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The Feminization of Violence

by

Caitlin Logan

Submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts Literature, Language and Theory, Hunter College  
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Thesis Sponsor:

May 9, 2017  
Date

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Dedicated to my sissy, whose idea this paper is based on. Thank you for always pushing the boundaries of my thinking. I love you.

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## INTRODUCTION

There is an intrinsic value to the feminine sphere of existence, to the health and understanding of the internal life. The modern conception of the feminine has been suffocated by its linguistic significance and the role of these signified “feminine” characteristics in the hyper capitalistic global sphere. Sacred femininity, the existence of a natural feminine, has lost its meaning in a world that has become dictated by capitalist gain. This is not something lost only by women, for both the masculine and the feminine are intimate parts of all humanness. This is a loss that should be felt by all of humankind. The repercussions of this loss of feminine significance, both psychologically and linguistically incited a process of collective forgetting; a misremembering of the importance of an internal existence, of the understanding of one’s self not only as an individual, with individual wants and needs, but as an integral part in a larger collective human experience. This understanding seems to be absent from dominant Western values, and because of the capitalist command of the Western world, seems increasingly absent from relationships in the globalized sphere. A return to the internal, to empathetic connectivity between all humans, is not only a project for women to tackle. The feminization of human history and the current external realms of global political and economic relationships is a project that is essential to the survival of humankind and therefore must eventually be engaged in by all. However, this paper seeks to argue that women are uniquely equipped to lead this fight. I use the term “fight” as part of a different signification outside of masculine linguistic constraints, as part of a larger argument for the creation of a feminized violence, and entirely different understanding of what it means to stand in the seemingly necessary “violent” opposition to the oppression of all people through the white, patriarchal power structures that now have pervaded every inch of globalized understandings of power. This reemergence of the feminine sphere as it exists outside of mascu-

line linguistic constraints and patriarchal power structures is conceptualized in the term *feminine violence*.

This paper intends to argue first and foremost that women must find a way to radically write and speak the feminine sphere into an actualized existence, that this is the act that will serve as an expression of a radical counter to the masculine sphere of existence and the proclivity of masculine violence. Grounded in the necessity of upending the base as it is defined by Louis Althusser, this paper seeks to express a possibility for the creation of a feminine voice, that when truly expressed as itself, independent of the pervasive nature of patriarchal power and significance, could be the very event that engenders the first real attack on the base. While this paper uses the signifier “feminine” to describe an intrinsic value present in all women as defined through the work of French feminists Helene Cixous and Julia Kristeva, the ultimate goal of this paper is to do away with the masculine concept of the binary, in which one side of the binary is “less than” its opposing side. If life is given to the female voice, as it exists in its many forms, separated from masculine signifiers, then the hierarchal relationship between the binaries of masculine/feminine, and internal/external, will fade away. This paper will also seek to empower the unique experience of the Black female aesthetic and the potent ability of Black women to tap into the sacred femininity that is within due to their embrace of the multiplicity of identity rather than the masculine ideology of linear value. Once again, the use of the term “femininity” applies only to an alternative linguistic understanding of the world that is no longer dominated by the masculine principles of power and a masculine lens, through which this strained relationship between the significance of the word femininity and its actuality has been historically corrupted.

Finally, this paper uses the deeply harmonious work of Zora Neale Hurston as an example of a female writer who chose to give voice to the feminine identity as a multiplicity.

Hurston's novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, provides an alternative to the linear sensibility of value instituted by the French feminists and embraces the feminine identity and identity in general as a multiplicity that is only fully realized when its multi-dimensionality is accepted. Hurston's own life as well as her character, Janie in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, illustrate the power that a full and complete acceptance of self and a recognition of one's internal life and value can have, despite the pressures, judgments, restraints and hatreds of the dominant white patriarchal power structures that are supposed to determine the validity of existence. Hurston is an example of one woman who saw see herself and therefore her characters outside of a prescribed masculine understanding of not only the feminine, but also the Black experience. She wrote her own version of the Black female experience into existence. This radical and decidedly violent act of protest in recognition of the internal, if realized on a large scale, could be the impetus for the first large scale *attack* on the base and in turn the first real redefining of power since the rise of capital.

## FOUNDATION IN THE ECONOMIC

There is a political and economic necessity to life. In both there is an essential femininity that must be realized. The modern project of the feminine is not a project of valuing the female in terms of gender, rather it is a project of valuing the feminine sphere of existence. It is a return to the value of the domestic within one's self, a value of internal life. The feminization of the world power structures is essential to the survival of humanity, for feminization embraces identity as a multiplicity rather than a singularity. The feminine seeks to engage in the questioning of the nature of power and status in the world. It no longer advocates for the insertion of women into the existing power structure, in other words it does not insist on an equal part to play in an

unequal system. Rather, it stands to question and disrupt the system at large. The feminine does not designate itself as an ideological project of gender, but rather an ideological project of perspective and values. The unchecked pursuit of masculinity has led the world to its current state of value defined only through the violence of hyper capitalist gain. There is a limit to the violence that can be inflicted upon people before there is an equally violent response. However, when we examine moments of revolution throughout history, where people were pushed to replicate the violence that was inflicted upon them, the initial violence was always fought with the same masculine conception of violence and therefore the change was never truly a radical one. Most revolutions never fully attack the economic base. The revolutions that did attempt to do this, did so with physical violence, and despite their enormous efforts, the systems of power are still very much intact. The American Revolution can be linked to just such a moment, where physical violence was enacted to counter the violence of an unjust system of taxation without representation. However, this act now must be examined in light of the current American project of capitalism that has gone beyond all restraint. A country whose sole basis for existence was linked the idea of freedom of speech, freedom of religion and equal rights for all men under the law, a total rejection of the monarchy, has now become one of the greatest hypocrisies of all time and the driving force behind the current system of late capitalism and the exploitation of the native peoples of the world. Somewhere this project of revolution went awry, which leaves an opening for the possibility that perhaps these singular acts of physical violence in reaction to specific violent injustices are not enough, and not only are they not enough, but they are a metaphoric representation of quelling a fire with more fire. The failures of these violent responses to violence, provide an opportunity for examination and for an alternative that is feminine in its construction.



There is an economic reality to the realization of a common starting ground for all people. Within the given organizational system of an assigned capital value to all elements of human life, it is impossible to escape the significance of economic empowerment. The introduction of capital, or the notion of value outside of simple existence, forever changed the relationship between objects and their role in human life and injected the significance of ownership, or lack thereof, right into the very cells of identity. Marx states in *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, “Private property has made us so stupid and one-sided that an object is only ours when we have it—when it exists for us as capital, or when it is directly possessed, eaten, drunk, worn, inhabited, etc., —in short when it is used by us” (87). The existence of supply is rooted in reality. There is a limit to resources, just as there is a theoretical limit to production. Supply has limitations. Demand, or at least demand outside of absolute necessity, however, has no basis in reality outside of ideology. Demand is an insignificant signifier, one that does not exist in any physical form but is only given pretense by the validation of worth in the human mind. If something is rare it might be harder to obtain, and therefore could begin to develop a sense of value. When it comes to the necessities for maintaining life, such as food, water or shelter, this concept of value has a sense of immediacy that holds significance within the human experience. Participation in the ritual is dependent on life and life is sustained by the demand of certain necessities. However, in the interest of further organization, beyond the capacity of basic survival, human beings assigned value to objects that were not of any real value at all, such as precious metals that eventually expanded into the use of a currency system. These objects served no real purpose in living.

The conceptualization of value beyond necessity only furthered the distance between the signified and the conceived signifier. Assigning value to certain objects that were simply for

possession rather than for use, proved to be a useful organizational tool. It became a way to identify human worth and power rather than relying on intelligence and utility. It created the concept of a class based society, where certain individuals had objects of value that other individuals did not. This made the individuals who possessed these objects of greater value themselves, simply because of their ownership. This ideological construction of value beyond necessity progressed carefully, adding another layer of removal from the immediacy of concrete necessity, the preservation of life and the ideological constructs of value systems, until eventually humanity was left with our currently late capitalist, post-colonial, but still very much colonial world, a world so full of gatekeepers and class hierarchy, so deeply entrenched in the established production of subject creation, that it can no longer see past capital value. Capital has moved almost entirely out of the physical and completely into the ideological. The value system is so internalized that there is almost no need for the actual sight of the valued thing. It is the final and most violent withdrawal of the human from the signified and in doing so we have created what often appears to be an irreconcilable disconnect between the human and the objects and ideological constructs upon which a life is supposed to be created and assigned worth. Slavoj Žižek states in *The Specter is Still Roaming Around!: An Introduction to the 150th Anniversary Edition of the Communist Manifesto*, “This ‘abstraction’ [capital] [is] ... ‘real’ in the precise sense of determining the structure of material social processes: the fate of whole state of population and sometimes whole countries can be decided by the ‘solipsistic’ dance of Capital, which pursues its goal of profitability in a blessed indifference with regard to how its movement will affect social reality” (17). This constructed notion of value solidified the development of a class structure that is seemingly inseparable from the construction of all other ideological constructs, whether it be

race, gender, sexuality or otherwise, and thus it must eventually be reconciled. However, the question remains as to how.

There have been multiple economic projects created as a response to capitalism in its current form, none of which have worked. The failure of these projects must be examined from two lenses. First, the omnipresent nature of capitalism is almost inescapable in today's world. Even countries or cultures who try to act outside of it have to succumb to its pressures in one way or another. One of the side effects of the endless acquisition of capital is our globalized world. Markets have limits, especially markets maintained within a localized sphere. If ownership is the ultimate goal, then the realization of a globalized market is an obvious progression. This project of capital acquisition would eventually have to be a global project to push the boundaries of ownership, and that is exactly what it has become. The global acquisition of capital is participated in by all, whether by choice or by necessity. Those who dictate the rules are the willing participants, while much of the world falls at their feet in a desperate and never ending attempt to own enough to actually "be". It is a system of winners and losers that not only thrives, but relies on the exploitation of human bodies and the strength of the ideological buy in to the project of capitalism, without the knowledge or at least the ability to fight it. Alternative projects cannot succeed in a world that insists upon the possession of capital. To operate entirely outside of it is almost an impossibility.

Secondly, there is a failure in the construction of these alternative projects and the methods these projects choose to operate by. The weakness of these projects seems to lie not in the foundation of their ideals, but in the language used to construct these ideals, and the suggested action for implementation of these ideals. There is no form of oppression that is not reflected in the economic realm. The capital worth of a life in an unfortunate reality in our globalized capi-

talist system. The endless ideological production to counter this reality is useful, but as not yet gone far enough. Capital is a reality of our existence and thus the assigned value of a life is a reality as well, that must “in the last instance” be grappled with (Althusser 112). But it is the way in which we grapple with this question that must be examined, because there is no denial that the current ideological methods available are not enough.

The organization of the world as it stands currently, is a masculine construction. Patriarchy is an ideology built upon the worth of a particular space, the value of the external over the internal. A society based upon necessity rather than capital did not place an existential value on these different spheres of human existence. They simply flowed between them, with acknowledgement that the health of both of these spaces was vital to the survival of the collective. This is not to say that women do not have an equal part to play in the external and that men do not have a role to play in the internal. It is not the intent of this paper act in a prescriptive manner in regard to gender roles. The external and the internal must be interwoven in the masculine and the feminine. However, this paper does wish to argue that the patriarchal focus on capital gain is where the value separation began between the internal and the external, as well as the point where capital engagement once again, interfered with a sense of interconnectivity between people and between spheres of existence. Capital exchange takes place in the external sphere and since value is intimately connected to capital worth, this sphere by its association with capital gain, became of greater value to survival within this project based on the uneven and unmonitored relationship between excess and necessity, and thus deemed an entire gender unequal participants. Marx states, “The transcendence of private property is therefore the complete *emancipation* of all human senses and attributes; but it is this emancipation precisely because these senses and attributes have become subjectively and objectively, *human*” (87). The violence in-

flicted by capitalism is inherently masculine in its realization. It promotes and supports the endless competition and feeds a system that willingly inflicts the violence of value upon the lives of those who are not privileged enough to alter their value as it is defined for them. This project is based entirely on masculine principles as they have come to be defined through capital. Therefore, perhaps the most radical act is not the implementation of change to a violent system through a furthering of a masculine sense of violence, but rather the radical act of re-defining violence itself.

## VIOLENCE

The definition of violence is something that this paper seeks to address directly. There is a violent overthrow of power structures that must occur for any real “liberation” of the oppressed populations to happen. Once again, there is an economic reality to this liberation that cannot be denied. This paper does not wish to place liberation only in the internal sphere or existence, but rather to suggest that a feminine re-writing of the internal, of power structures and of violence, can lead to a true upheaval of power, that will for perhaps the first time, result in real and lasting change to the economic/political reality of life. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Franz Fanon states, “National liberation, national renaissance, the restoration of nationhood to the people, commonwealth: whatever may be the headings used or the new formulas introduced, decolonization is always a violent phenomenon” (35). Fanon, relies heavily on liberation being a construction of the state, that can and must occur on the level of nation, which is always, in the end, true. As previously stated, there is an organizational necessity to human existence and therefore a political/economic reality to life. This assertion empowers the nation-state and the measures by which it has the power to instate, to liberate or enslave. However, to think of liberation as some-

thing that only comes to fruition when the violence of colonialism, which can be broadened to include wider forms institutionalized oppression, is met with greater violence than that which colonialism itself propagates, replicates the underlying flaws of masculine logic and the reliance on a sacrificial relationship rather than a collective one. Overthrowing, or staging a revolution against the state itself, using the violence that the state disseminates freely as a mechanism of control, is an ideology deeply rooted in the masculine understanding of existence being an act of sacrifice. This ideology emboldens the power of the nation, as it is already defined through a white patriarchal lens. There is no choice to redefine power, to redefine the nature of the organizational structures which constitute power. There is simply a desire for this power to change hands, to be given back to the colonized, to the wretched of the earth. This is not enough. Throughout history, there have been many instances of power changing hands. There have been violent changes in leadership and governmental systems, none of which have resulted in the redefinition of power and the nature of power. Fanon states, "To tell the truth, the proof of success lies in a whole social structure being changed from the bottom up", but this very idea promotes the same idea of a hierarchal understanding of the comparative correspondence of humans (35). Changing who is at the bottom and who is at the top, does not upend the reality of power. It does not question it or redefine it. It just asks that power change hands. The world has seen this. There have been revolutions that by this measure, should have been considered a success. Yet, we are left with the same underlying system of power, the same ideology of what power is and how it can, or rather should be exerted. This is why a masculine understanding of violence will never redefine the nature of power as we know it.

The word violence has several definitions. The first definition relates to the idea of physical force used to either hurt, damage or kill. Often the second definition references the strength

of an emotion as it applies to a destructive act. The gap between these two definitions provides room for a new conceptualization of violence and what it means to commit a violent act. Jean Paul Sartre is not wrong in his assumption that violence is an eventual necessity. He states in *The Wretched of the Earth*,

Get this into your head: if violence were only a thing of the future, if exploitation and oppression never existed on earth, perhaps displays of nonviolence might relieve the conflict. But if the entire regime, even your nonviolent thoughts, is governed by a thousand-year old oppression, your passiveness serves no other purpose but to put you on the side of the oppressors. (106)

However, there is ambiguity around an exact definition of violence and what it should entail present in Sartre's statement. What constitutes violence? If one is taking an action of some sort in opposition to something, can this ever be considered nonviolent? These are the questions that Sartre does not address. It is in the answers to these questions that a possibility for violence outside the applicable masculine definition of harm to the physical body can be born. The definition of violence and its connection to the potential disrupting power of emotion, where the potential lies for a feminization of the radical act of violence and therefore the expediency of radical change.

The problem lies in the expression of this feminized violence. What does this look like? How is it communicated? Fanon would say that to express one's self within the language of the oppressor is to become more like the oppressor. He states in *Black Skin, White Masks*, "To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weights of a civilization" (17-18). There is truth to that fact, which directly relates to the problem of genuine feminine expression within the confines of male dominated relationships between the signified and the signifier. Women, have not been the perpetrators of control when it comes to language, therefore how can

they ever truly write or speak themselves into existence in a world and within a language that is not of their own making?

In his seminal work, *Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences*, Derrida asserts that human beings can never transcend culture and language and that any word or concept in Western culture has a defined opposite. Western society, because of its engagement in capital exchange, took advantage of the logic of the binary that goes back to the Bible, in which one side of the binary is always given a more privileged position than its opposite. The binary is essential to the maintenance of the concept of capital value and thus it is the basis of Western linguistic understanding. However, while identifying this binary, Derrida also states that there is no inherent reality or logic to this binary relationship based on a hierarchical relationship between a concept and its opposite. Within a Western understanding of language, neither part of the binary can exist without its opposite and therefore the relationship is not really an “either/or” relationship but an “and” relationship. At its core the relationship should not be one of hierarchical value, but a symbiotic one. Derrida states in *Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences*, “Language bears within itself the necessity of its own critique, deconstructive criticism aims to show that any text inevitably undermines its own claims to have a determinate meaning, and licenses the reader to produce his own meanings out of it by an activity of semantic ‘freeplay’ (108). This paper seeks not to deconstruct the binary of masculine/feminine itself, but to deconstruct the value system that allows the masculine sphere the greater perception of value within a Western capitalist mindset. According to Derrida, language itself empowers a critique of its own limitations, which relates directly to the ability of women to write their experience into being, outside of a masculine understanding of the hierarchical relationship of the binary relationship present in Western linguistic constructions. Derrida is correct in his assertion that



human beings will never transcend their use of language. But that use of language is never set in stone. Language itself allows the relationships between the signified and the signifier to change and morph. Therefore, this reality of language allows for a destruction of the hierarchal understanding of language and an embrace of a potential symbiotic relationship between a linguistic construct and its “opposite.” To see individuals as simply mechanical parts in the maintenance of power, devoid of all agency is an version of individuality that this paper cannot promote. For the oppressed, there must be agency, agency in a re-imagining of language, even if that language is the one of the oppressor. The oppressed populations of the world, those who do not find themselves immediate benefactors of the white patriarchal capitalism that drives the globe, must look for their expression of truth within. Fanon asserts at the end of *Black Skin, White Masks*, “My final prayer: O my body, make of me always a man who questions!” (232). It is in this sentiment where agency lies. In the ability to question, to see one’s self outside of the given institutions of power that at first glance, seem to determine all of existence.

## FEMININE VIOLENCE

The power of femininity lies in its refusal to be reductive. Femininity acknowledges the importance of the internal, that is the importance of knowing one’s self and understanding the constitution of one’s identity. This sense of an individual understanding can be expanded to the external, but the internal must come first. To truly know and understand individuality there must be an understanding of the individual in context to that which he or she deems “other than” by nature of ritualization. We are born into an organized world and with this organization comes the making of one as a subject. The moment we are part of this world, we are made subjects. Foucault states in *Discipline and Punishment*, “A real subjection is born mechanically from a

fictitious relation. So it is necessary to use force to constrain the convict to good behavior, the madman to calm, the worker to work, the schoolboy to application, the patient to the observation of the regulations” (555). It is an unavoidable reality that cannot be escaped. Existence within the ideological sphere is not something that can be stopped, it cannot even be slowed down.

Humans are, from the moment they are born “always-already subjects”, participants in the ideological space far before the ideological space can be fully conceived or even consciously reckoned with by the individual. Humans immediately step into a world that has imagined each individual as a part within its current framework, as part of the ritual of existence. Althusser states in *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*,

Of the reproduction of the relations of production is to be assured, even in the processes of production and circulation, every day, in the “consciousness,” i.e. in the attitudes of the individual subjects occupying the posts which the socio-technical division of labor assigns to them in production, exploitation, repression, ideologization, scientific practice, -etc. (701)

Now, where does individual agency lie within this framework? How does the individual assert some level of ownership over the inevitable ritualization of ideology? In essence, where is freedom and how does the feminine sphere help in its actualization? The assumption of our ownership over the lives we lead is dangerous, but necessary because agency is another element of humanness that cannot be separated from the whole. Agency is also a necessity. Here again, we return to the acknowledgement of subject formation. By knowing oneself and by engaging in the examination of otherness in relation to the self, an individual engages in the powerful act of empathy and the acceptance of identity as a multiplicity within all of us, in short, an embrace of the feminine.

There is no one element of identity that defines any one individual. That is simply not how identity works. Society, often does not define the individual through one ultimate singular

designation. It is not enough to talk about the difference between men and women, because gender is not the only proponent of identity that impacts an individual's path through the world. It is not enough to talk about the life of a Black person in America, because Black people are also impacted by the implications of gender, sexuality, class, etc. within society's value system. A great deal of power is hidden in the recognition that we are all determinants of an ideological conception of identity as a multiple, rather than a singular entity. This current move toward the acknowledgement of intersectionality and the inherent level of connectivity between all people by forth wave feminists, is a valuable one in its idealization, and one that is feminine in its construction. But as previously stated, a move toward acknowledgement is not enough. Knowing the nature of an individual's own subject-ness and the relationship of an individual's status as subject to the subject-ness of others, is not enough. There is no action present in this understanding of intersectionality. This ideology never leaves the realm of the superstructure to raise an eventual attack on the base, on the arbitrary signification of value, and the misinterpretation of the relationship between necessity and excess, that is responsible for the creation of a hierarchal perception of difference as it relates to identity. So where does this feminine understanding of intersectionality and inclusivity translate into action? What does violence as a feminine construct actually look like?

If the realm of action lies within the political then somehow this concept of intersectionality, of acceptance of difference and the acknowledgement that difference is simply a learned component of ritualization, must be translated into political action. Organization is indeed a necessary component of human existence as it now stands, but the nature of this organization can be altered in the agency provided by the assumption of the political as an irreplaceable part of modern life. Citizenship, although not citizenship in terms of the nation-state only, will remain, but

the nature of the political reality does not have to remain stagnant. Feminine voice must be transferred into the political, thereby bringing the understanding of the duality of a feminine existence to an actionable form. There is a requisite nature the feminization of the political, because with the feminization of the political comes the feminization of all realms of human ideological experience, and the start of what would be an entirely different conceptualization of the world. A perception of the world absent of the organizing nature of capital, absent of the assigned value toward life, would open up a whole new way of being. However, the interjection of the feminine into the political will not come through the maintenance of an effort to change the superstructure without an acknowledgment of the absolute necessity of a violent act. It is in this moment, the moment where the move toward violence must be faced, that a decision must be made, which version of violence do we subscribe to? The violence of the physical or the violence of the emotional?

The feminization of violence suggests that there is an emotional form of violence that can be inflicted on the perpetrators of the inequity through masculine systems of power. The purpose behind a feminine act of violence is to present an entirely different path for agency from the one presented in a masculine construct. Physical violence, the physical destruction of the thing that stands in countenance to a perceived sense of justice within an understanding of subject creation, only destroys that thing physically, in the local sphere. It is a localized attack, and therefore can only have localized effects. It allows the ideology to live, to morph and to change into something other than, but still very much a part of the original ill. It allows for the same violence to be inflicted in another localized space. It does not eliminate the violent act and the ideology that serves to support that act, it just moves it, altering its channels for manifestation. A violent attack was made upon the institution of slavery in America, but the injustice of the ownership of

Black bodies just shifted, transformed into a new entity, one that on the surface is unrecognizable to its foundational counterpart, but is intimately related by the inheritance of violence. If violence is indeed a necessity, as it seems to “in the last instance” be, then how do we restructure this definition of violence as a physical act? How do we reimagine violence as something other than physical violence, but equal in its propensity toward an enactment of radical change?

A feminine construction of violence is a difficult concept to grasp. It is a loaded phrase, one full of the assumptions of the ritualization around gender and gender identity. Feminine violence exists in the infliction of an emotional violence. Feminine violence lies in the unexpected, in the predication of the exact act that would seem contrary to the violence being inflicted. Feminine violence takes away the counter, the push back of these historic acts of violent masculinity. Terry Eagleton states, “The message of the women’s movement, as interpreted by some of those outside of it, is not just that women should have equality of power and status with men; it is a questioning of all such power and status. It is not that the world will be better off with more female participation in it; it is that without the ‘feminization’ of human history, the world is unlikely to survive” (130). Enacting feminine forms of violence is not an act of self-sacrifice, but it takes a redefining of what it means to truly give oneself to a cause. If life is lost in the pursuance of ‘what is right’ then where is the end to this violence? Can this act ever change the political and economic realities of oppressed people, or does it simply shift the burden, offer a ‘freedom’ of choice, an alternative method of subject creation to one group, at the inevitable burden of another? The feminization of violence is a shift in the power structure itself and the sensibilities that have informed the definition of power for all of human existence. It is a restructuring of what it means to ‘fight’ for something. Its realization would be the first and only true attack to the base. This attack would inform a restructuring of the global sphere of power, in the

acknowledgement that collectivity is a necessity of human existence; that an enactment of a conceptualization of the collective is not a choice, but an absolute. Feminization will eventually be forced, for the alternative, is mass scale, masculine destruction.

## FEMININE VOICE

It is impossible to call something or someone feminine without the full gamut of assumptions, stereotypes and decidedly negative connotations that inevitably accompany such a statement, to be imparted. Rita Felski argues that the very notion of feminist aesthetics is problematic. She states, it is “impossible to speak of ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ in any meaningful sense in the formal analysis of texts” (2). To be feminine or to feminize something is a conception defined within the masculine constraints of language. It is a flawed and twisted relationship between the signified and the signifier, one that women need to redefine through their own conceptualization of language and what it means to be woman. The ideology of feminizing an action, or embracing the inherent femininity that can be found within every body is to talk about a thing as though it is easily defined and applicable to all women as a whole, a notion that is impossible to agree with, much less assert without an acknowledgement of the obvious contention that will come with such an idea. However, a great deal of this contention or the negativity automatically associated with calling something “female”, “feminine”, or “feminized” is the fact that the only language available in which to say these words, the only ritualized existence that we are made part of as women, is one that is masculine in its conception, defined through masculine terms, through a masculine understanding of language, and through a masculine hierarchal view of society, power and the relationship between the sexes. It is impossible to hear the feminine, without also hearing, and perhaps more powerfully so, the masculine by which it is defined. Women

have not yet carved out enough of their own genuine space, separate from the confines of a world constructed around masculinity and masculine principles. Women have not yet created their own language and therefore the very idea of calling an action some derivation of “female” is wrought with masculine discontent at the notion, even within a woman herself. French feminist, Helene Cixous states in “Laugh of the Medusa,” “I wished that woman would write and proclaim this unique empire so that other women, other unacknowledged sovereigns, might exclaim: I, too, overflow; my desires have invented new desires, my body knows unheard-of songs” (876).

Within the context of a system of language in which the female could simply be, described through her own words, her experiences given a new life through an entirely new concept of language, there would be no need to assume that by denoting something as feminine you are being reductive, or that by acknowledging the feminine characteristics of a person or thing you are acknowledging it as feminine as we understand it through a masculine lens of knowing. The loss of control or access to communication from a linguistic standpoint is infinitely damaging to the propensity for a group to have access to the institutions of power. Women absolutely must write themselves into being because when this is truly done, women will have torn away the walls of masculinity around what it means to be female within the assumption of the comparative nature of the sexes, rather than the simple existence of these things side by side, intertwined and beautiful in the equality of their value.

Allowing a woman the chance to speak in her own language is a notion that is entirely radical in its conception. This chance, this opportunity to hear a woman’s voice, untethered by the limitations of masculine language and masculine understanding of importance and value, could be the very event that topples the bastions of power, that questions the very make up of this world and those who have the right to define its value so narrowly. Cixous states, “...where

woman has never *her* turn to speak—this being all the more serious and unpardonable in that writing is precisely *the very possibility of change*, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures.” (879). This chance to speak and write could be defined as a “feminization” of power, a violent feminine response. But if it is a truly unadulterated expression, entirely free from the preexisting assigned significance of a woman defined by and through a man, then this could be the very instance where the world experiences the first and only true radical act against the power structures of human organization that must be exposed and sufficiently challenged for a true overthrow of the base to come to fruition. For the first time, it will be a challenge that is entirely outside of a masculine conception of what it means to be radical, what it means to question, who has the right to partake in these acts and how they are allowed to engage in a radical pursuit. Woman must write and speak and push herself to find a voice. This is where the world will start again, where the political, economic and social constructions that have defined and organized society will crumble and be swept away, to be replaced with a new “feminine” construction, that in this new reality, in this new societal construction, will no longer have to be referred to as “feminine” at all.

When arguing for the feminization of violence, or the feminization of that action which appears necessary to enact a true radical change to the base, it is necessary to look at the history which led to the definition of feminine as “less than.” Somewhere along the lines, the feminine space was put into a hierarchy, defined by a comparative, competitive notion of importance and its relationship to power in the modern world. Before the creation of an assigned capital value to every conceivable element of human existence, there simply were roles to fill, all of which were vital and valuable to basic survival. No one role was considered more valuable than the other



because humans lived in a space defined by essentiality. Want was not a worthwhile pursuit. The external and the internal spheres of human life were both acknowledged and valued, but value had an entirely different relationship between the signified and the signifier, as has been previously stated. Now when we hear the word value, there is an immediate cognitive jump to the monetary significance of an object, action or person. But prior to assigned capital value as a method of human organization, there was a concept of value as it related to necessity. This concept allowed for the performance of work without the decision to weigh its value in terms of economic gain. In tribalistic cultures men and women performed their assigned roles. Women often, were keepers of the internal domain, of familial life, prior to corruption of this association between women and the internal, this role was simply considered a necessary part that must be played for the survival of the group as a whole. This role was not considered of less value than the more external assignments of fighting or hunting often performed by men. They were simply different, not better than or less than or worse than or equal to. Life was not defined by the comparative. These roles were all simply essential. They were necessary and so they were performed and valued for their necessity in relationship to survival.

The compulsion to organize human society as it expands is an understandable one, and arguably an entirely necessary pursuit. The introduction of a capital value assigned to all elements of human existence was essentially an organizational tool, meant to place people, places, things and ideas into a regulated system of exchange. However, this forever changed the conceptualization of the masculine and feminine spheres of life. As previously stated, prior to the institution of capital value, masculine and feminine spheres existed, but they were not defined as such and came without the linguistic significance of the current definitions of these ideological concepts of an association with gender. Capital value placed a signified monetary value on cer-

tain spheres of human existence. The external, or more masculine sphere of human life became the place of economic exchange and therefore became more valuable. Men, and their entire sphere of existence were now seen through their ability to increase capital gain, while women, and the internal sphere of existence were becoming exceedingly excluded from this new system of economic exchange. The traits possessed by women, the maintenance of an internal health or familial life, could not easily be assigned a monetary value. Many elements of female existence could not be measured within capital constraints and thus they fell by the wayside, not losing their innate value in human life, but their value as it was now defined through capital exchange. And since capital immediately took over as the dominant means by which to determine value, the woman, the feminine sphere and femininity, whose sphere of existence and value now primarily existed outside of these constraints, was automatically deemed less than in the new hierarchal, competitive nature of asserting economic dominance through capital gain. In *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Frederick Engels argued that sexual inequality did not exist before the ideological creation of private property-- before the idea that man could "own". This concept of ownership, changed the system of production from one that was complementary and intersectional, to one that was hierarchal, competitive, based entirely in the economic nature of production rather than the view of production for basic human survival. This transition ineradicably changed the meaning of production in its relationship to human existence and thus changed the relationship between gender and production. Internal labor, which could also be deemed domestic labor (although I hesitate to use the term because of its linguistic significance in masculine linguistic constraints) often does not produce tangible results that can be accounted for and thereby assigned an economic value. This diminished the importance of feminine production

within the changing social structure that was increasingly defined by an individual's relationship to capital.

When talking about the feminine or the feminization of certain aspects of human life that do not automatically appear "feminine" in the traditional sense, you are immediately confronted with the stereotype associated with what it is to be "female". Julia Kristeva perfectly poses the question that arises when women chose to argue for some intrinsic value to their own femaleness in *Women's Time*. She states,

*What can be our place in the symbolic contract? If the social contract, far from being that of equal to men, is based on an essentially sacrificial relationship of separation and articulation of differences which in this way produces communicable meaning, what is our place in this order of sacrifice and/or language? No longer wishing to be excluded or no longer content with the function which has always been demanded of us (to maintain, arrange, and perpetuate this sociosymbolic contract as mothers, wives, nurses, doctors, teachers...), how can we reveal our place, first as it is bequeathed to us by tradition, and then as we want to transform it? (24)*

This is the ultimate question. How do you argue for the intrinsic value of the female without succumbing to the reductive power of stereotype? The effort of many waves of Western feminist movements has been to argue for the equality of the sexes, that women are equal to men and deserve equal treatment in the eyes of the dominant social power structures. However, to argue for such treatment is to also concede that "male" and all that comes with an association with "maleness" is inherently more valuable than any characteristic that is typically associated with "femaleness." Essentially, many of these movements have argued for the equal treatment of women within a system that only values one set of characteristics, those that lead to capitalistic gain. It is very difficult for women to make this sacrifice. There is such limitation to arguing for equality within a value set that was predetermined by a masculine aesthetic, one that completely ignored the feminine and any value that might come from any association outside of capitalist gain.

Kristeva states, “The assumption by women of executive, industrial, and cultural power has not, up to the present time, radically changed the nature of this power” (26). Women have not yet asserted that their relationship to power is decidedly different than that of men. They have not yet subverted that power structure and created an entirely different model, one based upon the collective, rather than the sacrificial. Women have not yet expressed their “desire to lift the weight of what is sacrificial in the social contract from their shoulders, to nourish our societies with a more flexible and free discourse, one able to name what has thus far never been an object of circulation in the community: the enigmas of the body, the dreams, secret joys, shames, hardships of the second sex” (32). This realization is the inescapable path of the larger feminist movement. Women cannot allow masculinity to define all that is “of value” from a capitalist mindset. It is this ideological perspective of capital value that has historically led to the consistent assumption of a sacrificial relationship between people and the societies in which they inhabit. This perspective inevitably led to the corruption of the many feminist movements, who willingly disregarded the multiplicity of identity as a way forward, but failed to realize that by moving forward within a system of masculine control, they were not really moving anywhere at all. bell hooks states in “Feminism is for Everybody”, “Overall women in our society are forgetting the value and power of sisterhood. Renewed feminist movement must once again raise the banner high to proclaim anew ‘Sisterhood is powerful’” (17). Feminism must strive for inclusion; otherwise it presents no real alternative. To sacrifice one, to promote the possibility of success for the other within an already accepted system of inequality, is a conformity that will never work for Women, with a capital W, as an inclusive whole.

## ZORA NEALE HURSTON'S ALTERNATIVE

Many of the French feminists admittedly do not confront the reality of identity as a multiplicity head on, a fact that this paper asserts is an essential element of a true realization of the feminine sphere. Kristeva, addresses what she terms “the multiplicity of female expressions.”

She states,

Indeed, the time has perhaps come to emphasize the multiplicity of female expressions and preoccupations so that from the intersection of these differences there might arise, more precisely, less commercially, and more truthfully, the real *fundamental difference* between the two sexes: a difference that feminism has had the enormous merit of rendering painful, that is, productive of surprises and of symbolic life in a civilization which, outside the stock exchange and wars, is bored to death. (18)

Acknowledging the female as having a multiplicity of expressions allows for the ideological space necessary to talk about issue of race, class and gender in the feminine sphere. Kristeva believes that this acknowledgment of the female experience, in all of its varied forms, will allow for the enhancement of symbolic life. This assertion allows room for the confrontation of the multiples of identity, including race and class, but through the empowerment of the Woman first and foremost. Kristeva states, “The sharpest and most subtle point of feminist subversion brought about by the new generation will henceforth be situated on the terrain of the inseparable conjunction of the sexual and the symbolic, to try to discover, first, the specificity of the female, and then, in the end, that of each individual woman” (21). It is clear that to Kristeva the discovery of the female as a collective will then embolden the story and symbolic place of the woman as an individual. However, this concept of linear time, and linear progress for the female does not fit within an overall understanding of the feminine voice as a space for the embrace of the multiple. This is where many female writers of color choose to differentiate themselves from this sequential view that requires and individual to chose one component of their identity to em-

power first, rather than a complete embrace of identity as a three-dimensional whole. Perhaps this concept of “one thing, than the other” does not serve the feminine identity. This places women of color in an impossible position. It requires them to choose their identity as a woman over their identity as a person of color. This is a choice that for many cannot, and I would argue should not, be made. Feminine voice must dismiss linearity. There is no one victory and then another. The feminine can and should empower all women to speak their truth, as they see it. Feminine voice, feminine writing or any component of feminine expression when truly conveyed outside of masculine linguistic concepts, does not have a race, sexuality or a class connotation. Cixous states,

Women must write through their bodies, they must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes and rhetorics, regulations and codes, they must submerge, but through, get beyond the ultimate reserve-discourse, including the one that laughs at the very idea of pronouncing the world silence, / the one that, aiming for the impossible stops short before the work ‘impossible’ and writes it at ‘the end.’” (886)

It allows for all of these identities. It cannot ask the individual to choose, to place value on certain elements of individuality over the others. It cannot subscribe to the hierarchal understanding of binary relationship of Western language. This is where writers such as Zora Neale Hurston, choose to differentiate themselves and embrace a version of femininity that more closely embraces the feminine, the idealized form of femininity that this paper ultimately seeks to promote. The history of feminism has taught us that the decision to identify one’s identity as a female as more important than the other multiples of human identity fails in the end. There is no end to the oppression of one population if there is not a simultaneous end to the oppression of all. Hurston did not make a decision to confront femininity over race or race over femininity. Instead she chose to breath real life into her characters, to confront the multiples of human identity as they

occurred in the life and psychology of that character. Her choices were not based upon a prescribed version of value. They were *real* life.

Zora Neale Hurston was a woman whose life was marred by controversy. She often was difficult to fully understand, chaotic and unapologetic. Much of Hurston's writing captures the alternative of a feminine form of violence that this paper wishes to convey; however, it is not just Hurston's work that does this, but Hurston herself. In Alice Walker's dedication in the aptly titled collection of Hurston's work, *I Love Myself When I am Laughing...and Then Again When I Am Looking Mean and Impressive*, she states, "We love Zora Neale Hurston for her work, first, and then again (as she and all Eatonville would say). We love her for herself. For the humor and courage with which she encountered a life she infrequently designed, for her absolute disinterest in becoming either white or bourgeois, and for her *devoted* appreciate of her own culture, which is an inspiration to us all" (xiv). Hurston was, at all times, herself. She lived her life, difficult as it was, cloaked in the unbreakable assurance in her own ability and in who and what she was. She was in many ways, untouchable, a woman who lived a life based on her own standards rather than those that were given to her.

Her life was never easy. She grew up in the all Black town of Eatonville, Florida and it was this experience that seemed to inflict Hurston with an indelible sense of racial pride that she carried with her throughout the rest of her life. She was extremely close to her mother, who encouraged Hurston's creativity, but she had a strained relationship with her father. After her mother passed away when Hurston was nine, she was in many ways on her own in the world. Hurston put herself through school, even despite the fact that she had no stability in her home life and no money. She was determined to a writer. She was determined to create her own future in a world that told her she had none. She was unafraid.

Hurston's writing career was never free from contention. She was widely criticized for her relationship with her white, wealthy benefactress and was often criticized by her peers for playing the "happy darkie" just to please the woman and receive more money. She was often attacked for down-playing or completely ignoring racism. Her politics were often confusing. She openly opposed desegregation because it insulted the work of Black teachers. She believed fiercely that her success was due to her own hard work, which caused her to believe that others were equally capable of the same accomplishments, no matter what the constraints of the current political/social system were. Perhaps, when it came to her own life, she had moments of short-sightedness and blind, unchecked individualism, but one thing is certain, she was never not herself.

Being Zora Neale Hurston was not easy in a time where Black women were supposed to be modest, compliant and timid. Hurston refused to write about race or gender in a way that she felt was reductive. She refused to talk about Black lives as though they were nothing more than a series of sorrowful musings of an oppressed people. She believed in the value of Black life, not as it was defined within the white, patriarchal value system, but simply as she experienced it, full of joy and sorrow, all of which occurred entirely outside of a system that wished to degrade and diminish Black life as the humiliating experience of incessant victimization. Hurston stated in *How It Feels to Be Colored Me*, "But I am not tragically colored. There is no great sorrow dammed up in my soul, nor lurking behind my eyes. I do not mind at all. I do not belong to the sobbing school of Negrohood who hold that nature somehow has given them a lowdown dirty deal and whose feelings are hurt about it...No, I do not weep at the world—I am too busy sharpening my oyster knife" (216). Hurston's use of the imagery of an oyster knife initially has a violent connotation, but it is not accident that the symbolism of the oyster connects directly to the



power of femininity. The symbol of an oyster knife is a vivid depiction of feminine violence. Hurston at her core was not sorry for who and what she was. She refused to conform to the pressures of a society that forced almost everything and everyone to adopt a white, male view or to be crumpled by it. She held her own.

Much of Hurston's writing touched upon the theme of an internal life, and the sanctity of that space, especially her novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. In her connection with the internal, with the connectivity that exists between all humans, Zora Neale Hurston exemplified a distinct sensitivity to the feminine sphere of life. Her unique position, both as a woman and as a person of color, in a society that tried to ideologically beat her into submission, forced Hurston to develop her own world view and thus her own language. Hurston wrote herself and her ideology into existence, even when no one wanted to hear it or understood. She did not allow anything or anyone to shake her intimate connection with self and her decision to see herself as a participant in this life and this world. As her history tells us, Zora Neale Hurston was not without her flaws. She had moments where her vibrant individualism bordered on egotism and a failure to realize that others perhaps were not dealt the same exact hand that she was. But overall, Hurston did something incredible. She brought life and voice to the internal. She never lost her connection to that magic that made her, her. She saw and felt the connectivity of humanity and she fought hard for the words to represent it. Yes, a form of feminine violence or perhaps, in Hurston's instance, Black feminine violence, was exhibited in her unshakeable decision to be herself, to display her thoughts and emotions for all to see, no matter what the cost. This too is a violent and oppositional decision that is radical in its very construct. To love one's self when you are laughing and then again when you are looking mean and impressive, is no easy task, but Zora Neale

Hurston did it anyway and it is in her language, her brave embrace of an internal sense of self that a new way forward can be found.

## HISTORICAL FAILURES OF ORGANIZED FEMININITY IN REGARDS TO RACE

It is impossible to use Zora Neale Hurston as an example for an alternative to the masculine linguistic definition of violence without addressing race and the role it played both in Hurston's writing and in the history of feminist movements in the United States. Feminist movements in the United States have become the dominant way in which progressive change to the feminine sphere have been addressed, however, there is an important distinction between the direction of feminists movements and how this paper chooses to define femininity. There is a contentious history between the different manifestations of the women's movement, which historically has defined the progress of femininity, and race. It is a history that often mimics the exact sacrificial relationship that is demanded within the confines of capitalist, patriarchal society. It goes without saying that an adoption of these same principles would be problematic and ineffective for the evolution of the role of the female within society. However, the movement toward equality for women and equality for people of color has often not worked in tandem and at points has even worked in direct opposition to one another. The anti-slavery movement, in many ways gave rise to the Women's Liberation movement. Many early suffragettes found their voice while standing in opposition to slavery. These two movements for freedom were intimately linked from the beginning, as all movements for freedom of oppressed populations, eventually are. Abolitionists, Sarah and Angelina Grimke were intimately aware of the indivisible nature of all freedom movements. Angela Davis states in *Women, Race and Class*, "Because the Grimke sisters had such a profound consciousness of the inseparability of the fight for Black Liberation

and the fight for Women's Liberation, they were never caught in the ideological snare of insisting that one struggle was absolutely more important than the other. They recognized the dialectical character of the relationship between the two causes" (44). This level of consciousness surrounding the intersectionality of all liberation movements was unfortunately not adopted by all participants of the Women's Liberation movement, including such well known suffragettes as, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott. In the interest of political expediency and perhaps more accurately, outright racism, Stanton allowed the movement for Women's Liberation to stand in direct opposition to the movement for Black Liberation, forever severing the women's movement from a foundational underpinning in the collective rather than the sacrificial. By politically aligning the women's movement with Southern white Democrats, whose goal was to obstruct the Black vote by allowing white women to vote instead, Stanton and others like her allowed for the collapse of the feminine understanding of multiplicity and the collective, and for this ideology to be replaced by a hierarchal understanding of liberation and who in fact deserves to be liberated. This is an ideology that stands in direct contrast to the idea of liberation as a principle. The liberation of one group is incomplete without the equal liberation of all oppressed peoples. The failure to understand this, led the movement for Women's Liberation down a path dictated by the capitalist understandings of race, class and gender, a system that insisted upon a hierarchal acceptance of these elements of identity. This departure from the very characteristics of the collective that define and differentiate feminine power from masculine power, was a huge failure of the movement for Women's Liberation. The movement embraced a reality where the only accepted linguistic relationship between signified and signifier was masculine in its conception, as well as the masculine understanding of success and progress in terms of entrance into the already existing power structure. It did not insist on redefining that power structure to allow for

the inclusion of all. It is this failure at inclusion both politically and ideologically, that forced Zora Neale Hurston to search for her own linguistic expression of emancipation. It is this failure that forced her into writing something new, a violent alternative to the acceptance of masculine violence of the sacrificial relationship between people and the creation of their own success within the patriarchal power structure, an internal resistance entirely her own that embraced her collective identity as a Black Woman. Hurston's identity allowed her the insight that many white, female leaders of the Women's Liberation movement, failed to recognize; that femininity can never accept masculine principles to enact radical change.

#### PRECARITY AND THE BLACK FEMININE

Judith Butler's application of the concept of precarity provides a lens for which to examine the feminine as well as a Black feminine aesthetic and the ways in which these voices could access a history of destruction and purposeful denial from the institutions created to provide stability. Butler sees all living being as susceptible to the precarity of living. At any moment, any being could be wiped from the earth. Humans try to modify and account for precarity through the development of social and political institutions in which the nation-state is responsible for the well-being of those who are within the bounds of its political hold. However, this benefits of a functioning political and economic life that is not bestowed equally upon all populations. Butler states, "Precarity characterizes that politically induced condition of maximized vulnerability and exposure for populations exposed to arbitrary state violence and to other forms of aggression that are not enacted by states and against which states do not offer adequate protection" (2). By this definition, Women are the constant victims of precarity, of a system that is designed to inflict these states of violence upon them for which there is no adequate protection. This assertion ap-

plies doubly to the Black woman, who through her identity as both female and Black is forced to voice the violence of two politically induced conditions that without a doubt maximize the vulnerability of the Black female. Through the reality of induced precarity that the Black female is unable to escape, she has been forced into finding a voice to expression the sorrow and destruction inflicted upon her body and spirit. Ewa Ziarek identifies the destructive nature of the exclusion of women from political and literary production in her book, *Feminist Aesthetics and the Politics of Modernism*, Ziarek examines how being violently kept out of the creation of history could allow the voice of the woman to be “transformed into the inauguration of new possibilities of writing, sexuality, and becoming” (15). It is precisely the violence experienced by women at the hands of white male patriarchy, this precarity, this purposeful destruction and erasure, that will force women to discover an entirely new form of expression, a violence of their own. Imperative to this potential transformation in the expression of the feminine is the recognition of the complete exclusion of the Black female subject. The recognition of this exclusion, the destruction of the Black female body and its overt exposure to precarity, is the exact conditioning that forced Black female writers, such as Zora Neale Hurston to examine their relationship to their own silencing and the ways in which they could develop a new voice to not only express their melancholia, but also to engage in the violent revolutionary act of the creation of a feminine expression of freedom in its linguistic form.

## THE BLACK FEMININE

This break from the ideology of the fight for liberation being a unified fight of all battles for liberation, caused the relationship between women of color and the movement for Women’s liberation to become strained. Feminization of the project of violent protest is a necessary one,

however, as previously established, the term feminization must undergo a significant process of redefining its core principles. It is no secret that the feminist project in all of its good and willful intent, and in all of its different manifestations throughout time, is lacking in its ability to render the obligatory space for women of color to be fully represented within the project as both women of color and as women. The current manifestation of feminist theory is one based on the concept of intersectionality, that the suppression of woman can only fully be understood when examined along with the other marginalized populations. This is an imperative move that if carefully manifested could result in a feminist theory that truly embraced the multiplicity of identity as opposed to the desire to define women firstly through the lens of gender being the ultimate determinate of discrimination. This assumption that gender is the primary underlying issue for all women has led the feminist project throughout its multiple incarnations to disregard the inevitable experience of intersectionality felt by women of color and the subsequent exclusion felt by women of color who could not see themselves represented in the feminism that used the experience of white women as the established “norm” for all female experience. This current attempt to acknowledge and find strength in the power of the intersectional identity in feminist theory is a necessary one, but one who’s optimism needs to find the requisite caution needed for a ideological project that has often failed to theoretically and practically indicate the importance of a unique experience felt by women of color. As stated by Kimberle Crenshaw in her 1989 paper, *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist theory and Antiracist Politics,*”

Black women are sometimes excluded from feminist theory and antiracist policy discourse because both are predicated on a discrete set of experiences that often does not accurately reflect the intersection of race and gender. These problems of exclusion cannot be solved by simply including Black women within an already established analytical structure. Because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, and analysis that does not take intersectionali-

ty into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated. (140)

It is in the complete embrace of the intersectional that feminist theory has the opportunity to provide a perspective capable of illuminating a way forward. This is also a decided separation from the ideology of the woman from masculine value systems. It is not only in the interest of feminist theory to expand its understanding of intersectionality, but that it would be the first genuine display of acceptance of the power of feminine as it could potentially exist without the domineering patriarchal lens that infringes on the ability of the female to define what femininity looks like rather than falling suit with the masculine identification of feminine characteristics and their attached value. In her writing and in her own life, Zora Neale Hurston expressed a sentiment of an internal self-knowledge that was focused intimately on both her identity as a woman and her Black identity. The intersection of these components of Hurston's own identity seem intimately linked and equally important to understanding how she as a writer and as a person carved out a space of internal peace, understanding, confidence and knowledge in a world that seemingly did not want to allow her that possibility.

Femininity within the Black community is intimately connected to the history of slavery. As an object to be owned, a commodity to be bought and sold, the Black woman was not allowed the designation as simply a domestic being. She was expected to work in the fields, engaging in the physical production of labor as well as maintaining the domestic tasks of child bearing, cooking, homemaking, etc. Hortense Spillers states in *Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book*,

First of all their New-World, diasporic plight marked a theft of the body—a willful and violent (and unimaginable from this distance) severing of the captive body from its motive will, its active desire. Under these conditions, we lose at least gender difference in the outcome, and the female body and the male body become

a territory of cultural and political maneuver, not at all gender-related, gender-specific. (67)

This severing of ties between the female body and its identity was violent and inhumane, placing the enslaved in a category of other, no longer applicable or deserving of the association with stereotypically assigned components of female gender, whether those associations with limiting in their conception of the female or not. This severing of ties from ritualized female existence was never fully repaired. When examining Zora Neale Hurston in light of a feminine aesthetic, conceptualized outside of masculine linguistic bounds, it is important to also acknowledge that as a Black woman, Hurston was also working within the symbolic order associated with the history of the Black woman and an alternative linguistic history surrounding Black femininity that sprang out of the violence of slavery. Spillers viewed the Black female as outside of the traditional symbolics of female gender, and therefore part of an entirely different definition of femininity and the feminine, one that Hurston herself seemed to have knowledge of in her bestowal of these traits to many of her characters. Spillers states, "...we are less interested in joining the ranks of gendered femaleness than gaining the insurgent ground as a female social subject. Actually claiming the monstrosity (of female with the potential to "name"), which her culture imposes in blindness, "Sapphire" might rewrite after all a radically different text for female empowerment" (80). In a way, Spillers echoes Cixous call for women to write herself into existence, to linguistically redefine how she is represented. However, Spillers makes this call particularly to the Black female, in whom she sees a different, but equally radical ability to redefine female empowerment, a unique aesthetic that moves closer to a feminine voice of radical solidarity. It is in this combination of female aesthetic with Black aesthetic that Hurston provides her readers with a powerfully potent version of the feminine in which the multiplicity of identity and



the collective on an individual and societal level is embraced, all within a singular life. bell hooks states,

Radical groups of women continue our commitment to building sisterhood, to making feminist political solidarity between women an ongoing reality. We continue the work of bonding across race and class. We continue to put in place the anti-sexist thinking and practice which affirms the reality that females can achieve self-actualization and success without dominating one another. And we have the good fortune to know everyday of our lives that sisterhood is concretely possible, that sisterhood is still powerful. (17-18)

There is a different and necessary expansion of the female that occurs when that identity is broadened to include those who have historically been excluded from its definition. In this expanded voice, and constant work toward the bonding race and class with feminism, that the actualization of the unique feminine voice lies. It is in this expanded view that Hurston finds her power and the violence of a collective feminine, in its true and untempered form, outside of patriarchal linguistic and socio-political restraints, can be realized.

#### BLACK FEMININE VIOLENCE IN *THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD*

In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Hurston provides an example of a life lived in the preservation of self above all else with the character of Janie. Janie presents the reader with an ideological alternative to a life lived in the pursuance of grand ideals and suggests that there is salvation to be found in the acceptance of one's self and the refusal to view femininity and Black identity as a comparative measure to white masculine ideological constructs. Hurston creates a character who is intimately connected with self, with others and with place, but not with time. Janie is of her own time. She is a normal individual, not bound by the constraints placed upon black life and femininity during the early 20th century and therefore possesses a capability that is unique within the novel. Hurston's realization of Janie as a character both intimately connected

to the past and the present allowed her to present the reader with a character who has the ability to truly know herself outside of what society tells her she should be. Janie distances herself from a societal understanding of who and what she should be, and commits herself to a journey of self- acceptance, treasuring the little intimacies of a life truly and freely lived. Through simply living her life, without thought to how her life should be lived in the eyes of others, Janie stands for something. She is a woman untethered by her race and the supposed significance of her racial identity and its political and economic implications in America. She is content to be how she is.

The very first lines of, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, breathe life into the feminine sphere of existence.

*Ships at a distance have every man's wish on board. For some they come in with the tide. For others they sail forever on the horizon, never out of sight, never landing until the Watcher turns his eyes away in resignation, his dreams mocked to death by Time. That is the life of men. Now, women forget all those things they don't want to remember, and remember everything they don't want to forget. The dream is the truth. Then they act and do things accordingly. (Hurston 1)*

Hurston begins her novel by immediately addressing a perceived difference between men and women. Men view their dreams as outside of themselves, as something they might never get to see or touch in actuality. However, women, when they act outside of the ritualized nature of their own existence within white patriarchal power structures, view their dreams as their reality and engage in actions to bring that dream forth. This is the gift of feminine empowerment granted to Janie as a woman who can conceptualize herself outside of the grasp of the white masculinity. This is something that femininity allows, the chance to see oneself as whole, manifested in reality, capable of action that defies a stated reason. The novel presents Janie as a woman capable of this selective memory. Janie commits to a self-concept that allows her to acknowledge the violence and destruction inflicted on her body by society, but also provides her with the subse-

quent enlightenment of the choice not to remember that this destruction should define her.

Hurston immediately portrays this story as one about a woman who does not want to forget her connection to self and her ability to see a place and a life for herself outside of the one designated for her, but who also chooses to forget the implications of her assigned societal role as a Black woman. Janie is not bound by this role. The reader knows this immediately.

In many ways, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, is a text separated from time. The historicity of the moment in which the novel takes place, at many points, seems almost irrelevant. This lack of historical or linear time permeates throughout the novel. It is a human story, the story of a woman's life and her journey to make it her own, a life of her own choosing. The overall lack of a sense of historical context removes Janie's story from a masculine sense of time. Hurston creates a character who is intimately connected with self, with the feminine, with others and with place, but not with time. Janie is of her own time, and therefore possesses a capability that is unique within the novel. She has the ability to truly know herself and embrace the power of her femininity. Janie distances herself from a societal understanding of who and what she should be, and commits herself to a journey of self-acceptance, treasuring the little intimacies of a life lived. Through simply living her life, Janie stands for something. She is a woman untethered by her gender and race, content to be as she is. Hurston disconnects the work from history's male dominated concept of linear time, marked by violence and conquest, but this does not mean that Hurston completely ignores the political reality of life. Societal critiques are woven throughout the novel, but they are never allowed to take precedence over Janie, over a woman's singular existence in the pursuit of her own piece of happiness. Janie succeeds in her effort to assert a sense of agency over her life and through that agency, the reader is left with the hopeful

possibility that a life lived in violent rebellion is not always masculine in its construction and definition.

Hurston addresses the precarity faced by a woman like Janie. There are almost no social protections allotted for her. The only social and economic protection that Janie is allowed is the institution of marriage. When the story of Janie first begins, she is a young woman still under her grandmother's care. Her grandmother, a former slave, saw marriage as Janie's only form of agency. Unable to evaluate the limitations of masculine understandings of race and class, Janie's grandmother subscribes to many of the same assumptions as the dominant society around her.

Honey, de white man is de ruler of everything as fur as Ah been able duh find out. Maybe it's some place way off in de ocean where de black man is in power, but we don't know nothin' but what we see. So de white man throw down de load and tell de nigger man tuh pick it up. He pick it up because he have to, but he don't tote it. He hand it to his womenfolks. De nigger woman is de mule uh de world so fur as Ah can see. Ah been prayin' fuh it to be different with you. Lawd, lawd, lawd. (Hurston 14)

Her grandmother's view of the Black woman as "the mule uh de world" as well as her survival of the institution of slavery, positions her to view the life of a wealthy, white woman, who says and does little, as the ultimate goal for her granddaughter, a goal that is only achieved through an economically advantageous marriage. This leads Janie's grandmother to insist upon Janie's marriage to Logan Killicks and his "often-mentioned sixty acres" (Hurston 21). Janie understands her grandmother's perspective. She knows and has experienced the destruction of Black female agency and voice, but she does not prescribe to its forbearance on her life. Janie wants to create a place for herself outside of that vision of the Black woman as "the mule uh de world" even after her first dream of love through marriage is crushed (Hurston 14). This is what prompts Janie to abruptly leave Logan Killicks when Joe Starks, a man of dreams and ambitions of his own,

comes into her life. Janie jumps at the chance to inch ever closer to the actualization of her own dream, the life and conceptualization of self that she deems true.

Hurston utilizes Janie's relationships with men throughout the novel, as an opportunity to make a subtle, yet poignant critique of masculinity, the concepts of race and capital within the masculine lens and the ways in which Janie's femininity and search for self keeps her constantly striving for her own version of agency within the dominant white patriarchy around her. While Janie showed a great deal of agency in her decision to leave Logan Killicks, her new marriage to Joe Stark is wrought with constant judgment of class and gender. Joe is a man, who once again, like Janie's grandmother and her first husband saw himself as subject to the same power structures that defined his existence and his larger societal identity. Joe believed that he was meant to lead the people of Eatonville out of their own ignorance. In his idealism, he thought that through his guidance, perhaps he could create an independently successful black community, driven by his own sense of ownership; ownership of his house, his store, land in the community and ownership of Janie. Joe's focus on race and ownership was all encompassing. Joe's desire to own gives Hurston space to comment on the hypocrisy of creating a society that mirrors the same masculine value systems as the white world. Joe's masculinity causes him to objectify Janie as a possession. Through the years of their marriage his fear of her femininity and his own failings in the white patriarchal design cause him to become more and more resentful of Janie and in turn causes Janie to resent Joe as well.

This mutual resentment that begins to define the relationship between Janie and Joe allows Hurston to expose the limits of masculinity and the power of the feminine voice when Janie chooses to ignore Joe's effort to silence her expression. Joe tries to reduce Janie to his possession. She is humiliated, denied any sense of individualism or agency and physically abused.

Janie absorbs the wrath of the world toward the feminine and more specifically her own Black femininity. She experiences this masculine violence and destruction. But this destruction forces Janie to once again find her voice and her expression of feminine agency. In many ways, Janie reignites her quest for self-actualization and liberation from masculine societal constraints in her decision to verbally fight Joe. First, Janie thrusts herself into a conversation among men in the store.

Sometimes God gits familiar wid us womenfolks too and talks His inside business. He told me how surprised He was 'bout y'all turning out so smart after Him makin' yuh different; and how surprised y'all is goin' tuh be if you ever find out you don't know half as much 'bout us as you think you do. It's so easy to make yo'self out God Almighty when you ain't got nothin' tuh strain against but women and chickens. (Hurston 75)

Janie calls out the men on their lack of knowledge about women and mocks their supposed superiority. Her decision to speak, to question masculinity and its assumption of righteousness, is a form of violence enacted through the expression of the feminine voice. Masculinity might rule the day, but Janie identifies the limits of masculinity in its understanding of feminine power.

Janie's decision to speak, outside of an acceptable context, makes Joe very uncomfortable, even threatened. This interaction is not the end of the verbal conflict between Janie and Joe. When Jody makes rude comments about Janie's age and figure to the men in his store, Janie's responds by verbally castrating him in public. "When you pull down yo' britches, you look lak de change uh life?" (Hurston 123). Janie, exhausted from the constant mental and physical abuse inflicted upon her in her marriage decides to take a stand and liberate herself from her oppressor and from the restricting nature of masculinity on feminine agency. In many ways, this is the moment that kills Joe Stark, the weakness of his masculinity exposed at the hands of his wife, whose femininity has always threatened him was too much to bear. Janie did not enact physical violence on Joe.

She did not replicate a masculine violence, but rather chose to expose its weakness through feminine expression, once again partaking in the process of her own ideological liberation.

In her relationship with Tea Cake, Janie finally finds the essence of equality that she had been seeking in her relationships with men. It is in her relationship with Tea Cake that Janie is finally able to express herself freely and to embrace her femininity as she wants it to be defined, not as society defines it for her. Tea Cake allows and even partakes in Janie's empowerment. When Janie and Tea Cake were discussing Tea Cake's journey home in the store one night, Janie complains about the length of the walk. "If it was me, Ah'd wait on uh train. Seven miles is uh kinda long walk." "It would be for you, 'cause you ain't used to it. But Ah'm seen women walk further'n dat. You could too, if yuh had tuh do'" (Hurston 97). Tea Cake's exposure to Black women fulfilling other roles other than ones delineated to the feminine realm as it is defined by the idealized role of white women, allows him to help Janie expand her understandings of self and the life she is capable of leading. Janie's time living on the muck with Tea Cake expands her understanding of self and her potential role as a woman. The financial stability Janie gained from Joe's death allows her to be in a position where she grants Tea Cake his masculinity through access to her capital. She is aware of the connection between capital and masculinity and allows Tea Cake that luxury, not out of a desire to promote the connection, but out of pure love and her own disconnect from money and its bearing on her happiness.

Janie's marriage to Tea Cake ends tragically with Janie's decision to shoot Tea Cake, who was infected by the mad dog's bite during the storm, to save herself. Tea Cake's internalized inferiority to the white man and acceptance of his own situation within white patriarchy eventually leads to his demise and Janie's enactment of masculine, physical violence. In this enactment of physical violence, Janie saves her life, a point of contention between the argument for

the feminization of violence and its application to Hurston's novel. However, it is important to note that with the necessity of Janie's decision to fight back in violent physical manifestation, Janie also loses the man she truly loved. Janie knew something was wrong with Tea Cake. She wanted to contact a doctor sooner, but he told her not to. If Janie had remembered to access her own voice, her own agency, rather than resorting to assuming her logic was subservient to Tea Cake's then Tea Cake's death could have been avoided. It was Janie abandonment of her voice and feminine intuition that resulted in the necessity of masculine violence to ensure her survival. Janie survives; she preserves herself and thus her ability to continue her quest for self-realization and voice, but much is lost in her failure to act upon the messaging of her own connection with the internal.

It is not Hurston's intention to present Janie as a character without fault. She is a woman who, in many ways is unable to fully embody the feminine in the constrictive nature of the dominant white patriarchy. She does not always succeed in her desire to separate herself from the ritualized nature of female existence or Black female existence at the time the novel takes place. The most notable way that Janie alters her reality and attempts to show agency is through marriage a concept that seemingly does not challenge the maintenance of patriarchy, as marriage is a central structure to the maintenance of patriarchal power. However, her quest for a relationship based on love, rather than capital gain, comfort and class exposes the systems of masculine value as they relate to monetary significance as extremely inadequate in their relationship to humaneness and happiness. Through Janie, and the moments where she finds her voice, her own connection to feminine expression outside of masculine linguistic and political significance, Hurston exposes the power of the feminine, feminine writing and feminine voice, as well as tap into the shortcomings present when masculinity and capital become intelligibly intertwined. Janie is, at



least momentarily, able to access and control feminine agency, which when actualized is a manifestation of feminine violence. She has a concept of the power of her own femininity and the power she wields when she uses it. This depiction of heroism through feminine voice and agency promotes a concept of violent resistance that stands in direct opposition to the limited understandings of masculine violence. At the end of Janie's story she says, "It's uh known fact, Pheoby, you got uh *go* there tuh *know* there. Yo' papa and yo' mama and nobody else can't tell yuh and show yuh. Tow things everybody's got tuh do fun theyselves. They got tuh go tuh God, and they for tuh find our about livin' fuh themselves" (Hurston 192). Hurston wrote Janie as a woman who saw, experienced and acknowledged the violence inflicted upon the Black female body, and the limitations of a masculine concept of femininity. Janie was not always able to act outside of these constraints. But Hurston made her a woman who dared to try to find out about life for herself, who dared to access her femininity and use the power of her unadulterated feminine voice and in this Hurston created an unforgettable image of feminine violence in its actualized state, both in life and in literature, the dream is truth.

## CONCLUSION

Constructing an argument for the feminization of violence is a complicated task. It relies on the possibility of redefining the relationship between the signified and the signifier, of forever altering that relationship to include the potential for an alternative method of expression, the enlightenment of an internal existence. It relies on the belief that power can not only change hands, but can be entirely upended, completely redefined and changed at the foundational level. It relies on the possibility that these concepts of femininity and violence can be redefined in the collective human psychology, which admittedly, with the all-encompassing nature of white patriar-

chy and capitalism, often seems like a nearly impossible task. But perhaps the question that needs to be asked is: what happens if these concepts are not redefined? How much further can the projects of patriarchy and capital, in their current incarnations, be expanded? How many more revolutions defined through masculinity can the world experience before it finally either destroys itself or opens itself up to another infinitely radical possibility? It is this radical possibility that this paper seeks to locate in the power of the feminine, not the feminine as it is currently defined by a patriarchal linguistic understanding of the feminine, but rather the feminine sphere as it refers to the internal, where it is not decidedly masculine or feminine in the patriarchal insistence on a gender binary, but rather simply empowered as an essential component of humanness. Women must insist on their own language. We must insist on bringing the feminine out of the shadows and allow it to emancipate the internal life and the human connection with the collective. We must allow it to embolden identity as a multiplicity, to allow individuals to embrace all of themselves simultaneously, without ever requiring the sacrifice of a masculine hierarchical perspective. Women of color, like Zora Neale Hurston, started writing a path long before it was ever thought there was a path to take, forcibly molding language to adequately express the multitude of the internal life. But women as a collective cannot allow this path created by the militants of the past to become overgrown and unrecognizable. The *fight* for an empowerment and resurgence of the feminine sphere of existence cannot be abandoned. There is far too much at stake. The desertion of the internal and the intimate recognition of self and the location of the self within a larger collective is an ideological conception that the world cannot exist without. It is the abandonment of the possibility of radical change to the concepts of power that define and dictate human experience. It is an abandonment of the possibility of a radical *attack* on the base.

These ideas are not ones that can be abandoned because they are, at their very core, the ideas that sustain the hope for the betterment not of the masculine or the feminine, but of humanity itself.

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