

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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According to Katherine McKittrick, black women's geographies reveal and confront geographies of domination that have been erased or considered unworthy of analysis. This thesis positions #SayHerName protests and natural kink/coiled hair within a black women's geographic analysis suggesting that both body and hair politics provide historical and contemporary geographic clues of racial and sexual domination of black women's bodies. I explore what histories and memories of violence and oppression against black women and black hair must we return to and confront when black women participate in #SayHerName protests. My methodological approach is rooted in black feminist critical geography and uses Toni Morrison's concept of sites of memory to provide context of the ways in which #SayHerName protests and the wearing of coiled/nappy hair and protective hairstyles in places of protests provide spatial clues of how black women critique, interrogate, and disrupt traditional geographic projects that are structured to conceal and dominate black women. In this thesis, I argue #SayHerName protests and coiled/nappy

hairstyles are sites of memory that (1) expose geographies of domination and (2) reimagine a world where *all* black lives matter.

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Sites of Memory: Black Women's Geographies, #SayHerName Protests, and Black
Hair Politics

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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

Daryl Adkins, Author

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Introduction

“I guess no one hears the howling of a black girl ghost in the night time. We stayed unheard Blotted out, buried, dead. Black girls receive tombstones too soon and never any flowers to dress the grave, so we fight alone”

-Porsha Olayiwola, *Rekia Boyd*

“Dark strands of camouflage, of validation, of having never been mid back, bone straight but a cluster of kink, lie (lye) limp and wet falling over a black girls shoulder, this must be the spook house, walled with smoky mirrors”

-Kush Thompson, *For Colored Girls Who Considered Yaky*

As police brutality and vigilante violence against black men across the country have sparked mass media attention around the nation and globally, violence and police brutality committed against black women, black queer and transgender women reap far less national media coverage. In response to the silence of police brutality, state violence, and sexual assault against black women, transgender women, and gender non-conforming folks, black activists and scholars formed the black racial and gender justice movement #SayHerName (Crenshaw and Ritchie). In addition to spreading awareness of how *all* black lives, not just black cisgender men, are targeted by racial profiling and police violence, #SayHerName *demand*s justice be served to those who have been sexually assaulted, brutalized and murdered by the police. In May 2015, legal scholars Kimberle Crenshaw and Andrea Ritchie co-authored *Say Her Name: Resisting Policy Brutality Against Black Women* published in the 2015 African American Policy Forum report. Crenshaw and Ritchie’s report documents the stories of black cisgender, transgender, and queer women who have been killed by police officers. Additionally, Crenshaw and Ritchie’s

report provides an analytical framework of how race, gender, sexuality, and class particularly impact black women's experience with police violence.

With the recent stream of organized anti police brutality protests, hundreds of photographs have been published and shared among various social media sites including Twitter, Tumblr and Facebook. Similar to the photographs taken of Black Panther activists with natural hairstyles, photographs taken of #SayHerName and #BlackLivesMatter activists and protestors capture a significant amount of black women leading and participating in these movements with natural hair and protective hairstyles. Unable to separate the social construction of black "kink/coiled" hair as "other" from the ways that black people are conceptualized as nonhuman, this thesis explores what histories and memories of violence and oppression against black women must we return to and engage with when black women participate in #SayHerName protests. Additionally, I explore what histories and memories of bondage and assault against black hair must we confront when black women wear natural and protective hairstyles in #SayHerName protests.

Reflecting on Toni Morrison's essay "The Site of Memory", Katherine McKittrick suggests that imagination of black geographies that invoke past, present, and future memories offers us a way to re-envision a different world where black lives and geographies matter. The site of memory allows us to reimagine and create a world of new histories, new memories, and new geopolitical possibilities where blackness is validated (Morrison). While *site* of memory is critical to imagining a new world where black lives matter, Morrison suggests we must address the *sight* of memory, which confront and engage with realities of black peoples past and present denial of humanity and citizenship, before we can create this new world. Confronting and centering the stories of political violence and anti black racism requires us to "sight" what has

been forgotten and, more importantly, makes visible black peoples relationship to and understanding of space and the landscape (McKittrick). With that said, in this thesis, I argue #SayHerName protests and kink/coiled hairstyles are sites of memory that (1) expose geographies of domination and (2) reimagine a world where *all* black lives matter.

Defining Natural Hair

According to Ayana Byrd and Lori L. Tharps, during the 1960s “The Natural” was defined as “unstraightened Black hair that was not cut close. It was a less sculpted, less maintained version of the rounded, perfectly actualized Afro” (57). According to the Urban Dictionary, natural hair is defined as “Your natural hair is when your hair is in the state that you were born with. Hair that is not permed, dyed, relaxed or chemically altered” (www.urbandictionary.com). Naturalista blogger, Maria Stuart, argues natural hair only applies to the texture, not the color or length, of one’s hair. In this thesis, I define natural hair and natural protective hairstyles as non-chemically relaxed hair such as afros, curls, kinks/coils, locs, twists, braids and bantu knots. While I believe interrogating the ways in which white heteronormative beauty standards are reinforced in natural hair communities (i.e. long and loose curly hair) are important conversations to address, my research offers a (re)reading of kink/coiled hair and protective hairstyles as *maps* or *texts* that provide insight about black peoples relationship with geographies of domination, histories of bondage and containment.

Approach

This thesis is informed by the interdisciplinary work of Katherine McKittrick’s *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and Cartographies of Struggle*. According to McKittrick, traditional geographies are fundamentally embedded in logics of white supremacy, domination, difference,

and anti-blackness that render black and subaltern people and communities invisible and ungeographic. As McKittrick asserts, traditional geographies upholds “the profitable erasure and objectification of subaltern subjectivities, stories, and lands” (x). In other words, traditional geographies or geographies of domination and spatial colonization normalize the idea that black people and people of color are unrelated to the production of space. As McKittrick reminds us, space is socially constructed and “we produce space and its meanings” (xi). Furthermore, McKittrick argues the social processes of concealment, marginalization, and boundaries underscore geography and space. “We make concealment happen, it is not natural but rather names and organizes where racial-sexual differentiation occurs” (McKittrick, xii).

Unlike traditional geographies, black women’s geographies disrupt and undermine ideologies of traditional geographies providing a more in-depth analysis of how space is produced. According to McKittrick, black women’s geographies “allows us to engage with a narrative that locates and draws on black histories and black subjects in order to make visible social lives that are often displaced, rendered ungeographic” (x). Additionally, black women’s geographies expose the terrain of ongoing struggle black people continue to endure and highlights black women’s resistance to ongoing practices of racial-sexual domination (McKittrick). She argues, “This naturalization of ‘difference’ is, in part, bolstered by the ideological weight of transparent space, the idea that space ‘just is’, and the illusion that the external world is readily knowable and not in need of evaluation, and that what we see is true” (xv). In order for traditional geographies to remain intact, it requires that black women’s bodies be hidden and contained. What is hidden and contained within the landscape is that black women are racially profiled, brutalized, and murdered by the police. I suggest that if we understand that black women, black queer, black transgender, and black gender non-conforming people must be

physically and *spatially dominated* in order to maintain geographies of domination, then we can begin to understand how #SayHerName protests inevitably challenges and disintegrates the ideology of transparent space. By centering black transgender, black cisgender women, and black gender non conforming folks as vulnerable targets of police brutality and violence, #SayHerName unearths and confronts historical legacies and contemporary acts of anti-black violence against black women that is often read as non-existent.

Examining both #SayHerName and natural kink/coiled hair within a black women's geographic analysis highlights past and present racial-sexual domination, displacement, and concealment of black women. (McKittrick). As I discuss in the following chapter, using contemporary black feminist and black women's geographic theoretical frameworks make visible black women's histories and knowledges of geography as central, not peripheral, to the design and maintenance of traditional geographies and transparent space (McKittrick). Furthermore, utilizing a black geographic theoretical analysis for this thesis helps to explore and reimagine the limitless possibilities of how #SayHerName protests and natural hair serve as texts and maps that make visible the "ungeographic" and physically violated black woman. Additionally, a black women's geographic theoretical analysis allows us to explore what kinds of stories (real or imagined) surface and/or resurface when guided by the *demonic*.

Informed by the writings and critical analyses of Sylvia Wynter, this project conceptualizes the *demonic* as a being or entity that cannot be determined or readily knowable. As McKittrick states, the demonic ground is "...genealogically wrapped up in the historical spatial unrepresentability of black femininity and...one that thinks about the ways in which black women necessarily contribute to a re-presentation of human geography" (xxvi). What the

demonic provides is an alterable landscape for black women's resistance, art, and activism to unapologetically address and disrupt white supremacist and anti-black ideologies that strategically place black women's bodies as "out of place", "out of sight" and "ungeographic". The *demonic* not only challenges ideas that spatial racial difference and racial-sexual domination against black bodies as static and unalterable, the *demonic* promotes and offers different ways of imagining black women as human.

This thesis situates #SayHerName protests and natural kink/coiled hair within a black women's geographic analysis suggesting that both body and hair politics provide historical and contemporary geographic clues of racial and sexual domination and displacement of black women's bodies. My methodological approach is rooted in black feminist critical geography and uses sites and sights of memory to provide context and to analyze the ways in which #SayHerName protests and the wearing of coiled/nappy hair and protective hairstyles in places of protests provide spatial clues of how black women's geographies critique, interrogate, and disrupt traditional geographic projects that are designed to conceal and dominate black women's bodies.

I analyze two poems Porsha Olayiwola's *Rekia Boyd* and Kush Thompson's "*For Colored Girls Who Considered Yaky*" to provide additional spatial clues and the language that critiques the boundaries of containment and domination, respatialize blackness, and reclaim black women as geographic knowledge holders. Olayiwola and Thompson's spoken word pieces provide the support necessary to conceptualize the significance and representation of natural and protective hairstyles and black women's bodies in sites of #SayHerName protests. In addition to spoken word poems, I offer a close reading of three photographs from the 2015 San Francisco #SayHerName protest. I specifically chose to analyze this demonstration because of the way

protestors blocked a busy intersection in the San Francisco financial district and rallied topless with phrases including “Fighting for Survival” painted on their chest. The collective decision to disrupt the flow of traffic, to protest topless, and to center state sanctioned sexual and physical violence against black cisgender, transgender, and queer black women highlights and embodies McKittrick’s discussion of black women’s geographies altering fixed and “transparent” landscapes.

Organization

Chapter one outlines the theoretical framework and methodological approach. I draw on the black feminist theorist including Sylvia Wynter, Tiffany King, and Katherine McKittrick to make sense of how state sponsored and political violence against black women is integral to the foundation of the U.S. settler colonial landscape. According to Edouard Glissant, relationship to geography, naming space and place is intertwined with sensation/feeling, imagination, language, and poetry, this is known as the “poetics of landscape”. For Glissant, naming space and place in a non-colonialist venture is a process of humanization and liberation. By this definition, I utilize “poetics of landscape” to reflect on the ways the poems *Rekia Boyd* and *For Colored Girls Who Considered Yaky* critique the boundaries of containment and domination, respatialize black womanhood, and reclaim black women as geographic knowledge holders despite traditional geographies that frame blackness as peripheral to the production of space. Chapter two examines Porsha Olayiwola’s poem *Rekia Boyd* and the scholarship of Kimberle Crenshaw and Andrea Ritchie’s *Say Her Name: Resisting Police Brutality Against Black Women*, a legal document, to uncover the *sights* of memory about police violence committed against black women. Chapter three conceptualizes kink/coiled hair and protective hairstyles as sights of memory that invoke memories and histories of the enslavement, captivity, and geographical displacement of black

bodies in the United States and throughout the Americas more broadly. Chapter four offers a close reading of three photographs from the 2015 San Francisco #SayHerName protests. In this chapter I argue this protest (1) exposes and critiques the logics of transparent space and (2) functions as a *site* of memory. Throughout the chapter, #SayHerName is conceptualized as a black women's geographic project that undermines racial-sexual domination of black women's bodies and offers an example of what a new world would look like if lives of black women, transgender women, girls, and gender non-conforming people matter.

Chapter One

Traditional Geographies and Domination of the Black Female Body

This chapter centers black feminist and critical geography theoretical frameworks in order to make sense of how state sponsored and political violence against the black body is integral to the production of space in the United States. As Katherine McKittrick argues, the production of space is *already* wrapped up in geographies of domination. These geographies of domination, or traditional geographies, are inextricably linked to conquest, colonialism and transatlantic slavery. It is these processes that currently inform the social production of space (bodies that belong, bodies that do not belong, and bodies that are out of place) and organizes human and racial-sexual difference, or the ways that overlapping systems of racism and sexism marks black women as other (McKittrick). Space creates boundaries, marginalization, and concealments that are important social processes to pay attention to because they arrange and identify space, place, and location as well as where racial-sexual differentiation is presented. For black women, racial-sexual differentiation is geographically situated by “*placing* her within the broader system of servitude – as an inhuman racial-sexual worker, as an objectified body...” where political and sexual violence can be imagined and normalized because her body is a

categorized as captive (McKittrick, xvii). It is her racial-sexual and objectified body that determines the black women's ability, or lack thereof, to access full humanity. Thought to be "transparent", "innocent" and "objective", what becomes evident is that space and geography are fundamentally organized to uphold systems of power and domination. McKittrick suggests that we can look towards black women's experiences, knowledges and understandings of and relationships to the land in order to analyze and critique traditional geographies. More importantly, we can look to black women's geographies for insights on how to create "more humanly workable and just geographies", that is, geographies that represent the fullness of the human experience that do not maintain and reproduce social, economic, and political domination (McKittrick).

"The Site of Memory"

Reflecting on Toni Morrison's essay "The Site of Memory", McKittrick suggests that imagination of black geographies that invoke past, present, and future memories offers us a way to re-envision a different world where black lives and geographies matter. The *site* of memory allows us to reimagine and create a world of new histories, new memories, and new geopolitical possibilities where blackness is validated (Morrison). While imaginative work (*site* of memory) offers "a route to the reconstruction of the world" that is critical to creating new possibilities and a different world where black lives matter, we must confront and engage with realities of black peoples past and present denial of humanity, belonging and citizenship in order to imagine the impossible (McKittrick). Returning to the painful places of enslavement, dehumanization, segregation, mass incarceration, police brutality, and other histories of violence, maps the *sight* of memory. "Reconstructing what has been erased...requires confronting the rationalization of human and spatial domination...What you cannot see, and cannot remember, is part of a broader

geographic project that thrives on forgetting and displacing blackness” (McKittrick, 33).

Confronting and centering the stories of political violence and anti black racism that have been erased, hidden beneath the cemented streets and skyscraper buildings, the *sight* of memory *requires* us to “see” and visually “sight” what has been erased (McKittrick).

As a black women’s geographic project, #SayHerName protests influence *sites* of memory that call forth a recasting of the space of the human and offer an alternative landscape where black women exist outside and beyond the logics of racial-sexual domination. Kink/coiled hair and protective hairstyles among black women in spaces of protest uncover and reintroduce *sights* of memory wrapped up in histories of the Middle Passage, transatlantic and plantation slavery, and as such exist as a map of these histories of racial domination. The geographic project of #SayHerName and the geographic map of kink/coiled hair and protective hairstyles in sites of protests reveal a deep and unsettling history of domination, concealment, and bondage of the black body since the genesis of modernity.

Genres of the Human

In order to analyze the ways #SayHerName protests and kink/coiled and protective hairstyles are sites/sights memory introduce humanly workable geographies, it is critical to reflect on and interrogate the meaning of the human, who is and who is not conceptualized as embodying “full humanity” in the modern world. I draw on the philosophical work of critical theorist Sylvia Wynter and her analyses of the inventions of Man or the “genres of the human” to illustrate how black bodies, since modernity, are *always already* outside of the conceptualization of full humanity and, therefore, imagined as nonhuman. In the psyche of the modern world, the exclusion of black people from the realm of the human not only normalizes political violence and brutalization against the black people but also ultimately renders these acts of terror as

illegible. In addition to Wynter, I also reflect on Tiffany King's understanding of how anti-black racism and the fungibility of the black female body complicates conversations about the production of space, conquest and land possession in the United States. Lastly, Katherine McKittrick's vision of the limitless possibilities of black women's geographies offers insight into how black women's experiences, knowledges and understandings of the world create and imagine new and more humanly workable geographies. The black feminist theoretical scholarship of Wynter, King, and McKittrick interrogate the power structures of modernity, political violence and dehumanization and how these systems of domination uphold, maintain, and make illegible violence against the black female body.

Wynter is interested in how the categories of the human construct sociospatial arrangements, arguing the invention of the modern Man (Man 2) or the Human is rooted in the ideologies of the Enlightenment era, the arrival of European colonizers in the Americas, and economic and territorial expansion. As a result of the 15th and 16th century Western European voyages, the invention of the human ideologically shifted from a socioreligious agenda to what Wynter describes as the imperialist political citizen agenda. Unlike the invention of Man 1, which stemmed from evangelical theology, the invention of Man 2 was constructed alongside the creation of the biological sciences, transatlantic slavery, and land exploitation (Wynter). As Wynter asserts, the secularized reconfiguration and political version of Man 2 constructed "the rise of Europe and its constructions in the 'world civilization' on the one hand, and, on the other, African enslavement, Latin American conquest, and Asian subjugation." (Wynter, 263). Under this logic, Indigenous and African people were categorically justified through biological science as abnormal, differently human, or non-human. In contrast, Man became synonymous with and constructed as a white European male. In her analysis of Wynter's Man 1 and Man 2 inventions,

Katherine McKittrick states, “The inventions of Man paralleled vast violent colonial and slavery projects, increasingly heightening the meaning of phenotype and physiology and centralized economic power” (McKittrick, 126).

As McKittrick and Wynter remind us, we cannot begin to deconstruct the invention of Man or the idea of the human without interrogating and centering the political violence of genocide, the middle passage, transatlantic slavery, and European colonization, which are foundational to the growth, maintenance, and sociopolitical power of modernity. Although complex and vast in her theorization of the genres of the human, in this project, Wynter’s scholarship on the genres of the human provides the critical and visual analysis necessary towards understanding how and why political violence and the dehumanization of the black body is normalized.

Settler Colonialism and Racial-Sexual Violence

While Wynter’s work on the invention of Man is critical to the theoretical framework of this project, I also draw on the scholarship of Tiffany King to provide a historical gender analysis of how racial-sexual domination of the black female body has been integral to the organization and creation of space in the settler colonial landscape of the United States. King’s work complicates discourses of how the construction of the human or Man is always already defined against the black woman. As King argues, we must critically analyze the ways in which black women’s bodies “function as sites” where settler colonialism, in addition to slavery, asserts power and domination in sociospatial practices in the United States.

King’s “In the Clearing: Black Female Bodies, Space, and Settler Colonial Landscapes” invites us to think about the role and impact of slavery and settler colonialism simultaneously. Specifically, King calls for a different reading and understanding of the settler colonial landscape

by suggesting that, as a result of slavery and the fungibility of the black female body, black women's bodies are "materially and symbolically essential to the space making practices of settler colonialism in the U.S. and Canada." (King,1).

According to King, although anti-black racism and the enslavement of African people, *and* the genocide of Indigenous people and the clearing of the land are foundational to the sociospatial order of the United States, scholars in settler colonial and critical geography studies rarely acknowledge or interrogate the pivotal role of anti-black racism into how space is created. For its survival and its domination to continue, settler colonialism requires the genocide of Indigenous peoples, *clearing the land*, in order to turn the land into property (Smith).

As a result of slave labor, transforming the settled land into property and wealth for the settler/master, black women's bodies became material and fungible forms of property (King). The *fungibility* of the black woman's body is particularly important because her body symbolized, for the settler/master, the potential of increasing spatial expansion. King suggests, "Materially, their actual bodies that produce the plantation as a space for the Settler to inhabit and self actualize" (King, 7). As long as the enslaved black female body produced the next generation of slave laborers to cultivate the land and produce the wealth of the land, the settler would continuously seek *more* land, kill *more* Indigenous people, and enslave *more* black people in order to maximize domination geographically and to further a "human" versus "non human" agenda to justify genocide and racialized violence (King). Critically analyzing the arrangement of space and how it is produced during slavery and post emancipation, King asks the question, "If the human has spatial coordinates, can Blacks have spatial coordinates as non-beings?" (King, 6). In the process of the clearing, we can read the black female body as a text that uniquely, or not so uniquely, informs how space is created and how "non human property" is

formed. For King, the non-humanness of the black female body must find its way to academic and non academic discourses concerning settler colonialism, the inventions of man, and the production of space because it is within a spatial analysis that we can observe a matrix of power that creates, establishes, and normalizes where particularly bodies “naturally” belong, in plain sight, slightly out of focus or completely out of sight (King).

Building off the work of Katherine McKittrick and Ruth Gilmore, King asserts that black women’s bodies are *always already* in dialogue with how geography and space are created, determined, and arranged in the Americas. King writes that during slavery, “When the Settler surveys the Black female body, the settler can imagine their land, territory, property and spatial coordinates expanding....” (23). As a metonym, the black female body is made malleable, ever expanding (both symbolically and physically because of her ability to reproduce) and fungible. It is because of these reasons that settler colonial discourses must consider how the histories of the fungibility of black women’s bodies, slavery, and anti-black racism contribute to the structure and maintenance of settler colonialism and modernity (King).

While this project is not particularly focusing on stories of slavery and slave resistance, it is of particular importance to highlight how histories of slavery have informed and continue to inform the ways black women’s bodies are remembered and continuously imagined as non human, hypersexual, and outside of ideas of heteronormative gender presentation and femininity. This is especially the case when thinking about how black women are forgotten or simply unacknowledged in the face of contemporary facets of state sponsored violence. Paying close attention to how the creation of gender and sexuality intersects with hierarchization of race and gender informs the examination of black women’s humanity. For centuries black feminist theorists from Sojourner Truth to Hortense Spillers have highlighted a particular focus on the

power of slavery, anti-blackness and gender and how these constructions have placed black women on the outer limits of humanity, assigned the “space of non-being-ness” (McKittrick, 25). King writes, “Situating within the power of slavery and New World violence, gender becomes a discourse of power that in fact removes some bodies out of the category of woman and outside the human family” (59). While settler colonial violence does not present itself in the same ways for Indigenous women (genocide/clearing) as it does for black women (enslavement/fungibility), both must be defined against “possessing” the “correct” gender category in order to *materially* see the logics of the “not-quite-human” and “non-human” *placed on* the body and *placed* geographically (King). In addition to viewing how the genres of the human interact with spatial coordinates, which inform who is constructed as *always* disappearing (Indigenous) and ungeographic to the project of settler colonialism (Blacks), gender is another way of determining who is and who is not human (King). Furthermore, King argues “gender functions as a discourse of humanness”, where Indigenous and Black people cannot be men or women or access the status of manhood or womanhood (59). Instead, Indigenous and Black people are what King defines as “reproductive and productive units”, that are outside the category of the human (59). Similar to the invention of Man or the human, Black women’s bodies must physically and visually occupy the outer limits of gender and “womanhood” in order for the classification system to generate power and domination over and against the black body (King). Under slavery, Black women’s bodies in particular had to be outside the parameters of humanness and gender to ensure that their bodies remained as the settler/master’s property in order to facilitate the continued production of space and clearing of Indigenous land (King).

As many Indigenous and Black feminist scholars have asserted, the construction of gender is a tool of colonial domination and violence. The construction and organization of

gender for enslaved black women did not allow them to possess a *gender* rather, this construction situated their bodies within a production and reproduction capacity. According to Andrea Smith in order for the logics of settler colonialism to assert sexual domination and power over Indigenous and black women, their bodies must be marked as inherently rapeable and non human (Smith). And according to King, the black female body must not disappear in the same ways the indigenous body is made to disappear within settler colonialism, instead, the black women must be visually recognized as deviant, illegible, and inhuman. King asserts, although this illegibility and deviancy of the black female gender is unnamable, the eviction of black bodies and black female bodies from accessing full humanity is not only violent in nature but once again, displays how black bodies are integral to the development of geographic and spatial arrangements in the United States.

During the Post Emancipation era, the conceptualization of black female bodies shifted from needing to produce a surplus of exchangeable goods (both in cultivation and in reproducing the next generation of slave laborers) for the survival and wealth of the plantation/settler state to being represented as chaotic and impeding on the spatial expansion of United States (King). Within anti-black racist logics, free blacks posed a direct threat to whites/settlers ability to accumulate capital and access to land, therefore, black women's bodies must be "contained" in order to prevent a "surplus population" of black bodies (King). In this framework, the "contained" black woman is murdered by the law enforcement with impunity. Rallies in support of "saying her name" do not garner mass amounts of protesters and violence against her body is rendered illegible. In other words, black women's bodies must be contained in order to "place" black women's bodies out of place. Although the containment and domination of black people is one of the key factors that constructs how space is created under the settler colonial, Katherine

McKittrick's work offers alternative ways to viewing how black women's geographies disrupt and alter traditional geographies, which then lead to creating and imaging new workable human geographies.

Black Women's Geographies

According to McKittrick, because of the Middle Passage and transatlantic slavery, black women's bodies are already embedded in the geographies of the New World. Thinking about the slave ships that transported bodies across oceans, the sea, and landmasses as a key site of modern technological progression, McKittrick suggests that the struggle for and idea of freedom for black people is inevitably a concern about geography and spatial matters. Connected to transatlantic slavery, settler colonialism, and racial sexual displacement, geographies of domination or traditional geographies instill ideas that space "just is" and is static. According to McKittrick, "Geography's discursive attachment to stasis and physicality, the idea that space 'just is', and that space and place are merely containers for human complexities and social relations, is terribly seductive....it seemingly calibrates and normalizes where, and therefore, who we are" (xi). That is, geography is not fixed or secured; instead, we produce space and its meanings that normalize space. Boundaries, marginalization, and concealment are symbolic and important social processes to pay attention to because they arrange and identify where racial-sexual differentiation is presented. For black women, racial-sexual differentiation is geographically situated by "*placing* her within the broader system of servitude – as an inhuman racial-sexual worker, as an objectified body..." where political and sexual violence can be imagined and enacted because her body is categorized as captive (xvii). Her racial-sexual objectified body that determines black women's *whereabouts* in relationship to humanness. Although McKittrick does not define black womanhood to be fixed within the context of

ongoing or unchanging violence and bondage from the middle passage or transatlantic slavery, she does argue that we cannot simply abandon the histories and legacies of power and domination that constructed the ways black women are conceptualized and imagined as outside of humanness in the present day. According to McKittrick, the category of the black woman must incorporate connections with past histories and contemporary power structures and spatial arrangements in order to identify the ways black women are connected to and resist *terrains* of struggle.

While traditional geographies reify systems of racial-sexual domination, marginalization, and objectification of black women, black women's knowledges and understandings of geography are crucial to analyzing and critiquing geographies of domination, as well as the ordering of space and place and the human/nonhuman as "fixed" and unalterable. Refusing to accept ideas that black bodies will never escape "the seemingly natural spaces and places of subjugation", black women's geographies confront and unravel the reality that space/spatial arrangement *requires* the displacement of blackness, absence of blackness, blackness as peripheral to or outside the production of space in the Americas (McKittrick, xi). Furthermore, black women's geographies expose legacies of domination, anti-black racial and gender oppression that have been erased or considered unworthy of analysis.

What McKittrick's theorization of black women's geographies offers is a framework that (1) exposes systemic issues of oppression, which are foundational to traditional spatial arrangements making sure that black women are geographically absent (2) suggests that black women's rejection of traditional geographies opens up new ways of reading and conceptualizing blackness outside of and beyond categories of concealment and domination and (3) identifies

that black women's relationships to and knowledges of the land are valuable and important to critically analyzing the arrangement of geography, space and place.

Methodology

This thesis uses a black feminist methodology. My methodological approach is rooted in black feminist critical geography and uses *sites* and *sights* of memory to provide context and to analyze the ways in which #SayHerName protests and the wearing of kink/coiled hair and protective hairstyles in places of protests provide spatial clues of how black women critique, interrogate, and disrupt traditional geographic projects that are designed to conceal and dominate black women's bodies.

We can look to literature, art, music, poetry, black women's theories, resistance movements, folklore, and fiction as way of *hearing* and *seeing* black women write and theorize about the politics of geography. According to Edouard Glissant, relationship to geography and naming space and place are intertwined with sensation/feeling, imagination, language, and poetry, this is also known as "poetics of landscape". Glissant suggests through written and oral histories or narratives, the writer, the speaker and the landscape bring the subject into being. For Glissant, naming place and space is a process to lay claim to humanness. It must be noted, Glissant insists, that there are multiple and non-colonialist ways of naming place and relationship to land that do not follow the norms of material ownership and dispossession. In discussing the poetics of landscape, McKittrick states, "The claim to place should not be naturally followed by material ownership and black repossession but rather by a grammar of liberation, through which ethical *human*-geographies can be recognized and expressed" (xxiii). Thus, in the context of black geographies and specifically black women's geographies, rather than reasserting settler colonial relationships to land, claims to space are intended to disrupt and resist logics of

geographic domination that maintain spatial and racial sexual domination over black people (McKittrick). The poetics of landscape (comprised of storytelling, folklore, literature, black feminist theory, poetry, theater, music etc.) gives black women the platform to be recognized and taken seriously as geographic knowledge holders and subjects who offer clues and insights on how to create an entirely new society, one that is outside of domination and political violence.

As Carole Boyce Davies argues, when we begin to *listen* to and *hear* black women, we are put into a position to think differently about geography— one that is connected to political action and demands of liberation from violence, captivity and objectification. I look to the scholarship of Kimberle Crenshaw and Andrea Ritchie’s “#SayHerName: Resisting Police Brutality Against Black Women” and Ayana Byrd and Lori Tharps’ *Hair Story: Untangling the Roots of Black Hair in America* to provide historical context of how geographies of domination make illegible violence against black women, black transgender women, and black gender non-conforming people and placed/place black hair in bondage. Additionally, I consider the theoretical content made available in two poems that focus on black women, racism, and violence. Porsha Olayiwola’s *Rekia Boyd* and Kush Thompson’s *For Colored Girls Who Considered Yaky* to provide spatial clues and critique the boundaries of containment and domination, respatialize blackness, and reclaim black women as geographic knowledge holders. I use both traditional scholarly texts and black women’s poetry as context to analyze three photographs from the 2015 #SayHerName protest in San Francisco, California. I argue that these photos of the protest, particularly the depictions of natural hair they represent, bring up histories of violence and bondage, and place them within the terrain of contemporary, on-going instances of violence against black women. The next chapter situates Porsha Olayiwola’s *Rekia Boyd* poem and Crenshaw and Ritchie’s report, #SayHerName: Resisting Police Brutality Against

Black Women, within a black women's geography and explores the sights of memory their work exposes about violence against black women.

Chapter 2

Rekia Boyd Poem and #SayHerName

“Isn’t it a misfortune if a black girl gets killed by the police and the killer goes free? Does anyone notice? Do you still call it a lynching? Is her rally just a rehearsal? Ain’t that why no one ever shows up?” – Porsha Olayiwola

In this chapter, I situate Porsha Olayiwola's *Rekia Boyd* and #SayHerName within a black women's geographic landscape and explore what sights of memory *Rekia Boyd* and #SayHerName protests expose and bring to light. In discussing Toni Morrison's sites of memory, McKittrick writes, “The site of memory is also the *sight* of memory – imagination requires a return to and engagement with painful places, worlds where black people were and are denied humanity, belonging, and formal citizenship...” (33). This chapter looks to Porsha Olayiwola's poem *Rekia Boyd* and the scholarship of Kimberle Crenshaw and Andrea Ritchie's *#Say Her Name: Resisting Police Brutality Against Black Women*, a legal document, to uncover the *sights* of memory – or hidden and painful memories – about violence committed against black women. The sights of memory Olayiwola, Crenshaw, and Ritchie reveal include (1) intimate partner violence, (2) state and police violence, and (3) queer and transphobic violence. As McKittrick suggests, black women's geographies *require* “seeing” and “sighting” what has been erased. In this case, what has been *erased* is the legibility of violence against black women and black gender non-conforming people. What has also been erased is the alarming routine frequency at which security guards, police officers, and anti-black racist vigilantes murder *all* black folks and, often face very few consequences for committing such violence.

Due to the silence in response to police brutality, sexual assault, and violence committed against black women, transgender women, and gender non-conforming folks, black legal scholars and activists launched the black racial and gender justice movement #SayHerName. The #SayHerName hashtag helps circulate social media coverage of black queer, transgender, and cisgender women murdered and sexually assaulted by the police. In addition to reminding the nation that *all* black lives, not just black men, are at risk of experiencing racial profiling and violence by law enforcement, #SayHerName *demands* justice for those who have been sexually assaulted, brutalized and murdered by law enforcement officials (Crenshaw and Ritchie).

#SayHerName *requires* us to *see*, *sight*, and *speak* the names of the black women, black transgender women, and black gender non conforming people who are sexually assaulted, physically abused, and murdered by police officers and vigilantes. Porsha Olayiwola's poem *highlights* the illegibility of political violence against black women. Crenshaw and Ritchie's scholarship provides background information on the genealogy and purpose of the #SayHerName movement. Speaking, writing, and protesting about state sponsored violence against black women, transgender women, and gender non-conforming people into existence, embedding them within the current geographic landscape, and imagining black women beyond and outside racial-sexual domination *requires* examining the construction of the human and demands an entirely new society where *all* black lives matter.

Rekia Boyd and Sights of Memory

On March 21, less than one month after the murder of Trayvon Martin, Rekia Boyd was fatally shot in the head by off duty Chicago police officer Dante Servin (Khalek). Rekia and her three friends were waking down an alley on their way to the store when they crossed paths with Servin. Upset because the four friends were being "too loud" and frustrated that they did not

quiet down after he asked them to lower their voices, Servin fired his gun five times into the group of friends, shooting Rekia in the head. Servin claims that one of the friends approached Servin's car with a gun and in fear for his life, he fired in self-defense (Rekia Boyd Shooting, The Guardian). On trial for manslaughter, officer Dante Servin's charges were dismissed in April of 2015. In response to the acquittal of Dante Servin, several dozen protestors organized in the streets of downtown Chicago to express their disdain for the judge's decision. Due to the silence and the lack of political organizing around Rekia's murder, Olayiwola inquires and interrogates why political violence against black women goes unnoticed and does not ignite national protests and boycotts. For this reason, I place Porsha Olayiwola's *Rekia Boyd* poem within a *sight* of memory that particularly addresses and requires us to confront the "painful places" of collective silence around violence against black women.

In the first few lines of her poem Olayiwola shares the story of Boyd's murder, names Rekia's murderer, reminds the audience that he was not charged for murder, and states "*Last night, no one showed up to march for Rekia Boyd, Rekia was shot dead in the head...Dante Servin charged with manslaughter went jail bird free. Rekia was a 22 year old black woman living on the south side of Chicago and last night, no one showed up to march at her rally*" (Olayiwola). In a rather sarcastic manner, Olayiwola suggests protestors who publicly rallied for black men and boys like Trayvon Martin and Oscar Grant were too busy and preoccupied with more *important duties* for the movement that perhaps prevented them from attending Boyd's rally. Olayiwola states, "*I guess all the protestors got tied up, I guess all the black folks were busy making signs saying 'Stop Killing Our Black Boys', I guess no one hears the howling of a black girl ghost in the night time, we stay unheard*" (Olayiwola). In this way, Olayiwola draws attention to the discrepancy in responses to violence and murder against black boys and men in

more immediate and public reaction from the black population across the nation and violence against black women and girls does not. Due to the lack of urgency to organize and attend rallies in response to the murder of black girls and women by police officers, Olayiwola “guesses” no one can hear the screams, the howling, the gunshots, the beatings, and the murders of black girls and women because they “stay unheard”, “blotted out” (*out of sight*) and “buried, dead” (*ungeographic*). The forgotten black woman and the inability to recognize that they are also subjected to political violence and are murdered by police officers leads Olayiwola to assert black girls and women must “fight alone” for justice.

Olayiwola highlights other public instances of misogynoir, such as how the terrorist organization Boko Haram’s kidnapping of 200 Nigerian schoolgirls did not warrant the United States to send troops to search for the missing girls, the media’s continuous comparison of First Lady Michelle Obama’s facial features to apes, and homophobic hate speech directed at black masculine queer women as entertainment.¹ Olayiwola states:

Two hundred black girls go missing in Nigeria and America puts out a hash tag instead of a search party, no one ever causes a riot. The first black first lady is being called the first ape on all the media outlets and no one is outraged, there ain’t no boycott or nothing. Down the street a black man did a hate speech to a black butch woman and someone gave it a ten. Someone said it was freedom; poets are still over there cheering. I guess queer black woman ain’t black enough.

¹ Black queer feminist scholar Moya Bailey coined the term misogynoir in 2010. Bailey describes misogynoir as having to do with “the ways that anti-Blackness and misogyny combine to malign Black women in our world.” (Bailey) See more at <http://moyazb.tumblr.com/post/84048113369/more-on-the-origin-of-misogynoir>

Once again, as Olayiwola states, none of these three scenarios ignited national rioting or outrage, leading Olayiwola to assume that “the movement ain’t meant to be a crossroads”, where one’s queer identity and presentation erases their blackness, and how threats and violence against black women are not taken seriously. Olayiwola’s poetry articulates that black women encounter more than just issues of racism and anti-blackness. The intersections of how gender and sexuality coupled with anti-black racism impact the ways that black women become explicitly marked as targets of state and verbal violence, in addition to intimate partner violence and other forms of gendered violence. This violence committed against black women is made illegible through the interplays of racism, sexism, and queerphobia. The following section explores the sights of memory Olayiwola engages. What *painful places* and *experiences* must we return to in the *Rekia Boyd* poem? What erased stories does Olayiwola confront? In what ways does her work expose the limitations of transparent space and how does she speak back to geographies of domination?

One of the painful places or sights of memory Olayiwola draws attention to is the reality that black girls and women are murdered at alarming rates. According to a study published by the Violence Policy Center, men in the United States murdered 1,600 women in 2013. Of the 1,600 women who were murdered, 453, or 28 percent, were black cisgender and transgender women (Cooper). Every 19 hours, a man kills a black woman and every 21 hours, a black man kills a black woman (Cooper). Research shows that 92 percent of the time, the woman murdered knew her killer and 56 percent of the time she is the wife, ex-wife, or girlfriend of her killer (Cooper). According to the Institute on Domestic Violence, black women only account for 7 percent of the population; however, they comprise 22 percent of domestic violence homicides. Despite statistical research to support the reality that black women are murdered at alarming rates, their deaths do not seem to spark national outrage or much concern of ending violence

against black women. Olayiwola highlights these discrepancies: *“They will tell you of the woes of a black man who got beat by the police in the street...beat by the system at the institution but never of the black woman he took his frustrations out on, never of the black girl he stretched into the casket.”* Olayiwola points out the complexities of racial and gender violence for black women. The discourse around anti-black racialized violence tends to assume a black male victim, suggesting that violence only happens to black men and leading people to assume that violence against black women occurs infrequently.

A second painful memory Olayiwola addresses is the consistent and collective silence around the hundreds of black girls and women who die each year because of gender violence. Olayiwola remarks, “Black girls receive tombstones too soon and never any flowers to dress the grave so we fight alone.” She questions who is here to support black girls and women and asks what will it take for people to begin to realize black women and girls also suffer from violence and oppression. Her voice filled with pain and anger, Olayiwola asks, *“How magic trick missing must I become? How tight does my noose have to ring? How long does my body need to deteriorate before anyone can smell it rot?”* Olayiwola’s reference to the noose invokes acknowledging and confronting that state violence against black women stems from 400 years of slavery, post emancipation, and state sanctioned Jim Crow laws of the early 1900s. Questioning the ever so present stench of the accumulating number of dead and rotten black female bodies, Olayiwola’s series of questions begin to unravel the construction of gender that places black women on the outer limits of humanity (King). Furthermore Olayiwola’s mention of the rotting an deteriorating black female body is suggestive of Hortense Spillers theory of the hieroglyphics of the flesh and draws attention to the historical conditions of “tortures and instruments of captivity”, which do not protect black women from violence and brutality.

As King points out in her dissertation, “In the Clearing”, the construction and organization of gender functions as a tool of colonial domination violence. For black women, the construction of the human and gender evicts black female bodies from possessing full humanity. Although Olayiwola does not specifically address histories of slavery, her questions “*How tight does my noose have to ring? How long does my body need to deteriorate before anyone can smell it rot?*” point to the hypocrisy that if being a woman grants automatic protection, love, respect, and appreciation then it is apparent that black women do not occupy the space of the correct gender. When the state routinely murders black women and no one bats an eye and their murders are not categorized as a state of emergency, it is clear that black women do not possess the “correct” gender category, a gender or human worth protection (King).

According to Olayiwola, black women’s dead bodies and rotting/rotten flesh in public and private spaces go unnoticed and no one seems to care or have any idea what is happening. Perhaps we have become accustomed to the smell of black women’s rotting flesh in the streets, in public places, in the U.S. settler colonial landscape. Perhaps we have become so familiar to this god-awful smell of rotten flesh, we do not even notice there is something wrong in the first place. Perhaps we have become so used to the stench of rotting black women’s flesh, we conditioned to believe she smells like a beautiful bouquet of fresh roses. (But, wait; I remember Big Boi and Andre 3000 of Outkast saying in 2003 that roses really smell like boo-boo.)

In order for traditional geographies to remain intact, it requires that black women’s bodies be hidden and contained. What is hidden and contained in the landscape is the reality that violence against black women goes unnoticed. As McKittrick remind us, “What you cannot see, and cannot remember, is part of a broader geographic project that thrives on forgetting and displacing blackness” (33). If we cannot see how racial and gender violence impact black

women, if we cannot remember black women are victimized by state and structural violence, we fall short of creating a new world where all black lives matter. As Olayiwola calls us to confront and interrogate the collective silence around violence against black women, #SayHerName requires us to see, remember, and, center the stories of state and structural violence against black women, transgender women, and gender non-conforming folks. The following section focuses on the literature and research published in the 2015 African American Policy Forum report, *Say Her Name: Resisting Police Brutality Against Black Women*, co-authored by Kimberle Williams Crenshaw and Andrea J. Ritchie. This report delves more deeply into the issues and events Olayiwola references in her poem. Crenshaw and Ritchie's work informs the ways I analyze the photographs taken from the 2015 #SayHerName San Francisco protest.

Genealogy of #SayHerName and Police Violence Against Black Women

According to Arlene Eisen, in 2012, police officers, security guards, and vigilantes murdered 313 black people. Eisen's statistical data revealed that a black person – regardless of gender, class or sexuality – is murdered every 28 hours. However Eisen's research findings are often misinterpreted and used to solely represent an idea that *only* black men are murdered every 28 hours (Crenshaw and Ritchie). To dispel the myth that only black men disproportionately experience police violence, Crenshaw and Ritchie, along with various scholars and activists who focus on police profiling of black women, call for a gender inclusive racial justice movement in order to end state violence against *all* black people. It is important to make clear that state sponsored violence against cisgender black men is extremely important to investigate and their families deserve justice. At the same time, the countless murders of unarmed black women and sexual assault cases committed against them deserve just as much attention and their murderers must also be held publicly accountable for their violent actions.

While there are a number of scholars and activists who have theorized about how the state upholds and reinforces violence against black women, this thesis draws primarily on the research published in the 2015 African American Policy Forum report, *#Say Her Name: Resisting Police Brutality Against Black Women*, because of the particular focus on and the genealogy of the #SayHerName movement. As noted in Crenshaw and Ritchie's report, "None of these killings of Black women, nor the lack of accountability for them, have been widely elevated as exemplars of the systemic police brutality that is currently the focal point of mass protest and policy reform efforts" (1). Due to the lack of police officers held accountable for sexually violating and murdering unarmed black women, the #SayHerName movement was created to specifically confront and highlight the various ways in which black women across class, sexuality and gender identity spectrums are systemically criminalized, brutalized, sexually violated and murdered and "forgotten about" within the discourse of unarmed black folks murdered by the police. As Crenshaw and Ritchie state, "Say Her Name sheds light on Black women's experiences of police violence in an effort to support a gender-inclusive approach to racial justice that centers all Black lives equally" (1). Unlike popular black resistance movements from the past that operated through a nationalistic and heteropatriarchal lens, #SayHerName is rooted within a black feminist framework based on the idea that when the lives of the most vulnerable black people are centered, "a clearer picture of structural oppression emerges" and the fight towards freedom and liberation of *all* black lives becomes more possible (Crenshaw and Ritchie, 30).

Although the legal brief *#Say Her Name: Resisting Police Brutality Against Black Women* does not provide an extensive history of black women who have been murdered and sexually assaulted by police officers, the research and statistical information provided in this text

reveals that black women are regularly abused and murdered by law enforcement. Additionally, SayHerName interrogates what factors contribute to the lack of public awareness that black women and girls are in fact targets of state violence. More importantly, this report disrupts the tendency to erase black women and black gender non-conforming folks from discourses of who is racially profiled by drawing attention to the ways that gender, race, and sexuality intersect and inform how black women are particularly targeted by state sponsored violence (Crenshaw and Ritchie).

Prioritizing a gender and racial inclusive movement against police brutality like #SayHerName deepens conversations and further complicates discussions on the *legibility* and *illegibility* of violence against black bodies. Because Crenshaw and Ritchie's scholarship specifically addresses and exposes under reported cases of police violence committed against black women and black gender non-conforming folks, their work in this project is recognized as calling black women into geographic existence. Their scholarship centers the histories of police brutality and violence against the black women's and gender non-conforming bodies and writes into existence their stories that are largely ignored and/or erased. In addition to presenting over thirty cases of black women and gender non-conforming people who were harassed and murdered by the police, Crenshaw and Ritchie provide information on how systems of oppression, including homophobia, transphobia, classism, and ableism, factor into black women being targeted by state and police violence. Mentioned below are four cases from the *Say Her Name* briefly document how social disenfranchisement, historically harmful stereotypes, homophobia and transphobia reinforce the *illegibility* of police power and violence against the black women.

The social disenfranchisement and historically harmful stereotypes of black women plays a significant role into black women's experiences and vulnerability to violence and sexual abuse by police officers. According to a 2014 study in *Social Psychological and Personality Science* journal, data findings showed that white people were more likely to "implicitly and explicitly superhumanize" black people (Waytz). The "superhuman" trope of black people stems back to nineteenth century ideologies that enslaved Africans were unable to feel or experience pain because of their "non-humanness" (Washington). In the case of black women's interactions with law enforcement, Crenshaw and Ritchie argue, "this 'superhuman' trope can lead Black women to be treated punitively, denied help, and left to suffer in unbearable circumstances while in police custody" (Crenshaw and Ritchie, 18). In the cases of Sheneque Proctor's and Natasha McKenna's deaths, we can infer the "superhuman" trope ultimately lead to their deaths while in police custody.

On November 1, 2014 in Bessemer, Alabama, 18-year-old Sheneque Proctor was arrested and held in police custody for disorderly conduct (Crenshaw and Ritchie). Although Proctor suffered from asthma and had informed officers that she felt ill, officers ignored her requests for medical attention and the next morning she was found dead in her cell. Despite the videotape surveillance of Proctor's cell, the Bessemer City Jail has refused to release the recording (Crenshaw and Ritchie). One year later in Fairfax County, Virginia on February 8, 2015 Natasha McKenna died in the hospital days after being tased in police custody at the Fairfax County Jail. What makes McKenna's case particularly disturbing is the fact that while being tased, McKenna was already handcuffed, shackled by the legs and had a hood pulled over her head (Kackman and Jouvenal). Officers claim that McKenna, who had a history of mental illness, was uncooperative and had to be tased four times in order to restrain her. After being tased, McKenna became

unresponsive and stopped breathing. When her mother arrived at the hospital, she found Natasha “covered in bruises, both of her eyes were blackened, and one of her fingers was missing. She died a few days later” (Crenshaw and Ritchie, 18). Both Sheneque Proctor and Natasha McKenna’s cases highlight why an analysis of gender must be considered, if not centered, in understanding how the trope of the “superhuman” manifests itself violently onto the black body. The *incapability* of black bodies to feel pain adds yet another layer in questioning the legibility of “humanness” on the black female body.

As mentioned previously, queer and transgender black women and gender non-binary black folks are also erased from popular discourses around police violence. Crenshaw and Ritchie write, “The overlap of sexism, racism, homophobia, and transphobia place Black people in LGBTQ and gender-nonconforming people in a precarious position at the intersection of constructs around gender, race, and sexuality, fueling police violence against them” (24) Folks of LGBTQ and gender nonconforming communities are routinely subjected to verbal and sexual harassment from law enforcement due to their gender or sexual orientation “deviance” or rejection to heteronormativity (Crenshaw and Ritchie). Black gender non-conforming folks and transgender women in particular are often subjected to transphobic verbal harassment and unlawful body searches (Crenshaw and Ritchie). Data from a 2011 National Transgender Discrimination Survey states, 38 percent of black transgender people reported some form of harassment by law enforcement, 14 percent experienced physical assault, and 6 percent experienced sexual assault (Grant).

On August 18, 2006 in New York, New York, seven Black lesbians and a gender non-conforming person were sexually harassed and physically assaulted by a man on the street because they were lesbian (Crenshaw and Ritchie). One of the friends who was assaulted had her

dreadlocks pulled out her head and was burned with a cigarette. Even in the act of self-defense and evidence to prove that a hate crime did in fact take place, all seven friends were arrested and found guilty for gang assault, assault and attempted murder (Crenshaw and Ritchie). Unwilling to plead guilty to the assault charges, 4 of the 7 friends – Patreese Johnson, Renata Hill, Venice Brown and Terrain Dandridge – served between two and eight years in federal prison (www.outinthenight.com). Although none of them were murdered, state disciplinarian tactics taken out on all seven queer black bodies reiterates that blackness, black femininity, and queerness are disruptive to heteropatriarchal structures that maintain and reproduce the highest levels of power and domination. This case of the New Jersey Four is especially significant to thinking geographically about anti-blackness, since the media largely represented the friends as violent and dangerous, within the very affluent and white neighborhood of Greenwich Village.

Two years later on February 12, 2008, Duanna Johnson, a black transgender woman, was racially profiled and arrested for allegedly soliciting sex although there was no evidence to prove she was a sex worker (Crenshaw and Ritchie). At the time of her booking, officer Bridges McRae continuously used transphobic slurs to gain Johnson's attention. When she refused to answer to his transphobic slurs, Officer McRae handcuffed Johnson, pepper sprayed her, and viciously beat Johnson in her face and head. Unbeknownst to Officer McRae, the entire assault was captured on a security video, which led to McRae serving a two-year prison sentence for violating Johnson's civil rights (Crenshaw and Ritchie). Not long after her beating, Johnson was shot to death. As of today, her murder is still unsolved (Grant).

Both Porsha Olayiwola's *Rekia Boyd* and Crenshaw and Ritchie's legal brief not only *sights* that black women across sexual and gender spectrums are subjected to state and political violence but their work *sites* for an immediate intervention within black resistance

projects/movements that routinely erase how black women, queer, transgender and gender non-conforming are particularly targeted, harassed, and murdered by the violent police institution. As Crenshaw and Ritchie note, the purpose of publishing the *SayHerName: Resisting Police Brutality Against Black Women* is to help make state sponsored violence against *all* black folks legible to activists and news media reporters interested in ending police violence. As black geographic projects, *Rekia Boyd* and *SayHerName* challenge geographies of domination that blackness and violence against black women must remain concealed and invisible. Olayiwola's poetry and Crenshaw and Ritchie's report confront and require us to engage with painful histories, stories, and memories of black women denied recognition, denied empathy, and denied protection from violence. While there is a great deal of scholarship that focuses on how anti-black violence is deployed onto the black body, less researched are the historical connections between anti-black violence and the demarcation of black hair as other. The following chapter locates black hair, specifically coiled/nappy hair and protective hairstyles, within a black women's geography and explores the sights of memory black hair takes us on.

Chapter 3

For Colored Girls Who Considered Yaky Poem and Coiled/Kink Hair

"Afros look too much like lion's mane, so they box us into boxes of relaxers to relax themselves, as long as your edges are tamed, they can forget where you came from."

- Kush Thompson *For Colored Girls Who Considered Yaky*

The purpose of this chapter is to offer a (re)reading of coiled/kink hair and protective hairstyles among black women. In this chapter, coiled/kink hair and protective hairstyles are conceptualized as *sights* of memory that provide insight about black peoples relationship with geographies of domination, histories of bondage and containment. I draw on Kush Thompson's

poem “*For Colored Girls Who Considered Yaky*” to think critically about the histories of black hair in bondage and anti-black racist ideologies that mark coiled/kink hair and protective hairstyles as other, dangerous, and outside of humanness. Thompson’s poem provides a way to conceptualize black hair beyond the politics of hegemonic beauty standards. That is, her poem reveals the multilayered complex histories attached to black hair that cannot be reduced to the binary of either rejecting or conforming to white beauty standards. This chapter deepens the discourse of black hair politics by inviting a conversation about black hair that explores what kink/coiled hair and protective hairstyles can remind us about histories of the enslavement, captivity, and geographical displacement of black bodies in the United States and throughout the Americas more broadly. In addition to reflecting on the sights of memory presented in *For Colored Girls Who Considered Yaky*, this chapter also looks to the scholarship of Ayana Byrd and Lori Tharps *A Hair Story: Untangling the Roots of Black Hair In America* to provide historical background on the “centuries-long assault on black hair” (Smart). This chapter explores what histories and painful memories of violence against black people are recalled if we read kink/coiled hair and protective hairstyles as sights of memory?

For Colored Girls Who Considered Yaky, Slavery, and Sights of Memory

The sights of memory that black hair expose are histories of the transatlantic slave trade and plantation slavery. Reflecting on Wynter, if we locate the invention of Man 2 or the creation of the genres of the human at the sight of the transatlantic slave trade, the captivity of West Africans, and the shaving of West Africans “*cluster of kink*” hair, kink/coiled hair instantaneously became a marker of being outside of humanness. Hair adds to the analysis of what creates the conditions for and justification of political violence against the black people,

where kink/coiled hair is an instant reminder of what features constitute who is read as human and non human.

In *For Colored Girls Who Considered Yaky*, Thompson draws connections between black girls and women's relationships to their hair and the history of slavery in the United States. Through the title of her poem, Thompson alludes to Ntozake Shange's 1976 *for colored girls who considered suicide / when the rainbow is enuf*, a book consisting of a series of monologues about black women's experiences with racism, sexism, and violence. Thompson situates her poem in conversation with Shange's work, replacing 'suicide' with 'yaky', a type of synthetic weave. Thompson's choice to name her poem after Shange's book functions to make black women's hair part of a larger conversation about the oppressions black women have historically endured. In the beginning of her poem *For Colored Girls Who Considered Yaky*, Thompson sets the imagery of comparison between black kink textured and chemically 'relaxed' straight hair. She mentions the "*cluster of kink...falling over a black girls shoulder*" and states, "*this must be the spook house, walled with smoky mirrors.*" Thompson offers a different reading of black hair within a "ghostly" and "haunting" context. Thompson's artistic approach to discussing black hair, specifically the "*cluster of kink*", exposes and unravels histories of violence against black women and how hair was used as a marker to justify black people's inhumanity. Although Thompson directs us to multiple painful and historical memories of racial violence, two that I explore in this chapter for the purposes of this project are the transatlantic slave trade and plantation slavery.

The first sight of memory Thompson evokes is the shores of West Africa during the transatlantic slave trade. Thompson states "*Do you not notice your shackles, they brought us here in chains for a reason, look no further than caged kings for truth.*" Thompson recalls centuries of

forced removal of West Africans from their homelands to unwillingly board slave ships and relocate to the New World. What is often missing from conversations about West Africans being held captive in slave dungeons to the point of boarding the slave ships is how slave traders shaved the heads and beards of those in captivity. By the 16th century, an estimated 20 million West and Central African people were kidnapped, held in bondage, and sold into slavery. Prior to boarding the ships, slave traders shaved the heads and beards of those held captive and sold into slavery. As Byrd and Tharps explain, “The shaved head was the first step Europeans took to erase the slave’s culture and alter the relationship between African and his or her hair. Arriving without their signature hairstyles, Mandingos, Fulanis, Ibos, and Ashantis entered the New World, just as the Europeans intended, like anonymous chattel” (11). According to Byrd and Tharps, shaved heads for West Africans during this time symbolized what it meant to be in bondage. In referencing Frank Herreman, Byrd and Tharps suggest to have one’s head shaved during this time was comparable to taking one’s identity, thus removing the hair of enslaved Africans was a means by which to erase their humanness. As Byrd and Tharps explain, the styling of one’s frizzy, curly and/or kinky hair served as indicators of a person’s geographic origins, age, religion, ethnic identity, wealth, and status in the community. Followers of Yoruba gods and goddess were required to wear their hair in specific braided hairstyles in order to respectfully communicate to the various deities. “Because the hair is the closest thing to the heavens, communication from the gods and spirits was thought to pass through the hair to get to the soul” (Byrd and Tharps, 4). Yoruba women and girls were taught how to braid and those who were skilled in braiding were trained as masters and held responsible for the entire community’s coiffures (Byrd and Tharps). In short, in West African cultural practices around hair represented more than just a daily grooming activity; hair embodied aesthetic, social, and spiritual

significances that continue to be practiced throughout West Africa and throughout the African diaspora (Byrd and Tharps). Shaved heads and beards as a process of enslavement further eradicated enslaved Africans' relationships and connections to their homeland (Byrd and Tharps).

According to Byrd and Tharps, slave traders documented shaving the hair of enslaved Africans for "sanitary" reasons. During this historical moment, which would come to define the demarcations of who is human, not-quite-human, and non-human, West African coiled hair texture and hairstyles contributed to the justification of blackness as unsanitary, other and non-human. For those who survived the Middle Passage, only to face a lifetime of torture, violence, and enslavement, the sociopolitical construction of African/black hair in the New World would continue to serve as a justification of the dehumanization and racial oppression of black people.

The second sight of memory Thompson takes us on is to the site of the slave plantation. Thompson situates the *cluster of kink* within the memories of the horrific but ordinary scenes of violence that took place on the plantation. Thompson states, "*Don't tell a soul we are dancing on fine crushed bones and dirt road, we're dancing on porch steps of plantations, we're dancing on welted backs bent beneath backwards.*" In this stanza, the "*cluster of kink*", the shape and texture of black hair serves as a kind of palimpsest, layered with the experiences of black ancestors who endured plantation slavery. For Thompson, black women's hair, whether worn naturally or straightened with chemicals or heat is a continuous reminder of ancestral trauma and enslavement, a memory that one is unable to fully disconnect from. While there are products and styling techniques to straighten the kink texture of black hair, Thompson emphasizes that the "fire" and hazardous chemicals created to erase the kink does not silence the stories, secrets, and memories of plantation slavery that are wrapped up in the *kink* of the black woman's hair.

Thompson states, *“this must be the spook house, looked like we done seen ghosts, we can’t hear anything but maddening screams...we cant hear anything under the crackle of fire lapping at our edges, can’t hear the crackle of hair, echoes of cracking of whips won’t stop till we see blood, boils, and sores.”* Here, Thompson draws direct parallels between black hair and enslavement, nothing the similar sounds of whips cracking on the flesh of enslaved black people and the crackling sounds of black natural hair as it meets the burning metal of a hot comb used to straighten it. Thompson continues, *“This is for colored girls who considered yaky when her black wasn’t beautiful enough, when her fingers grew tired of picking at the cotton growing from her scalp, does our hair remind us too much of the fields?”* Linking black hair directly to the cotton fields and the plantations, Thompson calls forth a rereading and a new understanding of kink/coiled hair in sights of trauma, violence, and subjugation. If the natural texture of black women’s hair is a reminder of picking cotton, of forced labor and anti-black violence, then removing these coils and kinks is also connected to attempts to create distance from such memories. *“We let hot combs sink their teeth into tender scalps, let them gnaw at our necks, fold ears in hear of their breath...a laying of hands that will smear hot cream across your kitchen until it cooks, until it slicks, burns, kneels obeys like good hair should...so they box us into boxes of relaxers as long as your edges are tamed, they can forget where you came from.”* Thompson suggests that the pressures black women face to straighten or chemically relax their natural hair is tied up with the reverberating memories of enslavement and subjugation. Thompson mentions other examples of anti-black racism including minstrel shows, blackface, and stereotypical portrayals of black people, all of which function to further instill black peoples’ non-belonging within the space of the human.

Understanding the “*cluster of kink*” or coiled hair within sights of trauma, violence, subjugation, and dehumanization brings into focus the construction of blackness and racialization. The historical construction of race in the United States was primarily determined by skin color or complexion; however, other physical and social characteristics were used as markers in determining the black race. Scientists and philosophers of the 17th and 18th centuries aided in establishing and reinforcing racial theories equated whiteness with superiority or human and blackness with inferiority or non-human (Greene). In 1797, eugenicist George Leopold Cuvier determined the “negro” race was “marked by a black complexion, crisped or wooly hair, compressed cranium, and a flat nose...the most complete state of utter barbarism” (Eze 104, 105). In addition to science demarcating dark skin and *wooly hair* as “barbaric”, coiled/kink hair was compared to the texture of sheep.

Black Hair Dehumanized

The comparison of African people to sheep furthered the dehumanization of enslaved Africans and justified their inhumane treatment. This comparison to animals, particularly sheep, emphasized that the slave was not a human but rather chattel. Given the inhumane working conditions of chattel slavery and the unsanitary living quarters enslaved Africans were forced to live in, slaves were less inclined to invest much time and energy into their appearance, including their hair (Byrd and Tharps). More importantly, traditional hair care tools were not available in the Americas so slaves with kinky and curly hair became matted and tangled (Byrd and Tharps). As scalp diseases and infections spread rampant throughout the plantation, to avoid contracting various infections and baldness, slaves would wrap their head with rags, scarves or fashionable kerchiefs to keep their scalp and hair protected (Byrd and Tharps). Despite not having the proper hair care tools or combs available, slaves untangled their mated hair using sheep fleece carding

tools. Because their hair texture was similar in consistency with that of sheep, white slave owners classified African hair as animalistic (Byrd and Tharps). Referencing the scholarship of Joy DeGruy Leary, Byrd and Tharps state, “White slave owners sought to pathologize African features like dark skin and kinky hair to further demoralize the slaves, especially the women” (14). The demoralized African subject brings into focus Tiffany King’s understanding of how anti-black racism and slavery, black fungibility and the genocide of Indigenous people and the clearing of the land are foundational to the sociospatial order of the United States, in which African bodies were materially vital to cultivate the land and to produce the wealth of the land. The dehumanization of African people, marking skin complexion and coiled/kink hair as outside of humanness, was of significant importance to the settler/master since doing so allowed for him to imagine the “land, territory, and spatial coordinates expanding” (King, 23). Thompson’s excavations of these histories attached to black hair, requires us to confront painful memories of domination, marginalization, and concealment of African slaves and their decedents living in the Americas.

As *sights* of memory, Kush Thompson’s *For Colored Girls Who Considered Yaky* uncovers black histories that confront past and painful memories of transatlantic and plantation slavery. The theories, which emerge from Thompson’s poem, map out the way that these histories are attached to marking black hair and black women as outside the human. Black women with kink/coiled hair and protective hairstyles recall these memories, embedding them into the geographic spaces they inhabit. As previously stated, “What you cannot see, and cannot remember, is part of a broader geographic project that thrives on forgetting and displacing blackness” (McKittrick, 33). With each strand, twist, and *cluster of kink*, we are called to see and remember black hair and blackness as connected to geography and histories that are rooted in the

construction of race, difference, and political violence. Reflecting on the sights of memory identified in *Rekia Boyd*, #SayHerName, and *For Colored Girls Who Considered Yaky*, the next chapter offers a close reading of three photographs taken during a 2015 #SayHerName protest in San Francisco, California. When sights of memory, including the transatlantic slave trade, plantation slavery, murdered black cisgender and transgender women, and black gender non-conforming folks, are recalled into spaces of protest, what new possibilities of existence are imagined?

Chapter Four

A Close Reading of #SayHerName 2015 SF Protest

"Our labor, our bodies, our lives are valuable. I won't go another day without that being recognized. The state sanctioned violence against black women is intolerable. It has to stop. We black women have had enough. We're done. It stops now."

--Asantewaa

This chapter provides a close reading of three photographs taken from the 2015 #SayHerName protest in San Francisco, California. This chapter suggests that the photographs taken at the 2015 #SayHerName San Francisco protest (1) exposes and critiques the logics of transparent space and (2) functions as a *site* of memory. According to McKittrick, transparent space is "the idea that space 'just is', and the illusion that the external world is readily knowable and not in need of evaluation, and that what we see is true" (xv). This specific protest, along with the entire #SayHerName movement, calls into question the logics of transparent space that relegate state sponsored violence against black women illegible and, therefore, natural. In other words, transparent space reaffirms and normalizes violence against black women wherein violence against them is not recognized as a state of emergency.

According to McKittrick, “The site of memory suggests that erasure is lived and livable through the past and present. The site of memory displays and utters new sites of being, and a different sense of place, as they are embedded with forgetfulness” (33). As a black women’s geography, #SayHerName is a site of memory because it disrupts transparent space by refusing to forget and remain silent about past and present histories of state violence against black women. The *sights* of memory discussed in the chapter two and three inform my analysis of what *sites* of memory are presented and imagined at the 2015 #SayHerName protest in San Francisco. In this chapter, #SayHerName is conceptualized as a blueprint to a new and different world where the lives and stories of black women, transgender women, girls, and gender non-conforming matter and are validated.

Background of 2015 San Francisco #SayHerName Protest

On May 21, 2015, black queer, transgender, and cisgender women protested in the streets of San Francisco’s financial district participating in the national day of action #SayHerName protest. Organized by the local BlackOUT and Black Lives Matter chapter, protestors gathered in the streets during morning rush hour traffic to make the message clear that police brutality and political violence against black women and black trans women must end immediately (Lazare). Blocking the intersection of Market and Beale, protestors held signs remembering the names of black women and trans women who were murdered by police officers and vigilantes (Lazare). Many of the protestors held signs honoring Yvette Henderson, a 38-year-old black woman who was shot to death by police officers near Oakland, California, Aiyana Jones, a 7-year-old black girl who was shot by police in her home, Yazmin Payne, a 33-year-old black transgender woman who was murdered by her boyfriend, and Rekia Boyd. Protestors also held signs titled “#Justice For Rekia”, “Justice For Yvette”, “Rest in Power”, “#SayHerName”, and a banner displaying

Assata Shakur's quote "It Is Our Duty To Fight". Flowers and candles rested at the feet of the protestors, signaling honor and respect for the women slain by police officers and abusive partners. In various photos, protestors have their arms raised high and hands closed into a black power fist symbolizing empowerment and reclamation of the black body from domination and political violence. The protestors styled their hair in a variety of styles, some wore their hair in natural and protective hairstyles while others covered their hair with differently patterned African head wraps. Unlike many of the other #SayHerName protests that occurred on that same day, the San Francisco #SayHerName protestors rallied in the streets topless with painted designs and phrases including "With Love 4 Female Masculinity" and "Fighting For Survival" written across their chest and body.

According to BlackOUT Collective activist Chinerye Tutashinda, the decision to protest topless was rooted in "longstanding tradition in western African cultures that, when women go to war, the take off their tops off. We were bare-chested to say, 'Enough is enough'" (Lazare). Tutashinda further explains while black women's bodies are routinely sexualized in the media, their bodies are continually ignored when reclaiming their bodies in public spaces for peace and justice (Lazare). This particular method derives from Nigerian and other African women, particularly mothers, who protest naked to express dissent and intolerance for violence (Ochelle). Contrary to the national #freethenipple movement, black women protesting topless for #SayHerName withholds a much different meaning.² As Felicia Ochelle states in "Black Women in the U.S. and the African Tradition of Bare Chests as a Freedom Cry", black women utilizing nudity in sites of protests reflects and addresses histories of racism, sexism, and colonialism that have normalized objectification and other forms of violence against black women.

² The #freethenipple movement is a gender equality movement that aims to legalize toplessness. See more at www.freethenipple.com

“Transparent Space” and Displacement

The geographic location of this protest is particularly important to the idea of exposing and critiquing logics of transparent space. On the surface level, one may assume the decision to protest in San Francisco city was simply to attract a large and diverse audience rather than in a less populated area on the outskirts of the city. However, the decision to protest in San Francisco’s financial district, a major site of capitalism, seems to draw on past histories of black women’s slave labor in producing the wealth of the United States. Additionally, this decision also seems to draw attention to current gentrification policies that are responsible for the displacement of black families from historically black neighborhoods in the Bay Area.

In an interview with a Common Dreams reporter, #SayHerName protestor Asantewaa stated, “We refuse to be invisible. Our labor—slave labor—helped build this country, and we won’t be commodified anymore” (Lazare). Asantewaa’s statement brings into focus the historiopolitical position of black women’s bodies in the economic development of the United States. Refusing to remain invisible interrupts the seemingly static and “objective” viewpoint of transparent space that *places* black women as unrelated to the production of the physical landscape (McKittrick). In other words, Asantewaa and the protestors refusal to remain invisible or ungeographic disrupts the logics of transparent space that black women naturally occupy spaces of illegibility. Asantewaa understanding and acknowledgement that black women’s slave labor was and continues to be instrumental in the economic wealth and power of the United States geographically situates black people, specifically black women, in the development of the physical landscape. According to Tiffany King, these “naturalized spaces” are dependent on the erasure of black women, “the landscape of the settlement does not contain any evidence of the ways that Black female bodies were made to labor or become ontological spaces of

fungibility...Forms of settler colonial power that produce and regulate Black female bodies (Slaves, prisoners) vanish within the normative spaces and analytics of settler colonialism” (142-143). Asantewaa and the participants in the #SayHerName San Francisco protest reclaim the forgotten memories and histories of how black women’s bodies were constructed into fungible property in order to produce and maintain the wealth of the United States that (in)directly helped develop the financial district of downtown San Francisco city.

As mentioned previously, the decision to protest in San Francisco city also draws attention to gentrification and the displacement of black families in historically black neighborhoods in the Bay Area. Between 1990 and 2011, an estimated 40 percent of black residents were displaced from various neighborhoods in Oakland (Causa Justa). In a KQED news report, the U.S. Census Bureau estimates that close to 10 percent of Oakland’s African American population relocated because of the increase of real estate prices (Katayama). In 2005, 113, 833 African Americans lived in Oakland compared to 102,933 in 2014 (Katayama). Residents of the area and researchers attribute the development of the tech industry and the arrival of professionals from the Silicon Valley to Oakland is one of the main reasons why black families have been and continue to be pushed out of the historically black neighborhoods of Oakland (Katayama). The displacement of low-income black residents in Oakland (which, ironically, is the birthplace of where Huey Newton and Bobby Seale created the Black Panther Manifesto) to accommodate white middle class residents highlights the spatial organization of specific racial-sexual bodies and normalization of spatial and human hierarchies.

According to McKittrick, “Practices of domination, sustained by a unitary vantage point, naturalize both identity and place, repetitively spatializing where nondominant groups ‘naturally’ belong...in turn suggesting that some bodies belong, some bodies do not belong, and some

bodies are out of place” (xv). In this case, the gentrification of Oakland’s historically black neighborhoods and the displacement of black residents indicates that white middle class residents and their families access to affordable housing takes priority, whereas, black residents and their families are “so out of luck” on finding a place to live. In other words, in geographies of domination, white bodies *naturally* belong *in place* (seen, visible, legible) whereas black bodies *naturally* belong *out of place* (unseen, invisible, illegible).

As naturally “in place” by being *out of place*, black women participants in the 2015 #SayHerName San Francisco protest, expose the incompleteness of transparent space by *placing* themselves in a geographic space meant to conceal black people and eliminate black neighborhoods. In this chapter, I analyze the ways that hair, signs, and the placement of protestors’ bodies disrupt transparent space and offers clues and insights to a new society where black lives are matter and are validated.

Analysis: Photograph One



Figure 1

In the background of this photograph stands a tall, grey, colonial architecture styled building in the financial district of San Francisco city. Standing side by side, the protestors strategically positioned their bodies in the middle of the road, blocking on-coming traffic. Behind them, a station wagon steers away from the protestors, almost driving up onto the sidewalk. Obstructing the flow of traffic, forcing drivers to move around their bodies, and redirecting traffic symbolizes a construction of a dam. Like a dam that obstructs the flow of water, the protestors used their bodies as a barrier to interrupt the flow of traffic *requiring* pedestrians and drivers to confront and see the names of black women who, as a result of

³ https://www.crowdalbum.com/album/555e1e29fadb582bb50018ee/Protesters-Block-Market-and-Beale_20150521?mediaId=601460856690319362

misogynoir, anti blackness, and transmisogyny, were murdered by police and state sponsored violence and intimate partner violence.

Bare chested only wearing black pants and black sweaters tied at the waist, the protestors stand in the middle of the street reclaiming public space, particularly the financial district, as their own. With signs in hand, including “Justice For Yvette” and “With Luv For Yazmin”, protestors require the audience to acknowledge and remember black women, black transgender women, and black girls who have been murdered by the state. The signs “Rest In Power”, “Rise Up”, “#SayHerName”, and “It Is Our Duty To Fight – Assata Shakur” unapologetically proclaim to the audience that these protestors are no longer waiting for the nation to “wake up” and realize that black women and black transgender women are *also* suffering from state and political violence. Blocking the road and “inconveniencing” drivers and people on their way to work, not only draws attention to the protestors refusal to remain silent on issues regarding anti-black racism, heterosexism, and state sponsored violence but also suggests they refuse to wait any longer for civilians to fight for justice on behalf of murdered black women and girls.

On the ground, at the protestors’ feet, stand nine candles with an assortment of flowers in between each candle. On this day, protestors were gathered in the streets of San Francisco to remember the lives of black women murdered by police officers and abusive partners despite our nation’s lack of concern to address state violence against black women. As Olayiwola recites in her poem, *“I guess no one hears the howling of a black girl ghost in the night time, we stayed unheard, blotted out, buried, dead. Black girls receive tombstones too soon and never any flowers to dress the grave so we fight alone.”* The presence of the candles and flowers seems to offer black women and black transgender women the public memorial they never received. The deaths of these unarmed black women, also murdered by police officers, did not mobilize

national protests or incite public outrage like the deaths of unarmed black boys and men murdered by the police. We were not asked to pause for a moment of silence, we were not required to publicly mourn the loss of another black women murdered because of police brutality and violence, we were not expected to stop in our tracks and think critically about reoccurring issues of state violence against black women. The candles and flowers serve as reminder to the murdered *black girl ghost* that someone hears her, someone still mourns her death, and that she will not be forgotten.

Analysis: Photograph Two



Figure 2

In this photograph, two of the five protestors have their hair styled in coiled/kink Afros (one big afro and one mini afro), one protestor has braids and the other two protestors have their hair covered with a head wrap. The styling of hair in this protest is of significant importance because it recalls histories of marking the black body as “other”. The *cluster of kink* Afro hairstyles seems to suggest a refusal of “taming” the black female body. In *For Colored Girls Who Considered Yaky* Thompson states, “Afros look too much like lion’s mane, so they box us into boxes of relaxers to relax themselves as long as your edges are tamed, they can forget where you come from.” Refusing to *tame* the kink suggests a rejection to containing black hair to “proper” or “respectable” boundaries or representations that are designed to demoralize

⁴ https://twitter.com/blackoutcollect/status/601460880174231553/photo/1?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw

African/black hair textures. In refusing to tame the *cluster of kink*, the protestors confront the demoralization of black hair and speak back to centuries of anti-black racist ideologies that distinguish kink/coiled hair as “other” and, therefore, mark black people as outside of who is human. Additionally, the protestors require the audience (drivers, pedestrians, by-standers, etc.) to reflect on and confront histories of transatlantic slavery and enslavement that marked black people as non-human, black bodies as chattel and capital, and black hair as “other” and animalistic.

Aside from exposing past and painful memories of dehumanization and systemic oppression, protective hairstyles, like braids, and coiled/kink hairstyles (i.e. Afros), provide black people a genealogical map back to West Africa despite historical efforts from colonists and slave owners to obstruct any ties and connections to the motherland. Similar to the ways hairstyles communicated one’s status and background in their respective community in pre-colonial Africa, perhaps we can imagine coiled/kink hair and protective hairstyles worn by black people in the U.S. as a present day non-verbal language that withholds and communicates stories of black oppression and resistance. If we can imagine *the cluster of kink* as a text that withholds memories of the pre-colonial West African, histories of the middle passage, modernity, and racialization, and stories of refusal and innovation, we can then look to *the cluster of kink* as already challenging and disrupting the ideology of transparent space. The *cluster of kink* breaks open the ideology of transparent space in that it exposes the geographic landscape is organized to mirror systems of domination and power (McKittrick). In wearing coiled/kink hair in natural and protective hairstyles, black women recall memories of transatlantic and plantation slavery, the construction of the human, and systems of power and domination. In recalling these memories

through hair texture and hairstyles, it becomes apparent that black women and black people are inextricably linked to the production of space and the landscape of the United States.

Also in this photograph, two protestors are holding signs, one that says “Justice for Yvette” and the other “In Our Hearts Yazmin”. On the ground, in between two other protestors are signs that say “#Justice 4 Rekia” and “Justice For Women”. On February 3, 2015, 38-year-old Yvette Henderson, an African American woman, was gunned down by police officers in Oakland, California. That afternoon, police officers responded to a phone call about a “combative” shoplifter who was armed with a gun. On their way to the scene, the officers found the alleged shoplifter, Yvette Henderson, a block away from the scene. Within seconds, officers opened fire, killing Yvette (Id). On January 31, 2015, 33-year-old Yazmin Payne, an African American transgender woman, was found dead in her Van Nuys apartment. According to Officer Sara Faden, “Neighbors reported hearing an argument, or some sort of verbal abuse from the apartment” (Holden). Within a few days of the investigation Ezekiel Jamal Dear, Yazmin’s boyfriend, turned himself into the Los Angeles Police Department after confessing that he had murdered Yazmin. At the time of her death, she was reported as the fourth transgender woman of color who had been murdered in the Los Angeles area within an eight-month span (Holden). According to a report published by the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Program, in 2013 transgender women of color accounted for 72 percent of anti-transgender homicides, transgender people of color are 1.6 times more likely than LGB folks to face intimate physical violence, 1.9 times more likely to require medical services, and six times more likely to experience physical abuse from the police than white transgenders (Ahmed). Displaying these signs, “Justice for Yvette” and “In Our Hearts Yazmin” force visibility and recognition of police and intimate partner violence and transmisogynistic violence against black cisgender and transgender women.

The protestors holding these signs *require* the audience to confront the politics of which women *matter*, whose bodies are worth *protecting*, and which stories of violence are forgotten or erased from popular media. All four signs “#Justice For Women”, “#Justice4Rekia”, “In Our Heart Yazmin” and “Justice For Yvette” illustrate one example of how black women are imagining a new world that invokes a humanly workable geographic possibility. In this new world, black women are visible, their bodies no longer *blotted out*, *buried*, *dead*, black women and their respective communities receive justice when harm and violence is committed against them. In this new world, anti-black transmisogyny is eradicated, black women are no longer targets of police brutality, and more importantly, black women’s bodies are no longer subjected to violence and abuse.

Analysis Photograph Three



Figure 3

In this photograph, the protestor to the right has her mouth covered with a small U.S. flag scarf. The scarf wrapped around her mouth seems to draw attention to who has full access to freedom and justice in the nation. In the “*land of the free and home of the brave*”, we are called to question what freedom means to black women and black transgender women living in the United States. If statistics prove that black women are murdered every 19 hours, are black women truly *free*? (Waytz). If the stories of police violence and murder against black women are routinely under reported and ignored, are black women not seen as worth protecting from racial and sexual terrorism? The juxtaposition of the U.S. flag on the protestor’s black body suggests an ironic gesture between the nation’s values of “liberty and justice for all” and black women’s

⁵ https://www.crowdalbum.com/album/555e1e29fadb582bb50018ee/Protesters-Block-Market-and-Beale_20150521?mediaId=601453551122944001

inability to fully access those liberties and forms of justice that are supposedly guaranteed to all people living in the United States. As a result, black women and gender non-conforming people's citizenship and humanity are questioned and scrutinized. As long as black women, transgender women, and gender non-conforming people are not recognized as citizens, their bodies do not require protection. Unlike the mission of the Civil Rights Movement that aimed for racial equality and inclusivity, the #SayHerName movement seems less concerned with politics of equality and more interested in constructing an entirely new society where *all* black lives are validated and are free from political violence and concealment. Because African and black people's humanity has been distinguished as other and non-human in the modern world, imagining an entirely new society requires dismantling the genres of the human – who is human, not-quite-human and non human. In addition to recasting the human, this new society that the #SayHerName 2015 San Francisco protest envisions, a society where *all* black lives matter, a society where queer black women and other black people who identify within non-heteronormative genders and sexualities are protected and loved.

Topless, holding the sign “Justice For Yvette”, with her mouth covered with a U.S.A flag scarf, the same protestor discussed above has the phrase “With Love 4 Female Masculinity” painted above her breasts. The phrase “With Love 4 Female Masculinity” brings into focus how queer black women and queer black folks in general are physically and visually situated *out of place* in relationship to heterosexuality (Cohen). This affirmation painted on the protestor's chest calls for the deconstruction of the heteronormative sex and gender norms. “With Love 4 Female Masculinity” suggests a refusal of participating within heteropatriarchal and heteronormative politics, which are dependent on disseminating power and domination over women, gender non-conforming, and queer and trans folks. This refusal to heteronormativity induces a queer politic

that resists and envisions something beyond what is conceptualized as “normal” (Willis). As Brandon Wint, a queer black poet and activist, describes, “Not queer like gay. Queer like escaping definition. Queer like some sort of fluidity and limitlessness at once. Queer like a freedom to strange to be conquered. Queer like the fearlessness to imagine what love can look like...and pursue it.” In this context, loving female masculinity, protecting female masculinity, acknowledging female masculinity, and creating visibility of female masculinity adheres to a queer politic because it calls forth dismantling, reframing, and expanding gender and sexual identities that are free of domination.

Protesting in the streets, disrupting the flow of traffic with their black bodies, and holding signs with the names of black women and transgender women murdered by police officers and vigilantes, *requires* us to confront past and present histories of violence against black women and exposes limitations of transparent space. Importantly, protesting in San Francisco’s financial district speaks back to transparent space’s attempt to invisibilize black women’s bodies and to mark violence against their bodies illegible. In conclusion, as a site of memory, the 2015 San Francisco #SayHerName protest suggests that in order to end state sponsored violence against black women the world must be (re)evaluated in the hopes of creating an entirely new society where black women, transgender women, and gender non-conforming lives matter. This new society begins with recasting the space of the human, acknowledging black women’s histories, dismantling heteropatriarchy and heterosexism, and disassociating political violence from power and the production of space.

Conclusion

“Isn’t it a misfortune if a black girl gets killed by the police and the killer goes free? Does anyone notice? Do you still call it a lynching? Is her rally just a rehearsal?”

-Porsha Olayiwola, *Rekia Boyd*

“Somebody, anybody, sing a black girls song...sing her into her lover’s hands and out of a no touch rule, no longer in fear of the water that washes her back into herself. Let her be born, let her be born and handled, warmly.”

-Kush Thompson, *For Colored Girls Who Considered Yaky*

On August 29, 2015, Jasmine Richards, the founder of the Black Lives Matter chapter in Pasadena, organized a peaceful rally to draw attention to police violence against black residents in Pasadena and across the nation. After the rally, across the street at a local restaurant, Richards’ and several other protestors tried to detain an unnamed woman from police custody who allegedly walked out of the restaurant without paying for her meal (Marquez). In September 2015, Jasmine Richards was the first black person to ever be convicted for “felony lynching” crime (Townes). The origin of this crime stems from the times when police officers would arrest and take a black person into custody, and the local lynch mob would arrive to the police station in an attempt to abduct that black person from the police in order to torture and lynch them (Gyamfi). Intended for the purposes of “protecting” black people from lynch mobs, the state created what is known as the “felony lynching” law (Gyamfi). Under the California Penal Code 405a, a felony lynching is defined as, “The taking by means of a riot of any person from the lawful custody of any peace officer is a lynching” and Penal Code 405b states “ Every person who participates in any lynching is punishable by imprisonment...for two, three, or four years” (<http://www.shouselaw.com/lynching.html>). On June 7, 2016, Judge Elaine Lu sentenced Richards’ to three months in jail and three years probation for attempting to de-arrest a black

woman from Pasadena police officers (Townes). Richards' attorney, Nana Gyamfi, highlights about this case is the "felony lynching" conviction is unlawful and unjust because there was no riot that occurred the day of the demonstration. In an interview with Amy Goodman on Democracy Now!, Gyamfi mentions the ways in which the state is making an example out of Richards and her political organizing against state sanctioned violence against black people. Gyamfi states, "And it can't be said enough times that this is a perfect example of what the criminal sanction system does to black people who dare to speak up, who dare to win, who dare to challenge the system and state-sanctioned violence." The conviction and sentencing of Richards, who is considered a political prisoners of the #BlackLivesMatter movement, particularly demonstrates the entity of the state's power and domination over black political organizers and activists who envision and demand a new social order where black people are no longer targets of police brutality and state sponsored violence. In an Identities.Mic interview with Jamilah King, Gyamfi asserts, "A law that was enacted for the purposes of defending black people against hangings and torture is now being used against black people who are fighting for the lives of black people who are killed by the police." In the attempt to depoliticize and terminate black radical movements against police violence including #BlackLivesMatter and #SayHerName, the state has made an example out of Jasmine (Richards) Abdullah, a queer black woman, a #blacklivesmatter activist and political organizer, to intimidate and strike fear in black communities across the nation that black empowerment, self-determination, reclamation, black bodies, and black futurity belong to the state and, therefore, confined to places/spaces of containment, marginalization, and brutalization. In Richards' case, along with many other black political prisoners, what we come to realize is that imagining, demanding, and organizing a new society, a more humanly workable geography, comes at a cost of imprisonment and denied

access to human rights. However, despite the state's attempts to discourage political uprisings and dilute social awareness of systems of oppression, Jasmine (Richards) Abdullah's activism and the #BlackLivesMatter and #SayHerName movements remind us and gesture towards the idea that not only are more humanly workable geographies possible, these geographies are imagined, lived and expressed every single day (McKittrick).

In this thesis, I have argued #SayHerName protests and kink/coiled hairstyles are sites of memory that speak back to geographies of domination and allow us to reimagine a world where *all* black lives matter. According to Katherine McKittrick, black women's geographies unearth and confront geographies of domination that have been erased or considered unworthy of analysis. The poetry of Porsha Olayiwola's *Rekia Boyd* and Kush Thompson's *For Colored Girls Who Considered Yaky* provided spatial clues that critique geographies of domination and containment, make visible black women's histories, and reclaim black women's relationships to and with the land. As black geographic projects, *Rekia Boyd*, *For Colored Girls Who Considered Yaky*, and #SayHerName challenge geographies of domination that blackness and violence against black women must be concealed and remain invisible. #SayHerName exposes and challenges ideas that render violence against black women, black transgender women, and black gender non-conforming people illegible. Through #SayHerName, we are required to *see*, *sight*, and *speak* the names of the black women and black gender non conforming people who are sexually assaulted, physically abused, and murdered by police officers and vigilantes. As a sight of memory, kink/coiled hair and protective hairstyles require us to confront histories of black peoples relationship with geographies of domination, histories of bondage, enslavement, captivity, and geographical displacement in the United States. Coupled together, the 2015 San Francisco #SayHerName protest and the protestors decision to wear their hair in natural and

protective hairstyles exposed and confronted histories of political violence stemming back to slavery and the construction of the human to contemporary acts of police/state violence against black women and black transgender women.

As a black women's geographic landscape, the 2015 San Francisco #SayHerName protest "see" and "sight" black women into geographic existence. This site also calls for recasting the space of the human by imagining an entirely new society where black women, black transgender women, and black gender non-conforming lives matter. Writing, speaking, and protesting black women into existence, embedding them within the current geographic landscape, and imagining their bodies beyond and outside of racial-sexual domination *demands* an entirely new structured society. This new and differently imagined world requires abandoning colonial European ideas of geography (traditional geographies), dismantling heteropatriarchy, redefining the human, and valuing black, indigenous, and subaltern communities histories and connections to the land that do not profit off the erasure and objectification of others.

Sites of Memory: Black Women's Geographies, #SayHerName Protests and Black Hair Politics is intended to add to the discourse of black women's geographies in Women and Gender studies and to interrogate the ways in which Man/human is *always already* defined against the black body. This project also adds to the discourse in Women and Gender studies of black feminist scholarship in that #SayHerName suggests that new and more humanly workable geographies are currently being imagined and lived. For further research intended purposes, interviewing the protestors who organized and participated in the 2015 San Francisco #SayHerName protest must be the next approach to develop this research project even further.

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