor of the Appalachians' poverty according to the TVA surveyors, underlining a greater industrialist and capitalist imperative for technological progress. I quote at length here from the Norris Dam section of a report entitled "The Social and Economic Characteristics of Six Tennessee Valley Reservoir Areas" that summarizes the categorization work of the research.

> The degree to which people are isolated is an important clue to an understanding of their culture. …
>
> Range of mobility. The limited range of movement of husbands is indicative of a fairly high degree of isolation. … Such limited range of migration suggests decreased opportunity for contact with divergent ways of living.
>
> Current literature. The absence of newspapers and periodicals is another indication of the isolation of the Norris families. Nearly one-half (46.8 per cent) of all families in the area subscribed for no current literature, and less than one-quarter (23.5 per cent) received both newspapers and magazines. … Consequently, for many families in the area, contact with events beyond their immediate locality did not exist or came to them by word of mouth from some neighbor who received a newspaper or magazine.
>
> Telephones. The extent to which telephones were presented in homes indicates that this instrument served only in a very insignificant way for either intra-community or extra-community contacts. Only 3.2 per cent of the Norris families had telephones. …
>
> Automobiles. The automobile has, more than almost any other modern invention, broken down the isolation of people. Yet of the Norris families less than one-fourth (22.5 per cent) owned either a passenger car or a truck. Such scarcity of private means of transportation limits contacts with urban centers.
>
> While it is easy to overstate the degree of isolation that people may experience, there are definite indications that Norris families were sufficiently isolated from urban influences and contacts with other sections of the country to warrant the conclusion that their general culture was homogenous and somewhat less complex than that of people in urban centers or people living more directly under the influence of urban culture. (8-10)

The research here echoes the rhetoric and tone of Strother's *Harper's* article from the 1870s, suggesting that the TVA officials are still propagating in the same stereotypes. Jaqueline Jones observes this discrepancy in *The Dispossessed*, writing, "Former slaves as well as Appalachian farming folk held dear the notion of home place, defined as their own piece of land in proximity to kin and friends … White middle-class people boasted that their own freedom of movement was proof of a distinctive 'American dream' of upward mobility, where they simultaneously condemned the 'wandering' poor for their apparent irresponsibility, their apparent attempt to avoid productive labor" (5). The ephemera of a modern life – cars, telephones, newspapers and magazines – highlight a narrative of the movement of people and information in the twentieth century as a part of the new American manifest destiny, but we must interrogate how unique Appalachia seems in relation to these categories. Would Americans in other "rural" areas, like the West, have access to these items, and would the poor even in cities have *ownership* of these materials? This emphasis on mobility imposes a narrative of middle-class white capitalist class movement that discounts the Appalachian way of life as non-progressive, anti-industrial, and a failure of social and economic advancement.

The paternalism of the entire project of surveying highlights the discrepancy between the TVA and its rural constituents, a paternalism that seems to echo debates a century earlier about the benefit to Cherokee and eastern nations of being removed from proximity to white civilization. (Of course, two significant differences occur: the Appalachians are only *forced* to move beyond the taking line, though many move out of the region altogether, and the TVA as a corporate-government entity followed through with at least some of its promises to the Appalachians.) John Alexander Williams notes,

"Many of the agencies' [including TVA, Park and Forest Services] staff members were openly appalled at the living conditions that they observed among the mountaineers and had not the slightest doubt of their duty to bring mountain life up to twentieth century standards, whether the mountaineers involved wanted this or not" (301). TVA agents found houses "scarcely adequate" for the number of occupants, poorly furnished (though handmade craftsmanship), with almost no electricity and running water. Water ironically presented a large problem for these families, according to the documents, since "[o]nly 9.0 per cent of the houses had the water supply in the house or on the porch. … Only 1.1 per cent had bathtubs. … Almost one-third (32.9 per cent) of the families had no toilet facilities. Sixty-six and four-tenths per cent of the families had outside toilets, and 0.7 per cent had inside toilets. … The fact that one-third of the families had no toilet facilities at all must have constituted a serious health hazard" (Social and Economic Characteristics 11). Corporate TVA may have had some good intentions in large-scale regional planning and those intentions motivated the sociological surveys to get the root at what might best assist the inhabitants of the flowage area. But the internal documents do very little to recognize and ameliorate the tone of privilege in which agents could suggest a danger in raising the standard of living too rapidly (by providing too large homes with too many modern conveniences of toilets, electricity, and heating) (Tenant Families 10). At the same time, they found that "a surprisingly large percentage of the families in the Norris Flowage own their own homes" (Tenant Families 3). In other words, the TVA agents knew what they would find in terms of abject poverty, but they were surprised to find that these farms also represented the very possessive individualism that they believed only occurred around centers of industry, rather than industriousness. There is a deep irony in

the research that states that the families in the Norris Dam area are highly individualistic – "Very few of these tenants report membership in fraternal or other organizations. This and other findings show that these folk live isolated and individualistic lives. … The data presented relative to newspapers and magazines read by the tenant families supplement other evidence which indicates that these folk are underprivileged, intellectually dormant, and individualistic." (Tenant families 7-8) – and the anxiety of their dependency on the TVA to provide relocation assistance and further relief funds. Not only does their lack of newspapers and magazines and the absence of fraternal orders indicate their isolation, but it marks their economic status, their apparent lack of kinship, and their intellectual inferiority. This situates the crux of the social death of the TVA project: the dispossession was not only collateral damage from a necessary regional project to provide electricity and flood control but tied to Appalachian Americans' interpellation as backwards, ignorant, abject dependents of a progressive government.

This degradation moves forward from the 1930s into a greater discourse about the alterity of Appalachia arising in both popular culture and government propaganda. "Valley of the Tennessee," a short black and white propaganda video about the TVA project published in 1944 by the Office of War Information and narrated by multi-Oscar winner Frederic March, narrativizes the rhetoric of progress and visualizes Appalachian alterity.[53] The short begins by following an airplane as it takes off, flying around a cityscape that seems to be New York City. The voiceover states, "More than 300 years ago, the first pioneers crossed the ocean to a new world. A promise called them – the promise of a land where a man could build his own house, farm his own acres, raise his

[53] Available in the FDR library online at https://archive.org/details/gov.fdr.353.3.3

children in freedom. They carved from the wilderness an empire of agriculture and industry. They set for themselves new and higher standards of living. And yet, in one of the great river valleys of America, something went wrong." Something went wrong. Appalachia never achieved higher standards of living. Even though Appalachians, as the TVA research shows, certainly have built their own houses and farmed their own acres, their achievement of the American dream is interpreted as a failure because they have not created centers of industry like New York City. The film's first images of Appalachia are of a babbling creek in the woods (certainly not the large Tennessee River or any of its tributaries) and barefoot, towheaded, white children in overalls, some without shirts, entering a one-room wooden schoolhouse with oil lamps and wood stove. The voiceover tells us that these children, "the descendants of the pioneers, were a neglected people living in a ruined land. For these children, the hope and the promise were dead. For them the only future was poverty, ignorance, drudgery." However, this image is as manufactured as the myth of mountain blood feuds. Michael McDonald and John Muldowny's work compiling oral histories from inhabitants of the Norris Dam area makes clear that education had progressed from the one-room schoolhouse even before the TVA arrived. They write, "the days of the single-teacher school were numbered at the time the TVA came … one-teacher school itself was more a product of isolation, poor roads, and bad transportation facilities than of personal choice … [and] some of the publicity attendant upon the coming of the TVA stressed the one-room schoolhouse as a symbol of 'backwardness' while ignoring larger and better schools in the area" (50-1). The figure of the one-room schoolhouse signifies the lack of progress of the region, casting retardation of Appalachia into a moral argument about futurity and children. This

morality is necessary in order to justify the subsequent dispossession of the flowage area's inhabitants, although the documentary short never addresses the citizens' removal.

The schoolhouse stands in as representative of the "underprivileged [and] intellectually dormant," but the economic situation of the children's farmer fathers illustrates their perceived individualism and ignorant practices. The short cuts from the children in the schoolhouse to images of farmers walking, behind a horse drawn plow, next to a ramshackle barn, in a field of lackluster corn crop. Their craggy features and baggy clothes visualize the same embodiment of poverty as Harney's article a century earlier. Almost every man wears overalls, as if they have never heard of pants, and close-up shots of men's faces put them in shadowy relief as they stare off in the distance. One main character, Horace Higgins, who "speaks" voiced by the narrator, has a lanky figure and approximately three teeth. The voiceover explains that the land is infertile because of erosion caused "innocently" by deforestation from the early settlers and farmer's straight furrows plowed "out of ignorance," although history clearly shows that major deforestation and erosion problems were caused by logging and mining corporations from the 1890s to the 1920s (J. Williams 246). One farmer looks to the sky as clouds gather and torrential downpours begin, and the video cuts to shots of water rushing by with increasingly intensity and climaxes with a roaring, flooded river splashing against the bottom of a bridge. It should be noted, of course, that the Tennessee Valley is located in a temperate rainforest, causing higher rainfall, and the mountainous landscape contains little area of arable soil that can be easily farmed, but the Norris Dam would cover almost all of the useable bottoms (McDonald and Muldowny 72). According to the film, the threat of the river's flood emerges as the most significant factor of Appalachian poverty

and inferiority "in a forgotten part of the United States [as] this was the havoc caused by greed and neglect and men working alone and unaided against the forces of nature." The question of whose greed and neglect caused this problem remains unanswered, but the documentary does not seem to indict corporate exploitation of the resources in the land, but rather a family barely surviving on subsistence farming without running water to their house. The narrator explains that the flooding river smashes farms and towns and industries, drowns hundreds, and makes thousands homeless. The propaganda irony cannot be measured here, as we know that close to 3000 families, about 14,000 people, were made "homeless" by the dam and subsequent lake on this very same river. But the narrator reveals the real problem with this way of life when he admits that the river's energies were running to waste and the energies of the farmers are tacked on as an afterthought. *Waste* – not as excess, though there is certainly excess water, but as inefficient and inappropriate use. The river's natural energy needed to be harnessed and translated into electrical, and later nuclear, energy because electricity was the hallmark of modern life.

The short creates a paradox in the Appalachian farmers' distinct individualism – which would positively connote self-sufficiency – and their dependency on state-assistance. Without the proper use of the water and land resources, Appalachia becomes "a challenge to democracy and its ability to care for its own." The film uses the most common stigmatypes of Appalachia to render the space waste(d)land and the people inferior dependents and suggests that the government would come in with economic and technological progress and solve "years of isolation, ignorance and bigotry [that] die hard." By the time the TVA engineers arrive, the mountain folk have gone from not only

ignorant but to bigots as well. The video devotes three and half minutes of a twenty-nine-minute short to shots of the heavy machinery – cranes, bulldozers, and steam shovels – as they move dirt, metal, and men in constructing the dam, all while a few of the Appalachians look on in fear, confusion, and wonder. The TVA agents bring education to help drag the ignorant fools into the twentieth century, and though some seem resistant at first, they quickly come around to the magnanimous benefits of the project. Of course, in these images of the new farming methods and miraculous phosphate fertilizer there is no mention of the many farms drowned by the dam reservoirs. When the farmers do succeed with these new methods, "for the first time, they were acting together, cooperatively, for a common purpose. And even more important, a change was beginning to come into their thinking. For the first time, they were thinking in terms of each other." The farmers have gone from ignorant bigots to a collective guided by the TVA to agricultural wealth and prosperity, and the shots pan over fertile farms and a brand-new tractor. These images clearly mean to position the TVA as a savior of the people. Once again, however, this propaganda pivots on the same assessment of isolationism and individualism as the TVA surveys, which the citizens interviewed by McDonald and Muldowny directly refute. One Norris area inhabitant, Myers Hill, reports, "All the rural communities, I think, was pretty much like that back then, to help one another. Seems like they was more close to one another, and [there was] more love for one another than there is today [around 1976 when the interviews were taken]" (McDonald and Muldowny 40). The narrative of non-cooperativity and isolation performs a kind of figurative natal alienation which denies the deep kinship of the Appalachians.

Towards the end of the short, we return to the schoolhouse to see what change progress has wrought. Gone are the church pews and the single book read aloud by the schoolmistress. The children, now fully clothed, sit at tables, play with toys in the floor, draw on chalkboards hung on the walls. Older children, completely absent from the earlier schoolhouse, do science experiments at lab tables in a classroom bright from the light of several windows. For the first time, black Appalachians appear. The voiceover says, "the development of people is the first concern of a democracy." While a work of propaganda with the inherent political purpose, the focus on the TVA in wartime still proves significant. That this film comes out of the war office in 1944, at the height of World War II with D-Day and the strengthening of the Allied forces, aligns the propaganda of the construction of the TVA dams from the 1930s with strong patriotism and paternalism of a benevolent government that protects its own and polices the world. The documentary does not work in the purpose of promoting patriotism and the war effort, but in highlighting the great American Dream and the march of Manifest Destiny in which "the children of the Tennessee Valley have recaptured the hope of their grandfathers … [and] a world with dignity, work, and hope for all." Recapturing the pioneering spirit of their grandfathers links the Appalachians to what Richard Drake calls the "yeomanesque" myth of the mountains. They have gone from simpletons to merely simpler. But the video shows the concatenation of the stereotypes of degradation – ignorance, bigotry, disability – and economic viability as citizenship. The development of the Tennessee Valley was an *American* project for *American* people to show *American* ingenuity to the world. Before the TVA, Appalachians experienced economic hardship

that manifested as cultural humiliation. After the TVA, their hardships were won, their lives improved, and they were able to join the ranks of true American citizens.

The short's stereotypes of life in the Tennessee Valley before the savior TVA propagate the continued stigmatization of the Appalachian people, and they are picked up by one of the most iconic representations of Appalachia, and dam building, in James Dickey's *Deliverance* (1970) and John Boorman's 1972 film adaptation.[54] Anthony Harkins calls the film "[i]ndisputably the most influential film of the modern era in shaping national perceptions of southern mountaineers and rural life in general, … [as] degenerate, imbecilic, and sexually voracious predators" (206). Both the novel and the film came out almost concurrently – only two years apart. The movie's iconic status has surpassed Dickey's novel, but both works have the same goal in mind, and the cultural capital that *Deliverance* exhibits cannot be overstated. Dickey's *Deliverance* was a *New York Times* Bestseller and is on both *Modern Library*'s and *Time Magazine*'s lists of the 100 Best Novels. Boorman's film, starring Jon Voight as Ed Gentry, Burt Reynolds as Lewis Medlock, Ned Beatty as Bobby Trippe, and Ronny Cox as Drew Ballinger, grossed more than $46,000,000 in the United States in 1972 and is included in the National Film Registry. Filmed in Tallulah Gorge in the North Georgia mountains, Boorman makes a conscious effort to portray Dickey's novel in a manner consistent with the original work, and Dickey authorized the film when he wrote the original screenplay

[54] There is, in fact, a Hollywood film portraying a TVA agent as he tries to convince an old woman and her daughter, the last holdouts, to abandon their Tennessee home soon to be flooded by the dam construction. *Wild River* (1960) was directed by Elia Kazan, and stars Oscar-winners and -nominees Montgomery Clift, Lee Remick, and Jo Van Fleet. Although this film is on the National Film Registry, *Deliverance* far outpaced its popularity, critical appreciation, and lasting impact on representations of Appalachia. For that reason, I have concentrated on the discourse produced by Dickey's work rather than addressing Kazan's film, although the plot more closely aligns with that of Greene's novel. I believe that Greene refers to Kazan's film, but speaks back to Dickey's work.

for Boorman's film and participated in the filming process, even making a cameo as the mountain town's sheriff. Boorman's film won him Oscar nominations for Best Director, Best Film Editing, and Best Picture, as well as Golden Globes nominations for Best Director, Best Drama, Best Actor in a Drama for Jon Voight, Best Original Song for "Dueling Banjos," and Best Screenplay for James Dickey. Even now, in tourist towns throughout Appalachia, shops sell t-shirts emblazoned with the joke "Paddle faster. I hear banjos."

Boorman's *Deliverance* echoes the tropes of the earlier short film, both in the portrayal of the Appalachian Americans as ignorant rubes and in the dichotomies between mechanical "progress" and backwoods failure. The film opens with shots of what seems to be a flooding river, as fully-grown, leafy trees rise up from the center of the water, while Burt Reynolds's voice over argues with the other three leading men that the dam will flood the "last wild, untamed, unpolluted, un-fucked-up river in the south." It cuts quickly to bulldozers and dump trucks moving earth as one of the other men argues that the project is "progress … a clean way of making electric power." These images and the narrative that overlays them directly employ the same tropes as the propaganda video from the 1940s, suggesting that in 30 years the "truth" about Appalachia has not changed. Reynolds's Lewis foreshadows the coming violation when he argues that suburbanization and modernization will "rape this whole goddamn landscape." In the background, a siren goes off as the camera pans over the dug-out basin, while Voight's Ed tells Lewis "that's an extreme point of view." The voiceover stops, with only the siren continuing, until that too falls silent for a breathless second until a large blast from a dynamite explosion tosses dirt and rocks into the air. These

juxtapositions of the natural landscape and the mechanical destruction of that landscape and of Lewis's reading of the wilderness and the other men's interpretation of progress erase the Appalachian people from the first two minutes of the film, and yet still participate in the dialectic produced by the TVA official documents and the propaganda video. The explosion metaphorizes the destruction of the natural world, but it should be understood to also explode the men's sense of urban security and the Appalachians' way of life.

While arguments can be made for interpretations of the film related to the ennui of middle-class life and natural creative restoration and related to an indictment of man's ecological destruction, *Deliverance* is most culturally significant for its abjectification of Appalachians.[55] *The Handbook to Appalachia* recognizes that "perhaps the most damning portrayal [of mountain life]...was outsider James Dickey's *Deliverance*, which remains one of the worst pictures of the mountain people as inbred, suspicious, violent, and bestial" while Harkins argues, "In 1972, the leering rapists in the film *Deliverance* would lend the hillbilly a darker and more threatening aura [as opposed to earlier equally degrading but non-threatening portrayals]" (qtd. in Knepper 18). Representations of Appalachian otherness, as I have traced here, turn on tropes of physical and intellectual disability as they manifest economic degradation, and both popular media and government entities have employed these tropes to justify dispossession and paternalism, but *Deliverance* twists the discourse of otherness into savagery. Pamela Barnett suggests that the depth of the depravity portrayed in the film's Appalachians marks an experience

[55] See Lindborg on art, Davis on the literary use of wilderness, Guillory on the journey as a hero myth, Longen on sex. Perhaps unsurprisingly, these early articles from the 1970s all focus on the urban men's position in the text, using mostly structural and archetypal critique, and say very little about the Appalachian characters at all.

of whiteness in flux in the 1960s (146), and I add that the film represents a concerted effort to redefine whiteness so that those not invested in maintaining white power can be jettisoned. The Appalachians in Dickey's portrayal become abject because they do not live up to the standards of whiteness as defined through possessive individualism and capitalism. The TVA documents elucidate the institutional marginalization of the Appalachians, but Dickey's work radically degrades and dehumanizes them. In his study of white trash rhetoric, Wray writes that "[i]n conjoining such primal opposites into a single category, white trash names a kind of disturbing liminality: a monstrous, transgressive identity of mutually violating boundary terms, a dangerous threshold state of being neither one nor the other" (2). I connect Wray's reading of the dangerous liminality here with Patterson's theory of the social death of the "fallen insider." Patterson argues that the social death of the fallen insider occurs because he no longer belongs in the social order and he thus becomes an internal exile "deprived of all claims of community" and "became the enemy because he had fallen" (43). Avery Gordon expands, "where criminality, poverty, misery, heresy, and rebelliousness are the principal conduits to enslavement, the slave is conceived as the fallen insider or as someone who might have or did in principle belong but has been 'expelled' and now no longer belongs. The fallen insider has violated the social or legal terms of order; the fallen insider is an outlaw" (12). Criminality, poverty, misery, rebellion, outlawry – these are the main stigmatypes of Appalachia. Appalachians become the fallen insider because they fail to live up to whiteness. They do not add to the economic investments of whiteness; they cannot make up a significant lobbying group or political donors; they do not present a definitive opposition to the positionality of people of color. The argument is somewhat

circular: are Appalachians poor criminals because they are not white enough, or are they not white enough because they are poor criminals? I maintain that they are pushed away through institutional neglect, alienation from their traditional ways of life, and deeply degraded because they fail to live up to the social order of white power; criminality and savagery are simply easy, racialized markers of this dismissal from the community of viable whiteness.

There can be no doubt that Appalachians are the enemy in Dickey's novel and the film; this classed, raced, and gendered tension is literally written into a plot of rape, murder, and revenge. Both novel and film portray a male adventure tale that must be undertaken before the wilderness is tamed, following a group of four white men as they leave the safety and complacency of metro Atlanta and enter the Appalachian wilderness to conquer the fictional Cahulawassee River before it is dammed and the valley flooded. Though the river and its impending dam are fictional, they are clearly meant to stand as a reference to the many TVA projects throughout the South, and the violence in the novel is predicated on this dispossession. Ed and Lewis write a dangerous, life-threatening menace onto the mountain and the river in order to enter a survivalist myth in which they can reinvigorate their beleaguered masculinity and relieve the ennui they experience through their whiteness. They imagine a quickly fading territory filled with unknown surprises and possible hardship, just as the American West was mythologized as a great adventure and colonial rhetoric interested in creating new agents of empire told of the peril of the landscape and the oddity of its inhabitants. As the men journey down the river in search of some action to relieve the ennui of their affluent, urban lives, they encounter unspeakable violence from two mountain men, which must be avenged before they can

be free of the whitewater. Both works use the terror of homosexual rape and violence to force the urban characters to decide what they will do in order to survive.

Deliverance makes the connection between cultural degradation and racialization of poor whites clear, and this rests on colonial rhetoric and portraying the Appalachians as savage in opposition to the strong unmarked whiteness and possessive individualism of the Atlanta men. Both the *New York Times* and *Time Magazine* compare *Deliverance* to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, the quintessential colonial examination of the native Other (Garner); Scott Von Doviak compares it to *Apocalypse Now*, which is loosely based on Conrad's novel. Lev Grossman at *Time* writes that "their itinerary unexpectedly swings into darker territory when they meet a gang of savage, sodomitical mountain men, and by the time they emerge again—most of them—from the wilderness, they have been through some of the blackest terrain, both geographical and spiritual, since Marlowe [sic] went up the river in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*." The novel opens with the four urban characters looking at a map of the North Georgia mountains, just as Marlow stares at the empty map of Africa. Lewis marks their trip with a pencil, drawing an "invisible shape" similar to the invisible and arbitrary borders drawn during the Scramble for Africa (Dickey 4). This mapping figuratively marks the boundaries of necropower that will soon be physically marked with the shores of the lake. Those below the "taking line" are colonized by the map and the water until their presence is erased, covered over by the blue water. In the novel, Ed notes their urban objects as ephemera identifying them as agents of empire, and he believes that he and the other urban men must take up the task presented them, must go into the mountains and colonize the river in the name of an escape from their boring urban lives. He thinks, after they have set up camp on the first

night, "[w]hen we had the tents up and the air sacks and sleeping bags inside them, with a flashlight in each tent and the snake guards up, I felt a good deal better; we had colonized the place" (Dickey 83). Comparing *Deliverance* to *Heart of Darkness* positions the Appalachians as the savage, cannibal Africans and the men from Atlanta as the intrepid, though unprepared, witness and agent of capitalism.[56] Their colonialism rehearses the process of othering. As I have previously argued, this colonial othering originates with discrepancies of things, stuff, economics, written into racialization. Therefore, Appalachian poverty allows them to be marked with non-whiteness, as white trash scholars have theorized.

This colonial rhetoric works elucidates the differences between the urban men and the rural Appalachians, and this alterity is written into the bodies of the characters. In his seminal work *White*, Richard Dyer argues that films representing images of whiteness rely on "a champion/built body and a colonial setting [where] … The built body in colonial adventures is a formula that speaks to the need for an affirmation of the white male body without the loss of legitimacy that is always risked by its exposure, while also replaying the notion that white men are distinguished above all by their spirit and enterprise" (146-7). He suggests that whiteness's supremacy rhetoric can be read through the bodies that represent it; "many of the formal properties of the built body carry connotations of whiteness: it is ideal, hard, achieved, wealthy, hairless, and tanned" (Dyer 150). Burt Reynolds, a natural athlete who played college football and had hopes

[56] Alternatively, Butterworth argues, "*Deliverance* is not an American *Heart of Darkness*. Unlike Marlow, the American hero does not beat a paranoiac retreat when he encounters the primitive aspects of his own psyche; rather he approaches those manifestations, with trepidation perhaps, but also with fascination and a desire to understand their meaning and value" (77). Butterworth reads each of the four urban men as Freudian metaphors for Dickey's own personality – the id, the superego, the ego, and the psyche. He ignores, however, that these "primitive aspects" are always already written onto the Appalachian threat and only by entering the space of abjection can the urban men approach and reconcile this structure.

of entering the NFL, came to the film with a number of credits placing him in highly masculine roles: detectives, cowboys, and soldiers. At the time of the film's release, he was being hailed as quite the sex symbol ("Reynolds"). While Reynolds is certainly not hairless, he presents an image of the most popular masculine body of the time. He spends the entire movie in a tight fishing vest, half unzipped, showing his heavy chest hair.[57] He is tanned, strong, and muscular, with a dark, often brooding, brow and intelligence that demonstrates his ability to survive in the hostile environment of the North Georgia mountains. By representing whiteness through his hard body, non-white bodies can only be contrasted as lesser: weaker, softer, poorer.

The threat of "hillbillies" arises from the very beginning of the journey and sets up a relentless dichotomy between the urban men and their Appalachian foes. The film follows the men in two cars as they enter into the mountains and voiceover once again explains the men's desires and anxieties about the trip; Bobby asks Lewis if there are "any hillbillies up there" and Lewis tells him that the woods are filled with people who have never seen a town before. This once again reiterates the lack of progress and incorporation that the TVA surveys document. The first shot that includes Appalachian life surveys a single gas pump and a ramshackle homestead covered in refuse and broken car parts. The visual directly aligns Appalachians with garbage, and thus with abjection, before any Appalachian person arrives. Bobby denies the Appalachians any humanity, since when he denigrates the setting and Drew tells him not to upset these people, Bobby

[57] However, the novel also suggests that perhaps Lewis can trace his ancestry to more than just white ancestors; Ed describes him as "clay red" and his love of archery can perhaps be connected to stereotypes of Native Americans (Dickey 10). Indeed, Burt Reynolds claims to have a trace of Cherokee ancestry and he is certainly swarthier than the film's other three stars ("Reynolds"). This once again inscribes the palimpsest of the Cherokee/Native presence in the mountains that has been erased to only a trace.

looks around him, as if searching, and only asks, “People? What people?” We can understand that he does not mean simply that the area is empty, but that it could never hold people to begin with. Hartigan writes, “[t]he poetics of this internal primitive fashion a figure of sprawling trash heaps, junk strewn yards, distorted, ruined faces; … the dramatized images of white trash as ‘backwards,’ ‘degenerate,’ ‘incestuous’ living filthily in piles of ‘relations’ or ‘kin’ are complexly motivated representations that are an effective means of exteriorizing behaviors and attitudes which undermine white middle class propriety” (“Reading Trash” 9). Hartigan gestures towards the racialization, dispossession, abjection, and social death of the Appalachian people. Beyond a class differentiation, the interpellation denies any humanity to the garbage tossed away.

Just as the urban men physically embody whiteness, the mountain people physically embody their marginalization and non-white failure. In the novel, the narrative focalized through Ed’s point of view maintains this same disdain from the urban men. The first man he meets “looked like a hillbilly in some badly cast movie, a character actor too much in character to be believed” (Dickey 55). To Ed, the man so embodies the clichés about Appalachia that he cannot even be understood to represent his own lived experience. Ed sees the town of Oree as “sleepy and hookwormy and ugly, and most of all, inconsequential. Nobody worth a damn could ever come from such a place” (Dickey 55). There is an irony to think that the people of the valley are literally not worth a damn/dam, since their way of life will be flooded out by the lake project. But Ed’s interpretation pivots on embodied degradation – ugliness and disease – as well as political degradation – their inconsequentiality. Ed thinks,

> There is always something wrong with people in the country … I had been struck by the number of missing fingers. Offhand, I had counted around

> twenty, at least. There had also been several people with some form of crippling or twisting illness, and some blind or one-eyed. But there was something else. You'd think that farming was a healthy life, with fresh air and fresh food and plenty of exercise, but I never saw a farmer who didn't have something wrong with him, and most of the time obviously wrong; I never saw one who was physically powerful, either. Certainly there were none like Lewis. (Dickey 56)

They cannot be like Lewis, who embodies the inviolable strength of the white male, because their perceived poverty, illiteracy, inbreeding, and physical difference marks them as non-white. The film visually represents this otherness with actors and extras that are all cock-eyed, missing teeth, gnarled and weak, clearly malnourished, many with birth defects or mental deficiencies. As they wander around the gas station, trespassing on the Appalachians' home, Ed looks in the window of a dilapidated cabin and sees a frightfully disfigured, developmentally challenged girl and a gnarled old woman, and he is clearly shocked at the scene. These characters must be visibly othered because if they were embraced within the context of whiteness, their inclusion would subvert and destabilize the ideology of white supremacy. Therefore, they must be marked so that whiteness can remain unmarked, and they serve as a foil for Ed to understand the strength of his own body.

This racialized degradation is most evident in the most iconic scene of the film, in which Drew plays guitar with a banjo-picking boy. In the novel, Dickey makes the boy "an albino boy with pink eyes like a white rabbit's; one of them stared off at a furious and complicated angle. That was the eye he looked at us with, with his face set in another direction. The sane, rational eye was fixed on something that wasn't there" (58-9). The boy's albinism, a hyper-whiteness, only further serves to mark his failure to be embraced in the social order of whiteness. The ocular juxtaposition of sanity that sees nothing and

the unnatural eye that peers at the urban men fixes them in a narrative of violence, as the eye is "furious." Simply with a glance, a little boy presents a threat to the men. In the film, the boy is small, his features are pinched and malformed, and he appears mentally and developmentally challenged. According to IMDB, the boy who plays the part actually did not know how to play the banjo but was chosen out of a Rabun County school because *he looked the part*, or in other words materialized the many stigmatypes of Appalachia. The novel has Drew and the boy play a standard mountain ballad, "Wildwood Flower," but the film changes this to a more menacing and ominous "Dueling Banjos," an antagonistic motif repeated throughout the film. Ed narrates the moment in the novel, ending with the statement that "something rare and unrepeatable took hold of the way I saw them, the demented country kid and the big-faced decent city man, the minor civic leader and hedge clipper" (Dickey 60). This single description serves to illustrate the difference between the white characters and their mountain counterparts. The Appalachian character is demented, implying both mental deficiency and immorality or malevolence, while Drew is decent, involved in the social order by doing his civic duty. Nevertheless, Drew and the unnamed Appalachian boy, on whom the threat of violence, ignorance, illegitimacy, and sexual depravity can be written, experience a moment of connection, if rendered in opposition.

Dickey must create a deeper and more lasting threat in the mountains, beyond the natural danger of the river, so that Ed and Lewis can fulfill their colonial adventure; he produces this violent abjectification through the images of the two mountain rapists. Dickey plays on the long-standing fear of rape and emasculation in white men and the subsequent discourse of sexual depravity on non-whites. Cornel West recognizes that

"[w]hite fear of black sexuality is a basic ingredient of white racism" (125), which extends to all non-white sexuality; colonial texts from India are replete with fears of rape by natives and Nazi rhetoric writes this dangerous sexuality onto Jewish bodies as well, effectively creating the Africanist presence that Toni Morrison reads. The fear of impurity, miscegenation, and disease creates a number of populations that are hierarchically lower according to whiteness. Even "stereotypes of white trash and 'hillbillies' are replete with references to dangerous and excessive sexuality; rape (both heterosexual and homosexual), incest, and sexual abuse, are supposed to be common practices among poor rural whites" (Newitz 171). While these sexual perversions do not take place among lower-class whites any more than any other group, they have been monstrously sexualized with little interest in truth.

The rape consummates Ed and Lewis's imagined menace of the mountain. Hearkening back to Lewis's summation of the mountain people – "[s]ome hunting and a lot of screwing" (Dickey 45), these mountain men have hunted, by stalking the urban men down the river, and are now about to screw. Two men come from the woods, just appearing where Bobby and Ed have stopped their canoe to wait for Lewis and Drew to catch up with them. Their sudden appearance aligns their threat with the savagery and ungovernability of the wooded forest through which the river threads. This connection to nature, rather than a romantic narrative of grace, highlights the boundaries between the city and the mountain that Ed demarks as they travel from Atlanta and further maps the distinctions between the civic and the socially dead. Ed describes them as toothless, possible escaped convicts or bootleggers, animalistic; his description of one of the men echoes the little boy's unnatural, threatening gaze, as he peers at Ed and Bobby "as

though out of a cave or some dim simple place far back in his yellow-tinged eyeballs" (Dickey 108). The yellow-tinged eyes indicate disease – the kind of disease found in caves and simple places, not in the civilized homes of the urban men. Ed's assumption that they are escaped convicts or bootleggers ties them to violence and criminal activity (and creates a direct lineage to *Moonshiners* and *Appalachian Outlaws*). Jacqueline Wilson observes the connections between criminality and poor whites, arguing "Whether criminal or not, the individual or family labelled 'White Trash' is assumed to have a problematic relationship with the law, most obviously in the form of its enforcers (the police), but also, importantly, in the form of its various modes/agencies of surveillance (welfare authorities, etc.)" (388). This trope of lawlessness situates the mountains as a place where anything can happen outside of the surveillance of polite society's rules and regulations – the space of abjection. Moreover, Dickey presents this action not as an aberration but a pattern of mountaineer behavior, for Ed thinks as his captors tie him to a tree just before they assault Bobby, "they must have done this before; it was not a technique they would just have thought of for the occasion" (Dickey 111), again relying on stigmatypes of criminalization, aberrance, inhumanity.

The rape and subsequent murder of the rapist occurs almost in the middle of the two-hour film, thus centralizing the monstrous sexuality of the Appalachians. The film makes the men frightening in their appearance. Their menacing faces and posture illustrate their grotesqueness. The toothless man carrying the gun leers at Ed and Bobby, creating an uncomfortable and frightening sexual tension only exacerbated by the threatening and phallic nature of his rifle. The other man caresses Bobby's face and tweaks his nipple. The mountain men tie Ed to a tree, threatening him with his own knife,

and asking him "'[y]ou ever had your balls cut off, you fuckin' ape?' [Ed replies,] 'Not lately,' I said, *clinging to the city*. 'What good would they do you?'" (Dickey 112, my emphasis).[58] The moment is clearly about the mountain men establishing their power over the urban men through violence and the use of the derogatory ape seeks to flip the script on a narrative of racialization. The threat of queer rape makes the reader, and Ed and Bobby, supremely uncomfortable, and Ed clings to his city identity, his whiteness, in an attempt to assert control over the situation. Bobby becomes the target of their dangerous sexuality because he is the most resistant to the river trip and the least capable in handling the canoe – Ed says he has a "face absolutely perfect as an expression of dead weight" (Dickey 74) – yet, he is the most condescending to the mountain people. In some way, Dickey has been preparing him through the entire novel to be emasculated because he does not maintain his whiteness – in the colonizing spirit of Ed and Lewis – well enough. The mountain man directs him to take off his pants and "[t]hem panties too … [and] Bobby took off his shorts like a boy undressing for the first time in a gym, and stood there plump and pink, his hairless thighs shaking, his legs closed together" (Dickey 113). In the film, Ned Beatty is pale and flabby as he scrambles over the hillside trying to escape his rapist. He is completely and totally emasculated through the sodomy, humiliated as the man demands that he "squeal like a pig." This animalistic description highlights both the violence and unnaturalness of the rape. The film closes in on tight shots of the rapist's sweaty face, twisted in violence, his open mouth and decaying teeth grinning and squealing. Only when the sexual threat shifts back toward Ed does Lewis come in as a savior, shooting his arrow through the rapist's chest.

[58] The mountain man calls Ed an ape because he is especially hairy.

From that moment on, the mountain becomes a space of death, and its inhabitants – both the mountain men and the urban men – must occupy that space of death. The four urban men must approach and reckon with the abject, not only as a metaphorical degradation of bodies, but in the dying corpse slain right in front of them. Lewis's arrow pierces the man's body through, and the camera shot follows him as he writhes and eventually falls against a tree, blood pouring from the wound and from his decrepit mouth. Lewis pushes the group to bury the body of the "cracker, a mountain man" (Dickey 123). He turns to racial name-calling because the Appalachian man's subjectivity has been effaced under the narrative that Ed and Lewis have ascribed to the mountain. The mountain man remains nameless except, according to Lewis, as "an escaped convict, or he may have a still, or he may be everybody in the county's father, or brother, or cousin. … Everybody up here is kin to everybody else, in one way or another. … And I'm goddamned if I want to come back up here for shooting this guy in the back, with a jury made up of his cousins and brothers, maybe his mother and father too, for all I know" (Dickey 123-4). Lewis's characterization relies on stereotypes of Appalachian people as lawless, interbred, and isolated. Carissa Massey frames the concept of kin and clan by arguing that "[b]y the mid-twentieth century, this familial propensity morphs into sexual deviance" (130). Appalachian kinship, rather than representing the sanctity of family, becomes another peculiarity, one that poses a direct threat to Lewis and his way of life. Lewis believes that they can get away with their crime because "[d]o you think the state is going to hold up this project just to look for some hillbilly?" (Dickey 129). He marks out the institutional marginalization of the Appalachian people with his absolute

certainty that even the crime of murder would not stop the progressive expansion of technological advancement.

The urban men's superiority in whiteness has been subverted by the actions of the Appalachian character, so they must now re-establish their white power by destroying the personhood of the rapist, and the corporate-government project of dam building gets implicated in the cover-up. Lewis effaces the humanity and the physical presence of the rapist because soon there will be a lake "hundreds of feet deep" that will cover over their transgressions and people will never "think about something buried underneath it … that's about as buried as you can get." The bottom of the lake becomes the space most abjected, most pushed away from the civilization of the urban men. They carry the man further into the woods and toss him into a shallow grave, and Ed thinks that "the body riding there, slumped back with its hand over its face and its feet crossed [is] a caricature of the southern small-town bum too lazy to do anything but sleep" (Dickey 133). Like the first man Ed encounters in the mountain, the man of clichés, this man also becomes nothing but a caricature, with the irony of knowing that Dickey's entire portrayal has been nothing but cliché and caricature. Dickey has written this monstrous sexuality onto the Appalachian characters and the actions of the urban men ensure that the Appalachians are afforded no dignity. The river and the mountain remain a threat and a space of death; Drew is killed, perhaps by sniper shot from the would-be rapist that escaped or else by drowning after tipping from the canoe with no life vest. He, too, is consigned to a watery grave. The river cuts into a gorge, a veritable shooting gallery for the urban men's escape route, and Lewis breaks his leg going down a large waterfall. Thus, Ed must fulfill their survivalist desires by scaling the rock face by hand and positioning himself to hunt the

remaining Appalachian threat. Ed does kill a man, managing to stab himself through with his own arrow in the process, but it is left ambiguous as to whether this is the would-be rapist or not, as this man has false teeth where the other did not. Ultimately, it matters little whether the man killed by Ed is the rapist or not; all of the Appalachians have been inscribed with the same threatening menace. Three deaths result from a weekend trip, and three bodies are left to be covered by the lake.

The end of their journey reminds the audience why the urban men have ventured into the wilderness at all, linking the violence, the stigmatypes, and the dispossession. When Ed, Lewis, and Bobby finally make it to their destination, they take out of the river on a submerged paved road next to a church set on stilts for removal. The water lapping at the steps of the church provides a visual reminder of the impending flood. Ed crawls up a hill graded by bulldozers and finds their cars parked at a gas station where an Appalachian family has stopped. Once again, their physical representation evokes malaise, malnutrition, and malevolence. Their furniture – chairs, bed springs and mattresses, a radio – is piled into the back of an old Chevrolet pickup, and the family lounges among the material goods of their lives, *Beverly Hillbillies* style, as they evacuate from their home while the water threatens to submerge them. The film ends with Ed surveying the rising lake and happening upon a group of men digging up graves to remove the coffins; a shot of Ed embracing his wife and sitting with his son; and a shot of the still water of the lake as a white hand rises from the water as Ed wakes screaming from a nightmare. Where one must occupy spaces of abjection, death always rises again. Tara Powell argues, “the frontier Southern past as represented by the redneck or hillbilly is literally wiped off the face of the earth at the end so that the physical and moral

wilderness it represents live only in Ed's mind, no longer visible beneath the still waters of suburbia or its recorded history" (220). But I would argue that this frontier redneck never really existed at all, except in the American imagination as a convenient, malleable, ambiguous narrative that changed depending on the need of whiteness. When whiteness needed authenticity, Appalachia became a bastion of self-sufficiency and work ethic. When whiteness needed capital, Appalachia became a Podunk strain on progress and the future. And when whiteness needed an enemy, Appalachia once again stood in for the internalized precarity of white power. Appalachian Americans represent the fallen insider – white, but not white enough, by nature of their abject poverty, criminality, and degradation.

Amy Greene writes against these renderings of social death, these renderings of abjection. Growing up in east Tennessee, she offers an insider's perspective to the region and its problems. She refutes the institutional marginalization of the TVA's studies, the natal alienation of the dispossession, and the degradation of Dickey's works. She participates in the structured discourse around Appalachia, while still denying its stigmatypes by exploring the territory of the fallen insider distinguished by necropower as a "zone of disposal." Greene's portrayal of Yuneetah is not without ambiguity. She recognizes the incredible difficulty of subsistence farming and mountain foraging; she uses some of the standard tropes of Appalachian literature – like elements of magical realism and spatial isolation of the characters, and she allows that the TVA's removal offers an opportunity for struggling people to start over in a new place. However, I suggest that *Long Man* produces intertextuality with these many negative representations in order to deconstruct the stigmatypes of Appalachia. If *Deliverance* offers a violent

künstlerroman of the white artist in the modern era, then *Long Man*, with its focus on the young mother Annie Clyde Dodson, rejects the possibilities of bildung in the face of dispossession. Annie Clyde has always already faced the trials of her society that render her expendable.

As Greene's response to the discourse of Appalachian monstrous alterity, *Long Man* plays with time to disturb the narrative of forward progress. Writing in 2013 of the 1930s and the Tennessee Valley Authority Act positions this property violence within the rising tide of Appalachian narratives from the last few years, reminding audiences of the implications of Appalachia in a larger framework of imperial and technological progress out of the Great Depression during the middle of the Great Recession. The chapters of the novel are dated: June 30, 1936; July 31, 1936; August 1, 1936; August 2, 1936; August 3, 1936; July 31, 1937. These dates correspond to the TVA's documentation of the construction of Norris Dam. Moreover, the main narrative action takes place from July 31-August 3 – four days from Friday to Monday, just like the urban men's river trip. But where in *Deliverance* the men seek to tame the river, Greene makes it clear that even as the Long Man becomes a lake, it cannot be tamed. The process of ruination, as the shallow caves underground open up and the rising water level spreads, returns the land to the wild, but within the boundary of human ingenuity and technology. The undated prologue, at once both just before the temporal setting and out-of-time, focalizes through the natural time of river, the "ages old" mountain ridges, and the novel references several times the palimpsest of the Cherokee presence and removal. The constant irony of the impending flood frames the novel, so that Gracie's disappearance is threatened by more than just isolation. The river, even before the dam, presents a much greater threat than

any socially constructed menace, but nevertheless, Annie Clyde Dodson fights to resist the TVA's eviction.

Greene takes the computational data of the TVA's impersonal sociological surveys and humanizes the resistance. The character of Sam Washburn, graduate in social work from University of Tennessee, represents the TVA's Reservoir Family Removal Section. Tasked with convincing Annie Clyde to leave or going forward with condemnation proceedings, he stands as a cog in the imperial machinery of the project. The Fifth Amendment gives the government the right of eminent domain, and Section 25 of the Act gave the TVA the authority to set a standard price for the region and pursue legal condemnation of properties in the event that property owners refuse to sell, the first time this technique had been authorized in a public corporation (Land Buying Policies 7). The rhetoric of this property violence draws a line between property and degradation – "to condemn" as "unfit for use or consumption," as "guilty," as "reprehensible or wrong" (Merriam-Webster). According to the TVA's land buying procedure manual, homeowners unhappy with the price could take their case to a specially appointed panel to adjudicate the proceedings, and litigation was necessary in less than five percent of the total tracts sought (35), but "the Norris area is the only one in which it [was] necessary to resort to legal eviction" (Family Case Records 7). The land buying manual warns agents to foster good will with residents in order to avoid being met by a shotgun. Sam Washburn's introduction to Annie Clyde Dodson indeed has him wondering whether she will pull a Winchester from behind the front door.

Annie Clyde's resistance works against the propaganda and imperial machinery of the TVA project. She is the absolute final hold-out in Yuneetah, but Silver Ledford

thinks, “Most of the townspeople had never ridden in automobiles. It must have felt good to rest their feet, after all their lives walking wherever they went. They couldn’t resist the change that had come, for better or worse. Nobody could stand alone against the government” (Greene 7). The change, the progress narrative, offers the people of Yuneetah a way out of the difficult life of survivance. The TVA convinces the inhabitants to leave with “the patriotism of their husbands” (Greene 13) so that “they believed they were doing it for their country, the same reason they signed up to fight in wars” (Greene 92). The rhetoric of patriotism harkens back to the propaganda of the short film and connects Appalachian dispossession to a larger imperial project of the 1930s. Greene references Roosevelt’s “Fireside Chats,” as Ellard listens to a radio show in which FDR discusses “an uneducated man living on a mountainside with his ten children, making twenty-five dollars in cash a year, who had been forgotten by the American people … [and] giving that man a chance on better land, bringing him schools and industries and electric lights” (104). This radio description of the poor, uneducated Appalachian employs the same stigmatypes as Harney’s estimation of mountain folk and the paternalism of the TVA surveys. Using FDR, and later mentioning Charles Lindbergh (with his implied Nazi sympathies) and the missing Lindbergh baby, positions the damming of Long Man in context with the Great Depression, WPA and CCC, and the impending Second World War. Greene deconstructs the abjection of poverty, realistically portraying the difficulty of subsistence farming and foraging, but denying that this way of life discounts satisfaction.

Annie Clyde’s resistance to this march of progress renders her a criminal in the eyes of the federal TVA law, gesturing to the frequent criminalization of the region and

its refutation of the imposition of codified law and order from outside of Appalachia. Silver, as a moonshiner, also represents this same refutation, not as a ridiculous stigmatype, but as a cultural practitioner of tradition handed down from her grandfather. Even Ellard the sheriff obstructs the TVA eviction process against Annie Clyde. But Amos, the one-eyed drifter who returns to Yuneetah just days before the dam's spillway will close for the final time, most directly references the dangerous criminal of Dickey's work. Amos is literally cast aside by polite society, relegated to and consciously inhabiting a positon of abjection. Abandoned and left for dead by his mother as a little child, he is found and adopted by local outsider Beulah Kesterson. He has lost his natal kinship, but he also rejects and is rejected by the kinship of Yuneetah. Amos is "the sort decent men and women turned their heads from. He had a missing eye and his face was scrawled with whiskers. He was tall and gaunt with long black hair, lank on the shoulders of the peacoat he wore even in the heat of summer. On the streets he wandered crowds parted around him. For the most part he was left alone wherever he went" (Greene 23). Greene incorporates the physical alterity of the Appalachians from the propaganda film and *Deliverance*; Amos's missing eye provides a reversal of the albino boy's pink furious eye that fixes the urban men in its wandering gaze. His homelessness, indigence, and mobility as a Depression-era hobo refutes the middle-class imperative of mobility in the TVA documents. His anti-establishment penchant for chaos frequently results in run-ins with the law, and when Gracie Dodson goes missing, Amos is the first and only person suspected because "the people of Yuneetah noticed Amos only when he lied or got into meanness" (Greene 98). Greene uses Amos as an intertextual foil for the many representations of Appalachian criminality. She does not gloss his liminality from even

his own community, but the novel frequently focalizes through Amos's interiority to round-out the one-dimensional namelessness of Dickey's escaped convict rapists. Amos does engage in criminal activity: he uses dynamite left over from the construction and blasting crew to blow up the dam. But he interprets this act of rebellion as a political statement for Gracie, the "one last child occupying the land that was taken from them all, standing in the corn with a drop of Indian blood coursing through the threads of her veins. About to be purged by the same government, unaware in her innocence that her birthright was being stolen" (Greene 245). In the end, Annie Clyde and Amos embrace criminality for the same purpose – to protect Gracie's future. Both ultimately lose, as Annie Clyde must vacate her land and Amos fails to bring down the dam, but in their acts both demand to be recognized by the imperial machinery of the TVA and a distant paternalist government in Washington. Greene enters the discourse of Appalachian criminality, but she reframes their acts as resistance rather than a natural state of being for mountain folk.

Greene also refutes the anti-kinship narrative of both the TVA and *Deliverance*. The TVA argues that the Appalachians' isolation and perceived individualism indicate a lack of kinship, while Dickey uses Lewis to shape the hyper-sexual, interconnected, and expansive kinship of the mountains. Greene, however, explains that kinship in Appalachia is a way of life, a collective, communal, and affective expression, not necessarily dependent on consanguinity. In fact, in the case of direct natal alienation, kinship transfers to the community, as with Amos and Beulah. Amos feels kin to Annie Clyde and Gracie when he considers how they are similarly devalued by the TVA; Annie Clyde's husband feels kin to his neighbor Dale who helped James put down and bury his

lame horse; Ellard the sheriff feels kin to all the people of Yuneetah. The expression of kinship as assistance directly refutes the TVA's argument of isolation, and Beulah thinks, "The people of Yuneetah were losing more than their property. They relied on each other. If a house was taken by a flood they rebuilt it. If a man got sick they worked his crops. If he died they rang the death bell and the whole town came to see what needed doing" (Greene 92). Because kinship is based on neighbors helping each other, the death of the town from evacuation enacts a figurative natal alienation. Their kinship way of life, their connection to the land of their kin, even their access to the graves of their kin drowns with the flood. The TVA required an entire department dedicated to grave removal and relocation, and the internal paperwork of this endeavor brings the dead to the surface. Graves were dug up by volunteers from the community, as when James volunteers to assist in Yuneetah; the materials in the grave, including casket, corpse, and cargo, were recorded and placed in cardboard boxes, and the remains were transported and reinterred elsewhere under the supervision of a TVA engineer (Grave Removal Records). This places the Appalachians in direct contact with the supreme expression of abjection, but it also marks a significant difference from the bureaucratic response to Indian removal. Yet even in this forced contact with abjection, the community expresses its own form of assistance and kinship. That kinship assistance most significantly manifests in the search for missing Gracie. The people of Yuneetah return from their state of removal to scour their home for the missing child, and when she is finally recovered, they "arrived by the car and truck load [to the hospital] … traveling from wherever the dam had scattered them to see proof of a resurrection from the graveyard of their drowning town" (Greene

255). Gracie is disinterred from the ground of the mountain in the same manner as the graves of their kin, and they come to pay their respects in a reverse wake.

Gracie's near death, being buried alive in a shallow shelf by a cave-in, centralizes the death of Yuneetah with the rising flood. Her disappearance as the waters rise lead most of the searchers to assume she has drown in the river. However, she actually lies underground almost above the taking line, injured and unable to call out for her parents, and "[e]ven one day was too long for a child to lie buried in the ground, given up for dead" (Greene 209). Her pseudo-grave gestures to the shallow grave in which the rapist lies, as she too will soon be covered over by the lake if not found. In *Deliverance* the mountain becomes a space of death after the murder of the rapist; in *Long Man* Yuneetah always already represents a space of death with the impending flood. Annie Clyde is a "stubborn figure standing by the side of a grave" (Greene 13). Washburn thinks that the de facto death of the town "was the kind of death that had to come before a resurrection" (Greene 14). In fact, even before the lake waters cover the land, the town has already died. The abandoned farms, houses, and machinery have been left to rot until they are covered over by the lake, in fact becoming "condemned" as unlivable. The natal alienation of the evacuation ensures that the way of life in Yuneetah ends with its inhabitants' dispersal. Their dispossession mirrors the image of the family at the end of *Deliverance*, as they leave "riding on tick mattresses among the heaps of chattel in their wagon or truck beds" (Greene 7). As Washburn races Annie Clyde and Gracie out of Yuneetah to the hospital in Clinchfield, Annie Clyde thinks, "the death of the town seemed like nothing compared to the waning life she held in her arms" (Greene 222). With her second sight, Beulah feels the emptiness of the Dodson farm and thinks, "none

of them would come back to this place. The last holdout had given in. The last farm was abandoned. There was no turning back from the course Yuneetah had been set on" (Greene 235). Yuneetah is officially declared dead the moment that Annie Clyde leaves her homestead with the last hope of the town.

The little child, last child in Yuneetah, Gracie stands in opposition to this death; she represents the intersubjective abjection. Greene uses the Deering child, a little boy whose body was never recovered from an earlier Long Man flood, as a foil for Gracie. When interrogated about Gracie's disappearance, Amos leads Gracie's father James and the sheriff Ellard to the decayed remains of a dead child that he had found years before, knowing full well that the child was not Gracie. The Deering child manifests the construction of Gracie in relation to the abjection of a corpse, literally separated from the society of her town and her family and incredibly close to dying. She is also connected to Amos and his suicide in attempting to destroy the dam; Amos's and Gracie's stories align so that "the story of the man who blew a hole in the dam and the little girl resurrected from the ground made the newspapers not just in Knoxville but all over the country" (Greene 266). Gracie can no longer an unnamed missing child to the TVA and its imperial machinery but becomes as recognizable as the Lindbergh baby. By rising, resurrected, from a grave, her budding subjectivity will always be formed in relation to the days she was presumed dead. But in this way, she also represents the hope formed in contrast and relation to the institutional marginalization of the TVA project. Missing, "[i]t wasn't just the child slipping farther away every minute. It was all of Yuneetah," and Gracie, as the next generation of Appalachian, performs futurity as a relational measurement against the abject discourse that has come before her.

Long Man ends with a similar image of *Deliverance*'s image of the still lake waters, but without the dead hand rising from its surface, threatening to expose Ed's truth. The dead has already risen; Gracie has healed and the Dodsons are resettled in Whitehall County nearby. Instead, Greene returns to ruination and natural time, focalizing through the rising water as it covers over Yuneetah. The lake disregards property boundaries. It breaks down man-made endeavors. It fills structures "[u]ntil the still and fathomless depths of the lake covered all forty of the Walker [Dodson] farm's acres. Until there was nothing left to see but miles and miles of blue" (272). Yet, even as Greene recognizes the inevitable property violence of the TVA and its dam projects, she positions Appalachia as a space of refutation and isolation. Silver Ledford, Beulah Kesterson, and Ellard Moody – the oldest generation of Yuneetah – remain in their mountain cabins above the taking line to continue living out their Appalachian way of life, refuting the degradation that the march of "progress" seeks to inscribe onto them. Silver observes, "Electricity couldn't put right everything wrong in this valley… [Annie Clyde and James] would still struggle, but [Silver] guessed they'd make it together" (Greene 270). Appalachia remains a place of self-sufficiency and kinship in spite of the many negative narratives of its inhabitants. Gracie takes the death of Yuneetah with her as she moves forward, and Beulah believes, "This river will always be here. It'll keep on running, no matter how they dam it up … This river's underneath [Yuneetah's inhabitants'] skin. They won't forget" (Greene 239). Underneath the still waters of the lake, underneath the skin of Appalachians, underneath the stigmatypes and media representations and social death, the mountains and their truths remain.

CHAPTER FOUR
REFORMATION: TRANSLATING PSYCHO-LINGUISTIC SUBJECTIVITY IN JULIA ALVAREZ'S *HOW THE GARCÍA GIRLS LOST THEIR ACCENTS*

In the first pages of Julia Alvarez's 1992 novel *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, Yolanda García drives her aunt's Datsun into the mountains of the Dominican Republic in search of her antojo, clinging to the desperate hope that she will be able to make her home in her natal country. Having moved to the United States under the threat of the violent Trujillo regime when she was just a little girl, the DR has become a place of vacations and longing. Now an adult, Yolanda struggles to understand where she belongs. She wants to return, but she has been away so long that she has forgotten much of her natal Spanish language.[59] Her aunts tease her and force her to speak in Spanish, positive that she can recover this loss. However, the end of the novel questions this possibility. Told in reverse chronological order, the novel performs a temporal revision that begins with the girls' adult state of bifurcated, agitated subject formation and traces it back to the trauma of dispossession in migration caused by U.S. interventionism. This chapter maps the García's material dispossession, but it makes a turn to explore the psychological result when language is that which is dispossessed. Arguably the novel's main narrator, Yolanda demonstrates the difficulty of understanding one's subjectivity as an immigrant in the United States, especially between two different language systems. Yolanda suffers from an excess of other subjects to which she must create intersubjectivity in order to reform her own identity, not the least of which is her understanding of her own

[59] I use *natal* here purposefully, as I believe the term *native tongue* implies something natural to the body. I would argue that, since language is a construct, no one language is any more natural to a body than any other is. Alvarez's novel certainly demonstrates that just being born and spending your formative years in a specific language does not make it native. Thus the term natal simply signifies the language learned from birth.

subjectivity in her natal linguistic system. In exploring reparative abjection, I reject romanticized hybridity; in Alvarez's work, Yolanda's interrupted subjectivities do not present the possibility for positive hybridity. This failure highlights the anti-utopic nature of intersubjective abjection. Though Yolanda and her sisters do the work of reformation, this does not guarantee an integrated self.

The Garcías have access to white power in the Dominican Republic through their wealth, political connections, and powerful kinship. The patriarch of the de la Torre family held a position in the United Nations during the administration before Trujillo and he defects to the United States when Trujillo takes power. They live in a massive compound with houses for as many as five families that abuts the estate of one of Trujillo's daughters. The family maintains a private security force, drivers, many maids and house servants. The de la Torre name means power in the DR. We know the García family is white because their race is normalized and unmarked, except when aligned with white power. Much is made of the de la Torre "blood of the Conquistadores," the "light-colored blood" of the "fair-skinned Conquistadores arriving in this new world" (Alvarez 212). The novel opens with a family tree that traces the de la Torre family straight from the Conquistadores, through the "great-great-grandfather who married a Swedish girl," to Laura and her siblings (Alvarez 1). Carlos, as the "youngest of his father's thirty-five children, twenty-five legitimate, fifteen from his own mother, the second wife," ascends to power through the typical Caribbean romance of marriage and education, and he therefore seems obsessed with social respectability. When Sofia, the youngest daughter, marries a pre-eminent German chemist their first son "was large and big-boned with blond fuzz on his pale pink skin, and blue eyes just like his German father's. All the

grandfather's Caribbean fondness for a male heir and for fair Nordic looks had surfaced" (Alvarez 26). Even after the rise of Trujillo and their family's resistance to the dictator, their economic wealth and racialized ancestry aligns them with power in the DR, a Caribbean space in which colorism closely aligns with political supremacy. The Garcías enact these same pigmentation politics in their individual intimacies as a microcosm of the national politics between the Dominican Republic and Haiti. Many of the maids are described through their brownness as a marker for their lower-class and rural upbringing. But Chucha, the oldest and most trusted servant in the García's house, "was super wrinkled and Haitian blue-black, not *Dominican café-con-leche* black" (Alvarez 218, emphasis in original), and "none of the maids liked Chucha because they all thought she was kind of below them, being so black and Haitian and all" (Alvarez 219). Chucha comes to the family begging for asylum on the night of the Haitian massacre in 1937 and stays with them until the Garcías leave for New York in 1960. Nivea, a laundry maid, "was 'black-black': [Laura] always said it twice to darken the color to full, matching strength. She'd been nicknamed Nivea after an American face cream her mother used to rub on her, hoping the milky white applications would lighten her baby's black skin" (Alvarez 260). These interactions highlight the ways that Haitians stand in as the racialized, classed, and non-citizen other in the Dominican Republic and the ways that the Garcías profit from this hierarchy of white power.

U.S. interventionism in the Caribbean causes the family's dispossession of this white power by their immigration. The Garcías are forced from their home after a failed CIA-sanctioned coup against Rafael Trujillo, narrated near the end of the novel in the chapter called "The Blood of the Conquistadores." Here it is unclear whether the title of

the chapter refers to the blood of the white Spaniard colonials to which the García's can trace their heritage, the blood of the Dominican dictatorship, or the blood spilled on account of the Americans and their plot. The CIA comes to interfere in the Dominican Republic as a response to the Cuban Revolution in 1959 and the threat of losing hemispheric influence and control. Trujillo had taken control of the DR in 1930 and enacted an incredibly bloody and brutal dictatorship, especially violent in its pursuit in eradicating the country of Haitian immigrants, but he was not perceived as an imminent threat to American interests in the Caribbean basin until Fidel Castro took power in neighboring Cuba. Yolanda's father Carlos is a well-respected and wealthy doctor and one of the "upper-class fellas the State Department wanted [Vic] to groom for revolution" (Alvarez 25). In 1960, he is pulled into a plot organized by CIA agent Victor Hubbard to assassinate Trujillo, but "orders changed midstream from *organize the underground and get that SOB out* to *hold your horses, let's take a second look around and see what's best for us*" (Alvarez 215).[60] The CIA intervention, which wavered between eradicating non-democratic governments in the hemisphere and attempting to use Trujillo's far-right regime to counteract Castro's far-left, creates a twentieth-century opportunity for employing the Monroe Doctrine of 1823. Rather than opposing the expansion of European imperialism in the Caribbean, this manifestation attempts to slow the tide of Communism and anti-capitalism and the influence of the Soviet Union. Monroe, in an address to Congress on December 2, 1823, stated, "the occasion has been judged proper for asserting, as a principle in which the rights and interests of the United States are

[60] See Blum 175-183 for a discussion of the actual CIA plots in the Dominican Republic during the 1960s. See also, *Encyclopedia of US Military Interventions in Latin America*, "Dominican Republic, intervention in" and "Rafael Trujillo."

involved, that the American continents, by the free and independent condition which they have assumed and maintain, are henceforth not to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European powers." Monroe, speaking of course to other like-minded U.S. politicians, outlines his policy in which activities by European powers in the American hemisphere will be considered "dangerous to our peace and safety." Monroe specifically highlights the role of colonial Spain in the hemisphere, so it is unclear if he had in mind protecting the freedom and independence of the former slave colony of Haiti (which declared independence from France in 1803) or the subsequent declaration of independence of the Dominican Republic from Haiti in 1844 (although future presidents certainly employed this policy to invade and occupy Haiti, the DR, and other Latin American countries). What is clear is that by declaring the U.S. protector of independence in the hemisphere, Monroe asserts an imperial claim of his own, based not only in ideology but also in economics. By the 1960s, the United States was highly committed to protecting their investments in the DR, and so the U.S. protection of independence in the hemisphere presented itself as neo-liberal imperialism and political paternalism. In effect, the Monroe Doctrine dispossesses Caribbean and Latin American countries of the right to decide their own political destinies.

This political interventionism results in the dispossession of those caught up in the conflict between the United States and anti-U.S. regimes. After the failure of the assassination plot, two of Trujillo's secret police visit the García family compound, forcing Carlos to hide in the false back closet and the four girls to cower in fear in their mother's skirts as they wait for Victor Hubbard to arrive. One of the conspirators has already committed suicide while incarcerated in order to avoid giving up his accomplices.

The rest hide out, armed to the teeth, and jump at every shadow. Hubbard's escape plan, with the code name "tennis shoes," requires the García family to leave everything they know – their family, their wealth, their respectable social position, Dr. García's medical practice – to seek asylum in the United States under the guise of a medical fellowship for Carlos. I propose, rather than offering a good-faith agreement with the conspirators, their removal enacts dispossession based on Vic's guilty conscience. Hubbard knows that the plot failed because "the State Department chickened out on the plot they had him organize" (Alvarez 201). The U.S. officials re-evaluate the political expediency of keeping Trujillo in power as Cuba falls (of course they would go on to kill Trujillo in 1961). The Garcías go from a wealthy family living in a huge compound with many servants to living in a small New York apartment with racist neighbors. Carlos's medical practice also disappears, as he cannot get an American doctor's license because he was educated in the DR. Victor Hubbard, too, disappears from the narrative, or rather has not yet appeared, since the novel is told in backward chronological order, thus signaling the abandonment of the State Department once the Garcías arrive in New York.

Coming to the United States destabilizes the García family's access to white power; they become just more brown people in a mid-60s atmosphere highly antagonistic to immigrants and people of color. The Garcías experience institutional marginalization and natal alienation because of their dispossession as immigrants caused by the Monroe Doctrine-style intervention of the CIA. They are abandoned by the State Department, without family and without social positioning, to reform their identities as Hispanic immigrants in the United States. Yolanda thinks, "We didn't feel we had the best the United States had to offer. We had only second-hand stuff, rental houses in one red-neck

Catholic neighborhood after another, clothes at Round Robin, a black and white TV afflicted with wavy lines" (Alvarez 107). She highlights the state of material dispossession caused by their immigration. In the DR, the family is treated with deference, with "special attention paid to them. At home there had always been a chauffeur opening a car door or a gardener tipping his hat and a half dozen maids and nursemaids acting as if the health and well-being of the de la Torre-García children were of wide public concern," but in the United States the girls, especially Sandi, note the absence of this kind of respect (Alvarez 173). The García family enters on green cards and settle first in a small apartment in New York, which they can only afford because Papito, the de la Torre patriarch, pays the rent, so that "without Papito, we would have to go on welfare' Welfare, they knew, was what people in this country got so they wouldn't turn into beggars like those outside La Catedral back home" (Alvarez 173). Thus, even though a successful doctor and the de la Torre family has massive wealth in the DR, the state-sanctioned dispossession caused by their forced immigration places the family on the edge of precarity as a dependent of the state. Going from a large compound that promotes free-range childhood to a cramped apartment for a family of six circumscribes the girls' ability to self-define through their Hispanic whiteness; instead, they must reform their identities in relation to the degraded state of brown immigrant racism in the US. The elderly white woman who lives downstairs from their apartment, nicknamed "La Bruja," the witch, complains constantly about the family: "The Garcías should be evicted. Their food smelled. They spoke too loudly and not in English. The kids sounded like a herd of wild burros" (Alvarez 169). The neighbor woman perpetrates the many micro-aggressions that immigrants experience in white neighborhoods, and those micro-

aggressions become full out racism when she encounters Laura and the four girls in the apartment lobby and "spat out that ugly word the kids at school sometimes used: 'Spics! Go back to where you came from!'" (Alvarez 171). The depth of this woman's racism allows her to render even little children as degraded racial others. The family eventually moves to a suburban neighborhood on Long Island that borders on rural farmland. Rather than harkening back to their Dominican compound, the "little green squares around each look-alike house seemed more like carpeting that had to be kept clean than yards to play in" (Alvarez 150). The chapter that describes this transition to suburban living is called "Trespass;" in it, Carla must deal with bullies at her school who call her the same racial slurs, indicating that even with economic ascension, the Garcías' status as brown immigrants does not change.

Their forced immigration also dispossesses them of their property in kinship. Carlos, and his girls, seems to be the only conspirator who escaped from the DR (Alvarez 171), and other than the de la Torre patriarch, none of the rest of the de la Torre family members come to the United States. This loss of kinship is acutely felt by Yolanda at the beginning of the novel when she returns to the DR somewhat alienated from her extended family and their customs. Their family name means nothing in the U.S. but that they are another Hispanic immigrant. Even when Dr. García makes a successful medical practice for Hispanic immigrants in the Bronx and sends the girls to an upper-class Boston boarding school with the likes of the Hoover, Hanes, Scott, and Reese children, "García de la Torre didn't mean a thing to them, but those brand-named beauties simply assumed that, like all third world foreign students in boarding schools, we were filthy rich and related to some dictator or other" (Alvarez 107). The García girls cannot be understood as

citizens with American wealth, but become foreign and aligned with third-world violence in spaces of white power in the United States. As a young woman, Yolanda blames her immigrant status for her inability to connect with her classmates, from her Catholic elementary to her boarding school to college. She interprets American whiteness as freedom, thinking, "[f]or the hundredth time, I cursed my immigrant origins. If only I too had been born in Connecticut or Virginia, I too would understand the jokes everyone was making on the last two digits of the year, 1969; I too would be having sex and smoking dope; I too would have suntanned parents who took me skiing in Colorado over Christmas break" (Alvarez 93). The permissiveness that she perceives in American identity is, of course, highly classed and a direct reflection of a liberal, anti-establishment politics of the 1960s protest era, but that she draws her inability to embrace this culture to her status as an immigrant highlights the loss of self-confidence inherent to immigrant liminality. Yolanda, desperate to find means of self-identifying and affirmation, turns to writing because "in New York, she needed to settle somewhere, and since the natives were unfriendly, and the country inhospitable, she took root in the language" (Alvarez 141). Registering the white American children in her Catholic schools as inhospitable natives positions her own foreignness and taking "root" in the language belies the unrootedness of her life in the United States. Turning to theories of translation and psychoanalysis helps to explicate the rupture and dislocation that Yolanda experiences to consider the state of psychic liminality between two different linguistic systems. The girls, especially Yolanda, must begin to think about their subjectivities in an entirely new way, a way wrapped up in cultural degradation and psycho-linguistic abjection. Ultimately, the loss of cultural capital, the property violence of immigration, plays out in

the language, in the translation from Spanish to English and the reformation of subjectivity that requires.

Much of the scholarship on Alvarez's novel has focused on the relationship between language and identity for the girls, and critics can be divided into two camps: the possible hybrid and the failed. Juan Pablo Rivera and Joan Hoffman both advocate reading through a bilingual hybrid identity in which the girls are able to identify as Dominican-American. On the other side, Helen Atawube Yitah argues that "the profound linguistic dislocation and the resultant disorientation that the young girls experience in the United States combine to erode their self-assurance and deny them any stable sense of self" (234). Fatima Mujcinovic reads the father's experience and notes that although for most of the novel the family is no longer in political exile and could physically return to the island, a psychological return is harder to imagine. Jacqueline Stefanko connects the novel's polyphonic narrative form to a hybridity that illustrates the fracturing of identity in the diaspora. For me, Yolanda's psycho-linguistic breakdown firmly signifies the failure of hybridity; indeed, Yolanda fails so significantly that she falls outside of language completely and into a liminal space of abjection where meaning breaks down.[61] I posit that her desire to return to the island mirrors a desire to return to the state of jouissance, a proposition impossible and dangerous. In trying to build a new subjectivity in a new language system, Yolanda actually embraces the state of abjection.

Even though entering language is universal for human subjects as social beings, I argue that immigrants must always negotiate an identity somewhere in between their

[61] Here I differentiate between hybridity as the absorption of both/and identities and liminality which I read as a threshold outside of either dichotomous position. In the case of Alvarez's characters and many other characters negotiating Caribbean identities, forming a both/and identity through hybridity does not offer the political efficacy that Bhabha suggests.

natal linguistic system and the new system into which they have moved. Therefore, they occupy a space rooted in neither one nor the other system, a liminality that complicates subjectivity. I turn to translation theory to justify reading the transition from one linguistic system to another as creating a new subjectivity. Ultimately, subjectivity is a linguistic creation, and the act of understanding one's self as an *I*, a political agent, and a subject, depends on language. Jacques Derrida notes, "[e]very culture institutes itself through the unilateral imposition of some 'politics' of language. Mastery begins, as we know, through the power of naming, of imposing and legitimating appellations" (39). This act of naming differentiates the subject position from the predicate, the subject from the object, the self from the other. Yolanda's trouble with naming evidences her identity trauma. Yolanda tells the reader that she is "Yolanda, nicknamed *Yo* in Spanish, misunderstood *Joe* in English, doubled and pronounced like the toy, *Yoyo*—or when forced to select from a rack of personalized key chains, *Joey*" (Alvarez 67). Yitah claims, "Yolanda's task of piecing together her fragmented identity is one that proves impossible to accomplish in America, where her name cannot be found in a display of supposedly personalized key chains" (238). I would argue that this "piecing together" is not only impossible in the United States, but also in the Dominican Republic, as Yolanda's naming problems cross both linguistic systems. The social censorship of Standard English willfully and aggressively misinterprets Yolanda's name and natal tongue, whether through racist epithet or denial of her true name, but what is unique here is that Yolanda experiences these problems of naming in both linguistic systems. This problem proves especially interesting because the García girls transition from Spanish to English. In Spanish grammar, the subject position is implied in the declension of verbs as opposed

to English grammar's simple agreement of verb count. Thus, Descartes's statement *I think, therefore I am* might translate to *Pienso, entonces soy.* Both *pienso* and *soy* contain the subject tacitly represented. Additionally, the word *soy* translates as *to be*, indicating the state of being of an essential quality or static identification. However, *estar* is also a verb of being, used to represent a condition that can change over time. Comparatively, Standard English grammar limits subjectivity to a single verb of being and always needs syntactic representation of the subject position.[62] Therefore, the García girls must not only learn a new language, but also think about themselves in a different way. Even though Yo signifies the personal pronoun in Spanish, Yolanda cannot create a cohesive identity in either language.

As Derrida notes, every culture has a politics of language, and I posit that by learning the semantics and grammar of the new linguistic system, immigrant children internalize a new form of identifying.[63] Julia Kristeva theorizes that subjectivity is constructed by the transition from the semiotic chora into the thetic phase, where the semiotic chora is "a nonexpressive totality" (*Revolution* 25). In other words, the semiotic chora exists outside of language, pre-linguistic, occurring before consciousness of the Symbolic system. Thus, while in the semiotic chora a child uses holophrastic utterances – *up* to ask to be held, *food* to indicate hunger. At this time, the child's needs are assuaged

[62] Decena introduces this idea in *Tacit Subjects*. However, Decena's work makes use of the grammatical anomaly as a metaphor for self-representation. I am interested in how the grammar informs the psychology of self.

[63] This is most prevalently observed in the United States through immigrants moving from a non-English language system into English, but this can also be true of those moving within varieties of English. As globalization continues to spread English as a global language, different Englishes with different politics form, and moving among those systems does not guarantee facility within each disparate system (e.g. between American English and Australian English). Moreover, this can be true of American immigrants moving into new language systems, assuming that they do not hold on to American exceptionalist practices that resist learning the language of their new country.

by the caregiver, and the child experiences the jouissance of being completely fulfilled with no differentiation between their own subjectivity and that of the caregiver. The process of establishing differentiation develops when the child enters the thetic phase. Linguistically, "syntax registers the thetic break as an opposition of discrete and permutable elements but whose concrete position nevertheless indicates that each one has a definite signification" (*Revolution* 55). Consequently, entrance into the Symbolic through the thetic phase depends on the ability to use syntax, instead of simply making holophrastic gestures toward language. The immigrant child forced to learn a new language system must return to the semiotic chora, even after creating subjectivity in their previous language system, to begin to learn new words and phrases. This process creates chaos in the psycho-linguistic subjectivity.

The translation theory of Derrida and Walter Benjamin, in conjunction with Kristeva's theory of psycho-linguistic subjectivity, give us language to read the immigrant situation as an act of translation into a new symbolic system; this allows us to read the desire to return to the natal linguistic system as the desire to return to the semiotic chora. Both Benjamin and Derrida theorize an originary loss that results in the need for translation. Benjamin writes,

> In all language and linguistic creations, there remains in addition to what can be conveyed something that cannot be communicated, … that very nucleus of the pure language; yet though this nucleus remains present in life as that which is symbolized itself, albeit hidden and fragmentary, it persists in linguistic creations only in its symbolizing capacity. … To relieve it of this, to turn symbolizing into the symbolized itself, to regain pure language fully formed from the linguistic flux, is the tremendous and only capacity of translation. (Benjamin 261)

Putting Benjamin in conversation with Jacques Lacan, we can identify that which cannot be communicated, which Lacan theorizes an endless chain of signifiers that come close to

meaning but never express the *real*. The *real* haunts the Symbolic like Benjamin's pure language, and linguistic expression becomes a constant act of translation of the *real* by the Symbolic. Benjamin argues that translation attempts to return to the state of pure language. Although Benjamin defines pure language as the lost Biblical-historical language of the people before the Tower of Babel, I read Benjamin's nucleus of pure language found in each expression as the desire for the semiotic chora haunting subjectivity after the originary loss of the jouissance of undifferentiation. The constant work of translating the *real* and constructing syntax in language systems exhausts the subject and can lead to a desire to return to non-expressive totalities. Moreover, for Derrida, this loss, of pure language or the semiotic chora, is the "prosthesis of origin." The prosthesis metaphorizes both the experience of the loss and the desire for that which was lost. The constant phantom limb pain simulates the loss of the caregiver, the origin. Therefore, both Derrida and Benjamin use metaphors of loss and desire to describe the process of language and translation in a manner similar to Lacan's and Kristeva's descriptions of the process of subject formation through language acquisition, and these connections illustrate how moving from one linguistic system to another mimics a person's construction of subjectivity.

Benjamin notes the flux, the constant signification and translation, and, as I demonstrate, for the immigrant, the constant triangulation of identity, a literal translation between two languages. This flux often results in the deep desire for a return to the natal tongue, just as the weary experience of constantly defining subjectivity results in a desire to return to jouissance. However, this return, both to the semiotic chora and the natal tongue, is impossible. The prosthesis is a mechanism – the original has been irrevocably

lost. Each of the García girls at some point in the novel tries to return to the Dominican Republic, searching for not only a return to their way of life but also the security of a return to their original subjectivity. Although she desperately wants to make the DR her home, Yolanda cannot go back to the time before her immigration; she has already been irreversibly interpellated in the American English linguistic system. Yolanda's attempted return pushes her back to the semiotic chora in both Spanish and English. Her aunts ask her what she wants to do on the island, "any little *antojo*" (Alvarez 8). Yolanda does not recognize the word, which the family goes on to define as her one desire. Subconsciously, Yolanda's one desire is to form an authentic subjectivity, but she relates that desire through the guava, a product not as readily available in the US as in the DR. As an antojo, guavas represent both the fruit of her motherland and a complete entrance into Yolanda's natal symbolic system. William Luis argues, "[e]ven though ... Yolanda desires that her country of origin be her home, … She cannot return to the past of her innocence, … the guavas will [only] allow Yolanda to return to the past of her memory, which initiated her voyage to her origin, the womb" (847). In this case, the impossible return to the womb results instead in a return to the semiotic chora that stymies any chance at hybridity. When she goes out into the countryside, alone and against the advice of her aunts, she gets a flat tire in the guava grove, implying once again the difficulty of establishing her subjectivity. She encounters two campesinos who help her, but she is afraid of them and "feels so trapped by the situation in which she finds herself that she becomes once again inarticulate, appropriately losing her original language in a situation that demands that she be a dominicana rather than an americana" (Gomez Vega 91). Although being a de la Torre back in the DR positions her in a class and racial hierarchy

over the campesinos, the language failure marks out her unrootedness in this identity. She cannot speak even a condescending Spanish to the campesinos, nor can she articulate herself in English, but instead babbles incoherently, a non-syntactic non-expression. This failure of translation highlights Yolanda's marginalization and isolation, not as an opportunity to create new means of identifying in the interstices, but rather as a third-space liminality outside of both the natal and new linguistic systems. She has become too Americanized to be Dominican, even though she was too Dominican to be American. This liminality stands as antithesis to hybridity.

Immigrants entering into a new system must reform subjectivity, creating a situation where they have to understand themselves in relation to both the natal and new subjectivities. Therefore, they experience intersubjectivity not only with the children in the old and new systems, but with their own previous subjectivity. I use intersubjectivity here to emphasize both the act of recognition of other subjects in relation to one's own subjectivity and the relationship to the liminal third-space as the experience of marginalization in an immigrant subjectivity understood in *relation* to both the natal linguistic system and the newly learned linguistic system. Immigrant children experience intersubjectivity through exclusion and isolation in the new linguistic system. Often, they face extreme hostility from others during this period of language acquisition meant to form a new subjectivity. One threat comes from the hegemony of the new system, as those who already inhabit that system put pressure on the newcomers to conform. Immigrant children learn that they must find a way to create subjectivity quickly in order to achieve social integration. Lacan states that "[the] moment in which the mirror-stage comes to an end inaugurates, by the identification with the *imago* of the counterpart and

the drama of primordial jealousy … the dialectic that will henceforth link the *I* to socially elaborated situations" (5). For immigrant children, the imago is not themselves in the mirror image – which has already helped the children form subjectivity in the natal system, but the image of children integrated into the new system who represent the self they should be now. The child must find a way to understand his or her subjectivity in *relation* to the natal understanding of self, to the nascent forming self, and to the others, both in the natal and new systems. This fraught triangulation requires immigrant children to be constantly code-switching not only their language but their psycho-linguistic identities to fit the situation, often different at home than at school.

The American children that the García girls encounter signify the new ideal subject; the immigrant child must identify with these other children, who are at the same time threatening alienation and annihilation, especially in cases of racial difference. Carla, the oldest García daughter, experiences this threat as a young girl in Catholic school. A group of boys taunts her, throwing rocks at her and telling her to "[g]o back where you came from, you dirty spic!'" (Alvarez 150).[64] When she compares herself to the other students, she thinks that the boys look "blank and unknowable, the way all Americans did. Their faces betrayed no sign of human warmth. Their eyes were too clear for cleaving, intimate looks. Their pale bodies did not seem real but were like costumes they were wearing" (Alvarez 151). The images of blankness highlight the impossibility to identify with the imago that the boys represent. Carla's claim that the boys do not look real echoes Lacan's formation of the *real* in interesting ways, as he argues that the *real*

[64] Interestingly, the Irish appear in this novel as in the other three as a cultural connection to the racialization of whiteness. Alvarez writes that the girls "were trying to fit in America among Americans; they needed help figuring out who they were, why the Irish kids whose grand-parents had been micks were calling them spics" (Alvarez 138). Once again, Irishness stands as a marker for inter-racial intersubjectivity.

intrudes in the traumatic break of the Symbolic order. For Carla, the trauma of immigration has disrupted her natal linguistic system and caused her to question what is indeed real. Beyond the racist hostility that prevents her from desiring subjectivity in the new system, she cannot imagine a way to fashion her identity into the blank and unknowable. This instead underlines her isolation and alienation by the society formed by the proper use of the new linguistic system. Clearly, this process of identification is fraught with danger for immigrant children, who must sublimate their original selves created in the natal system under a new hostile subjectivity.

Moreover, this aggression and exclusion can result in the violent rupturing of meaning, a breakdown of language. The García girls experience the collapse of their subject formation in the difficult transition from the Dominican Spanish linguistic system into an American education system where they must use Standard English to negotiate a new identity based on perceived American ideals, alienated from their natal linguistic identity and forced to internalize a new symbolic system.[65] The child begins to learn words and phrases in the new linguistic system, which I read as re-entering the semiotic chora, and then slowly begins to form subjectivity in the new system by appropriately using syntax in the thetic phase. Learning a new linguistic system positions even the most established subject back into the semiotic chora, as the only way to learn language seems to be one word and holophrastic utterance at a time. Adult language learners often express frustration at this infantilizing feeling; for a child, this struggle becomes even

[65] Castells notes, "The sisters repeatedly find themselves at odds with their bicultural surroundings, experiencing a form of alienation that is often symbolized by either silence or by an absolute failure to communicate with the other characters" (34). I agree with his assessment of the girls' alienation and their failure to communicate, but I diverge from his focus on bilingualism to turn to the psychological root of the García girls' problems. I do not privilege the girls' Spanish language as the pre-Symbolic state, but as their natal linguistic system in which they have developed subjectivity that is disrupted when they are forced to reconsider their subject positions through the new linguistic system.

more fraught with insecurity. In the chapter "Snow," Yolanda explains that when she enters school, she is separated from the other students in her class, "put in a special seat in the front row by the window, apart from the other children so that Sister Zoe could tutor me without disturbing them" (Alvarez 163). This physically positions her on the outside of the system, indicating her psychological positioning as well. The hegemony of Standard English cannot accommodate her among the other students because she does not fit into the linguistic system. The earliest vocabulary she learns revolves around the Cold War and the Cuban Missile Crisis: "*nuclear bomb, radioactive fallout, bomb shelter*," marking her new world with danger and the threat of annihilation – an even greater fear for Yolanda because she already feels alienated in the face of the failure of her language (Alvarez 163). It once again illustrates the intrusion of American interventionism and the threat of Cuba and revolution. As Yolanda sits at her desk one day, she mistakes the newly falling snow for ash. Unable to articulate her fear, Yolanda simply yells "Bomb! Bomb!" to warn the other students of nuclear doom (Alvarez 163). Yolanda has never seen snow in the Dominican Republic and therefore has no language by which to label and understand the phenomenon. Her holophrastic utterance of *bomb* to represent her fear of obliteration once again attests to her isolation, as she cannot enter the thetic phase with her limited knowledge and vocabulary. The holophrasis precludes both meaning and subjectivity and illustrates the impossibility of effective participation in the new linguistic system for the immigrant child.

Yolanda cannot fully inhabit either linguistic system, so she experiences the rupture of her subjectivities manifested in holophrastic utterances that reveal her desire to return to the semiotic chora, but not one represented by her natal linguistic system. Even

when Yolanda's vocabulary develops, she cannot find the words to express her self. Thinking about the snow, Yolanda writes, "Each flake was different, Sister Zoe had said, like a person, irreplaceable and beautiful" (Alvarez 163). The uniqueness of the snowflakes exemplifies Yolanda's creative originality, but she grapples with mixed messages concerning her development of subjectivity and individualism. The new linguistic system in which she must reform her identity tells her both that she is unique and that difference is bad and she must conform. The episode "Daughter of Invention" highlights this paradox, as Yolanda encounters strong resistance to her efforts at thetic authenticity in English. The nuns of her school commission her to give the Teacher's Day address. At first, writer's block stymies her, once again illustrating the impossibility of efficacy in the new linguistic system. She finally finds inspiration in the poetry of Walt Whitman – poetry being a holophrastic usage of language according to Kristeva. Whitman, the great American poet, would seem to connect her to an assertive articulation of a unified American identity, so she molds his words into a speech, writing "recklessly, three, five pages, looking up once only to see her father passing by the hall on tiptoe. When Yoyo was done, she read over her words, and her eyes filled. She finally sounded like herself in English!" (Alvarez 140). But her father rejects her efforts to enter the thetic phase and be true to herself, calling it "insubordinate … improper … disrespecting of her teachers" (Alvarez 142). His reaction reflects his interpretation of American ideals of authority that would construe her immigrant authenticity as insolence. He rips up the speech, and her carefully chosen words lie on the floor like the pieces of her identity; Yolanda learns that her authentic self cannot be communicated in English. She and her

mother write a new speech, appropriately pandering to the egos of the nuns, she receives a standing ovation, culturally reaffirming that she does not fit the new linguistic system.

When she becomes a poet as an adult, Yolanda embraces holophrasis. However, at one of Yolanda's poetry readings, her mother tells a story that indicates that she has been related to the holophrastic semiotic instead of the thetic since her youth. As a child, Yolanda's parents accidentally leave her on a city bus as they are travelling to a doctor because Yolanda has been losing all of her hair. Her hair loss reveals the abjection of her body caused by the stress of her efforts at assimilation. When her parents chase down the bus, they find her surrounded by strangers "like Jesus and the elders … listening to her reciting a poem" (Alvarez 49). The poem she recites turns out to be Edgar Allen Poe's "Annabel Lee," associating her to again to a line of American poets, but also to a kingdom by the sea in which she is trapped. This kingdom could be either New York or the Dominican Republic. Yolanda begins her performance of her poetry, interrupting her mother's story and making the mother prophetic, as Yolanda does indeed become a poet. However, this embrace of holophrasis, along with the difficulty of establishing her subjectivity in either linguistic system, results in Yolanda's failure to enter the thetic phase, which breaks down bodies and meanings.

Looking at the imago of the other children and finding "blankness" breaks down chances of intersubjectivity and disturbs the process of identification within the social censorship. When the subject cannot position itself into the thetic phase by remaining in or contemplating a return to the semiotic chora, the psycho-linguistic subjectivity becomes disrupted by the intrusion of the death drive. Kristeva writes, "when the semiotic chora disturbs the thetic position by redistributing the signifying order, we note

that the denoted object and the syntactic relation are disturbed as well. The denoted object proliferates in a series of connoted objects produced by the transposition of the semiotic chora and the syntactic division (modified-modifier, NP-VP, or the placement of semantic features) is disrupted" (*Revolution* 55). Thus, the use of holophrasis symbolizes the disruption of subjectivity, and the attempted return to the semiotic actually implies a move to the dangerous space of the abject. Both Yolanda and Sandra desire a return to the semiotic chora because of their inability to form subjectivity in the alien linguistic system. This results in their madness, indicated through their strangely poetic use of language. Kristeva notes,

> All poetic 'distortions' of the signifying chain and the structure of signification … yield under the attack of the 'residues of first symbolizations' (Lacan), in other words, those drives that the thetic phase was not able to sublate by linking them into signifier and signified. As a consequence, any disturbance of the 'social censorship' – that of the signifier/signified break – attests, perhaps first and foremost, to an influx of the death drive. (*Revolution* 49)

For immigrants, the residue of the first symbolization is their originary, natal subjectivity that can never be fully sublimated, even after internalizing the new linguistic system. This constant disruption from the natal self corresponds to the drives that push immigrants towards the seduction and annihilation of the death drive. Both Yolanda and her older sister Sandra give in to the death drive through their rejection of language.

Sandra, the second of the García girls, experiences liminality through pigmentation politics, and the constant effort to find a racial identification draws her back to the semiotic chora. Her mother notes, "the family has light-colored blood, and that Sandi got it all. But imagine, spirit of contradiction, she wanted to be darker complected like her sisters" (Alvarez 52). Sandra cannot live up to the lightness of her skin because

she cannot successfully assimilate into the American symbolic system, but she cannot be fully Dominican either because of her family heritage. Once in the United States, Sandra, more than the other girls, observes the contradictions of their new position as Hispanic immigrants. In the chapter called "Floor Show" the family goes out to a new Spanish restaurant (though of course they are not Spanish) with the Fannings, the American doctor and his wife who offer the white benevolence of helping the father get an internship in the United States. Sandra hears her parents' concerns about money and thinks that "she would present herself as the daughter willing to make these sacrifices [in order to get money for her family]. Maybe [the Fannings] would adopt her, and give her an allowance like other American girls got, which Sandi would then pass on to her real family. Provided she could see them periodically, that would not be a bad life, being an only child in a fine, rich, childless American family" (Alvarez 169). Sandra could indeed pass as this American couple's daughter because of her fairness, and theoretically could enter into their symbolic system. However, the evening out serves to bounce Sandra back and forth between the two symbolic systems, never able to find purchase in either one.

The Fannings choose the Spanish restaurant, El Flamenco, believing that it would give the Garcías a taste of home, but the "goopy meat and greasy rice" does not provide a reminder of the island (Alvarez 180). Sandi hides the food on her plate, thinking that if her parents asked her why she was not eating, "[s]he would say, just as an American girl might, 'I don't wanna. You can't make me. This is a free country.'" (Alvarez 180). Sandra rehearses the American statements in her head as a method of entering into that symbolic system, but she never gets the opportunity to express herself because her parents ignore her. Ever the observant child, Sandra sees behind the façade of the

Fannings' generosity and thus the American symbolic system that suggests a great generosity in *allowing* immigrants to pursue life in the United States. Sandra finds herself pulled back towards her Spanish symbolic system as she thinks that "they had come to a *Spanish* place for dinner. La Bruja [the García's racist neighbor] was wrong. Spanish was something other people paid to be around" (Alvarez 175). In this way, Sandra oscillates between embracing an American identity and perceiving the valorization of her Spanish heritage.

Mrs. Fanning and her husband represent the white blindness of benevolence and cultural appropriation. She and her husband believe that they are generously assisting Dr. García and his family, but they only replicate the dependence that Victor Hubbard initiated and the institutional racism that suggests Dr. García 's training is not sufficient for practice in the United States. Mrs. Fanning directly refutes the patriarchal order of the García family after Dr. García tells Sandra that she cannot have a souvenir doll from the restaurant. Mrs. Fanning believes that she comes to Sandra's rescue when she magnanimously tells the salesgirl to give each of the sisters a Barbie doll. Significantly, rather than choosing a white Barbie that would align her to the Fannings, as she desired before the dinner began, Sandra chooses a doll dressed just like the flamenco dancers, and in thanking the drunken woman, she presses the doll to the woman's cheek and "made a smacking sound. '*Gracias*,' Sandi said, as if the Barbie doll had to be true to her Spanish costume" (Alvarez 187). If the Barbie must perform true to her Spanish costume, then Sandi must perform true to her whiteness, but she cannot ever successfully enter the American symbolic system because she is constantly pulled, enthralled, by her Spanish blood. This back and forth causes Sandra to try to navigate multiple symbolic systems at

once, but instead of forming a bilingual identity, as Hoffman argues, she ends up outside of both systems.

As an adult, Sandra's failed subjectivity causes her to be institutionalized. The mother tells the doctor that Sandra's troubles "started with that crazy diet … Can you imagine starving herself to death?" (Alvarez 51). In fact, Sandra's troubles began with her inability to enter the alien linguistic system; they are simply manifested in her anorexia, an assertion of the death drive because Sandra cannot enter the thetic phase which establishes syntax and thus a subject. Her parents find her in the hospital, too weak to do anything but read "lists and lists of books … Finally, she told us why she couldn't stop reading. She didn't have much time left. She had to read all the great works of man because soon … soon she wouldn't be human … She told us that she was being turned out of the human race. She was becoming a monkey" (Alvarez 54). Sandra's madness, stemming from her incapacity to internalize the new linguistic system, causes her to believe she is de-evolving, which can be read as a metaphor for the dissolution of the subject position to the pre-thetic phase. Her reading represents an attempt to consume language as an alternative entrance into the social censorship. However, when Sandra perceives her monkey transformation as complete, her mother finds her in her hospital bed making animal sounds. The only words that she can utter are "monkey hands" (Alvarez 55). These holophrastic gestures place Sandra firmly outside of the thetic phase; she has ruptured the social censorship and thus must remain institutionalized. In effect, she has "returned" – in a pre-evolutionary sense – to a state of jouissance not encumbered by language, but she cannot remain in this state; this return provides no resistance to the difficulty of translating psycho-linguistic identity.

In Yolanda's case, the failure of intersubjectivity results in a concerted break with language, a return to the holophrastic utterances of the semiotic chora and the dissolution of her psycho-linguistic subjectivity. She cannot fully internalize the semiotics and grammar of the new linguistic system, so she tries to reject the Symbolic altogether. The chapter entitled "Joe" describes her institutionalization, exacerbated by her attempts at forming intersubjective relationships. Narrated through flashbacks from a mental hospital, Yolanda tells the reader that "[i]n the beginning, [she and John] were in love. … He came to my door. I opened it. My eyes asked, *Would you like to come in out of the rest of the world?* He answered, *Thank you very much, just what I had on the tip of my tongue*" (Alvarez 69). This non-verbal communication places Yolanda in the semiotic chora, "at the beginning of time … [where] [a]t night as the lovers lay in bed and connected the stars into rams and crabs and twins, they heard the barks and howls of the happy mating beasts" (Alvarez 69). At first, she seems happy in this state, a state marked by a connection to the natural and animal that communicates non-linguistically. But when John reasserts the social censorship by saying "I love you," then "Yolanda was afraid. Once they got started on words, there was no telling what they could say" (Alvarez 69). John's thetic statement creates a social censorship based on syntax and an explicit subject position separate from the object *you*. Yolanda's fear signifies a fear of the failure of her subjectivity in a linguistic system where language must take the place of her loving non-linguistic space.

However, she and John experience a failure of translation that once again does not produce active resistance to the social censorship or manifest new ways of communicating. She tries to create a totally new linguistic system with John, a new

language not always already complicated by the weight of an endless chain of substitutions provided by a social censorship. As their relationship goes on, Yolanda realizes that she and John are not speaking the same language. She plays rhyming games with his name, but he refuses to play along, telling her "[n]ot everyone can be as goddam poetic as you!" (Alvarez 70). He resists her use of holophrasis and her role as the poet. She asks him to give her a new pet name; looking for something by which to identify herself, she states, "'Sky,' she tried. Then, the saying of it made it right: 'Sky, I want to be the sky'" (Alvarez 71). She makes these poetic statements, trying to find an identifier, but John calls foul, claiming that sky does not rhyme with her name. Even though I rhymes with sky and Yo rhymes with cielo, John refuses to allow her this moniker, again causing her to feel disconnected in his linguistic system. As they break up, she argues, "Words? Wasn't I the one always saying, *Don't say it. Don't say it?* I was the one who tried to keep words out of it" (Alvarez 73). She indicates to him her desire to remain outside of the Symbolic, in the semiotic chora, pre-thetic. When he tries to make up to her, Yolanda experiences abjection as a dissolution of all linguistic and intersubjective constructions, as his words were "clean, bright sounds, but they meant nothing to her. … He spoke kindly, but in a language she had never heard before" (Alvarez 76). She loses the ability to communicate in any linguistic system, occupying the space where meaning breaks down. Yolanda tries to communicate in gestures, but John refuses to forgo his linguistic system in order to communicate with her. She thinks, "He is saying *I love you*, … 'Babble,' she mimicked him. 'Babble babble babble babble.' Maybe that meant, *I love you too*, in whatever tongue he was speaking," (Alvarez 77). The complete breakdown of Yolanda's language of love also indicates the breakdown of her identity, harkening back

to her incoherent babbling in the guava grove at the beginning of the novel that indicates the failure of her hybridity.

She recognizes the dissolution of her subjectivity and the breakdown of her language. Yolanda hopes that "[m]aybe now they could start over, in silence," but when she leaves John, she writes him a note that says, "*I'm going to my folks till my head-slash-heart clear.* She revised the note: *I'm needing some space, some time, until my head-slash-heart-slash-soul*—No, no, no, she didn't want to divide herself anymore, three persons in one Yo" (Alvarez 77). These slashes illustrate her consciousness of the intersubjectivity of the multiple psycho-linguistic subjectivities warring inside her. She strives to reconcile her identity in the space of the semiotic, but instead she is further isolated and alienated from society in a mental institution. This physical isolation reflects the psychological exclusion of the abject on the borders of society, both repeating and foreshadowing, because of the backward chronology of the novel, her physical isolation in the classroom of her childhood. Instead of silence and non-Symbolic communication, here she talks non-stop; "[s]he quoted Frost; she misquoted Stevens; she paraphrased Rilke's description of love" (Alvarez 78). These poets once again align her with holophrastic poesis and symbolize the disruption of the social censorship. Nothing that she says has meaning, and she believes that she has an allergy to her own name, her aversion indicating the impossibility of Derrida's process of legitimating appellations.

Rejecting the social censorship, not as active resistance but as altogether denial, proves impossible and results in an equal and opposite rejection from the social structure. She cannot stay in this state of abjection and return to society, so she must find the social censorship through treatment and enter a proper linguistic system. Slowly, the doctor

helps her reintegrate into the Symbolic through the thetic phase, so that her first original, authentic statement during her treatment is "I love you guys" (Alvarez 80)—a fully formed sentence with subject and object, emotion and meaning, revising and redefining John's imposition of the social censorship by building intersubjectivity with her parents. When Yolanda tells her mother that she and John could not speak the same language, she has a fleeting moment of perfect unified subjectivity. Her mother embraces her and says, "'*Ay,* Yolanda.' Her mother pronounced her name in Spanish, her pure, mouth filling, full-blooded name, Yolanda. But then, it was inevitable, like gravity, like night and day, little apple-bites when God's back is turned, her name fell, bastardized, breaking into a half dozen nicknames—'*pobrecita* Yosita'—another nickname." (Alvarez 80). Alvarez's image of the little apple bites calls to mind the Fall of Man that later precipitates Benjamin's Tower of Babel. The diminutization and mother's compassion through her nickname once again returns Yolanda to the state of the child. By refusing to name her properly, her mother problematizes Yolanda's subjectivity, causing her to relapse.

Yolanda's relapse takes her full circle to her mother's favorite story. She imagines that there is something inside of her stomach, not a child, but an utterance. She feels it rise "up through her trachea—until Yo retches … she feels ticklish wings unfolding like a fan at the base of her throat. They spread her mouth open as if she were screaming a name out over a great distance. A huge, black bird springs out; it perches on her bureau, looking just like the etching of the raven in Yo's first English poetry book" (Alvarez 82). In a kind of backwards birth, reminiscent of the chronology of the novel, Yolanda brings forth a raven, which relates back to Poe and Yolanda's prophetic childhood. The bird springs from her body and floats through the window, down to the lawn, where she

imagines it attacks the doctor, ripping his chest open. This association with the poetic language of abjection causes her develop an allergy to language and makes her wish to be outside of any symbolic system.

Yolanda's treatment and subsequent release, and her attempts at building subjectivity after her institutionalization, manifest what I theorize as intersubjective abjection. All of Yolanda's attempts in adulthood at subject formation, including the incident in the guava grove that opens the novel, are formed through and against her abjection experienced in the mental hospital. Yolanda's abject self becomes yet another representation of fraught subjectivity that she must recognize through intersubjectivity. She must embrace the thetic, must create utterances with both subject and object, with socially acceptable syntax and definite signification. Julie Barak asserts that Yolanda is "too much a heteroglot being to survive in a poetic world [because poetry] denies and suppresses what she needs to embrace and express to be healthy" (174) and that "Yolanda's recovery is directly connected with her return to writing – but this time in prose. And the language of prose, of novels – heteroglot, polyphonic, multilingual – is what she needs to heal" (175). Rather than a heteroglot, I would argue that Yolanda is more of an anti-glot. Although she does begin to write a novel, her lived experience destabilizes any chance of hybridity and multilingualism. As an adult among her sisters, Yolanda, "acknowledging that she had not written much of anything in years, … announced to her family that she was not a poet anymore" (Alvarez 46). After Yolanda's treatment in the mental hospital, she denounces a possible return to the semiotic chora and remain in the thetic phase. However, even in the present narration in the novel, Yolanda does not fully achieve the thetic, evidenced by her experience in the guava

grove. Because of her immigrant status, she must constantly deal with the intersubjectivity of her natal subjectivity and her new immigrant subjectivity; therefore, the possibility of hybridity fails.

The chaotic structure of the novel's reverse chronology acts as a metaphor for the repeated attempts at returning that signify the impossibility of Yolanda's hybrid psycho-linguistic subjectivity. Yolanda's narration works backward to her moment of traumatic exile from the DR, and the opening and closing images of the novel elucidate Yolanda's struggle with intersubjectivity. In the beginning of the novel, as she leaves the guava grove after having failed to communicate effectively in either English or Spanish, Yolanda looks back and sees an advertisement "above the picnic table on a near post, [in which] the Palmolive woman's skin gleams a rich white; her head is still thrown back, her mouth still opened as if she is calling someone over a great distance" (Alvarez 23). The Palmolive poster, with its connotations of cleanliness, whiteness, and American consumerism, calls to Yolanda. The novel ends with the chapter "The Drum," which Yolanda narrates as a young girl. She tells the story of stealing a young kitten from its mother, hiding it in her American toy drum and banging on the head to cover the mewling of the distressed kitten. Full of remorse for taking the kitten away from its mother, Yolanda eventually throws the kitten out of the open window and watches it limp away. That night, and for many nights after, Yolanda dreams that the mother cat sits at the foot of her bed, haunting her for taking the kitten. In a way, Yolanda is the kitten, taken away from her motherland too soon and limping away, trying to find her way on her own. The novel ends with Yolanda coming back to the present, writing,

> Then we moved to the United States. The cat disappeared altogether. I saw snow. … I read books. You understand I am collapsing all time now so

> that it fits in what's left in the hollow of my story? I began to write, the story of Pila, the story of my grandmother. … I grew up, a curious woman, a woman of story ghosts and story devils, a woman prone to bad dreams and bad insomnia. There are still times I wake up at three o'clock in the morning and peer into the darkness. At that hour and in that loneliness, I hear her, a black furred thing lurking in the corners of my life, her magenta mouth opening, wailing over some violation that lies at the center of my art. (Alvarez 285-6)

The cat's open mouth, calling to Yolanda, mirrors the Palmolive woman, but this call comes from the Dominican Republic, calling her back to her childhood. The Palmolive woman, the cat, and Yolanda's own mouth forced open by the raven all wail over the violation that lies at the center of her art – Yolanda's inability to form a cohesive subjectivity because of her status as an immigrant. These wails are the ultimate non-expressive totality, the non-linguistic, non-syntactic.

Even though Yolanda is haunted by her abjection, Kristeva, Benjamin, and Derrida all argue that haunting is necessary in language whether through translation or through the transition from the semiotic chora and holophrasis to the thetic and syntax. The desire to return will always be there for Yolanda, but she resists the urge to give herself up to the death drive and remains in the thetic. Yolanda's novel illustrates an immigrant artist's constant struggle to form subjectivity through intersubjectivity, to accept the social censorship and remain in the thetic, no longer a poetic distortion but a denoted subject in a series of connoted objects. Perhaps Alvarez's sequel, *Yo!*, which by its title suggests an explicit, celebratory subjectivity for Yolanda, offers hope for her integration into the linguistic system and identification as a totalized whole. But *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* offers critics an opportunity to consider the psycho-linguistic subject formation of immigrants and question the narrative of hybridity, which is ultimately assimilative. Instead, Alvarez requires us to remain in the uncomfortable

pressure of subjectivity constantly in reformation. Yolanda becomes a microcosm for the intersectional experience of the American dispossessed forced to find alternative avenues for constructing subjectivity in relation to their own abjectivity caused by the social death of various dispossessions. Although Yolanda fails as a hybrid, she can stand as representative of intersubjective abjection by holding simultaneously in relation her natal psycho-linguistic self, her new psycho-linguistic self, and the precarity that these processes cause. Translating psycho-linguistic subjectivity is messy and incomplete and fraught with danger, but necessary.

Conclusion

On February 16, 2017, my hometown of Dahlonega, Georgia was taken hostage. Sometime overnight a sign featuring an image of a hooded Klansman and the words "Historic Ku Klux Klan Meeting Hall" was hung on one of the historic buildings in our town square, as well as Confederate and KKK flags. Townspeople immediately began a contentious protest, and the sheriff's office removed the sign for violating local permitting ordinances. It was revealed that the sign had been authorized by the local white businesswoman, a major real estate developer in the area, who owned the building ("KKK Controversy"). The sign was removed because it had not been permitted, so the next day one of her employees applied for a permit for a more permanent, wooden sign (later withdrawn). She posted the sign as an ultimatum against the city council and historical preservation society who, in enforcing zoning requirements, have rejected her plans to destroy two historic buildings, including the one in question, to build a modern chain hotel. According to the local news source, the KKK has never had a presence in Lumpkin County ("Our View") and certainly not in the building so designated ("Banner"). The businesswoman mobilized the divisiveness of their racist rhetoric in order to force the city council's hand to approve her development plans. This incident illustrates the ways that white supremacy aligns with economic interests to produce boundaries of possessive individualism. This property owner believed that her right to own property, and to do what she wants with that property, superseded the long history of racism and violence that the KKK represents. In pursuing her economic interests, she aligned herself with the degradation and rejection of non-white humanity; in effect, she proclaimed that her possessive individualism made others expendable.

Dispossession shapes the narratives that we tell about manifest destiny and the imperialist growth of the United States. The very same town hijacked by racist rhetoric occupies land stolen from the Cherokee tribes driven out during the Trail of Tears between 1830 and 1850. A prevailing narrative of the resiliency of "settlers," rather than "colonizers" or "immigrants," erases the violence of this act in favor of the myth of hardworking self-reliance. Just an hour away from my hometown, the metropolis of Atlanta reinvented itself after Sherman's 1864 March to the Sea into a city former Atlanta mayor William Hartsfield, after whom the world's busiest airport is named, dubbed "too busy to hate." This rhetoric of racial amity, developed during the height of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement, also covers up a history of slavery, segregation, and political marginalization in favor of a narrative of economic prosperity. Trump ran on a platform that would build a wall on the southern border in order to keep out "Mexican illegals" and would deport the current immigrant population that he suggested in his 2015 candidacy announcement comprises drug dealers, criminals, and rapists who steal Americans' jobs and do not pay taxes. He militarized an economic narrative of the dispossession of white jobs and aligned it to a racist moral argument. At the same time, Native American activists from all over the United States seek to block the destruction of sacred grounds and despoiling of the Standing Rock reservation water access by a multi-billion-dollar oil pipeline cutting across North Dakota, and protesters are met by state police and private security with pepper spray, water cannon, and security dog attacks. This current dispossession is of course only another blip in the long history of violence and theft against Native nations, but it is invested in the imperialist, capitalist narrative of fossil fuel expansion, the new manifest destiny. These seemingly disparate moments

present a timeline of the longue durée of dispossession of ethnic groups in the United States. They speak to the conjunction of land and space with legal personhood in the U.S. and the continued denial of that personhood to groups with property vulnerability. These narratives disguise, dissemble, deprive; they redefine conflict with a neo-liberal shaping of subject formation and perform an erasure of the violence of dispossession and denial of legal personhood. They are propagated as fact, truth, history, and they create archival silences almost impossible to recover.

However, dispossession also shapes the narratives that the American dispossessed tell about themselves in response to those silences. Novels offer a unique testing ground for theories of subject formation in relation to dispossession and white power because of the temporal flattening that they can achieve. These contemporary novels at once critique earlier historical periods and the state of contemporary politics and self-making. The authors build subjectivities within and against various states of propertylessness, alienation, degradation, and humiliation, and they require us to live in the ambiguities and angst of precarity. They reject tropes of integration fabricated in the bildungsroman; the American dispossessed always already experience marginalization, and thus social integration remains out of reach. The narratives discard linear narrative time through rememory, time-travel, narrative irony, and backwards chronology in order to deconstruct narratives of progress and progressive subject formation. These authors tell a different story about the United States' formation and American identity.

This project uses three main keywords: abjection, social death, and dispossession. These key terms allow me to intervene in critical race studies conversations framed through Afro-pessimism and necropolitics and bring those conversations outside of

blackness. Julia Kristeva's definition of abjection in *Powers of Horror* has a certain useful porosity. She opens possibilities to read materially, psychologically, spatially, linguistically, socio-culturally, and politically. But I have also found that, while many scholars use the term abjection, few deeply theorize it, with two notable exceptions: Darieck Scott's *Extravagant Abjection* and Karen Shimakawa's *National Abjection*. I wanted to address this gap and also deal with Kristeva's legacy of psychoanalytic whitewashing. Thinking about abjection led me to consider the political and social sources for becoming or embracing the abject, which drew me to Orlando Patterson's work on slavery and social death. For Patterson, social death is the "permanent violent domination" of the enslaved and formerly enslaved through the tripartite mechanism of natal alienation, institutional marginalization, and degradation. For me, Patterson's mechanisms dovetail nicely with Kristevan abjection, but Patterson is also deeply invested in slavery as the ur-state of social death. Scholars have indicted Patterson for ignoring slave resistance and agency, but what also struck me was that these three mechanisms, though certainly present in slavery, are not necessarily unique to slavery. I wanted to think through social death beyond slavery, to consider how other groups are interpellated as expendable. These questions brought me to dispossession. Well, honestly, James Franco's film adaptation of Cormac McCarthy's *Child of God* brought me to dispossession. I convinced a friend to see the film with me without giving her any of the gory details of the plot. Right at the beginning of the film, Lester Ballard witnesses his family homestead auctioned off to his neighbors, and this loss seems to precipitate his descent into madness, homicide, and necrophilia. As we left the theater, it occurred to me that dispossession brings together the mechanisms of social death and the states of

abjection. Property has both material and affective resonances; property is built in to the very concept of Americanness and thus shapes how people understand their identities. Dispossession has been used by colonial, imperial, and national governments for centuries to control populations. Dispossession problematizes kinship, citizenship, representation, self-awareness.

I focus on dispossession, rather than class struggle, because in many cases the dispossession is enacted on groups not recognized in class terms – like slaves or the Cherokee nation. I also use dispossession as a framework over race because, in these instances, and in others that my project examines, a rhetoric of racialization only visually and affectively marks the American dispossessed. The instances of property violence discussed in this project are perpetrated by legislation meant to establish the boundaries of white power in times when the United States needed to confront how it would define itself to the world. Therefore, these laws from the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century frame the novels, directly or tacitly, in this project. In deciding who would count as citizens, property violence offered a useful apparatus for expelling those not invested in white capitalism. Dispossession, I argue, can be the fulcrum that aligns social death beyond slavery and the many definitions of abjection.

This project does not put forward a Marxist critique of neo-liberal subject making. Nor does it encamp with either Afro-pessimism or Afro-optimism. Rather, my theory of intersubjective abjection presents what might be considered a kind of social pragmatism. Intersubjective abjection takes into account the incredible difficulty of producing subjectivity in a world in which one's personhood is always already constantly denied. Though I refuse to believe that we have passed the point of no return for collectivity and

reconciliation, I also recognize the anxieties produced by antagonistic and contingent personhood. The theory exists within the third-space between pessimism and optimism in which a pragmatic double consciousness posits a possible solution that rejects unification, assimilation, integration. Remaining in the third-space produced by social death and abjection positions the intersubjective abject to destabilize dichotomies: subject/object, propertied/propertyless, oppressor/oppressed, pessimism/optimism.

This form of resistance emerges as a necessary and critical pathway in the current political era. With the privatization of the prison-industrial complex, increased violence by the State, assaults on human rights and civil liberties, expansions of global white nationalism, and the entrenchment of racial capitalism, our current stage of neo-liberalism requires a redefinition of subjectivity produced through precarity and refusal. Taking a multi-ethnic approach to this study teases out the particularities and similarities across race and class. Although the intersubjective abject is an individual state of being, its impetus creates coalition within and among the American dispossessed. The Trump era requires that groups find ways to work together, in effect to form intersubjectivity in their activism, to rebuff an assault from all sides. Though a literary study, this project posits a heuristic for recognizing modes of resistance that fall outside of both antagonism and accommodation. It remains to be seen what new groups will be incorporated into the American dispossessed and what new methods for establishing intersubjective abjection those groups will discover.

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