Granny Midwives' Epistemic and Embodied Care[1]

Helen A. Gibson

> The brilliance of a granny midwife in terms of keeping our people alive during a system where your body is an object – that your body is cattle, that your child is someone else's property, even though you see an umbilical cord connecting you to your child, even if you have a child that looks like the person who is oppressing you, and owning you – that that granny midwife was able to restore and maintain your humanity, and the humanity of the community, and the humanity of that child, and figure out how to be the purveyor of the gate between being property and a human being, and maintaining community. And that is the responsibility of a doula.
> – *M. Carmen Lane in conversation with Dr. Alicia Bonaparte*[2]

Mai'a Williams writes in her co-edited 2016 book *Revolutionary Mothering: Love on the Front Lines* of "midwives, who had for generations saved the community."[3] Referring to generations of midwives practicing birthwork from slavery through the mid-

1 I am especially grateful to Briana Edmonds, Camalo Gaskin, and Gem Kocher for introducing me to their practices of radical birthwork, and to K. Bailey Thomas, Anwar Uhuru, Michelle Lanier, crystal am nelson, and SaraEllen Strongman for questions and feedback at the second annual *Roundtable for Black Feminist and Womanist Theory* from Nov. 4–6, 2021. Profound gratitude to Melina Morr de Pérez, Robel Afeworki Abay, Caleb Ward, Daniela Rosner, M. J. Packo, Felix Krämer, Jürgen Martschukat, and colleagues in both the Collaborative Research Centre 294 TRR "Structural Change of Property" and the North American history department at the University of Erfurt for reading various iterations of this paper and providing critique. Thank you to the students in my seminar on Black midwifery and a history of science for sharing insights in class and in term papers, and to Jasper Verlinden for introducing me to the book *Revolutionary Mothering: Love on the Front Lines*. Research for this paper was funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation) –SFB TRR 294/1-424638267.

2 Lane, M. Carmen/Bonaparte, Alicia: Decolonizing at the Root: Settler Colonialism, Granny Midwives, and the Mayhem of Intersectionality within Birthwork (In Loving Memory of Erica Garner). Panel discussion, *Born Into This* conference, Austin, TX, July 12 and 13, 2018. Video of panel discussion, https://wearedti.podia.com/decolonizing-at-the-root.

3 Williams, Mai'a: Introduction. In: Gumbs, Alexis Pauline/Martens, China/Williams, Mai'a (eds.): *Revolutionary Mothering: Love on the Front Lines*, Oakland 2016, 147–149, 147.

twentieth century, Williams elucidates, "They let birth be intimate, by being intimate with mamas. They let birth be spiritual, by calling on the spirit."[4] Midwives, as underlined by Williams' allusions to loving the Folk and the Spirit, are quintessential Womanists, steeped in understandings of spirituality and "Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* female," as Alice Walker, the matriarch of Womanist theory, wrote in 1983.[5]

This essay, like much recent Black feminist and Womanist theorization, is about traditions of care as solidarity. I contextualize the significance of enslaved midwives' *saving the community* as a disruption of racial capitalism.[6] I suggest that 'granny' or 'grand' midwives, as they are more accurately known – women, men, and nonmen – created significant gendered realities for the people whose lives they affirmed and nurtured in the arena of birth. Operating at the intersection of the metaphysical violence explicated by the past thirty years of Black feminist theory and the genocide addressed in the Womanist arena of the Reproductive Justice movement, granny midwives, I posit obviated the Marxist general strike in favor of conjuring alternative cosmologies.[7] Granny midwives refused the frame of economic rationality, and they superseded the violent logic of blackness as a fungible commodity in their explicit acknowledgement of Spirit.[8]

This paper discusses the practice of midwifery during enslavement as part of a Black radical tradition that complicates dialectical understandings of Black Marxism. As Saidiya Hartman, Jennifer Morgan, Hortense Spillers, and myriad doulas attest, the history of blackness in the colonial Americas is a history of women's re-

4 Ibid; Walker, Alice: *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose,* New York 1983, xi.

5 Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, xii.

6 See: Robinson, Cedric J.: *Black Marxism: the Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (1983), Chapel Hill 2000.

7 See: Spillers, Hortense J.: Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book. In: *Diacritics* 17(1987), 2, 65–81; Ross, Loretta J./Solinger, Rickie: *Reproductive Justice: An Introduction*, Oakland 2017; Warren, Calvin L.: *Ontological Terror: Blackness, Nihilism, and Emancipation*, Durham 2018; Warren, Black Care. In: *liquid blackness: Black Ontology and the Love of Blackness* 3(Dec. 2016), 6, 35–47, 45. Loretta J. Ross writes, "Reproductive Justice theory was developed by African American feminists in 1994 and subsequently popularized by many women of color through the leadership of the SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective. […] Said most simply, Reproductive Justice is (1) The human right to not have a child; (2) The human right to have a child; and (3) The human right to parent in safe and healthy environments," Ross: Preface. In: Gumbs, Alexis Pauline/Martens, China/Williams, Mai'a (eds.): *Revolutionary Mothering: Love on the Front Lines*, Oakland 2016, xiii-xviii, xvi.

8 See: Judy, R. A.: The Unfungible Flow of Liquid Blackness. In: *liquid blackness* 5(April 2021), 1, 28–36.; Moten, Fred: *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*, Minneapolis 2003; Crawley, Ashon T.: *Blackpentacostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility*, New York 2016.

productive lives and labors.[9] This is primarily because, as Jennifer Morgan argues, Atlantic slavery depended on the commodification of Black women's wombs. A Virginia act in 1662 made *partus sequitur ventrem*, or "offspring follows belly," the logic of human commodification under chattel slavery.[10] This logic ossified associations of gender and race via the abject – propertization. "The 1662 statute," Morgan writes, "solidified a presumption long acted on by Atlantic settler colonialists, slave traders, and slaveowners, namely, that the physiognomy of subjection was not only heritable but was so indelibly rooted in black women's bodies that it could not be dislodged."[11] What methodologies beyond a romanticized historical materialism, Saidiya Hartman asks in her essay "Venus in Two Acts," will untether contemporary historians from the abjection of ledger books and disinterested, terrorizing records of death and rape?[12]

The subject of midwifery is uniquely poised to address both epistemic and embodied care. Midwifery speaks not only to cultural practices of historical, gendered subject positions for Black women, but also to the continued relationships of Black women and non-men in the United States to medical communities at large.[13] Historian Tanya Hart writes that Black women delivered most babies in the antebellum South.[14] Yet granny midwifery in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries is a subject that has received relatively little historical attention.[15] How and

9 A doula is a contemporary name for an emotional support guide for birth. Hartman, Saidiya: The Belly of the World: A Note on Black Women's Labors. In: *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture, and Society* 18(2016), 1, 166–73. DOI: https://www.doi.org/10.1080/10999949.2016.1162596; Morgan, Jennifer L.: *Partus sequitur ventrem*: Law, Race, and Reproduction in Colonial Slavery. In: *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 22(2018), 1, 1–17. muse.jhu.edu/article/689365.; Morgan, Jennifer L: *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery*, Philadelphia 2004.

10 Morgan, "*Partus sequitur ventrem*," 4.

11 Ibid., 16.

12 Saidiya Hartman, Saidiya: Venus in Two Acts. In: *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 12(2008), 2, 1–14. DOI: https://www.doi.org/10.1215/-12-2-1.; See also: Farmer, Ashley D.: In Search of the Black Women's History Archive. In: *Modern American History* 1(2018), 2, 289–93. DOI: https://www.doi.org/10.1017/mah.2018.4.

13 Chidi, Erica/Cahill, Erica P., M.D.: Protecting Your Birth: A Guide for Black Mothers: How Racism Can Impact Your Pre- and Postnatal Care—And Advice for Speaking to Your Ob-Gyn About It. In: *New York Times*, Oct. 22, 2020; Cooper Owens, Deirdre/Fett, Sharla M.: Black Maternal and Infant Health: Historical Legacies of Slavery. *American Journal of Public Health* 109(2019), 10, 1342–1345. DOI: https://www.doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2019.305243; Bonhomme, Edna: Covid Threatens to Worsen Disparities in Maternal and Reproductive Care. In: *The Nation*, Oct. 1, 2020.

14 Hart, Tanya: *Health in the City: Race, Poverty, and the Negotiation of Women's Health in New York City, 1915–1930*, New York 2015, 203.

15 See: Morgan, Jennifer L.: *Reckoning with Slavery: Gender, Kinship, and Capitalism in the Early Black Atlantic*, Durham 2021; Morgan, *Laboring Women*; Morgan, "*Partus sequitur ventrem*";

under what circumstances did these midwives work?[16] What means of affirming Black life and confronting pain did midwives offer? This essay will provide a short introduction to the significance of Black feminist and Womanist theory – two different modes of theorization developed by Hortense Spillers and Alice Walker, respectively – for a history of midwifery before turning to a brief discussion of the significance of the Black radical tradition from a gendered perspective.

1. Black Feminist and Womanist Theory and Midwifery

Grand midwives are commonly acknowledged in contemporary birthwork settings and Reproductive Justice scholarship as having sustained entire communities. This is vital in a historical context in which people were rendered property and situated close to death. Ruth Hays writes, "Finally, and most importantly, granny midwives played an important role in linking generations of enslaved people. Their rituals, knowledge, and support were paramount to enslaved people's collective emotional and psychological survival."[17] This tradition of care is a profound act of solidarity with the spirits of the formerly enslaved in refusing settler-colonial logics. Drawing on Kristie Dotson's concept of "orienting stories" as epistemic solidarity, Lindsey Stewart writes, "'Orienting' stories are contrasted to 'originating stories,' which justify the erection of settler-colonial states by erasing their past and present violence toward oppressed peoples, producing 'colonial unknowing.'"[18]

Stewart, Lindsey: 'An Inside Thing to Live By': Refusal, Conjure, and Black Feminist Imaginaries among Granny Midwives. In: *Hypatia* (2021) 1–23. DOI: https://www.doi.org/10.1017/hyp.2021.40; Cooper Owens, Deirdre: *Medical Bondage: Race, Gender, and the Origins of American Gynecology*, Athens, 2017; Fett, Sharla M: Consciousness and Calling: African American Midwives at Work in the Antebellum South. In: Baptist, Edward E./Camp, Stephanie M. H.: *New Studies in the History of American Slavery*, Athens 2006, 65–86.; Fett, Sharla M.: *Working Cures: Healing, Health, and Power on Southern Slave Plantations*. Chapel Hill, 2002; Robinson, Sharon A: A Historical Development of Midwifery in the Black Community: 1600–1940. In: *Journal of Nurse-Midwifery* 29(1984), 4, 247–50.

16 This research question guides part of my larger Habilitation project.

17 Hays, Ruth: Birthing Freedom: Black American Midwifery and Liberation Struggles. In: Bonaparte, Alicia D./Oparah, Julia Chinyere (eds.): *Birthing Justice: Black Women, Pregnancy, and Childbirth*, New York 2016, 166–75, 169.

18 Stewart, Lindsey: 'An Inside Thing to Live By': Refusal, Conjure, and Black Feminist Imaginaries among Granny Midwives. In: *Hypatia* (2021) 1–23. DOI: https://www.doi.org/10.1017/hyp.2021.40, 2–3; Dotson, Kristie: On the way to decolonization in a settler colony: Re-introducing Black feminist identity politics. In: *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples* 14(2018), 3, 190–99. DOI: https://www.doi.org/10.1177/1177180118783301.

Stewart posits that "the figure of the midwife itself is an 'orienting story' within black feminist thought."[19] This orienting story obviates the origins story of people as property, allowing for more expansive analysis of ways of knowing in the context of care. This is not only relevant to questions of redress for slavery, but, crucially, reading granny midwives' practices as orienting stories renders obsolete the white academic practice of what Hortense Spillers has described as "black people being treated as a kind of raw material." [20] Recognizing granny midwives as orienting stories promises a repudiation of white historiography in explicit solidarity with the spirits of the formerly enslaved and their descendants.

Analyzing the intersection of these theoretical traditions within the context of birthwork and m/othering (a phrase by Alexis Pauline Gumbs), Jennifer Nash writes in *Black Feminism Reimagined: After Intersectionality*, "Black feminist theory has become newly and emphatically preoccupied with care."[21] Nash elucidates two prominent strands of contemporary Womanist and Black feminist theory: "self-care *as* Black feminism's primary agenda for survival" and "care as a practice of black life in the face of black death."[22] Midwifery allows for these two important strands of thought to be brought together in conversation.

Beyond a commitment to survival, itself a powerful negation of the historical force of Atlantic slavery, midwifery is an important historical example of Black care, a practice theorized by Calvin Warren.[23] Warren, in analyzing the theorization of Hortense Spillers and Christina Sharpe, as well as cinematic evidence of Black care such as the 1998 adaptation of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, writes, "Captivity is precisely the experience in which 'a spirit, a soul, a psyche' is violated without end, and captives found a way to endure the incessant violation." He continues, "Black care is an essential practice of attentiveness. […] These forms of expression enable us to endure the burdensome and bear what seems unbearable."[24] This conversation reverberates notably in Christina Sharpe's theorization of "wake work" in the context of proximity

19 Stewart, 'An Inside Thing to Live By,' 3.

20 Spillers, Hortense/Hartman, Saidiya/Griffin, Farah Jasmine/Eversley, Shelly/Morgan, Jennifer L.: 'Whatcha Gonna Do?': Revisiting 'Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book': A Conversation with Hortense Spillers, Saidiya Hartman, Farah Jasmine Griffin, Shelly Eversley, & Jennifer L. Morgan. *Women's Studies Quarterly* 35(2007), 1/2, 299–309, 300.

21 Nash, Jennifer C.: *Black Feminism Reimagined: After Intersectionality*, Durham 2019, 78; Gumbs, Alexis Pauline: "m/other ourselves: a Black queer feminist genealogy for radical mothering,". In: Gumbs, Alexis Pauline/Martens, China/Williams, Mai'a (eds.): *Revolutionary Mothering: Love on the Front Lines*, Oakland 2016, 19–31, 22.

22 Nash, *Black Feminism Reimagined*, 78.

23 Warren, "Black Care," 46.

24 Ibid., 46.

to death.[25] These understandings of care bring together related practices of survival and endurance that analysis of midwifery is uniquely poised to elucidate.

Calvin Warren is writing within Black feminist traditions, such as that of Hortense Spillers, which distinguish between the social "body" not available to enslaved women and the "flesh" that they were arguably rendered.[26] Warren is also writing on the margins of work on Black mysticism by Fred Moten, including Moten's elucidation of moments of transcendence.[27] While philosophers writing in the Black feminist tradition of Hortense Spillers have been largely reluctant to fully embrace analysis of mysticism, this analytical perspective is, arguably, becoming more pronounced.[28]

This tradition of Black feminist thought is intimately related to, but rarely dovetails with, the explicitly spiritually-oriented and emphatically embodied Womanist theorization within the Reproductive Justice movement. Bringing together these profoundly important perspectives on Black care as an affect of attentiveness that nourishes 'a spirit, a soul, a psyche' in the face of indefinite violation and 'survival as

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25 "Living in the wake means living the history and present of terror, from slavery to the present, as the ground of our everyday Black existence; living the historically and geographically dis/continuous but always present and endlessly reinvigorated brutality in, and on, our bodies while even as that terror is visited on our bodies the realities of that terror are erased. Put another way, living in the wake means living in and with terror in that in much of what passes for public discourse about terror we, Black people, become the carriers of terror, terror's embodiment, and not the primary objects of terror's multiple enactments; the ground of terror's possibility globally," Sharpe, Christina: *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, Durham 2016, 15.

26 Spillers, Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe.

27 Warren, Calvin L.: Black Mysticism: Fred Moten's Phenomenology of (Black) Spirit. In: *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik* 65(2017), 2, 219–229. DOI: https://www.doi.org/10.1515/zaa-2017-0022; Moten, Fred: *Black and Blur: consent not to be a single being*, Durham 2017; Moten, Fred: Blackness and Nothingness (Mysticism in the Flesh) In: *South Atlantic Quarterly* 112(2013), 4, 737–780. DOI: https://www.doi.org/10.1215/00382876-2345261; Moten, Fred: The Case of Blackness. In: *Criticism* 50(2008), 2, 177–218; Moten, *In the Break*.

28 See: Uhuru, Anwar: Textual Mysticism: Reading the Sublime in Philosophical Mysticism. In: *Philosophy and the Black Experience* 19(2020), 2, 3–5. PhilArchive copy v1: https://philarchive.org/archive/UHUTMRv1; Crawley, *Blackpentacostal Breath*. Warren, explicitly engaging Ashon Crawley's argumentation in *Blackpentacostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility*, has written, for example, that "for black thinking, spiritual breath and thinking are 'identical'"; Warren, Calvin L.: *Ontological Terror: Blackness, Nihilism, and Emancipation*, Durham 2018, 171. In her most recent book, *Unpayable Debt*, Denise Ferreira da Silva suggests that "the shattering of transparency" disrupts logics of racialized appropriation; Ferreira da Silva, Denise: *Unpayable Debt*, London 2022, 143. This is reminiscent of Tiffany Lethabo King's reference in *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies*, Durham 2019. to Édouard Glissant's "'demand'—for 'the right to opacity," 7; Glissant, Édouard: *Poetics of Relation*, translated by Betsy Wing, Ann Arbor: 1997, 189.

a form of self-love' in the context of ongoing genocide, midwifery as a Black feminist practice of care and a Womanist practice of "divinely inspired knowledge" is an important tradition to investigate.[29]

Writing within the Womanist framework of Reproductive Justice, Loretta Ross analyzes what Warren refers to as ontological terror as genocide. She ends her 2014 introduction to *Revolutionary Mothering* by writing, "*Our mere existence is a subversive act*." She continues, "Rethinking mothering from a radical point of view leads to considering survival as a form of self-love, and as a service and gift to others whose lives would be incalculably diminished without us."[30] Ross's analysis entails an understanding of care as *more than* love of self and love of community. In her most recent book, *Birthing Black Mothers*, Jennifer Nash juxtaposes the weight of the violence identified by Warren with ways in which contemporary Black mothers defy relegation to the symbolic realm.[31] This is both the realm against which Hortense Spillers writes in her essay "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book" and the realm to which Black (female) subjects are relegated in nihilistic and pessimistic analytical traditions. Nash's distinction is relevant to the contemporary conflux of Black feminist and Womanist theory, and to the ways in which granny midwives' epistemic and embodied care embraces a means of relationality that, in the words of R. A. Judy, "simply has nothing to do with ontology."[32]

Alexis Pauline Gumbs writes in an essay titled "m/other ourselves: a Black queer feminist genealogy for radical mothering," "What if mothering is about the how of it?" Gumbs distinguishes between "motherHOOD" as a white, cis-gendered, heteropatriarchal construct analyzed by Hortense Spillers, and "MotherING" as

> another matter, a possible action, the name for that nurturing work, that survival dance, worked by enslaved women who were forced to breastfeed the children *of* the status mothers while having no control over whether their birth or chosen children were sold away.[33]

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29 Brewer, Rose M: Black Feminism and Womanism. In: Naples, Nancy A.: *Companion to Feminist Studies*, Hoboken 2020, 91–104, 98.

30 Ross, Preface. In: *Revolutionary Mothering*, xviii.

31 Nash, Jennifer C: *Birthing Black Mothers*, Durham 2021, 6. Nash foregrounds the significance of birthwork, writing that "doulas have made a case for their own urgency, for their necessity in creating a birthing space marked by (counter)ethics of togetherness, intimacy, and deep patience with the temporality and spiritual components of birth," Nash, *Birthing Black Mothers*, 83.

32 Judy, R. A: *Sentient Flesh: Thinking in Disorder, Poiēsis in Black*, Durham 2020, xvi.

33 Gumbs, "m/other ourselves" *Revolutionary Mothering*, eds. Gumbs, Martens, and Williams, 22.

Like Loretta Ross and Jennifer Nash, Alexis Pauline Gumbs emphasizes the how of conjuring realities beyond racial capitalism. For Gumbs, this conjuring includes "motherful" futures such as those brought about by the queer, collectivist work of the Sisterhood of Black Single Mothers in the 1970s and 1980s in Brooklyn, New York.[34] This is in keeping with Spillers' emphasis in "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe" on "gaining the *insurgent* ground as a female subject" and rewriting a "radically different text for a female empowerment."[35]

2. Gendering the Black Radical Tradition

Granny midwives invoke a radical fusion of what Calvin Warren terms "spiritual breath and thinking" that disrupts both teleology and eschatology.[36] Taking up Spillers' line of inquiry, Saidiya Hartman writes in her 2016 essay, "The Belly of the World: A Note on Black Women's Labors,"

> Certainly we know that enslaved women fled the plantation, albeit not in as great numbers as men; poisoned slaveholders; plotted resistance; dreamed of destroying the master and his house; utilized abortifacients rather than reproduce slaves; practiced infanticide rather than sentence their children to social death, the auction block, and the master's bed; exercised autonomy in suicidal acts; gave birth to children as testament to an abiding knowledge of freedom contrary to every empirical index of the plantation; and yearned for radically different ways of being in the world. So where exactly does the sex drudge, recalcitrant domestic, broken mother, or sullen wet-nurse fit into the scheme of the general strike?[37]

Hartman's emphasis on "giving birth to children as testament to an abiding knowledge of freedom contrary to every empirical index of the plantation" is an impor-

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34 Ibid., 30.

35 Spillers, Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe, 80.

36 Warren, *Ontological Terror*, 172; Crawley, *Blackpentacostal Breath*. Explicit reference to granny midwives' historical and contemporary potency was made in in the discussion following a reading from Denise Ferreira da Silva's latest book, *Unpayable Debt*; Denise Ferreira da Silva in conversation with Edna Bonhomme, "Future Perfect: Encounterings in Three Acts," Savvy Contemporary, Berlin, June 25, 2022. Ferreira da Silva writes, further, that "[…] a figuring of the political is needed that does not rewrite the text as relations in the form of a dialectic, which is but the unfolding of necessity—teleological (Hegel) and eschatological (Marx)—in/as time," *Unpayable Debt*, 144.

37 Hartman, Saidiya: The Belly of the World: A Note on Black Women's Labors. In: *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture, and Society* 18(2016), 1, 166–73. DOI: https://www.doi.org/10.1080/10999949.2016.1162596, 167.

tant reference to the cosmological significance of midwifery. Her questioning of the general strike, the Marxist means of realization of a new world which is consistently construed in the work of both W. E. B. Du Bois and Cedric Robinson as liberatory, is a crucial intervention into an important arena of Black imagining.[38] Hartman's analysis aligns with theorization that refuses or disrupts recognition of political ontology.[39]

Alys Weinbaum takes up Hartman's analysis in her work on *The Afterlife of Reproductive Slavery*, writing of "a *feminist* black Marxism focused on sex and reproduction."[40] Weinbaum elucidates,

> When we view slavery from the vantage of enslaved women, we learn that the work performed by the black worker was not only agricultural and domestic but also sexual and reproductive, and that the general strike against the conditional of labor took an array of forms – not only those unanticipated by Marx or Engels but also those that were never fully acknowledged by Du Bois or the scholars of the black radical tradition that have influentially reclaimed Du Bois's work in constructing a genealogy of black Marxism.[41]

Weinbaum's astute analysis of a dynamic theorized elsewhere by Saidiya Hartman and Jennifer Morgan, among other historians, is distinctive in its focus on surrogacy. Yet while analysis of surrogacy draws attention to particular forms of expropriation in reproductive labor, Weinbaum does not center the tradition of granny midwifery. She critiques W. E. B. Du Bois's and Cedric Robinson's accounts of the Black radical tradition receiving much of their theoretical thrust from their framing within the dramatic upheavals of the U.S. Civil War and the Haitian Revolution, respectively.

Black Marxism in the tradition of Du Bois and Robinson uses analysis of historical revolution to make visible the political coherency of Black men as recognizably sovereign subjects. Jennifer Nash, writing in a Womanist tradition, critiques this

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38 See: Du Bois, W. E. B.: *Black Reconstruction in America: An Essay Toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860–1880*, New York 1935; Robinson, *Black Marxism*.

39 Embracing the work of Audra Simpson on "feeling citizenships," Lindsey Stewart offers an alternative epistemological frame, writing: "For some Indigenous peoples of North America, such political recognition is 'politically untenable' and 'normatively should be refused' (Simpson 2014, 22), for the terms of that recognition involve accepting the legitimacy of a state that has sought to destroy their people (or assenting to what Dotson calls 'originating stories')," Stewart, "An Inside Thing to Live by," 4; Simpson, Audra: *Mohawk Interrupts: Political Life across the Borders of Settler States*, Durham 2014.

40 Weinbaum, Alys: *The Afterlife of Reproductive Slavery: Biocapitalism and Black Feminism's Philosophy of History*, Durham 2019, 62.

41 Ibid., 79.

emphasis on the "temporality of crisis" and an "insistence on [Black women's] bodies as out of place and out of time."[42] This critique resonates with Saidiya Hartman's conclusion in her essay "The Belly of the World" that "The forms of care, intimacy, and sustenance exploited by racial capitalism, most importantly, are not reducible to or exhausted by it."[43] Hartman ends her essay with an emphasis on both fugitivity and survival, writing, "This care, which is coerced and freely given, is the black heart of our social poesis, of making and relation."[44]

Nineteenth-century granny midwives have both a direct legacy and a contemporary corollary in the 'radical doula,' an emotional support guide for primarily Black and brown birthing people who understands their work as profoundly cosmological.[45] Using their divinely-inspired knowledge of birthwork for the process of making and relation, granny midwives have always birthed worlds 'committed to the survival and wholeness of entire people.' In recognizing Spirit, granny midwives have always planted the seeds of love of self and of community.[46]

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42 Nash, *Birthing Black Mothers*, 16.

43 Hartman, "The Belly of the World," 171.

44 Ibid.

45 Emma Morgan-Bennett writes in her thesis of 2020 that "Radical Doula work […] imagines (and manifests) new worlds beyond the framework of white supremacy"; Emma Morgan-Bennett, "Revolutionary Mamas: Radical Doulas and the Black Maternal Mortality Crisis," (B.A. thesis, Swarthmore, 2020); Stewart, "An Inside Thing," 20; Toni Morrison, "Rootedness: The ancestor as foundation," in *Black Women Writers (1950–1980): A Critical Evaluation*, ed. Mari Evans (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 339–45; Dána-Ain Davis, *Reproductive Injustice: Racism, Pregnancy, and Premature Birth* (New York: New York University Press, 2019). Obstetricians and nurses, in addition to radical doulas, have largely replaced midwives in historically Black communities.

46 This may be nonduality, or what Thích Nhất Hạnh calls "interbeing"; bell hooks and Thích Nhất Hạnh, "Building a Community of Love: bell hooks and Thich Nhat Hanh," *Lion's Roar: Buddhist Wisdom for Our Time*, March 24, 2017.

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