1. Phenomenology of Power: Black Feminism and Adjacent Theories

My work, positioned at the intersection of sociological and literary productions, engages with texts spanning the Black commons of Africa, North America, and the European diaspora. To analyze these texts, I employ a multidisciplinary and transatlantic archive of theories for close reading. While a substantial number of theories used in my work are developed by Black American writers, with a reflection on their own anti-imperialist and anti-colonial struggles, the need for a progressive Black liberational ideology is anchored on its commitment to global Black solidarity, given the specific nature of social problems afflicting people of African descent, and our historical legacy with Western domination through slavery, colonialism, and neocolonialism. My methodology transcends the European, North American diaspora and African continent, and my monograph, analyzing Black female characters' lived reality is fueled by dialogue with the archive of Black feminist scholars and varied white and non-Black scholars that speak to the issues of power and identity, which can be used to deconstruct Black women's subjectivities as well as create pathways to Black women flourishing. This personal interest in Black women flourishing is reflected in one of my subsections on psychoanalytical scholarship that speaks to issues of subjectivity and subjection. Reflection on the internalized intricacies of power and domination helps me to engage with the subjective process of Black women's becoming that does not rest solely on the outer appearance of power and domination. In addition, because my theories are strongly interwoven and greatly influence one another, I examine their main articulations in subsections and at their points of intersection.

Many of the past explorations by feminist and Black liberational movements have left Black women out of both women-centered perspectives and Black-centered struggles. Although this exclusion has been redressed over the years and continues to be addressed by Black women intellectuals, "the

years of exclusion of Black women has meant that the concepts, perspectives, methods, and pedagogies of women's history and women's studies have been developed without consideration of the experiences of Black women" (Brown 2004, 47). This mutual exclusion of Black women's experiences is predicated on the assumption that women's struggle and race struggle is separable, so even though Black women's experiences may include these two struggles, they "insist upon delimiting each" (47). The necessity to capture these inseparable and convergent issues has led many Black women on the continent and in the African diaspora to seek other terminologies, creating newer terms like Womanism, African feminism, Stiwanism, Afro feminism, Postcolonial feminism, Black feminism, and Intersectional feminism. These newer terminologies seek to incorporate the multidisciplinary analysis of Black women's lives and struggles (racial, cultural, sexual, national, economic, political etc.) into their feminist consciousness with the understanding that disconnection from both feminist and pro-Black movement is not the solution, rather, a reconstruction that recognizes "the interconnection between race and sex" even if they have to "battle their white sisters and their Black brothers to achieve it" (48). Despite the historical erasure of Black women from public consideration, Black women have continuously maintained critical spaces of intersectional analysis and contributed to mainstream feminist thinking. Black American feminist theorists like Patricia Hill Collins, Audre Lorde, bell hooks, Barbara Smith, Toni Morrison, and Alice Walker have explored Black women issues towards self-determination and social problems in ways that are very intersectional. In her groundbreaking work on Black sexual politics, Patricia Hill Collins persuasively argues that for the wholeness of the Black race, the categories of race, gender, class, gender, and sexuality must always be treated as "mutually constructing systems of power" (2004, 11) rather than "competing frameworks for developing a progressive Black sexual politics" (10). One must not be ranked more important or valid than another, as that will only lead to crippling the "social justice core of a progressive Black sexual politics" (10).

Although in the Black diaspora "Black American culture looms large and has a tendency to crowd out and misunderstand other histories and understandings of Blackness and resistance" (Emejulu & Sobande 2019, 4), my predetermination to theorize Black feminism across these geographical spaces is predicated on my hypothesis that while there is a connection between North America's and Europe's anti-colonial and anti-imperialist histories and struggles, the Black experience and liberational struggles should not be universalized. Most importantly, Black feminism as a theory, which interrogates power

structures and "valorizes the knowledge production and lived experiences of different Black women" (1), must also endeavor to theorize the lived experiences of Black women across different contexts, reflecting on the similarities of experiences across linguistic, cultural, and national borders, as well as the nuanced differences amongst the various local contexts (8–9). This hypothesis is reflected in my selection of novels that I use to interrogate the hegemonic constructions of racialized and gendered social order vis-a-vis Black women's layers of Otherness.

For this reason, I interchange often between the terms Black and African in reference to women of African descent. I use both terms to refer to women of African heritage, recognizing the shared history of transatlantic slavery, the exploitation and dispossession of Africa's resources and African women's sexual and reproductive freedom, and the ongoing systemic experience of anti-Blackness that connects all African people. This subordination of African people and our relegation to the bottom of the social structure has culminated in substantial scholarly research into the process of liberation from global systems of domination. African feminism on the continent according to Filomena Chioma Steady is not exempted from this scholarly endeavor. According to Steady, African feminism is a humanistic feminism, which is a "product of polarizations and conflicts that represents some of the worst and chronic forms of human suffering" (1987, 4). Hence, I draw a connection between the descendants of African women in the African diaspora and women on the continent and use the racialized term 'Black' to reflect the global socio-political categorization of African descendants on and outside the continent.

My introduction unfolds in four major parts. First, I discuss Black feminism and intersectionality as they expand and contour each other. Then I delve into a thorough examination of Black feminist theories, focusing on how they center the lived experiences of Black women, who navigate a reality often characterized by exploitation, disposability, and dispossession across the globe. My second sub-section as I spotlighted above focuses on how Black women become Black female subjects to be imposed upon by racialized-gendered power. My third sub-section explores the contemporary concept of misogynoir as coined and expanded upon by two Black feminist scholars. In conclusion, I undertake an in-depth inquiry into the femicide of Black women, particularly spotlighting how racialized sexism plays a significant role in these tragic occurrences.

1.1 Bodies that do not matter[1]

The concept of intersectionality and Black feminist theories are strongly interwoven because of their approaches to feminist thoughts and social justice movements. Intersectionality is an analytic tool that is rooted in Black feminist criticism and critical race theory. Kimberlé Crenshaw, a civil rights activist and legal scholar, first introduced it in 1989. In her paper "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics", Crenshaw uses intersectionality as an analytic tool to address Black women's theoretical erasure within traditional feminist and Black liberational theory and politics as well as their marginalization via legal and political systems. She engages this analytic tool with the objective that centering Black women's experiences within the single-axis frameworks of both resistance movements and legal systems will reveal how their theoretical frameworks make use of prototypical representatives to define the contours of sex and race discrimination, consequently excluding Black women from structural remediation and institutional transformation. To quote Crenshaw: "In other words, in race discrimination cases, discrimination tends to be viewed in terms of sex- or class-privileged Blacks; in sex discrimination cases, the focus is on race- and class-privileged women" (1989, 140). To capture the intersectional experience of Black women, using various legal examples, Crenshaw argues that "the entire framework that has been used as a basis for translating "women's experience' or "the Black experience" into concrete policy demands must be rethought and recast" (140). Although race is still regarded "by many as the primary oppositional force in Black lives" (162) around which activism converges, Crenshaw proposes that a holistic investigation of the problems of the Black community "will reveal that gender subordination does contribute significantly to the destitute conditions of so many African Americans" (162), and also that the rationalization of racial harmony most often relegates Black women's concerns to the "periphery in public policy discussions about the presumed needs of the Black community" (163). Crenshaw submits that the only way to include every disadvantaged group in remedial policies is by persistently centering the needs and problems of the most oppressed (167).

1 This is an obvious nod to Judith Butler's *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (1993).

Intersectionality has generated considerable amount of controversy and contestation of its originality because of its popularity and proliferation across and outside the academic space. Devon Carbado in his 2013 essay "Colorblind intersectionality" reinvigorates the theory by first addressing some standard criticisms of the theory and then moving it forward to new sites and concerns. His desire to reinvigorate intersectionality is also based on Edward Said's standpoint that trans-demographic application of theories should be embraced because they "can become more insurrectionary and capacious as they travel" (Said 2000 as qtd in Carbado 812). Contrary to one of the criticisms that intersectionality is only or largely about Black women and can only be applied to the mapped terrain of race and gender, Carbado contends that intersectionality does not "necessarily and inherently privilege any social category" (812). What intersectionality does is specify the distinctive forms of oppression experienced by those with intersecting subordinate identities (814). That Black women and race and gender feature prominently is because of "the particular juridical and political sites in which Crenshaw sought to intervene" (812), by illustrating "the constitutive and ideologically contingent role law plays in creating legible and illegible juridical subjects and identities" (815). Furthermore, Carbado argues that intersectionality does not map fixed hierarchies onto particular identities, but instead highlights how "both power and social categories are contextually constituted" (813–814).

Lending a note of credibility to his claims, Carbado employs intersectionality to engage "men, masculinity, whiteness, and sexual orientation, social categories that have been said to be beyond intersectionality's theoretical reach and normative concern" (Carbado 817). By flipping the discursive terrain of intersectionality, he introduces two concepts – "colorblind intersectionality and gender-blind intersectionality" (817) to illustrate how "formal equality frameworks in law and civil right advocacy entrench normative gender identities, consequently producing racialized gender identities (817). He explains both concepts as instances in which whiteness and white male heterosexuality, which helps to produce other cognizable social categories, is represented as an invisible "intersectional subject position" (817). Carbado's representational currency of white male heterosexuality with respect to gender-blind intersectionality is quite perceptive. He expounds that, although white male heterosexuality is "a triply blind intersectionality of which gender-blind intersectionality is but a part" (818), these mutual axes of differentiation construct "a high-status intersectionality whose conduct is already normative" (818) because of the intersectional identities behind such conducts. He concludes

by affirming that gender-blind intersectionality is not exclusive to white heterosexual men. Black heterosexual men also benefit from this phenomenon, though not in the same substantial way: "Rarely do we frame Black heterosexual men in intersectional terms. This gender-blind intersectionality is an effect of and contributes to the representational potential heterosexual Black men have to stand in for the "race" in antiracist organizing and theorizing" (818).

According to Patricia Hill Collins, "the convergence of race, class and gender oppression characteristic of US slavery" shaped African American women's intra and inter social relationships and created the "political context" for their intellectual work (2000, 6). Collins in her analysis of the US context dissects African American women's oppression into three interdependent dimensions; first is the economic dimension via exploitation of their labor, second is the political dimension by means of denying them the rights and privileges accorded to white male citizens, and third is the ideological dimension, by projecting and proliferating racist and sexist stereotypes about African American women (6–7). These prevailing contradictions in the reality of Black women's treatment, within the contours of American multiculturalism, despite the "democratic promises of individual freedom, equality under the law, and social justice" promised to all American citizens would make a huge component of US. Black feminist thought (7). Collins maintains that both "US and European women's studies" (7) and "African American social and political thought" (9), which were also constituted primarily to challenge hegemonic white male scholarship, ironically have also employed similar yet different ways to oppress Black women's ideas. These tactics of oppression are intentional omission, commodification, and tokenization (symbolism without transformation) in the white feminist arena, and inclusion through subordinate roles to further Black men's rights, gender discrimination, in addition to the Anglo-European biblical doctrine of absolute female submission in Black intellectuals' organizations. This historical oppression of Black women, Collins argues, becomes visible upon closer examination of the theories propounded as universally applicable to both women and Black people as a group (8). To this end, Black feminist thought is engaged with scrutinizing, challenging, and deconstructing mainstream scholarship, theories, epistemologies, and standards of legitimacy of intellectual discourse, whilst also discovering, reclaiming, re-interpreting, and analyzing Black women's subjugated works through new theoretical frameworks (16–18).

Because Black feminist thought concerns itself with the lived experiences of Black women, developing Black feminist thought requires delineating the epistemological framework that can be used to delimit Black feminist thought from other social critical theory. Who and what should be characterized as Black feminist becomes pertinent to its legitimacy. For Collins, using "standard epistemological criteria" (18) to develop Black feminist scholarship will produce another form of subjugation, because Black women are "neither all academics nor found primarily in the Black middle class" academia (17). In addition, "traditional epistemological assumptions concerning how we arrive at truth" (17) must be disassembled for full Black empowerment. The criteria to defining social critical theory as Black and feminist, Collins concludes is an engagement with "self-conscious struggle on behalf of Black women" as envisioned within Black feminism, regardless of the "actual social location where that work occurs" (18). Nevertheless, the centrality of Black women intellectuals to Black feminist thought "does not mean that others cannot participate" (39), or that it must concern itself with only the analysis of one's own experiences (41). Instead, Black feminism advocates that coalition scholarship should be pursued via ethical, principled dialogues that explore "the parallels between Black women's experiences and those of other groups" (42) with the intent to "further social justice projects" (41) and "possibilities for new versions of truth" (42). Nevertheless, Collins insists that the prefix "Black" is quite significant to the whole appellation. This is because feminism is commonly regarded to operate exclusively within white American boundaries and against Black and American identities. Due to this hasty perception, Black women "routinely choose race and let the lesser question of gender go" when asked to choose (Collins 1996, 13). To this end, the adjective 'Black' "challenges the assumed Whiteness of feminism and disrupts the false universal of this term for both white and Black women", while also providing relief and safety for Black women to conceptualize their own paradoxical reality (13).

In Europe, the term Black feminism is less commonly used. In their introduction to a collection of essays on Black feminist knowledge production in Europe, Akwugo Emejulu and Francesca Sobande argue that Afrofeminism is more frequently and preferentially used in place of Black feminism (2019, 5). While there are many similarities between Black feminism and Afrofeminism, they argue that Afrofeminism is conceived on the "distinct European racialized social order" and unpacks the "existing experiences and histories of European Black feminists resisting racist and sexist domination" (5). Nicole Grégoire and Modi Ntambwe contend that in Belgium, Afrofeminism is quite

young, and was created out of the need to "counter male patriarchy in the colonization movement and to voice their own postcolonial critique" (2019, 68). They maintain that prior to Afrofeminism, there were several movements dedicated to the African diaspora that focused on "stimulating immigrant's participation in the Belgian civil society" (67). These emancipatory organizations were usually non-gendered and occasionally initiated and led by migrant women of African descent, confirming that activism led by African women is not a new concept (66). While the first generation of African organizations adopted an accommodating-integrationist approach with the host society, the young Afro movements, although intergenerationally and intersectionally linked to older African organizations, employed "more subversive forms of activism" (68), which involved talking back to the system and asserting the "permanence of the Black presence in Europe" (68). For this younger generation, often children of immigrants, advocacy for the community was focused on "Black or Pan-African solidarity in Belgium, Europe, and the rest of the world, rather than on 'homeland' – related activities" like their parents' generation pursued (68). Although there was an obvious transformation in the approach, the movements were mostly "male led" (68) and catered to racial politics. This created the need for Afro women in Belgium to branch out and create new political identifications tailored to "address their own oppression and emancipation from an intersectional perspective" (69). These Afro feminist collectives are mobilized to actively participate and provide support to Afro women, so they insist on grounding analysis of "non-mixed spaces where Afro descendant women share their experience and strategies about their racialized and gendered conditions" (69). These layers of oppression have subsequently expanded the vocabulary of the discourse, and new interpretive frameworks, theories, and concepts, such as misogynoir, whitemensplaining, whitewomensplaining, negrophobia, and many more developed in order to capture Afro women's daily lived experience of gendered racism (70).

To address the ever-growing international legacy of feminist matters, Ien Ang argues that feminism must always leave room for "ambivalence and ambiguity" (2003, 191) rather than adopt a politics of inclusion amidst a united global sisterhood. Differences produced by the intersections of race, class, ethnicity, nationality, and sexuality, among others, prompt a difference in social positioning. It should not be the intention of feminists to resolve these differences between women, as that would imply that differences must comply with feminism's frame of essentialism, thereby reducing the social relations into an asymmetry between two categories (man and woman). Rather, the prolifera-

tion of difference should aim at dismantling hegemonic categories situated along the axis of "white-dominated, Western, capitalist modernity", which has subsumed other political, economic, social, and ideological standards and narratives as a result of a global historical development throughout the last 500 years (197). Ang points out that the chasm between Black and white foundational feminist knowledge and advocacy is a consequence of the differences between their realities and experiences. Women who fall into the 'othered' category all share a common "fundamental sense of permanent dislocation" (197) in relation to white hegemony and are left with the option to either assimilate or be excluded. This is, it is important to note, what white feminists need to be aware of when dealing with difference.

In mapping feminist historiography in the Global South, postcolonial feminist, Chandra Talpade Mohanty argues that the scholarly engagement with feminist issues is very limited, even though there has been a large body of scholarship on women in developing countries (2008, 195). This is not because 'third world' women do not contribute to feminist discourse, but because our contributions, like our multilayered oppression, intersect with a number of progressive discourses (195). Mohanty maintains that addressing and constructing the history of 'third world' women's feminisms entails exploring the links among intersecting progressive discourses and oppositional struggles against racism, sexism, colonialism, slavery, imperialism, neocolonialism, capitalism, citizenship, nationalism, oppressive cultural memory, and many more, which proves that third world feminism is political rather than biological or cultural (196). One can argue that this is due to African women's grappling with multitudinous simplistic narratives of us that imposes rather than negotiates with us. We are either depicted as happy and content with our subordinated status in the narratives of African male writers (Peterson 1995, 253), or situated within the boundaries of Western feminist narratives (Mohanty).

In the essay "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses", Mohanty likewise examines the production and articulation of third world women in some recent Western feminist writings. In her analysis, she focuses on three main analytical strategies of Western feminist productions: (1) the location of the category of 'woman' within the context of analysis accompanied by an encompassing universal analysis of this category; (2) the methodology provided for their argument of universality and cross-cultural validity; and (3) the political presupposition underlying their methodology and analytical strategies (2003, 52–53). Within these modes of analysis, the image of the

third world woman "undergoes double oppression of being third world and woman in contrast to the self-representation of Western women as the norm and modern" (53). Within the context of hegemonic power and hierarchical relations, an authorizing signature of "privilege and ethnocentric universality" (51) is imposed on the third world woman by Western feminist writings. This is accomplished without an adequate "self-consciousness about the effect of Western scholarship on the third world in the context of a world system dominated by the West" (51). However, for third world women, this dominant representation signifies to us a replication of imperialism.

My monograph hence argues that in order for coalition politics across cultural and racial boundaries to be effectual, it is important to consider not only the knowledge that is represented, but also the position from which that representation is engaged with and subsequently produced. Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí in her critical dissection of the colonial institution vis-a-vis feminist ideologies of women's oppression argues that the concept of female inferiority was something foreign, successfully imported by the colonial power, before which African women participated fully within their local contexts. 'Anafemales' like the 'Anamales' in the Yoruba society, one of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria, had multiple identities which were not based on biology, the very idea by which females were categorized and reduced within Western gender ideology (2006, 257). Colonial developmental policies founded on the ideological superiority of men were directed primarily at African men, stripping African women completely of their localized identities and social status and investing in African males more power and authority with new meanings. While only two categories existed within Western society (man and woman), there was a hierarchy of four categories in colonized contexts (European men, European women, African men, and African women). Although African men were excluded from the higher echelons of power, they were recognized and represented in society at the lower levels of government and marginally at elite levels, while African women were completely erased from all colonial structures, suffering double colonization. The manifestations of the double oppression for African women we have today, according to Oyěwùmí, are outcomes of the "combination of race and gender factors because European women did not occupy the same position in the colonial order as African women" (257). Similarly, Ifi Amadiume in *Male Daughters, Female Husbands* takes offence to the sovereignty of western feminism and "the interpretation and use of data on African women in the West" (1987, 1). Using an ethnographic methodology to examine the social and gender system of an Igbo village town, Nnobi, Amadiume argues that Igbo gen-

der construction was flexible prior to colonialism and "was separate from biological sex" (15). Igbo women actively participated in both public and private spheres. They were depicted in origin narratives as empowered and agential beings, had access to lands and agricultural power, amassed wealth, possessed political voice and currency, and occupied roles such as female husbands, reflecting more complex gender and social system. Both Oyěwùmí and Amadiume's polemics cohere with Mohanty's argument that it is not color or sex that constructs the ground for these struggles, rather the way we think about them, which makes 'Third world' feminist struggles "political rather than biological or cultural bases for alliance" (2008, 196).

Because of the colonial destabilization of most of African societies, there has been a critical research problem due to the absence of inexhaustible pre-colonial data. In addition, Indigenous African cultures, values, and activities were observed and interpreted through a colonial patriarchal standard. The pattern of analysis previous historians followed, according to Rosalyn Terbog-Penn, was to erase the female presence and perspective when analyzing the data collected from African and African diasporic history (1987, 43). For most of the studies carried out on the gender fabric of the African societies, Terbog-Penn argues that the majority of the data were often extrapolated from post-colonial archives, engendering the dangerous assumption that "Black women have always had a history of being victimized, like the stereotyped slave woman, or of being victimized like the stereotyped Black matriarch" (44). This way of historicizing Black women's place in the African society, according to Terbog-Penn, has fostered narrow ways of (de)constructing Black women's experiences, to center them either as passive citizens who need to be saved by the West, or as abusive matriarchs (44). This makes the interdisciplinary methods and cross-cultural perspectives that is being embraced in the emerging field of African diaspora for the reconstruction of Black women's history, an exciting endeavor (44).

bell hooks[2] is one of such theorists who committed herself to reconstructing Black women's past and examine Black women's lives. For bell hooks, the oppression of Black women is a combination of numerous socio-cultural interactions between traditional African societies and colonial empires. In her inquiry into the nature of domination, she contrives the expression 'imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy' to describe the interlocking power

2 bell hooks's name is deliberately written in lowercase in accordance with the author's style of writing her own name.

structure undergirding the social order. In her conversation with George Yancy, hooks expounds on the significance of the phrase for contemporary feminist movement. Instead of separately stressing any one of these systems of subjugation, hooks explains that the phrase posits a "global context, of the context of class, of empire, of capitalism, of racism and of patriarchy. Those things are all linked – an interlocking system (2015, n.p). Over the years, she has persistently argued that an accurate picture of Black women's status cannot be formed from focusing on either racial hierarchies or women's roles under the patriarchal social order. Reflecting on the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism of the African continent in her book, *Ain't I a Woman: Black women and Feminism* (1982), hooks contemplates the unique suffering and oppression of enslaved Black women. Her assertion that "sexism was an integral part of the social and political order white colonizers brought with them from their European homelands" (15) was founded on historical scholarships deeply engaged with in her book. She describes the slave trade as one that was first focused on the importation of Black males for labor because the "Black female slave was not as valued as the Black male slave" (15). However, the passing of time and recognition that enslaved Black women could be made to produce offspring for economic gain increased their market value (16). hooks notes that further examination of 18th and 19th century historical scholarships document that the African female in the colonies were also subjugated by the African males, so it was a case of one sexism interacting with another form of sexism. According to hooks, white male observers of African culture in the 18th and 19th century recorded that the African female was not only inferior within their patriarchal social order but was at the same time made to participate actively in the community labor force (16).

This local social order, hooks convincingly argues, came to have a profound influence on the treatment of the Black female slave in the American colonies, "exploited as a laborer in the fields, a worker in the domestic household, a breeder, and as an object of white male sexual assault" (22), while the Black male slave was primarily exploited as a laborer in the fields" (22) and allowed to "maintain some semblance of their societally defined masculine role" (21). The African woman on the other hand was probably seen as an ideal subject for slavery, because they could execute both masculine and feminine prescribed gender roles (17–21). She expresses her disagreement with historians and sociologists' perspectives on slavery that suggest that Black men were much more victimized than Black women because they were stripped of their patriarchal status during slavery (20). hooks classifies this perspective as one advanced

by a sexist social order and cautions that we must recognize the implication in the assertion that the subjugation of Black women is essential to the Black male's humanization and "development of a positive self-concept" (21). Methods that were used to de-humanize and effectively "transform the African human being into a slave" (19) ranged from physical torture to ideological indoctrination. For enslaved Black girls and women, rape, sexual exploitation, breeding, intentional indecent exposure, sadistic floggings of naked Black female slaves, deplorable childbearing conditions, physical brutalization of Black children, anti-woman Christian teachings, racist-sexist stereotyping of Black womanhood, and institutionalization of sexist discrimination were all sadistic misogynistic acts used to strip Black women of their dignity (22–43). The two forces of oppression (sexism and racism) suffered by Black women clearly signify that the lives of Black women were made much more difficult than that of the Black male slave.

Abuse of Black women, according to hooks, was not limited to white men. Black men and white women also participated in displaying the racist-sexist ideologies they absorbed from the imperialist white supremacist patriarchal system. Historical narratives of Black female slaves sexually molested by Black male slaves indicate that, "rather than assuming the role of protector, Black men imitated the white man's behavior" (35), creating a black sub-culture which emulated imperialist white supremacist anti-woman sexual politics.

> It is likely that the Black male slave did not feel demoralized or de-humanized because 'his' women were being raped, but that he did feel terrorized by the knowledge that white men who were willing to brutalize and victimize Black women and girls (who represented no great threat to their authority), might easily have no qualms about totally annihilating Black men. Most Black male slaves stood quietly by as white masters sexually assaulted and brutalized Black women and were not compelled to act as protectors (35).

Black female slaves were also easy targets for white women, who were also caught in the webs of the white men's anti-women sentiments. Historical records of white women physically assaulting and sexually exploiting Black female slaves abound, and for those who did not participate in these acts, they were nevertheless reluctant to "involve themselves with a slave's plight for fear of jeopardizing their own position in the domestic household" (36). hooks hypothesizes that white women's decision to maintain a passive stance regarding the brutality inflicted on enslaved Black women might be associated with the

trepidation of suffering a similar fate if "Black women were not available to bear the brunt of such intense anti-women male aggression" (39). Following several slave narratives and diaries, it takes little imagination to comprehend that white women's kinship with white men on the "common ground of racism enabled them to ignore the anti-woman impulse that also motivated attacks on Black women" (39). In hooks's work, we find a sustained argument that both prior to and following slavery, Black womanhood has been systematically devalued by white and Black men alike, functioning as a deliberate mechanism of patriarchal control. While the oppression of Black women, institutionalized by other oppressive practices continued long after slavery was abolished, they have been the recipient of patriarchal oppression long before slavery. However, the system of enslavement, the dominant white culture and multiple perpetrators involved in the domination of Black women has led to an alteration in the patterns of anti-Black sexist oppression perpetuated on Black women.

Clenora Hudson-Weems in her robust theoretical writing on the status and struggles of African women, both in the diaspora and at home, takes an oppositional stance to bell hook's theoretical analysis and conclusion. Calling for the academic reassessment of the historical complex realities of African women, Hudson-Weems advocates for the renaming of a theoretical legitimacy that prioritizes Black women's realities and struggles, and a distancing of such theoretical legitimacy and empowering movement from the tag 'feminism'. Her reason being that such appellation even with a silhouetting prefix of Black or African will always suggest a relative compatibility with the agenda, needs and demands of white women feminists. In contrast to hooks, Hudson-Weems argues that African women were equal to their African male counterparts within African cosmology. In spite of the individual particularities, which unfortunately have dominated and eclipsed the group characteristic of African gender history, African women "have not had that sense of powerlessness that white women speak of, nor have they been silenced or rendered voiceless by their male counterparts, as is the expressed experience of white women" (2020, 31). The characterization of African women's status as recipients of African men's sexist domination and brutality, prior to Anglo-European colonial activities, Hudson-Weems claims, is a misguided generalization based on unsystematic personal experiences. Moreover, Black feminists who incline their arguments in that direction "base their decisions upon either naivety about the history and ramifications of feminism or on negative experiences with Africana men" (17). Upon this conclusive account, Hudson-Weems makes the decision to coin the term "Africana womanism",

with the argument that even other variances of African-women-centered-ideology like Black feminism, African feminism, Alice Walker's womanism etc. do not sufficiently address African women's plight, owing to the fact that like their white feminist counterparts, they perceive "gender issues to be most critical" (16) in their quest for collective liberation. This inadvertently exposes their movements to the risk of co-optation and obliteration by hegemonic white feminist activities. For Hudson-Weems, an African-woman-centered-ideology must be grounded in the commitment and mission to center the dignity and humanity of all African people and actualize the liberation of the African race.

Niara Sudarkasa takes a similar approach on the investigation of African women's intersectional oppression. She argues that the hierarchical ascription introduced into the gender atmosphere in Africa is mostly influenced by the positionality of the writers. By examining the "roles of women in families and descent groups, in the economy, and in the political process in West Africa" (1987, 28), extrapolating her data from preindustrial stateless and state societies, Sudarkasa counters the overall "subordinate-superordinate relationship" (27) used to characterize women's relationship to men. She argues that gender is only one of the defining characteristics among the many "clusters of statuses" (27) identifiable in African societies. Age was one of these characteristics used to regulate interpersonal relations. Within the kin groups, the order of birth superseded gender, and younger males had to show respect to older females. In addition, the wife status was not restricted to the conjugal male and female relationship. Wives' positionality within the Yoruba extended family, for example, was also a core of their identity. "African extended families, which are the normal coresidential form of family in indigenous precolonial African societies" (30) extended beyond the conjugal into the consanguineal. The tendency to assess the status of women in Africa only within the constituent nuclear parameter is a derivate of Western paradigm that has led to the "misrepresentation of many aspects of African kinship" (30). Within their lineages, African women had rights and responsibilities that were independent of men and vice versa. Even though in patrilineal African societies, women as wives generally show "deference to their husbands", however, it is important to not neglect other kinship roles, where women were positioned as authority figures and deferred to (31). In the precolonial political and economic spheres, African women also participated actively at the highest levels of government, and remarkably contributed to the sustainability of both the public and domestic domains. Yet, African women's participation has often times been dismissed as

"simply women controlling women" (33) and still subordinate to men in the wider context due to the peculiar parallel male and female rulership adopted by indigenous African societies. Sudarkasa yet again dismisses this viewpoint as an "a priori judgment" with the argument that the public domain in West Africa was one in which both sexes' complementary roles were duly given recognition (33). This is in contradiction to Western conceptualization of the category of the 'third world' woman as being oppressed, helpless and looking to others to advocate for her liberation (Mohanty 2002, 196–198, Terbog-Penn 1987, 44). Sudarkasa reveals that a neutral complementarity rather than a hierarchical partnership more accurately describes the gender relation in indigenous African societies, assenting to the suggestion that the hierarchical gender relations contemporary Africa has emulated is because of the incursion of imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy (36).

Given this context, it is conceivable that the ease with which enslaved Black women in America assumed perceived masculine roles both in the home and on the plantation, as well as the matriarchal characteristics used persistently to stereotype Black women have their roots in indigenous African ethos. Nevertheless, all of these perspectives have their merits because they represent the various cross-cultural perspectives and interdisciplinary methods applied by Black feminist theorists to investigate the historical fact of Black women's oppression, while emphasizing the continuity of their experiences across time. Additionally, my research is neither focused on the construction and reconstruction of Black women's history nor is it situated in the field of history or cultural history. My work, situated within the field of literary criticism, instead aims to examine the representations of Black women's everyday encounters with power and oppression and how these experiences are articulated in literary texts. To echo Minna Salami's African feminist critique, "We don't need to dutifully refer to protofeminism[3] in historical Africa to justify feminism today" (2025, 171).

3 Minna Salami defines "protofeminism" as a kind of feminism that focuses on proving the existence of feminism in relation to African women's autonomy and equality in Africa, rather than engaging with important issues of equality and justice that viscerally affect African women (2025, 163).

1.2 Butler, Psychoanalytic Theory, and the Becoming of the Black Female Subject

In exploring the lived realities of Black women and reaching new conclusions, it is vital to grasp how we are shaped by the complex interplay of power dynamics, knowledge systems, and processes of subject formation. Judith Butler in their 1997 book *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in* Subjection, establishes their theory of the life of power and constitution of subjectivity through engaging with, critiquing, and expanding Michel Foucault's book *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1979) and Louis Althusser's essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" (1971). Significantly, Butler proceeds to ask some critical questions that according to them was not addressed in earlier essays on power. If, according to Foucault and Althusser, power is that which presses on us from the outside to subordinate us, and at the same time, produces and sustains our agency in our internalization and acceptance of its terms, then what are the specific mechanisms of how the subject is formed in submission, and what is the psychic form that power takes to engender submission? Is the psyche excluded from the disciplinary regimes imposed on the body? Finally, is there possibility for resistance to our unconscious attachments to subjection if we are already the effect of subjection? Butler takes on this project to establish a link between the discourse of power and the discourse of psychoanalysis, because it is an essential inquiry that according to them has not been adequately addressed by writers in both "Foucauldian and psychoanalytic orthodoxies" (1997, 3). By asking these critical questions, Butler's overall objective is to show how the subject formed by power becomes the principle of their own subjection by virtue of the effect of the regulatory formation of the psyche. Finally, how this psychoanalytical conception of the subject works in "tandem with processes of social regulation" to constitute the subject's self-identity (19).

Both works focus on the role of institutions in maintaining power structures and shaping subjectivities and intersubjectivities. Foucault's insight into the operation of power and subjectivation, according to Butler, articulates the soul as the embodiment of the normative ideal unleashed by the relation of power. Analyzing Foucault's disciplinary mechanism, Butler argues that Foucault establishes the subjectivation of the prisoner on a combination of the prison's spatial captivity and signifying practices of the prison such as inspection, confession, regularization and normalization of bodily movement and gesture (85). Foucault, according to Butler, underlines that the prison through the adoption of particular material practices, possess, alters, and

codifies the prisoner's individuality by forcing the prisoner to "approximate an ideal, a norm of behavior, a model of obedience, […] and a regulatory principle" (85). By making the prisoner adopt these material and abstract ideals, Butler argues, is the way the soul of a prisoner, as Foucault calls it, is inculcated into a subject and the subject becomes the effect or principle of its identity — "coherent [and] totalized" (85). Butler, however, argues that Foucault in his preoccupation with how the identity we wear and perform comes into being appears to privilege the "metaphor of the prison" and trivialize the frame of the soul, thus rendering his theory of power inadequate for inquiry into subjection and subjectivity (85). In light of this interpretation, Butler's concern is how to make sense of this imposing and imprisoning frame of the soul, if identity is always already produced through "imprisonment and invasion" (85). Butler proceeds to answer by first counterposing the 'soul' with the 'psyche' in the psychoanalytic sense (86). For Butler, the reiteration that a subject requires to remain a subject and maintain its coherence,[4] coupled with the possibility of resistance to subjectivation, counters Foucault's theorization of the soul or psyche as imprisoning and totalizing. Thus, if resistance at the level of the psyche is possible, then the psyche must be separated from the subject, because it is the psyche that "exceeds the imprisoning effects of the discursive demand to inhabit a coherent identity, to become a coherent subject" (86). In essence, the repetition an identity requires to maintain coherence, together with palpable resistance exhibited by the subject, undermines the force of normalization as capable of producing an always already coherent subject, thus severing the psyche from the provisional subject, and eliminating any notion of the psyche as imprisoning. Butler, however, implores that one should not make an extreme leap that the only function of the psyche is to contrive resistance to normalizing ideals, or replace psyche with resistance, as this could also bring into focus an attachment to subjection that is found at the level of the unconscious (88).

Reading Louis Althusser's conceptualization of power and subjectivity, Butler argues, reflects a similar submission with Foucault. According to Butler, Althusser stages an interpellative scenario or social scene that involves an alignment between a hailing made by an addresser and responsiveness of the addressee to such hailing. Reading Althusser's metaphorical illustration in his

4 See Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) for explanation on how gender as an identity is formed through a set of repetitive acts and practices that are said to be its results.

influential essay, a police officer calling "Hey you there!" elicits a recognition that "that the hail was 'really' addressed to him, and that 'it was really him who was hailed', and not someone else (1971, 49). This recognition is followed by a positive response from the hailed individual, and it is in this recognition and subsequent turning to respond to the hailing that ideology has functioned to transform individuals into subjects. Yet, Althusser concedes that this recognition and consciousness of one's subjective self is an enigmatic phenomenon, which, in reality, does not follow the temporal sequence of his metaphorical explanation: "The existence of ideology and the hailing or interpellation of individuals as subjects are one and the same thing" because there is never a pre-discursive self that is prior to the conferral of identity, as the self is always already confined within the discursive subjectivation of ideology (49). Of importance yet again, is the metaphor of the police officer, which Butler argues, establishes a disciplinary scene (1997, 107) just like Foucault's metaphor of the prison and the prisoner. Building upon Althusser's doctrine of interpellation, Butler is yet again concerned with how the consenting subject, who turns to answer the officer of the law, materializes. What kind of relationship binds both the officer and the subject such that the subject is conditioned to turn by both the officer's voice and its own inclination? Butler expresses their dissatisfaction with Althusser's interpellation, which in an attempt to explain the force that he grants to his social ideology to compel a vulnerable subject, turns to the metaphor of the church, as an authority divinely empowered "to name, and in naming, bring its subjects into being" (110). This equivalence between social interpellation and the divine power of interpellating structures, Butler maintains, is inadequate to explain the readiness and anticipation of the subject "to be compelled by the authoritative interpellation" (111). This notion of the enigmatic workings of the performative power of the authoritative voice on which interpellation depends, Butler insists also "promises no enlightened escape from ideology" (110).

> Significantly, Althusser does not offer a clue as to why the individual turns around, accepting the voice as being addressed to him or her, and accepting the subordination and normalization effected by that voice. Why does this subject turn toward the voice of the law, and what is the effect of such a turn in inaugurating a social subject? Is this a guilty subject and, if so, how did it become guilty? Might the theory of interpellation require a theory of conscience? (5).

The implication in Althusser's model of subject formation, according to Butler, would be to accept that the power in the interpellative scene appropriates a mysterious form. That there is neither an intelligible reference to a pre-existing subject which then undergoes and internalizes subordinating mechanisms, nor can there be any further interrogation into why the subject responds to the hailing because Althusser's "model of internalization takes for granted that an internal and external have already been formed" (115). This model, Butler stresses would reveal a unilateral distinction in the argumentation on subject formation (10).

In addressing the shortcomings of Althusser's theorization, Butler theorizes the concept of guilt and compulsion to account for the enigmatic chasm occupied by pre-discursive subjects who prepare to enter into the site of intelligibility, internalize and become attached to subjectifying conditions that assign their interpellative terms. Butler admonishes for "the subject" not to be interchanged with "the person" or "the individual", but instead be regarded as "a linguistic category, a place holder, structure in formation" (10). Since individuals acquire their intelligibility by being exposed to interpellative process through which they become subjects, this implies that the arbitrary use of the individual presents an impossible situation that must go in cooperation with the implicit supposition "that the constitution has already taken place" (11). In this sense, one has already "yielded before one turns around, and that turning is merely a sign of an inevitable submission by which one is established as a subject positioned in language as a possible addressee" (111). For Butler, the framework of interpellation contingent on the performative condition of psychic subjection expounds the vicious circle of a subject-centered discourse. This performative condition also accounts for the optimistic possibility of alteration and discontinuity in subject formation. This formulation of interpellation on the basis of the iteration of subjects shows how agency may well consist in transforming and refusing the conditions of their emergence (29), thus disrupting the notion of the psyche, underpinned by Althusser and Foucault, as an exterior frame that self-disciplines and imprisons the body. The production of incoherent and aberrant identities for Butler indicates that the operation of power on the formation of the psyche does not have a totalizing effect, therefore locating the psyche back in the unconscious and interlinking it with the social practice of regulation.

Noela Davis's approach to Althusser's text however argues that Butler's interpolation of the performative theory of subjectivity into Althusser and Foucault's texts is indicative of their overall investment in the "coercive nature of

the norms that constitute us (that is, name or authorize us and make us intelligible) and at the same time constrain us" (2012, 885). This theoretical direction, I agree, is reiterated in most of Butler's distinguished works on gender, heteronormativity and subversion and non-complicity with hegemonic norms. A reading of Foucault and Althusser's texts, according to Davis, however indicates that their explanation of subject formation does not rely on coercion, guilt and punitive force for its functionality. Instead, Foucault's and Althusser's subject-formation relies on a mutuality between ideology and materiality to constitute the subject into constituted members of their society (888). Davis argues that Foucault's power is more an instrument of subject constitution than subject repression as Butler visualizes: "The significance of the suggestion that we are always-already implicated within the values and norms of our particular place and time is that we 'obey', not because we are compelled, but because these are our constitutive conditions. We performatively re-enact this constitution as we materialize our social/ideological environment. It is thus not a question of obedience or submission" (891). This, according to Davis, makes Foucault's a more welcoming and positively oriented view on subject-formation than Butler's "grim and ground-down" vision of subjectivity (896).

While Davis's re-reading of Althusser's essay and Butler's account of Althusser's work is inarguably a useful way of pursuing a comprehensive scope of power and subjection, I argue that Butler's theory of power is much more suited and specific to the theorization of Black women's subjectivity. As Davis themselves note, Althusser's system of power-ideology does not assert that there can be no negative outcome, in the form of producing a subject that is insignificant. What Althusser's theory does is cover the spectrum of possibilities—from legitimized to dominated subjectivity (896). I argue that the "grim and ground-down subjects of Butler's vision" that Davis argues we are not necessarily made of (896), is in fact a vision of Black women's subjectivity, making Butler's theory indispensable to the analysis of the Black women's fractured subjectivity. I argue that for Black women who on account of the combination of their race and gender, suffer systematic oppression, power subordinates us, and if at all it constitutes us like Althusser's theory posits, then it constitutes us again in subjection to dominant norms, rituals, and values we did not contribute to instituting. Butler's argument that forms of resistance exhibited by subjects in a society compromises any endeavor to contextualize an enigmatic and taken-for-granted theory of power, shows a fit with the theorization of Black women as an oppressed and Othered category,

who according to Michelle Wright, can only come into being through the "introduction of dialogic structure of subjectivity" (2004, 4).

My commitment to using Butler's psychoanalytic power theory is further substantiated by Maria R. Markus's and David Lloyd's arguments in their respective essays "Cultural Pluralism and the Subversion of the 'Taken-for-granted' World" and "Colonial Trauma/Postcolonial Recovery?". Markus, in analyzing the political culture of nation-states, argues that the pre-reflexive layer that produces the "intellectually and reflectively generated systems of beliefs, norms, and organized traditions (moral maps), providing evaluative standards for different modes of life or their components" within the newly constructed nation-states, is permanently shattered for groups with the history of colonization (2002, 392). In parallel with Markus's argument, Lloyd also holds that the discourse of subjectivity in both Western and previously colonized countries must be engaged with differently. According to Lloyd, in contrast to Western states, the production and emergence of an "ethical subject" (i.e., one whose subject-formation is produced through its own relational consent to disciplinary institutions and who retains the agency to suspend its immediate interests in the service of a well-regulated society), is unrealized in colonial and postcolonial contexts as a result of the historical exercise of and contemporary presence of racialized coercive violence (2000, 217). Using Butler's analysis of how the subject is formed in submission because of the psychic form that power takes, I conclude, move Black women (who are used to being omitted from normalizing discourses) from the margin to the center. It allows for a critical interrogation of an Othered subjectivity that is most often neglected or treated as a peripheral—a possible collateral damage.

1.3 Misogynoir: The Paradox of Black Women's Invisibility and Hypervisibility

The term misogynoir was coined and developed by the Black feminist scholar Moya Bailey in her contribution to an online blog under the alias Moyazb. In her contribution titled "They aren't talking about me", Bailey discusses the pervasive misogyny and sexism in musical contents. She mentions in a footnote that the term misogynoir serves to describe the "particular brand of hatred directed at Black women in American visual and popular culture" (Moyazb, 2010). The struggle to find an expression to discuss Black women's experience with gender generated the concept of misogynoir. In a 2018 commentary by Bailey

and Trudy, Bailey further explains that "naming misogynoir was about noting both an historical anti-Black misogyny and a problematic intra-racial gender dynamic that had wider implications in popular culture" (762). Stereotypes about Black women that circulated in popular culture impacted educational environments and always "ended up leading to ideas about Black women that negatively impacted their care" (762). By coining a new word entirely to describe the specific anti-Black racist misogyny experienced by only Black women, Bailey hopes to "engender more specificity in gender studies scholarship", and to develop a new interpretive framework that can attend to the realities of Black women and "expand the theoretical possibilities" of gender discourse (2013, 342).

Another Black feminist unaffiliated scholar, whose name is also associated with the expansion and application of misogynoir across contexts, is Trudy. She explains in the commentary that her introduction to the term on the online blog Crunk Feminist Collective in 2011 would be instrumental in her investigation into the impact of misogynoir on "relationships, entertainment and institutional violence" (Bailey and Trudy 2018, 763). Trudy's theorization of misogynoir gives additional clarity to the difference between intersectionality and misogynoir. Accordingly, she clarifies that "if intersectionality explains how Black women experience race, gender and class differently from Whites/men, then misogynoir explains why this occurs" (766). In other words, it explains how everything Black women do is used either for exploitative purposes against them or weaponized to deny them their humanity (766). Trudy believes that the treatment meted out to Black women embodies the "contempt that people have for womanhood", and that putting an end to racism and sexism without capitalism "can guarantee that Black women would still experience misogynoir" (767) because of the ways people think of Blackness itself.

In her piece on misogynoir published in 2014 on her online space Grandient Lair, she explains misogynoir as:

> specifically Black women's experiences with gender and how both racism and anti-Blackness alters that experience diametrically from white women [as anti-Blackness and white supremacy make white women the "norm" in terms of intersectional experiences with gender, even as solely via gender, misogyny harms all women) and differently from non-Black women of colour (although they face racism, the dehumanization associated with anti-Blackness is more than racism or sexualized objectification alone, but

> speaks to the history of Black bodies and lives treated as those of non-persons] (Trudy).

Trudy insists on a distinction between "Black women" and "women of color" with the argument that these identifiers overlap "only because Black women can be considered women of color" alongside other non-Black women of color, although one must not be used as synonym for another (Trudy). Thus, while the former is a racial classification engendered by "stereotypes, violence, oppression and dehumanization unique to Black women's bodies, experiences, lives and histories, the latter is a political identity of theoretical solidarity of non-white women" brought by the aftermath of "white supremacy, racism and white privilege on non-white women" (Trudy). Trudy's elaboration of the term beyond its application within pop culture provides insight into how Black women experience gender differently and establishes a backdrop for further interrogation. For Black women, the performance of their gender is inherently flawed because of anti-Blackness. Thus, even though white women experience general misogyny, they, based on an established binary with Black women, represent good womanhood in ways that are unachievable for Black women. Black women are either forcefully masculinized and regarded as "non-women" or hyper-sexualized and reduced to sexual objects with "non-person status" (Trudy). These two occurrences, which might be considered empowering or a simple case of objectification for white women and women of color when viewed from the lens of whiteness, are much more nuanced for Black women. These stereotypes do more than insult and objectify Black women. They are weaponized to "reify the non-human status of Black women" when set in opposition to white women, a position even "non-Black women of color are placed 'above' even as they are placed 'below' white women (Trudy). These weaponized stereotypes, according to Trudy, extend beyond interracial contexts, due to "an interracial value system that mirrors external oppressors", with the consequence that the humanity of Black women is challenged by Black men, who enjoy male privilege even as they experience anti-Blackness and racism, and by Black people, in general. By implication, this pairing and juxtaposition creates a hyper-visible reality for Black women, who are constantly judged and watched because of their perceived difference.

In Hortense Spillers's "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book", we see up close the historic conditions that create the absolute annihilation of the Black female subject that Moya Bailey and Trudy contrive of as misogynoir. Spillers argues that whatever privilege granted to the patriarchal-

ized white female gender is denied enslaved African women because of the profiteering economy that the Atlantic slave trade was established upon. According to Spillers, the severe torture and dehumanization of the African female subject without consideration for her femininity—the same femininity granted protection under the male-dominant European civilization—reveals the profiteering objective of the transatlantic slave trade (1983, 68). The entire captive community perceived only as means to generate phenomenal wealth suffers under the "powers of distortion that the dominant community seizes as its unlawful prerogative"; after which they lose any sense of differentiation they might have enjoyed under their own cultural system as well as under the dominant cultural system (69). Directly following from her submission that African women's gendered annihilation is deeply tied to profit, Spillers goes on to discuss a few of the dehumanizing procedures that was deployed on the "captive flesh" of the African female subject, and "thoroughly interwoven in their literal and figurative emphases", which has any kind of gender distinction embarked upon after the end of slavery useless (68). A few of these ungendering procedures are medical experimentation, sexual violence and rape, work not limited to domestic spaces, and dispossession of the right to motherhood. Against this historical background provided by Spillers, Trudy's insistence on the differentiation in Black women's (non)gendered lived reality becomes clearer.

Equally evident in Black feminist scholarship is the space for translocation. This translocation is also evident in Trudy's perceptive conceptualization and recognition that misogynoir is not and should not be limited to Black women's experiences within the US because "anti-Blackness, sexism and misogyny have a global impact for Black women" beyond the singularity of the Western kind of white supremacy and American kind of racism (Trudy). Because of the specific nature of Black people's protracted struggle against colonial domination and the impact of white epistemology on other societal fabrics, it is notwithstanding pertinent to critically interrogate the manifestation of misogynoir even in spaces where white supremacy is not directly "visible in local culture and power" (Trudy). Oda-Kange Midtvage Diallo's project on racialization within and outside Danish academia reveals that Black women have a need to create their own safe space due to the erasure of racial discourse from the social fabric of Denmark. According to her ethnographic study, all the participants felt "relieved that they were finally able to voice their experiences in the company of other Black women" (Diallo, 2019, 219). I argue that excluding race and Blackness from national discussion by practicing a colorblind approach to discourses of classifications even though Black women's experiences are "shaped

by hidden colonial processes which influence the fabric of their blackness" (218), is a pattern of anti-Blackness practiced by hegemonic Western institutions and spaces. This racializing gaze and preconditions attached to the Black female body "requires a performance, as well as a constant neglect of one's self" (227), to embody Blackness in a "specific sense of the word, regardless of your own interpretation of Black embodiment" (227).

For Black women, I argue that these preconditions and racializing gaze most often can blur the social categorizations that create overlapping systems of privileges enjoyed by white women. By being denied the discussion of racism, Black women are also denied the possibility of defining themselves. In spaces that are historically white, male and center a white and masculinist worldview, reproducing specific criteria for access and acceptance, the mere presence of a Black female body is "almost impossible" and can lead to invisibility or hyper-visibility "for the few who manage to enter these spaces" (220). The acceptance of a few others into historically white spaces, Diallo argues, is most often a way to exercise diversity, "while maintaining privilege, power and the ability to define valid knowledge production" (220). Black women are from a young age forced to reflect upon their "identity and bodily representation" in ways that white women are not required to do. This hyperawareness, according to Diallo, is a direct consequence of the "specifically gendered racism that Black women experience, also called misogynoir" (220).

1.4 The Racial Dynamics of Black Women's Femicide

In this section, I draw out the intersectional dimensions of the theoretical concept of femicide for the purpose of interrogating the intersectional characteristics of the lethal violence experienced by Black women as represented in my selected texts. My intersectional interrogation rests on my argument that Black women's experiences of violence carry different historical legacies due to the two-tier system that treats white bodies differently from Black bodies. I argue that discussing femicide without analyzing the impact of competing patriarchal power structures on the aliveness and femicide of Black women will contribute to the essentialism of the victims of this form of fatal crime. An intersectional approach makes it possible to link the femicide of Black women to the historical legacies of colonialism, imperialism, and address "the racist femicide of Black women by white men and the existence of sexual violence and femicide within Black communities" (Radford 1992, 8). This is even more im-

portant because of the stereotype continuously perpetuated by Western feminist scholarship based on colonial narratives that female oppression in Black communities is homogeneously produced, and 'third world' women are situated within pathological oppressive and misogynistic social practices, which they must be rescued from (Mohanty 2002, 2003 and Radford 1992). To this end, I aim to contribute to the discussion on this concept from an intersectional feminist approach by discussing the intersection of femicide, which affects Black women because of the combination of their race and gender.

Femicide was first introduced by the American feminist, Diana E. H. Russell. She used the term during her testimony before the 1976 International Tribunal on Crimes against women and implied it as the misogynist murders of women and girls perpetrated by men (2011b). The definition since then has undergone numerous changes by Russell herself. Her final definition delimits it as "the killing of females by males because they are female" (2011b). Russell draws attention to how ingrained prejudice against women visibly maps the margin of women's murder at the hands of men. Importantly, the backdrop against which Russell frames and explores this specific social phenomenon requires that it is named and theorized. As she maintains, the vast majority of all murders of women are femicides. Even if men are murdered more frequently than women are, their murder is rarely motivated by ingrained prejudice against them in comparison to the murder of women at the hands of men. In contrast, the relatively few women who murder men are usually motivated by self-defense (2011a).

Further elaborating on the distinctiveness of femicide, Jane Caputi and Diana Russell describe the misogynous killing of women as the "most extreme form of sexist terrorism, motivated by hatred, contempt, pleasure, or a sense of ownership of women" (1992, 15). Rooting their analysis in sexist cultures that are central to the preservation of hetero-patriarchy, they undergird the dimensions of violence within a form of sexual violence:

> Femicide is on the extreme end of a continuum of antifemale terror that includes a wide variety of verbal and physical abuse, such as rape, torture, sexual slavery (particularly in prostitution), incestuous and extrafamilial child sexual abuse, physical and emotional battery, sexual harassment (on the phone, in the streets, at the office, and in the classroom), genital mutilation (clitoridectomies, excision, infibulations), unnecessary gynaecological operations (gratuitous hysterectomies), forced heterosexuality, forced sterilization, forced motherhood (by criminalizing contraception and abortion),

> psychosurgery, denial of food to women in some cultures, cosmetic surgery, and other mutilations in the name of beautification. Whenever these forms of terrorism result in death, they become femicides (15).

This definition makes it clear that femicide not only addresses overt one-on-one sexist murders, but also includes covert forms of the killing of females that is informed by misogynistic social values and laws. Focusing on the social control function of these murders unveils the misogynist motivations of these killings and separates femicide from other non-gendered murders. More so, locating femicide within the "continuum of sexual violence" (4) allows for the coverage and connection of a range of coercive heterosexual experiences, that move beyond "legal discourse that is based on discrete and narrow definitions of the sexual and the violent, definitions that can distort and deny women's experience" (3).

Judith Butler, in an interview with George Yancy, describes femicide as not just murder that is committed because of gender, but a form of violence against femininity and feminized bodies. This is especially noteworthy because of the specific violence also committed against trans women. Butler construes this violence as one that first establishes the femininity of the victim before it is unleashed, thereby securing "the class of women as killable, dispensable", articulating the existence of women as a masculine prerogative (Butler 2019). Since Russell laid the foundation for the understanding and dissection of the violent death of women, which before had been invisible and summed up under the general-neutral terms murder or homicide (2011a), a few researchers have analyzed femicide from various approaches. However, there has been limited discussions of femicide in feminist literature, despite the extremity of this form of sexual violence. This theoretical limitation, Jill Radford argues, might be due to the finality of death, which does not accommodate the women involved to share their experiences, placing femicide "outside traditional feminist modes of working" (1992, 4). Unfortunately, feminist silence, "however understandable, leaves it open to justification or denial by the larger culture" (5).

Corradi Consuelo et al. document and review the five theoretical approaches researchers have followed in their inquiry into femicide, one of which is the decolonial approach. This approach championed by decolonial feminist researchers as they apply to Black women is central to my analysis because it endeavors to examine the concept of femicide beyond the single narrative of heteropatriarchy. In addressing femicide within colonial contexts, Consuelo et al. argue that an awareness of the complexities and contribution

of "politics, economic disadvantage, racism and spatial segregation" must be established (2016, 983). Notably, only a fair amount has been written on the dimensions of Black women's femicide globally. In Shatema Threadcraft's essay "Making Black Femicide Visible", Threadcraft argues that Black American women, although three to four times more likely to experience high rates of lethal violence than women of other groups, with the exception of Native women, struggle with spotlighting their experience. This is due to the overall sexist social order that diminishes issues related to women, together with anti-Black racism that perpetuates bias against their cry for help (2021). In Threadcraft's words: "The violence Black women experience is less visible because it does not always look like the violence white women experience and white women have had greater power in narrating the story of gender-based violence (39). Floretta A. Boonzaier, for example, centers her analysis on the prevalent rate of women being murdered in South Africa, with the argument that "racist sexualization, derogatory representations of Black bodies, notions about morality, respectability, and legitimized suffering" tend to contextualize the crime, beyond simple heteropatriarchy (2022, 4). Boonzaier argues that for South Africa, with its history of apartheid as the foundational framing of its nation-state, there is a longer history of settler colonialism and slavery that provides an important, much deeper and necessary contextualization of the contemporary movement (4).

In "Who's Killing Us?" Jaime, M. Grant focuses on the 1979 rape and murder of 12 young African American and one white woman in Boston, Massachusetts. In examining the public and legal discourse surrounding the case, Grant draws out the intersectional dimension of violence against African American women and the responses from within and outside the community. Grant describes how the white feminist women who protested these deaths alongside Black women, analyzed their grief within the general culture "in which violence against women was condoned and, at times, glorified" (1992, 146), while Black men activists centered their activism around racial violence, completely ignoring the sexual politics of the murders (147). For Black feminists, situating these murders within a monolithic power structure did not capture the multilayered complexities of their situation, especially because media coverage was practically non-existent and hostile to the Black community's criticism, exemplifying the racist-sexist aspect of their oppression (150–151). This dissatisfaction propelled the Black feminist collective to draft their own pamphlet, illuminating their own standpoint on the femicides. The pamphlet served as an external indication to "mainstream institutions that their inadequate

coverage and response to the murders was unacceptable" (150). It is through the convergence of these public and legal discourses concerning the murders of these Black women, that the marginalization of Black women is revealed.

The racial dimension of femicide in relation to structural counteraction is further amplified in Diana Russell and Elli Ellis's "Annihilation by Murder and by the Media: The Other Atlanta Femicides. By contrasting police's response to the investigation of the murders of both 34 Black women and 26 Black men, they capture the complicity of the criminal justice system in the femicides of Black women in US-America. According to Russell and Candida, the intensification of public pressure on the police to bring the killer(s) of the 26 murdered African American males was not applied in regard to the female victims. This indifference to the femicides of Black women "exposes the complicity of both racism and sexism" (1992, 162) that African American males regardless of their oppressed status do not experience. Russell and Ellis conclude that there is a form of complicity between those who previously condemned official indifference to the deaths of young African American males and those who hold African American lives cheap, and this unity is why "racist sexism, or sexist racism, continues to flourish in the United States" (162).

As such, according to the Southhall Black Sisters, the struggle for and advocacy of Black women is often fraught with contradictions. For Black people in the United Kingdom, the police have "always represented the mostly repressive face of a racist state" (1992, 313). The Southhall Black Sisters describe how the racist-sexist dimension of Black women's femicide render their struggle and advocacy particularly vulnerable to contradictions that are not present in white feminism.

> Ironically, for Black women, in the face of harassment, intimidation and violence from our communities, the police have continued to be the only agency to whom we are forced to turn for immediate help. The majority of women have no faith or confidence in the police, but because of a lack of any alternative, women have had no choice but to make demands for protection and safety from them. For Black women, challenging an issue like domestic violence within our own communities and challenging the racism of the police at the same time is often fraught with contradictions. On the one hand, we are involved in campaigns against police brutality, deaths in police custody and immigration fishing raids. On the other, we are faced with daily beatings, rape and sexual harassment. We are forced to make demands of the police to protect our lives from the very same men along whose side we fight in anti-racist struggles. The struggle against racism cannot be waged at the ex-

> pense of the struggles within a male-dominated and patriarchal community whose traditions and customs confine the woman to the home and deny her the right to determine who she wants to live with and how. Many of us feel that to make this struggle secondary to the struggle against racism means at best to ignore women's experiences and at worst to passively collude with those patriarchal practices. Instead, our view is that somehow both struggles have to be waged simultaneously without losing sight of the consequences each can have on the other. Our demands must take both struggles into account (313).

Further elaborating on the intersectionality of Black women's femicide, Kimberlé Crenshaw in "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against women of Color" presents a clear example of how race and gender makes women of color's experience of domestic violence and rape qualitatively different from white women, and how this experiential difference has functioned to erase them from both feminist and antiracist politics. In Crenshaw's brief study of battered women's shelters located in minority communities in Los Angeles, she observes that the situation of these women is a manifestation of "the multilayered and routinised forms of domination" that converge to keep them trapped in their "abusive relationships that brought them to shelters in the first place" (1995, 358). Even though there are multiple frameworks through which violence against women of color can be explained, Crenshaw makes the decision to focus on the intersections of race and gender because they act as primary sites for the manifestation of the subordination Black women experience. Crenshaw highlights several sites where structures of power intersect to subjugate Black women. These sites range from poverty, childcare responsibilities, access to employment, housing, wealth, and language barriers to immigration status for immigrant women. She stresses that strategies employed to combat these problems must be shaped by the particular experiences and needs of these women (360).

Crenshaw draws out some of the shortcoming of antiracist politics in addressing domestic violence against Black women, arguing that rhetorical strategies of anti-racist politics, in "attempts to maintain the integrity of the community," (361) often aim at suppressing the domestic violence suffered by Black women within the Black community. Another strategy within antiracist discourse is "to regard the problem of violence against women of color as just another manifestation of racism," (362) even though the violence suffered by Black women is more complex and extends beyond this monolithic narrative.

This deliberate decision to obscure women of color's abuse, Crenshaw argues, is also encouraged by Black women's reluctance to involve the police in their private lives, due to their lack of trust in the criminal justice system. "In many cases, the desire to protect the home as a safe haven against assaults outside the home may make it more difficult for women of color to seek protection against assaults from within the home" (362). Crenshaw concludes that challenging the contradictions present in Black women's lives is a never-ending-process of identity politics, and that Black women "need not await the ultimate triumph over racism before they can expect to live violence-free lives" (363).

It is not a coincidence that I employ multidisciplinary theories as analytic tools for my fictional exploration of Black women's reality. I do this for the purpose of offering interdisciplinary perspectives from which the intersectional complexities of Black women's reality can be unraveled. That majority of these theories used in my work are generated by Black women and women of color is fundamental to my research, because it is my primary objective that my analytic tools reflect informed engagement. Additionally, it is my view in agreement with Patricia Hill Collins that these theories applied to Black women's issues, due to the delimitation of their concerns, must simultaneously engage in deconstructing mainstream scholarships and producing new versions of truth. For the purpose of clarity, rather than use a lengthy approach to my analysis, I have chosen to engage with my theoretical frameworks in sub-sections notwithstanding their convergence. In the last decades, a significant number of Black feminist movements have emerged and gained momentum across the continents. These movements share a common goal; to reconstruct the experiences of Black women within and outside African social structures through theory and intellectualism, making it reasonable to argue that these theories and methodologies are derivatives of one another. The majority of theoretical contributions to my book critically engage with the gap in Black liberation politics and traditional feminist movements, developing new methodologies and theories to engage with the discourse of power and oppression.