Black Feminist Hauntology
Rememory the Ghosts of Abolition?

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Beloved (Morrison, 1987) is a novel inspired by the true life story of Margaret Garner, an enslaved African woman who entered the official records of history through a notorious trial presided over by a federal judge. On January 28, 1856, one of the coldest nights on record for Kentucky, Margaret age twenty-two and pregnant, escaped with her four children, ages nine months to six years, her husband Robert, age twenty-one, and his parents, along with nine other enslaved people (Walters, 2013, 3). It was necessary for them to escape in the winter to facilitate the crossing of rivers by foot over frozen waters. After crossing the Ohio River the group of seventeen split. Margaret and her family went to Cincinnati where her free cousin Elijah Kite lived.

The plan for Kite to obtain assistance from Quaker abolitionist Levi Coffin to get them to the next safe house on the Underground Railroad failed. Not long after they arrived at the house it was surrounded by Gaines1 and a number of deputy marshals. Resisting capture Robert shot and injured two of the deputies. Meanwhile, Margaret grabbed a butcher knife from the kitchen table, cut the throat of her toddler daughter, Mary, and struck the other three children. Her intent, she stated, was to prevent their return to slavery (Walters, 2013, 3).

Margaret and her family were arrested through the Fugitive Slave Laws, passed six years earlier in 1850. Following the Mexican American war (1846-1848) European colonists partitioned one third of Mexican territories adding them to the already conquered territories of the United States creating New Mexico, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, Colorado, California, Oklahoma, Texas, Kansas and Wyoming. The newly conquered territories would bring to surface deep divisions amongst Europeans who agreed to colonize these lands, but disagreed on the details of their operations. Senator Henry Clay, an outspoken supporter of slavery proposed a compromise for North and South, in a failed attempt to avoid what would eventually become the American Civil war.
On January 29, 1850, Henry Clay presented eight proposals to the Senate. Clay grouped the first six of his proposals into three pairs, each pair offering one concession to the North and one to the South. The first pair would admit California as a free state but would organize the rest ... without restrictions against slavery. The second would settle the Texas boundary dispute in favor of New Mexico but would compensate Texas for the bonds it had sold when it was an independent republic. The third pair of proposals would abolish the slave trade in the District of Columbia but would guarantee the continued existence of slavery there unless both Maryland and Virginia consented to abolition. Of Clay's final two proposals, one affirmed that Congress had no jurisdiction over the interstate slave trade; the other called for a strong national fugitive slave law (Murrin et al., 2014, 304).

In these historical moments it is clear how institutions of enslavement intersect with colonial land-theft and its corollary, indigenous genocide. The manners in which lands outside Europe were being bought and sold by Europeans mirror attitudes they practiced in buying and selling African people, centered upon compromises and negotiations amongst themselves to institute White Supremacy. Through European colonialism and its forced labor branch of chattel slavery, land and bodies alike were simultaneously transformed into conquered properties. It was through these intersecting wars and conquests that national White identities in the United States emerged, clearly differentiated between colonists in the South, who saw White wealth in slavery, and colonists in the North, who saw White wealth in industrialization and the solidification of a White blue collar workforce for European settlers unwilling to compete with slave wages. Though presented as oppositional they were – and for the most part still are – bound together in their decisions and imperial desires to conquer and colonize as many lands and peoples outside of Western Europe as possible. Under the terms of these morally corrupt systems, the details, as we can see, are negotiable.

Fugitive slave laws were considered controversial from the start, and though White anti-slavery abolitionists were staunchly and publically opposed to them, the majority in White society viewed them as problematic but not worrisome enough to warrant national outrage (American Anti-Slavery Society, 1861). When Margaret and her family were arrested in 1856 there had been a growing national conversation regarding the constitutionality of the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850. When Margaret was captured White abolitionists saw an opportunity to launch their own anti-slavery positions to national levels in a singular conversation centered upon, not the liberation of Black people from White supremacist bondage, but instead, what they were to do to Margaret. White abolitionists advocated for her to be handed over to the criminal justice system and tried for murder. This individualized and brutal solution stands in contradiction to their public declarations that Mary’s murder was an act of resistance to the federal government’s Fugitive Slave Laws and a testament to the horrors slavery inflicts upon its victims. A truly sincere advocacy for justice would have required they push for the indictment of slave owners and their accomplices for kidnapping, all forms of assault, involuntary confinement, blackmail, and murder. They did no such thing. Instead, they advocated for Margaret to be indicted and tried for the murder of her enslaved daughter. It is clear that for these abolitionists, the need to validate their own sense of White moral supremacy was undermined by the more overtly brutal violence of chattel slavery, and what they sought was a differing, more justifiable (to them) form of enslavement. Hidden in the shadows of their abolitionism is a relentless anti-Indigenous investment in colonial land-theft and a deep-rooted anti-Blackness towards the victims of slavery. Their advocacy for Margaret to be tried for murder was a testament to this. The criminal justice system...
provided a safe haven through which they could sustain (both individual and group) sense of self as moral and just as they took a stand against a savage system of enslavement, while at the same time keeping Black victims of that system conquered and enslaved within a appealingly different system, now termed [criminal] 'justice', assumed to be the opposite of chattel slavery. Conveniently, the criminal justice system enforced slavery (Childs, 2015), protecting and enforcing colonialism (Saleh-Hanna, 2008).

Though seemingly diametrically opposed, each White side of this bloody tale stands firmly rooted in anti-Blackness driven and legitimated by their own images of White superiority. On one side of White colonialism’s coin stand slaveholders and their plantations built on stolen lands hanging on, by any means necessary, to a White supremacist slave economy of anti-Black exploitation. On the other side of capitalism’s racist coin stand White (self-proclaimed) anti-slavery abolitionists and their criminal justice system built upon a stolen sense of justice, hijacked and replaced by imperialist and racialized constructions of crime and criminality. Together these positions and their institutions enforce racial violence while (only in narrative and only for their beneficiaries) self-moralizing a White expropriation of Indigenous peoples, and their lands so they can enslave Black labor, life and death. The criminal justice system and chattel slavery are flip sides of Western democracy’s coin of capital. Each side of this coin foreshadows and constructs the other side of this coin, living in perpetual intersectionality and co-dependence. Chattel slavery and criminal justice are both at the beginning of this system, one and the same, haunting, replacing, reforming and rebirthing one other.

In this paper, I anchor my analysis within the re-occurring life and repeated deaths of Margaret Garner, both through reference to what we know about her life from the murder trial and the life that Toni Morrison rewrote for her, and for us, in Beloved. I present Black Feminist Hauntology as an emergent consequence of penal colonialism (Saleh-Hanna, 2008) and introduce shape-shifting methodologies that transcend the structural powers of subjugated knowledges (Foucault, 1980) enabling a metamorphic liberation of colonized and enslaved bodies beyond the “creatures” existing only within White institutionalizing fantasies of Black personhood (hooks, 1981, 84). Through Black Feminist Hauntology we reach beyond the identity/body forming powers of colonizers and captors to produce a more appropriate critique of them, their colonizing ways, their moral bankruptcy and their varying systems of enslavement. Ultimately, what I present is an exorcizing framework that, to start, names the structurally abusive nature of colonial race relations and the colonizing praxis of punishment that forms its power. While the majority of my examples and analysis in this paper emerge from the context of the United States, Black Feminist Hauntology can be applied to lands, systems, histories and circumstances that, like European colonialism and chattel slavery, extend far beyond the borders of this nation-state.

I. A Future-Haunted Birth of Modernity: Foreshadowing the Rise of Criminal Justice Regimes

When C.L.R. James (1962) wrote that enslaved Africans became the first modern people he was pointing to the intersections of capital and race at which they lived and died, and through which modern empires and their institutions of domination were born. He commemorates the millions of small and large battles for freedom waged by victims of
White modernity, for it would be unethical and incomplete to speak of modernity while erasing the struggles of those who fought against its un-human ways. Because the Middle Passage enacted Europe’s violent journey into modernity (James, 1962) it is impossible to embark upon a comprehensive understanding of the criminal justice system without addressing the White elephant in the room: this system, today’s modern version of mass human warehousing - that is, the penitentiary - represents an extension of rather than an antithesis to Middle Passage genocide (Childs, 2009, 278). Through Black Feminist Hauntology I center this point and as a result, can only conclude that White modernity is bathed in the blood of its victims. To enable us to see that blood, and to understand the gendered nature of this violence, I turn our attention towards Margaret Garner as a symbol of resistance, and to those who surrounded her as representatives of why we have failed to abolish carceral punishment from the landscapes of modern, postmodern, and postpostmodern life.

As we read about Margaret Garner’s life and death we are forced to confront her brutal act of infanticide. We are made to look at modernity through its own lens of sexual violence, to speak of those unspeakable things unspoken that Toni Morrison (1987) speaks of. Saidiya Hartman defies un-speak-ability by pointing to the impossibility of adequately representing the violence of slavery... due not only to the enormity of the degradation and the unwillingness of the reader to believe the extremity or obscenity of violence but also to the fact that by speaking of these crimes the narrator carries the burden of the indecent and the obscene (Hartman, 1997, 109). Like Morrison, when she speaks of unspeakability, she enables her readers with the ability to speak. Hartman defies silence when she states, to speak of the foul wrongs committed... is to enact the indecent and unveil the unspeakable; for to utter the shame that is carried by victims is to release it back into public space, to risk assigning it to perpetrators. Additionally, to speak of that which is unspoken is to reverse the manners in which rape is only represented in terms of its effects – mute, pregnant women and near-White offspring (ibid.). Margaret’s daughter Mary was described as one such near-White baby. When Toni Morrison wrote Beloved she re-wrote Margaret (renamed Sethe) as pregnant when she killed her baby. The excerpts in this paper that include conversations between Sethe and Denver are conversations Sethe is having with that baby, now born. These are Morrison’s renditions of conversations that Margaret is having with future generations of Black women, from her grave, through her life and the many manners in which she died. Through these layers of understanding we can begin to comprehend why C.L.R. James defined enslaved Africans as the first modern peoples and why Dennis Childs (2009) concludes that chattel slavery is a system of death perpetuated and extended through the genocide of modernity’s criminal justice system.

Modernity and the rise of Western science required civilized people prove someone had done something to deserve enslavement. In these terms the process becomes unthinkable, for we cannot speak of enslavement without assigning ‘deservability’. The criminal justice systems provides the language and tools whereby the unspeakability of slavery can be uttered, the first step needed for recreation. In the quest to locate guilt within colonized individuals, crimes of enslavement within plantations, chain gangs, reservations and penitentiaries are shielded from moral interrogation while processes of confinement (whom, how and for how long) conveniently take precedence. These shifts in language and process, more aptly named ‘reform’ – and in this paper identified through structural shape-shifting – are necessary, not for the greater good of society, but for the institutionalization of White supremacy. To survive valid criticism, racial colonialism had
to shed its overarching statements of biological supremacy and inferiority so dominant through chattel slavery. This system had to turn to the criminal justice system and its interrogating, individualizing and imprisoning ways. Importantly, the criminal justice system could brutalize people more seemingly (but extremely rarely in practice for agents of the state remain dominantly shielded from incrimination) for what they had done, as opposed to who they were. A logistical shift in systemic narrative was sufficient because, as stated above, the larger goals of racial colonial conquest were shared across the White political spectrum, then as they are now.

The diametrically opposed conditions of sustaining and defending White supremacy produces a schizophrenic racism whereby the collective sense of White self as morally and culturally supreme is disputed in the face of slavery and colonialism’s overtly visible and savage violence. It is from the ruins of these personal and systemic contradictions and pathologies that the criminal justice system, like a bloody Phoenix, reawakens and renews chattel slavery. The criminal justice system’s reanimated power resides in its militarized capacities to hold entire populations captive, stripped of agency and formal identity, while maintaining a regimented monopoly over what could be defined as criminal. In these forward-haunting circumstances, the slaveholder (soon to be reborn police officer, prison guard) and his accomplices (soon to be reborn courtroom judges, lawyers, probation officers) never went to trial for committing crimes against humanity, more precisely here, for enslaving Africans, including Margaret (soon to be reborn racialized criminal) who, during these specific events became the only person charged with a crime when she was sent to trial for killing her daughter. More than anything else, White abolitionists were driven by White savior complexes, stoked by the needy and violent fires of White supremacist hetero-patriarchy. This became abundantly clear in Margaret Garner’s courtroom trial. An abolitionist ‘victory’ would not have liberated her, but simply moved her confinement from plantation to penitentiary. This can only be dubbed ‘abolitionist’ if we accept abolition only within and never beyond the borders of White supremacy.

On the flip side of White supremacy’s coin, pro-slavery advocates who saw themselves as supporters of Robert Gaines insisted a murder was never committed, that when Margaret escaped with her family and killed her daughter she had committed theft, that she ‘stole’ herself and her family from Robert Gaines, destroying his property when she killed her daughter. According to them, nothing more and nothing less had happened. The child was not a person and could not legally be murdered. Limited to the confines of racialized capitalism’s borders, whether Margaret would be found guilty or innocent depended on resolving the case’s compelling if atypical dilemma: whether she would be charged with the crime of murder or of theft (Walters, 2013, 4). It should be clear to us today that Margaret’s actual freedom from White bondage was never on the table. She merely represented moral (for Northerners) and economic (for Southerners) fodder to colonists who craved redemption. Beneath the surface of plantations in the South and factories in the North lies a deep and unforgiving thorn: the so-called civilized peoples of the modern world occupy lands that will never belong to them because they are European, and North America, regardless of how many Indigenous peoples they massacre or displace or how many colonial laws they pass, will always belong to their victims and the murdered ghosts of their ancestors. Trains, roads, skyscrapers, military might, technological advancement, laws, bills of rights, constitutions (and their amendments) and a million declarations of independence cannot ever change that fact. Modernity and its institutions stand haunted by the ghosts
of their own victims and the descendants of those who survived serving as a constant reminder of racial colonialism’s own failures, blood-thirstiness and savage ways.

As for Margaret Garner, the state of Kentucky, in structural representation of slaveholders, wanted her tried for theft while the state of Ohio, in structural manifestation of White abolitionists, wanted her tried for murder. The lives of her and her family hung in the balance between these two violent options leading to a singular outcome. The federal court judge decided to enforce the Fugitive Slave laws ruling in favor of Kentucky and the slaveholder. Margaret and her family were returned to the custody of Robert Gaines and to slavery. The punishments they all endured must have been horrific. Gaines immediately moved Margaret and her family to Arkansas where friends of his family kept them until arrangements were made for them to be sold at a slave auction in Louisiana. During her transport down south the ship carrying Margaret and her daughter collided with another ship. Some testimonies assert Margaret jumped out with her daughter and willingly drowned her before being dragged back onto the boat against her will. Others claim her daughter’s death was an accident (Walters, 2013). Margaret eventually made it to Louisiana where Judge Dewitt Clinton Bonham bought her and forced her to labor upon the stolen lands that had become his farm. She died from typhoid fever two years later in 1858 at the age of twenty-four (Barker, Jefferson, 2013). Margaret Garner’s life under a slave owner’s violence and death within a plantation owned by a judge exemplifies how the Prison-Industrial-Complex is modern day slavery. Her life, trial and death foreshadow and future-haunt the inevitability of these developments and institutional transitions: systemically taken from slave ships into plantations into penitentiaries, shifting from ship captain to plantation owner to prison warden and police officer. This is the progression of White supremacy. This is its transition into modernity.

II. What Haunts Derrida?

I was talking about time. It’s so hard for me to believe in it. Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay. I used to think it was my rememory. You know. Some things you forget. Other things you never do. But it’s not. Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it’s gone, but the place – the picture of it – stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world. What I remember is a picture floating around out there outside my head. I mean, even if I don’t think it, even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there. Right in the place where it happened.

Can other people see it? asked Denver [Sethe’s surviving daughter]

Oh yes. Oh yes, yes, yes. Someday you be walking down the road and you hear something or see something going on. So clear. And you think it’s you thinking it up. A thought picture. But no. It’s when you bump into a rememory that belongs to somebody else. Where I was before I came here, that place is real. It’s never going away. Even if the whole farm – every tree and grass blade dies. The picture is still there and what’s more, if you go there – you who never was there – if you go there and stand in the place where it was, it will happen again; it will be there for you, waiting for you. So Denver, you can’t never go there. Never. Because even though it’s all over – over and done with – it’s going to always be there waiting for you. That’s how come I had to get all my children out. No matter what.

Denver picked her fingernails. “If it’s still there, waiting, that must mean that nothing ever dies”.

I first came across the term ‘hauntology’ in Jacques Derrida’s 1994 book *Specters of Marx*. It is a book inspired by two lectures he gave at a conference named ‘Whither Marxism?’ in which one may hear beneath the question ‘Where is Marxism going?’ another question: ‘Is Marxism dying?’ (Derrida, 1994, xiii). Derrida suggests communism has not died, but instead haunts and defines the processes of producing and institutionalizing capital. He points to the first word in the first sentence in *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (Marx and Engels, 1848) and contemplates his unintentional reuse of it. He notes that he had not read *Manifesto of the Communist Party* in decades and concludes, *I have just discovered, in truth, I have just remembered what must have been haunting my memory: the first noun of the Manifesto and this time in the singular is 'specter': ‘A specter is haunting Europe – the specter of communism’* (2, original emphasis). What is interesting in these reflections is Derrida’s use of the verbs “discovered” interchangeably and “in truth” with “remembered”. The Black feminist in me could not help but see the ghost of Christopher Columbus hovering over those two words, “discovered” and “remembered” as bell hook’s words continue to ring true decades after she wrote them:

> We were taught that Columbus discovered America; that ‘Indians’ were scalphunters, killers of innocent women and children; that Black people were enslaved because of the biblical curse of Ham, that God ‘himself’ had decreed they would be hewers of wood, tillers of the field, and bringers of water. No one talked of Africa as the cradle of civilization, of the Africans and Asians who came to America before Columbus. No one mentioned mass murders of Native Americans as genocide, or the rape of Native American and African women as terrorism. No one discussed slavery as a foundation for growth of capitalism. No one described the forced breeding of White wives to increase the White population as sexist oppression (hooks, 1981, 121)

Indeed discovery, and memory or remembrance carry meanings far deeper than Derrida’s use of them. A brief introduction to Derrida’s own personal, colonizing history provides the appropriate context, or (to use Derrida) deconstruction of his careless use of these terms. Jacques Derrida grew up in a French, settler colonial family in Algeria:

> For the first two decades of his life, he never left the Jewish suburb of Algiers where he was born, not even to take the train elsewhere in Algeria... The familial residence...is invoked lovingly by him as the place where he, his older brother René and a younger brother who died in infancy... were born and raised... He played on the street’s name as a way of invoking his sense of identification with the Christian philosopher and saint who was also born in North Africa. Even after leaving El-Biar for the French mainland in 1949, he returned frequently during vacations and fulfilled his military service there, in the midst of the war, as a teacher of French and English to French Algerian [colonized African] students between 1957 and 1959... As the war intensified, Derrida’s family contemplated what seemed the inevitable: leaving Algeria. Initially, Derrida tried to convince them to stay, an indication of his attachment to his place of birth... a remarkably strong one. He suffered a serious period of depression toward the end of 1959-60... very likely rooted in the strain of the approach of this inevitability... By 1962, however, he was resigned and returned to Algeria to help move his family to Nice, not subsequently returning to his country of birth for nearly ten years (Riley, 2010, 224).

Riley continues with a quote by Derrida in which his agonized post-Algerian war pied noir identity, is expressed in the remnants of his ‘French Algerian’ accent buried deep within him, and emerging in moments of anger or extreme emotion (ibid.). Pied noir is a term meaning ‘barefoot Blackness’ or ‘Black foot’ used by French colonists in North Africa to politically naturalize themselves to North Africa. This term is constructed through the
same colonizing praxis used by the Dutch in South Africa who named themselves Afrikaners and is part of a long legacy of expropriation employed by colonists who stole, not just land, but home, legacy, and identity from their victims. With this as his backdrop it is telling how Derrida expresses his memory of the Manifesto of Marx and Engels, with a deeply embedded reverence and colonizing relation to specters similar in fashion to the annual celebrations many in the Western Hemisphere have on Columbus Day.

III. Rememory and Willed Forgetfulness: Resisting White Supremacy’s Vision of Life and Death

16 In Beloved, Toni Morrison (1987) presents ‘rememory’ as structural remembrance transcending individual or time-segregated acts of remembrance. Reflecting on her experiences of enslavement Sethe explains: It’s so hard for me to believe in it [time]. Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay. I used to think it was my rememory...But it’s not...places are still there. If a house burns down, it’s gone, but the place the picture of it – stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world (ibid., 35-36, emphasis added). In rewriting our conceptions of memory into rememory Morrison invokes the intergenerational nature of structural violence, speaking to institutional and inter-generational memory held within the bodies of enslaved Africans, European slaveholders, settler-colonists and their descendants. When Orlando Patterson (1982, 175) declared racial thinking constructs race upon the assumption of innate differences based on real or imagined physical or other differences he inspired us to consider how constructions of difference between races produces a likeness necessitating homogeneity within racial categories, giving rise to the stereotyping of Blackness imagined by White culture. That homogeneity of the stereotype is a repeating and ghosted process whereby White rememory articulates across time the violent constructions of Blackness implanted by their slaveholding and colonizing ancestors.

17 Flipping the oppressive nature of this process Stuart Hall’s (1996, 211) construction of Black cultural identity asserts our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as ‘one people’ with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning beneath the shifting divisions of vicissitudes of our actual history... This ‘oneness’, underlying all the other, more superficial differences, is the truth, the essence, of ‘Caribbeaness’. What he terms ‘Caribbeaness’ can be applied to a larger Diasporic Blackness born out of a place of surviving displacement alongside and because of Diasporic Whiteness born out of a place of imagined entitlement and militarized hetero-patriarchal racism. At the root is a system of terror trapping colonized and enslaved peoples within cycles of abusive relationships structured upon racism – a masculinized, heteronormative, classist system of control of the global majority so that a minority White community can achieve abusive, parasitic prosperity.

18 What involuntarily binds us together are the institutionalized, thus wide-reaching and repetitive praxis of colonial violence. Through both the processes of colonizing or being colonized we emerge – with very different relationships to history and systems – a people haunted by racial colonialism and promises broken, submerged in what Warren Cariou (2006, 730) termed willed forgetfulness, a process whereby the colossal injustice in the settlement of the West has been successfully repressed by settler culture. Willed forgetfulness has been foundational to my conceptions of Black Feminist Hauntology as it opens a
window to envision and articulate the overbearing silence – reimagined as enforced or willed forgetfulness surrounding colonial violence and its racializing ways. Willed forgetfulness is rooted within dominant colonizing cultures and thus impacts all that live within them:

…and suddenly there was Sweet Home [plantation] rolling, rolling, rolling, rolling out before her in shameless beauty. It never looked as terrible as it was and it made her wonder if hell was a pretty place too. Fire and brimstone all right, but hidden in lacy groves. Boys hanging from the most beautiful sycamores in the world. It shamed her – remembering the wonderful soughing trees rather than the boys. Try as she might to make it otherwise, the sycamores beat out the children every time and she could not forgive her memory for that (Morrison, 1987, 6).

The impact of willed forgetfulness manifests itself through Sethe’s memory in manners that move her beyond will and into a coerced place of conquest. These conceptions of memory, renamed rememory take on new dimensions beyond the mind, now residing in repeated (institutionalizing) actions 'out there' beyond each individual. Rememory is preserved in institutions, branded upon their violently structured bureaucracies and practiced upon the bodies of the colonized by the bodies of colonizers: a specter is haunting modernity – the specter of colonialism. It is from outside our own decision-making reaches, a dichotomized notion of remembrance versus forgetfulness, that rememory’s haunted manners formed my imaginings of Black Feminist Hauntology.

IV. What is a Sociological Ghost? Is She a Black Feminist?

Black Feminist Hauntology is an anti-colonial analysis of time that captures the expanding and repetitive nature of structural violence, a process whereby we begin to locate a language to speak about the actual, not just symbolic or theorized violence that is racial colonialism. The ghosted nature of this work brings forth or calls upon the silent yet visible and enduring realities of colonialism:

...a ‘sociological ghost,’ the form by which something is lost, barely visible, or seemingly not there to our supposedly well-trained eyes, makes itself known or apparent to us, in its own way, of course. The way of the ghost is haunting, and haunting is a very particular way of knowing what has happened or is happening. Being haunted draws us affectively, sometimes against our will and always a bit magically, into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience, not as cold knowledge, but as a transformative recognition... the forces in our lives that we usually try to ignore or forget, but never totally leave us alone. If we deliberately investigate these ghosts, though, we can learn to take control over troubling memories; we may turn destructive haunting into something more enabling (Jacobs, 2007, 7).

Here, the term 'ghost' neither confirms nor denies the metaphysical. It simply invokes a framework in which terror and unpredictability, grief and unrest, guilt and injustice, ancestors and demons can be called upon to empower and liberate us, not from the fact that we have been violated or even that violation continues, but from a condition of inability to locate the heart and soul of the problem.

As we learn to see in Beloved, slavery shapes (present tense) the lives of the people (across its racializing spectrums) it consumes. Through Sethe, Toni Morrison brings forth the undeniable reality of the problem at hand: that the ensuing legacies of centuries engulfed
in chattel slavery and Indigenous genocide are real, that at this time, we continue to live through its bloodshed and that no amount of silence, distortion or terror can erase it. In her presentation of Sethe’s rememory Morrison disallows, even at the periphery, a view of the world in which chattel slavery and plantation violence is not forever carved into the social, political, cultural, and economic landscape. At the same time, a fatalistic view of colonial slavery assuming we always have and always will be colonizers or colonized is rejected in her vivid articulation of the brutality with which these institutions are built and maintained. So finally, with both of these realities articulated, we are left with a deep recognition for the casualties and survivors of such violence, their descendant’s continued struggles against it and an immediate reverence against it. From this place of both acceptance (that colonialism and slavery happened, are happening, and are significant indicators of how we live our lives today) and rejection (that this violence is reprehensible) we locate an acutely anti-colonial stance desperately needed in abolitionist movements today.

1) White Supremacy is a Ponzi-Scheme Trapping its Victims within Racialized Cycles of Abuse

Through Black Feminist Hauntology, racial colonialism re-appears an implicitly abusive system of power (capitalism) and control (enslaved, reservation-bound, imprisoned and many more varying forms of conquest). A system built upon White supremacist conceptions of humanity and conquest is a system that must appear and re-appear in varying forms to uphold its own lies. It functions like a ponzi-scheme borrowing from one liberation movement’s language and ideologies to the next, co-opting the images of freedom to conceal its racist, morally corrupt bankruptcy. The scheme can only crumble – and quickly – when new lenders stop providing funds. Thus, White supremacy’s fuel has always resided in an implicit anti-Blackness it knows it can bank on, for its political campaigns, its policies of reform, its anti-Black constructions of abolition, its varying punishing and thinking institutions. That ponzi-scheme flourishes when feminism remains dominantly White, when Marxism remains dominantly White, when postmodernism remain dominantly White, when neocolonial and postcolonial studies became dominantly White, and so on. While the ponzi-scheme analogy helps us understand how White supremacy perpetuates itself despite moral bankruptcy, its actual practices are best understood through our knowledge of abusive relationships.

Race-relations, through colonial conquest, have developed inter-generational, wide-reaching, institutionalized and structurally abusive relationships that mirror cycles of abuse made familiar to us in feminist scholarship. Abusers start by isolating their victims from family and support networks, proceed by entangling their victims in a web of self-doubt and dangerously involuntary dependence, and entrap their victims by building an illusion of change to come or abuse to end. The institutional beatings of a systemic abuser manifests itself behind a million small and large acts of injustice behind the looming figure of a White man, on a horse, with a gun in one hand and a bouquet of flowers in the other. Buried deep within that figure are the qualities that form the modern abusive husband who is born out of the colonial soldier’s massacres, the White feminist who constructs her own womanhood in juxtaposition to her colonized stepdaughter, the one who was born because her husband, a slaveholder, a prison guard, a president of the United States raped that child’s enslaved, imprisoned mother. Racial colonialism binds us
up in one place and constructs us through a classically capitalist competition of humanity in which Whiteness, backed by militarized power (penal and otherwise) becomes dependent upon racializing violence to construct itself.

White hetero-patriarchal violence classically legitimizes racial abuse by othering so it can blame the victim. It occurs in cycles starting with isolation, followed by beatings, then apologies accompanied by gifts in what feminists call the ‘honeymoon’ phase rife with formerly broken promises. Typically as the honeymoon ends tensions begin to build and soon after the abused partner bears the brunt of her abusers ways and inevitably, the cycle continues with beatings once again manifesting themselves in overtly abusive measures of control. Through Black Feminist Hauntology we apply this cycle of violence so well discussed in feminist scholarship (e.g. Snider, 1998; Harris, 2011) to a structural understanding of colonizing race-relations in the United States. These are inter-generational, foundationally abusive; the original acts of isolation began with colonial land-theft (isolating Indigenous peoples from their land, identities and ways of life) and slavery (isolating African peoples from their homelands, families, ways of life and worship, their very identities). The first severe and often lethal beatings were performed by Europeans through chattel slavery and Indigenous genocides. Centuries of abuse were followed by a brief honeymoon phase phase (in the structural Black and White Racial relationship) in the United States named ‘reconstruction’ after the 13th amendment was passed in 1895: Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as punishment for a crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction (United States Constitution, emphasis added). Heavily embedded in this amendment is the abuser’s warning, that slavery could re-emerge if his victim does not follow his rules (i.e. if she is convicted of a crime). This moment in race-relations, the passing of the 13th amendment, is mirrored every time an abuser comes home with flowers or blood diamonds, depending on his inherited or achieved status, to atone for his violence. As we know, these gifts are accompanied by ‘never again’ messages underscored by classic, ‘do not provoke me’ tones of victim blaming. Race-relations through colonial conquest continue to exist within these tensions and the beatings eventually resurface. During Reconstruction Whiteness emerged solidly rooted in the formations of the ku klux klan and their support within White neighborhood associations manifesting in White police enforcement and their politically popular endorsement of lynching (Hale, 1999). Those beatings performed through lynching, and accompanied by varieties of Black resistance, commenced for decades and claimed thousands of lives. This abuse was briefly followed by a honeymoon moment in which the Civil Rights Act was signed in 1964. Shortly afterward COINTELPRO waged its war on freedom struggles, the war on drugs became institutionalized, privatized prisons were revived, and prison labor entered into the New York Stock exchange to be bought and sold by corporations investing in these most expensive and ‘low risk’ stocks (Browne, 1996). The criminal justice system emerged empowered to carry on the beatings that chattel slavery and jim crow violence had performed before it accompanied by each generation’s resistance, struggles to survive. Today, the public, recorded and endorsed police murders of Black people in the United States are confronted with ghosted words, “Hands up don’t shoot” and “I can’t breathe”, uttered from the graves, sustained by protesters shouting back White supremacy’s ultimate unspeakable sentiment: “Black Lives Matter”. Anti-Black police violence today is ghosted by its historic antecedents, was forward-haunted by lynching and the countless deaths inflicted by armed White men on plantations colonizing the vast majority of the Western Hemisphere, overshadowing but unable to fully erase the fact that chattel
slavery extends well beyond the Confederate States of the Southern United States and pollutes the Northern regions of the United States, Canada, Western Europe (Cooper, 2007) and vast lands and islands south of the United States. Chattel slavery was the underpinning institution for White modernity and as generations of White Supremacy’s abusive institutional beatings arises, with each comes its own systemic perpetrator’s versions of why the victims of abusive race-relations are ‘responsible’ for that violence. Much like an abused woman must first recognize that she is trapped in an abusive relationship before she can find the language needed to critique it, it is only through an understanding of colonial cycles of abuse that we can transcend these exploitative explanations – of crime, of segregation, of slavery, of the inevitability of Black and Indigenous death mirrored in the progression of White supremacist life – to fully consider an exit from White supremacist hetero-patriarchy altogether.

Oftentimes, the first step in exiting an abusive relationship alive requires the abused to see, in her abuser, his potential to kill, coupled by her desire to remain alive. She must recognize his intentions to continue abusing her, his obsessive need to control her. It is not that he cannot or will not change, it is that he does not want to or does not have to change. Margaret Garner knew that, which is why she left Sweet Home Plantation. That was why she killed her daughter, because she had to kill her: If I had not killed her she would have died and that is something I could not bear to happen to her (Morrison, 1987, 200).

Orlando Patterson’s definition of slavery as parasitic helps us better define the abusive nature of White racializing colonialism: parasitism emphasizes the asymmetry of all such unequal relations: the degree to which the parasite [Whiteness] depends on the host [Blackness] is not necessarily a direct measure of the extent to which the host is exploited in supporting the parasite. A parasite may be only partially dependent on its host, but this partial dependence may entail the destruction of the host (Patterson, 1982, 335). To view slavery through these lenses requires we see racial dependency and race relations as inherently exploitative: for slavery produced a parasitic Whiteness dependent on degraded conceptions of Black personhood through which forced Black labor is imagined legitimate, legal and ethical. Whiteness, as such, relies on and literally feeds off anti-Blackness, without which it could not uphold the White power structures upon which European colonialism then and now is dependent.

V. Black Feminist Hauntology: Un-Ghosting Whiteness

Colonial languages have enforced the notion that racialization happens to colonized/imprisoned/enslaved bodies and diverts our attention from how the bodies of colonizers and slaveholders are racialized into Whiteness. At the root of colonial racialization through a Black to White spectrum is a distinctly anti-Black praxis powered by White supremacy’s hetero-patriarchal, imperialist powers. Thus, anti-Blackness embodies racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, ableism and so on. Accepting that allows an accurately complex perception of Blackness, while disallowing the narrowly racist construction of ‘being’ Black as race alone leading to the ludicrous suggestion that the study of race/racism cannot and does not simultaneously speak to class, gender and sexuality. At the American Society of Criminology meeting in San Francisco in 2014, I was on a panel with a White woman who insisted that ‘race’ was not the ‘problem’ she was studying because the women (all of them White, she confirmed) in her study reflected issues of gender alone. When I insisted that the women in her study were in fact White
women, therefore embodying a White racialization of gender she turned her back to me and engaged in discussion with the White woman sitting next to her on our panel. This well illustrated the deep entrenchment of White power and its constructions of ‘normal’ bodies (just women) juxtaposed against everybody else.

Kimberle Crenshaw (1989) produced a Black feminist understanding of intersectionality, clearly inspired by the Combahee River Collective (1977) and in resistance to these narrow constructions of body, place, and identity. She introduced intersectionality by citing court rulings in which the legal separation of race discrimination from sex discrimination was mandated in order for the law to function and for the colonial conception of justice to proceed uninterrupted. The result has been a legal unwillingness by the colonizing court to produce justice for colonized Black women. For example, the court ruled against sex discrimination in hiring practices regarding Black women in a corporation (General Motors) that had, in its entire history at the time of the case, exclusively hired men and White women. The court ruled gender discrimination did not exist because White women had been hired, and race discrimination did not exist because Black men had been hired (ibid., 41). Alternately, in another case, when a Black woman filed a race discrimination suit she was immediately prevented from introducing any statistical evidence for sex discrimination in her workplace. And finally, some cases have denied Black women certification as class representatives in race discrimination suits insisting sex disparities between Black men and Black women created such conflicting interests that Black women could not possibly represent Black men adequately (ibid., 43). Each of these cases provides insight into how White power’s dichotomies are mirrored in the court system’s piecemeal readings of colonized bodies.

Though we discuss the social, cultural and political processes of segregation in the world, we often fail to identify how the White academy extends and naturalizes those policies in its insistence all conversations on class (or gender, or sexuality) do not need to include race; that when we study ‘race’ we obscure the actual power of class (if you are a White Marxist) or gender and sexuality (if you are a White feminist). These views of class, gender and sexuality are brought to us through a White power perspective that refuses to see race as a study of itself, for it knows that today the terms White race, White power and White pride carry long legacies of visible bloodshed, and to maintain White power and pride it cannot speak of Whiteness anymore. In reality, class, gender and sexuality have never been studied in isolation from race because they have always hinged upon the experiences, bodies and needs of White people. To define White working class struggles or White women’s struggles as simply classism or sexism is the ultimate expression of White supremacy, for it illustrates a position and process whereby White bodies erase or exterminate from the ‘regular’ academy, Black, Brown, and colonized bodies. Crenshaw’s work was groundbreaking because she stated the obvious in an academic context where the fallacies of White supremacist masculinity had exterminated complexity in manners convenient for data analysis, but like its corollary in the courtroom fails to produce appropriate results or justice.

VI. Black Feminist Hauntology’s Shape-Shifting Analyses

What for? What does a sixty-odd-year-old slavewoman who walks like a three-legged dog
need freedom for? And when she stepped foot on free ground she could not believe that Halle knew what she didn’t; that Halle, who had never drawn one free breath, knew that there was nothing like it in this world (Morrison, 1987, 141).

Derrida presents hauntology as part of his general theory of capital in which objects, labor and all things related through capitalism are transformed into use-value conditions in what he calls phantasmagoric or hallucinatory processes. He conceives of hallucinations as process of transformation beginning at an origin that is itself fictive or ideal, thus already purified by a certain fantasies (Derrida, 1994, 160). He names this transformation ‘limit-concept’ and suggests that it is in advance contaminated, that it is pre-occupied, inhabited, haunted by its other, namely what will be born… [which is its] commodity form, and its ghost dance (ibid.). Derrida centers a Marxist analysis in which the constructed commodity-form is distinct from yet haunted by its soon-to-be born ‘use-value’ under capitalism. Haunting, he suggests, originates in the world in which the object is about to be born “like the ghost it will become” (ibid., 161). Thus, to haunt does not mean to be present, and it is necessary to introduce haunting into the very construction of a concept. Of every concept, beginning with the concepts of being and time. That is what we would be calling here a hauntology (ibid.).

It was at this juncture, of hauntology as originating in the world in which the object is about to be born “like the ghost it will become” that I generate shape-shifting tools. It was clear to me that the haunted object is masculine hetero-normative Whiteness, produced in a phantasmagoric delusion of grandeur and entitlement, beginning at an origin that is itself fictive or ideal, thus already purified by a certain [I insert: violent] fantasies (ibid., 160). That limit-concept was more than a capitalist process of othering, it is (in the present tense) a colonial (post) modernizing endeavor, in advance contaminated… pre-occupied, inhabited, haunted by its other, chattel slavery and colonial genocide emergent yet silent in White disciplines of history, sociology, criminology, political science, biology, and so many more, in commodity form, and its ghost dance (ibid.). The ghosting of Whiteness in dominant scholarship produces work that is tragically incomplete; thus, it is destined to remain unfinished (Mathiesen, 1974). In Black Feminist Hauntology unfinished business is the result of oppression. As we know, ghosts remain because justice has not been achieved. The unfinished nature of abolitionism and resistance will continue to produce inaccurate renditions of the social world until anti-Blackness is exorcized. Short of an exorcism, this type of thought will continue to dwarf complex and liberating understandings of oppression and privilege, remaining trapped within its own lessons, reproducing its own cycles of violence, on small and grand scales simultaneously.

As I finished Derrida’s book I found myself unwilling to engage too deeply in what would be an obvious critique of his work; it is a highly romanticized and at times uncritical representation of Karl Marx and an exaggerated affirmation of Marxism’s wide reaching ideological prowess. Derrida’s writing about ghosts was distracting and at the same time inspiring – as my mind wandered through some of his denser passages I found myself chuckling to Foucault’s French accent declaring: as far as I am concerned, Marx does not exist! (1980, 76, exclamation point added). Above Foucault’s ghost flashed images of Joy James’s (1996) Black insurrection of Foucault’s (1980) White subjugated knowledges. I kept waiting for Derrida to address the abundant critiques of Marx and Marxism, but to no real avail. My English-speaking mind wandered to a German accented Marx who had adopted
from his Christian neighbors the habit of calling ideas and people he did not like ‘dirty-Jewish’ whether they were Jewish or not, and when he really hated someone... Marx would call him a ‘dirty Jew of Negro blood’ (Randall, College, 1964, 9-10). And thus, Black Feminist Hauntology was born for me through these readings of Whiteness between the lines of dominant scholarship, radical and otherwise.

The ghosted and ghosting essences of White scholarship, when assessed through Black Feminist Hauntology remerge trapped within a fragile, ponzi-scheme form of paranoid existence, always in anticipation of the ‘discovery’ of its morally bankrupt reality. With each generation of White scholars reproducing scholarship easily located within White supremacist power and abuse emerges the ensuing legacies of colonial violence and the attempted (but not fully successful) extermination of all that is not White, or not yet White. So, yes: the sociological ghost I call upon is a Black feminist. She is the voices and the intellectual contributions of Black women who have known and seen that which has not been articulated or documented in White-ologies. She (and her descendants) is a Black woman who lived hundreds of years ago on plantations, beneath the boots and belts of White men and their wives, and she (and her descendants) is the Black woman who lived thousands of years ago in societies and worlds predating racial colonialism and chattel slavery. She is the transcendent shape-shifter I locate below and she has produced metamorphic and structural shape-shifting, tools for the exorcism I invoke here.

VII. Three Tools for Analysis: Transcendent, Metamorphic and Structural Shape-Shifting

Through Black Feminist Hauntology colonialism re-appears a system shape-shifting its way through a people – beneficiaries as well as victims – who in turn become shape-shifters. Shape-shifting is the animal into human (and vice versa) transformations abundant in sacred texts, mythological legends, and widely adopted spiritual practices of historicized peoples and societies around the world. Politically ‘animal’ has come to embody the dehumanizing paradigms of colonialism – they treated Africans or they treat prisoners like ‘animals’. In this paper I use the term in its earlier contexts that did not construct animals as debased beings.

The ‘animalization’ of human bodies was a process pursued through the racial sciences of the late 19th century gaining popularity early in the 20th century soon after the abolition of chattel slavery in the United States. At the time, popular and well-funded White researchers insisted that Black people belonged to a ‘species’ different from Whites. Josiah C. Nott and George R. Gliddon (1854) wrote the widely received Types of Mankind arguing that human beings were descendants of entirely distinct ‘species’ delineated by race and emerging from distinct origins. They stood in firm opposition to the creationists (then referred to as naturalists) in their vulgar belief that all human beings descended from an Asiatic pair (the biblical Adam and Eve):

We incline to the opinion of M. Agassiz, that men were created in nations, and not in a single pair. Since the time of Linnaeus, who first placed man at the head of the Animal Kingdom and in the same series with monkeys, numerous classifications of human races have been proposed (ibid., 82). They conclude that nothing short of a miracle could have evolved all the multifarious Caucasian forms out of one primitive stock; because the Canaanites, the Arabs, the Tartars and Egyptians, were absolutely as distinct from each other in primeval times as they are now; just as they all were from the co-existent Negroes. Such a miracle, indeed has been...
invented and dogmatically defended; but it is a bare postulate, unsupported by the Hebrew Bible, and positively refuted by scientific facts (ibid., 89).

While few openly express these views today, their impact continues to be seen within the underlying assumptions of racial criminalization. It is clear to me that the racist animalization of humanity in the 1800s foreshadowed and haunts the popular belief today that people can dehumanize each other. I do not believe people can become externally ‘dehumanized’ – treated as if they are not a person (i.e. an animal as defined by White modernity) because no matter what someone or a system does to a person or a people, they, the victims and survivors of structural violence, remain human. Instead, the ‘dehumanization’ so many speak of, the act of ‘making less human’ happens to the person who commits crimes against humanity, the slaver and the colonist and their descendants through time; for colonization decivilizes the colonizer (Césaire, 1955,10).

In mythology, shape-shifting is generally presented in three overlapping narratives (Windling, Datlow, 2010). The first presentation of shape-shifting in mythology comes in the form of Gods or Goddess, immortal entities produced at the junctures where human and animal have morphed into one being. They have transcended the perceived dichotomy between animal and human worlds, and now embody an animal-human being accessing all powers residing in both worlds, thus achieving immortality. I name this transcendent shape-shifting and explain how it is produced through Black Feminist Hauntology’s practice of intersectionality. The second type of shape-shifting includes immortal beings voluntarily shifting from their recognized physical form to achieve good or evil (sometimes these are overlapping) goals. I name this structural shape-shifting and use it to define institutional and structural cycles of abuse. The third form of shape-shifting includes humans who are involuntarily transformed into animals through a magical enforcement of punishment for lesson learning. I name this metamorphic shape-shifting and present it as a tool for studying the bodies of colonizers and their uniformed, armed, corporate descendants. Each of these shape-shifting formations are useful in framing Black Feminist Hauntology (transcendent-shape-shifting), colonialism (structural-shape-shifting), and the varying ways in which colonial violence is manifested, rewritten and ultimately resisted (metamorphical-shape-shifting). In combination these three tools produce inherently anti-colonial knowledges intended to assist us in locating and deconstructing the ghosted and wide-reaching practice(s) of anti-Blackness.

1) Transcendent Shape-Shifting: Black Feminist Hauntology on Black Humanity

The first form of shape-shifting produces a framework for the practice of Black Feminist Hauntology. Transcendent shape-shifting is represented in mythologies of Goddesses and Gods who have morphed into unified beings drawing power at the intersecting boundaries of many worlds. Black feminism arose through the intersectionality of race, class, gender, sexuality, body, nation and ability, thus providing the lens through which we can practice transcendent shape-shifting. Drawing on that Black Feminist Hauntology adds the dimension of time and represents bodies/institutions as un-categorical (as haunted and haunting), while relying on Baucom’s (2001, 80) brilliant declaration: time does not pass, it accumulates. Black Feminist Hauntology emerges from the intersection where White supremacy (that racializes and genders bodies and institutions) meets the
death and un-doing-of-death of its victims. In other words, Black Feminist Hauntology allows us to recognize that White supremacy is haunted by Black Feminism, that White cannot be supreme when confronted by its own acts of violence. Black Feminist Hauntology unveils Whiteness in a manner that renders the very term ‘White Supremacy’ an oxymoron.

I envision Black Feminist Hauntology as simultaneously central and relegated to the corners of a thousand identical triangles lying side by side to form a perfect circle, demarcated within the endlessly cyclical nature of the racist formation of bodies, institutions and time (see image below).

The center formed at the silent tips and corners at the top of each triangle are together, one singular dot in the middle of a positivist pie chart locating how many of us and how many of them are in prison, a dot in the middle of an American apple pie baked by a Black woman who has not seen her own children for years. An apple pie, made by apples grown on trees littered with the strange fruit that Billie Holiday sang about, planted on stolen lands, served over and over again, for 500 years, at a beautiful dinner table full of White slaveholders (and their descendants) with their White families (and their descendants) who know that at the end of their meal, it will be the Black woman (and her descendants) who baked that apple pie that will clean up after them: the same slaveholder who sold that Black woman’s children (and her descendants) down the river is sitting at the head of that table. He is always served the first piece of pie.

The only place on the plate that the knife cuts over and over and crosses through consistently and evenly every time a piece of pie gets cut out of modernity’s grid-like system of control, is that singular dot in the middle. This indicates the repetitive nature of colonizing violence in its construction of Black womanhood. That dot is the place in colonial life that appears minimized, put in the corner of a million triangles and emerges small, yet at the same time lies at the center of it all; it is that dot that holds that circle together. It is that all seeing-eye at the center of the Panopticon that Foucault (1977) wrote about, constructed upon the shadowed corners of White Supremacy built with parasitic dependence upon anti-Blackness and Indigenous death. What Foucault could never see was that within that center, in the middle of that pie resides not the all seeing eye of the state alone, but simultaneously beneath its uniformed boots and transcendent above it, an enslaved Black woman, and her children, carrying upon their backs the violence of carceral punishment, being made, through the threat of violence and the terrors of unending death, to hold it together.
The study of the sociological ghost is an interrogation of that dot, that ghosted center where Black carcerality and White power are morphed and intertwined into a singularizing and complex organism out of which European colonialism and its children, racial genocide and chattel slavery were born. That dot in the middle is my visual imagination of Stuart Hall’s (1996) description of ‘Caribbeaness’ and my understanding of colonial race-relations as inherently abusive in the forced dependence and exploited conditions it has structured throughout its dominant institutions of economy, political power, and carceral punishment.

Black Feminist Hauntology emerges from that center, delineating the categorizing and dichotomizing powers of colonization to produce transcendent shape-shifting to deconstruct racial power through an erasure of colonization’s own conceptions of self, nation, and personhood. This effectively disempowers colonial rhetoric by denying its delusions of civilization, along with its justifications for land-theft and enslavement. Through a transcendent shape-shifting lens we are best suited to accept the actual, rather than imagined, narratives of colonialism and slavery:

... neither evangelization, nor philanthropic enterprise, nor a desire to push back the frontiers of ignorance, disease, and tyranny, nor a project undertaken for the greater glory of God, nor an attempt to extend the rule of law... that the decisive actors here are the adventurer and pirate, the wholesale grocer and the ship owner, the gold digger and the merchant, appetite and force, and behind them, the baleful projected shadow of a form of civilization which at a certain point in its history, finds itself obliged, for internal reasons, to extend to a world scale the competition of its antagonistic economies (Césaire, 1955, 10-11).

In this passage Césaire produces a transcendent shape-shifted knowledge of colonialism rooted in his lived knowledge of French colonial conquest. His presentation of time as cumulative allows him to view Europe on a continuum, which at a certain point in its history institutionalized White imperialism. This is important for it decenters the ‘naturalized’ approach to conquest framed in evolutionary perspectives of violence. In an act of transcendent-shape-shifting Césaire re-articulates the evolution of violence as detrimental to human civilization, as counter-intuitive to humanity, not as inevitable, as is often done in White scholarship. Césaire, transcends the illusions of charity and goodwill articulated in colonial discourse’s ‘White savior’ complex and places inhumanity back upon the body of the colonizer despite the fetishized ‘dehumanization’ paradox assumed by radical White scholarship later exemplified in Michel Foucault’s Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison:

The historical moment of the disciplines was the moment when an art [romanticization] of the human body was born, which was directed not only at the growth of its skills, nor at the intensification of its subjection, but at the formation of a relation that in the mechanism itself makes it more obedient as it becomes more useful, and conversely. What was then being formed was a policy of coercions that act upon the body, a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behaviour. The human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it. A ‘political anatomy’, which was also a ‘mechanics of power’, was being born; it defined how one may have a hold over others’ bodies, not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed and the efficiency that one determines. Thus discipline produces subjected and practised bodies, ‘docile’ bodies. Discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience). In short, it dissociates power from the body; on the one hand, it turns it into an ‘aptitude’, a ‘capacity’, which it seeks to
increase; on the other hand, it reverses the course of the energy, the power that might result from it, and turns it into a relation of strict subjection. If economic exploitation separates the force and the product of labour, let us say that disciplinary coercion establishes in the body the constricting link between an increased aptitude and an increased domination (1977, 137-138, emphasis added).

It is crucial to note Foucault’s repeated use of it (not ‘his’, not ‘their’ and certainly not ‘her’) in his reference to human bodies in captivity. This singularizing and dissociating approach produces a distance that allows for a sanitized rendition of what Foucault suggests produces domination. As you read his passages on subjugation and control one finds that he injects into the very essence of humanity, not only at the growth of its skills, nor at the intensification of its subjection, but at the formation of a relation that in the mechanism itself makes it more obedient (ibid.), a rendition that rewrites the very humanity of those living in captivity. Foucault’s reading of prisoners’ bodies has troubled me throughout the years. His work seemed alien(ating), fetishized and mechanical, absolutely contradictory to the people I sat with and spoke to, and worked with inside prisons and penitentiaries in North America and Africa. Furthermore, as Foucault lays down his theory of docility and discipline his exclusive focus on those whose bodies are being ‘controlled’ and complete lack of attention to the bodies, souls, and practices of those who have imagined, produced, and are enforcing captivity produces a fetishizing and problematic focus on colonized bodies, while shielding from the magnifying glass of detail, rank, technique, time and posture those who colonize, enslave, and imprison. The low ranking soldier is thus compared to prisoners, factory workers and pupils in a classroom while colonists, slave holders, and high ranking officials are left with their humanity intact, not interrogated, not studied, unquestioned.

In direct opposition to Foucault’s (1977) articulation of sub-humanness, Césaire (1955) had long before presented an understanding of colonized peoples that rejected the fetishizing nature of White male discourses on power. Foucault’s theories of carcerality, though intentionally meant to deconstruct power, produce a fetishized vision of the prisoner’s body as broken, docile (or domesticated and neutered), and impossibly dehumanized. Foucault sacrifices the humanity of the prisoner to make his point, that carceral power is violent. The manner in which White critical and radical theorists, including penal abolitionists speak about power and prisons today so often reproduces this fetishizing rhetoric, a denouncement of the ‘dehumanization of prisoners’ bodies that fails to articulate what Césaire has already shown us: that colonization [imprisonment and slavery] decivilizes the colonizer [the prison guard and the slaveholder]. At its core, transcendent shape-shifting requires an intimate understanding of powerlessness and conquest to Garner viewpoints that shape-shift out of ideological conquest (subjugation) and into knowledge of self and power residing beyond colonial propaganda. Transcendent shape-shifting requires we un-fetishize (Farley, 1997) our relationship to colonized, enslaved and imprisoned bodies, and turn our critical lens upon the bodies of colonizers, slavers, and imprisoners.

2) Margaret is Seth(e): a God they Turned into a Devil

Toni Morrison (1987) beautifully performs transcendent shape-shifting, literally and figuratively in Beloved. The central character is not named Margaret Garner, she is named Sethe, a female rendition of the masculine God Seth from Egyptian mythology. God Seth is one of the oldest of the Egyptian Gods, originally worshipped by Africans living in Upper
Egypt, those who the records inform us referred to themselves as the *Beloved of Set*. When conquered by Lower Egypt God Seth was transformed into a devil, thought by philosophers to be the founding mythological legend upon whom Typhon, the Greek demon – later the devil in White Christian mythology – was modeled. Performing brilliant analytic genius in what I have come to recognize as transcendent shape-shifting, Toni Morrison renames Margaret Garner Sethe: Seth with a feminizing ‘e’. In so doing, Morrison brings to life a Black Feminist understanding of power as it resides in time, place and body. In the act of rebirthing Margaret as Sethe Toni Morrison literally accomplishes the Black feminist art of transcending White violent mythologies (called stereotypes) of Black women in a disavowal that both accepts (Margaret *is* Seth, the God who they turned into a devil) and rejects (she *is* Seth, the God who they turned into a devil) colonialism in a singular moment. Through this framework we are able to write into our languages and bring back into vision the closeted (unspeakable) acts of colonial violence we have for so long been expected to shamefully internalize, minimize, and deny. Transcendent-shape-shifting is not afraid of the skeletons in the closet, in fact it seeks them and demands for them a decent burial. This process begins by resisting the violently seductive claws that fetishize violence within the bodies and identities of those conquered. This tool of understanding roots and names humanity within the bodies of colonized and enslaved peoples, and in so doing transcendently shape-shifts to bestow (or reverse project) the anti-human qualities of colonialism back upon their rightful owners. To speak about carcerality (Foucault, 1977) and penal abolition (discussed in more detail below) without reference to the impact slavery and colonialism had upon Europe’s conception of punishment instills a poison that as Césaire (1955) explained, slowly but inevitably proceeds its beneficiaries towards savagery.

3) Structural-Shape-Shifting, from Animal into Human and Back: Locating (In)Humanity

If we identify the structures of European colonialism as embodying the second form of shape-shifting we discover *structural-shape-shifting*: a view of colonialism’s evolution as visually transforming on the surface to maintain and expand its core internal powers and abilities. From this perspective we develop a stronger understanding of time as cumulative (Baucom, 2001) and begin to recognize how European colonialism shape-shifted its way through our independence struggles against colonialism, producing neocolonialism’s *Devil on the Cross* (Ngugï, 1982). We can visualize European colonists shape-shifting from slaveholders into prison wardens, from field overseers into prison guards, from slave hunters into police officers, land grabbers into gentrifiers, eugenics into forensics, niggerologists into criminologists, and so on. Through this lens the modern day police officer is haunted by, developed by, born out of his original self – the slave catcher. We can expand this to include structural-shape-shifting performed by colonizing nation-states, along with the people and agents who perpetuate their institutions. For example, the structural-shape-shifting of chattel slavery, forward-haunting convict leasing (Childs, 2009), backed by Black codes and Jim Crow laws, shape-shifted into chain gang labor necessitated in modernity’s transition from plantation into industrialized economies, shape-shifted into penitentiaries necessitated in shifts from industrialized into privatized economies. Through this most recent shape-shift in the United States we see the New York Stock Exchange assume the role of slavery’s original
auction block whereby the richest can buy and sell prisoners’ labor, captured by slave hunter’s bodies shape-shifted into uniformed police officers, transported to the forward-haunting plantation now inhabiting the body of a penitentiary. Through structural-shape-shifting we can locate the institution and the persons within its changing forms across time, in one breath.

4) Metamorphic Shape-shifting: Unlearning so as to Learn

The third form of shape-shifting in mythology, metamorphic shape-shifting occurs when humans are involuntarily transformed into animals through a magical or cursed enforcement of punishment or lesson-learning. The new formation remains intact for a long time (for the most part) forcing the newly created animal (who used to be human) to learn to live with the powers of the animal, but without access to skills only possible through a human body. Only when the new formation has learned its intended lesson or has unlearned its faulty past can the original human body be restored – emergent is a person forever changed by that experience. Thus, at the root of metamorphic shape-shifting is an inevitable change that must occur as it hinges upon the very survival of the subject.

For decades Black feminist writers have been rewriting slave narratives to unearth the buried and polluting histories of slavery in America. Parham (2009) names this type of writing neo-slave narrative and presents it as an:

...attempt to move specific histories away from the silent and shameful not by representing history - that would be the work of historical fiction - but rather by bringing the historical past into the present tense, thus conjuring history’s actualities - flesh, survival, and the things people do in the interest of the future. Such texts make... manageable the shame of one’s encounter with the past... such encounters teach us how many have made the transition from victim to survivor (Parham, 2009, 1321).

Sarah Wood (2007, 90) views neoslave narratives as an extension of the traditional slave narrative and suggest they are written in order to interrogate the realities of both slavery and contemporary US society. Avery Gordon (2008) views texts such as Beloved as social and political commentaries bringing to light that which the Western social sciences have attempted to exterminate. In her introduction to Avery Gordon’s (2008) Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination, Radway (2008, xii) suggests that Gordon effectively articulates exactly what these novels unconsciously know by rendering with a certain systematicity the particular way of knowing the world that produces these characters, objects, and events that inhabit their fictional space. It is clear that Black feminism guides these particular ways (plural) of knowing the world. This is evident in Toni Morrison’s Beloved.

Through metamorphic shape-shifting Beloved ceases to read as a neoslave narrative (Parham, 2009; Wood, 2007): it, and works like it, become metaslave narratives, invoking the latin root ‘meta’ to implant its definitive meanings of ‘beyond and change’ rooted in growth cycles (i.e. egg into caterpillar into butterfly) termed ‘metamorphic’ in nature. When Toni Morrison (1987) rewrote the life of Margaret Garner she did not remain confined to the facts determined by slaveholders and the criminal justice system. She stepped beyond them and rewrote (or changed) Margaret’s life, renaming her Sethe, erasing the trial, her pursuant re-enslavement and death two years later. She took pieces of Margaret’s life as we know them and she produced a Black woman who survives, who is successful in her defiance of slavery, and who was haunted by the violence she endured.
and performed. In addition, Toni Morrison renames, or shape-shifts the slaveholder’s wife into ‘Margaret Garner’ metamorphosing her identity as a White woman with her investments in slavery foregrounded as opposed to disappeared. What Parham (2009) and Wood (2007) have identified as neoslave narratives, and what Radway situates as a place of ‘knowing’ in Gordon’s work, are in fact the perspectives of Black writers and thinkers emerging from that dot at the center of the pie which resides simultaneously in a corner and yet in the middle of racial colonialism. Though I had read *Beloved* before I wrote *Colonial Systems of Control: Criminal Justice in Nigeria* (Saleh-Hanna, 2008), I had not yet learned to read *Beloved* as a metaslave narrative. At the time I craved the understanding that metaslave narratives provide of colonialism as multi-faceted in its violations and of time as uncategorically cumulative. Having not yet located theory within Black feminist novels I wrote: [b]ecause colonialism is such a highly complex and intrusive process, defining it and articulating the depths of its brutality has been a struggle as difficult as the socio-political fight for liberation from it (ibid., 17). What I did know then was that an appropriate definition of colonialism could only emerge through an anti-colonial lens of resistance (ibid., 21). What I know now is that Black feminists had located the depths of colonialism’s brutality and had done so in manners cutting across that which divides the social sciences from the humanities, and in so doing have allowed me to infuse the basics of humanity back into my work in the social sciences.

VIII. Discussion: Rememory the Ghosts of Abolition?

Daily life took as much as she had. The future was sunset; the past something to leave behind. And if it didn’t stay behind, well, you might have to stomp it out. Slave life; freed life – every day was a test and a trial. Nothing could be counted on in a world where even when you were a solution you were a problem (Morrison, 1987, 256).

I have presented Black Feminist Hauntology’s shape-shifting methodologies. In this section I apply these tools to penal abolitionism, both as it is constructed within international abolitionist circles and as it is received by the anti-Black worlds in which we live. Below, I address the most popular question and the most popular assumption associated with and asked of those who seek to abolish the modern criminal justice system and its cultures of punishment. The first is the question of the dangerous few. The second is the assumption that abolitionists embody a utopian and unrealistic view of society and humanity.

1) The Most Ghosted Question of All: What Do We Do with the Dangerous ‘Few’?

When penal abolitionists discuss the need to abolish the criminal justice system because it is rooted in state sponsored violence and revenge we are constantly confronted with the question of ‘the dangerous few’ most often appearing in the imaginations of the questioner as a serial killer (Morris, 1995). What is most interesting about this rhetoric is its juxtaposition to who the serial killer (up until the last five years) has actually been. For the most part, he has been a White, middle class, heterosexual man (Fox and Levin, 1998).
While quantitative research warns against the inference of correlation with causation, researchers have found higher rates of male serial killer activity... associated with a local state culture supportive of game hunting and military training and a local culture supportive of punitive violence (DeFronzo Prochnow, 2004, 104).

The now out-of-date serial killer who consumed White imaginations of danger in the last few decades of the 20th century has been replaced by the mass shooter, a slightly younger yet still, for the most part, a White, middle-class, heterosexual male who has been bullied by White, middle-class heterosexuals who more often than not, have inferred he is a homosexual (Kimmel, Mahler, 2003). The dangerousness of these ‘few’ has never been extended to the White middle class heterosexual men and women who propagate White Male power, while residing in and enforcing the norms of the suburbs of colonizing societies.

Black Feminist Hauntology demands we realize how the violence of the ‘dangerous few’ mirrors ancestral White massacres of Indigenous communities and the kidnappings and lethally shackled confinements/brutalities of chattel slavery. From within White heteropatriarchal frames of reference, the serial killer or the mass shooter never emerges fully responsible for his violence, because he, and his ancestors, have yet to be held accountable, because he and his counterparts continue to benefit from those original acts of chattel slavery and colonial conquest. Thus, to answer the question of the dangerous few, we must first deconstruct the serial killer, identify his role in modern society, his emergence in White modernity as the shadowed figure whose violence produced the first modern peoples on plantations and inside slave ships a few hundred years ago.

Through Black Feminist Hauntology we recognize the serial killer (at times metamorphically shape-shifted into the mass shooter) as the unapproved and ununiformed man who has not been authorized by the state to perform actions his uniformed and state/corporate-sponsored counterparts perform. He is doing what soldiers, police officers, prison guards, and their ancestors who served in colonial wars and kidnapped, confined, and enslaved Africans have done. It is only his lack of directive from a state or corporate power that opens him up to criminalization, ghosting the larger definitions of street crime employed and dominantly discussed in criminology. Yet, like his ancestors, it is his race, class, gender, and assumed sexuality that protect his larger community and neighborhood from the profiling mechanisms of the criminal justice system. The following is a classic example of how criminology disallows this analysis by relying on the academy’s politics of segregation:

Although state-sponsored killings are important in their own right, they may be better explained through the theories and methods of political science than criminology. Thus, for example, our definition of multiple homicide would include the crimes committed by Charles Manson and his followers, but not those of Hitler’s Third Reich. Similarly, the murderous activities of mob enforcers and hit men, while technically involving a series of killings, are perhaps better understood as a consequence of organizational demands rather than individual psychopathology (Fox, Levine, 1998, 408).

When criminology segregates the serial killer from heads of state it re-enforces the belief that they are a product of individual pathology as opposed to structures of domination. Only by segregating our definition of serial killing from historic and contemporary acts of genocide, enslavement, and colonial domination can criminologists conclude that the dangerous are ‘few’ and that they have become a-typical actors of violence. Alternately, Black Feminist Hauntology would suggest that serial killers reside at the visible branch of...
colonial violence gone rogue – rogue only because they are performing this-type-of-violence without state and corporate sanctioned permission. Regardless of permission and beyond boundaries of criminology, serial killers, mass shooters, criminal justice agents, slavers, settler-colonists, soldiers, and their many counterparts, then and now, are enacting institutionalized entitlements inherited from White hetero-patriarchy’s’ perceived and falsely legitimized right to hunt down (investigate), kidnap (arrest), imprison, torture, mutilate, disfigure, rape, terrorize, assassinate, and exterminate colonized peoples as they are involuntarily and metamorphically shape-shifted through the bodies of enslaved fugitives, criminalized, rehabilitated, imprisoned, and paroled peoples. Through this Black Feminist Hauntological interpretation of the dangerous ‘few’ the colonial, bloodthirsty dance between individualized language/interpretations of the problem and the structured nature of the violence at hand emerges from the shadows of White supremacy revealing itself as inherently flawed.

The relationships between colonial slavery and criminal justice violence are inevitable and unavoidable. That most penal abolitionists have failed or refused to incorporate these facts into their own conceptions of abolition is telling. From these failures arises an inability to widely critique the question of ‘what about the dangerous few’, with a simple answer in the form of many rhetorical questions: “if it is the dangerous few you are worried about then why are you not outraged that the majority in the prison do not come from the communities where the serial killer/mass shooter is born and bred?” It is the same conundrum White abolitionists found themselves in centuries ago, as they advocated for Margaret to be tried for murder, never considering the option to turn the criminal justice system, a system that they (so falsely) believed produces justice, loose upon slaveholders and their accomplices, all people who had clearly ‘offended’ society (but not the state) and enslaved individuals that by the standards of the penal code would constitute the crimes of aggravated assault, kidnapping, murder, rape, and involuntary confinement, to mention a few.

Black Feminist Hauntology makes evident how our conceptions concerning the dangerous few are haunted and trapped in a repeated cycle of racial nonsense dating back to before the time Margaret’s desperate and tragic act of infanticide was shifted by abolitionists into advocacy for criminal justice enslavement. It is the same conversation that ensued when the actual violence of the lynch mob was reframed into a ‘debate’ about whether or not their Black victim’s represented a threat to White society. We continue this nonsensical conversation when we claim the majority in prison are there for ‘nonviolent’ offences, or that the problems of mass incarceration are the result of a war on drugs and its racist policies. This long-standing narrative is nonsensical because it keeps us trapped in a ‘debate’ about the perceived violence or nonviolence of the victims of White violence, shackled in a jailhouse or at an auction block, hanging on a rope from a tree, confined to a prison cell or strapped to the sterile bed of a death chamber, violently murdered by a White mob, their ancestors on plantations and their descendants in a White system of criminal justice. Regardless of time or circumstance, this narrative insists that danger resides within the bodies and actions of the colonized when in reality dangerousness is endemic to White supremacy. It is evident that the dangerous ‘few’, as they are imagined by anti-abolitionists, do not actually exist in these conversations, for if they did, mass incarceration in the United States would embody a completely different and opposing demographic. We can only conclude that the fear of the dangerous ‘few’ so widely expressed by supporters of the criminal justice system is a ghosted fear, phantasmagoric,
or hallucinatory beginning at an origin that is itself fictive or ideal, thus already purified by a certain fantastics (Derrida, 1994, 160). In other words, the dangerous ‘few’ (they are in fact many) represent shadows of the original slaveholder remerging in postmodern life to be propped up in a conversation as a threat really meant to silence the fact that colonial society inevitably produces and has within its own foundations kidnapping, serial killing, and mass murder tendencies and dependencies. This threat is armed with the power to displace his violence upon the bodies of his victims, imprisoned upon plantations then and warehoused within penitentiaries today. Any conversation on the matter of the dangerous few that excludes these nuances would be incomplete and inherently flawed.

2) Utopian Views of the World: The Colonial Response to Exiting Abusive Race-Relations

“They got me out of jail,” Sethe once told Baby Suggs.

“They also put you in it” she answered.

“They drove you ’cross the river.”

“Oh my son’s back.”

“They gave you this house.”

“Nobody gave me nothing.”

“I got a job from them.

“He got a cook from the girl.”

“Oh, some of them do all right by us.”

“And every time it’s a surprise, ain’t it?”

“You didn’t use to talk this way.”

“Don’t box with me. There’s more of us they drowned than there is all of them ever lived from the start of time. Lay down your sword. This ain’t a battle; it’s a rout.”

(Morrison, 1987, 224)

Even when abolitionists reach a point in our teachings or discussions where it has become necessary for our students or our questioners to acknowledge the pitfalls of the criminal justice system’s seemingly contradicting injustice, we are often met with the inevitable: “so what do you want to do now?” This is often followed by a shrug indicating that colonizing violence has always been and will always be part of the flaws we embody as humans. Below I locate this shrug within the abusive dynamics of colonial race relations and conclude that utopia is only out of reach if we remain confined to the plantation and its punishing praxis.

If we listen to the narratives of abusive men we hear the same controlling narratives of dependency evident in the criminal justice system’s construction of deterrence: ‘you need me to protect you from your own self, I am burdened with caring after you, no one else would feed or house you, no one else could love you, you have no where else to go, no one would defend you against the harshness of this world, without me you could not get justice’. And finally, the undercurrent holding it all up, the ultimate declaration: ‘you would be nothing without me’.

Classical, Positivist and Critical (so long as they fail to present anti-colonial discourses) criminological theories on what to do with ‘the criminal’ are rooted in this assumption
that modern society remains civilized because the criminal justice system deters us from descending into savagery, because it saves us from ourselves (Agüino, 2003). These assumptions are distinctly colonizing and can only be addressed by penal abolitionists if appropriately viewed through Black Feminist Hauntology’s knowledge of colonial race-relations as inherently abusive. When we locate abuse in these relationships we empower ourselves with a language that articulates criminal justice violence as inexcusable and arm ourselves with an analytic power that transcends and shifts our ways back to an articulation of our own humanity that is not shadowed by the colonizer’s violent interpretations of us. We effectively change the conversation from one that ‘pleads’ with the haunted sensibilities of colonial socialization to one that speaks directly to the oppressive force of colonialism: criminal justice punishment is born out of plantation whippings of enslaved Africans who would not surrender themselves to slaveholders and finally, that our liberation from it requires we end enslavement altogether, in all of its carceral manifestations (James, 1996).

Associating criminal justice with its co-conspirator chattel slavery transcends the conversation of ‘utopia’ to a stronger place of resistance. From within this context, articulated by that dot in the center of White carcerality, we hear the millions of White conversations occurring over the course of centuries declaring that enslavement, industrialization, capitalism, criminal justice and colonialism are necessary parts of modern life and insisting that without them civilized society would savagely collapse. The abusive rhetoric of violent men declaring to their victims ‘you are nothing without me’ is structured upon and married within the inherently abusive violence of the criminal justice system and its ‘to serve and to protect’ narratives of deterrence.

Echoed within the chambers of criminology, and heard loud and clear through the lens of Black Feminist Hauntology are the abusive words of criminal justice embodying fatalistic and naturalizing expressions of abusive victim-blaming: we arrest/kidnap and confine/imprison you, punish you and beat you so that you can learn, be deterred or get rehabilitated. If you die in the process, it is because you did not learn fast enough or did not adjust well enough. The longer one remains in an abusive relationship the more difficult it becomes to view life beyond this violence as possible. From the outside looking in we wonder ‘why does she stay’, while from within she screams to herself, ‘how the hell do I get out?’ Just as we know that danger to women’s lives increases when they attempt to leave physically abusive relationships (Naples, 2012, 159), so we know that freedom fighters when captured are extremely vulnerable as political prisoners. When confronted with the reality that he may lose control of his victim the abuser lashes out, as does the abusive system of colonial race relations intensify its violence towards those who try to break free and to take their people with them. For these reasons, captured freedom fighters suffer greater rates of criminal justice violence with longer sentences and higher rates of death from within the penitentiary (Jackson, 1970; Newton, 1973; Abu-Jamal, 2004; Bukhari, 2010). This is mirrored in the short two years it took Margaret Garner to die after her first attempted escape.

A society living beyond colonial domination, deemed ‘utopian’ by colonists and their supporters, only appears unattainable from within the abusive rhetoric of colonialism. As we exit, or transcend the abusive paradigm we must first be ready to internalize the fact that anti-Blackness is not natural, it is rooted in hatred not ignorance alone, it is intentional and not a ‘necessary’ part of life (hooks, 1992). Penal colonialism (Saleh-
Hanna, 2008) is modernity’s extension of slavery. It is inherently anti-ethical and morally corrupt, and only anti-colonial, anti-racist constructions of abolition can appropriately respond to the absurd suggestion that a view of the world beyond the abusive parameters of colonialism, criminal justice and slavery is unattainable because it is utopian.

**Conclusions: Living beyond the Shadows of Slavery**

Standing alone on the porch, Beloved is smiling. But now her hand is empty. Sethe is running away from her, running, and she feels the emptiness in the hand Sethe has been holding. Now she is running into the faces of the people out there, joining them and leaving Beloved behind. Alone. Again. Then Denver, running too. Away from her to the pile of people out there. They make a hill. A hill of Black people, falling. And above them all, rising from his place with a whip in his hand, the man without skin, looking. He is looking at her (Morrison, 1987, 262).

Five hundred years into this abusive relationship abolitionists must accept that racism is the fuel that the criminal justice system needs to function. For the reasons described in this paper, it is apparent that deconstructing crime and delegitimizing the criminal justice system's use of state violence cannot alone address the racializing and colonizing foundations of criminal justice (Davis, Rodríguez, 2000). A larger understanding and denouncement of anti-Blackness must inform our definitions of the problem as we seek strategies and actions to eradicate it. In a world where we are consistently told that the problem of 'race' either does not exist or exists so much that it is simply a natural part of the human condition (Morrison, 1989) it has become necessary to unlearn all that nonsense so that we can get on with the work.

Black Feminist Hauntology’s shape-shifting tools provide a language and vision whereby the original slaveholder’s body and his colonizing networks are recognized in their various and (re)occurring manifestations. The struggle for liberation has always been central to Black feminism (James, 2000). Thus, it would appear inevitable that an abolitionist lens for hauntology, a paradigm invested in articulating the historic foundations of contemporary struggles, could only emerge through Black feminist interpretations of ghosting. Moving ahead, abolitionism, if seriously (not peripherally as it has been for centuries) committed to penal abolition, must adopt anti-colonial standpoints and theories that inherently and vividly exorcize anti-Blackness.

An effective penal abolitionist movement must address, pay homage to and continue the struggle of her grandmother, the anti-slavery movements of the 16th, 17th, 18th and 19th centuries and her mother, the anti-colonial movements of the 20th century. At the heart of these struggles lies the need to abolish White supremacist hetero-patriarchy, for without the death of these pillars, colonialism will thrive in a variety of manifestations and increasingly horrific apparitions. In the context of the United States I have illustrated that Black Feminist Hauntology brings back into view the chains and lives/deaths that link racial colonialism and chattel slavery to the criminal justice system. Internationally, through the globalizing nature of racial colonial conquest, justice has been debased and
replaced by the parasitic entrenchments of Europe’s original and America’s growing criminal justice system. Future and international research should build towards an exorcism of criminology and related fields, in their many contexts and manifestations. Abolitionism should work towards arming itself with the tools needed to perform an exorcism that will rid colonizing society of its imagined, institutionalized, racialized criminal, and the inherently anti-Black conceptions of danger so abundantly reproduced within and far beyond the boundaries of the United States. It has become clear to me that justice itself, whatever that may be at this time, is in dire need of an anti-colonial, anti-racist, anti-criminological exorcism, and for that reason, I felt compelled at this time to begin that exorcism through an invocation of Black Feminist Hauntology.

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NOTES

1. Robert Gaines was a White slaveholder.

2. White Anti-slavery abolitionists held the faulty assumption that justice could be pursued through the criminal justice system, regardless of its similarities with, and strong institutional relationships to, chattel slavery.

3. Coin can read as gold used in exchange for Black bodies, diamonds and other materials mined out of stolen and occupied lands, capitalism’s modern day dollar, euro, yen, the New York Stock Exchange’s private prison stocks, the international exchange rate, modern day currency, historic mills and factories, raw materials, processed by the hands of children working in factories, cotton, sugarcane and tobacco picked by the hands of Black people crossing all sorts of ages and genders, all of it giving birth to White wealth then and institutionalized White power now.

4. Childs (2009, 274) uses this concept in reference to how he reads Morrison’s presentation of convict leasing’s overlapping relations to plantation slavery in Beloved.

5. [A] fraudulent investing scam promising high rates of return with little risk to investors. The Ponzi scheme generates returns for older investors by acquiring new investors. This scam actually yields the promised returns to earlier investors, as long as there are more new investors. These schemes usually collapse on themselves when the new investments stop [see http://www.investopedia.com/terms/p/ponzischeme.asp].

6. This is endemic in all abolitionist movements, including but not limited to the movements that come to mind when the term ‘abolition’ is invoked: penal abolitionists, prison abolitionists, prison-industrial-complex abolitionists, death penalty abolitionists, human trafficking abolitionists.

7. A people become historicized when their cultural artifacts are placed in museums after colonizers refer to them as ‘ancient’ peoples; they effectively become assumed ‘extinct’ despite a continued existence on earth. This has happened to the Mayans, Aztecs, ‘ancient’ Egyptians, and many more named and unnamed. Almost all Indigenous societies outside Europe constitute historicized peoples. This is tied to the White belief that they were ‘phased out’ (an unassuming way to say exterminated without having to be held accountable for genocide), assimilated or died off (unassuming once again) due to the expansion of White modernity and Western civilization.

8. My use of ‘animal’ is inspired by Clare Palmer’s (2005) reading of Foucault’s Madness and Civilization in which she suggests that Foucault’s early works endorse an uncritical notion that animalism is diametrically opposed to human reason (the ‘reason-animal-madness’ binary) and in so doing produces a limiting, and I would add Western (as these ideas of humanity and
animalism are dominant in Western discourses and endemic in the racial sciences of Western thought) notions of humanity and humanness.

9. Or the more popular, but just as violent ‘everyone’ does it.

10. Human references to ‘one’ and ‘they’ used to describe the bodies of colonizers; alongside ‘it’ used to describe bodies of those imprisoned.

11. In Colonial Systems of Control I rely on Ngugi’s novel to deconstruct post-independence as an era that perpetuated rather ended White control of African resources.

12. According to Mann, The whole pseudoscience of eugenics was created specifically to legitimize colonial oppression as objective science. Terms from those days - anti-Semite, Niggerologist, Injun-hater - may cause gasps today, but it is important to understand that they were labels self-applied and proudly worn until quite recently (2005,1). While Cohen (1988) does not provide a detailed critique of criminology’s racist praxis in Against Criminology, he does present compelling evidence about the corrupt and violent nature of the discipline.

13. In this paper I focus only on Toni Morrison’s Beloved. In my classrooms my students read Beloved and Kindred by Octavia Butler (1979): a science fiction ‘grim fantasy’ in which a Black woman in 1970s California is involuntarily transported between a historic plantation that enslaved her ancestors and to the 1970s California home she shares with her White husband. Kindred offers a brilliant rendition of how modern society exists within the shadows of slavery. These books together supplemented by readings on historic memory and hauntings have produced my most effective teaching experiences on racism.

14. In this portion of her work Parham is speaking specifically about Octavia Butler’s novel Kindred (1979) and as I show in this paper, her analysis also applies to Morrison’s Beloved.

15. In Counter-Colonial Criminology: A critique of Imperialist Reason, Biko Agozino (2003) provides a strong and very important critique of criminology’s failure to define and pay widespread attention to genocide and crimes against humanity, most especially as they have been enacted and institutionalized against Black populations who are not coincidentally over-represented in prisons throughout the West.

16. Classical criminological theories claim humanity is hedonistic and in our desire to maximize pleasure and minimize pain we can be deterred by laws that threaten to inflict pain upon us (Bentham, 1789).

ABSTRACTS

This paper uses what Toni Morrison named ‘rememory’ in Beloved (1987) to redefine what Jacques Derrida named ‘hauntology’ in Specters of Marx (1994) to produce Black Feminist Hauntology: a counter-analysis to broken conceptions of time and bodies that critiques dominant, White supremacist constructions of colonized/colonizing, enslaved/enslaving and imprisoned/imprisoning bodies, lives, deaths, and histories. Black Feminist Hauntology is a socio-philosophical study of ghosts through whom we can locate the abusive and morally bankrupt nature of structural race relations as they manifest through the violent race-making and land-grabbing conquests of colonialism. If, as Baucom (2001, 80) proposes, “time does not pass, it accumulates”, then what does it mean to live within a system of incarceration in the United States where the majority of those shackled and locked up are the direct descendants of enslaved Africans, while the majority of those who lock them up and profit from their
confinement are the direct descendants of European slave holders and colonists? This localized inquiry can be applied to varying contexts, namely White nation-states and their systems as they occupy lands and resources across the globe. Black Feminist Hauntology provides a framework intent upon exorcizing Colonial Systems of Control (Saleh-Hanna, 2008) through which race, class, gender, and sexuality are constructed, conquered and enforced. To facilitate the application of this exorcism the article introduces three intersecting shape-shifting methodologies: transcendent, metamorphic, and structural. Each is inspired by Egyptian mythology, reawakening a point of vision and definition born in analytic spaces dwelling well beyond the shadows and reaches of colonial slavery.


INDEX

**Keywords:** black feminism, hauntology, penal abolition, race relations, anti-colonialism

**Mots-clés:** féminisme noir, hantologie, abolitionnisme pénal, relations racisantes, anti-colonialisme

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