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Dreams of Flight: Literary Mapping of Black Geographies through the Air, Airplane, and Airport

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Abstract

After spending most of her flight back to Ghana writing a letter to her estranged lover, Sissie, Ama Ata Aidoo's protagonist in *Our Sister Killjoy*, observes the actions of her fellow passengers and reads the atmosphere onboard the airplane as that of "another human market-place." Sissie's statement transports into her postcolonial present the past of the transatlantic slave trade, connecting air travel and its technology to slavery and its transformation of Black lives. This dissertation, *Dreams of Flight: Literary Mappings of Black Geographies through the Air, Airplane, and Airport*, argues that the air, airplane, and airport are crucial sites for examining Black travel and mobility. It reads black literatures written in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, such as Kwadwo Opoku-Agyemang's *Cape Coast Castle*, Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, Ralph Ellison's "A Party Down at the Square" and Kojo Laing's *Woman of the Aeroplanes*, to posits that no matter the era, region, or genre, black writers have understood the development of commercial and military aviation as entangled with the condition of blackness.

Drawing on the insights of Black Studies on geography, space and time, Postcolonial Studies on globality and transnationality, Black/African feminist analytics, and studies of the Black diaspora, *Dreams of Flight* writes against the conventional understanding of Black literary expressions, which tend to see flight, broadly speaking, as escape, lightness or freedom, and aviation as distant from the condition of blackness globally. The sites of the air, airplane, and airport have been central to the politics and poetics of space and cross-spatial mobility in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. *Dreams of flight* shows how Black writers viewed race and its historical and geopolitical entanglements with the technology of the airplane and airport, and its transformation of the mythologies of flying into technological innovation. It takes these sites

of air travel as material, elemental, historical, geopolitical systems that converge at the site of the black body.

By taking air as space, and fundamental in the enactment of speech, it investigates how black contemporary travel and migration are intricately woven into slavery and its afterlives. Further, it highlights how the airplane, in proximity to blackness, fractures the linearity of techno-modernity by creating uncomfortable simultaneities between black life and experiences, and developments in commercial and military aviation. The airports, situated at the edge of the nation-state, shows how the hauntings of extractive imperialism, migration, and the nation's anxiety/desire take center stage. It brings together the air, airplane, and airport to interrogate the material conditions necessary for air travel, and the kinds of transformation that air travel engenders in communities and individuals offer us alternatives ways for understanding black mobility globally and historically.

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Dedication

For my mother, who died too soon, who believed and hoped for this, but didn't live to witness the

transition.

Mummy, I carry you with me.

For my grandmothers, who were not educated formally but taught me to taught me to write

towards those beyond academia.

And my father, whose struggle to be more than he was born to be, allowed me to be pursue all

that I could be.

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INTRODUCTION:

Mapping Black Mobilities Towards Flight

In the late 1990s, Ghanaian photographer Philip Kwame Apagya took a series of photographs with models interacting with painted backdrops of airports and airplanes. Apagya, who owned a studio in Takoradi, a coastal town in Ghana, uses the West African studio portraiture style with painted backdrops of urban landscapes, architecture, business, and domestic interiors that portray models and subjects as they wish to be seen. Apagya's pictures also juxtapose models with the imagined excess of Euro-American life. In a photograph entitled, "Come on Board!" a young Ghanaian woman acts as though she is about to step onto the stairs leading to a Ghana Airways airplane. In another, a young man stands in front of the stairs leading into/out of an aircraft with a white t-shirt with the words, Hermes. A pair of sunglasses hang from the neck of his shirt. He has newly arrived, it seems, sporting the latest "designer-wear." His head is slightly tilted to the left as though he is listening to the sounds of flights taking off and landing around him. Apagya's photos exemplify the aspirations and dreams of transnational travel that equate air travel with a transformative experience that catapults one from socio-economic deprivation into wealth. These *dreams of flight* negotiate between access-to-the-world narratives of aviation and air travel, the unequal and uneven structures of global mobility, and the violent histories of transatlantic slavery, colonialism, and its haunting of flight and flying. The air, airplane, and airport mediate these desires, and as they appear in Apagya's photos, they are the canvas on which these aspirations are enacted. Thus, the air, its technology, and infrastructure symbolize the terrains of power through which these idealized dreams of global travel, with its attendant hope of transnational citizenship and cosmopolitanism, must first transgress.

Philip Kwame Apagya's "Come on Board" and "Untitled"

Around the same period as these photos were taken, two Guinean boys, Yaguine Koita and Fodé Tounkran, were found dead in the landing gear of a Sabean airplane in Brussels. They were attempting to enter Europe with a letter calling on the "Excellencies [sic], members and officials of Europe" to aid in Africa's development. [1] The Sabena Airline flight had landed over thirty times before the decomposing bodies of Koita and Tounkran were discovered.[2] The tragedy of the two Guinean boys has become a mainstay for many who study migration and globalization in Africa. In their reading, this tragedy is the impetus to re-assess Africa's claim to

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[1] Citing a version of this letter reproduced in James Fergurson's *Global Shadows: African in the Neoliberal World Order* (2006)

[2] Stephen Bates, in *The Guardian* newspaper, speculates that where Koita and Tounkran to have survived the flight, they would have been locked away in a detention center, and their letter read only by a few immigration officials before being discarded. See https://www.theguardian.com/world/1999/aug/05/stephenbates and https://www.theguardian.com/world/1999/aug/08/stephenbates.theobserver. For scholarly writing on this tragedy, see James Ferguson's *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order* (2006); and Simon Gikandi's "Globalization and the Claims of Postcoloniality." *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 100, no. 3, 2001, p. 627- 658.

global citizenship and the incongruities in narratives of globalization.[3] I contend rather that this tragedy, reveals the need for a critical study of mobility in Africa and its diasporas that foregrounded the space of air as it intersects with technology, infrastructure, and race. The transnational dreams that Apagya's models and Koita and Tounkran's letter express are entwined with the real and imagined space of the air, airport, and the airplane. These narratives haunt the imagined potential of itinerancy by foregrounding its real and tragic consequences.

These dreams of mobility, which at an earlier period in time might have been concentrated on the ship, the automobile, or the railroad, have in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries been centered on what Saul Cwerner, Sven Kesselring, and John Urry call "aeromobilities." The global airport, the technological innovations of the airplane, and the mapping of airspace into networks of connectivity that at once connects the world, its people, and its industries have also had its attendant repercussions on how literature written by black writers across the globe engage with global travel and mobility. Prior to air travel and aviation, the automobile in the United States opened up the nation-state for black travelers. It became a vehicle for escaping and confronting the violent aftermaths of chattel slavery and Jim Crow. For elite athletes like Jack Johnson, for instance, the automobile allowed for a display of wealth and masculinity, to the extent of openly disregarding miscegenation laws. Paul Gilroy in *Darker than Blue: On the Moral Economies of Black Atlantic Culture* argues that the use of black culture and iconography to sell the automobile, had the effect of translating black culture into a "form of property" (21). Earlier, Gilroy posits that the ownership of a car functioned as a "prerequisite for the exercise of substantive citizenship" (13). This claim to "substantive citizenship," fails to

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[3] In addition to the aforementioned works by Ferguson and Gikandi, the edited collection, *African Migration Narratives: Politics, Race, and Space* (2018) is a more recent instantiation of how the Koita and Tounkran reappear in scholarship that focuses on African migration and mobility.

account for the innumerable examples where black car owners and users are subjected to increased harassment by law enforcement that more often than not result in imprisonment and death. The arrest, and subsequent imprisonment of Assata Shakur who was accused of murdering a State Trooper on the New Jersey turnpike in 1973; the recent arrest, imprisonment, and death of Sandra Bland after a traffic stop in July 2015; and the shooting of Philando Castile the following year during a similar traffic stop all point to the continuing restrictions of citizenship to black automobile owners, and users, and to the larger black population in the United States. Across Africa, the automobile, for private personal use, marked the increasing chasm between those who occupied the upper echelons of socio-economic and political standing vacated by colonial and imperial masters, and those forced to use public transportation. For example, recent works in Postcolonial Studies such as Lindsey B. Green-Simms' *Postcolonial Automobile: Car Culture in West Africa* examines the automobile in the literary and cultural text in West Africa to interrogate global modernity and its technologies. Others, such as Jennifer Hart, have analyzed how global economic deterioration and the failure of structural adjustment led to increased criminalization of commercial drivers in Postcolonial Ghana.

Both the automobile and the rail are grounded in long historical unfolding that encapsulates the movement of people, such as the great migration and the civil rights movement, which appropriated the bus as means of mobility to carrying the embodied resistance to the violent apartheid regimes of the American South. The automobile, for instance, oscillated between a newfound sense of unrestricted mobility, a remapping of the nation-state into zones of accessibility for others, and re-structuring of hierarchies of power. Traveling via the railroad in the United States made visible the boundary between the American South, where Jim Crow policies restricted the movement and rights of black people, and the American North where

racism operated covertly. Though there is more complexity to these divisions, the railroad

nonetheless allowed for the swift movement of black people towards the north. Examining the

African-American migration narrative through literature, music, and art, Farah Jasmine Griffin

contends that the railroad has long been a "symbol of freedom in African-American oral

traditions" (19). Griffin further observes, by citing Hazel Carby, the gendering of the symbolism

of the train, which marks a terrain of possible "freedom and mobility for men in male blues

songs" and for women "a mournful signal of imminent desertion and future loneliness" (cited in

Griffin 19). Such male-centered symbolism is reflected in aviation and air travel. In Toni

Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, which I read in the first chapter, men have unlimited access to air

and flight, while women are grounded by their responsibilities.

In colonies across Africa, the developments in transportation infrastructure, whether

through the construction of ports and harbors, roads, and railroads, coincided with colonial and

imperial extraction. In Ghana, for instance, the railroad network that remained after

independence from the British connected the resource-rich areas of the country to the major ports

along the coast in areas such as Tema and Takoradi. During the scramble for Africa and colonial

rule, increased networks of roads or rails meant the extension of colonial and imperial power and

the re-constitution of borders that disregarded land tenure systems and indigenous customs of

delineating land. This is also reflected in literature, and the interplay between transportation and

colonial extraction is a mainstay in postcolonial novels such as Ousmane Sembene's *God's Bits

of Wood* (1960), Ngugi wa Thiongo's *Petals of Blood* (1977), and Amma Darko's *Faceless*

(1996). Air travel as a site of continuing extraction is the focus of literary works such as Ama

Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy: Reflections of a Black-Eyed Squint*.

These entanglements between transportation, race, and colonialism reappear in the depiction of air travel in black literatures of mobility. They are pertinent to Aidoo's protagonist Sissie (from *Our Sister Killjoy* (1977)), who after spending most of her flight back to Ghana writing a letter to her estranged lover, observes the actions of her fellow passengers and reads the atmosphere on board the airplane as that of "another human market-place." Sissie's statement transports into her immediate postcolonial present the past of the transatlantic slave trade, connecting air travel and its technology to slavery and its transformation of Black life and *sense* of travel. In the same year, Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* (1977) imagined the possibility and tragedies of flight through the myths and stories of flying African, directing attention to the air as a pathway of impossible return.[4] Tracing flight from the period of slavery where the air was imagined as the only route of return for enslaved Africans, Morrison's novel entangles mythical flights with the modern history of aviation and air travel.[5]

Aidoo's and Morrison's novels, deliberately draw attention to the space of the air. It is a space that bears witness to older and contemporary forms of transnational movement, both forced and elected. The air is also the terrain of airplanes and airports; thus, examining movement and mobility through the air is to map out its relationship to aviation. The air, airplane, and airport as sites of movement and mobility are central in literary and cultural analyses of black literatures globally. As sites of literary and cultural analysis, the air, airplane, and airport, open up new vantage points through which to examine contemporary forms of black mobility via air travel, and histories of forced mobility. Taking these three sites together, allow

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[4] There is a significant body of scholarly study, and creative works that attends to the mythology, folktale, belief in flying Africans. These texts call attention to the air as a space imbued with the potential of freedom, albeit one that is always already impossible and foreclosed. I attend to these in greater detail in the first chapter.
[5] In the "Foreword" to the Vintage edition of *Song of Solomon* describes the examples of flight in the novel as offering no easy ways to understand the place of flight.

an attentiveness to the network of entanglements between slavery, myths, escape, return, technology, surveillance, colonialism, and blackness.

Dreams of Flight, in broad strokes, investigates the space and temporality of the air, its infrastructure (airport), and its machinery (airplane) in black literatures. It argues that dreams of aerial itinerancy are an inherent part of histories of black flight and escape that extend back to slavery and stretch forward into this neoliberal moment, contending that the sites of air, airplane, and airport open new possibilities for understanding black transnational mobility across space and time. Drawing on literature that spans African and its diasporas, it examines the interplay between slavery, its underground architecture, and its institution of an epistemological and systemic structure that reverberates in trans-national travel in our contemporary era. This historical continuity enables a grounding through which to engage with aviation, architecture, and race. Black Feminist Geographers such as Katherine McKittrick have argued that black histories "are worked out in geography, in space and place, in the physical world" (x). This project builds upon McKittrick's assertions that that "black maters are spatial matters" to elucidate and open up air, airplane, and airport as another spatial terrain through which to approach black histories of "displacement, geographical domination, transatlantic slavery, and the black Atlantic Ocean" (xiv). Displaced from the land and the sea through the transatlantic slave trade, air as space and territory becomes imbued with imaginative potential for transgressing the violence of the sea and land. Air as vital matter, as breathed in to sustain biological life and functioning, as enabling speech is inhibited by the architectural structures of slavery, by the hold of the slave ship. This multiplicity of air's functioning in black life necessitates an interdisciplinary approach that can at once account for the possibilities of "imaginative geographies" and the violent realities of blackness in the world (xiv).

It is because of these multiplicities that this project derives its energies, in part, from Evan Mwangi assertion that examining literature, specifically African literature, solely through its response to or influence by Western literature obscures the "multiple points of convergence, the internal heteroglossia, and the self-interrogation" (252). Texts engage internally and externally with other texts. There remains the need to chart the multiple ways black literatures written around the world engage with their immediate and transnational connections and routes. In this project, I approach black literatures converging and diverging with different histories and temporalities, moving in tandem and contradiction to each other, revealing, obscuring, and extending the sites of aerial mobility. While some of the writers I examine as part of this project identify as African, others are located in the United States and the United Kingdom; others are part of recent migratory streams that crisscross the world. While Kwadwo Opoku-Agyemang, Kojo Laing, and Nana Nyarko Boateng are Ghanaian, Toni Morrison and Ralph Ellison are African American, and Abdulrazak Gurnah and Marguerite Abouet live in the UK and France respectively. These writers are but a small sample of an expansive black literary landscape that deals with flight through air, airplane, and airport. Each of the writers animates and complicate the sites under consideration through their depiction of how racial formation and identity shifts historical, theoretical, and discursive studies of these sites. Beyond national identity or geopolitical located-ness, the texts span various genres, poetry, short story, novel, and graphic novels. This infidelity to genre allows for a display of the expansive yet fleeting nature of capturing flight and movement. In other words, while many literary texts inevitably deal with flight, few have a sustained depiction of these sites. The air, airplane, and airport constitute the locus of the quotidian, alternative, sometimes liberatory, but often violent spaces of black mobility.

Much of this project is concerned with the black body in transit. As such, it takes a cue from Frantz Fanon's peripatetic notion of blackness, where blackness exceeds the bounds of the nation-state. In the oft-cited chapter in *Black Skin White Masks*, "The Lived Experience of the Black Man," Fanon writes that the experiences of being black in the world are inescapable. One is, in Fanon's words, "overdetermined from the outside," even as systemic and institutional structures are harnessed to mitigate one's experience in the world (170). Earlier in the chapter, Fanon writes about the way racialization manifests itself across the world, "In the United States, Blacks are segregated. In South America, they are whipped in the street, and black strikers are gunned down. In West Africa, the black man is a beast of burden" (165). Fanon's description underscores how the "epidermal schema" feeds into the structural and institutional mechanism of the world that determines how a black person moves and is received in the world. To move through the world in a black body, as Fanon shows, is to be subject to various forms of interpretive acts and technologies (172). The interpellation that forms blackness, or Fanon repetition of the exclamation, "Look! A Negro!" is an incorporation into the kinds of technological and surveillance mechanisms harnessed to reinforce the initial visual confirmation of racialization. [6]

The institutional, systemic, and structural processes that affect black people and births a sense of what Shaundra Myers calls a "global black presence," is created through a network of conditions and experiences that is endemic to being interpellated as black in the world (237). Myers' conception of "black anaesthetics," which are the "narrative practices that defer or curtail extant processes of racialization, but always in the ghostly presence of racialized blackness,"

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[6] This interpellation is what Charles W. Mills refers to as the "pervasive social construction" that exist globally and plays a role in how one's "*being and consciousness*" are socialized and mitigate one's experiences in the world (xv).

suggests that these intepellative acts are not always overt (49-50). Though none of the works I

read in this project utilize this kind of deferral, it is nonetheless a significant critical scope

through which to think through how narrative, both real and fictional, form racial subject in the

absence of naming race. As Fanon explains, being black in the world is a condition that is

external to one's personhood. It is the child who, even at that innocent age, has imbibed the

racializing logic of their society who points and interpellates. When Manthia Diawara posits that

it is 'erroneous' to believe that you can "leave one culture and walk into another without

contaminating it or being contaminated by it," he has in mind the ways travel and shifts and

changes us and our sense of ourselves (131). Diawara's assertion can be revised to think about

how antiblackness operates or manifest itself differently as one travels and moves in the world.

Where travel and mobility are concerned, one's racialization is more often than not informed by

the complex network of histories, discourses, institutions, and systems that exceed one's body.[7]

'Dreams of Flight' and Recalibrating Movement and Mobility

Dreams, or dreaming, is a form of transportation that mobilizes the unconscious into

bodily action. It acts as a vehicle that ferries realities, conditions, aspirations, and desires into the

unconscious and vice versa.[8] It mobilizes and moves the body into action. This concept of

dreaming emanates from Frantz Fanon's sense of dreams as an unconscious terrain where the

violence and aspirations of decolonization are actualized. Describing dreams in the first chapter

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[7] Also see Michelle Wright's *Physics of Blackness* where which contends that Middle Passage epistemology should not be the sole reference of blackness is right on the money. Wright's understanding of "Blackness" operation as "a construct (implicitly or explicitly defines as a shared set of physical and behavioral characteristics) and as a phenomenological (imagined through individual perceptions in various ways depending on the context)" allows for an approach to the study of blackness that is attuned to how racial constructs operation across space and time (4).

[8] Indebted to Ethan Madarieta, whose analyses of Roland Barthes' *Mythologies* helped me in getting to this understanding of dreams.

in *Wretched of the Earth*, "On Violence" (translated in earlier versions as "Concerning Violence") Fanon writes,

> "Hence the dreams of the colonial subject are muscular dreams, dreams of action, dreams of aggressive vitality. I dream I am jumping, swimming, running, and climbing. I dream I burst out laughing, I am leaping across a river and chased by a pack of cars that never catches up with me. During colonization the colonized frees himself night after night between nine in the evening and six in the morning" (15).

The "colonial subject" slips into the "I," and dreams expand beyond the unconscious into the muscles, into a kind of freedom unleashed in the inaction of the body. In the duration of dream-time, the colonized escape the scope of colonization ("chased by a pack of cars that never catches up with me"), yet the cars remain to chase another night. In these dreams, the on-going actions of "jumping, swimming, running, and climbing" allow for possibilities of freedom, even as its repetition point to the ever-looming potential for death and capture. Fanon's dreams allow the realities of colonial violence to be conveyed into a realm where escape can be imagined. At the moment of decolonization, these dreams sustain the struggle towards the "substitution of one "species" of mankind by another" (1). These dreams are removed from the "realm of the imagination" and "hallucinatory dreams" and reshaped as "practical tasks" and actions that sustain the struggle for liberation (19).

In the foreword to the Grove Press edition of *Wretched of the Earth*, Homi Bhabha writes that the "colonized who are devoid of a public voice, resort to dreaming, imagining, acting out, embedding the reactive vocabulary of violence and retributive justice in their bodies, their psyches" (xx). According to Bhabha, understanding Fanon's violence is impossible without understanding the French assimilationist colonial policies that at once acknowledged French colonies as a part of France while allowing only those assimilated into its language and culture

the benefits of French citizenship. The inevitable rupture of this assimilationist policy is most

clearly detailed in Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, whereupon arriving in Europe, the

assimilated French colonial subject soon realizes that their blackness overdetermines them. In

Wretched of the Earth, however, the rupture begins from the muscular dreams, or what Bhabha

calls the "psycho-affective," which provides a vocabulary that ultimately responds to, and

challenge the "colonial vocabulary" of the colonist. It incites a kind of decolonial vocabulary that

emerges from dreams, a vocabulary where issues of land, bread, and dignity take center stage,

where the violence that was restricted to the "dance or possession" is redirected toward the

demise of the colonial regime (21).

That this decolonial vocabulary begins in the realm of dreams is significant, and Fanon at

a different moment points to the significance of the unconscious as an "action-enabling" sphere

that is, in some societies, considered equivalent to action. Citing Anthropologists who describe

how in certain societies, a man must confess and be penalized for dreams where he engages in

sexual intercourse with a woman other than his own, Fanon suggests that the gap between a

dream and an action is no gap at all, it is a precursor to an inevitable action (18). Dreams and the

actions they enact are centered in the movement of the body; they are found in dance and the

tensions of the body. The energy of dreams is, according to Fanon, unleashed in dance and in

possessions, but these soon turn into revolutionary action when the struggle for decolonization

begins (19).

To draw on this conception of dreams in this project is to marry the aspirations for Euro-

American modernity exhibited in Apagya's models, the two Guinean boys, the search for

freedom, and escape that earlier forms of transportation were invested with, to the air travel and

aviation. The decolonial vocabulary of dreams as a conduit of action, when funneled through the

variegated meaning, experience, and utility of flight, allows for an interrogation of movement

through air, airplane, and airport as part of a long historical unfolding.[9] In other words, *Dreams*

of flight occupy the space at the nexus of multiple dreams where the aspirations, narratives,

technologies, and infrastructure of flying and flight are centered on the black body globally. To

recalibrate Fanon's entanglement of dreams with action, as dreams of flight, I make visible the

relationship between the actions, aspirations, hopes, failures, and violence of the spaces of air

travel and aviation.

Postcoloniality, Globalization, Transnationality, and the Discourse of Black Mobility

Postcolonial theory has been pivotal in framing the discourse of globalization,

transnationality, and mobility. Through its critical engagement with mobility and movement,

postcolonial theorists have been key in formulating the grammar of transit, transnationality, and

globalization. Simon Gikandi, in "Globalization and the Claims of Postcoloniality," criticizes

how the way this language of global and transnational movement has rendered the differing

desires and violence that are part of global movement illegible. Gikandi argues that postcolonial

theory's attempts to explain the postcolonial subject in the world has created a discourse that

renders impossible the position of those postcolonial subjects whose experiences differ from the

postcolonial migratory subjects that have more often than not been excluded as the subject of

postcolonial theory. These legible migratory subjects, which Gayatri Spivak refers to as the

"postcolonial migrant," have become the normalized experiences of the postcolonial subject, and

as a result, "occlude the native once again" (256). The chasm between the subjects of

postcolonial theory, globalization, and those others clamoring after its socio-economic benefits

becomes particularly poignant in Aihwa Ong's *Flexible Citizenship*: *The Cultural Logic of*

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[9] See the Oxford English Dictionary definition of "flight".

Transnationality. Ong's study of transnational subjects who are not restricted to the boundaries of the nation-state paints the picture of global movement as unrestricted by national belonging or socio-economic constraints. She frames the airport is as a space that allows transnational subjects to escape the strictures of the nation-state. Even as Ong centers the transitory nature of transnationality in understanding postcolonial subjects who lay claim to multiple passports, and whose lives are dictated by their proximity to airports, she declines to historicize what this proximity means in terms of class and racial privilege (4). Ong's "flexible citizens" recognize that proximity to the air is crucial in the conduct of their lives. Still, the privilege of this focus on proximity erases forms of racial and gendered violence that the airport engenders. In focusing on transnational subjects armed with the social and economic power to live in close proximity to the airport, Ong elides a discussion of state surveillance and power imposed on those who cross international boundaries. The air, airport, and airplane are not merely a transitory space; they carry deeper histories of European, and American colonial and neocolonial dominance, histories of exploited Black bodies in Euro-American world wars and continuing exploitation by world powers and markets. These deep histories continue to impose unequal forms of power on postcolonial subjects like Abdulrazak Grunah's protagonist, Saleh Omar Rajab, who reinvents himself as his archenemy to utilizes the airport to escape one nation-state while becoming trapped in the logic of another.

When aviation and air travel have emerged as significant to the study of mobility in Postcolonial Studies, it has involved figures like the two Guinean boys who stowed-away on an airplane to attain the material opportunities of globalization. It does not linger on aviation and air travel as yielding and demanding interrogation. I content in this project that it is not sufficient to gesture toward one peculiar instantiation or example, because, at the nexus of aeromobilities,

postcolonial analyses, and mobility is the potential to understand longstanding entanglements

between race and class that often slips through the cracks of our analyses. For instance, by

looking at aviation and air travel through its core sites of air, airplane, and airport, I can probe

how the architecture of the slave dungeon restricts air to the captured black body and becomes

the catalyst for air's narrative role in black vernacular narrative traditions. In addition, I can

focalize on how the technology of the airplane recalibrates questions of class and identity in the

American South.

When the air, the airport, and the airplane do make an appearance in the theorization and

analyses of globalization and transnationality by postcolonial scholars, it is submerged under the

focus on transcultural transmission through mass media such as in Arjun Appadurai's *Modernity

at Large*, or nouveau ways of unbelonging by the elites of the global south[10], or as part of events

precipitated by global economic forces that reinforce the dynamics of socio-economic class that

turn some beings into global citizens and others into global foreigners as we find in Françoise

Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih's introduction to the edited collection *Minor Transnationalism*.[11] The

spaces of the air, airport, and airplane within this matrix, when present, are spaces divorced from

their interrelatedness to each other and from their histories. Arjun Appadurai, for instance,

discusses the airport within his conception of locality in the last chapter of *Modernity at Large*.

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[10] Aihwa Ong's *Flexible Citizenship* (1999) studies postcolonial subjects who have developed means of belonging to a nation that is predicated on singular citizenship. Shi and Lionnet (2005) *Minor Transnationalism* seeks to interrogate different forms of global and transnational experiences by examining the multiple relations between the national and the transnational while being attentive to the difficulty that without access to citizenship mediate and experience this space.

[11] Rebecca Saunders in "The Uncanny Presence: The Foreigner at the Gate of Globalization" (2001) argues that globalization articulates multiple notions of the "foreigner" by assigning degrees of exoticism to the figure of the "foreigner," so as to obliterate those "foreigners" that engage in "low-wage jobs" that sustains "the lifestyle and consumption requirements of the growing high-income professional and managerial class" (89). Others such as Lisa Lowe's *Intimacies of Four Continents* (2015) and Néstor García Canclini *The Imagined Globalization* (2014) posit that the ability of people and things (products or goods) to circulate beyond their home or places of origin necessitate a more focused theorization and analysis of transnational and global mobility.

His definition of the locality as a space marked by a kind of "placeness" within the national imagery situates the airport as one such site where "nationally appropriated nostalgias, celebrations, and commemorations or a necessary condition of the production of nationals" are enacted. The effect of this is that it renders the airport an auxiliary to other spaces that the nation-state uses to delineate itself from others and displaces the ways that the airport, as it is related to the air and the plane, exists beyond the state's reach.[12] Similarly, in the postcolony where the airport is closely tied to the colonial metropole, as we see in Chapter Three, the airport exposes and peddles in the neoliberal desires of the nation's inhabitants.

Studies of the Black Diaspora, however, offer ways to consider the space of the air, airplane, and airport through their innovative understanding of diaspora's relations to the postcolony and the transnational. Scholars like Samantha Pinto (2013), Yogita Goyal (2010), Michelle Wright (2015), and Brent Hayes Edwards (2013) develop and theorize modes of analysis that allow for blackness to be a significant part of understanding mobility.[13] Indeed postcolonial theorists such as Ato Quayson have called for postcolonial studies to engage with studies of the black diaspora because colonial notions of space-making are founded on both transnational and global mobility and displacement, as well as on the formation of diasporas.[14]

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[12] In Appadurai, the airport is part of the structures of nationness that are "a flat, contiguous, and homogeneous space of nationness … calculated to create the internal distinctions and divisions necessary for state ceremony, surveillance, discipline, and mobilization… and perpetuate the distinctions between rulers and ruled, criminals and officials, crowds and leaders, actors and observers" (189)

[13] Samantha Pinto's *Difficult Diasporas: The Transnational Feminist Aesthetic of the Black Atlantic* (2013) creates the rubric of "Difficult Diaspora" to center gender in the lateral movements of transnationality. Yogita Goyal's *Romance, Diaspora, and Black Atlantic Literature* (2010), Brent Hayes Edwards's *The Practice of Diaspora* (2013) and Michelle Wright's *Physics of Blackness: Beyond the Middle Passage Epistemology* (2015) have read African and African Diasporic literatures together as texts that relay black experiences across geopolitical spaces and times.

[14] Ato Quayson in "Postcolonialism and the Diasporic Imaginary" in *A Companion to Diaspora and Transnationalism*. Eds. Ato Quayson and Girish Daswani. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell. 2013. Quayson explains that postcolonial studies' inability to come to terms with the significance of diaspora stems from its inability to understand that diaspora is the "primary conditions of production and reception of much of what falls under the rubric of postcolonialism" (140). Postcolonial Studies is invested in the distorting and accounting for the binary between the colonizer and the colonized. Quayson seems to be suggesting an additional element that shifts the

For Quayson, diasporization was a salient component of colonialism and colonial space-making, and thus should be a more prominent component of postcolonial studies. Scholars of diasporic studies have incorporated the transnational and the postcolonial into their fields of analyses to create theories and frameworks that undertake literary and cultural analyses incorporating the postcolonial. Black Diasporic studies, and its attention to developing approaches to transnational black literature, has created frames of analysis that reads across various literary and cultural products and unearth connections between transitory black men and women. Brent Edwards' notion of "black internationalism" encapsulates lateral connections between black intellectuals and cultural workers in post-World War II Paris. Samantha Pinto's conception of "difficult diasporas" imagines ways of thinking about diaspora and mobility through gender. Pinto advocates for a conception of mobility where Black women's writing is the "act of mobility itself."[15] This method in Pinto's work allows for postcolonial writers like Ama Ata Aidoo to be read alongside African diasporic and transnational migrants M. NourbeSe Philip and Erna Brodber. This method, in addition, enables Pinto to draw from the diaspora's ability to be attentive to "unpredictable imaginative routes, nonnarrative realization," even as she uses gender as analytic for examining travel.[16] Using a similar method that utilizes the innovations of black diasporic studies and postcolonial studies, along with the work from transportation studies, this project centers the air, airport, and airplane to analyze and theorize black mobility across national boundaries.

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perspective to account for aspects of the postcolony that often occluded. And in Quayson's monograph, *Oxford Street, Accra: City Life and the Itineraries of Transnationalism,* he accounts for the many forms of diasporic presence and influence that are woven into the fabric of coastal cities such as Accra.
[15] Samantha Pinto's *Difficult Diasporas: The Transnational Feminist Aesthetic of the Black Atlantic* (2013).
[16] ibid

Different disciplinary fields such as Transportation Studies, Human Geography, Sociology, Anthropology, and History have long engaged with the space of the airport and airplane as an object of analysis as well as a space for theorizing forms of unbelonging, power, and modes of communication. Gillian and Ross Harley, for instance, in their multimedia project and book, *Aviopolis: A Book About Airports*, see the airport as part of deep binaries that permeate the architecture of the airport as it signifies and delineates between who and what belongs within the space-time of the nation and the international. These binaries, according to Fuller and Harley, are part of the tensions that exist at borders.[17] Fuller and Harley analyze the deliberate ways airport architecture is created to both admit people into the nation and restrict others in ways that are not clearly defined. Extending these binaries that Fuller and Harley identify and discuss to encompass the air and the airplane, I stage an interdisciplinary conversation between theorists of transportation such as Fuller, Mark Salter, and Alastair Gordon, and Black feminist thinkers such Simone Browne and Chandra Bhimull who advocates for understanding "racism and antiblackness" as woven into the fabric of surveillance and air travel. In doing so, I interrogate how the aviation and air travel regulate and surveillance black bodies admitted into the space-time of the nation, through its structures and histories. But I also question what it means to divorce the airport from the air and the airplane, by showing how an analytic that considers these three entangled sites together opens up new modes of understanding the history and present of black flight.

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[17] Fuller and Harley describe this binary thus: "At the airport, this architecture is expressed through folds, frames and patterns at those threshold points where the binaries of inside/outside, public/private, movement/stasis once ruled. For instance, how does inside/outside really work when you can be inside the plane and still outside the terminal building, when you can be inside the airport but not yet in the country, and so on? Borders of all kinds become refined into series of connections and processors" (81).

Much of the research on the airport and the airplane focuses on the spatial dynamics of the airport as: a semiotic space,[18] spaces created by capital and invested with anthropological life,[19] a political space that unearths new sites of "vulnerability" and governmentality,[20] zones of hyper-securitization for black female bodies in transit,[21] or as "layers of textuality" that constitute a network of "stories and meanings" that permeate air travel[22]. The strength of these texts is that they take up the space of the airport as constructing its own discourse of relations between people, arms of governmentality, and the nation-state. Particularly Browne's *Dark Matter: On the Surveillance of Blackness* sees the airport as an extension of the state's surveillance of black subjects, specifically black female subjects, whose over-determination as TSA officers in the mass media renders these forms of racialized and gendered violence illegible. For Browne, as well as for Augé, Salter, and Schaberg, the airplane and its technological developments are seen as an extension of the airport or as part of the space of the airport. In situating the airport as a constitutive element of the space of air and the airplane, this project investigates how these three inter-related spheres unveil transnational circuits that are attentive to issues of nationality and female sexuality.

The possibility and "fantasies of flight" are important nodes in this project, but ultimately this is a project about *dreams* of flight, mostly im/possible, often violent and sometimes stagnant.[23] This project understands *dreams* of flight as encompassing the difficult relations

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[18] Gillian Fuller's "The Arrow--Directional Semiotics: Wayfinding in Transit" explores how meaning is transmitted and codified in airports.

[19] Marc Augé *Non-Places: Introduction to An Anthropology of Supermodernity*

[20] Mark Salter (2008) *Politics at the Airport*

[21] Simone Browne (2015) *Dark Matter: On the Survelliance of Blackness*

[22] Christopher Schaberg (2011) *The Textual Life of Airports: Reading the Culture of Flight*

[23] Frank Wilderson III in the acknowledgment section of his book *Red, White and Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* states about Adrian Bankhead and Saidiya Hartman: "as two Black people who looked unflinchingly at the void of our subjectivity, thus helping the manuscript to stay in the hold of the ship, despite fantasies of flight" (xi). Christa Sharp suggests this statement provides a path through which she theorizes "the

between dreams/fantasy/imagination on the one hand and violence/power/death on the other.[24]

These dreams are situated as much in the air as they are in the technological modernity of which

airplanes and airports are core constitutive elements. In other words, a critical evaluation of the

air, airplane, and airport is also one that must consider the undeniable relationship between

modernity and global travel to investigate how blackness emerges and is instantiated in these

spaces. It is an investigation that accounts for the ways modernity and its alternatives have been

falsely distanced from slavery and colonialism and their many afterlives, to use Saidiya

Hartman's terminology.

That the specter of modernity haunts this work is no surprise. The development of

aviation and air travel allowed for the technological dreams of travel and access to the world in a

way unprecedented. Rudyard Kipling writing 1909 about the night mail, subtitles his essay as "a

story of 2,000 A.D." propelling into the future the kinds of distance and technological efficiency

that the airplane enabled. Similarly, Muriel Rukeyer's *Theory of Flight* where *flight* takes

embodies multiple valences to signal technological flight, aerial view of the present and past,

liberation, while experimenting with form, syntax, and the subject matter of poetry in general,

and feminist poetry in particular provide an aerial and intimate perspective that connects poetic

form and the question of being. Other examples of aviation in literature spans from Richard

Wright, Ralph Ellison, Toni Morrison, to Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* that begins with two

men falling through the air. What connects modernity to the places and people beyond the Euro-

American world is understood by Dilip Gaonkar and Simon Gikandi to be the "inescapability" of

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wake" in her book *In the Wake*: *On Blackness and Being* (2016) as "to occupy that grammar, the infinitive" of the "afterlives of slavery" (13-14).

[24] Much like Toni Morrison's character Eva in *Song of Solomon* who burns her son (Plum) because she believes that dreams are imbued with the possibility and threat of reality, this project reads dreams similarly as both real and imagined.

modernity's idioms even when disguised as its opposites, tradition or the unmodern. For

Gaonkar, however, foregrounding the "variations," "creative adaptations" of modernity allow

room to acknowledge the "latecomers" who often play with and expand the scope of modernity

(17-22). For Gikandi, modernity, particularly in Africa, functions as both the "source of loss and

of utopian possibilities" (18). Whereas each of these positions has elicited a cohort of dissenting

views and opposition, they nonetheless point to the postcolony as a space that continues to

grapple with the possibilities, contradictions and complexities of modernity. Beyond modernity

per se, are the technologies that characterized the aspirations and ennui of modernity, the

airplane, and with it the air and airport.

"The Air was full of Water"[25]: Reading Literature from Air, Airplane, and Airport

Since Paul Gilroy's seminal text, *Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*,

the dominant vocabulary of the diaspora has been the ship, the sea, and water. The dominance of

the ship and the ocean in transnational and diasporic studies has opened up new vistas of

understanding how black bodies and experiences are scripted, participated in, and oppose

modernity. Critics of Gilroy such as Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley point out that Gilroy deserts the

ship and the Atlantic in later chapters of his book, focusing instead on "masculine sailor

intellectuals" while simultaneously overlooking African and female intellectuals.[26] *Black*

Atlantic has nonetheless provided a rich critical vocabulary that continues to generate and

restrain our imagination of space, blackness, and mobility (195). If, as Gilroy claims in *Black*

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[25] From Nnedi Okorafor's *Binti* (2015)

[26] For criticism of Gilroy's *Black Atlantic*, see Tsitsi Jaji's *Africa in Stereo: Modernism. Music, and Pan-African Solidarity*; Yogita Goyal's "Africa and the Black Atlantic" in *Research in African Literatures,* 45:3, 2014 and *Romance, Diaspora, and Black Atlantic Literature*; Simon Gikandi's "Afterword: Outside the Black Atlantic" in *Research in African Literatures,* 45:3, 2014; and Jessica Krug's *Fugitive Modernities: Kisama and the Politics of Freedom* among others.

Atlantic, the "ship is the first of the novel chronotopes" that allows for "rethinking modernity via the history of the Black Atlantic and the African diaspora," then I would argue that aviation and its attendant form of travel is its subsequent form. Just as the ship allowed for considerations of blackness in the world, so too does aviation and air travel, and its constitutive elements allow for rethinking blackness in the world.

With this study, another assemblage of vocabulary is possible. It is a vocabulary that necessarily remains entangled with that of the *Black Atlantic* even as it seeks to escape its bounds. This vocabulary comes to the surface in part through Toni Morrison understanding of the relationship between water, movement, and memory in her essay, "Sites of Memory" where she writes: "All water has a perfect memory and is forever trying to get back to where it was" (99). Morrison explains that when water floods, for instance, it is "not flooding; it is remembering" (99). If the water, which at its elemental level is a mixture of gases, remembers, then what do its constitutive parts, air, do? Can we, from this sense of water as memory, distill the relationship between water and air? Put more succinctly, if water is memory, then what is air? Water shares a lot of properties with air. Like water, the air is fluid; it can be contained in a vessel. The air in its general sense as the atmosphere is reflected by water. Thus, when the ocean is seen as blue, it is because it is reflecting the skies. In general terms, the air is "a mixture of oxygen and nitrogen, with smaller amounts of other substances that are breathed in by all human and animal lifeforms." The air we breathe is composed largely of oxygen (O), which is also a component of water (H_2O). Air also facilitates our symbiotic relationship with the universe. The combination of oxygen, nitrogen, and carbon that is excreted by humans and animals is essential for plant life. These are our airy genetic entanglements to plants, animals, and all living things.

Air is more than and beyond the mixture of gaseous elements that are breathed in, which combine with other gaseous elements to produce other gases, fluids, and matter. It is atmospheric, experienced, felt but not seen.[27] To think about air like anthropologist Tim Choy does, is to go beyond its characterization as "solidities opposite" and to pursue its potential to elucidate our "thinking about relations and movement between places, people, things, and scales that obviate the usual traps of particularity and universality" (143). Though Choy's concern with air is primarily through the environmental concerns of Hong Kong, his question, "who is a breather, and who is not," eerily suggest that implicit in theories of air are questions of access that often include questions of race, class, and gender (145-6). It is these same questions of breathing that become reanimated when Kwadwo Opoku-Agyemang, who in the introduction to his collection *Cape Coast Castle* writes about the countless "many" who "died from a lack of air" (3). These deaths from the "crowded spaces" of the dungeon where there was "no light, no ventilation, or contact from the outside" signal air's absence in the architectural structures of transatlantic slavery (Jordan 56). The dungeon was part of the architectural style of forts and castles that became, according to Coleman Jordan, entangled with "political and economic forces" with the rise in "racial and spatial hierarchies in the wake of the transatlantic slave trade in the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries" (48). These dungeons, in the course of the slave trade, were so packed with human cargo that surface analyses conducted in the mid-1990s at Cape Coast Castle found the dirt floor containing several inches of "compacted and decayed bones, flesh, and excrement that has lain unsettled for centuries" (56). The structure of the dungeons, underground, dark, and airless, assuaged the flow of air to those kept there while waiting to be

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[27] Dora Zhang's "Notes on Atmosphere," which thinks through the air as atmospheric in literary and cultural studies, is very informative.

carried across the Atlantic. Those who died, as Jordan and Opoku-Agyemang show, left behind remains in these airless caverns.

Choy's question about who has access to breathable air and who does not is extended by Sarah Cervenak to theorize air and its ancillary, breath. Cervenak argues that climate is part of the "ecohistory of the Middle Passage" (166). Examining mist, as the process where "water becomes air," Cervenak posits that this transformation mimics "blackness as enfleshed errancy" (168). Distinguishing between climate and atmosphere where the climate is "the experience and subsequent averaging of atmospheric tendencies" which is exemplified in the Enlightenment fixation with the weather which finds grounds in the racism of white settlers, Cervenak further examines how anxieties about the atmosphere and its waywardness are "always already anxieties about blackness" (168). These anxieties often mobilized by the pseudo-science of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries nonetheless continue to endanger black people in the wake of climate disasters. The climate, or what Christina Sharpe describes as the "weather," the "totality of our environment," is saturated with antiblackness (104). These natural and man-made ecological and environmental phenomena reveal the deep groves into which the structure of antiblackness is entangled with climate and its effects.

The ability to draw in breath, to enact that biological imperative is an act that separates the enslaved, as a "commodity that breathes," from other commodities, even if resonances of the imposition of property are inescapable.[28] Much like the speaking commodity that Marx is unable to locate, breath marks a fissure between the enslaved and other commodities. If like Lenart Škof

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[28] For further discussion on commodification and blackness, see Saidiya Hartman's *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*. Oxford University Press, 1997 and Fred Moten's *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*. University of Minnesota Press, 2003. On breathing and philosophy see Lenart Škof and Petri Berndtson's (2018) edited collection *Atmospheres of Breathing*.

and Petri Berndtson propose in their introduction to the collection *Atmospheres of Breathing*,

breath is a "key epistemological foundation of both our biological and spiritual life" then who

gets to breathe and under what conditions should be a crucial part of how we study a number of

things including blackness and space (ix). For instance, Sasha Engelmann in "Toward a Poetics

of Air: Sequencing and Surfacing Breath" attune us to the politics of air and breathing that center

bodily necessity of air, and its potential to closely elucidate air's particular functioning through

the body, but in her focus on breathing as biological process available to all under certain

condition, Engelman's discussion does not account for race (Engelman 433). By revising Fred

Moten's proposition of the "commodity that speaks" as the "commodity that breathes," I attend

to air and breath as vital in understanding the limitations of Marx's theorizing of the commodity,

as well as the limits of breath as a biological necessity available to all.

Our most enduring understanding of air as a commodity is via our understanding of air as

territory. As such it has been, and continues to be commodified through war, aviation, and urban

development[29]. Prior to the development of aviation technology, dreams of flight, as Gaston

Bachelard depicts in his essays, *Air and Dreams,* surfaces in mythical, literary, psychoanalytic,

and philosophical works to illuminate the imagination's role. For Bachelard air's verticality

allows the juxtaposition of aerial ecstasies of liberation with falling. Drawing on a vast archive of

poetry and poetic technique from Shelley to Poe, Bachelard connects the heavenly with the

nightmarish. The air in Bachelard signals the biological, the atmospheric, the buried (or the

dungeon), movement and mobility, and the technological, fuels the trajectory of this project. This

project starts with the biological by examining breath and speech, moving in subsequent chapters

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[29] Adriene Browne's (2017) *The Black Skyscraper: Architecture and the Perception of Race* describe how the skyscraper as an architectural feat in urban development also elicited anxieties about the perception of race.

to focus on the technological, and ultimately the architectural. Air's multiplicity cannot be limited to potential or "fantasies of flight," rather, its flow provides paths and opportunities to account for the buried, and the underground as it stifles and molds the passage of black mobility in the world.

In Gaston Bachelard's work, dreaming about flight preceded the temporality of technology. Before the technology of aerostat and the airplane, flying was part of myths, dreams, and the aspirations of humans to exceed their gravitational grounding. Wilbur Wright and Orville Wright's first successful flight in 1905 allowed, at least partially, the fulfillment of these dreams of flight. The airplane's development during the first World War (1914-1918) and the interwar period (1918-1939) to become the bastion of modernity meant that it became a more efficient instrument of war and oppression. It became a particular favorite for colonial and imperial governments in wars of conquest, and in oppressing armed revolts and opposition to colonialism. It is worth noting that the first-time airplanes were employed in a military campaign was by the Italian forces in what is now Libya in 1911. Later, according to Federico Caprotti, Italy will use airplanes again in the Italo-Ethiopian war in 1935 (385). In addition, the British government used airplanes to bomb Mau Mau strongholds in Kenya. In the Algerian decolonial war, the French government used airplanes for similar actions. Airplanes were also used in Mozambique, Guinea Bissau, and Cape Verde. In the United States, the KKK dropped fliers to threaten and suppress Black voters in the South during the transition from reconstruction to Jim Crow. In Angola, the Portuguese security forces used airplanes to drop napalm to stop rebellion by the cotton-growing region of Malange.

Before the Wright brothers' successful flight, several scientists and inventors also attempted to or succeeded in building crafts that were heavier than air. These included the

aerodrome built by Samuel Langley and the engineer Charles Manly. However, the Wright brothers were the first ones to build one that could fly successfully. The success of the Wright brothers made the United States an epicenter for aviation. In Alastair Gordon's cultural history of aviation begins with the United States, and moves outward to the world. Gordon attends to the deep ties between aviation technology and the military when he explains that for places beyond Europe or America, aviation arrived through airfields that were built in the service of flight routes or to support the military during the second world war. In places like Monrovia, Accra, El Fasher in the Sahara Desert, Khartoum, and finally, Cairo airfields were constructed to support the Allied forces during the Second World War (134).

Jill Snider's "Flight to Freedom: African-American Visions of Aviation" attempts to tell another part of the history of aviation technology through Black inventors. These inventors brought the airplane and aviation technology to the forefront of black technical and technological fairs and everyday life in the United States. Snider examines the many African American and Afro-European inventors who took up the challenge to build flying machines and/or attempted to improve upon existing airplane design to facilitate their commercial potential or enhance its military applicability. Black aviators such as Charles Wesley Peters and Bessie Coleman learned to fly through white benefactors or by finding a way to travel to Europe to gain the training refused to them in the United States. The United States Air Forces did not allow blacks to enlist until the second World War, in part because aerial combat was deemed too technical or specialized a form of combat. Despite their achievements, the Tuskegee airmen remained discriminated against for much of the Second World War.[30]

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[30] William Alexander Percy's "Jim Crow and Uncle Sam: The Tuskegee Flying Units and the U.S. Army Air Forces in Europe During World War II" and Alan M. Osur's *Blacks in the Army Air Forces During World War II: The Problems of Race Relation* both provide a comprehensive study of the experiences of blacks in the armed forces.

My approach to air travel diverges from Alastair Gordon's and Jill Sniders, in its foregrounding literary texts. It examines, among other things, the entanglement that language makes visible. Extending the shared nomenclature between older technological forms more intimately connected to blackness such as the slave ship, and newer ones, the airplane, it excavates these connections and extends them further. For instance, in Christina Sharpe's chapter entitled "The Hold" in *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, she cites the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) Online definition of the hold. The OED definition of 'hold' ("large space in the lower part of a ship or aircraft in which cargo is stowed") reveals the shared "genetic" (semantic) understanding between the ship and the aircraft (68). The hold of the ship, throughout *In the Wake*, is shown to be intimately tied to the formation of blackness. It reappears in the airplane as a place for cargo, and for those brave enough to stowaway on an airplane, it acts as a kind of hold that moves black bodies from the so-called periphery to the Euro-American center.[31] In examining the aircraft's linguistic and historical relationship to the hold of the ship, I point out how the airplane, despite its futurist/progressivist orientation, is entangled with blackness, which at times is imagined to be at the other end of the temporal spectrum or even outside time. In my reading of Ralph Ellison's short stories, for instance, I analyze how Ellison's insistence on entangling the airplane to the experiences of black men places pressure on the entanglement between modernity, technology, and blackness. I question how we are called upon to reconsider the airplane in "A Party Down at the Square" when the pilot mistakes the lynching fire for a

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[31] Sharpe writes about the hold in relation to blackness as resonating in multiple ways across black lives globally. She writes: "The hold is the slave ship hold; is the hold of the so-called migrant ship; is the prison; is the womb that produces blackness" (67). Though Sharpe does not address this directly, there are several reported cases where migrants stowed away on airplanes by hiding in the cargo hold, landing gear, or some other such space. In July 2019, there were reports of a Kenyan man who fell from a Kenyan Airways flight when the landing gear opened as the airplane was approaching Heathrow Airport in London. The man's frozen body fell next to a woman who was sunbathing.

landing stripe? Or how the protagonist, Todd, in "Flying Home" encodes the distance between

him and the seemingly old form of blackness he encounters in the sharecropper who comes to

assist him after his crash, to reformulate the relationship between black identity and technology?

The airplane necessitated architectural structures that could manage the flow of

commercial and military flights. The airport gradually became the architectural zenith of

aviation; it is a site of transit, mobility, and motion that contains and reveals the deep, evolving

history of travel and its entrapment with race, colonialism, and capital.[32] The airport is also an

ecological structure that maps sites of (un)belonging by pulling together histories and narratives

fundamental to the formation and sustenance of the nation-state and its people. The airport, like

the airplane, has militarized beginnings that become discernable in its surveillance and

securitization techniques and technology. In its regulatory role of deciding who enters and does

not enter into the space of a nation, airports manage the flow of passengers while facilitating

interrogation and holding facilities for those are deemed unworthy for entry. This duality is the

remains of, and the foreshadowing, of the nation-state's struggle to create a cohesive imaginary

of itself.[33]

As a space that facilitates movement and is always moving and changing structurally, the

airport also functions to inhibit movement by creating forms of immobility or stasis. It

simultaneously offers the possibilities of swift, high-speed travel while unearthing deep racial

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[32] Adrienne Brown in *The Black Skyscraper: Architecture and the Perception of Race* argues that all architectures are "inevitably, racial architectures, producing and maintaining site-specific phenomenologies of race" (3). Brown goes on to describe how the architecture of skyscrapers shifted how race could be perceived and the anxieties that this induced. I am interested in Brown's argument about architecture because, like the skyscraper, the airport is a unique architectural feat that grapples with the way categories of being, race, gender, class were sustained and evolved.

[33] Several scholars have written about aviation and militarization. Key examples include Peter Adey in "Secured and Sorted Mobilities: Examples from the Airport" (2004), where he asserts that early airports "consisted of a few tents and airfield" because they were remnants of the military beginnings of airports (500).

divides that saturate twentieth and twenty-first-century travel. The airport is conceived

ceaselessly through motion as "sites of perpetual motion" that are in "perpetual motion

themselves," however, it sometimes succeeds in trapping and halting movement (Fuller and

Harley 104). Federico Caprotti's study of the Italian colonial airline, Ala Littoria, showed how

the Italian colonial government restricted Ethiopian travelers from purchasing seats that white

travelers wanted (396).[34] James Baldwin, too, recounts how a particularly unnerving experience

at O'Hare airport left him and his friends feeling trapped in the airport (319). Baldwin's

experience of air travel during Jim Crow reveals how the era's racial attitudes and politics

extended into the space of the airport. The space of the airport, lauded for its incessant

movement, through racism and racial violence becomes a trap; within the airport's flow of

people and goods is the trap of anti-blackness.

　　For writers like Nnedi Okorafor, the intrusive post-9/11 airport security protocol where

TSA officers searched her hair for contraband left her with a sense of how the airport acts out the

nation's fears and anxieties on black bodies. The issue of racial profiling at the airport is not

new. A few years ago, in 2017, the NAACP issued a "travel advisory" warning African

Americans about their safety while traveling on American Airlines. Relating several "disturbing"

reports in which black people were prevented from boarding their flights, or unduly

discriminated against, the NAACP issued an "advisory" (adopting the language of the US State

Department) to warn black airline travelers to avoid American Airlines.[35] The dangers of "flying

while black" remain particularly pertinent for those seeking to gain access to the nation-state

through the airport. A cursory look at the hashtag #flyingwhileblack provides a sense of the

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[34] According to Caprotti, the Imperial government and Italian travelers in Ethiopia even insisted that all baggage
handlers be "natives" to avoid Europeans from handing the "native" luggage (396).
[35] The United States Department of State issues travel advisories

"dangers" of being recognizably black will flying. Regardless of which country issued one's

passport, once racialized as Other means an amplified demand to prove one's belonging. As

Simone Browne insists, those "who can be left at the border and abandoned by the state and by

what technological means" is often determined by race, class, and national affiliation. For those

who willingly submit to the tactics of terror and fear employed by the militarized airport police,

immigration, and customs officers there are no "advisories" on how to act or to extricate

themselves from these systems of control and management that the site of the airport thrust upon

black, and increasingly on brown travelers since 9/11 (Kimani 28).[36]

If as Chandra D. Bhimull believes "airline travel and racial oppression go together," and

that airplanes became means to "relocate empire" and "reposition how and *where* race was

made" then airports, as part of the ecology of aviation is space where race is perceived and acted

upon (21 and 28). The multiple cases the ACLU brought against airline companies, and customs

for criminalizing and violating black travelers, and the seemingly "efficient" segregation of

travelers to and from continental Africa into separate terminals become sites where the quotidian

mechanism of racialization within the world system can be gleaned.[37] Bhimull's study of the role

of empire in the making of British Airways provides a historical and anthropological account of

how the formation and operation of this airline sustained an imperial discourse and ideology. In

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[36] The violence that the state performs in the name of "border security" at the airport comes to the fore in Donald Trump's muslin travel ban that brought to the attention of the American public the bodily and psychic violence black and brown people experience daily at the airport.

[37] A few years ago, in 2017, the NAACP issued a "travel advisory" warning African Americans about their safety while traveling on American Airlines. Adapting the language that the US Bureau of Consular Services utilizes to communicate the levels of caution or warning for US citizens traveling abroad, the NAACP made visible the forms of violence that black people undergo within the United States as worthy of issuing a warning against.[37] Relating several "disturbing" reports in which black people were prevented from boarding their flights, or unduly discriminated against, the NAACP issued an "advisory to warn black airline travelers to avoid American Airlines. The dangers of "flying while black" remain particularly pertinent for those seeking to gain access into the nation-state through the airport. Regardless of the passport these travelers bear, their race signals a demand for more than the average proof of belonging.

so doing, Bhimull *Empire in the Air* unveils how "aviation in general and airline travel, in particular, reconfigured the geometry of power" (146). The connection between racialization and aviation as formed through fliers, in-flight experience, and other such documents shows how "racism underwrites the modern air transport industry" (148). Another of Bhimull's concerns is how the Caribbean is written out the early history of air travel, a position that this project takes up in its consideration of how Africa is also left out of the early and contemporary history of air travel except through developmental narratives. Though Bhimull's account is significantly historical and anthropological, it succeeds in enfolding literature to peel open how the space of air, and air travel more generally, emerges and persists in Black literary works.

Bhimull's project allows for my project to pay attention to the erasure that the air, airport, and airplane as sites where power is performed. By situating the air, airport, and airplane in literary and cultural analysis, this project takes into consideration how dreams of transnational mobility and global aspirations that often replicate racial violence and erasure. It remains necessary, as far as the scope of this project, to interrogate the space of the air, airport, and airplane as part of the discourse of freedom, whether real or imagined. Even as the haunted histories of the sea continue to be a sacred space of black world making and being, this project urges that we critically engage with other sites of black life and imaginary that are equally significant in the study of black mobility and world. This project positions the air, airport, and airplane as the space to study global black literature and transnational mobility as a core component of any study of global travel.

The Chapters:

Using close reading, interdisciplinary research and archival material, I orient each chapter of the dissertation thematically around the air, airplane, and airport as a spatial and temporal

entity in the literary texts under discussion, and as an analytic that activates a reading of spaces and places of transit that exist at the margins of geopolitically bounded spaces. Each chapter reads literary works by black writers along with various theoretical and analytical perspectives that span African and Black Studies, Postcolonial Studies, Human and Cultural Geography, Transportation Studies, among others. While the first three chapters are organized around the sites of air, airplane, and airport, the final chapter attempts to examine how experiments into alternative forms of air travel inevitably brush up against real violence and impediments that travel encounter. Each chapter builds upon the preceding one. For instance, Chapter One ends with Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, where stories and narratives of flying Africans coincide with the Golden Age of aviation during the interwar periods of 1918 to 1939. The subsequent chapter deals with the airplane as entangled with black imaginaries of escape and freedom under conditions that preclude those aspirations. Similarly, the third chapter considers on a global scale the internalized borders of the world that restricts by regulating, often to violent extends, the movement of black travelers. The airport, as a global border, subject black travelers to forms of surveillance that often curtail their mobility, calling into sharp focus the racialized assumptions of global citizenship and transnational mobility.

The first chapter seeks to reconstruct the genealogy of aviation and air travel through black vernacular narrative traditions that emerge out of transatlantic slavery. It argues that air and airspace constitute a versatile topos that refers to the mixture of oxygen and nitrogen breathed in by all human and animal lifeforms; air as fundamental in the production and enactment of speech; and air as territory, space, the setting of flight, and flying. Air's imperceptibility to the unassisted human eye means that its effects often titter between the banal and the tragic. As an analytic, air, is expansive and necessitates a trans-disciplinary and trans-

national methodology and approach that spans philosophy, anthropology, human geography, and literary studies to account for its flows, drifts, and ebbs. By examining the absence of air in the architectural and institutional structure of slavery necessitates an attentiveness to air's vitality and role in speech and its later constitution as a pathway to freedom and escape. In this chapter, I read together Ghanaian poet Kwadwo Opoku-Agyemang's collection *Cape Coast Castle* and Toni Morrison's novel *Song of Solomon* it reveals the entanglements made available through air's multiple dimensions. The chapter attends to air's absence in the dungeons, and its circulation in the black diaspora through vernacular narrative traditions that become the locus of Toni Morrison's genealogy of air travel. It argues that *Cape Coast Castle*'s framing of airlessness as a fundamental technology of captivity forms a theoretical and analytical vestibule through which to read air in *Song of Solomon*. Opoku-Agyemang's attention to air allows for a reading of *Song of Solomon's* "equivalence" of mythical and technological flight can tease out the multiple valences of air, and its genealogical and violent possibilities. The first chapter ends with a consideration of land's relationship to air as economic and cultural spaces that are implicated in both transatlantic slavery and colonialism.

The second chapter considers how the airplane in Ellison's short stories signifies the unattainable possibility of escape through land or air. Titled, "Into a storm of blood and blackness": Airplanes, Blackness and the Temporality of Technology," the chapter focuses on the airplane through Ralph Ellison's early short stories, "A Party Down at the Square" and "Flying Home." It argues that the airplane in each of these stories, is intimately connected to an identity that is simultaneously racial and technological. In these stories, Ellison fractures the linearity of techno-modernity by creating uncomfortable simultaneities between black male fascination with aviation, the lynching of black men in the South, and developments in

commercial and military aviation. Drawing on Ellison's "The Extravagance of Laughter" as well as a number of contemporary black theories of space and race, I argue that Ellison's stories provide an opening through which to interrogate the seeming gap between blackness and technology. The chapter ends with the interrogation of Adriene Piper's *Self-Portrait 2000*. Piper's collage tells of multiple histories, one of which is a downed airplane. I examine the relationship between Piper's abstraction of the autobiographical into an image of a failed technology that also tells of complicated and entangled family histories.

Chapter Three, "Trapped in the Airport: Borders, Blackness, and the Myth of the Global Citizen," examines the airport as constituting spaces at the edge of the nation-state. It contends that the airport is the boundary of the modern nation-state and, thus, a place where the histories, anxieties, and desires of the nation and its actors are staged. The airport is described as an "interregnum" by Pico Iyer, who argues that the airport is where having left the authority of one state, one is not entirely within the authority of the next. Others have described it as a space created purely in the service of capital[38], as well as a securitized space where the theater of security and surveillance and its pursuit of blackness becomes evident.[39] It is a space where race, gender, and sexuality mark out whom the nation recognizes, admits, detains, and attacks. This chapter examines different literary illustrations of the airport, namely, Abdulrazak Gurnah's *By the Sea* (2001) that opens with the protagonist seeking asylum at Gatwick Airport; *Aya: Life in Yop City* (2005-2010), a graphic novel set in Cote d'Ivoire about young women growing up in Abidjan in the 1970s; and a short story, "Swallowing Ice" (2015), about a young journalist who invents the news in Ghana. Each of these works unveils the deep entanglements between race,

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[38] Marc Augé (2009) *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity*
[39] Simone Browne (2015) *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness*

colonialism, gender, and aviation. I examine how the airport as an architectural structure, pulls together ecologies, histories, and narratives fundamental to the formation and sustenance of the nation-state and its people. Additionally, I show how the militarized history of aviation and the securitization of aviation facilitates forms of incarceration and racial and sexual violence directed towards black travelers.

The concluding chapter turns first to Kojo Laing *Woman of Aeroplanes* (1988) to bring together the air, airplane, and airport. Laing's *Woman of the Aeroplanes* depicts a mythical immortal community in Ghana, Tukwan, who travel by air to a similar community in Scotland called Levensvale. I interrogate the material conditions necessary for air travel, and the kinds of transformation that air travel engenders in communities and individuals. The second half of the chapter concludes this project by detailing possible routes of continuation for thinking and engaging with the space of air, airport, and airplane as sites of transnational circuits. Examining the possibilities of what Mukoma wa Ngugi calls "rooted transnationalism," this chapter interrogates how anxieties around Africa and blackness are translated into these sites of air, airplane, and airport. Using Laing's Ghana-centered transnationalism in *Woman of Aeroplanes* as a point of departure, I ask how routes of air travel have been re-imagined in order to address and circumvent the racism that engulfs air travel.

I enter into this project less optimistic than most, knowing full well that a pessimist outlook is rigorously managed and policed. Historically, African and Black persons have been the raw material of scientific progress and experimentation; however, they are those who benefit the least from these discoveries. More contemporary times, those outside the so-called Euro-American center are the ones whose labor and material resources are fundamental to the transformation of ideas into consumer products, but who cannot escape their "wretched"

conditions. Similarly, where aviation technology is concerned, the pervasive development

discourse of Africa's latent admission into the halls of techno-modernity, and the many

incidences of racial profiling and violence against black travelers solidify the urgency not only

for a study of this nature but for understanding the recurring racializing logic that governs

technology, particularly those associated with air travel and aviation.

CHAPTER ONE:

Air as Breathe/ Territory/ Flight: Aerial Geographies In Kwadwo Opoku-Agyemang's
Cape Coast Castle* And Toni Morrison's *Song Of Solomon

Mona/Shola,[40] the main female protagonist of Haile Gerima's film *Sankofa* (1993), after

her confrontation with the linguist of Cape Coast Castle, wanders off into the dungeons of the

former slave castle and finds herself surrounded by manacled slaves.[41] She is captured by white

officers who brand her with a hot iron and put her in chains. Captured, enslaved, and transported

across the Atlantic, Mona renamed Shola becomes part of a slave rebellion and ultimately kills

the master of the plantation who violently and repeatedly rapes her. As Mona/Shola begins to run

towards her freedom, a female voice (presumably her voice) takes over and describes what the

camera does not show as it pans to a blue sky. This female narrative voice describes

Mona/Shola's escape as a run that turns into her flying and being scooped up by a big buzzard

into the air. Mona/Shola's ultimate flight into freedom is extradiegetic, narrated by a voice that

suddenly intrudes into the film. Indeed, what we do see is the layering of images, of the bright

blue sky fading into the ocean that fades into a painted drummer, that is overlaid with an image

of the pyramids, and finally, we slowly see Mona/Shola emerging out of the dungeon where she

is embraced by an elderly Ghanaian woman who both apologizes and welcomes her home.

I start with *Sankofa* because, in as much as it is a film about black enslavement, mobility,

and return, it is one deeply invested in the *air* as a pathway of return to an African homeland.[42]

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[40] In Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Something Torn and New: An African Renaissance*, he asserts that the practice of
renaming enslaved Africans was to obliterate any connection they might have had to the continent. These practices
of renaming are part of what he calls a "dismembering," a practice that became "the foundation, fuel, and
consequence of Europe's capitalist modernity" (5). I place both names side by side, Mona/Shola, to acknowledge
this violence.

[41] The linguist in Gerima's *Sankofa* is akin to the griot. In traditional Fante society, the linguist is the historian of the
state and sometimes the spokesperson of the royal family and the ancestors.

[42] In Frank Wilderson III's "Grammar and Ghost: The Performative Limits of African Freedom," he critiques the
adoption and application of the idea of homeland and diaspora to the dispersal of Africans through slavery. He

This aerial return, in *Sankofa*, weaves together the past of black life with its present imagining

Mona/Shola escape as offering a pathway for all Black freedom.[43]

The conundrum of *Sankofa* is air. Air is a pathway towards freedom towards a homeland.

Even the title of the film, *Sankofa*, is taken from the Akan pictorial philosophical system,

adinkra, which depicts a bird with its head turned back while its feet are facing forward.[44] The

bird itself is a creature that straddles the air and land. It is a bird, specifically a buzzard, that

ultimately guides Mona/Shola back to the continent. The buzzard is a bird of carrion, a

metaphorical representation of death. It is the revelation of air's *deathliness*—its ability to spread

disease and contagion, its invisible potential to transform from life-giving substance to life-

ending ether. For Mona/Shola, it is through this aerial flight that she reemerges and claims her

freedom and her place in Ghana and Africa. The narrative voice that takes over at the moment

when air is actualized as territorial and temporal site signal the possibility of a present and/or

future of black freedom. The voice captures, translates, and informs the audience's reading/

interpretation/ feeling of this moment in the film, destabilizing ascendance into the air as

freedom by metaphorizing the violence and death of the blackened life.

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asserts that to call Africans who were brought to the Americas and Europe through the transatlantic slave trade, a diaspora is to overlook the peculiar specificity of that dispersal that simultaneously created blackness and turned Africa into "a shorthand term for technologies of force that rob possessive pronouns and place-names of their integrity" (124). To use the word "diaspora" is to create an analogical relation between Africa and other diasporic histories where there is none. Though I use diaspora for lack of a more appropriate term, it is always with this understanding in mind.

[43] Kara Keeling critiques Gerima's investment in the possibility of decolonization by asserting that the ultimate redemption of Mona can be interpreted as the "decolonization of Mona's mind and body," and thus the cinematic audience too can become part of this possibility of decolonization through their minds and the sensorium (53). Later Keeling interprets *Sankofa* as invested in the project of the Black Arts Movement that sought to utilize a return to a pre-colonial black African past as a site through which to reclaim black freedom. In the transformation of Mona into Shola, and her subsequent return to an enslaved past to reclaim her humanity, Keeling argues that part of the "epistemological and ontological framework" that believe that there are alternatives to humanity, and the other and the slave can somehow become part of this alternative (63).

[44] The Sankofa symbol is interpreted as an insistence on the lessons of the past for the events of the future.

This chapter considers air as breathe, as a territory, as a site that enables both flight and stasis. It argues primarily against equating air solely with flight, lightness, and freedom or escape because that intentionally puts under erasure the many ways that black literatures incessantly call attention to the air a crucial site of possible escape that is violently marked with failure and death. It investigates air through Kwadwo Opoku-Agyemang's collection of poetry *Cape Coast Castle* and Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*. It uses *Cape Coast Castle* as a kind of vestibule through which to read *Song of Solomon*'s repeated interrogation of air space as a potential for black flight amid the development of aviation.

Air denotes and connotes many things in the texts examined as part of this chapter; it is a versatile topos that refers to "a mixture of oxygen and nitrogen, with smaller amounts of other substances that are breathed in by all human and animal lifeforms" (OED). It is fundamental in the production and enactment of speech. Who or what speaks, or does not speak, as this chapter shows, cannot be divorced from considerations of who or what can breathe, occupy or use territory or who can fly. For the biological functioning of the body, the air is fundamental. It is necessary for the production of speech, and thus the absence of air is the absence of speech and life. The presence of "bad air" or polluted air has the potential to end life. Because of air's imperceptibility to the unassisted human eye, its effects often titter between the banal and the tragic.

Air is also a pathway that reverberates across black pasts and its present, from the slave dungeons on the West Coast of Africa to slavery and its afterlife, to the histories and continuities of European colonialism and in the technological apparatus of war and contemporary air travel that mitigates these violent entries into the world. By asking how Opoku-Agyemang and Morrison translate air through black experiences of transatlantic slavery, vernacular narrative

traditions, and the golden age of aviation, I am implicitly seeking to understand how the structural economy of the dungeons haunts black mobility and epistemes of flight.

Air escapes sight, it flows and drifts, the skin senses its movement. Air also occupies space; it is a territory. Since the invention of various dirigibles and aircrafts, the air is also a commodity exploited by the nation-state, its military, and its aviation industry. Air's affectivity means that it is associated with possibility, freedom, and escape. Chandra Bhimull, for instance, posits that the air, sky, and the universe are "more than conduits, more than spaces through which things move. They are inhabitable, emancipated places" (20). In Bhimull's work, these sites allow her to interrogate the British Imperial Airways as mobilizing empire that more often than not erase considerations of race. In my work, the air is bodily and mechanized. It is present in the act of breathing, speaking, and flying. The development of civil and military aviation meant that mechanized flights simultaneously shared space with bodily flight, and replaced it by relegating it to the realm of narrative and the fantastical.

There is an ease with which flight or taking to the air becomes interpreted as freedom or as offering some form of imaginative resistance invest air with a potential that submerges air's potential to unearth continuities between slave dungeon in Cape Coast and narratives of flying Africans. Air's formlessness, its lack of material integrity, is often taken as a lightless or weightlessness, which in turn is interpreted as freedom. But Lin Weiqiang warns that air's formlessness which is often interpreted as a "transcendental medium that circumvents land and sea may … promise unprecedented freedom in movement" but is the "preserve of only some" (41). The air as free space, as Weiqiang asserts later, is "at once accessible and blockaded, depending on which side of power a nation-state is found" (Lin 41). Weiqiang calls attention to the inexorable freedom that is imposed on air without attention to the ways that access to air is

commodified and beyond the reach of those without the political or the requisite socio-economic status. The question of access to air, which undergirds this chapter's lines of interrogation, is also a question of genealogy. The development and unfolding of civil and military aviation have often precluded black genealogies. This, in part, explains why interpretations of *Song of Solomon*, for instance, insist on comparisons between Morrison's mythologies of black flight with Greek mythology. For Morrison to occupy the air with black myths of mobility and movement, it has to be made legible through the familiar scape of Greek mythology. Even when the fault-lines and tensions of this imposed reading of Morrison are revealed, the fundamental assumptions that force this entanglement persist.

It is necessary to understand the transatlantic slave trade, therefore, as facilitated by architectural and technological structures, such as the dungeon and the ship, that mitigated the flow of air. I contend that examining air's entanglements with black life and experiences provides a critical addition in the study of air's biological, elemental, social, and political dimensions. Air is not merely "solidities opposite," it allows for interrogating the gap between the banal and the tragic, by focusing on relationships, entanglements, networks, and overlaps between people, spaces, and things (Choy 143). In Tim Choy's study of Hong Kong in *Ecologies of Comparison: An Ethnography of Endangerment in Hong Kong,* he identifies air as substantial for understanding and experiencing a city like Hong Kong. This is true, in part for city-scapes across the world. In Choy's work, air also functions as a "heuristic" that incorporates a variety of "atmospheric experiences, among them dust, oxygen, dioxin, smell, particular matter, visibility, humidity, and various gases" (145). As Choy explains later, air re-orients and "co-implicate us at different points as "breathers" allowing for temporal continuities that are pivotal in say theorizing blackness in the afterlife of slavery (143 and 145). There is perhaps no other temporal

marker as significant as the transatlantic slave trade, and its peculiar mitigation of the air has temporal resonances. By starting with the architectural structure of transatlantic slavery, the castle, and its underground, cavernous structure as limiting airflow, I amplify what African and Black Studies have discussed as the formation of blackness through captivity. It is a formation that is historically bound to the Western capitalist economies, religions, and to the epistemologies that undergird discourses of the human. What this chapter does, however, is interrogate how the absence of air in the dungeons underneath the castle sought to biologically constrict breath and speech in order to further vacate from the category of the human, black-bodied persons.

In this chapter, the presence of air in all its forms is as significant as its absence. Starting with Kwadwo Opoku-Agyemang's poetry collection, *Cape Coast Castle*, and its central proposition that the absence of air in the slave dungeon lingers as the deprivation of vitality that governs black life, this chapter moves to Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, where air becomes intertwined with the discoveries that the protagonist, Macon' Milkman' Dead makes about his family's legacy as flying Africans. Milkman, in the course of his journey, must reconcile these pasts of mythical and fantastic flight by black men with the women and children who are rooted to the earth unable to enact their flight.

Cape Coast Castle and Measuring Airlessness

Written in 1996 while the Ghanaian poet Opoku-Agyemang was living in and working in Cape Coast, the collection examines the legacy of the slave castle to those who live in its shadows, those who captured and enslaved, and those left uncaptured, and those who return to confront the legacies of the castle. It is divided into three parts: Part 1: "Four Hundred Years of Eternal Vigilance," Part 2: "People in Me," Part 3: "First Trip to Sunrise." The poems in *Cape*

Coast Castle imagine the moment of capture and its aftermath for both those enslaved and those left behind. It considers the imposed "amnesia" of those left behind who, in their literary works, have foregrounded colonialism. *Cape Coast Castle*, according to Nana Wilson Tagoe, "nibble the edges of the people's amnesia as it relentlessly evokes the castle's enduring arrogance and its associations with the Middle Passage" (98). In his other writings, Opoku-Agyemang has been critical of the absence of slavery as a subject matter of African literature, and the consequent prominence of colonialism in this same literature. Opoku-Agyemang in "A Crisis of Balance: The (Mis)Representation of Colonial History and the Slave Experience as Themes in Modern African Literature," writes that African literature has not adequately confronted slavery. He says: "For the most part our creative writers hug the bare shorelines of African history, touch the colonial experience and report that to be all there is. The vaster depths and structures of African history, slavery, and the slave trade are hardly ever regarded in a sustained way or mined in any serious fashion for its lessons, its truths, and its metaphors" (64). Achille Mbembe's echoes these absences when he claims that there is "no African memory of slavery," if/when it exists, it is relegated to the realm of witchcraft (259-60). More recently, literary scholars like Laura Murphy have rightly critiqued Mbembe's position by positing that the memory of the slave trade despite its silencing and absence in public and popular discourse exists in literary forms where memories of the slave trade are "buried" (143-144). Opoku-Agyemang, living in the shadows of the relics of slavery side-steps metaphor and takes as his subject the visible structural evidence of the slave trade, Cape Coast Castle.

The castle, after which Opoku-Agyemang's collection is named after, dates back to a 1555 Portuguese lodge, and was captured by the English in 1664 as a prelude to the Second Anglo-Dutch War and renamed Cape Coast Castle. According to Opoku-Agyemang, the castle is

"the edifice and metaphor" of a society/continent whose trajectory has been disrupted by slavery, and whose "fundamental concepts" have been plunged in disorder. In this physical structure and monument, Opoku-Agyemang locates the creation and sustenance of slavery and its bifurcated parallel trajectory from colonization. At the height of the slave trade, Cape Coast Castle served as the headquarters of the British, who were one of the leading European slave traders on the coast of present-day Ghana (3). Once the British decided to abolish slavery, Cape Coast Castle became the place where the transition into other forms of extractive capital and subjection was facilitated. It was in Cape Coast Castle that on 6th March 1844, a group of Fante chiefs went to welcome the new Lieutenant Governor, Commander Hill, and ended up signing a document that would become the claim through which British colonization became formalized.[45] The Bond of 1844 was signed as an agreement between Fante chiefs and the British to protect individuals and property, to end human sacrifices, and to permit certain high crimes to be adjudicated by the British. Thus, when Opoku-Agyemang writes in the introduction to the collection that "Cape Coast Castle is a blind permanence, the white-heat center of a pyre, anguish become a castle, a castle as a sign both of the triumph of others over us and of our seeming rootless grief: rootless because we are so silent," he entombs within this structure slavery, its revisioning and

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[45] There has been a long debate about the events that culminated in the signing of the Bond of 1844. According to the minutes and a letter sent by Hill after the meeting, the purpose of the visit by the Fante chiefs and merchants was to inquire and protest rumors about the possible effects of the transfer of power at Cape Coast Castle. In the letter send on the same day, Governor Hill writes to Lord Stanley at the Colonial Office: "… several of the Chiefs from different parts of the country adjacent to Cape Coast, have visit me today in great state, to pay their respect in the transfer of the government. I have for some days been aware that an idea was believed by the natives, of its being the intention of Her Majesty's Government to pronounce freedom to all slaves within the limits over which jurisdiction has been exercised. I need not tell your lordship that an attempt to carry any such measure would cause a revolution" (CO 96/4 P. 95). Hill's concern of a revolution from the chiefs seems somewhat puzzling since the jurisdiction of the British existed only within Cape Coast castle, and Cape Coast town or the Fante towns were beyond his jurisdiction. In a letter from Governor Winniett to Elizabeth Ward, dated 31st Jan, he explains the confusion over the extent of British jurisdiction by writing: "Much confusion has arisen…from not bearing in mind the distinction between Cape Coast Castle and Cape Coast Town, in the former the English Government has a jurisdiction with right to enforce British laws, in the latter and throughout the extensive Territory on the Gold Coast under our protection, it has not, and never had such right…" (CO 96/15 26th January 1849).

repositioning in the transition from slavery to colonialism (8). The enduring attitude towards

race, where blackness is cemented in the zone of non-being and imagined as separate from the

political peculiarity of colonialism, is the effect of this reinvention of Cape Coast Castle as the

seat of British Colonial Government. If race in the postcolony is imagined to exist elsewhere, to

affect others, and to be an imposition of a foreign analytical, it is an outcome of the

whitewashing Cape Coast Castle, and space like it across the African continent.[46]

Opoku-Agyemang frames the slave castle and dungeon as the "womb/abyss" of

blackness, a space deprived of air, a concrete stony space that forms blackness out of air's

absence.[47] Air and its absence extinguishes and kills some of the enslaved, preserving others for

the drudgery of slavery. Describing the slave dungeon in the introduction to *Cape Coast Castle*,

Opoku- Agyemang reads the absence of air as fundamental to the ongoing trauma of slavery. It is

the catalyst for what he later describes as the "victim society" of the modern African state.

> These vaults, mysterious underground holds, cramped, cavernous, dark, musty
> and airless, could contain over a thousand captives at any one time as they
> awaited the Middle passage. *Many died from lack of air*. *The airless darkness*
> within the dungeons is the metaphor of a modern predicament whose vehicle is
> trauma. (30 *Emphasis Mine*)

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[46] Here, I am thinking along two intersecting lines of criticism. The first is through Achille Mbembe's formation of the postcolony as a "particularly revealing, and rather dramatic, stage on which are played out the wider problems of subjection and its corollary, discipline" (*On the Postcolony* 103). The second is through Lisa Lowe's tracing of the genealogy of liberalism where the mechanism that undergirded the creation of racial divisions of humanity are "imbricated processes" that structure the "ongoing and continuous" forms of violence and racial dispossession and expropriations of all kinds in our contemporary era (7). These processes, as Lisa Lowe shows in *Intimacies of Four Continents*, leave traces that can are found throughout the four continents.

[47] Saidiya Hartman in "The Belly of the World" A Note of Black Women's Labor" begins with the assertion "The slave ship is a womb/abyss" and examines on how gestational language, when applied to Black women's reproductive labor during slavery and later coupled with Marxist notion of the worker/labor, obscures the peculiar nature of black women's reproduction. Christina Sharpe adapts this language to assert that the hold of the slave ship is the womb of that birth's blackness. I want to position the slave dungeon as a site between capture and the slave ship where the enslaved's position to the human is recalibrated, enters into discourse, and becomes part of the epistemological structure as a kind of void, per Zakkiyah Jackson.

The absence of air in the dungeons is literal, and the airlessness of the slave dungeon resonates throughout the life of the enslaved, and in the precariousness of black existence in the "afterlife of slavery" (Hartman 3). The deprivation of air in the slave dungeons later turned in to prisons, seats of government, and the hold of the slave ship; all constitute part of what Achille Mbembe characterizes as necropolitics and/or necropower, the "weapons deployed in the interest of maximum destruction" that create unique forms of social existence that vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of living dead," as social death (40). Keeping the slave in airless dungeons underneath the castle, keeping the slave in airless holds underneath the slave ship deprives the slave of a basic claim to humanity, to do what they are biologically constructed to do, to draw in breath, to live, to speak because speaking is "moving air over muscle."[48]

By inhibiting breath, speech is also inhibited. The biological process of producing speech involves bringing air from the lungs to the larynx (respiration), where the vocal folds may be held open to allow the air to pass through or may vibrate to make a sound (phonation). The airflow from the lungs is then shaped by the articulators in the mouth and nose (articulation). When anthropologist Tim Choy in theorizing air asks, "who is a breather, and who is not," he anticipates air's role in speech as well as how access to "clean" air can be racialized, classed and gendered (145-6). By emphasizing the castle and its dungeons as deprived of air, a stony concrete space that forms blackness out of air's absence Opoku-Agyemang offers a way to re-

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[48] I borrow this phrase from Cynthia Oliver's dance piece about Caribbean male desire and sexuality, *Virago-Man Dem*. Performed at the Columbia College Dance Center, Chicago, on November 3, 2017. The relationship between speech and air remains particularly resonant in this project because the ability to produce sound relies fundamentally on the ability to move air with/through the organs of speech.

interrogate the logic of silence and speech and the role of air. If one is not a breather, one is also

not a speaker.

As early as the introduction to the collection, Opoku-Agyemang contends that Cape

Coast Castle is ruled "by silence," and it is this silence that is its source of power as well as its

seduction. In many of the early poems, speaking is deferred to the castle itself or the sea. For

instance, in the first poem, "Introit," which begins with:

> AND THE SEA cackled, foaming at the mouth
> Till dry cracks ploughed the waves back;
> Hope, said the sea, is not a method
> There are too many sad stories/ carved in indifferent stones
>
> Did our elders not say
> The boats leave but the people stay?
> Behind the dawn stand
> Queues of days, nibbles at debts
> The lonely poor dropping from sight
>
> Behind the dawn, nothing
> Save the bones of sad stories:
> History does not repeat itself
> It merely quotes us
> When we have not been too wise. (13)

The description of the sounds and sights of the roiling sea invoke its personification where, the

sea is imbued with the capacity of speech. In the second stanza, there is another allusion to

speech though it is detached from a speaker and thrust onto a collective, "our elders." The final

stanza completes this move by once again deferring speech to entities. What does it mean that it

is the sea that speaks the words of hope? The sea, which is itself a mixture of air, hydrogen and

oxygen, an eco-system of life and ghostly remains. The sea has to speak because the captured

cannot, and neither can those who remain are also captive within this terrain of airlessness.

In another poem, "The Watch," the persona waits for freedom to come and for their

"mouth to be cleared of all weed" while waiting they note the sound of the wind and the cry of

the seagulls and the "cracks and leaning turrets" of the castle, all the while the persona is silent.

> Too many sad stories are lost to stain
> In the castle's cracks and leaning turrets
> Too long have I stood silenced in the shadows
> Where people got carried away by the bargain
> I am waiting, will till freed
> And our memory cleared of weed. (14)

These silences are juxtaposed with oscillations in time, entangling time, entangling slavery with

the postcolony. In "The Watch," the persona stands at the crossroads of these entangled

temporalities as a witness to slavery, waiting for freedom that is yet to come but which is also a

memory. These oscillations are not just between the past and the present, speech and silence, but

the future where freedom might be located, where "our memory cleared of weed" to allow the

possibility of freedom. The past is lost in the stain of the castle's structural elements ("cracks and

leaning turrets"), which has been whitewashed repeatedly and incorporated into the tourist

economy of the world. In the shadows of this structure are those who have been "silenced" and

whose memories are overgrown with the tragedy of the colony while the violence of slavery that

initiated these tragedies are seemingly forgotten.

Beyond speech, Opoku-Agyemang harnesses air's absence to depict the terrorizing

reality of those whose families were taken during the slave trade. Those like Equiano's mother

returning home to "find her only daughter and youngest son stolen, never to be heard from

again" (6). In the *Interesting Narrative of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa*, Equiano writes

that he and his sister were stolen while his family was away from home. These deeply wounded,

like Equiano's mother, escape the capacity of the archive and are forced to live a life of

mourning, and it is to these that poems such as, "Supplication (Equiano's Mother) attempt to

craft a place for in the world. It is also these figures who illuminate the terrifying potential of air.

> She *shouts* her own name to the passing wind
> That something in time will remember her proper name
> The rush seed, the animal pain and the cornered eyes
> At the shrine where skulls parade the Apirede dance
> Child of the crocodile, she is beating water
> Chasing the dead with her dirge
> …
> I ask you: why do they not return
> Those who go?
> …
> I have something hard to say
> Hold me, hold me down
> I fear to report the endless death
> No place is safe, not even my own mouth
> And the words that lie in it, how true are they
> To the few that hear? (25-26 emphasis mine)

In the poem, the difficulty of speaking is extended to those who are left uncaptured, living

through the terrible possibility of being enslaved. The persona's very act of mourning for her

children cannot be fulfilled, in part because there is nothing where there should have been

remnants of life, or a corpse to offer the certainty of death.[49] On the other hand, the persona

recognizes the danger of speaking about their loss when they say, "No place is safe, not even my

own mouth." These lines, almost confessional, but firmly declarative suggest no ecology or

environment or space that the speaker can envision or possess freedom devoid of the terrors that

slavery engenders. Perhaps a more sinister interpretation would be that the bodily necessities

such as breathing, and speaking are unavailable for those living under conditions of airlessness.

Though this persona can speak, it is a speech act performed under the conditions of terror.

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[49] Laura Murphy refers this what to as the "suffering of survival."

Moreover, the persona's attempt to mark her tragedy with a plead for a future, however fraught, by shouting her name into the "passing wind" echoes the Akan saying that "if you want to speak to God, speak to the wind." It is possible to read this moment as one that demands that the future accounts for her suffering, one that calls to the ultimate power to witness her suffering. But even this glimmer of a sense of the future seems to be foreclosed upon when the persona reminds us of the terror that is part of her existence, "No place is safe, not even my own mouth" (26). These lines, almost confessional, but firmly declarative erases any optimistic rendering of the future. The act of witnessing, of mourning, by those directly affected by slavery cannot be read as a form of resistance to their bodily dissipation. Though this persona can speak, it is a speech act performed under the conditions of terror, under the conditions of airlessness. Terror operates by turning the environment against bodily necessities such as breathing and speaking.[50]

When Opoku-Agyemang asks at the beginning of "Howl the Waking Deep," what happens to breathe in the dungeon where death is "unending," he is suggesting that something shifts in the dungeon and with it the potential of keeping breath in the black body is no longer guaranteed.

> YET WHAT thoughts kept them company
> Kept mind cocooned
> Breath-held against such infinitude?
> What strength carried them
> Down the hollow wailing deep
> Into the gut-rot: there to die
> Die again, be witness to unending death? (17)

How does on hold one's breath for/against infinitude? The answer simply is that one cannot. And dying and being a "witness to unending death" is the condition of blackness in the world.

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[50] I am revising Peter Sloterdijk's understanding of terror as operating beyond the "exchange of armed blows between regular troops; it involves replacing these classical forms of battle with assaults on the environmental conditions of the enemy's life" (16).

Airlessness is not an absence of air per se. It is an absence of air that sustains bodily functioning and life. While air contains gaseous elements, the human body depends upon oxygen and excretes carbon dioxide. It is the replacement of oxygen with carbon dioxide, with the form of air that sustains plant life and ecologies that are detrimental to the human body. As Crawley writes, air is "an object that is shared" an "admixture of nitrogen, oxygen, other minute atmospheric gases and particulate matter that enters the flesh through the process of breathing" (36). For Crawley the act of breathing is not merely to "fill lungs with air is to displace the carbonite matter that was previously within" but it is one comparable to writing "narratives of flight" that displaces "the common conceptions of the human, the subject, the object" (37). Developing what he refers to as "black pneuma," which is the "capacity for the plural movement and displacement of inhalation and exhalation to enunciate life," Crawley argues that this has the capacity to exceed the totalizing capacity of gratuitous violence (38). Focusing on Black Pentecostal preachers such as Dorinda Clark-Cole and Juandolyn Stokes use "whooping" and vocals such as "hah" and "tuh," Crawley illuminates how breathing constitutes a "resource from which to perform resistance that is prior to power and whooping is but one audible example of such performance" (48). The biocentric uses of air, to breathe, to live, and enact speech, is available to all, but the point of gratuitous violence per my reading of Opoku-Agyemang is that breath can be taken from the black body at any time without consequence. To insist that breathing enacts resistance takes for granted how air's absence for black-bodied people has engineered a kind of eugenics or selection process, that in earnestness starts from the moment the black is objectified as a slave and continues through the airless slave dungeons through to the hold of the slave ship.

Cape Coast Castle functions as a site where the multiple trajectories of black history culminate. It serves as an origin for thinking through air and its absence. In "Eclipse" Opoku-Agyemang writes,

> NOTHING COULD BE simpler
> History simplified as a castle
> The wind stands mouthing
> Nothing can be heard
> Except the rainroar of the past
>
> It was dark then, it is dark now (40)

Oyeniyi Okunoye reads this poem as evidence of Opoku-Agyemang's reliance on the castle and sea as images that are "demonized." The castle is "a torture chamber, an indecent grave and an arrogant monument that conceals the atrocities of its interior by outwardly appearing white" (68-69). The castle is a structural testimony of the seemingly "forgotten" history of the slave trade. It is also testimony to how thoroughly the erasure or revision of the slave trade's salience to continental Africans has permeated these nation-states. For the poet, there is nothing "simpler" than the monumentalizing of the transatlantic slave trade and slavery in the built structure that bears witness to this violent history; yet the chaos and choreography of forgetting muddles that simplicity. Even the weather attempts to articulate by "mouthing" and "roaring" what remains so profoundly hidden in the psyche of the nation and its memory (ll. 3 and 4). It is this forgetting, that according to Opoku-Agyemang, ensures the continuing "darkness." In the act of looking backward and facing forward simultaneously, he says towards the end of the poem, "Give memory nothing/ And it is darker still tomorrow" (40).

In *Cape Coast Castle*, airlessness extends beyond the space underneath the castle; it permeates the dream-scape. The dungeon, in Opoku-Agyemang's work, extends beyond the space underneath the castle, it is reconstituted in the slave ship and the nation-state. The poem,

"In the dungeon" speaks about the castle as "a dream/ Without windows" (49). It is a space constructed with no outlets for air. Whatever is within it is trapped. It is a space shared with animals, where the "wet-eyed" dogs wander, and where, "A slave is as naked/ As a peeled vein/ In a dream" (49). The proximity between animal and slave, the insistence on comparing the nudity of the slave to blood in a dream, signals the slaves' ongoing dehumanization. The connection between animal and slave that made Europeans suspect that the Black was something other than human, something less than but never equal to, functioned as a license to violence. The poem understands the castle as a kind of unconscious, one that is airless, because it is without windows. It alludes to Cape Coast Castle both as a slave fort, and later as the seat of British colonial government, and much later as a prison. I also want to venture a reading of the dungeon become a castle, in this poem, as a nod to, and extension of, Fanon's sense of colonial compartmentalization, where the "native" "world has no space, and people are piled onto of the other, … [and] squeezed tightly together," as opposed to the "sated, sluggish sector" of the colonized strategically located on the higher plains and plains (4). The colonizer's space is designed for the free flow of air, while the colonized is forced to live in airless conditions. Anyone who has ever seen a picture of Cape Coast Castle can attest to its many windows and doorways, but the poet is describing what is unsee-able in those scenic pictures of the white castle, it is the dungeons underneath it, where one enters from one door and comes out the other. There are no windows in these dark cavernous dungeons, and there are no inlets for air.

Whereas we can guess the darkness of the dungeon through the many torches that are needed to make this space visible to the cinematic audience in *Sankofa*, the airlessness of the slave dungeons, and its continuing strangulation of Black bodied persons is beyond the scope of the camera. The relationship between air and airlessness persistently re-emerges in the enduring

narrative of flying Africans in literary and artistic works, in the erasure of these narratives from modern histories of the technology of air travel, and on the streets of New York where Eric Garner repeatedly pleaded/asserted: "I can't breathe." "Many died from a lack of air," writes Opoku-Agyemang in *Cape Coast Castle*, many continue to die of a lack of air. Unlike Ashon Crawley, for instance, who understands Eric Garner's "I can't breathe" as a moment to begin theorizing and living otherwise, I see Garner's words as part of Opoku-Agyemang's understanding of how airlessness permeates Black existence. In uttering the words that so inspired Crawley, Garner gives voice to what Christina Sharpe refers to as "monstrous intimacies"— "a set of known and unknown performances and inhabited horrors, desires and positions produced, reproduced, circulated, and transmitted, that are *breathed in like air* and often unacknowledged to be monstrous" (3 emphasis mine). These intimacies are so normalized that their resonances are easy to overlook.

Before Garner, the absence of air in the slave dungeon is experienced by those who, while visiting the slave dungeon, are overcome with a sense of strangulation or dizziness or breathlessness. Michelle Commander in *Afro-Atlantic Flight: Speculative Returns and the Black Fantastic* writes about Seestah Imahküs, who describes her experiences at Elmina Castle thus, "As the Guide continued to describe the horrors of these pits of hell I began to shake violently; I was being smothered. I turned and ran up the steep incline of the tunnel, to the castle courtyard, the winds from the sea whipping my face, bringing me back to the present" (87). Saidiya Hartman also describes the difficulty of breathing in the dungeons. She writes: "The hollow inside my chest expanded. I could feel my torso bulge and distend like a corpse swelling with gasses. And the emptiness was a huge balloon expanding inside me and pressing against my organs until I could no longer breathe and was about to explode. Five minutes back in the

sunlight, and I was breathing easily again. No one could discern it was just the husk and not really me (118). I am not attempting to explain away Seestah Imahküs or Hartman's encounters in the dungeon. Rather, I am proposing that we pay closer attention to how both Hartman and Seestah Imahküs re-narrate these encounters in the dungeon through a schema of which air and airlessness are a fundamental constitutive element. In Hartman's description, she sees herself becoming a corpse and re-emerging not as a fully constituted person, but as a husk, an outer covering that hides the emptiness within, as flesh. She foregrounds the absence of air as the absence of humanity. Hartman's living-dead fleshiness is reminiscent of Aimé Césaire's definition of colonization as a process that turns the colonized into an object. Airlessness is perhaps the primal scene of what Césaire describes as *thingfication*, "relations of domination and submission" that transforms the "colonizing man into a classroom monitor, an army sergeant, a prison guard, a slave driver, and the indigenous man into an instrument of production" (42). It is through the airless dungeons that the slave, the Black, the colonized, and Hartman are stripped of life, and remerge as a husk, a thing to be monitored, and controlled by the instruments of violence.

By theorizing the ongoing violence of slavery through the many ways that Cape Coast Castle mediates black existence as an absence of air, Opoku-Agyemang offers insights through a mode of questioning that connects continental Africa to its many diasporas. If part of the de-humanization or the removal of life from the slave begins with deprivation of air in the slave dungeons, can this lack help us ask different questions of the narratives of blackness that stipulates air as a pathway, as a bodily function, as technology, as the place where blackness is unmade and molded by capital? I believe it can, and there are echoes of this in Opoku-Agyemang's collection and other forms of black literary imaginary. Opoku-Agyemang's

airlessness allows for understanding the deprivation of air as permeating the past and present of the nation-state and its people. Additionally, Opoku-Agyemang is also clear about the on-going conditions that are created and sustained through the absence of air. "There is a chill," Opoku-Agyemang writes at the end of "In the Dungeon," "And it is not over yet" (49). It is not merely the continuing legacy of Cape Coast Castle that Opoku-Agyemang's work illuminates, it is also the conditions of Black existence under a constant threat and possibility of enslavement, of being deprived of air. Opoku-Agyemang's poems activate a confrontation with the "vast dark cave[s]" of slavery not only as the absence of freedom but as a practice that deprives the slave of basic human needs of bodily survival, air, as means to curtail any "meaningful human expressions" that might catapult the slave to humanness.

In *Lose Your Mother*, Saidiya Hartman recounts meeting Kwadwo Opoku-Agyemang armed with a question that his collection of poems raised for her. Her question, "Where are the mourners?" emanated from Opoku-Agymang's imagining in *Cape Coast Castle* of the conditions of life for those whose sons, daughters, and family had been captured and sold into trans-Atlantic slavery. Opoku-Agyemang answers and does not answer her question. He says, "We, as Africans, are ashamed for our participation in the slave trade, and for this reason are unwilling to talk about the very issue that brings most of you here. And on both sides, there is ignorance and a failure to understand one another's lives" (73). Finding this answer unsatisfactory, Hartman responds, "It was his way of telling me there weren't any mourners" (73). Having explained the significance of mourning to Ghanaians, Hartman recalls a line from Opoku-Agyemang's poem, "Africa was a land of graves without bodies" and ascertains the absence of mourners as evidence of her indictment of Ghanaians and their lack of critical posture towards slavery. But there are other questions and routes of inquiry here. Can ghost mourn, can ghost perform the functions of

mourning and breathing? Hartman begins to answer her question when she asks rhetorically, "but it made no mention of mourners because the graves were empty?". [51] She wonders and accuses, perhaps rightly so, what she reads as forgetting. This absence of a re-membering practice can also be interpreted as the successful project of colonial epistemology that separates the temporality of continental Africans from Black existence globally in order to render invisible the shared original wound of slavery.

Would it have been possible for Opoku-Agyemang to locate the mourners of slavery in modern Ghana? If we take Hartman's question and reframe it as a question of time, if we change "Where are the mourners?" to "When is the mourning?" we begin to glean why Opoku-Agyemang's use of airlessness is pivotal to understanding slavery and its aftermath for Black bodied persons in the African diaspora and on the continent. The conditions of slavery and its aftermaths were of violence and terror, but the conditions of black life on the continent, as Achille Mbembe's work depicts, is also one of continuing terror whose tragedy remains deep-seated in physical and psychological trauma of the slave trade and colonial rule. What we read in Opoku-Agyemang's work is an understanding that mourning cannot exist on a continent unaware of its past and continuing complicity.

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[51] The brilliance of Hartman's book is its cogent attention to the ongoing logic of slavery and the peculiar "afterlives" it produces both in the United States and across the African continent. The criticisms of *Lose Your Mother*, such as by Ato Quayson in "Postcolonialism and the Diasporic Imaginary", stems from what has been read as her foreclosing of peculiar afterlives for Africans by choosing the "dungeon" over the "ancestral village" and thus forcing those she encounters into an ethical gird that can be interpreted as fixed (150-151). I agree that this kind of forced "ontological and corporal integrity or unity" placed onto Africans as Mlondi Zondi called it during a personal conversation, assigned to Africans (specifically Ghanaians) is misleading, and Opoku-Agyemang's introduction and poetry provides an astute articulation of the ontological positioning that emerges through slavery and the dungeon.

Flying Not Like Airplane, Not like Superman: Air, Flying, and Aviation in *Song of Solomon*

   Song of Solomon begins with flying, with a note tacked onto the outer side of a door, "a mild invitation" to witness Robert Smith's flight: "At 3.00 p.m. on Wednesday the 18th of February, I will take off from Mercy and fly away on my own wings. Please forgive me, I loved you all. (signed) Robert Smith, Ins. Agent" (1).[52] This "promise" translates Smith's affection for the community into a singular act of love—flying (a move much like his profession as an insurance agent where he translates the familial intimacy of the domestic sphere into the calculable index of numbers, the legible workings of capital). [53] His flight, the first one in the novel, sets a trend that situates male flight as communal, public events, remembered, and historicized by the community. The women and children burden of witnessing these flights, and living through their remains; it is on them that the legacy of these air-bound men survives on/in/ through their bodies and memories. These "magical," or "theatrical," "heroic," and even quotidian flights often interpreted as Morrison's rewriting of the myth of flying Africans, when situated within aviation's transformation of air space elicits a closer examination of air, blackness, and the role of aviation. By placing Smith's flight within the context of Lindbergh 's

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[52] In the foreword to the Vintage edition of *Song of Solomon*, Toni Morrison credits her father's death for propelling her to shift her attention from the domestic site of Black life to the other side of the door, into the community (xi). In her essay, "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature," Morrison posits that Robert Smith's actions are gestures that sought to "enclose rather than repudiate" the community (191). She further explains that the note that Smith tacks onto his door is a "mild invitation," not an advertisement (191). An advertisement announces in the most convincing possible way a product or event, while Smith's merely calls to passersby and declares love and seeks forgiveness.

[53] I use the word "contract" because I agree with Toni Morrison that the note Robert Smith tacks to his door act as a kind of bond between him and the community. Melvin Dixon interprets Morrison's deployment of flight as a corrective to Ellison's *Invisible Man*, where the protagonist chooses hibernation at the end of the novel. In his essay, "Like an Eagle in the Air: Toni Morrison" he asserts that Robert Smith 's flight is not flight, because it is staged at a "foreign, outer terrain of the hospital roof," involves artificial "wide blue silk wings curved forward" and results in an "undignified, clumsy fall" needs remedying by Milkman's flight (39). Nevertheless, it is Smith's flight, however clumsy, that is the catalyst for all of the other flights in the novel. Without Robert Smith, Milkman's, Pilate's, and Guitar's flight might not be possible.

transatlantic flight three years earlier (in 1927), *Song of Solomon*, right from the beginning

entangles air, flying, and blackness with aviation.

If Opoku-Agyemang's *Cape Coast Castle* delineates the way that the absence of air crafts

and pursues black life and death, then Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* marks a kind of

interregnum where air constitutes the narrative center of tales like the flying Africans as well as

the development, militarization, and commercialization of aviation. Air, or the ability to publicly

take to the air in its many iterations, is rooted in the complex interplay between access to

aviation, blackness, and communal memory. Even as air erects and sustains the pathway to a

black public, as we see with male characters like Robert Smith, Solomon (Shalimar), and Jack

(Macon Dead), it signals a stasis/a stagnation, a kind geopolitical nowhere because it has no

destination.[54] Air as a site of black communal and public becoming, in *Song of Solomon*, is never

available to women, and the many examples of male flight and female rootedness culminate into

an episteme of flight that *Song of Solomon* revises, critiques and undermines.

There is a well-rehearsed index of air in black literary analysis that considers the long

tradition of folklore, myth, and stories about African slaves flying home, flying to freedom, and

since slavery, these stories have taken on various forms to explain, elucidate the conditions of

black existence. In these stories, found throughout the African diaspora, the enslaved by reciting

a phrase in an indigenous language, by refraining from eating salt or in need of an escape, one

can levitate and fly away. For instance, in the Georgia Writers' Project's *Drums and Shadows*

Carrie Hamilton recounts the story of a man and his wife who, after being tricked on board a

slave ship and brought to St. Helena bid their fellow slaves' goodbye and flew away (48).

Similarly, another man, called Uncle Jack, recounts a group of slaves from Africa who could fly,

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[54] I characterize it as such because those who take to the air do not necessarily go anywhere.

and one day they "fly up" and flew away (89). These myths/stories not only gestured towards an "imagination of supernatural power" and return, but they also rationalized suicide as a form of rebellion against the institution of slavery.[55] Death through air became a means to transcend a life of social death. For others, the vast and deep reaches of the myth by those spaces "touched by the Atlantic slave trade" speaks to a "counter discursive historiography of slavery."[56] These stories continuing presence in Black literature, and Black women's works in particular, as some have argued, is an indication that these women follow in the tradition of African women as a "custodians" of cultural-historical narratives that imagine worlds founded on "alternative modes of being."[57] The many intricate workings of the myth/stories of flying Africans in these and other critical discourse, all seem to agree that these stories underwent revisions as the conditions of Black life shifted.

These stories were affected by the developments and commercialization of aviation. Katherine Thorsteinson, for instance, writes about the various historical movements such as Garvey's "Back to Africa," Kwame Nkrumah's attempt (and failure) at a pan-African state open to continental and diasporic Africans, and the civil rights movement, shifted the way that African-Americans viewed their place within the nation-state. These shifts meant that the stories/myths of flying Africans slowly began to fade from popular black imagery or to exist in forms such as the one we encounter in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*.[58]

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[55] See Lorna McDaniels (1990) "The Flying Africans: Extent and Strength of the Myth in the Americas" (32) and Snyder, Terri L. "Suicide, Slavery, and Memory in North America." *The Journal of American History*, vol. 97, no. 1, 2010, pp. 39–62.

[56] Wendy W. Walters (1997), ""One of Dese Mornings, Bright and Fair,/Take My Wings and Cleave De Air": The Legend of the Flying Africans and Diasporic Consciousness" (4)

[57] Gay Wilentz (1989-1990), "If You Surrender to the Air: Folk Legends of Flight and Resistance in African American Literature"

[58] Thorsteinson explains that with the development of aviation technology, stories of flying Africans underwent revisions until it was no longer the reference point for Smith's audience, as exemplified by Lindbergh's attraction of a larger audience than Smith (272-273). Though there is much value in Thorsteinson's analyses, the communities in

The narrative in *Song of Solomon* begins during the golden age of aviation. Making it particularly poignant that male characters enamored by flight do not concentrate their desire on airplanes, but rather on flying not like superman or an airplane but "floating, cruising, in a relaxed position of a man lying on a couch reading a newspaper" (298).[59] Even where well-known black aviators such as the three Tuskegee airmen (332nd Fighter Group) are present, Milkman and Guitar are more concerned with not being able to purchase a beer than they are with flying (57). Interestingly, it is to Smith that Milkman hinges his desire to fly and when he discovers at four years old that "only birds and airplanes could fly," he loses interest in himself (9). Aviation is not Milkman's primary point of reference. Unlike Ajax in Morrison's other novel, *Sula*, whose love for airplanes is only rivaled by his love for his mother, Milkman seems surprisingly disinterested in airplanes except as means of escape.

Morrison's conveys with factual certainty Smith's flight and its relation to Lindbergh's transatlantic flight.[60] A tone that takes for granted the temporal simultaneity of Smith's flight with the "golden age" of aviation technology (interwar period 1918-1939) where air shows, races, and daring feats dominated the news and the air. It is an age where technology, especially aviation, enthralled many black engineers and inventors, many of whom will go to France to

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Song of Solomon who witnessed flying Africans and for whom the references to flying Africans would make sense are those in the South like the Gullah community where these stories have persisted. The characters whom Thorsteinson cites as not recognizing the connection between Smith's flight and this genealogy of flying African narratives are the one the white hospital staff who have no idea what is going on in the first place, and can only locate this black gathering as solely for the purposes of "racial-uplift" and protest (6).

[59] In chapter two, I examine more closely what the airplane meant for black male writers like Ralph Ellison, whose characters are enamored by the airplane or are subjected to Jim Crow violence amidst technological advancement in commercial aviation.

[60] In her essay, "Unspeakable Things Spoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature," Toni Morrison posits about *Song of Solomon*'s beginning sentence, "This declarative sentence is designed to mock a journalistic style; with a minor alteration it could be the opening item in a small-town newspaper. It has the tone of an everyday event of minimal local interest, yet I wanted it to contain (as does the scene that takes place when the agent fulfills his promise) the information that *Song of Solomon* both centers on and radiates from" (189-190).

become pilots.[61] The racism of the United States and the U.S. Army Air Corps meant air-minded

blacks in the United States had to travel to France to attend flying school. The air, in the golden

age of aviation, is as much a commodity as it is a territory.[62] Moreover, the many aviators and

engineers who achieved fame and economic stability through the commodification of air are

numerous and primarily white. Morrison diverges from this path, choosing air's more profound

and most direct relation to black historical and narrative traditions. The novel directs our

attention to a genealogy of air steeped in Black narrative tradition even as it sets these against the

backdrop of commercial aviation.

Within the narrative scope of the novel, Smith's actual flight is rather short, and Morrison

chooses a rather cinematic move of panning to spectators and each of their concerns that

culminates into a rather short all-too-concise statement that he leaped into the air. The

descriptive paragraph about Smith and his place within the community is unequal to the short

paragraph that reports his initial slip and ensuing flight: [63]

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[61] Many Black pilots traveled to France to attend flight school. One such person was Sosthene H. Mortenol, who was born in Guadeloupe in 1859. Mortenol would command the French air defenses. The first African-American to fly was Eugene Jacques Bullard, who was born in Columbus, Georgia, in 1894. After completing flying school, Bullard joined the French air combat team headed by Felix Brocard. When the US joined the first world war, he tried to join the ranks of the U.S. Army Air Corps but was denied entry because of the racism. At the beginning of the Second World War, he enlisted in the French Underground and was a spy for the Free French. Bessie Coleman, the first black female aviator, also went to France to obtain her pilot license in 1921 from the Fédération Aéronautique Internationale. Coleman attained her license two years before Amelia Earhart started her flying career (12-14). Coleman would return to the US with plans of setting up a flying school, but she died suddenly in a crash. See Samuel L. Broadnax's *Blue Skies, Black Wings: African American Pioneers of Aviation* (2007).

[62] Chandra D. Bhimull in *Empire in the Air: Airline Travel and the African Diaspora* draws on James Baldwin's *Notes on a Native Son* asserts that "air is territory" and explains that air is also "valuable, a commodity not unlike those tied to slavery" (19).

[63] "They kidded him, abused him, told their children to tell him they were out or sick or gone to Pittsburgh. But they held on to those little yellow cards as though they meant something—laid them gently in the shoe box along with the rent receipts, marriage licenses, and expired factory identification badges, Mr. Smith smiles through it all, managing to keep his eyes focused almost the whole time on his customers' feet. He wore a business suit for his work, but his house was no better than theirs. He never had a woman that any of them knew about and said nothing in church but an occasional "Amen." He never beat anybody up and he wasn't seen after dark, so they thought he was probably a nice man. But he was heavily associated with illness and death, neither of which was distinguishable from the brown picture of the North Carolina Mutual Life Building on the back of their yellow cards. Jumping from the roof of

> Mr. Smith had lost his balance for a second, and was trying gallantly to hold on to a triangle of wood that jutted from the cupola. Immediately the singing woman began again:
>
> > *O Sugarman done fly*
> > *O Sugarman done gone ...*
>
> Downtown the firemen pulled on their greatcoats, but when they arrived at Mercy, Mr. Smith had seen the rose petals, heard the music, and leaped on into the *air*. (9)

Air encapsulates all of the many possibilities of Smith's flight; it is an unstated fact of death and life, of "things not only unthought but also perhaps unthinkable."[64] These short, direct turns to air are easy to overlook until it increasingly becomes obvious that air is not without significance in this novel. This sparse-ness is repeated later in the novel when Pilate Dead recounts to Milkman what happened to their father (his grandfather): "They blew him five feet up into the *air*. He was sitting on his fence waiting for 'em, and they snuck up from behind him blew him five feet into the *air*" (40). This use of air is ordinary enough, suggesting death with such force that gravity loses its grip throwing the body off the ground. Once Milkman's journey unearths Solomon and Macon Dead's ability to fly, air becomes meaningful. It is a "nowhere" where one floats, suspended, and drifting away. Philip Page observes the novel's presentation of "multiple lines, multiple reactions, and multiple versions of a topic or an entity, demonstrate[ing] that no single thread is adequate" (109). Following Page, the many repetitions of air in the novel suggest that no singular instance of air is adequate to understand how it encapsulates the making and unmaking of blackness. It is unknowable enough/ open-ended enough that earlier events and

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Mercy was the most interesting thing he had done. None of them had suspected he had it in him. Just goes to show, they murmured to each other, you never really do know about people" (Morrison 8-9).

[64] I am borrowing this phrase from Jared Sexton's interview with Daniel Colucciello Barber "On Black Negativity, or the Affirmation of Nothing" where he asserts that "Black studies as a field is, or black studies as iterations of an internally differentiated project are, involved in an ongoing attempt to think about things not only unthought but also perhaps unthinkable" (6).

their interpretation must be reexamined once Milkman begins to understand who his ancestors were. Milkman's journey to find his ancestors emphasizes Griffin's assertion that the South in African American migration narratives allows for "meeting the ancestors," and "lynching scenes" (3). It is the search for ancestors that guides Milkman's journey to the South, while in the next chapter, I examine a lynching scene and its relation to aviation in the American South. In the narratives where the ancestors are pivotal to the narrative arch, the South is represented as "a place where black blood earns a black birthright to the land, a locus of history, culture, and possible redemption" (5). Milkman's journey to the South brings him in contact with his ancestors, but also with those who continue to live and work in the South. Though his ultimate goal is to find gold, Milkman's purpose alters along the way to finding out about his ancestors. Through this journey, Milkman begins to learn from, and connect with the people who continue to live in the South. Moreover, it is both the ancestors, as well as his contemporaries who guide him towards his family's past.

The air in *Song of Solomon* is not only for breathing; it is for flying, floating, drifting. While the ability to fly guarantees a kind of communal immortality. Smith's "leap into the air" transforms his life from inevitable demise into communal memory. Before his flight, Smith is a predictable fixture. He is closely associated with sickness, death, and monthly necessity of insurance ("But he was heavily associated with illness and death, neither of which was distinguishable from the brown picture of the North Carolina Mutual Life Building on the back of their yellow cards" (8)). Taking to the air paves the way for others also to fly. Smith leap into the air is also a leap into the fantastic death of Black life—always happening and only captured on camera on rare occasions—haunts and directs the novel. Unlike the other forms of human flight in the novel that are removed from "the eye" of the community per se, Smith's flight

happens under the supervision of the community who inadvertently honored Smith's contract. It is the fireman, the rose petals, and the singing that propels Smith to make his leap into the air.

In *Song of Solomon*, air oscillates between vitality, death, and escape. For Milkman, air's vacillations become manifested in his continual attempt to escape from his parents, his community, and the airlessness that engulfs his life. Though it starts with Milkman's documenting how Guitar is changing, notably Guitar's ability to "change the air" through words, it is Milkman's responses to these changes that activate the circulation of air or the absence thereof in the novel (116). This becomes apparent when Milkman recounts his dream in which he witnesses his mother being strangled by the flowers she plants. "He knew they were dangerous," Milkman says, "that they would soon suck up all the air around her and leave her limp on the ground. But she didn't seem to guess this at all" (105). Guitar concludes that Milkman's dream is as much about Milkman's indictment of his mother's perverse relationship with her father as it is about Milkman's careless relationship with those closest to him. Even as Milkman comes to terms with what he *knows* as he observes his mother, Guitar also constitutes/reconstitute his condemnation of Milkman. Milkman's "light-hearted" retelling of his dream where his mother's life is under threat spurs on Guitar towards an unforgivingly critical response to Milkman's "passive" witnessing of his mother's passing. This "light-hearted" tone mitigates the horror of this "losing" of the mother, and elicits a response that is clear, accusatory, direct: "Why didn't you help her?... Help her. Pull her out from underneath" (105). And Milkman's response, "But she liked it. She was having fun. She liked it. … It was my dream" followed by Guitar's response, "Are you sure? … It was *your* mother too" (105). The mother "marked" for death facilitates Milkman's hope for escape, even as her death is only witnessed within the paradigm of pleasure that ignores her unregistered, unknowable response to her death. The triangulation of

dream, pleasure, and death happen beyond the control of the black mother, whose progeny, both her son and her plants, becomes the instrument and witnesses of her suffocation. Defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as "to kill by stopping the supply of air to the lungs; to cause difficulty in breathing; to feel trapped and oppressed," suffocation prevents the flow of air from reaching the lungs.[65] Milkman's dream punishes and traps (the other meaning of suffocation) his mother in this airless death in order to escape from her. In killing the mother, he can now escape into the genealogy of his father.

Guitar, too, dreams of air and flight. But unlike Milkman whose dreams are tethered to a deep-seated search for selfhood, Guitar's dreams are rooted in the fulfillment of "divine" act of avenging black death, as retribution ("four little colored girls…blown out of a church, and his mission was to approximate as best he could a similar death of four little white girls some Sunday since he was the Sunday man" (173).) Guitar translates this act of vengeance into his dream of air:

> Little scraps of Sunday dresses—white and purple, powder blue, pink and white, lace and voile, velvet and silk, cotton and satin, eyelet and grosgrain. The scraps stayed with him all night and he remembered Magdalena called Lena and Corinthians bending in the wind to catch the heart-red pieces of velvet that had floated under the gaze of Mr. Robert Smith. Only Guitar's scraps were different. The bits of Sunday dresses that he saw did not fly; they hung in the air quietly, like the whole notes in the last measure of an Easter hymn. (173)

Air, in Guitar's dream, is a place where things linger, things that haunt the unconscious, woven in, and through Guitar's memories of Smith's flight. It is not a territory to be possessed and commodified; it is nowhere. Whereas Smith imagined a path for his flight, Guitar dwells in the interstices of the air and holds therein "quietly" things/people/sounds that weigh heavily on any equation of Black flight as freedom. Guitar's understands suspension as part of the grammar of

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[65] Definition from the Oxford English Dictionary

air. Unlike Milkman's deeply ingrained middle-class understanding of air and flying as inevitably escape, Guitar's dream considers air and flying as a refusal of movement in any direction. Air is a space/place that captures Black flight in "suspension." Guitar's dream in refusing movement also calls into question the possibility of flight directed towards freedom by emphasizing that not all things that take to the air fly or have the potential to fly, often they are suspended outside time, outside the order of the world. Guitar's suspended scrapes of Sunday dress that do not fly mark terrain that can hold the past, even as it incorporates the new territoriality often imagined as free.

Guitar's divines the difficulty of reparative acts such as the one that the seven days undertake by depicting how changing the logic of white supremacy, racism always already render such action an impossibility. Guitar explains how the work of the Seven Days, the secret society of seven black men who avenge the murder of black persons, would have to adapt by stating that "assignments of the Days would more and more be the killing of white people in groups since more and more Negroes were being killed in groups" (173). Guitar realizes that attempts at reparative acts, deadly or otherwise, can never equal the continuing and changing systems of white supremacy, racism, and anti-blackness. In being handed this task of avenging the killing of black girls in the16th Street Baptist Church bombing in Birmingham, Alabama, on Sunday, September 15th, 1963, Guitar struggles to equate the value of dead black children to dead white children. Guitar's inability to avenge what Martin Luther King Jr. referred to as a "vicious and tragic crime" because of a lack of resources also suggests that the Days and the acts of

reparation and vengeance it represents cannot follow apace with the vast resources harnessed to inflict death onto Black people.[66]

If air in its many reiterations moves across these forms of vitality, death and escape, then there is no better culmination point than Pilate's song that accompanies Smith's flight, that she sings with her daughter and granddaughter, the same one that the children in Shalimar sing and perform in hopes of their own flight, and the one that Pilate too, will demand of Milkman as she dies, and Milkman will ultimately "sing" in his leap with Guitar.

> O Sugarman don't leave me here
> Cotton balls to choke me
> O Sugarman don't leave me here
> Buckra's arms to yoke me…
>
> O Sugarman done fly away
> Sugarman done gone
> Sugarman cut across the sky
> Sugarman gone home…. (7 and 303)

This song accompanies Milkman's life. It is repeated and extended at each pivotal moment. Music, according to Melvin Dixon, "creates landscape, defines space and [a] territory the singer and protagonist can claim" (14). It is by no coincidence that it is through music that Milkman uncovers his family's history (14). This song of abandonment reenacts the forgotten family history that Milkman has been seeking. Interestingly, this song provides tells of other histories, too, of slavery and its violence imposition on the black by blocking air from the body. In the lines: "Cotton balls to choke me" and "Buckra's arms to yoke me…" we get a vivid image of slavery and drudgery. And it is this violent history and present that Milkman finally comes to

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[66] This is from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. funeral eulogy for the four girls, Addie Mae Collins, Cynthia Wesley, Carole Robertson, and Carol Denise McNair, who died in the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing in Birmingham: "These children – the unoffending, innocent and beautiful – were the victims of one of the most vicious and tragic crimes ever perpetuated against humanity".

terms with when revises the song to fulfill Pilate's dying wish for him to sing, the song remains

about not being left to the violence of slavery, "Sugargirl don't leave me here/ Cotton balls to

choke me/ Sugargirl don't leave me here/ Bukra's arms to yoke me" (336). Through these

revisions, Milkman creates space for women in these flights, but also in the genealogy of slavery.

No longer does he disavow the mother in order to pursue the father's genealogy, but surrenders

to the love that he discovers as Pilate dies.

In the foreword to the novel, Morrison explains that the significance of the words "fly"

and "mercy" in the novel (xiii). She writes:

> Two words of significance are "fly" and "mercy." Both terms are central to the narrative: *flight as escape or confrontation*; mercy the unspoken wish of the novel's population…. The insurance agent does not declare, announce, or threaten his act; he promises, as though a contract is being executed between himself and others. He hopes his flight, like that of the character in the title, toward asylum (Canada, or freedom, or the company of the welcoming dead), or home, is interpreted as a radical gesture demanding change, an alternative way, a cessation of things as they are. He does not want it understood as a simple desperate act, the end of a fruitless life, a life without examination, but as a deep commitment to his people. And in their response to his decision there is tenderness, some contrition, and mounting respect ("They didn't know he had it in him"), an awareness that his suicide enclosed, rather than repudiate them…
>
> Of the flights in the novel, Solomon's is the most magical, the most theatrical, and, for Milkman, the most satisfying. Unlike most mythical flights, which clearly imply triumph, in an attempt of not the success, Solomon's escape, the insurance man's jump, and Milkman's leap are ambiguous, disturbing. Solomon's escape from slavery is also the abandonment of his family; the insurance man leaves a message saying his suicide is a gesture of love, but guilt and despair inform his decision. Milkman believes he is risking his life in return for Pilate's, yet he knows his enemy has disarmed himself. These flights, these erstwhile heroics, are viewed rather differently by the women left behind. Both the quotation and the song of the title fairly shout that different understanding. To praise a woman whose attention was focused solely on family and domestic responsibilities, Milkman summons a conundrum: that without ever leaving the ground she could fly. (xiii-xiv)

In Morrison's analysis of the word "fly," she invokes different purposes and means for the

characters, who attempt it. For the male characters, these flights are ambiguous, with motivations

that are not always clear. Yet it is Pilate's flight that invokes the conundrum, that "without ever leaving the ground, she could fly" (336). I read this conundrum first and foremost as an opportunity to turn more fully towards the women who are left behind when the air becomes a viable pathway towards escape, freedom, and death for black men (336).

Indeed, in the moments when men leap into the air and/or fly, the women appear as supporting figures. Their roles are not necessarily diminutive because in the remembrance and the narratives of these fantastic feats, the women, and the children, become the unsettling detail, suturing onto these possibilities of Black freedom the continuing index of slavery. Pilate's singing as Smith leaps into the air, or Ryna's lasting cry/ scream as Solomon flies away with Jake (later Macon Dead), and Hagar's abandonment by Milkman as he pursues his family's fantastic past, tempers any celebration of these flights. It is not merely that the women's view of these flights is different; the women's view of these flights disturbs, haunts, and un-suture flight as an escape, flight as freedom, flight as futurity. Milkman acts as the intermediary between Smith's "leap into the air," Solomon's flying, Macon Dead's command to sing to fly enables Pilate to fly even while grounded. Thus, it is through Milkman that Pilate flies and the women's grounded-ness becomes evident. Milkman, through his journey, and his "travel companions" Guitar and Pilate offer a paradigm of flight where Pilate's ability to take to the air without "ever flying" can be juxtaposed with Ryna's cry/scream/howl or with Hagar's mirror, and Sweet's questions. Each of these women assists in Milkman's coming into awareness that the episteme of black flight if there is one, is enacted through gendered violence.

After Milkman's initial excitement upon discovering that his great grandfather and his grandfather flew, he is untroubled by what this flight meant for the women and children who remained grounded: "He could fly! You hear me? My great granddaddy could fly! Goddam,"

and a page later, he continues, "That motherfucker could fly! Could fly! He didn't need no airplane" (328-329). Milkman's enthusiasm is borne out of his belief that flight is always an escape from harsh realities, from an unbearable condition, into freedom. The women in Milkman's life, who guide his journey, curb his enthusiastic reactions by articulating the questions that he is unable to foresee or to predict. They lead him to question what flying means for those unable to take to the air. For instance, in response to Milkman's excitement and revelry, Sweets ask him, "Where'd he go, Macon? ...Who'd he leave behind?" (328). There is something deeply unsatisfactory about Milkman's generalizing in his response, "Back to Africa. Tell Guitar he went back to Africa" and "Everybody! He left everybody down on the ground and he sailed on off like an eagle" (328). The flight "back to Africa" is a trope of ultimate return to an imagined point of origin and the escape from "everybody" the ultimate escape from the things that tether one to land. Milkman's celebration of this leap into the air, of flight, is short-lived when he is confronted with the deadly results of his abandonment of Hagar. It is only through Hagar's death, and Pilate's forgiveness that he begins to realize that like all fictions of freedom, flying or leaping into the air may seem like "refuge" only to those who ignore those left screaming or dying or desiring to also leap into the air.

There are other characters in *Song of Solomon* who are unable to escape the violence of land regardless of the possibility of flying. Michael Awkward in his brilliant reading of the role of the women in the novel, calls these characters "permanently grounded objects" to elucidate how Morrison appropriates the narrative structure of the myth to posit that any "transcendent joy of knowledge-informed male flight" must also deal with the "immeasurable pain of desertion felt by females like Hagar and Ryna" and the duty thrust onto children to remember and long after these feats (494). Perhaps this is why "mercy," as well as "flying/flight," are identified by

Morrison as two of the central concepts that the book excavates and investigates. Milkman

awakening that a leap into the air cannot be an escape for those left crying burdened, and alone,

or desperately hoping also to fly, allows him to be a recipient of mercy.

> While he dreamt of flying, Hagar was dying. Sweet's silvery voice came back to him: "Who'd he leave behind?". He left Ryna behind and twenty children. Twenty-one, since he dropped the one he tried to take with him. And Ryna had thrown herself all over the ground, lost her mind, and was still crying in a ditch. Who looked after those twenty children? Jesus Christ, he left twenty-one children! Guitar and the Days chose never to have children. Shalimar left his, but it was the children who sang about it and kept the story of his leaving alive. (332)

Awkward interprets Milkman's epiphany as the consequence of black flight. He avers that it is

the "complex sometimes unflattering meaning" of Solomon's flight and its abandonment of

"social responsibility" (486). Awkward's reading gets Morrison's practice of unearthing and

centering Black women. However, I am also interested in how children become implicated in

this narrative. The men fly, the women in cry/scream and lose their minds, and the children sing

to keep this narrative alive. If children, like the women, are called to bear witness to male flight

by remembering and keeping them alive, then what is the relationship between air and

childhood? One approach to this question is to think about Milkman's obsession with air and

flight. Upon learning at a young age that only birds and airplanes flew, he lost interest in himself.

Framed as an effect of Mr. Smith's "leap into the air," Milkman's desire to fly foreshadows his

later response to his flying ancestors. Milkman, as an adult, also recognizes the labor of memory

that is thrust onto children. It is the children's game that recites the history of their ancestors that

ultimately leads Milkman to figure out his family history. Once he begins to understand that

male flight is also abandonment, and in some cases death, he is critical of male flight and

understanding of female suffering even as he considers the labor that black flight entrusts upon

children.

Air, in Morrison, is an interlocking concept, both to flight and its dimensions of myth, and to an episteme that is made and revised as different characters are called to steer and circumnavigate the conditions of air. It is perhaps not so puzzling that the end of the novel Milkman attempts to reformulate or retranslate air and flight as tethered to land and a form of surrendering. Soyica Diggs Colbert reads this surrender through the dual lens of black performance and movement, by concluding that this moment of surrender is "a literal difference covered by acoustic similarity that reads a dissonance, if ever so slight, into his flying" (140). However, it seems both from Colbert's discussion of Morrison's re-visioning of the novel, and from Milkman's characterization, and the characterization of all those who fly/flew/leap into the air (Solomon, Jake/Macon Dead, Robert Smith, Milkman, and Guitar) that dissonance governs black flight. Michael Awkward notices that the difference between other narratives of flying Africans and Milkman coming into knowledge about his family's legacy is that "his discovery of the means of transcendence—the liberating black word—is not shared with the tribe" (484). Surrender, like ambiguity, that Morrison and Colbert and others have identified as an implicit force in black flight, seems often read as a letting go of or a difficult to fly ("Can't nobody fly with all that shit. Wanna fly, you got to give up the shit that weighs you down" (179)). Yet Milkman's revisioning of the tenets of Black flight seems to me to exist within a logic of acquisition—acquiring family history, acquiring an understanding of black flight that displaces its male centeredness, and finds a way to expand the possibilities of black flight to include his aunt—and it is by acquiring these that he can undertake his flight. This is not to say that Milkman does not let go of certain things—his material possessions, his sense of entitlement (his working through his sense of what he deserves), and his oft-repeated route of escape taking a plane out of there—yet it is misleading to not also understand that there is some acquisition that

comes with Milkman's surrender. Thus, though surrender encompasses letting go of the materiality the weighs one down, it also includes the many histories and knowledge that one acquires on the way.

Conclusion

> "Breathing the air that could have come straight from a marketplace in Accra, they stood for what seemed to be a very long time." (Morrison 185)

In *Song of Solomon,* air confers a sense of imagined escape for male characters who fly, and signals continued captivity, death, and sorrow for their female counterparts for whom flying is not an option. In *Cape Coast Castle*, the absence of air in the slave dungeon shows how the false bifurcation of slavery from colonialism distorts the postcolony's racial foundation for a political one. *Cape Coast Castle*'s attentiveness to air and its absence is a throughway through which the air in *Song of Solomon* can depict the repeated interrogation of air space as a potential for black flight amid the development of aviation. If the air is *Song of Solomon* is thick, trapping breath and conveying the texture of blackness, it is because *Cape Coast Castle* insists that air's possibility and escape mask its exact multiplicity. [67]

The air, in *Song of Solomon*, is occupied both by black narratives of flight, and commercial and military airplanes. The strides in aviation that occurred during the inter-war period, and subsequently after the Second World War, meant that the air that Milkman dreams of floating and drifting though is being mapped by air-minded men and women and being increasingly subject to commercial aviation's restructuring of airspace. These concerns of the air cannot be disentangled for those of land. In her reading of *Song of Solomon*, Griffin argues that Morrison offers the land as an alternative mode through which black masculinity is defined (43).

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[67] Sasha Engelmann's asserts that a "poetics of air starts from a conception of air as 'thick'" (433). She further explains that this thickness is significant for perceiving how matter is "conveyed in and through air" (433).

Citing Macon Dead's (Milkman's grandfather) sermon of land, where he asserts: "we live here. On this planet, in this nation, in this country right here. Nowhere else! We got a home in this rock, don't you see! … Grab it. Grab this land! Take it, hold it, my brothers, make it, my brothers, shake it, turn it, twist it, beat it, kick it, kiss it, whip it, stomp it, dig it, plow it, seed it, reap it, rent it, buy it, sell it, own it, build it, multiply it, and pass it on—can you hear me? Pass it on!" (qtd. in Griffin 43). Griffin interprets land as the economic object par excellence that allows black people to claim space and self with the American nation-state. She further explains that possession of, and use of, land turned black men into threats of white masculinity, leading to the violence of lynching. Airspace, in *Song of Solomon*, becomes equally valuable as Milkman discovers that his ancestors could fly. Prior to this knowledge of his ancestors, Milkman, as part of the black middle-class, had access to land. Yet what he desired was access to the air, one that is only granted through his ancestors. Unlike Milkman, who eventually gets to "fly," the protagonist of Ralph Ellison's short stories, which I examine in the next chapter, are grounded by lynching, and structural racism. Each must recalibrate what mobility means when confronted with the violent presence of white supremacy.

CHAPTER TWO:

"Into a storm of blood and blackness": Airplanes, Blackness and the Temporality of Technology

> *Guardian Weekly*, March 30-April 5, 2000 (Austria)
> *...In January this year, when police raided the home of*
> *Black Africans in Trainskuche. "One hundred and forty*
> *police stormed the home looking for drugs, but nothing*
> *was found," he [a witness] said. "Then they carried out*
> *painful anal searches, simply because there was some*
> *suspicion that there might be drugs there. All you need is*
> *a black face to be considered suspicious" ... The focal*
> *point of Amnesty's allegations is the case of 25-year-old*
> *Marcus Omofuma, a Nigerian asylum seeker, who died*
> *while being deported from Vienna to Sofia in May last*
> *year. He was bound and gagged "like a mummy stuck to*
> *the seat" by the three officers who accompanied him, and*
> *arrived unconscious in Sofia where doctors pronounced*
> *him dead. No charges were brought.* (Dionne Brand's *A Map to the Door*
> *of No Return*, 46-7)
>
> Hold—a large space in the lower part of a ship or *aircraft* in which cargo
> is stowed. (of a ship or an aircraft); continue to follow (a particular
> course); keep or detain (someone); a fortress. (Christina Sharpe's *In the*
> *Wake: On Blackness and Being*)

When Dionne Brand reproduces (and reassembles) the *Guardian Weekly* story about

Marcus Omofuma's violent death while restrained and gagged in his airplane seat in the course

of his deportation, she reverses the order of the story, foregrounding the witness account of how

the presence of blackness *produces* police violence before the section that recounts the

circumstances leading to his death. She ends where countless other such stories of black violent

death at the hands of the police or other state-sanctioned security forces end, "No charges were

brought" (46-47).[68] In this retelling, Brand adds to the archive of state-sanctioned violence

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[68] Due to the limited perspective of the news, Brand cannot account for the other passengers on board that same flight who witnessed Omofuma's death—some claimed they tried to help, others said the police would not listen to their concerns. There were three autopsies, two suggesting Omofuma died from a lack of oxygen, from an asphyxiation process that would have taken between 20-50 minutes or from massive brain damage resulting from a

against black persons the space of the airplane. Much like Opoku-Agyemang's collection, and Morrison's novel insists on the air as a site for examining captivity, myths, and aviation, Brand's inclusion of Omofuna's death includes in the airplane as a crucial site for interrogating the nexus of blackness, aviation, and transportation. By placing Omofuna's story with those of Abner Louima, a Haitian man who was assaulted, brutalized, and sexually abused by the police after leaving a night club in Brooklyn, and Amadou Diallo who was shot and killed by plain-clothed New York police officers, Brand curates a kind of archive of sites of violent encounters making the airplane a site where black people one can/do die from a lack of air. Omofuma is by no means the only black person to die violently on an airplane; a year prior to his death two Guinean boys were found dead in the cargo hold of a Sabena airplane in Brussels in their attempt to enter Europe.[69] The flight had landed over thirty times before their decomposing bodies were discovered. These deaths shatter the transformative rhetoric of the airplane that too easily allows it to be appropriated as a conduit to freedom, liberation and a sense of belonging in the world through mobility.[70] In conjoining the airplane to blackness, Brand draws on the shared nomenclature between the airplane and the ship. Christina Sharpe also draws attention to this shared nomenclature by foregrounding how the hold—a space where "cargo" is stored—is also a space where black people were kept during the Middle Passage. In other words, the "hold" reappears, reverberates, and haunts these technologies of modern transit. Following the

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deficiency of oxygen in his tissues. The last one claimed it was an embolism worsened by dehydration and being tied up with his mouth taped shut. Ultimately three policemen were found guilty of "careless killing" in 2002 and were sentenced to eight months under a probationary period of three years that enabled them to continue working.
[69] Both Simon Gikandi in "Globalization and the Claims of Postcoloniality" (2001) and James Ferguson's in "Of Mimicry and Membership: 'Africans and the New World Society'" (in his book *Global Shadows: Africa and the Neoliberal World Order*) engage to different extents with the letter that was found with the two Guinean boys.
[70] I am thinking about the forms of Afropolitanism and cosmopolitanism advocated by people like Taiye Selasi and Kwame Anthony Appiah that fail to account for those whose desire for the material benefits of global travel often leads them to dire conditions from which they are unable to extricate themselves. A recent brilliant literary work on these failed global subjects is Imbolo Mbue's *Behold the Dreamers*.

suggestive insights that Brand and Sharpe provide, this chapter examines how the relationship between the airplane and blackness might unveil deeper pathways into understanding the history and logic of violence and its relationship to the airplane. Does the violence of the slave ship find expression in the technology of the airplane? In what ways does the airplane carry the weight of its deployment as a weaponized technology for the death of black people, and the suppression of black political struggle and daily existence globally? How has the airplane contributed to and sustained the high visibility and surveillance of black people, or what Simone Browne calls "black luminosity"? As Browne suggests, "candlelight, flaming torch, or the camera flashbulb," indeed the radar of the airplane document the "ritualized terror" occurring at the "site of the black body" (67). How do airplanes construct new "relations of subjugation" that continue the long history of violence on black bodies?[71]

In this chapter, I ponder these questions by considering the airplane's deep ties, real or metaphorical to black life and forms of dying. The airplane's ties to black experiences are often obscured by its distance from the history of African and Black travel, and civil and political struggle. Unlike other modes of transportation such as the automobile (bus and car), and train, the airplane has been marginal in the key moments of political mobilization for decolonization and civil rights in Africa and the diaspora. This, in part, explains why the automobile and the train have been fertile sites in the study of blackness, global and internal migration, displacement, and travel.[72] The airplane, when it makes an appearance in these moments, is often

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[71] This is a term I borrow from Simone Browne in "Everybody's Got a Little Light under the Sun": The Making of the Book of Negroes" from her book *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness* (2015).

[72] Isabel Wilkerson's *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* accounts for the role of the train in facilitating the exodus of southern black populations to the north of the United States during Jim Crow. Cotten Seiler in *Republic of Drivers: A Cultural History of Automobility in America,* and Paul Gilroy in *Darker than Blue: On the Moral Economies of Black Atlantic Culture* offer a critical analysis of the relationship between race and the automobile in the United States. Indeed, Gilroy is attentive to the ways in which the automobile is implicated in the development of neoliberal capital through Fordist capitalism. More recently, Lindsey

in the service of white supremacy and imperialism to maintain colonial and racial hierarchies. Even at its earlier conception, the airplane's military application was widely investigated. For instance, the airplane was instrumental in destroying and threatening black neighborhoods and suppressing black voters in the United States, as well as dropping bombs and/or napalm on strongholds of armed revolutionary movements. By entangling the airplane to black life, death, and temporality in this chapter, I make visible the complex nuances that Gilroy identified when he chose the ship as the fundamental image of the Black Atlantic—to signify both the violence of the Middle passage and its centrality in the circulation of cultural and political leaders and products. Even while asserting that the real and metaphorical (even metonymic) place of the slave ship in African and Black Studies has rendered the air and aviation an unexplored site in the study of Africa and the African diaspora.

Examining Ralph Ellison's short stories, "A Party Down at the Square" and "Flying Home," I illuminate how this bastion of modernity is inextricably linked to blackness. Blackness' veiled relationship to modernity and technology emanates from blackness' objecthood and the belief that the domain of technology was solely the playground of Euro-American intellectuals and engineers. Excluding those living under conditions of structural and systemic subjection, colonialism and imperialism. When Toni Morrison asserts that "Africans were the first moderns" she distills modernity's peculiar straddling of subjection and technological advancement through the African slave.[73] This forceful insistence on the way black

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B. Green-Simms' work on *Postcolonial Automobile: Car Culture in West Africa* examines how the car in literary and cultural text understand African's relationship to cars and to global modernity and its technologies.

[73] Morrison rescripts views such as Philip Brey's where he asserts that "technology is a central means by which modernity is made possible. It is a catalyst for change and a necessary condition for the functioning of modern institutions" by asserting that Africans (blacks) were the catalyst that initiated and sustained technology and modernity (55). Fred Moten and Stephano Harney also similarly underline how modernity and its infatuation with logistics cannot annul the place of blackness because "modernity is sutured to [the] hold" (93).

bodies, history, and intellect remain fundamental to technologies that ushered in and sustained

modernity is a core lens through which I approach this chapter. I displace the airplane's

entrenched futurity to explore how black life and mobility are woven into the materiality of

technology. This chapter uncovers the ways that the technological modernity of the airplane

enacted shifts in the ways that black bodies traveled, lived, and experienced the violence of

whiteness.

The well-known genealogies of the airplane and aviation diverge from the epicenters of

blackness. Alastair Gordon's history of aviation and its architecture, for instance, focuses

primarily on commercial air travel in the United States by comparing it to Europe where

commercial aviation thrived.[74] When non-Euro-American actors or spaces/places are featured in

Gordon's narrative, it is merely to speak about fueling strips in South America and the

construction of airports in strategic colonial states to support the war efforts of allied forces. Jill

Snider's "Flight to Freedom: African-American Visions of Aviation" attempts to tell another part

of the history of aviation technology through Black inventors who brought airplane and aviation

technology to the forefront of Black experiences in the United States.[75] I tell a story that diverges

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[74] The invention of the Wright Brothers was preceded by several scientists and inventors who attempted to or built a craft heavier than air such as the aerodrome built by Samuel Langley and the engineer Charles Manly. However, the Wright Brothers were the first ones to successfully build one that could fly. Gordon writes a cultural history of the airplane and its accompanying architectural phenomenon, the airport. Gordon explains that airfields were built across the global south in Monrovia, Accra, El Fasher in the Sahara Desert, Khartoum, and finally Cairo to support the Allied forces during the Second World War (134).

[75] Snider examines the many African-American inventors who took up the challenge to build flying machines and/or attempted to improve upon existing airplane design to facilitate their commercial potential or enhance its military applicability. Black aviators such as Charles Wesley Peters and Bessie Coleman learned to fly through white benefactors or by finding a way to travel to Europe to gain the training refused to them in the United States. The United States Air Forces did not allow blacks to enlist until the second World War, in part because aerial combat was deemed too technical or specialized a form of combat. Despite the achievements of the Tuskegee airmen, for instance, the squad remained discriminated against. William Alexander Percy's "Jim Crow and Uncle Sam: The Tuskegee Flying Units and the U.S. Army Air Forces in Europe During World War II" and Alan M. Osur's *Blacks in the Army Air Forces During World War II: The Problems of Race Relation* both provide a comprehensive study of the experiences of blacks in the armed forces.

from Alastair Gordon's and Jill Sniders, by foregrounding literary texts. Like Sharpe, in the epigraph, I move beyond the shared nomenclature between the airplane and the ship, by attending to simultaneities between the airplane and black life to understand the temporal divide that sutures the airplane within a futurist/progressivist orientation, and blackness at the other end of the temporal spectrum or even outside time.

"… into a storm…": The Weather, the Airplane and Violent Interruptions in Ralph Ellison's "A Party Down at the Square"[76]

Whereas the narrative in Ralph Ellison's "A Party Down at the Square" takes place during a storm, there is no evidence that the weather had a hand in the plane crash that begins "Flying Home". Thus, to place such emphasis on the weather seems misleading. But I want to venture a consideration of the "storm of blood and blackness" as akin to a weather phenomenon, per Sharpe's conception of the weather as the "totality of our environment" (104). Sharpe defines and extends the weather beyond natural (and man-made) phenomenon that is responsible for changes in the atmosphere by repurposing the weather as the terrain of totality and the "pervasiveness of antiblackness" mobilized to enact and perpetuate black death and annihilation (106).[77]

Both "A Party Down at the Square" and "Flying Home," enact peculiar revelations about the relationship between aviation technology, primarily the airplane, blackness, and time. By proposing the "storm of blood and blackness" as weather and thus as the totality of ecological

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[76] Taken from Ralph Ellison's "Flying Home" where the narrator, after describing what caused Todd to crash, states, "It had been as though he had flown into a storm of blood and blackness" (164).

[77] Drawing on Frantz Fanon's assertion, "We revolt simply because, for a variety of reasons, we can no longer breathe," Sharpe explicates Fanon's awareness of how systems mobilize against black life to posit that the weather "is not the specifics of any event or set of events that are endlessly repeatable and repeated, but the totality of the environments in which we struggle; the *machines* in which we live…" (111 emphasis mine). By proposing the "storm of blood and blackness" as weather and thus as the totality of ecological and man-made -scapes.

and made-made -scapes, I read Ellison's "A Party in the Square" and "Flying Home" through

this totality by being attentive to the role of the storm and/or tempest in literature and its

relationship to blackness and temporality.[78] Thus, the temporal disruption enacted by the airplane

in both these stories, and the entanglement between the precarity of black life and the airplane

unveils how blackness as flesh and blood ceaselessly unsettle the environment, the weather. The

weather is fundamental to the totality of blackness, it is "always marked in the plantation

management," the hold and the ship, the funeral, and in my project, to air travel and its

technologies.[79]

In the introduction to Ellison's posthumously published collection of early short stories,

where both "A Party Down at the Square" and "Flying Home" appear, *Flying Home and Other*

Stories, John Callahan sketches Ellison's early life and its influences on his maturing into the

author of his 1953 novel *Invisible Man*.[80] Callahan maps Ellison's "fidelity to reality" in these

short stories through his creation of the "archetype of a young man passing through loss and

desolation 'back in[to] the world of men again,'" a character that culminates into the protagonist

of *Invisible Man* (xxiv). Callahan argues that it is in these early stories, most previously

unpublished, Ellison discovers "his American theme" which depicted through the contradictions

of race and the racial divide in the United States (xxiii). For Ellison, this divide manifested as

reluctant acceptance even as it unveiled the "unspeakable acts of cruelty and violence" enacted in

and across the United States (xxiii). Many of the reviewers echo similar conclusions. Robert

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[78] Here I am thinking specifically about Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and *Othello* where the storm or tempest marks a transformation into an alternative temporal and narrative scape. In addition, the symbolic and metaphoric work of storms and tempest in literature as making a chiasmic shift or some other form of transformation in the order of things.

[79] In an interview with Selamawit Terrefe, Christina Sharpe elaborates on her sense of the weather as anti-blackness because it permeates black life. See the full interview "What Exceeds the Hold?: An Interview with Christina Sharpe" in *Rhizome* 29 (2016).

[80] The stories in the collection were written between the late 1930s through to the early 1950s

Butler, for instance, asserted that these early stories provided evidence that *Invisible Man* did

emerge over an extended period of "artistic and philosophical growth" dating as far back as 1937

(3). *Invisible Man* haunts Ellison's body of work, yet these short stories open up other avenues

for reading Ellison's work beyond that urtext.[81]

I start with "A Party Down at the Square," because the airplane in that story anticipates

the temporal disjuncture that "Flying Home" revels in. "A Party Down at the Square" is about a

young white boy from Cincinnati visiting family in Alabama whose uncle takes him to witness a

lynching. The airplane we encounter in "A Party Down at the Square" performs a kind of

interruptive act that turns the attention of the protagonist and narrator towards what seems to be a

bigger, more spectacular event because of its rarity: white death. Thus momentarily, the lynching

of a black man, an act so quotidian, is upstaged by the infrequent possibility of an airplane

accident that precipitates the *legitimate* death of a white woman.[82] The condition of this death

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[81] Becky Becker comments that Ellison's characters "possess the agency to explore a variety of alternatives, often employing a variety of tactics to fight oppression" (180). She also points to the complex and differing encounters between black characters and their white counterparts in many of the stories. Specifically citing the first two stories in *Flying Home*, "A Party Down at the Square"[81] and "A Boy on the Train," Becker emphasizes that many of the stories are told from a child's perspective and these child-protagonists forge a peculiar navigational maneuver through a world that foregrounds the color of their skin (180). These forms of agency, however, seem absent for some of the characters such as the unnamed black man awaiting his lynching in "A Party at the Square." Ironically, the lynching is briefly interrupted when the airplane's pilot mistakes the burning flames for a landing stripe. The airplane does not change the circumstances of the man awaiting his death. The possibilities that might have been created by the airplane's interruption does not lead to any agential potential for the man marked for death. The forms of agency that so enthralled Becker elude me. Yet, Becker's gestures towards Ellison's experimentation with points of view are pivotal in both my reading of the stories that bookend the collection ("A Party Down at the Square" and "Flying Home") and thread together blackness and the airplane. In "A Party Down at the Square" the airplane depicts the persistence of black death at the cusp of the technological age; in "Flying Home" the airplane is shown to be the technological future of the ship. This direct genealogical relationship imposes on the airplane the bloody past of the ship even as it offers pathways to black life.

[82] I use the term "legitimate" here because I want allude to how the lynching of black men was often connected to the death of a white woman, and here is an instance where no black person can be held responsible for this woman's death because we know that during a lynching most black people were hiding in their homes or whatever "safe" spaces were available to them. In the absence of a black body to punish for this death, it is deemed "legitimate" even though it is caused by other white persons in the mob. J. Gordon Hylton in "Ellison as Social Critic: A Party Down at the Square and the Problem of Lynching" refers to this death as an "undignified death" but I think he misses some of the complexity of this death (1012). Its significance is in part, as I argue, due to both its rarity and the impossibility of ascribing the cause to another black person.

permits a departure from the cult of white femininity which Ellison describes as the key impetus

for white violence against black men in his essay, "The Extravagance of Laughter". In that essay,

Ellison outlines the process where the mere presence of a black man transforms white

womanhood into a protected ideal: "When a Negro male came into view, the homeliest white

woman became goddess, a cult figure deified in the mystique of whiteness, a being from whom a

shout or cry or expression of hand or eye could unleash a rage for human sacrifice. When the

ignorant, torch-bearing armies assembled by night, black men burned in the fire of white men's

passion" (637). Black men's presence and existence apotheosizes white women and transforms

white men into a murdering mob. Yet in the course of exercising the power to kill through the act

of lynching, another death inadvertently occurs, the death of a white woman. And the ensuing

cocktail of horror and pleasure that the protagonist and onlookers derive from "the sizzling flesh"

of the dead white woman can be described as kind of "libidinal economy".[83] The desires often

thrust onto the black body are transferred onto the blackened body of the white woman. The

careful description of the dead woman's torn white dress and her exposed body transformed into

an "almost" black body by her electrocution ("the shock had turned the woman almost as black

as the nigger") allows for her induction into the economy of pleasure and violence stitched onto

the black fe/male body (7). This transformation, I argue, of the white woman into an "almost

black" body in death allows Ellison's child-protagonist to dismantle the cult of white femininity

and see the dead body as an available sexual being available to be feasted upon by the eyes of the

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[83] Jared Sexton describes libidinal economy as the "economy, or distribution and arrangement of desire and identification, of energies, concerns, points of attention, anxieties, pleasures, appetites, revulsions, and phobias—the whole structure of psychic and emotional life—that are unconscious and invisible but have a visible effect on the world, including the money economy" (qtd. in Wilderson 7-8). According to Frank Wilderson III, Sexton's libidinal economy is "something more than, but inclusive of or traversed" by what Antonio Gramsci and other Marxist call a "structure of feeling"; it is "a dispensation of energies, concerns, points of attention, anxieties, pleasures, appetites, revulsions, and phobias capable of both great mobility and tenacious fixation" (7-8)

mob. The airplane's initiation of these slippery moment of racial chiasmus, where the dead

woman is *"almost the same but not quite"* black, allows the airplane to function as a technology

that allows for the "unthinkable" where a white woman could (but doesn't) occupy the space of

culpability.[84]

Raymond A. Mazurek notes that the airplane in "A Party Down at the Square" performs

two symbolic roles; first, it recalls narratives of flying Africans, and secondly, it interrupts

repetitive use of "nigger". Mazurek explains that Ellison "chooses an aircraft and flight as a

symbol of escape, echoing the folk tales in which slaves fly back to freedom and prefiguring his

own use of flight as a symbol in the well-known story with which Callahan ends the volume,

"Flying Home"" (121-122). In addition, the omnipresent word "nigger" is absent for more than

700 words, or about one fourth of the story, as the reader's attention is shifted away from the

incessant "ritual torture" of the black man toward possible hope, or at least toward the poetic

justice in which one member of the mob dies (122). Though Mazurek chooses to foreground the

airplane's links to escape through a narrative where escape was imagined as a triumph over

enslavement, as hope or resistance, I want to reconsider these narratives of flying Africans

through Terri Snyder's nuanced reading of the tale of flying Africans through what she calls the

"slave suicide ecology" (42). These ecologies, the emotional, psychological and material

conditions that precipitate suicides, are in Snyder's assessment often narrativized as forms of

escape or "flying home" (42). Snyder's reading of the tale of flying Africans understands these

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[84] Drawing on Tyrone Palmer's conception of the "unthinkable" in his essay "What Feels More than Feeling?: Theorizing the Unthinkability of Black Affect" (2017) to think about the impossibility of recognizing black affect, and Saidiya Hartman's interview with Frank B. Wilderson III, "The Position of the Unthought" where Hartman argues that the law reaffirms that "blackness is on the side of culpability…" which explains why black women who killed their slave masters for raping them were punished by death, and why police who murder and/or harm black women, men and children are not convicted or punished in any significant way (192).

narratives as illustrative of how "distinct communities chronicled, compressed, and remembered

the experience of self-destruction in slavery" to create a "bridge from the past to the present that

redresses the wrongs of history" (43). Just as the airplane might signal possible yet elusive

escape, it also signals its inverse, the impossibility of escape in the face of enduring violence and

antiblackness. Even in the narratives that figured flight as escape, those who flew had no

conceivable destination where freedom was possible. In "A Party Down at the Square," the black

man is unable to escape or to enact any form of vengeance as his attempts to throw his burning

body into the mob remains unsuccessful. He is a man marked for death, and the symbolic

potential of escape is not available to him. As the protagonist notes, he is the only one who does

not seem to hear the airplane or look at it (5).

For the black man (or the "Bacote nigger"[85]) whose mobility has been compelled, and

now being tortured and executed, suicide or a quick death, by any means, is the only form of

escape.[86] And it is this desire for a swift death that leads him to plead with the mob: "Will one a

you gentlemen please cut my throat? … Will somebody please cut my throat like a Christian?"

(7). This plea to his white male torturers, soon to be murderers, to intervene minimally is met

with a response that reframes American-ness as different from the Judeo-Christian moral code

that seemingly underpins the American nation-state's imaginary of its origins as exemplified by

its motto, "In God we trust". Jeb, the leader of the lynch mob, whom we learn is likely to be

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[85] The repeated reference to the black man as "the Bacote nigger" seemed to allude to their last or family name or, as J. Gordon Hylton considers, a black community or the victim's "employer" if he was a sharecropper. Hylton also mentions that "Bacote" might refer to the "victim's geographic origins but contemporary maps of Macon County, Alabama, contain the name of no such community. …However, the surname Bacote is not uncommon in the South and is usually associated with African Americans" (1012).

[86] Cotton Seiler (2007) argues that by being attentive to race and gender, but particularly race, transportation scholars can better nuance their study of nineteenth and twentieth century. He explains that understanding of how racism "restricted and compelled mobility through "slavery, genocide, removal, or diasporic flight" will provide a broader understanding of the relationship between race and transportation (310).

elected the next sheriff, responds to this plead by saying, "Sorry, but ain't no *Christians* around

tonight. Ain't no Jew-boys neither. We're just *one hundred percent Americans*" (8 emphasis

mine). "Collective murder" and whiteness are, in Jeb's assessment, the necessary ingredients of

American citizenship. According to Christina Accomando, Jeb's response shows "violent white

masculinity" at the core of this nationalist imagining of American-ness (125). In actuality, what

Ellison's story exposes is how the murder of black persons sustains the fundamental logic of

American nation-ness. The murder of the Black is here the "shared symbol" that creates and

sustains the American nation.[87] As the symbol that aggregates "American-ness," the

burning/killing of the black and indigenous body is periodically repeated to garner alliance to the

American nation.[88] This in part explain the persistent murder of black women, men and children

to reawaken the rhetoric of American-ness. At the altar of whiteness, figured here as the

American nation, blackness is the sacrifice "necessary to the restoration of social," political and

economic order ("An Extravagance of Laughter", 641).[89]

When the airplane interrupts this spectacle of death, it locates through aviation

technology the temporal persistence of black terror in the United States. When the protagonist

notices with the help of the light of the fire, T.W.A (standing for Transcontinental and Western

Air Express, it was later renamed Trans World Airlines) written in "black letters under her

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[87] Benedict Anderson in his seminal work *Imagined Community: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* stipulates that the nation is a community imagined through shared symbols around which people congregate.

[88] Other black thinkers have made this point. For instance, Toni Morrison in her essay, "On the Back of Blacks" where she states that "A hostile posture towards resident blacks must be struck at the Americanizing door before it will open" (2). Similarly, Joy James in her essay "The Dead Zone" (2013) from her collected essays, *Seeking the Beloved Community: A Feminist Reader*, James asserts that in the United States "…irrespective of the political party, the state promotes premature social and physical death for its most marginalized peoples" (274).

[89] In Ellison's essay, "An Extravagance of Laughter" (1985) he limits the role of the lynching to the restoration of the social order. Though the essay gestures towards the political, he does not explicitly connect lynching to the political or the economic. If we consider the long durée of lynching, particularly through Assata Shakur, we realize that mass incarceration and the continuing legalized violence against black persons by the US judiciary, police, and market all enact forms of death akin to the lynching of black persons. This is this sense that I seek to unveil here.

wings" he is marking that this lynching is taking place sometime in the 1930s and the 1940s.

Formed when Transcontinental Air Transport (T.A.T) and Western Air Express merged to meet

the demands for bigger airlines to win airmail contracts Transcontinental and Western Air

(T&WA) boasted of well-known and respected airline pioneers like Charles Lindbergh and Jack

Frye. It was the first airliner to offer coast-to-coast flights called the Lindbergh Line.[90] At the

onset of the second world war, when aerial combat became an essential part of modern warfare,

T.W.A. was the "first domestic airline to operate land transport overseas for the Air Transport

Command" (35).[91] The technological advancement of T.W.A during the war was funneled into

the development of transcontinental commercial airliners like T. W. A. Yet for black persons

globally, still, under conditions of terror, the rapid technological advancement had done little to

curtail the daily dangers of living as a black person.[92] It is worth noting that in the document

created to mark its thirtieth anniversary, T. W. A. points to the ways that its aerial technology

continues to be used in the service of combatting the rise of communism defined in part as the

rise of anticolonial revolutions such as the mau-mau in Kenya.[93] T.W.A's politics is reminiscent

of the U.S. centered rhetoric that Jeb articulates when he disentangles the national identity of the

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[90] These flights took about 36 hours. However, with the development of their DC-1 in 1933 and Douglas DC-2 in May 1934, and DC-3 in 1937 allowed TWA to become forerunners in commercial aviation.

[91] TWA's intercontinental division transported essential military equipment for the allied forces. Towards the end of the war, TWA applied to the Civil Aeronautics Board for world routes and at the end of the war was awarded a "seven-year temporary certificate to fly the southern, or Mediterranean, route to Europe, the Middle East and Far East—through Ireland, France, Switzerland, Italy, Greece and Egypt—with an additional segment from the U.S. and via Azores, Portugal, Spain, North Africa, India and later, the Orient" (38).

[92] Two examples come to mind here. One is James Baldwin's "They Can't Turn Back" where he describes landing in a segregated airport in Tallahassee and observes what he calls the "irrational terror" that permeates the South. And second, the 1970 Gil Scott-Heron poem, "Whitey on the Moon" best exemplifies the dissonance between white technological advancement and the daily violence and insurmountable deprivations that blacks are forced to live through. I am grateful to Prof. Jim Igoe for making the connection between Gil Scott Heron's poem and the use of airplanes in bombing anticolonial revolutionary struggle in Kenya and other parts of the continent.

[93] See *Thirty Years of Service* by Trans World Airlines https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.c101368608

mob from its religion.[94] The existence of commercial airplane, the height of technological

attainments, within the persisting climate of antiblackness and the ever-looming possibility of

black death reveals what David Marriott in *On Black Men* discovers when he argues that

lynching became more frequent with the development of instant photographs because for the first

time one could capture and circulate the lasting visual image of black death. The technology

allowed for certificates of participation and/or remembrance, and a means of "(re)constituting a

community (or re-membering) through white supremacist violence" (105). Ellison's "A Party

Down at the Square" depicts how technological development performed merely an impermanent

interruptive to the ceaselessness of black death. It signals a shift in the weather, but this change

does not engender freedom, but the ceaseless continuation of black death.

The airplane in "A Party Down the Square" brings with it the ebbs and shifts in the

weather. Notwithstanding the cold rain, ice and wind, that the protagonist notes as he arrives at

the courthouse to witness/participate in the lynching, it is the airplane that brings the storm and

forces a momentary distraction that does not/ cannot save the imminent lynching (6). For a

moment the airplane creates the conditions for another death when it knocks down the power

lines that lead to the death of a white woman, but its totality cannot assuage the bloodthirst for

the mob (7). The airplane marks a kind of terrain where white death is possible, but it does not

foreclose or alter in any way the inevitability of black death. It brings what the narrator describes

as a "cyclone blowing up from the gulf," a weather event where a large-scale air mass rotates

around a strong center (5). The center remains in "A Party Down at the Square", the death-bound

man awaiting his execution, as the mob and the child-protagonist run to witness the events made

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[94] It is deeply ironic that white supremacists in the post 9/11 moment more often than not foreground their Christian identities as a fundamental part of their national identities. In order words, to be American is to be a white and evangelical Christian.

possible by the airplane's interruption.[95] The airplane shifts the attention of the spectators to the

air and away from the burning of the black man even as it exhibits the totality of ongoing

systems that disparage a durational marker for legacies of slavery and global antiblackness. The

shift in the air is brief, a mere reminder that the world has progressed technologically and that its

machines transform the air into a pathway for commercial travel. Yet a lynching fire can now be

mistaken for an extension of the machine's need to be directed and guided from the ground.

As the child-protagonist notes at the end of the story these events, taken together,

comment on the transitioning and cementing of the order of things.

> First it was the *nigger* and the storm, then the plane, then the woman and the
> wires, and now I hear the airplane line is investigating to find who set fire that
> almost wrecked their plane. All that in one night, and all of it but the storm over
> one *nigger*. It was some night all right. It was some party too. I was right there,
> see. I was right there watching it all. It was my first party and my last. God, but
> that *nigger* was tough. That Bacote *nigger* was some *nigger*! (11 emphasis mine)

The persistent repetition of the word "nigger" underlines the unchanging discourse into which

this narrator has been successfully inducted and continues to repeat and sustain. Despite his

assertion that this would be his last party, his induction into the discourse of white supremacy

has been successful. His continuing use of "party" to refer to the murder of a man, and his

persistent use of the word "nigger" are evidence of this induction. Accomando concludes that

"the unnamed boy's narration reveals clear complicity, potential critique, and the larger

machinery of white supremacy" (123). At the same time, the boy's disavowal of the humanity of

the man being lynched in order to emphasize his masculinity enacts a violence that persists by

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[95] Using Abdul R. JanMohamed's concept of the "death-bound-subject" which he describes as the subject which is "formed from infancy on, by the imminent and ubiquitous threat of death" (2). Though JanMohamed distills these subjects from Richard Wright's body of work, his straddling of Orlando Patterson's notion of social death and attentiveness to the ways the aftermath of slavery thrust a deathliness onto black persons cast a wider net to understand the ceaseless killing of black persons. I am grateful to my colleague Mlondi Zondi for pointing out JanMohamed's book to me.

accentuating the extra-human ability of black people to endure pain.[96] The emphasis erases the

lynching victim's "humanity," which Ellison understands, is the "ultimate goal" of the "ritual

purification" that lynching seeks to accomplish. The emphasis on the victim's masculinity is

reminiscent of what Joy James calls the black cyborg— "a modified, improved human whose

increased ethical, spiritual, and physical capabilities generate unusual strength, omniscience, and

boundless love"— a figure produced by white racism and colonization (188). James' figure of

the black cyborg transcends the limits of brutality and "the conditions of social and physical

death," and like the "Bacote nigger", can endure the torture of a lynch mob to the admiration of a

young white boy (188). This dangerous figuration of blackness distorts even the "values" of

humanity in blacks into something grotesque and excessive. In acknowledging the "masculinity"

of the victim, the protagonist also shows how black masculinity exists in excess of humanity.

"of blood and blackness": Time-travel, the Search of Self and the Airplane in

"Flying Home"

As the last story in the collection, "Flying Home" (1944) is structured to be in direct

conversation with "A Party Down at the Square," not least because both feature an airplane as its

central focal point. The Advanced Trainer, the airplane flown by Todd, the protagonist could

have been manufactured by T.W.A. as part of its war effort, but perhaps it was created by the

many other aviation companies vying to leave their technological imprint on the war. Whereas

the airplane in "A Party Down at the Square" momentarily interrupts without aborting the

lynching, in "Flying Home" the protagonist's descent into the *reality* of antiblackness (or into the

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[96] David Roediger asserts that "The matter-of-fact tone of the boy, in the face of a literally nauseating experience with terror, the ability to recognize Black masculinity but not Black humanity, and the sharp awareness that poor whites remained that way after racist attacks make this the most fascinating of the posthumously published Ellison short stories collected in Flying Home (1996)" (342)

"storm of blackness and blood" as he calls it) fundamentally disrupts his sense of time and self.

The Tuskegee airman, Todd, crashes his airplane into a field in Alabama and what he encounters

thereafter act as a disruption that opens a pathway for Todd to critically re-member his lifelong

obsession with the airplane. As a symbol of modernity and futurity, the airplane in "Flying

Home" however acts as a conduit (or a time machine of sorts) that carries Todd across time to

encounter therein his blackness.

"Flying Home" conjures and interrogates the temporal and technological distance of the

airplane from blackness. In its collision with the buzzard, Todd's airplane acts as kind of time

machine carrying him into a (his) past even as it traps him in the timeless violence of his racial

identity. The buzzard's appearance as a force that moves Todd across time invokes narratives of

flying Africans in which the buzzard assists the enslaved in their flight "home". In Haile

Gerima's film, *Sankofa* for instance, the buzzard brings redemption, albeit one tainted with the

possibility of death; here it enables a kind of temporal disjuncture that thrusts Todd into an

imagined anterior space/time he imagines precedes his, and to a people he believes have no

comparable experience to his own despite their shared racial identity. The buzzard functions

figuratively as deadly salvation, as a foreshadowing of bad luck, or as the symbolism of the

persisting systemic condition of black life. It also participates in an ecology that creates the

weather of antiblackness. It sends Todd into a tailspin that thrust him directly into the terrain of

anti-blackness that colors his vision of the world. As the figuration of the "blood and blackness"

that violently interrupts Todd's life, the buzzard functions much like his first encounter with an

airplane altered his vision of the air as a site of possibility. As a bird of carrion, the buzzard also

preys upon the remains of the dead. Todd's collision with the buzzard, therefore, symbolizes a

kind of collision with the past, or the fleshy remains of the dead.

These remains are embodied in the form of the black sharecropper, Jefferson, who witnesses Todd's crash and comes to assist him. The past that Jefferson embodies unsettles Todd and his subsequent thoughts and responses aim to distill his ontology from Jefferson's and the so-called "prehistoric" ecology Jefferson inhabits and represents. By keeping the airplane in his line of sight, touching it or believing that Jefferson does not understand how to operate such a machine, Todd depends on the futural temporality of the airplane to separate himself temporally, socially and economically from the persisting conditions of blackness he perceives in Jefferson (159). In Todd's assessment, Jefferson differs so exponentially from him that only time-travel makes sense ("that buzzard knocked me back a hundred years" (160)). Jefferson, as the story later reveals, is an "archetype" of the shape-shifting trickster of black literature that in this story summons all of Todd's urban and educated sensibilities to task.[97]

Even in his own "age," Todd feels trapped between "ignorant black men and condescending whites" and seeks recognition through armed battle believing it is only the "enemy who would recognize his manhood and skill in terms of hate" (161). There are bonds that bind Todd to the lynched black man in "A Party Down at the Square". Both of them seek recognition of their humanity, which is violently negated by the system of white supremacy. Even while rejecting their claims of equality, this system singles them out as somehow excessively human. Todd's search for recognition of his "manhood" is a desire to be incorporated into the (bare) human, an ontological space preserved for whiteness. He directs his pleas for recognition outward toward whiteness; its refusal to confer this unattainable humanity

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[97] Jefferson represents an older well-worn figure of the shape-shifting trickster that Todd, armed with his urbanity and education, recognizes and holds in disdain. Ellison instigates an encounter between the old hero of black literature, and its imagined present and future. It is encounter that takes place solely on the turf of the older hero. I am drawing from Hortense Spiller's "Ellison "Usable Past": Toward a Theory of Myth" in *Red, White and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (2003), 65-80.

is the "inescapable fact" of blackness' signification.[98] In other words, Todd's search comes from an internalized lack that he believes can only be conferred by someone who views him with a system of equivalence created by war (enemy/foe), and not within the ongoing racial hierarchy of the nation-state.

Yet blackness is what Todd encounters ("blackness washed over him, like infinity" (158)). And in his attempt to separate Jefferson's blackness from his, he begins to verbally suture the airplane to the ship, the older more persistent vestige of blackness. For instance, when Teddy (Jefferson's son) suggests that they put him on the oxen and ride him to town to see the doctor Todd tells Jefferson, "I have orders not to leave the *ship*…," and a little bit later he restates to himself, "in the *ship* there was a perfectly good radio, but it was useless" (159-160 emphasis mine). Though earlier versions of the airplane were referred to as the "airship," I do not want to take for granted that this is merely a move to make the airplane legible to Jefferson and Teddy, especially since there is evidence that this is not Jefferson or Teddy's first sighting of an airplane. When Todd refers to the airplane as a ship, I venture, it is to lament his transposition into this earlier, seemingly pre-technological time. He compares the ease and efficiency that the airplane offers, to the low technology of using the body's rhythms to tell time. He laments, "With all I've learned, I'm dependent upon this 'peasant's' sense of time and space. … In the plane, instead of time being measured by the rhythms of pain and a kid's legs, the instruments would have told him at a glance" (160). Todd uses the recognizable symbol of slavery, the ship, a tethering that unintentionally manifests a critique of the ways that technology of the airplane

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[98] Citing Fanon to explain the persisting dehumanization of blacks without state interference, Sylvia Wynter suggests that these practices and discourses are fundamental to the Euro-American notion of the human. She says: "wherever he[/she] goes in the world, the Negro remains a Negro"—and, as such, made to reoccupy the signifying place of medieval/Latin-Christian Europe's fallen, degraded, and thereby nonmoving Earth" (Wynter 319).

was deemed beyond the faculties of Blacks. In connecting these histories of transit technology to blackness, Todd simultaneously distances himself from his current predicament of being outside and within time's oscillations. It is a move that confirms Ellison's belief in the persisting present-ness of the past and its consequences.[99] At the same time, Todd communicates that the fundamental functioning of the airplane, like the ship, is that it carries cargo and people across space. Inadvertently, however, this airplane seems to also have ferried Todd across time (or into time) where he is confronted with the unchanging conditions of blackness. Yet this intentional coupling of airplane with ship indicates Ellison's attempt to tie the inherent progressivist futurity of the technology of the airplane with the slave ship.

Thus, time haunts and pursues "Flying Home". Time, it seems, also forms the substratum of Ellison's understanding of the art of writing which he describes as "require[ing] a constant plunging back into the shadow of the past where time hovers ghostlike" (xix). These ghostly hauntings of time in "Flying Home" have real consequences, and "knocked…back a hundred years" Todd attempts to meander his way back into what he believes is his present by vacillating between the memories of his childhood and his present predicament. The buzzard that appeared from nowhere, and Jefferson's concern and probing, are ghostly figures pregnant with history who are an all too consuming reality that does not align with Todd's version of the present. The buzzard renamed "Jim crow" by Jefferson and his son embody a continuing history of subjection. In these entanglements between blackness and time, the future is replaced by a radical and static present-ness. Though everything around Todd is marked by time, it is a form of time that, like a pendulum, oscillates between the past and the present. The oxen's "queer,

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[99] Ellison's "An Extravagance of Laughter" where he asserts that the past and its consequences are "never past" (637).

prehistoric shadows against the dry brown earth," Jefferson's tale that Todd has heard and forgotten but is somehow new again, and even Todd's thoughts are recollections of his first encounter with an airplane as a boy. These shifts between the past and the present entangle the future within these temporal oscillations, pointing to the impossibility of marking/dividing time into neatly bound entities. Just as the oxen exist in both the past and present, the conditions of blackness remain static throughout the past and the present, even as the stages of black existence shift from slavery to Jim crow to the carceral state.[100] Indeed, as Jefferson's tale later illustrates, black freedom and flight remain harnessed and controlled across time and space, even in heaven they are all forbidden to use their wings (166-167). Against this realization, Todd sutures himself to technology and believes that through it he can escape the reach of the past in the present of blackness.

Robin Lucy explains Todd's misplaced faith in technology's ability to rescue him as his attempt to hold on to the supremacy of technology. Lucy writes, "Todd clings to the promise of his mastery of technology as it is manifested in his plane, the tool and weapon that he believes allow him to transcend the economic inscription of southern soil and the black body and to enter into modernity. He maintains this attitude even though the white ostensible owner of this technology, the American military, have figuratively grounded him, and all like him, by refusing to let black men fly in combat" (262). What Todd cannot see is the contradiction in suturing his sense of self to a technology, viewed as the outcome of white ingenuity, when such production is dependent upon black suffering and labor. As Lucy explains, Todd's grounding is an attempt to enforce white control over the form of black participation in the war. The "social and political

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[100] This is not an attempt to refashion John Mbiti's assertions about the absence of a future in traditional African thought in his *African Religions and Philosophies* (1970). It is, however, an interrogation of the strand of scholarship that defers freedom for black people to an unknowable future.

consequences" of the past, Ellison claims, are "never past" (637). Thus, the past of blackness that Todd seeks to escape by propelling himself to modernity through technology remains steadfast in its chorus of repression. [101]

If the ecology of "Flying Home" is entangled time, then Jefferson is both a representative of the present and past of blackness. Through the story that Jefferson tells Todd, the "old tale," Ellison seems to suggest that the things that Todd believes separate him from Jefferson are minuscular.[102] Yet the emphasis on how this story recalls the tales of flying Africans undermines the ways that Ellison bridges the temporal gap that Todd enforces between himself and Jefferson. Robin Lucy recognizes Jefferson's story as the "archetypal story of the diaspora: the tale of flying Africans" which eventually "brings Todd home" (262). He asserts, further, that Jefferson's version of this story "reflects the situation of the Tuskegee pilot, fully trained but harnessed by racist assumptions and practices and bound by his refusal to draw on Jefferson's traditional— consciously and creatively improvised—resources" (262). To Lucy, Jefferson's story is the antidote to what ails Todd, and it is what ultimately brings him into the "burst of defiant and clarifying laughter" (262).

I want to retrace the steps between Jefferson's story and Todd's ultimate "redemption." Jefferson's story is one that Todd recognizes, and from his reaction, he clearly understands its import. Yet its retelling does not immediately result in Todd's redemption. The hero of

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[101] There are several excellent books and articles that explore the race and racism in the air force as it relates to the Tuskegee airman such as William Alexander Percy's "Jim Crow and Uncle Sam: The Tuskegee Flying Units and the U.S. Army Forces in Europe During World War II," Alan M. Osur's *Blacks in the Army Air Forces During World War II: The Problems of Race Relations* and Stanley Sandler's *Segregated Skies: All-Black Combat Squadrons of WWII*. The literature on Africans in the first and second world wars offers a fascinating overview of how military deployments worked to sustain white supremacy during these wars. David Killingray's articles in the 1980s on the military and ex-servicemen in West Africa are particularly informative.

[102] A version of this story appears in Ralph Ellison's essay "The Extravagance of Laughter" written in 1985 for the publication of *Going to the Territory*.

Jefferson's story, "the hero of the Old Negro folktale," is intended to be deceptively recognizable, yet its import is difficult to parse (Ellison 616). Even Todd who initially believes he has fully grasped its import is forced to question and reexamine what he sees and hears.

Jefferson begins his story by saying: "Well, I went to heaven and right away started to sproutin' me some wings. Six-foot ones, they was. Just like them the white angels had. I couldn't hardly believe it. I was so glad that I went off on some clouds by myself and tried 'em out You know, 'cause I didn't want to make a fool outa myself the first thing…" (166). Jefferson describes how he tried out his wings and discovered that he could fly, then he decided to find "some colored angels" because he couldn't believe he was an angel until he had seen a "real black one" (166). After finding these black angels, they inform Jefferson that he has to stop flying because "colored folks had to wear a special kin'a harness when we flew" (166-167). Jefferson is permitted to fly, however, if he only uses one wing, but he continues to fly too fast, and due to his stunts knocks off the tips of "some stars" causing "a storm and a coupla lynchings down here in Macon County" (167). Ultimately, Saint Peter banishes Jefferson and sends him off with a "parachute and a map of the state of Alabama…" (169). All the while Jefferson is narrating this story, Todd believes that Jefferson is mocking him, and becomes more and more agitated, and at the end of Jefferson's story when he narrates how he asked Saint Peter to admit that he was the "flyin'est son-of-a-bitch that ever hit heaven" and laughs. Todd then screams, "why do you laugh at me this way?" (169).

Lucy's reading of this story makes sense, particularly his argument that this story is parallel to Todd's experiences as a Tuskegee airman. What he overlooks in reading the story as a parallel to Todd's life is Jefferson's critique of time. Jefferson's story makes assertions about futurity, by undermining the very core of Christian belief that there is a predetermined future in

the afterlife, and this future is the goal of all life: heaven for the righteous, and hell for those who failed to live redeemable lives. Jefferson's story dismantles this notion. In this future of unending solace and equality, Jefferson suggests, black people remain restricted. And the very structure of heaven operates under conditions of anti-blackness that keeps black angels with wings from doing what their biological transformation should enable them to do, fly. Black angels remain harnessed and policed, and their actions are believed to have a direct causal relationship to the death of black persons on earth. When Jefferson's enthusiastic flight accidentally knocks the tips off some stars they tell him he "caused a storm and a coupla lynchings down in Macon County," making him directly responsible for the actions of white men (167). When in violation of the law, Black angels can be sent back to earth, or what in Jefferson's story is figured as the belly of anti-blackness, specifically Alabama, a metonym for the American south.[103] Jefferson erases any redemptive imaginings of the future and implicitly asserts that Todd, like him, has dared to fly when he was told he couldn't, and thus has landed in the place reserved for the punishment of those who break the "heavenly edict," Alabama.

If we hold Todd's reaction at bay for a moment, we can say that Jefferson revises the familiar folk narrative of the flying Africans, and does so by interrogating the possibilities of a site of black freedom.[104] Much like Fanon's insistence that all his actions can only be in service to the present of blackness, Jefferson's story is a reminder that the future of blackness can and

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[103] Though Ellison names Alabama, I think this could well be symbolic of the United States as a whole and the racial politics and practice that subject blacks to system of fear and violence.

[104] In the first chapter, I examine how Toni Morrison's revision of the tales of the flying African complicates the equation of these flights with freedom by challenging how they often involve the abandonment of women and children. Morrison puts under scrutiny the question of destination. Where do these flights lead to, and how does one measure whether these sites provide any sense of black freedom? Similarly, I think Jefferson advances a critique that parallels Morrison's. If heaven is a site of religio-Christian freedom, how do we know that black flight is possible or allowed in these sites?

most likely will operate under the axiom of antiblackness.[105] The present of blackness is the only

available evidence of the future of blackness. Though the conditions of enslavement and/or

subjection might alter, the restrictions, control, and violence will remain. It is also possible to

understand Jefferson's story as evidence of his short-sightedness and thus his inability to imagine

a future where he is not in service of a white master. Yet Jefferson's persistent trickster-like

nature, and his entrenched belief that to be given wings necessitates flight all point to his

enacting a critique of the changing oppressive benevolence of whiteness. His audience of one,

Todd, can only interpret the story as targeting his suffering. Todd's outburst and subsequent

realization that he might have imagined Jefferson's glee and mockery is followed by a looking at

Jefferson anew.[106] Destabilized by Jefferson's "somber and tired and old" demeanor, Todd

begins to question his original perception of Jefferson and the world. This renewed ocular

engagement, this *looking* and *seeing* again leads Todd to question his perception of the world he

inhabits and his relationship to the airplane. This is the shift in perception that begins with the

disruption of the plane's collision with the buzzard. There is more complexity to Jefferson's tale

than as a conduit ferrying Todd home. Jefferson's tale is both familiar and strange to Todd

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[105]Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* asserts, "The structure of the present work is grounded in temporality. Every human problem cries out to be considered on the basis of time, the ideal being that the present always serves to build the future" (xvi). Later in that same book, he writes, "In no way do I have to dedicate myself to reviving a black civilization unjustly ignored. I will not make myself the man of any past. I do not want to sing the past to the detriment of my present and my future" (201). Fanon's insistence on the present, even when it evokes a future, has always struck me as a kind of radical attentiveness to the present of black life, even when though in the theorization of black life the past functions as an unavoidable imposition. Perhaps this is the nuance of time that so deeply fascinates me about Fanon's work and finds pathways in my understanding of time.

[106] Seeing and/or looking forms a fundamental part of W.E.B. Du Bois' conceptualization of double consciousness. In "Of Our Spiritual Striving" he writes, "…the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,--a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him *see* himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always *looking* at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that *looks* on in amused contempt and pity" (8). Spillers draws focus to "the specular and the spectacular" in "'All the Things You Could be by Now if Sigmund Freud's Wife Was Your Mother': Psychoanalysis and Race" (1996) to analyze the privilege of sight at the confluence of psychoanalysis and race.

because it shifts how Todd sees Jefferson, how he envisions his relationship to technology and futurity, and how he perceives his own blackness. It is only after this story that Todd is able to recall and to confront the reason for his life-long desire to possess an airplane. It is a desire that alters his perception of space and distance, much like his plane crash altered his perception of time.

The intimacy between Todd and the airplane, the deep roots of his sense of self and its attachment to the airplane is both a source of dignity and shame. Jefferson's story disturbs this attachment. Prior to the story, Todd's attention primarily focuses on the airplane: "Twisting his elbows, he saw where dust had powdered the plane's fuselage, feeling the lump form in his throat that was always there when he thought of flight. It's crouched there, he thought, like an abandoned shell of a locust. I am naked without it. Not a machine, a suit of clothes you wear. And with a sudden embarrassment and wonder he whispered, 'It's the only dignity I have…'" (160). This dignity, that is laid out in pieces before him, leaves him humiliated. The ultimate articulation of this humiliation is encoded, in an earlier moment in the story, in Todd's girlfriend's letter where she questions the U.S. government's reason to ground the Tuskegee airmen. Jefferson's translation of Todd's predicament into a tale that is reminiscent of the flying Africans connect Todd's condition to an earlier (and even futural) state of blackness that Todd recognizes. However, whereas Jefferson's story makes a larger argument about the time of blackness, Todd only recognizes himself and his present despair. In that recognition, Todd is led to reveal his long and deep relationship to the airplane when he recalls the first time he saw an airplane: "It was as though an endless series of hangars had shaken ajar in the airbase of his memory and from each, like a young wasp emerging from its cell, arose the memory of a plane" (171). These memories of encountering the airplane when they "were new in the world" when

Todd himself was too small to understand the limitations of race and its direct correlation to

one's economic position in the world is essential to understanding Todd's fashioning of a self

that centers primarily on his desire to possess an airplane. I cite Todd's recollection in full

because it illuminates the ingrained unrelenting desire that the airplane awakens in young Todd:

> *The first time I ever saw a plane I was very small and planes were new in the world. I was four and a half and the only plane that I had ever seen was a model suspended from the ceiling of the automobile exhibit at the state fair. But I did not know that it was only a model. I did not know how large a real plane was, nor how expensive. To me it was a fascinating toy, complete in itself, which my mother said could only be owned by rich little white boys. I stood rigid with admiration, my head straining backward as I watched the gray little plane describing arcs above the gleaming tops of the automobiles. And I vowed that, rich or poor, some day I would own such a toy. My mother had to drag me out of the exhibit, and not even the merry-go-round, the Ferris wheel, or the racing horses could hold my attention for the rest of the fair. I was too busy imitating the tiny drone of the plane with my lips, and imitating with my hands the motion, swift and circling, that it made in flight.*
>
> *I became a nuisance to everyone with my questions about airplanes. But planes were new to the old folks, too, and there was little that they could tell me. Only my uncle knew some of the answers. And better still, he could carve propellers from pieces of wood that would whirl rapidly in the wind, wobbling noisily upon oiled nails. I wanted a plane more than I'd wanted anything; more than I wanted the red wagon with rubber tires, more than the train that ran on a track with its train of cars. I asked my mother over and over again....* (171-172 original italics)

Todd's recollection creates a parallel between his own growth and the development of the

airplane. His childhood marks the early days of the airplane, and thus like the boy in post-World

War II America in "A Party at the Square" who can identify the airplane by the letters on it,

Todd's childhood is in an earlier era where the technology itself has recently appeared. Todd is

not unlike many of the African American inventors and engineers of the 20th century who

pursued dreams of being part of the race to invent the airplane, or heavier than air flying

machines, or to invent parts of plane that would propel the technology's application to military

and commercial purposes. Like many of those who were restrained by their race and economic

situation, the airplane nonetheless remained an object of deep fascination and interest. Unlike the

automobile that was now within the reach of black households, the airplane remained a

technological fantasy to which few black people had access to in its early days.

In "Flying Home," the airplane is an object that demarcates different forms of

epistemologies. For Todd's mother who understands racialized stratification of wealth, it is

solidified as an object that is solely for the pleasure of "rich little white boys" (171). For Todd,

who cannot comprehend the price or expansiveness of an airplane, his mother's words make the

airplane a more desirable object. It is an object of play that he desires above all other things. The

young Todd cannot fully comprehend the scale of his desire until he tries to reach for the

airplane and realizes that it is beyond his grip. Once again, his mother scolds and explains:

> *"Boy, is you a fool?" she said. "Don't you see that there's a real airplane 'stead
> of one of them toy ones?"*
> *"Real…? I forgot to cry. "Real?"*
> *"Yass, real. Don't you know that thing you reaching for is bigger'n a auto? You
> here trying to reach for it and I bet it's flying 'bout two hundred miles higher'n
> this roof".* (175)

In articulating the difference between a "real airplane" and a "toy" one, Todd's mother divines

what ails Todd, his incomprehension of the workings of the race and class, and how the airplane

exemplifies these fundamental tenets of black life. His mother resorts to comparing the airplane

to an automobile, *"Don's you know that thing you reaching for is bigger'n a auto"* (175). Her

use of "auto" as a more recognizable mechanized machinery for moving through space is an

unsuccessful attempt to ground the airplane in another object that is within reach of most people.

This brief exchange reveals Todd's state of being for much of the story. He is perpetually

ignorant of the quotidian workings of race. For instance, immediately after Jefferson relates how

Mister Graves, the owner of the land, has killed five young boys mistaking them for men, Todd

responds by querying Jefferson on why he remains in Alabama, and Jefferson responds, "You

black, son … You have to come by the white folks, too" (177). Just as Todd's mother explains

the workings of the airplane to Todd, so too does Jefferson explain the workings of Jim Crow

where a black sharecropper and community cannot take a white man who killed five young boys

to task for his crime. This is the lesson that Jefferson and Todd's mother impart to Todd, yet it is

one that he can only fully comprehend once he is at the mercy of the black man whom he rejects

in order to reach for the seeming racial blindness of technological modernity that the airplane

signifies.

There is a palpable shift in Todd's consciousness after this moment in the story. His

conversation with Jefferson awakens memories and thoughts that allow Todd to confront his

suturing of his blackness to the airplane in order to escape the racial codes of the nation-state

("The closer I spin towards the earth the blacker I become" (178)). The air's signification as

devoid of racism is juxtaposed with the ground's saturation with racial violence. Todd's literal

grounding through his damaged body, and the air force's refusal to deploy the Tuskegee airmen

force him to unwillingly confront the racial violence he seeks to escape. Yet in his conversation

with Jefferson he is lulled into a hallucinatory state where he recounts the airplane, and the air, as

also a source of physical and political violence meted against black life. Todd's memory of an

airplane dropping fliers that threatened black voters recalls similar historical events reported in

Oklahoma in 1922 when the Ku Klux Klan dropped fliers from an airplane warning black voters

to "not attempt to vote unless you are legally registered and can vote for clean law

enforcement."[107] Ellison, again, shows how law enforcement has always been part of white

supremacy. Unlike the newspaper's brief description of the events that solely report on the

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[107] From the Topeka State Journal of August 1st 1922

KKK's message, Ellison centers the fear and terror of black residence. Todd describes the

terrorizing details of these events. I cite Todd's recollection in detail to show the depth of what

the newspaper article did not capture, and to convey the significance of this memory in altering

Todd's relationship to the airplane.

> … Todd was far away, searching the sky for a plane in a hot dry land on a day and age he had long forgotten. He was going mysteriously with his mother through empty streets where black faces peered from behind drawn shades and someone was rapping at a window and he was looking back to see a hand and a frightened face frantically beckoning from a cracked door and his mother was looking down the empty perspective of the street and shaking her head and hurrying him along and at first it was only a flash he saw and a motor was droning as through the sun's glare he saw it gleaming silver as it circled and he was seeing a burst like a puff of white smoke and hearing his mother yell, "Come along, boy, I got no time for them fool airplanes, I got no time," and he saw it a second time, the plane flying high, and the burst appeared suddenly and fell slowly, billowing out and sparkling like fireworks and he was watching and being hurried along as the air filled with a flurry of white pinwheeling cards that caught in the wind and scattered over the rooftops and into the gutters and a woman was running and snatching a card and reading it and screaming and he darted into the shower, grabbing as in winter he grabbed for snowflakes and bounding away at his mother's, "Come on here, boy! Come on, I say!" And he was watching as she took the card away seeing her face grow puzzled and turning taut as her voice quavered, "Niggers Stay from the Polls," and died to a moan of terror as he saw the eyeless sockets of a white hood staring at him from the card and above he saw the plane spiraling gracefully, agleam in the sun like a fiery sword. And seeing it soar he was caught, transfixed between a terrible horror and a horrible fascination. (178-179)

The young Todd's affective response towards the airplane is situated in his simultaneous viewing

of it as an object that spirals "gracefully" even as it delivers words of fear and suppression. His

mother's fear might be rooted in remembering how airplanes were used in the Tulsa riots of 1921

to wipe out a thriving black business community. The airplane is after all an instrument of

domination and oppression, particularly for black people. The quiver in her voice extends the

terror of the land to the air. Caught between his annihilation and his dream, Todd, however, feels

both a "terrible horror" and "horrible fascination," simultaneously afraid and titillated at the idea

of being in the air, of flying.

This memory lays the groundwork for Todd's confrontation with Graves, the white

owner of the land who attempts to have Todd admitted into an asylum. Graves becomes the

physical embodiment of Todd's horror: "Todd watched the drawling red face, feeling that all the

unnamed horror and obscenities that he had ever imagined stood materialized before him" (180).

Graves unsuccessful attempt to pass Todd off as someone who has clearly lost his mind because

he dared to fly an airplane ("you all know caint let the nigguh git up that high without going

crazy"). The physical harm he inflicts on Todd after he tells him not to touch him brings Todd in

confrontation with the racial violence he seeks to escape. Todd's response to the unfolding terror

of racism is laughter, a laughter that recalls Jefferson's at the end of his story earlier in the story:

> Blasts of hot, hysterical laughter tore from his chest, causing his eyes to pop, and
> he felt the veins in his neck would surely burst. And then a part of him stood
> behind it all, watching the surprise in Graves' red face and his own hysteria. He
> thought he would never stop, he would laugh himself to death. It rang in his ears
> like Jefferson's laughter and he looked for him, centering his eye desperately
> upon his face, as though somehow he had become his sole salvation in an insane
> world of outrage and humiliation. It brought a certain relief. He was suddenly
> aware that although his body was still contorted, it was an echo that no longer
> rang in his ears. He heard Jefferson's voice with gratitude. (180-181)

This laughter rescripts Todd's earlier separation of himself from Jefferson. Much like Jefferson's

laughter, Todd's laughter, like Ellison's in "An Extravagance of Laughter," is a sign of attaining

"a certain wisdom" of the possibility of both death and life (657-658).

Indeed, Todd's redemption, to finally return to Lucy's argument that Jefferson's story

ferries Todd home, happens when he begins to recall all his encounters with the airplane, both

the childhood excitement of flight and the horror of living under the conditions of terror. It is the

story of the KKK's repression through the airplane that allows him to re-evaluate his childhood

fascination with the air as a site of freedom. But it is a re-evaluation that is only possible through

Jefferson's story and laughter. Todd recognizes a parallel between Jefferson's story and his

condition, but unlike Jefferson who has no one to turn to for help, Todd fixes his eyes on

Jefferson waiting for him to assist him. In as much as Todd's salvation is routed through the

figure of blackness he initially rejects, it is also enabled by re-seeing his connection to

Jefferson.[108] This connection, in turn, enables him to understand that the airplane, regardless of

its technological capabilities, does not erase his racial grounding.

Todd's initial refusal to be led by his race is in stark contrast to the end of the story when

he is physically sustained by his "race", by Jefferson and his son. Between the two black persons

who have labored to sustain his life, Todd is forced to reconcile his imagined distinction from

Jefferson:

> A new current of communication flowed between the man and boy and himself.
> They moved him gently. Far away he heard a mocking-bird liquidly calling. He
> raised his eyes, seeing a buzzard poised unmoving in space. For a moment the
> whole afternoon seemed suspended, and he waited for the horror to seize him
> again. Then like a song within his head he heard the boy's soft humming and saw
> the dark bird glide into the sun and glow like a bird of flaming gold. (181-82)

The birds' "liquidly calling" resonates throughout "Flying Home" and creates a frontier between

Todd's imitation of flight as an attempt to escape the racial strictures that keep him grounded,

and Todd's ultimate reconciliation of his grounding as "unmoving". The pervasive presence of

the birds through sounds and sometimes through sight parallel flight as naturally occurring and

flight as mechanized. Just as you can hear the mechanical humming of the airplane, so too Todd

observes the many sounds of the birds who at the beginning of "Flying Home" cause his crash,

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[108] According to bell hooks "learning to see clearly" is a pathway towards the "political process of decolonization"
(18). If seeing is pivotal to understanding race, per Du Bois, then to see is a discursive tool that is fundamental to
any coming into consciousness of the workings of blackness.

and in the end, keep the horror away. The boy's humming rendered wordlessly and the buzzard's "glide into the sun and glow like a bird of flaming gold" undoes the expected "horror" which seems to allow Todd to be, to communicate, and to be present in the temporality of blackness after the storm has passed (182).

In this ecology of antiblackness, there is life and sociality; one that both acknowledges the pervasiveness of violence in black life but also its living in the "underground, in outer spaces".[109] It is precisely this living that Todd finds with Jefferson and Teddy.

Coda: A Portrait of Blackness Stitched into the Airplane

Both of Ellison stories, "A Party Down at the Square" and "Flying Home," were written a while ago, and in the time that has passed airplanes have undergone expansive technological transformations. Yet commercial and military aviation has not necessarily transcended the forms of violence that these stories depict, nor has the economic success of black people changed the ingrained forms of violence that technology enacts and performs daily, hourly. Taking Sharpe's understanding of interregnum as an "interval" or a breach of continuity, pause, vacant space, a lacuna that makes other things possible, this section considers Adrian Piper's *Self-Portrait 2000* as opening ways to understand the airplane in more contemporary forms of black travel. In the aftermath of Ellison's stories, other narratives emerge through which to grasp the airplane's temporal, and technological closeness and/or distance to/from black life.

In his viewing of Adrian Piper's *Self-Portrait 2000,* Roderick Ferguson begins with an edict: "LET THIS IMAGE BE A LESSON TO YOU. In fact, think of it as an archive, but one

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[109] Drawing on Jared Sexton's assertion in "Ante-Anti-Blackness: Afterthought" (2012) where he argues that there is a misrecognition (in the Lacanian sense of *meconnaissance*) of Afro-pessimism's understanding of black death. He says, "A living death is as much a death as it is a living…. Black life is not lived in the world that the world lives in, but it is lived underground, in outer space".
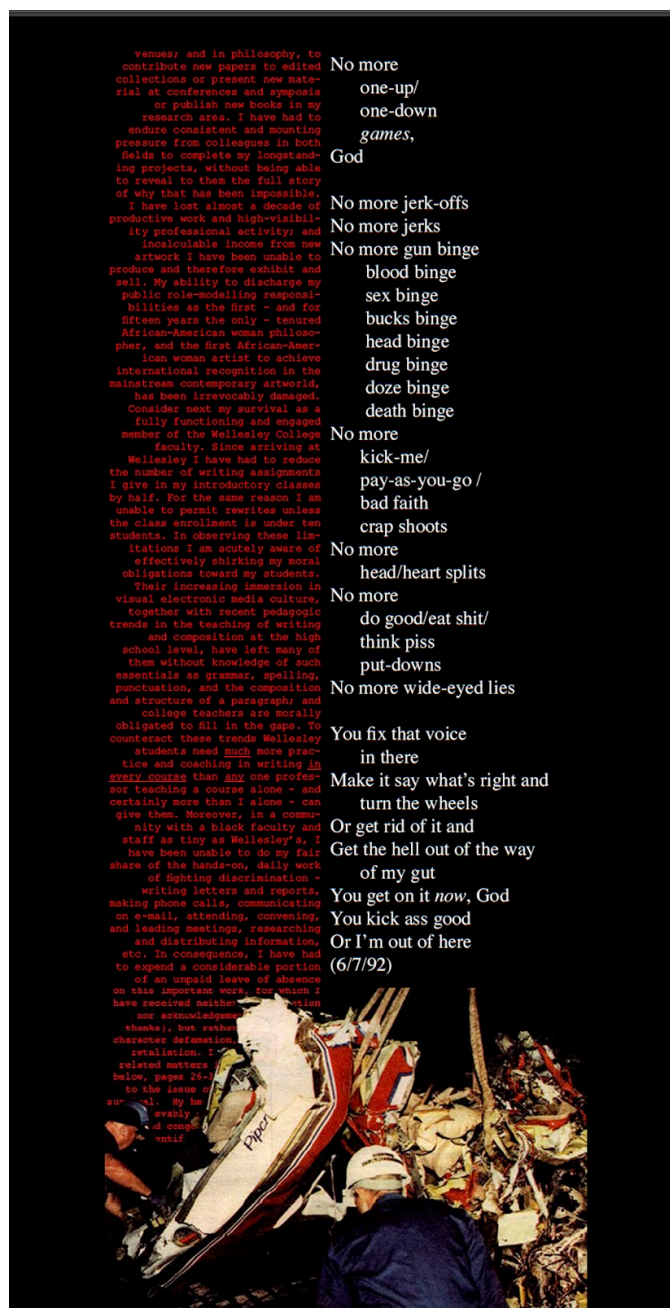
that records what typical depositories refuse to document" (Ferguson 1). This guide in looking

interprets Piper's collage of her dossier of grievances against Wellesley College, a poem

commanding "God" to set things right without further delay, and a crashed airplane with the

inscription "Piper" visible on the wreckage as bearing (in both senses of the word, as holding

something and making it visible) the structural reality and theoretical weight of archiving black

women's lives.[110] Piper's archive as a constellation of parts finds form through the moment of

assembling/collecting to constitute an imagistic portrait of her life, and the institutional life of

black women.[111] In the accompanying artist's note, Piper explains that the letter is part of "a

larger dossier of grievances, including legal documents against Wellesley as well as word of an

appendicitis that Piper suffered, presumably because of her working conditions. We also learn

that the felled plane named Piper is the one in which JFK Jr. died and that the Piper Aircraft

Company—founded by Piper's great-uncle—owns the plane. We are also informed that Piper's

mother was the upstairs maid in Cape Cod for JFK Sr. during the early 1960s" (3-4). Piper's

intertwining of personal manifestations and experience is represented visually as a downed

airplane, in actuality a mangled wreck imitating crumpled paper, like a discarded archive. This

airplane unveils Piper's deeply intertwined family history with air travel and its technology, even

as it points out the unknowable archive of black life and the technology of the airplane.

     Since the 1970s, Piper's art has transcended the imagined distance between art and life.

In abandoning the "three-dimensional constructed object altogether," Piper utilized herself as "an

art object" (Piper 21 and Cottingham 63). Thus, the image of the downed airplane at the bottom

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[110] I do not want to dwell on the vast expanse of work on the archive. The most well-known of these works: Jacque Derrida's *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (1996), Michel Foucault's *The Archaeology of Knowledge: And the Discourse on Language* (1982), and Carolyn Steedman's *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* (2002).
[111] Indebted to conversations with Ethan Madarieta whose sense of the archive as a constellation sustains my understanding of how Piper uses the collage in *Self-Portrait 2000* to convey an image of the self.

of the page allows for an aerial gaze into Piper's life. From the air, one sees the parts but fails to

comprehend the details that the artist note offers. This "condition of abstraction" as Sarah Jane

Cervenak reads in Piper's earlier performance of *Mythic Being* where she wears a wig and

sunglass and walks through the streets as a man, enables both a close engagement with the

different texts and images that make up the self-collected archive of the self, even as it obscures

the hidden details of their connection to Piper's life.

venues; and in philosophy, to contribute new papers to edited collections or present new material at conferences and symposia or publish new books in my research area. I have had to endure consistent and mounting pressure from colleagues in both fields to complete my longstanding projects, without being able to reveal to them the full story of why that has been impossible. I have lost almost a decade of productive work and high-visibility professional activity; and incalculable income from new artwork I have been unable to produce and therefore exhibit and sell. My ability to discharge my public role-modelling responsibilities as the first – and for fifteen years the only – tenured African-American woman philosopher, and the first African-American woman artist to achieve international recognition in the mainstream contemporary artworld, has been irrevocably damaged. Consider next my survival as a fully functioning and engaged member of the Wellesley College faculty. Since arriving at Wellesley I have had to reduce the number of writing assignments I give in my introductory classes by half. For the same reason I am unable to permit rewrites unless the class enrollment is under ten students. In observing these limitations I am acutely aware of effectively shirking my moral obligations toward my students. Their increasing immersion in visual electronic media culture, together with recent pedagogic trends in the teaching of writing and composition at the high school level, have left many of them without knowledge of such essentials as grammar, spelling, punctuation, and the composition and structure of a paragraph; and college teachers are morally obligated to fill in the gaps. To counteract these trends Wellesley students need _much_ more practice and coaching in writing _in every course_ than _any_ one professor teaching a course alone – and certainly more than I alone – can give them. Moreover, in a community with a black faculty and staff as tiny as Wellesley's, I have been unable to do my fair share of the hands-on, daily work of fighting discrimination – writing letters and reports, making phone calls, communicating on e-mail, attending, convening, and leading meetings, researching and distributing information, etc. In consequence, I have had to expend a considerable portion of an unpaid leave of absence on this important work, for which I have received neither ... ... nor acknowledgement ... thanks), but rather character defamation ... retaliation. I ... related matters below, pages 26-... to the issue o... su...al. My h... evably ... d cong... ntif...

No more
   one-up/
   one-down
   games,
God

No more jerk-offs
No more jerks
No more gun binge
   blood binge
   sex binge
   bucks binge
   head binge
   drug binge
   doze binge
   death binge
No more
   kick-me/
   pay-as-you-go /
   bad faith
   crap shoots
No more
   head/heart splits
No more
   do good/eat shit/
   think piss
   put-downs
No more wide-eyed lies

You fix that voice
   in there
Make it say what's right and
   turn the wheels
Or get rid of it and
Get the hell out of the way
   of my gut
You get on it _now_, God
You kick ass good
Or I'm out of here
(6/7/92)

Adrian Piper's *Self-Portrait 2000* (2000; Scroll-Down Website Artwork)

These layered archives that make up Piper's *Self-Portrait 2000* are more than an instance where a black woman's personal representation coincides with a downed airplane. It is a site of archive making, that turns the intersections of histories into narrative. Piper's conjoining of her narrative to her white lineage's involvement in airplane production, and her black mother's relationship to the Kennedy's through a downed airplane point to an intimacy between this sense of the self and

the airplane.[112] The documents compiled to reveal an experience of institutional power structures – a poem that demands redress from a deity that is considered all-powerful, and an image from the *National Enquirer*, a tabloid publication, of a downed airplane that generated more questions than answers – all point to Piper's creation of a constellation that directly confront institutions of knowledge (and power) in order to produce a kind of knowledge that substitutes the subject/object of the portrait for another kind of object. In the absence of a "proper body" or a named object, the airplane, the letter, and the poem become the surface through which the subject/object is distilled. Ferguson's keen sense of the "absent subject," still necessitates the rehabilitation of the downed airplane as a kind of visual depiction of the self ("she "depicts" herself as a downed airplane…) (Ferguson n.p.).[113] The airplane, almost completely wrecked but for the part that contains the name, signals a loss of something intimate and distant, something that is merely the surface on which a name is etched.[114]

If Piper's self-portrait is an archive, then it is also a site of institutional power that reveals as much as it obscures. It is perhaps a distant nuanced echo of Ellison's Todd, even as it reinforces the ways that the airplane is connected to whiteness first, and more distantly to blackness. The men in the image in white hats are white, and the victims are also white, and only distantly is Piper herself connected to this site. Yet it is this image of a downed airplane that holds together Piper's vision of her self. For Ferguson this self-portrait signifies multiply, as the "entrance, …representation, and … troubles" of racial minorities. For me, Self-*portrait 2000* is the darkened surface that sits uncomfortably within the institution.

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[112] Piper's father was excised from his sister and family, and Piper's only met with the white members of her family two years after her father died (Piper, "Personal Chronology" 193).

[113] From Roderick A. Ferguson's "World-Making and World-Devastation in Adrian Piper's Self-portrait 2000" on the University of Minnesota Press Blog (Posted Thursday, December 2012).

[114] Coincidentally, the Piper family lost Piper Aircrafts by the beginning of the 1970s

In this image, I reencounter Ellison's child protagonist in "A Party Down at the Square" whose line of sight moves from the man being lynched to the airplane on the verge of landing prematurely and interrupting this violent act. Somehow, I have a hard time seeing Jefferson and Teddy watching Todd's tailspin into the ground. Their line of sight remains uncaptured in the archive of aviation technology, uncaptured in my imagination. And this absence of black life in the annals of aviation is in part what this chapter has been interested in capturing.

There is no questioning technology's transformation of the working of the world. The airplane, as I argue, continues this relationship between black life (and death) and technology by unveiling the deep entanglements between black life and the technology of air travel. In "A Party Down at the Square," the airplane's interruption signals a transformation of lynching into less visible state-sanctioned forms of murdering black people, and Todd's memories, in "Flying Home," of the fear and violence that the airplane signifies allows him to begin understanding that the ties that bind him to Jefferson and Teddy might be racial as well as historical, epistemological, and technological. Piper's depiction of the airplane as always stitched into the fabric of blackness regardless of its perceived distance means that the ecology of the airplane, its reverberations, its unintended maneuvers interrupt, direct, kill, birth, and mediate black living globally.

CHAPTER THREE:

Trapped in the Airport: Borders, Blackness and the Myth of the Global Citizen

"There are uncertain traces that are hard to ignore once they are sensed. The feeling that airline travel and racial oppression go together is one of them." (Chandra D. Bhimull *Empire in the Air: Airline Travel and the African Diaspora*)

Borders are contentious spaces where the fiction of the nation-state meets its geographical limits. Created through European imperial and colonial violence, the fictiveness of borders across Africa are well-rehearsed while their material necessity is bemoaned by those who transit through them and face the regulatory impulse of the nation-state.[115] Writing in 2011, the Nigerian journalist and author Tolu Ogunlesi observes the increasing dissolution and insignificance of European borders in the Euro-zone, and the securitization and protectionism of African borders despite attempts by regional economic blocks such as Economic Community of West African Countries (ECOWAS) to render these borders more easily permeable. Observing European borders dissolving, while African borders are being reinforced, Ogunlesi reaches an epiphany: "a border does not merely separate one country from another; a border is actually a country in and unto itself, with its own government or anarchy; its own autographed atmosphere and copyrighted customs" (107).

If a border is a country, who belongs there? Who is excluded? Who is a stranger, a foreigner, and who decides? How does a border craft its atmosphere separately from the nation-

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[115] The borders of many African countries were the result of the Berlin Conference of 1885-6 where European states and their representatives met to divide the continent amongst themselves using various treaties that they had signed with different local rulers. In his critique of Kwame Appiah's notions of cosmopolitanism, Michael Onyebuchi Eze critiques Appiah's sense of fluid boundaries by positing: "Boundaries constitute a source of inequality. Boundaries, especially imposed artificial (imperial) borders perpetuate discrimination in terms of subjective and social mobility. Boundaries undermine human equality and social wellbeing" (94). I return to Eze in the conclusion of this chapter; however, it is worth mentioning from the beginning that his sense of borders as imperial creations that create forms of inequality is akin to my understanding of the airport as a border that creates particularly violent conditions for black travelers.

state? More pertinently, in the context of this chapter, how does the airport as the border of the modern nation-state stage the histories, anxieties and desires of the nation-state and its actors? And if increasingly, national borders are focalized not at the geopolitical limits of the state, but at the major point of international entry, the airport, then how does the airport delineate between those who belong and those who do not? Indeed, if the airport is also where Chandra Bhimull senses the entanglement between racial oppression and air travel, then how does approaching the airport as a seemingly autonomous space reveal how the powers of the state are enacted, deployed, and restricted by international law and its codes?

While the previous chapters have examined aerial and technological sites that are often unfixed, this chapter attends to the interplay between the landed and aerial border of the nation-state. It contends that the airport is the boundary of the modern nation-state and thus a place where its national narratives are deployed by its deputized actors. Described by essayist and novelist Pico Iyer as an "interregnum" and Political Scientist Mark Salter, as a "transient institution," the airport is a space where one is nationalized or denationalized through passports, visas and other forms of documentation.[116] In other words, having left the authority of one state, a traveler is not fully within the authority of the next one. The airport is thus a place where social, political, and economic categories of the citizen, foreigner, and alien are established and enforced. The airport, acting as an agent of the state, determines who is recognized, admitted, detained and /or attacked. Such determinations are often explicitly gendered and racialized, as Simone Browne has noted. Describing the case of Suaad Hagi Mohamud, a Somali born Canadian citizen who was detained at Jomo Kenyatta International Airport in Nairobi in May

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[116] For a more detailed analysis of these processes of identification at the global airport, see Mark Salter's "The Global Visa Regime and the Political Technologies of the International Self: Borders, bodies, Biopolitics" *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* Vol. 32, No. 2, 2006.

2009, Browne concludes: "who can be left at the border and abandoned by the state and by what technological means" is determined by race and gender (140). Black women are often those publicly marked for "scrutiny and inspection," she adds (140). For those subjected to the scrutiny and inspection of airport police and private security firms, and denied access into or out of a nation, the airport is far from "transient, purposeful, and . . . happy" space that the white British novelist J. G. Ballard described in the late 90s in his essay, "World City."

Drawing on Abdulrazak Gurnah's novel *By the Sea* (2001), Marguerite Abouet and Clément Oubrerie's graphic narrative, *Aya: Life in Yop City* (2005-2010); and Nana Nyarko Boateng's short story, "Swallowing Ice" (2015) this chapter examines the airport as the border of the nation-state where the global citizen is formed and recognized. Each of these texts invites an examination of the airport as an architectural and political structure, which pulls together national and transnational histories and narratives fundamental to the formation of the nation-state and its people, which have long been "secured" by the military. Indeed, this militarized history of aviation, which includes airport security, has perpetrated various forms of racial and sexual violence against black travelers. Paying particular attention to the postcolonial traveler, I examine the politics and poetics of recognition at the airport through the epistemological and systemic remains of colonialism that haunts the postcolonial Black traveler, or what Ayo Coly in another context calls "postcolonial hauntologies."[117] In other words, global mobility is haunted by a "racist angst" that justifies the indexing of the postcolonial traveler as "high risk" and somehow beyond the framework of the global or cosmopolitan citizen. By way of a conclusion, I

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[117] Coly in *Postcolonial Hautologies* provides a "diagnosis [of] a postcolonial angst about the female body" by showing how the African female body "haunts postcolonial African discourses and subsequently frames the tentative engagements of African women with the sexual female body" (3).

turn to a discussion of the global citizen by rehearsing and extending the interplay between

Afropolitanism and cosmopolitanism.

Additionally, I diverge deliberately from scholarship that considers African airports in the

context of development in order to detail their need for innovation and expansion, placing them

on par with airports in the Euro-American world.[118] Instead, I argue that airports allow for an

understanding of how nation-states and its denizens delineate citizens from foreigners and aliens,

and how for the postcolonial Black traveler, this act is entangled with histories of colonialism

and anti-blackness. I take this approach, in part, because literature's attention to the broad

ecological landscape of characters captures the interlocking workings of aviation and modernity

at the site of the black African at home and abroad**.** Further, by eschewing developmentalist

frameworks, I reveal that in aviation's entanglement with modernity in the context of Africa,

there is something in excess of the lacunae between Africa and the rest of the world.[119] It is not

enough to delineate between access to a technologically mediated ontology, and a "momentous"

perception of aviation in African literature because these disparities are always already historical,

economic, and political and act as a mask to obscure the whitened logic of development,

globality, and growth (49-50).[120]

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[118] There are a number of works that fall within this category. A cursory search for aviation in Africa will disproportionally yield such results. An early example of this is Duncan Cumming's "Aviation in Africa" which examines the steps taken by postcolonial African countries to increase air travel as a viable mode of transportation; Gordon Pirie's "Geographies of Air Transport in Africa: Aviation's 'Last Frontier'" is another example of the developmental impulse.

[119] In "Reading for the Region in New African Novels: Flight, Form, and the Metonymic Ideal," Jeanne-Marie Jackson argues that it is in the spaces where aviation's mundaneness has remained an "event" that "globality's paradoxical limitations" can be gleaned (44). Though Jackson's theoretical framing culminate into modernity, it is not clear to me how aviation in the "new African novel" tackles modernity's many complexities and incongruities where Africa is concerned.

[120] Denis Ferreira Da Silva asserts in "Globality" that race is often absent in development studies scholarship that aims at crafting the so-called third world, now the global south, as Europe's other who have somehow failed to attain the level of advancement prescribed by Europe and its siblings. Similarly, Kwame Otu in "LGBT Human Rights Expeditions in Homophobic Safaris: Racialized Neoliberalism and Post-Traumatic White Disorder in the BBC's The World's Worst Place to Be Gay" argues that when developmentalist frameworks are applied to queer

From Arrival to Detention: Airports and the Architectural Past/Future of Transit

Written in 2001, the novel Abdulrazak Gurnah's *By the Sea* is about a Zanzibari man, Saleh Omar, who leaves Zanzibar in order to escape potential imprisonment. He steals the identity of his enemy, Rajab Shaaban, whose son, Hassan, upon returning to Zanzibar threatened to have him imprisoned if he does not return the deed to his father's house. Upon his arrival at Gatwick airport, Saleh is interrogated and subsequently detained.[121] When he is released from detention, Saleh forges an unlikely friendship with Latif, the younger son of Rajan Shaaban, who now lives in the U.K. and has become an expert on Zanzibar. Gurnah's fictional world expertly weaves together a complex tapestry of themes from alienation to a kind of imperfect reconciliation, from silence to storytelling and memory, from friendship to betrayal. In so doing, Gurnah's astute novel and its protagonist provides one of the most relevant meditations on global travel, migrancy, and the fallacy of global citizenship.

From Saleh's arrival through to his interrogation, the airport emerges as a space where the nation must re-emphasize its commitment to its curated international public image as the purveyor of democracy (which is often adversarial to its actual imperialist objectives) even as it enforces its procedures of entry. Gurnah's meditation on the airport in the first section of the novel offers an insight into how state apparatuses function to assess who qualifies for admission

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men in Ghana it imposes a western order of sexuality at is at odds with how these self-identified effeminate men in Ghana would otherwise identify.

[121] At the detention center, Saleh meets non-white men from all over the world. These men, which he describes in some detail provide a cross-section of the kinds of travelers that are funneled to these detention centers. Saleh notes that there are no Nigerians in his center: "There were twenty-two men in the camp. The twelve in our building were four Algerians, three Ethiopians, two Iranian brothers just out of their teens, who clung to each other and whispered and sobbed in the night before they fell asleep in the same bed, a Sudanese and an Angolan, who was the dynamo and live-wire of our establishment, bursting with advice, with jokes, with politics, with deals, with the righteousness of Unita's cause in the war. No Nigerians here, the Angolan told us. Too many of them in detention and they're too much trouble, so they have to be kept under lock and key in an old castle in the frozen north, away from human habitation. Too many of them in the world altogether" (44). The idea that Nigerians constitute an excess and thus have to be separated can be applied to these group as well who might be understood as in excess of those that the nation can admit through its borders.

into the nation and implements a strategy to deal with those who lack the accouterments needed

for admission. The airport, as becomes clear in *By the Sea*, functions as a kind of exceptional

space constraining mobility for those travelers who are detained and subjected to the laws of the

state. Ironically, the state also renders them beyond the protection of these laws. At the airport,

the relationship between race, (neo)colonization and imperial epistemology are established and

contested.[122]

Using the first-person singular narrative, Gurnah closes the distance between Saleh's

interiority and the reader. By allowing the reader to be privy to Saleh's thoughts and unspoken

responses, Gurnah forces a relationality that destabilizes the distinctions between "us" and

"them" that is so prevalent in discourses of migration and globalization. Saleh's statement early

in the novel is both an introspection of a personal journal through one's lifetime, as well as

reflection on a larger collective experience of human mobility.

> I am a refugee, an asylum-seeker. These are not simple words, even if habit of
> hearing makes them seem so. I arrive at Gatwick Airport in the later afternoon on
> 23 November last year. It is a familiar minor climax in our stories, leaving what
> we know and arriving in strange places, carrying little bits of jumbled luggage and
> suppressing secrete and garbled ambitions. (4)

It is uncertain who is encompassed in the plural pronouns "our" and "we". Their use establishes

parallel trajectories and readings. On the one hand, it is possible to view the conditions of travel

and mobility that Saleh describes as an inevitable outcome of the dual forces of globalization and

modernity that has been exacerbated by aviation. On the other, one can also view Saleh as

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[122] As signatories of the Geneva Convention nations like the United Kingdom are required to not impose penalties on someone seeking asylum nor to restrict their movements. Yet there is difference between asylum as a category of international law and refugee status. Saleh claims both which invokes Article 31 of the Geneva Convention Article that warns host countries not to impose any penalties on those seeking refugee status, and advocates for their movement not to be restricted beyond that which is necessary. See "Article 31 of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees: Non-Penalization, Detention and Protection"

contemplating the *longue dureé* of human travel and mobility, of which his arrival at Gatwick

airport marks only a point. Regardless of where one leans, Gurnah succeeds in establishing the

airport as a site where longer historical processes of global travel culminate.

Awed by the sheer size and scale of the modern airport, Saleh's is first impressed by the

imposing "monumental" scale and architectural posture of Gatwick airport. A place unlike

anything he has ever encountered, Gatwick airport exceeds anything he could have imagined.

The second-largest airport in the U.K., Gatwick airport, facilitates the airport to detention

pipeline with two immigration removal centers, Tinsley House and Brooks House. It is in light of

this reality that John Masterson asserts that the airport: "conceived from the alien arrivant's

perspective," reveals itself as a "disciplinary and exclusionary space from the outset" (413).

Even before Saleh's realization of the exclusionary politics that functions through the airport, the

scale of it all impresses and frightens him. It disciplines his steps and demands that he submits to

the order that the signs provide. It allows no room for errors.

> I walked slowly through what felt like coldly lit and silent empty tunnels, though
> now on reflection I know I walked past rows of seats and large glass windows,
> and signs and instructions. … I walked slowly, surprised at every anxious turn
> that an instruction awaited to tell me where to go. I walked slowly so I would not
> miss a turning or misread a sign, so that I would not attract too early by getting
> into a flutter of confusion. (5)

In as much as signs and instructions provide guidance, they also function to maintain order and

discipline. And for Saleh, this disciplining translates into his slow and careful gait, his cautious

and dutiful obedience of the signs, and the management of his emotions. There is nothing in

Saleh's imagination to prepare him for the architectural scale of this airport; there is nothing to

prepare him from the disciplinary regime that the airport demands of one's body and self.[123]

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[123] As remnants of second world war architecture, or postcolonial architecture supported by international aid,
airports across Africa are often smaller in scale than their Euro-American counterparts or are located in areas where

In order to successfully navigate through the architectural scale of the airport, Saleh relies, like other travelers, on what Gillian Fuller refers to as the "navigational semiotics" of the airport. These are the universally recognizable signage that seeks to "stabilise the confluence of people and machines" to control movement and flow (Fuller 237-9). These signs, as Fuller further explains, pursue us beyond the airport, as we find them on the highway and at hospitals where they also manage flow and directionality. For Saleh, these signs lead him in his tentative, careful steps towards the passport desk, filled with the fear of "miss[ing] a turn or misread[ing] a sign," which in turn will, he believes, draw unsolicited attention to him (5). This fear is not the paranoia of the newly arrived. It is a direct outcome of the panoptic economy of the airport, where a recorded voice enjoins travelers to watch and observe each other in order to report any "suspicious behavior" or *some-thing* out of the ordinary. Here, to borrow from Sara Ahmed, one "sense[s]" the distinction between the ordinary and thing that is out of place, but the absence of specified language to encode the extra-ordinary is itself a "technique of knowledge," as well as an index of those "uncommon" bodies perceived to be out of place (29).

Once Saleh arrives at passport control, he has to rely on different forms of "navigational semiotics" to get him through the border into the nation. He adheres to the baffling, yet "resourceful," advice he received to pretend not to speak English when he purchased his ticket (45). Though Saleh does not initially understand the purpose of this advice, he believes that it is the kind of "crafty" practice that the "powerless" would know and utilize. This *semiotics of the powerless*, which momentarily deprives him of language, guides him through his interrogation.

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expansion into the kinds of monumental scale of other global airports have been inhibited by urban development and expansion. Newer airports constructed across the continent are taking steps to remedy this by building in areas far removed from urban areas to allow for opportunities to expand, and for greater securitization to meet the demands of European and American security measures. A great example of this Senegal's Blaise Diagne International Airport (AIBD) that is about 40km from the capital Dakar.

Though we have little information why Saleh is given this advice since the United Kingdom's foreign policy at the time had already offered asylum to people from Zanzibar, we get clues throughout the novel that these governmental pronouncements are limited by the calculable "cost" and benefit of accepting some asylum seekers over others. As Saleh comes to realize "…someone had started to count the cost of admitting a man of my age to the United Kingdom: too old to work in a hospital, too old to produce a future England cricketer, too old for anything much except Social Security, assisted housing and a subsidized cremation" (49). Finding himself disadvantaged, performing silence becomes the only pathway to navigating his interrogation.

Saleh's performance of silence enacts a kind of common-sense approach to the machinery of immigration that is located at the airport. In choosing silence, Saleh refuses to participate in the "confessionary" impulse that nation-state's demand of those attempting to enter through their borders. He refuses to participate in the kind of "self-telling" or "confessional" (as Mark Salter calls it) where migrants gain advantages by verbally and ontologically proving or narrativizing their abject conditions (171). In other words, if Saleh were to confess, or to tell his story of transit, he would be offering a mode of recognition by which he would be likely judged unfit or otherwise for access into the nation. These verbal confessions, together with the "auto-confession of the body" are taken as partial evidence of the narrative your documents and biometric data already tell. By remaining silent, and repeating only the English words that would secure his access into the nation, "refugee" and "asylum," Saleh finds a way to secure the advantages of the state, without yielding to the confessional.

Sissy Helff understands Saleh's silence as an attempt to "master the situation without losing control" (164). Citing Saleh's assertion that he knows the "meaning of silence, [and] the danger of words," Helff contends that this is illustrative of the reality that refugees encounter in

the world which demands that their narratives act as evidence of their violence experiences (qtd.

in Helff 165; Gurnah 12). In choosing silence, according to Helff, Saleh "fashion[s] realities

beyond narration" (165). Another reading, by Meg Samuelson, asserts that there is an oscillation

between silence and storytelling, which Gurnah's characters in *By the Sea* are called upon to

perform. Reframing Samuelson's interpretation, it is possible to ask what kind of space(s)

engenders silence, and which spaces allow for storytelling? It is clear from Saleh's decision to be

silent that the airport is not a space for storytelling. Neither is Kevin Edelman, his interrogator,

the ideal person to whom to tell stories. When asked if silence in *By the Sea* was a commentary

on stories which had not yet been told, the necessity of certain stories which were not yet told or

stories which had failed to be told, the author, Abdulrazak Gurnah responded by saying:

> I know the meaning of silence. Sometimes it endangers you to speak every word
> that you have to say. There is a paradox in that silence is on one hand
> intimidating, but on the other hand, it is also safety, for if you don't speak you
> don't incriminate yourself, if you don't speak you don't put yourself into
> difficulties. It's a kind of deference, a kind of resignation. But what this narrator
> really means and what I was interested in is the danger of words. Words are in
> you, but words are dangerous because they tell the truth. (121)

It is undoubtedly true that Saleh has something to fear from the revelatory potential of words,

having stolen another person's name and traveled to the UK to seek asylum. Silence, it appears,

is his only option, the only way to be certain that he does not reveal anything that British

authorities can use against him to prevent his successful admission into the space-time of the

British nation. Within the linguistic culture of airports, Saleh's silence performs, perhaps to the

extreme, the kinds of communicative restrictions airports impose, which have subsequently been

cemented into travel culture. Generally, communication at airports is often unidirectional,

delivered through public address systems and screens, or when solicited to permit entry

At their core, airports are constructed to process and to manage those who disrupt the flow of "process traffic" and to "capture and control flows in the most literal manner imaginable …of people, machines and cargo" (Fuller and Harley 15). Behind the shiny façades of sound-proof glass, lights and malls, are the "invisible corridors for the "deportation class"" (*Politics at the airport*, xi). While most travelers only experience airports through the visible sections of the airport's environment—ticketing counter, security, duty-free shops, and boarding gates, by arriving at the airport seeking asylum, Saleh is inducted into the substratum of the airport through his interrogation and subsequent detention. Saleh's experiences reveal the airport as designed to simultaneously show itself and conceal its workings. Increasingly, airports operate as sites for questioning and detaining any traveler, who threatens the security of the nation-state. It is thus significant that, particularly in the era of counter-terrorism, airports are often built by architects and architectural firms who also build prisons and detentions centers. The architectural company Hellmuth, Obata and Kassabaum, for instance, built Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport in Atlanta, LaGuardia Airport Terminal B, and Salt Lake City International Airport Passenger Terminal, among others. They also built a number of correctional facilities in Illinois, the Iowa State Penitentiary, and the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation Mule Creek Infill Complex.[124] Funneled through this system of arrival, interrogation, and detention, Saleh is forced to rely on his silence to help him. In his silence, he reveals the deep-seated economic and racial segregation that is scripted onto the modern airport.

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[124] Another poignant example of this phenomenon is in Paul Virilio's "The Overexposed City" reveals how the French in constructing "maximum security cell-blocks" used the same "magnetized doorways" that airports had been using for years (359). Peter Adey also reveals how the forms of surveillance employed by airports, such as metal detectors, after the hijackings of the late 1960s and 1970s have increasingly filtered into sites of the everyday, such as schools and shopping malls.

During his interrogation and subsequent detention, Saleh begins to "feel" the kinds of policing and strictures that the airport imposes on those global others who are deemed unworthy of entry, and those seeking asylum who are not required to secure entry visas before their departure. Between the "tiny room and the duplicitous courtesy," Saleh Omar begins to understand the bodily nuance of imprisonment as part of the theater of the airport in its execution of monitoring and controlling of those who seek to enter into the nation-state (10). And he, Saleh Omar, has been earmarked as one of those foreigners who must be kept out.

Saleh's experience underscores the shifting scale of meaning of the foreigner, "the refugee," the "asylum-seeker" ("terrorist" in more recent times). These concepts work to delineate foreign-ness and distinguish between those who belong and those who do not. Whether local or global, the concept of the foreigner is always marked by class. As Rebecca Saunders asserts, wealth often fills the gap that allows some non-citizens to be accorded the rights of citizenship. Others must remain "global foreigners," which the nation keeps at bay by erecting walls and deploying its military. Saunders further maintains that while globalization has "shifted borders and redefined belonging" it maintains the category of the foreign that often encapsulates those who slave away in "low-wages" to sustain the lifestyle and consumption of high-income professional and managerial classes (89 and 95). Similarly, Mark Salter observes how the constitution of the "foreign" is vital to understanding how airports operate. He writes, "The right to detain, examine, and search travelers is defined in relation to their foreignness, their origins "outside," which renders them without protection while under question at the border" (172). Thus, one of the first questions Saleh's interrogator, Kevin Edelman, asks him is "Do you have any money, sir? Traveller's cheques? Sterling? Dollars" (7). According to Salter, the mobile subject is constituted in terms of "health, wealth, labor/leisure, and risk" (176). Failing to have

the economic means to purchase his way into the class of those who belong, or to have any contacts in the UK, or the right documentation Saleh is perceived as a risk and forced to endure further interrogations.

If Saunders theorization of the foreigner forgets anything, it is what Sara Ahmed divines when she says that "some-bodies are more recognizable as strangers than other bodies precisely because they are already read and valued in the demarcation of social spaces" (30). These "skinned" bodies, as Ahmed refers to them, are defined by deep-seated sensibilities that both makes them invisibility, while also encoding them as stranger, outsider, foreigner, immigrant. Drawing from Fanon's assertion that the skin becomes a seal, Ahmed interrogates what it would mean to think of the skin as a border that works as "social differentiation" (45-49). In Saleh's case, the "skin" as a racializing signifier comes to the fore when he utters the words, "refugee" and "asylum". It is the dual signification of his "skin" and his immigration status that solidifies his alterity from British nationhood. According to Arun Kundnani, the lexicon of the immigrant has shifted meaning within UK public discourse. Incorporated into everyday language, "immigrant" signifies "illegal" for black and brown people, regardless of their conditions or terms of entry (43). Their very corporeality places them outside the racial category of Englishness.[125] Ironically, the British who at one time claimed ownership over almost half of the earth by sailing all over the world in search of spices and empires now believe that the citizens of those former colonies should have no access or share in their national cake. By homogenizing all forms of migrancy into the racialized category of "illegal immigrants," it licenses violent attacks

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[125] Simon Gikandi's *Maps of Englishness*: *Writing Identity in the Culture of Colonialism* comes to mind in its contention that colonialism created the conditions that culminated into the formation of an English identity.

on immigrants of color living in the UK. In addition, by racializing immigrants, there is an assumed whitening of British citizenship.

This racial logic of the "illegal immigrant" underpins Saleh's exclusion from the British nation. Kevin, by suggesting that Saleh's age should have prevented him from leaving his home and seeking asylum, is parroting anti-migration sentiments across Europe that constitutes the mobile non-white traveler as illegal. Saleh's unvoiced answers provide responses that are unheard of in this economy of violent exclusion and expulsion of the foreigner – "At what age are you supposed to be afraid for your life? Or not to want to live without fear? How did he know that my life was in any less danger than those young men they let in? Why was it immoral to want to live better and in safety?" – responds to the unreasonable logic that delineates and defines acceptable conditions for migrancy (11).[126] Saleh's unspoken, or even unspeakable, responses meditate on the ways that arrival at the airport works to segregate and impose imperial epistemologies on some, often "raced," bodies. Perceived as multiply disadvantaged, black, old, poor, Saleh can lay no claim to any form of belonging. He exceeds the work-age and is thus unable to provide the cheap labor that is the "privilege" of admitting asylum-seekers.

In Saleh's interaction with Kevin, the airport becomes a space for determining who belongs, who can be admitted, and who is too foreign and must thus be detained or deported. It goes without saying that black bodies are always already perceived as foreign, always recognized as a stranger, as out of place, or beyond the scope of citizenship, even when they bear the requisite documentation.[127] The repetitive and recurrent violence of "flying while black" that

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[126] It is this same logic of illegality that is deployed by European nations like Italy to criminalize organizations that rescue migrants drowning in the Mediterranean because they do not want to be responsible for those they rescue. See http://theconversation.com/people-are-drowning-at-sea-why-arent-we-saving-them-119864

[127] See the case of Yvette Bradley was a middle-class black American who was subjected to humiliating searches at Newark Airport by customs officers who believed she was carrying drugs. See ACLU's Press Release on November

Simone Browne outlines, illuminates how "racial baggage" is implicitly part of the workings of the airport. In the wake of 9/11, the anxieties of the Euro-American nation-state resulted in the global restructuring of airports. In the process, brown and non-white bodies became increasingly relegated to the category of the stranger and the foreigner, taking center stage in the technologies of surveillance at the airport. This does not mean that prior to 9/11, the airport did not facilitate pathways from arrival to detention and a possible return to one's country of origin. 9/11 intensified these pathways and telescoped it onto black and sometimes brown travelers.

In *By the Sea,* Kevin's attempt to keep Saleh out, and Saleh's silent claim of belonging in the UK is presented as an argument about historical perspective. The longer genealogical lineage of the airport to the coastal port of the slave ship, the train station, bus stop, as well as the shopping mall becomes evident. On the one hand, Kevin stakes his claim of belonging in the UK by insisting that, by virtue of his whiteness, he and his family already belong, while Saleh does not:

> But my parents are European, that have a right, they're part of the family. …
> People like you come pouring in here without any thought of the damage they
> cause. You don't belong here, you don't value any of the things that we value, you
> haven't paid for them through generations, and we don't want you here. We'll
> make life hard for you, make you suffer indignities, perhaps even commit violence
> on you. (12)

In his mind, Saleh offers a counter-genealogy in his unspoken response to Kevin: an even longer history of Euro-American intrusion into Zanzibar and Africa at large to steal and extract resources. This history, he insists, gives him every right to be admitted into the British nation. In his unspoken response to Kevin, he says:

17th 1999 "In Case of "Flying While Black", U.S. Customs Service Subjected Woman to Harrowing Search, ACLU Charges" on https://www.aclu.org/news/case-flying-while-blackus-customs-service-subjected-woman-harrowing-search-aclu-charges

> Do you remember that *endless* catalogue of *objects* that were taken away to Europe because they were too fragile and delicate to be left in the clumsy and careless hands of natives? I am fragile and precious too, a sacred work, too delicate to be left in the hands of natives, so now you'd better take me too. I joke, I joke. (12 emphasis mine)

Saleh includes himself among "objects," which Europeans stole from the continent. Saleh reverses what Michelle Commander identifies as "speculative returns" where black diasporic people seek pathways of return that are imaginary or rooted in other forms of psychic return by following in the tracks of the "objects" that were looted from the continent. Saleh enacts a journey toward the site of the metropole to demand an acceptance into the "empire's" home territory. Even as he is thrust into this situation, his thoughts are deeply revealing of the kinds of wisdom that one might find in Anasi or Brer Rabbit or any of the other trickster characters in African and African diasporic folktale traditions. He catalogs the ways that he, the African continent, and its people have paid for the economic prosperity of Europe and its white populace. By recategorizing himself as an object, he is harkening to those human and material objects that sustain Europe's place in the world. Saleh's demand for asylum and entry into the nation positions the airport as both the border and the "gateway" of the modern nation-state. It also links the airport to earlier transitory sites such as the port, the train and bus station, as well as to the environmental and ecological scapes that surround it. In essence, airports enact changes in the environment and the ecology by "changing the contours of land, sea, and sky" (Fuller and Harley).

Earlier architectural visions and structures of the airport in Europe and the United States mimicked the known transitory hubs of the train/bus station and the seaport/harbor. The airport exists along this continuum. Like these transitory hubs in Europe and the United States, the airport enacts the forms of racialization and class imposition, although now through its

sophisticated biometric surveillance systems. These transitory hubs are the *same* spaces through and out of which generations of Europeans traveled and sailed to so-called "new," "unknown" "blank" lands to pillage, enslave, claim property, indoctrinate through civilizing missions, and enact violence on native populations.

On the other side of the coin, the construction of airports in the colonies aimed at material and human extractions vital for sustaining the Second World War. In the era of global travel, the airport facilitates the travel and worldly aspirations of the postcolonial elite to global spheres, and inadvertently also allows "hordes" of people from the African continent to Europe and the Americas. These so-called hordes are strictly regulated and restricted by Euro-American embassies and immigration officers. In no way, do their numbers compare with the number of Europeans who traveled unrestricted to the "new world".

In Saleh's reasoning, the airport like these earlier sites of transit is stained by the forms of violence and theft that marked early European encounters with "natives." It is perhaps in keeping with this trajectory that Saleh also loses something precious at the doorstep of the metropole: the ud-al-qamari (casket of incense) that Hussein, his friend, had earlier given him in exchange for an antique ebony table. The casket of incense is for Saleh a symbol of the transnational trades and encounters that existed in the Indian Ocean prior to and during the colonization of Zanzibar. This object connects Zanzibar to Cambodia, Bangkok, the Persian Empire, and India. It also connects Saleh to his "before" life that is no more. When he realizes that Kevin has "plundered" the casket of incense, Saleh recounts the history that is now forgotten as the "ownership" of the casket changes hands. "He gave me the casket as a gift, the casket Kevin Edelman plundered from me, and with it the last of the ud-al-qamari Hussein and his father bought in Bangkok in the year before the war, the casket which I had brought with me as all the luggage from a life

departed, the provisions of my after-life" (31). Kevin's theft deprives Saleh of the sole

possession that connects him with his previous life—his home, his stories, and friendship—as

well as his after-life. Restrained by his predicament and momentary inability to communicate or

protest, Saleh must accept this robbery, which replays, in miniature, European claims to own and

map the lands they stole.[128] As the "gatekeeper," or "bawab of Europe" Kevin does not realize

that those same European gates unleashed "hordes that went out to consume the world," by

committing genocide, pillaging humans and resources, and colonizing. These same gates that

lead into Europe now demand that the rest of the world seeks Europe's permission to enter (31).

Kevin, it appears, exercises the same kinds of power over Saleh that his ancestors exercised over

Selah's: the power to claim possession over the resources and materials of the "native," "the

colonized."

When he is finally sent to the detention center, Saleh encounters others whose travel has

also ended in a kind of stasis, waiting for the state to decide their fate. The detention center does

not employ the surveillance tactics that Saleh expects, but rather, relies on forms of self-

surveillance generated by the inmates' fears. In Saleh's opinion, "to call it a detention center is to

be melodramatic. There were no locked gates or armed guards, not even a uniform in sight. It

was an encampment in the countryside" (42). Already imprisoned twice in Zanzibar, first in a

prison and later on a deserted island, Selah does not find the forms of surveillance he expects. In

their place, however, are the threats of bodily injury that haunt the center. Stripped of their

possessions, money and papers, Saleh and the other inmates quickly realize that even though one

could easily escape the detention center, they cannot "live" in the nation because "life" within in

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[128] The Omanis, Portuguese, British, German and French and "whoever else had the wherewithal" travelled from their homes, and upon arriving created maps to account for places on the continent in order to lay claim over it (15).

the nation is dictated by the kinds of documentation and material that have been confiscated. But beyond the absent documents, the weather in November presents for Selah an insurmountable obstacle. Turning once again to history, Saleh posits that Napoleon's delayed retreat from Moscow until February or March was primarily because of the weather, suggesting that he and anyone who tries to leave the detention camp would freeze to death.

Put differently, Saleh and the others he meets at the detention center, the "four Algerians, three Ethiopians, two Iranian brothers…, a Sudanese and an Angolan…" within the citizen/non-citizen categorization of belonging within the nation fall within the third category of "alien" in the eyes of the state and the world. They are no longer human; they have transitioned into a zone of non-being because they do not possess the requisite, material evidence of their right to exist and live within the parameters of the nation-state. As a detained asylum seeker, Saleh perceives the hierarchy of value the detention center represents: "The shed that accommodated us could have contained sacks of cereals or bags of cement or some valuable commodity that needed to be kept secure and out of the rain. Now they contained us, a casual and valueless nuisance that had to be kept in restraint" (43). In the hierarchy of value, Saleh recognizes that the "value" of the asylum-seeker is measured in comparison to commodities. But unlike the commodities that used to be kept in these detention centers, the cereal, and cement, whose value is tangible and indisputable, the value of admitting/ accepting asylum seekers or refugees is not assured. Finding himself detained in a place where life-sustaining commodities used to be kept, Saleh can't help but revise his assertion of being a precious object to a "valueless nuisance" beneath the commodities stored here prior to their arrival.

Ultimately, the airport, as an architectural structure that encapsulates the promises of globalization, also encapsulates the deepening securitization of global travel. In as much as the

airport is proof that the regions of the world are closer and more connected than ever before, a

vision of Marshall McLuhan's tight-knit "global village," it is also a space that delineates whom

the nation-state admits from those it detains and/or rejects. Further, the connectedness that the

airport purportedly sustains is always in concert with the nation-state, its militarized and

securitized border control, and its anxieties over the influx of foreign bodies, ideas, and

materials. Further, as an aspirational site of the nation-state, both its "business card and

handshake," the airport butts heads with its workings to separate and detain (Iyer 46).

Beyond Passport Control: Encountering the Stranger and Other Anxieties of the Nation-State in *Aya: Life in Yop City*

Marguerite Abouet and Clément Oubrerie's graphic narrative *Aya: Life in Yop City and*

Aya: Love in Yop City is set in a period in Ivorian history often referred to as "la belle époque" or

the "golden age of Ivorian Independence." The series depicts the lives of three young women,

their families, friends, and lovers in the working-class neighborhood Yopougon in the Ivorian

city, Abidjan, in the 1970s. Aya, the main character, is set on going to university to become a

doctor. Her friend, Bintou, is chosen as a back-up dancer for a very famous musician; and

Adjoua, another friend, after becoming pregnant, ultimately owes and runs a successful "maquis"

(*Aya: Love in Yop City*).[129] The main characters, Aya, and her two friends, Bintou and Adjoua

must reconcile their personal ambitions and desires with the potentialities and restrictions of the

newly independent nation and its desires for the trinkets of capitalism.

In her introduction to the English edition of the series, Alisia Grace Chase describes the

early economic and political successes of Félix Houphouët-Boigny's reign as the "Ivorian

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[129] According to the glossary at the end of the novel, a maquis is "open-air restaurant where locals get together to eat, drink, and relax with friends"

miracle" when the country's growth index was the highest in Africa. *Aya* is set amid this boom

when more than forty thousand French nationals occupied the Ivory Coast, and Abidjan was

popularly known as the "Paris of Africa.". Working-class neighborhoods, such as Yopougon,

were pushed to the periphery, and a vibrant open-air maquis culture flourished alongside

intellectual aspirations.[130] Ivorian photographer, Paul Kodjo, captured this period in his black

and white studio pictures. In one photo, a young woman with an afro is captured, mid-

conversation in what seems to be a white dress. In another, a young man in a straw-hat is dancing

for the camera while his friend stares on in what I assume is Abidjan's famous "maquis." In yet

another picture, a young woman with shorts and gladiator sandals stands angled in front of a

building. This low-angle shot creates a sense that the building is towering behind her. Though

none of Kodjo's images are taken at an airport, his "photoromans" dramatize life in Abidjan

during this period. They are an early version of graphic narrative like the *Aya* series.[131] His

pictures capture Abidjan as a profoundly intimate, deeply familiar postcolonial city, turning

attention away from the French nationals who remained after independence to the postcolonial

subjects still in the throes of the post-independence era with all its dreams and possibility.

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[130] These are recognizable spatial organization that we see early postcolonial novels such as in Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautyful Ones are Not Yet Born*, or Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* and *A Man of the People*.
[131] I am interested in thinking (perhaps even developing) a genealogy of the graphic narrative that emerges from West African photography traditions of using staged photos to tell a story.

Paul Kodjo's "Roman Photos" and "Soirees Dansantes"

It is in this atmosphere of potential that Bintou meets Grégoire. Their encounter at the airport brings Bintou directly into contact with the anxieties of her nation, and home, where choosing a suitable suitor is crucial to one's prospects. Earlier in the narrative, the three friends discuss their aspirations. Aya is adamant about carving a space for herself by becoming a doctor, but her two friends see men as an integral part of making any future aspirations materialize. Aya professes that she does not want to end up in the "c" series, which she defines as "combs, clothes, and chasing men," to which Adjoua responds by saying, "I'd take the "c" series. I can see myself owning a fancy hair salon, paid for by my man…" and Bintou reiterates, "And how about my dressmaker's shop, with all the rich ladies in Abidjan coming to have dresses made" (30). Shortly after this, Aya tells her father she wants to be a doctor, and he replies by saying that school is for men and agrees with her sarcastic reply that she should "find a rich husband to take care" of her (34). Bintou understands what her community expects her to seek out male suitors who can help her acquire her dreams. When she meets Grégoire at the airport, she recognizes

him as a likely prospect. She persistently refers to him as "her Parisenne" emphasizing his travels and his ability to help her transcend her working-class life.

The airport in *Aya*, operates through an elaborate logic of recognition not solely reliant on "the visual economy of sight," but instead on every mannerism, every speech pattern suggesting that one has acquired wealth and "something else" that only travel to France confers.[132] This is a sort of "absolute, definitive mutation," which separates the "been-to" from his peers, family, and community, and in effect, transforms the traveler into "a demigod" (Fanon 3). In this transformation, any perceived sense of one's inferiority is canceled by acquired improvements (3-5). Fanon's explication reveals why Bintou and later Rita consider Grégoire, a desirable suitor. These encounters with the newly minted "demigods" in Aya carry possibilities of a much-desired admission into economic prosperity and freedom only presumed to exist beyond the boundaries of the nation.

Thus, the airport in Aya, unlike that in *By the Sea*, is less a site of contestation over the remains and legacies of the colonial project, and a site where the young seek out their dreams of a desirable future. In the process, they confront the anxieties that their family, community, and nation thrust onto their bodies. The airport promises an escape from the nation, home, and its restrictions by making real the promises of transnational travel, allowing for admittance into the economic success associated with the European metropole. Encounters at the airport in *Aya* have the potential to alter one's future. The person who has traveled to the metropole is not merely a demigod, per Fanon, in *Aya*, they also have the potential to create pathways for others also to become demigods.

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[132] Drawing on Sarah Ahmed's notion of recognition in *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* where she argues that recognition operates through "a visual economy" which involves "ways of seeing the difference between familiar and strange others as they are (re)presented to the subject" (24).

In the graphic novel's tracing of multiple narratives simultaneously, the encounter at the airport exists beyond the chronological unfolding of the narrative. We do not know how Bintou and Grégoire met until the former goes to the prefecture to apply for a passport. A woman she encounters there encourages her to tell her story while they wait. Though we first encounter Bintou with Grégoire earlier when she goes to visit him at his hotel (146), it is a hundred and fifty pages later that we get to know how they met (308). Even before we know anything about Grégoire, we learn that he is recently back from Paris (147). When we do get to know how Bintou met Grégoire, this memory is both visually and verbally narrated. Throughout Aya, the recounting of non-chronological elements such as dreams and memories are marked both visually and narratively as distinct from the chronological time of the narrative. The graphic narrative's depiction of Bintou's memory of meeting Grégoire uses a shift in color to represent her affective associations of this particular meeting (See Figure 2 below).

The "bright hues" that prevail throughout the graphic narrative, which "confer a sense of liveliness," as we see in figure 1 and 1.1, are replaced by a pastel pink, orange, and brown that softens the tone and slows down the pace (Whitted 93). The pastel pink tint of the panels is a literal reflection of Bintou's emotional state. In other words, she sees Grégoire through rose-colored glasses. These memories reflect Bintou's affective attachments to Grégoire and separate these memories from the chronological narrative (see Figure 1). The softer hues of Bintou's memory separate it from these harsh realities of the daily lives of her family, friends, and community (compare figure 1 to figure 2). The change in hue affirms Bintou's belief that Grégoire is the portal through which she can escape her working-class neighborhood in Abidjan.
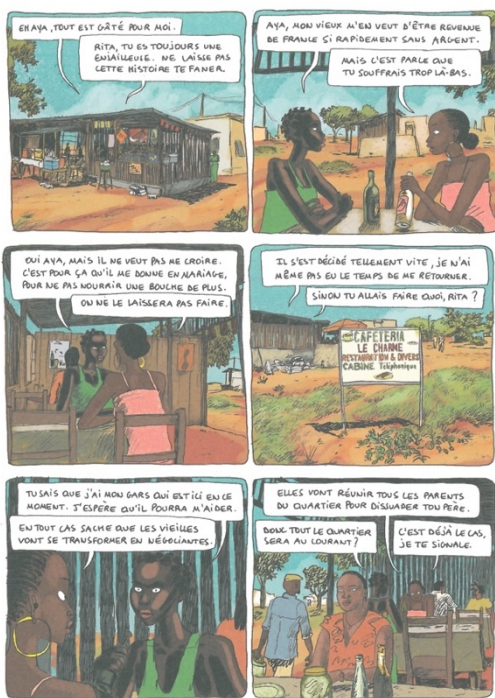
Figure 1

Figure 1.1 (English Translation)

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Figure 2

Figure 2.1 (English Translation)

Within this rose-colored narrative sequence, each panel depicts the sequence of events with a dialogue bubble, and above that is Bintou's narrative voice, emphasizing that this is a sequence told from Bintou's point of view. However, the reader is privy to information that Bintou is as of yet unaware having already encountered Grégoire earlier in the narrative. The reader is already aware of Grégoire's deception and understands that when Bintou's mother's friend says, "Just don't think you can trust men, ô. Once they say hello, the rest is lies," she is not merely giving advice but also divining Grégoire's character (309). Yet immediately after hearing and claiming to have listened to the advice she just received, Bintou meets Grégoire and says about him: "I turn around and I am looking at this elegant, handsome guy, real cool, dressed up to the nines, with a French accent to top it off" (309). Bintou notes the things that make Grégoire desirable, primarily his ability to move fluidly beyond the nation's border and acquire the cultural and economic capital that is supposedly an inherent part of his transnational movement (309). The fact that she meets him at an airport, and not on the street, only reinforces that desirability. Grégoire adopts a way of speaking that Bintou recognizes as distinctly Parisian. When Grégoire says, "Bonjourrr, Beautiful" the exaggerated rolled r's are meant to signal an identifiable trait of his travels abroad. By contrast, the men who try to talk to Bintou while she is on her way to the airport she describes as "a couple of jerks who wouldn't let me breathe… blossom and bloom…" (308). These men are inadequate because she meets them at places that reflect their limited socio-economic standing. Meeting a man in the streets of Yopougon or on the bus means that they are working class and thus unable to offer the life Bintou desires. The airport affirms Grégoire's suitability by verifying his value within the marketplace of marriage.

Abouet's airport is a space where one, possessing the requisite social and economic capital, is easily recognized and accepted provided one possesses and displays the recognizable

traits. Bintou's encounter at the airport, a space that is both literally and figuratively the border, illuminates how recognition is negotiated in the space of the border. Like all borders, the airport demarcates the nation from that which exists beyond it. Separating the "safe and unsafe, the airport exists to distinguish us from them," even as it remains transitory and "vague and undetermined," as Gloria Anzaldúa puts it (25). The airport differs from the land border of the nation-state. Whereas a landed border is literally at the limits of the nation, the airport attempts to "maximize" and to "regulate mobility" even as it exists and operates from inside the nation-state (Lyon 34). The forms of demarcation that the airport employs are the sterile enclosure of passport control and immigration, beyond which is the space where the nation fully encounters the new arrivals, and this is where Bintou recognizes Grégoire as a desirable suitor.[133] Bintou's encounter with Grégoire occurs within a logic of recognition where Grégoire is read as "valued" within the social logic because Bintou meets him at an airport. He is part of a wealthy, well-traveled social class that she longs to belong because he is Ivorian, "fresh out of France" and looking for a wife (309 and 160-161). At this border, the stranger possesses the things that the nation treasures, and so does not have to grapple with being interpellated as Other: as foreign, as in the case of Saleh; or as dangerous, as in the case of the two women in Nana Nyarko Boateng's "Swallowing Ice" that I discuss later.

Interestingly, the depiction of the airport in Abidjan is rather minimal. As Bintou arrives at the airport, the panel shows an older woman behind a desk with a counter-top poster with an airplane on it. In subsequent panels, we see travelers holding luggage, a police or security

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[133] Sara Ahmed writes against locating the stranger or the foreigner solely at the border. She suggests in *Strange Encounters*, that recognition of a stranger is based on one's place, or the lack thereof, within the social space. Ahmed makes a distinction between strangers who are recognized as a valued part of the community and strangers who are imagined as posing a danger to the community (30).

officer, and a poster of a palm tree. We know Bintou is at the airport because she tells us where she is going, "That's when my old lady sent me to pick up a package from a friend who works at the airport" (308). Once she arrives, the luggage-bearing figures behind her and the poster on the counter clue us into her whereabouts. However, when Innocent arrives at Charles de Gaulle airport in Paris later in the narrative, we get to see more of what we associate with the modern airport, the sound-proof glass, the escalators, the information boards, and other travelers. There is a kind of expansiveness to that airport, especially in the panel on the bottom of page three, where we see Innocent speaking to a custodial worker. The panel is a long-shot that depicts the characters from a distance through the glass and provides a sense of the size of the airport. Unlike Bintou's rose-colored airport, Innocent's airport is devoid of much color. Aside from Innocent's Michael Jackson-esque hairstyle and clothing, everyone else appears in muted clothing, making Innocent appear more striking in his alterity.

Figure 3

Figure 3.1 (English Translation)

Despite the size, the airport in each of these instances operates through an economy of recognition. When Innocent leaves Yopougon and Abidjan because his partner Albert refuses to come out to his family about his sexual identity, Innocent buys into the idea that the French metropole is a place where he will be able to live and love freely. Innocent's arrival at Charles de Gaulle airport begins the second part of the English edition of *Ay*a subtitled *Love in Yop City*. But unlike the airport in Abidjan that is figured as a place to encounter the transnational Ivorian traveler, or Saleh's timid steps in Gatwick, in Charles de Gaulle, Innocent makes it without incident to the passport counter, all the while complementing the kind of European ingenuity he sees at the airport. He says: "Tié Tié Tié, this is nice! White people never sleep, ô" and in the next panel, "And this is just the airport! What about the outside?" and in the panel, after he

leaves the passport control counter, he says, "These white people are friendly, ô. All smiles"

(10). In his fascination with the airport, Innocent does not pick up on the underlining

homophobia/ queer-phobia that the passport control officer expresses when he says to Innocent

rather pointedly: "I see, you're one of those funny guys," to which Innocent responds: "No, I'm

an Ivorian. I've come to make it big" (10). Through this exchange, Innocent's misplaced hopes

that France is a place where one can genuinely be one's self begins to unravel. When it comes to

finding his way around Paris for the first time, he turns to a black man cleaning the floors to ask

for help: "I need to get to 18th Arrondissement. Can I walk there?" (11). The unnamed man,

horrified at the idea of Innocent walking to his cousin's place, gives him 10 Francs to help him

buy a ticket and get to where he needs to go.

There are two key things to note about this interaction. The first is that recognition works

in the same way here as it did with Bintou's encounter with Grégoire. Innocent recognizes the

man cleaning the floors as the one most likely to understand his predicament. The black man

wearing a blue uniform is recognizable because they are neither white nor French, but possibly

from a French-speaking part of the world, and his speech corresponds to this reading. In response

to Innocent's question, he exclaims, "Walai! If you is walking you is having feet like an

elephant" (11). There seems to be an attempt to figure this character as speaking a kind of

"broken French," not the perfected French (or the "French French") that Grégoire speaks when

he meets Bintou, but one that is perhaps spoken colloquially by non-native speakers.[134]

The other issue that Innocent's interaction at the airport raises questions about the

location of the airport. According to Fuller and Harley, airports create landed space by

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[134] Cited in Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* where he cites passage from Léon-G. Dama's "Hoquet," *Pigments* (p.4)

"reconfiguring geography according to the spatio-temporal rhythms and cross-modal standards of global capital" (105). The creation of these spaces often means that airports are located at the limits of the city to allow for expansion, and where this is not possible, the land must be found to do so; "no airport has an absolute limit" (105). Situating the airport at the limits of the city or in areas that are at a distance from the city center means that those without certain means cannot access it. Similarly, those who arrive without the requisite financial preparation like Saleh can be funneled through interrogation to detention to incarceration, or like the many unnamed travelers be quickly deported to their country of origin.[135] In other words, access to the airport is managed by its seclusion. Situating the airport in sites like these mean they are reachable only by those employed to sustain its daily running, and by those transiting through it. There are hints of this distance in the depiction of Bintou's trip to get to the airport in Abidjan to run the errand for her mother. Innocent's fortuitous encounter with a fellow black migrant allows him to leave the airport and finally arrive within the city. These encounters mark a chasm between airports prior to the layers of securitization that were introduced following the hijackings in the 1970s and again in the aftermath of the events of 9/11. These measures worked to develop the contemporary airport into a highly securitized sterile zone and, along with it, the kinds of encounters and forms of recognition that are possible within the space of the airport.[136]

The encounters at the airport that *Aya: Life in Yop City* and *Aya: Love in Yop City* stage illuminate how the "navigational semiotics" of the airport are undergirded by recognition. Grégoire's performance of the successful transnational Ivorian is in stark contrast to his female

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[135] Prisons, particularly in the United States, are located in places that are also inaccessible.

[136] For instance, on July 22nd, 1968 an El Al flight for Tel Aviv was hijacked. The hijackers wanted to trade the passengers for Palestinian prisoners imprisoned in Israel. Citing Hoffman, Adey asserts that "by attacking the Israeli airline they were effectively attacking the Israeli state," solidifying aviation as an ideal target for terror (504).

counterpart, Rita, whose "failed" travel leaves her back in her father's house with the threat of being married off as a second wife. We later learn that both these transnational excursions have ultimately "failed" because neither Grégoire nor Rita has acquired significant wealth to transcend their working-class backgrounds. Innocent, on the other hand, uses recognition to help him navigate the space of the airport and the city. In choosing to ask the black custodial worker how to navigate the city, he also chooses the person most familiar to him. The airport as a space that borders and regulates is also a space where the most vulnerable travelers use recognition to confront the anxieties of the nation-state and to pursue the ever-elusive dreams of transnational global citizenship.

"Swallowing Ice": The Airport and the Palimpsest of National Memory and Sexual Anxiety

The airport, in Nana Nyarko Boateng's "Swallowing Ice," is a site where multiple histories and imaginaries of land and air intersect. It is a kind of microcosm of the nation where the nation's curated identity and aspirations are on display. The airport is a profoundly contradictory and ambiguous space, one which, at once, welcomes visitors while rejecting others. It is best described as a kind of palimpsest, where the older vestiges of British colonialism are entangled with postcolonial aspirations of global significance and the tourism-centered neoliberal economy. Andreas Huyssen's conception of the "urban palimpsest" where the "strong marks of the present space merge in the imaginary with traces of the past, erasures, losses, and heterotopias" illuminates these layers that the airport embodies (7). Huyssen applies the textuality of the palimpsest to urban space to think through how urban spaces are "unfolding in time" allowing for the techniques of literary readings (historical, intertextual, constructive, and deconstructive) to be integrated into the study of urban spaces and their molding of "collective imaginaries" (7). Inspired by Huyssen, this section thinks through the airport in "Swallowing

Ice." Kotoka International Airport straddles different genealogies that are often imperceptible

because they differ from, or conflict with, the airport as a pinnacle of technological modernity.

KIA was built during the Second World War by the British for the British Royal Air

Force. After the war and the ensuing struggle and victory for independence, the Nkrumah

government renovated the airport in 1956. After the renovations, the airport was renamed the

Accra International Airport. As Jean Allman shows in "Phantoms of the Archive: Kwame

Nkrumah, a Nazi Pilot Named Hanna, and the Contingencies of Postcolonial History-Writing,"

air-mindedness and the development of aviation were crucial to Nkrumah's vision of

modernization and development for the newly independent Ghana. As a result, the Accra

International Airport hosted the first airshow to display the gliding prowess of the students of the

Afienya Gliding School and their founder, former Nazi pilot, Hanna Reitsch. Four years later, in

1967, Nkrumah was ousted from the government. A year later, one of the men who orchestrated

the coup d'état that excised Nkrumah, Lieutenant General Emmanuel Kwasi Kotoka, was killed

at the forecourt of the airport in a failed coup (now terminal 1 and 2). The airport was renamed

after Kotoka. Despite this memorialization, Kotoka remains a peripheral figure of the nation's

memory and imaginary. Ironically, it is Kwame Nkrumah whose legacy and vision is

apotheosized in Ghana and elsewhere.

Beyond this political genealogy, the airport is also a site where the nation grapples with

its self-fashioning often through displaying its leader(s), its economic products, and outlining its

position on the issues it finds fundamental to its sense of self. Kwame Otu writes about a sign

that once welcomed visitors to Kotoka International Airport, which read:

> Welcome!! Akwaaba!! Ghana warmly welcomes all visitors of goodwill. Ghana
> does not welcome paedophiles [sic] and other sexual deviants [in red font].
> Indeed, Ghana imposes extremely harsh penalties on such sexually aberrant

behavior. If you are in Ghana for such activity, then for everybody's good,
including your own, we suggest you go elsewhere (1)

In Otu's reading of this sign, he calls attention to the kind of values the nation places on

sexuality and sexual practice. He asserts that "the proscriptive and prescriptive values around

sexuality and sexual practices" are transmitted through the red coloring of the font, but also

through the ambiguous language (3). In his words, "in red font, sexual deviance is left

ambiguous, leaving the reader to interpret (signify) the sign" (3-5). As Otu rightly points out, this

sign raises numerous questions about sexual practices and identities even as it transmits unclear

parameters for sexual behavior within the Ghanaian nation. After reading the sign, one might

rightly ask what behaviors or practices are considered "sexual deviance" in Ghana? What kind of

sexually aberrant behavior does the Ghanaian nation punish? Why even put up this sign at all? Is

it a response to sexual tourism? Sexuality and sexual practice become significant in the nation's

presentation of itself to the world. Unsurprisingly, it is this same struggle over sexuality and

sexual practices that is at the center of Nana Nyarko Boateng's imaginary of this same airport in

her short story, "Swallowing Ice".

Published in the 2015 Caine Prize for African Writing, Lusaka Punk, and Other Stories,

"Swallowing Ice" tells the story of a young Ghanaian woman, Brema, who lives with her cat,

Max with whom she has an intimate relationship. She works as a journalist who invents the

news. And one of the news items she invents is a story about two women, Miss Serwaa Boadu

and Miss Jane Owusu, who are attacked by a mob at Kotoka International Airport (KIA) for

French kissing in the arrival hall (159-160). Boateng complicates the nation-state and its

imagined community by bringing to the fore questions of sexuality and sexual practices that are

seemingly unimaginable in the nation's fashioning of itself. What Otu rightly insists as the

presentation of Ghana as a "sanctified postcolonial geopolity free from the contamination of western amoral indulgences" is tested when two Ghanaian women put on display the sexual proclivities that the nation purports to disallow (3).

Brema, Boateng's main character, lives an intentionally frugal and intensely regulated life. On the surface, this world is in stark contrast to the public and populated space of the airport. Despite Brema's attempts to keep the world outside her home regulated, it intrudes into it through her profession as a journalist. It is in her work as a journalist where Brema breaks from this regularity to test out possibilities for a community. Unlike other journalists who supposedly report on actual events, Brema purports to invent the news. She says about her work:

> I made up stories that were presented as actual news. The standards of journalism in Ghana worked perfectly in my favor. People took whatever they read in the papers as facts; other newspapers just copied my stories without acknowledging me or verifying the details. If journalism's first obligation was to tell the truth, without fear or favor, then we were fearless in manufacturing the news. (159)

Through Brema, Boateng critiques the feeble relationship to facts that journalists in Ghana possess, while simultaneously contending that "facts," as the primary constituents of the archive of the news, are also an invention of narrative and interpretation.[137] Brema's description of journalism in Ghana as a profession that has little to do with the truth or facts, but as imagined stories masquerading as facts, is Boateng's attempt to destabilize the apotheosized place of truth in journalism. A journalist, per Brema's description, is a person who creates stories that reflect the sociopolitical moment of the nation and the world so deftly that these fabrications can become accepted as fact. Even though Brema's article is invented, its ability to masquerade as fact and be disseminated as such suggests that the logic of its probability is validated.

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[137] It is worth mentioning that Nana Nyarko Boateng worked as a journalist and radio presenter for the radio station Citi FM in Accra.

The story Brema writes, "Gayism at KIA—Two Arrested!" is written under the pseudonym Vivian Quack. It reports that two women were attacked by a crowd at the arrival hall of the airport for French kissing (159-160). The two, Miss Serwaa Boadu and Miss Jane Owusu, according to the story, were handed over to the Ghana police. Though Boateng cues the reader that this news item is invented, the story nonetheless interrogates both the securitization and regulation of sexuality within the space of the airport and the nation-state at large. Brema's story unshrouds and forces into the public eye, the seemingly "hidden," non-heteronormative sexualities that the nation seeks to hide.[138] Yet it provides an outlet, of a sort, by placing these women at the airport where their straddling of both Ghanaian and non-Ghanaian worlds are palpable.

The crowd at the arrival hall that attempts to lynch the two women for "allegedly committing lesbian acts" are enforcing a form of justice that they deem justifiable within the boundaries of the Ghanaian state, even though the legal system of the state is baffled about the repercussions of two women French kissing (159):

> Lawyers contracted are torn about whether or not the accused persons can be
> properly charged and convicted for unnatural carnal knowledge. While some
> criminal lawyers opined that lesbianism was unnatural, contrary to Ghana's
> customary and criminal laws as well as its Constitution, others were of the view
> that the criminal code did not specifically prohibit lesbian acts. (160)

The state does not have any official legislation in its customary and criminal code that prohibits same-sex intimacies. However, there are many people, as the crowd exemplifies, who are violently opposed to this display of non-heteronormative sexuality. These people often believe

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[138] Sylvia Tamale and Evan Mwangi write about how non-heteronormative sexualities are shrouded with secrecy or are "hidden and unspoken" (Mwangi 189). Tamale argues that the myth of foreignness associated with homosexuality is often an outcome of homophobic Judeo-Christian and Arabic religions (19).

they are acting under a religious or traditional moral code that is beyond state laws.[139]

"Swallowing Ice" interrogates this murky legislative and public moral sensitivity surrounding same-sex intimacy. The tension between the airport's symbolism of techno-modernity and progressivist ideology is haunted by the struggles to define the sexual African female body. The postcolonial nation persists in this sartorial regime and management of the female body through variegated processes. The female body becomes the site where the anxieties of the nation-state unfold. The mob's reaction can be interpreted as enforcing a right to regulate and punish the ambiguous "aberrant sexuality" that the airport at one time advocated to travelers as a violation of Ghana's moral code. By rehearsing the ongoing debates about same-sex intimacy through the violent reaction of the mob, Boateng's story reveals the "angst" at the site of this enactment of female sexuality.

What hides in the attack of these women, moreover, is the implication that sexual intimacy between two women excludes men. Presumably, African female sexuality that excludes men is simultaneously a violation of traditional and moral code and a form of acquired western modernity. And this conflicts with a Ghanaian and African sense of being. This is why the two women have to be nationalized and identified:

> *Miss* Owusu is the executive director of Girl Child Foundation, an organization
> set up by the accused to offer free art courses for young girls, while *Miss* Boadu,
> prior to her sojourn in the US to study, was a top-level manager at a renowned
> architectural firm based in Accra. There have been speculations that *Miss* Owusu
> *uses her foundation to recruit young girls into lesbianism*. (160 emphasis mine)

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[139] In recent years in Ghana, any legislation or indication from the government towards legalizing same-sex unions has been received with public outcry and criticism. When the former Minister for Gender, Children and Social Protection, Nana Oye Lithur, suggested that Ghana needed to legalize same-sex unions, there were numerous calls for her dismissal.

Their identification establishes that the two women are Ghanaian and thus subject to the justice of the mob, and the state. And it directly locates them by class, successfully performing the complicated act of infantilizing their morality, drawing attention to their unmarried status (signaling their availability for men), and minimizing their achievements. Whatever success Miss Owusu might have achieved through her "Girl Child Foundation" is obscured by the allegation that her foundation introduces young girls to same-sex intimate acts. The justice of the mob is not solely in reaction to the women's kiss. It is also punishment for the unknowable others these women might have "recruited".

Brema's imaginative news story is a "staging ground" that scripts the regulatory discourse of modernity that the airport engenders for black women by demonstrating the deep-seated anxiety about women's sexuality. As a space that regulates human and material access into the nation, the airport also initiates one's being into the panoptic mechanism of the state. As a highly securitized and regulated space, the airport becomes and symbolizes the many boundaries that converge in the nation-state. Yet the space of the airport, with its biometric surveillance system, is also a place of "happenings." Large numbers of people travel to the airport to bid farewell, to welcome, to work, and to see; all participate in using the airport as a space deeply embedded in the symbolism of the nation-state while appropriating this same space to escape the nation-state. The airport is a space that reveals the unique socio-cultural context of its local environs. Much like all spaces of transit, the airport as Federico Caprotti put it, has significance not "only to the technologies of travel but also to the interactions experienced or represented within those spaces" (384). And this space, in "Swallowing Ice" engenders a confrontation with nation's view of sexuality.

The airport in "Swallowing Ice" is a space that is hard to signify singularly. In its historical and political role of defining and assigning an identity to the nation, it relies on varieties of ambiguity to situate itself as a welcoming space signifying the hospitality of the rest of the nation. It is also a space that is policed and surveilled like any other airport that is the gateway to a global city. The laws on sexuality and the kinds of sexual behavior deemed acceptable in the nation become part of the recognition index. The crowd "gathered at the arrival hall" does not recognize "French kissing" between women as an acceptable behavior between women. To them, this constitutes part of the "aberrant" sexual behavior that the state warns visitors against practicing. In the wide circulation of this made-up news article, we can glean that excitement with which such news of sexual aberrance is disseminated. It is evidence of the sexual threats that exist outside the nation and its infiltration. The newspaper story becomes a kind of fear-causing object, and thus it must be spread and internalized to signal to all what is undesirable for the women in the nation.

Conclusion:

The airport, as the architectural zenith of aviation, is a site of transit, mobility, and motion that contains and reveals the deep, evolving history of travel. At the same time, the airport betrays its entanglement with race, colonialism, gender, and capital.[140] It maps sites of (un)belonging by pulling together histories and narratives fundamental to the formation and sustenance of the nation-state and its people. It is at once "a place, a system, a cultural artifact" at the heart of techno-modernity (Gordon 4). Indeed, its militarized beginnings are discernable

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[140] Adrienne Brown in *The Black Skyscraper: Architecture and the Perception of Race* offers a comprehensive study of race and the built environment. She argues that all architectures are "inevitably, racial architectures, producing and maintaining site-specific phenomenologies of race" (3). I mention Brown's argument about architecture here because, like the skyscraper, the airport is a unique architectural feat that grapples with the way categories of being, race, gender, class are created, sustained, and evolved.

through its surveillance and securitization. The airport also facilitates forms of incarceration,

racial, and sexual violence that are simultaneously the remains and the foreshadowing of the

ways that the nation-state struggles to create a cohesive image of itself.[141] In the words of Arjun

Appadurai, the airport, like the prisons, barracks, radio stations, secretariats, parks, marching

grounds, and processional routes, are the sites where the nation attempts "to create internal

distinctions and divisions necessary for state ceremony, surveillance, discipline, and

mobilization" (189). Thus, to write about the airport is to be plagued by this multidirectional

viewing, or a particular form of what Susan Manning describes as "cross-viewing," that must

attend to the nation-state and its policies and perceptions of race, transportation and its

architectural history, as well as the international and global influence, and its entangled

histories.[142]

It is in the spirit of this "cross-viewing," I conclude by turning my attention to what I

describe in the title as the "myth of the global citizen." This myth, in actuality, is my sense that

the airport unveils the disparities between those with uninhibited access to the world and those

subject to the force of national borders. The debate about the global citizen, especially where

Africa is concerned, in recent times, vacillates between the debate between Afropolitanism, pan-

Africanism, and cosmopolitanism. Taiye Selasi in "Bye Bye Barbar, or What is an Afropolitan?"

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[141] Several scholars have written about aviation and militarization. Key examples include Peter Adey in "Secured and Sorted Mobilities: Examples from the Airport" (2004), where he asserts that early airports "consisted of a few tents and airfield" because they were remnants of the military beginnings of airports (500).

[142] Drawing on Susan Manning's notion of "cross-viewing" which she uses to describe spectatorship where individuals from different groups can exert influence on each other by watching each other watching performances. Manning explains that it is impossible to recover the full range of individual spectatorial responses from decades past, yet surviving evidence shows cross-viewing (between, for example, black and white, or gay and straight audience members) was an important factor in the evolving perceptions of dance performance. I adapt this to think about the way the airport is simultaneously looking to other airports and other places in the world, as well as within the city, state, or nation within which it is situated to form, define and create itself. See Manning's *Modern Dance, Negro Dance: Race in Motion* (2004).

argues that there is a new generation of African emigrants who have achieved academic, social, and economic success who live in metropolitan cities such as London, New York, and Paris. This generation is equally comfortable in the African countries and communities they claim as theirs. This nouveau generation is what Selasi calls the "Afropolitan." In the ensuing backlash against Afropolitanism, the late Binyavanga Wainaina, in an address to the African Studies Association UK, averred that pan-Africanism is a more nuanced expression of African and Black transnational identity that eschews the commodity-centric elitism of Afropolitanism.[143]

Sprouting out of these debates is a kind of African-centric philosophy of cosmopolitanism advocated by Michael Onyebuchi Eze. Eze critiques the older universalist forms of cosmopolitanism, such as Kwame Appiah's. He posits the Southern African philosophy of *ubuntu* as offering an "intersubjective discovery" of cosmopolitanism that allows for an "evolving relationship" characterized by "mutual recognition and unconditional tolerance" (Eze 101).[144] Eze challenges cosmopolitanism's uncritical leap towards the erasure of the nation-state through the ongoing neocolonial regimes of power. He contends that the global citizen, or the cosmopolitan as a "free-floating subject or an un-hinged citizen," must deal with the ethical conditions these positions conceal (94). This earlier, more universalist form of cosmopolitanism suppresses, according to Eze, the fact that bearing a "paperized identity" in the form of a passport from the United States or even New Zealand means one has access to about eighty percent of the world while bearing a Ghanaian or Nigerian passport means that one is forced to

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[143] See Stephanie Bosch Santana's "Exorcizing the Future: Afropolitanism's Spectral Origins" for an overview of Selasi's notion of Afropolitanism, and Achille Mbembe's. Santana argues that while the critiques against Selasi's notion are valid, Mbembe's explication of Afropolitanism is interested in how new concepts like Afropolitanism offers opportunities beyond what he sees as the dangerously nativism potential of pan-Africanism.

[144] Though I cite Michael Eze here, there have been other Philosophers such as Mogobe Bernard Ramose and Anke Graness who in "Transcending Cosmopolitanism" and "Ubuntu and the Concept of Cosmopolitanism" respectively, engage thoughtfully with the ideas of cosmopolitanism through the concept of ubuntu. Indeed, I arrived at Eze's work through Ramose and Graness.

undergo visa procedures, pay for these procedures as well as prove that one has the financial resources to undertake these travels. (94-5). And arriving at an airport exacerbates these procedures, subjecting one to further interrogations, checks, and sometimes even deportation. It is these distinctions that lead Eze to conclude, "only persons from certain geographic locations are deemed mobile worthy, or what Jürgen Habermas has termed *Amerkennungswüdigkeit* (worthiness to be recognized)" (95).

To ask at this point, who is recognized as a global citizen, is to probe how the airport in *By the Sea*, *Aya: Life in Yop City*, and "Swallowing Ice," frame the global traveling African as having access to the world primarily through regulation and policing. It is evident in *By the Sea*, for instance, that even though Saleh is educated, connected to the transnational littoral trade of the Indian Ocean, and is well-traveled by land and sea, he does not fit into the British nation's ideal of a global cosmopolitan citizen. Saleh finds himself at Gatwick airport without the right kind of traveling document that would permit someone like him, African, black, elderly, and without significant wealth to enter the UK (5).

Indeed, it is worth noting that it is the two main Zanzibari characters, Saleh and Latif, who insistently reference British and American literature. For instance, when Rachel, Saleh's immigration lawyer, discovers that Saleh can speak English, she questions him about what she assumes to be his deception. In response, Saleh references Herman Melville's short story, "Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street" by quoting Bartleby's, "I preferred not to" as an answer to her question (65). Rachel's response allows Saleh to infer that she did not know the story. Later, it is Latif, the other Zanzibari character, who immediately realizes that Saleh was referencing Melville's short story. Similarly, Latif, too, at one point recalls his brother's efforts at memorizing and performing Mark Anthony's speech in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* and

Rudyard Kipling's "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" for a class in Zanzibar. These literary references are proof of the nature of imperial and colonial education, where the literatures of the imperial power are apotheosized, taught, and studied.[145] While the literatures of the indigenous communities are recategorized as "primitive" or of a lower aesthetic standard. The exportation and absorption of these imperial literatures are so entrenched in the postcolony's ontology that it is the citizens of the postcolony who reference and adapt its meaning to translate their experiences. However, the racializing logic of cosmopolitanism and global travel do not recognize these forms of knowing and being in the world as evidence of a worldly belonging. The global citizen, as far as the postcolonial traveler is concerned, is a racialized and classed category that describes social and economic proximity to power, social capital, and whiteness. And Saleh, as becomes evident in *By the Sea*, cannot lay claim to this category or be imagined by Kevin and the nation-state as a citizen of the world.

While Grégoire, by virtue of rolling his r's and through his self-presentation as one who has attained the wealth and ease of transnational travel, is immediately recognized as desirable. The truth of his condition is made more tragic when one realizes that he, like the other working-class inhabitants of Yopougon who travel to France, have few opportunities to attain the economic and social wealth and freedom that they aspire to. Through another traveler, Innocent, who struggles in Paris to find a job and a place to live, it becomes quite clear that even though Ivoirian citizens did not need a visa to travel to France until 1984, there were still impediments that prevented them from assessing humane working and housing conditions.

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[145] It would be an oversight not to mention some of the critical work that postcolonial and subaltern scholars have done concerning English literary education and its beginnings in colonialism. See Gauri Viswanathan's *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule* (1989). Similarly, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o *Decolonizing the Mind* is also another essential text.

It is with the two women in Boateng's "Swallowing Ice" that the power of the nation-state, which is imagined as diluted within the global, still proves to have violent effects on those who have the social and economic capital to aspire to the ease of movement that is the foundational characteristic of the Afropolitan. The two women who are attacked by a mob for French kissing are confronted with the incongruity between the nation's attempts to present itself as hospitable and its insistence on maintaining its sovereignty. The two women, however, are not subject to the law in as much as they are subject to the verdict of the "mob" that attacks them. The mob, as research into ancillary terms like *crowds* and *riots* show, is often loosely applied to mass movements and groups without an attendant understanding of the purpose for this group of people. Scholars like Natalie Davis and E. P. Thompson argue that the mob is not the faceless violent mass that media and government often want us to believe. According to Davis for instance, it is necessary to see the mob and/or crowd as "prompted by political and moral traditions which legitimize and even prescribe their violence" and as a result "we may see their violence, however cruel, not as random and limitless, but as aimed at defined targets and selected from a repertory of traditional punishments and forms of destruction" (53). Though Davis is writing about religious riots in the sixteenth century in France, she nonetheless allows us to be more critical about the place of the mob in "Swallowing Ice." The mob's reaction is not solely a violent reaction to the public display of same-sex intimacy. It could well be read as a violent unleashing towards what is perceived as a representative of the influx of global capital and its demands on the social and political elite to incorporate ideas and beliefs that are in conflict with the beliefs of the inhabitants of the nation. Even this reading is haunted by the entrenchment of colonial epistemologies of sexual desire that is fed through colonial education and religion and becomes adapted as the moral foundations of the Ghanaian nation-state. Opposition to same-sex

intimacy is as much opposition to what is perceived as new forms of neocolonialism implemented by the newly minted categories of Afropolitans.

The airport in *By the Sea*, *Aya: Life in Yop City*, and "Swallowing Ice," is a network where histories and epistemologies of race and racism, gender, sexuality, and potential for global incorporation are performed with real consequences. Situated at the nexus of the architectural, epistemological and practical logistical aspirations of the nation-state, the airport is a kind of haunting, in which the injuries of colonialism become part of the body of the nation and its people. It is an urban palimpsest where hyper-securitization of global travel and the carceral state must wrestle with the postcolony and its deep entwining with the remains of colonialism and global capital. This airport remains a transitory space that illuminates how mobility must recon with the immobility of systems of racial and economic violence that intersect to ground the black traveler. The hauntings of the postcolony, the hauntings of the conditions of blackness in the world, finds renewed expression in the space of the airport.

CHAPTER FOUR:

"Aerial trotro and everything else": Mythical Flights and Real Impediments in Kojo Laing's *Woman of the Aeroplanes*

No one flies the Middle Passage no more.
And for lack of friends along the way
CubanaAir must take me first to Gander if the intemperate
  North
Then South to Madrid of the arid lands. And AirFramce into
  Paris.
And SwissAir into Zurich. And on and on
To the GoldCoast via IvoryCoast,
Those sometime treasure lands where now
We must embrace the orphan life in small measures of foreign
  aid.

And all our journeys must always take us
away from destinations into disLocations
until one day, tired at last from endless
trailings of lost purpose and lost vision
we mark the only straight route from Ghana to Havana to
  Guyana
and and on and on to Savannah in Georgia of the deep deep
  South.
With AfricanaAirways, we can renavigate the Middle Passage,
  clear
the old debris and freshen the waters with iodine and soul-
  clorine.
 (Kofi Anyidoho's "HavanaSoul," from *AncestralLogic and CaribbeanBlues*,
pp.16-17)

To encounter Kofi Anyidoho's collection *AncestralLogic and CaribbeanBlues* is to be let

into a world where the sea that separates the west coast of Africa from the Caribbean is bridged

by centuries of histories and a renewed connectedness through the people and stories that find its

way into Anyidoho's poems. In the introduction to the collection, Anyidoho writes about the

year-long journey he undertook to places in the Americas affected by the transatlantic slave

trade. Many of the poems in the collection, are thus dedicated to these people whose blackness

and place in the world informs his own. The poem "HavanaSoul," describes diverging histories

of Havana, pitching the significant tourism sites against a historical Havana, and the Havana of oral history as told by residents of the city. Towards the end of the poem, Anyidoho meditates on the difficulty of travel that seeks to "renavigate the Middle Passage" in the age of air travel (16). When Anyidoho writes, "No one flies the Middle Passage no more," he is describing how the global aviation industry created routes from Africa to the Caribbean that meander through old imperial nations in Europe. Those whose labor and resources sustained the transatlantic slave trade and its transformation into colonialism, and neocolonialism, are also the ones who have the least stake in commercial aviation, and no say in the mapping of flight routes. The diverging routes through Madrid and Paris are symptoms of imperialism and global capital's inability to imagine transit that does not reaffirm old colonial and imperial relations.

Through this journey, Anyidoho comes to realize that in the world, there are "dimensions" of himself "carved into every tombstone of in the graveyards of the world" (xi). The history of the transatlantic slave, and its remains, provide the impetus for Anyidoho to re-see himself in the many people he encounters. He references Kwadwo Opoku-Agyemang's assertion that the geography of slavery is an inescapable fact, "living under a patchwork of scars" (xii). These scars which refer to the transatlantic slave trade, slavery, colonialism, and ongoing imperialisms provide an impetus for Anyidoho to seek out connections with the many people he encounters, for whom many of the poems in the collection are dedicated. These people located across the world, but particularly in the Caribbean, allow for the entangled narrative of dislocation that *AncestralLogic and CaribbeanBlues* portray. The "old debris" of colonial metropole, a necessary transition through the history of empire, imperialism, and its continuing haunting of the present can only be overcome through a mode of air travel that connects Africa to the people and nations affected by the Middle Passage, particularly to the Caribbean.

Anyidoho's dream of "AfricanaAirways" to circumvent the obstacles of commercial aviation that separate Africa from the Caribbean and the rest of the black world has yet to materialize. The dislocations that so struck Anyidoho continue to linger, and enact prohibitive and violent obstacles to African travelers, as the previous chapters have examined.

Before Anyidoho, another Ghanaian writer, Kojo Laing, in his novel *Woman of the Aeroplanes* (1988), sought to transform commercial aviation into a form of transit that suited the particular needs and aspirations of travelers. In order to do so, he merges the airplane with the privately-owned and operated passenger buses found in Ghana, popularly known as trotro. This merger, in Laing's novel, transforms the gilded status of air travel in Ghana into a quotidian form of commercial transportation that is available to all. Unlike the narratives of air and air travel that I have examined in earlier chapters, in *Woman of the Aeroplanes*, air travel, and its various protocols and procedures are revised to attend to the unique needs of the community. Air travel, in this novel, permits greater localization of air travel and allows the travelers to accumulate cultural linkages with people that experience their unique spatial and temporal displacement. In the mythical world of Laing's novel, the characters aspire to transform all aspects of air travel into something that supersedes colonial and imperial arrangements of power by turning the airplane into an aerial version of the trotro. Fueled by magic, navigated by ducks, seats made of moss, and a ladder that connects two stacked airplanes, the air travel in *Woman of the Aeroplanes* is a sign of the technological possibilities of an Africa-centered vision of transit and air travel. In an interview with Adewale Maja-Pearce, Kojo Laing asserted, "I feel it's a fundamental fact that one should create breathing space outside the rather overbearing political sphere" (28) The vision of air travel in the novel provides room to breathe and imagine a form of connectedness to the world beyond the continent that attempts to exceed the reverberations of colonial world order. It

is a symbol of a home-grown cosmopolitan vision that creates spaces for being and breathing beyond the nation-state.

Kojo Laing, in *Woman of the Aeroplanes*, this chapter argues, reimagines the fundamental processes of commercial aviation. These procedures, which Martin Kimani's essay "Airport Theatre, African Villain" vividly depicts, often frame the African traveler as a "villain" to global travelers and thus in need of more stringent measures to mitigate the number of travelers from the continent. The elaborate costly visa procedures which are at times humiliating, the hyper -surveillance and -securitization during boarding and disembarkation, and the detention to deportation pipeline all work to make air travel an insurmountable obstacle for travelers. The absence of these structures, or their ineffectual existence in Laing's novelistic world point to a critique of these structures through the reimagining.

This short concluding chapter draws on Kojo Laing's mythical world in which airplanes are modified to suit the needs of African communities and their world-making aspirations as an imagined, perhaps even utopian, vision of the possibilities of air and its technologies of flight. Like all visions of utopia, it is plagued by the shadows of that which it seeks to correct. The novel's persistence on imbuing airplanes, things, animals, indeed all that exist within the scope of the narrative with animation and vitality reorients and explodes the realms of possibility, anticipating object-oriented ontologies. By providing vitality and the possibility of expression to his characters and things that populate the novel, each of these entities is capable of enacting a critique of the relations of power within the novel. This chapter also reads the excess of these mythical flights in Laing's novel as "real impediments." It argues that Laing's mythical world succeeds in revealing the impediments and predicaments that African and black travels encounter, navigate, and succumb to in their transnational travels and cosmopolitan aspirations.

Laing's novel also provides a register through which inequality, systemic, and structural violence can be undermined and surpassed to various degrees of success. One of the novel's greatest achievements is that it does not repress or overlook the realities of traveling from the continent to Europe but raises and makes visible those impediments so it can deal with them to the extreme of the ridiculous.

Kojo Laing and the Fantastic Future of Transit

Written by Ghanaian author Kojo Laing, *Woman of the Aeroplanes* tells the story of an immortal mythical community called Tukwan located somewhere in Ghana, near Kumasi, the second biggest city in Ghana. Tukwan is invisible to the rest of the country and operates its unique form of a social, political, and economic system. The leaders and citizens of Tukwan decide to travel to a similar community in Scotland, Levensvale, which also exists outside the space-time of the Scottish nation-state. One of their "boss" Pokuaa acquires two airplanes from Levensvale and arranges for the Tukwans to pay her back by exporting goods to Levensvale. The inhabitants of Tukwan hope to travel to Scotland to form trade and social relations with the people of Levensvale. What becomes apparent in the preparation and actual travel is the uneven structures of global power and the ways that transnational travel creates conditions of transformation that re-arrange the core structures and systems of a community.

Readings of this and other of Laing's novels have focused on his unique hybrid blend of languages such as English with indigenous Ghanaian languages such as Twi, Ga, and Hausa to create a unique linguistic landscape that demands familiarity with language formation and use in Ghana. This "cosmopolitan mix" of languages, creates a linguistic border for most readers.[146] At

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[146] See Arlene Elder's chapter on Kojo Laing, "Kojo Laing's Linguistic Journeying," in *Narrative Shape-Shifting: Myth, Humor, and History in the Fiction of Ben Okri, B. Kojo Laing and Yvonne Vera* (2009).

the same time, Laing's unique attention to language rescripts the existing Euro-American centric

nature of cosmopolitanism by positing a form of linguistic, social, and political outcome of

centuries of global mobility and encounter. One of the earliest instances of linguistic mixtures

and mesh-ups can be found in the narrator's description of Pokuaa thus: "She was a kind of buy-

and-sell woman, she was an arrangement alombo. She was prepared to take anything into the sky

to let the town prosper" (6). One can infer that Pokuaa's occupation involves some form of trade.

The glossary defines "alombo" as a lover, but from the context of the sentence, it could also

connote expertise. As Arlene Elder points out, the glossary provided is only partially helpful, and

where it is not, there is a sense that Laing wants the reader to create their meaning. For many

Ghanaian readers who understand the linguistic dexterity of Ghanaian English, meaning is

created from the context of the novel or the onomatopoeic nature of the words. For others who

have no such familiarity, the novel provides some lessons and withholds others. It forces the

cosmopolitan reader who is unfamiliar with Ghana and its unique language formation practices

to grapple with the limits of their education and understanding of the world.

Part of drawing attention to Laing's unique blending of languages is it's re-scripting of

cosmopolitanism's "localized" nature. If cosmopolitanism is an effect of global travel and a

worldly or perhaps even planetary sensibility, it nonetheless remains deeply rooted in a localized

center from which these worldly excursions are possible. Mukoma wa Ngugi proposes the term

"rooted transnationalism" to account for literary works that are rooted in more than one locale.

Rooted transnationalism, in Ngugi's assessment, allows for the "particularities of national

cultures and at the same time for a literary arch across two or more nations" (180). He explains

further that this does not mean that the novel is necessarily global, but that it is local in two or

more places, ultimately allowing a "study of the networks that have all along been driving

history and literature" (184). Though Ngugi does not explicitly think beyond the geographical, rooted transnationalism in its straddling of multiple localities could also have a temporal dimension. For instance, in being local in more than one geographical space also means inhabit different temporalities and histories. Thus, extending the networks that rooted transnationalism offers to encompass time, *Woman of the Aeroplanes* suggest that transgressing national borders re-animates older vestiges of colonial imposition. For instance, when one of the characters, Korner Mensah, in the novel expresses concerns over the effects of the Tukwan's trip on the English language by asking, "What will happen to the English language when we arrive among the natives?" (69). Kwaku de Babo, the "chief secretary to the town," responds, "…you are not going to get me to be defensive about a foreign language that I knew before I could walk" (69). While the Tukwans can and do speak English, Korner Mensah predicts that some linguistic intermingling is an inevitable part of such transnational and transcontinental excursions. Korner Mensah also establishes a distinction between the form of English spoken by the people of Tukwan from the one spoken by the "natives" of Levensvale. While Kwaku de Babo's response clearly illustrates the uneasy dominance of the English language in any British postcolony, it gestures to the kind of unique localization that English and other colonial languages are subjected to once they mix with the local linguistic and cultural forms. Thus, the English of the "natives" due to the forces of colonization become "vulnerable" to influences from the world. The variety of English the Tukwans are traveling with, because of its localized "cosmopolitan mix," becomes a threat to the "native" speakers. This threat is perhaps the threat that becomes possible when the European "natives" re-encounter the third world, not in the so-called global south, but the global North. It is a linguistic and ontological threat that has earlier precedent in the contagion ascribed to none white bodies, their smell, their diseases, and their color as all

transferable to those who get too close. Part of the tension we encounter in the novel is one that subverts all assumed understanding of how air travel functions even as the novel can't help but also allude to and critique the form of ontological proof that air travel demands of all travelers, but demands to the point of the ridiculous from African travelers.

Beside language is Laing's works are saturated with technological modernity, portraying the African novel, experiences, and life beyond the canonical realist novels that have penetrated the Euro-American literati. Unlike his 1992 novel, *Major Gentl and the Achimota Wars*, which has received critical attention for its imagining of African literature within recognizable technological modernity, *Woman of the Aeroplanes* does not seem to have garnered similar attention to its foregrounding of aviation technology. Derek Wright, for instance, interprets Laing's novel as a vision of "Africa's claim to a place on the informational highways of the twenty-first century and reassert its right to an existence" (151). The appeal of *Major Gentle and the Achimota Wars'* is that it is set in the future (ironically enough the novel is set in 2020) where Laing imagines extensive information technology available to Ghanaians, and Africa at large. It is rather difficult to decipher what time *Woman of the Aeroplanes* is set in, but the characters incessantly refer to Ghanaian historical figures from the 50s and 60s such Kwame Nkrumah and Kofi Busia, but they also seem aware of the contemporary Ghanaian politics of the 80s. This aside, there is also the difficulty of dealing with a technology that is often framed solely as a developmental issue than as an issue of transit. It is easier to imagine Africa's place in information technology when already existing infrastructure, such as telephone lines can be adapted to facilitate this technology. Where aviation is concerned, there are more than infrastructure at stake because air travel encompasses more than the airport. It involves procedures that are often beyond the scope of the nation-state.

Francis Ngaboh-Smart locates Laing's technological vision in the genre of the novel. He argues that Laing's combination of science and fantasy can best be described as "science fantasy," a literary genre that combines science fiction with fantasy (59). Though Ngaboh-Smart, explains that this "hybrid form" is one where "the narrative momentum depends on the overlap between elements of science and fantasy," it is unclear how this genre differs from other genres such as Speculative fiction or Afrofuturism both of which utilize the Science fiction and fantasy (59). But Ngaboh-Smart also identifies the existence of technology and science in things beyond the airplane in *Woman of the Aeroplanes*. He identifies the "stupidity machine" which is invented by the trickster-like character, Kwame Atta, as a mode of interfacing between the mechanical and the human.[147] Laing's novels assume the incorporation and utility of technology and science in the lives and experiences that emanate from the African continent.

Other African literary critics have focused attention on the interplay between modernity, globalization, and aviation. Writing in 2018, Jeanne-Marie Jackson locates at the intersection of aviation, modernity, and African Literature, a lacuna, a tension (more accurately), between transnational aspirations and national limitations. Reading contemporary novels written by African writers, Jackson does not account for the ways that aviation, or a rather techno-modernity of which aviation is one iteration, has been an inherent part of the concerns of African literature before the contemporary moment. According to Jackson, "determining when and where aviation is available to signify globalization's shifts in relation to space and time…is integral to

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[147] Gerald Gaylard in "Black Secret Technology: African Technological Subjects" also writes about technology and African literature with a focus on Kojo Laing's *Major Gentl and the Achimota Wars*. Gaylard acknowledges that while there has always been technology in African such as is evident in the construction of the pyramids, there nonetheless exists an "adversarial relationship to much of the 'cybercracy' and virtualist epistemologies of the West" (197-198). Gaylard's concludes by asserting that African writers are "asserting a sense of locatedness" through technology.

theorizing the novel today" (43). There is more at stake than the availability of aviation technology; questions about access and class cannot be disengaged from questions of race. What *Woman of the Aeroplanes* propose is a restructuring of the very systems and procedures that dictate and govern who moves across national borders, how they move, and under what conditions. The re-engineering of the airplane, the localization of the visa procedures, and reassessing surveillance and securitization would pave the way for Africa's participation in aviation. And that might already be significant, but more fundamental would a complete reimaging of the epistemologies of slavery and colonialism that informs these structures.

Grounds: Building Tarmacs Beyond the Scope of the Nation

Woman of the Aeroplanes, as the title suggests, is a novel deeply invested in travel and techno-modernity. Tukwan, the name of the community in the novel, is a town whose social and political fabric emanates, is defined by travel and movement. As Laing notes in the glossary, the meaning of the gerund form of the word 'Tukwan,' "*tukwaning*," means traveling (285). Indeed, the Akan word, 'tukwan', literally translates as to dig up a road or create roads or pathways. It comes as no surprise then that one of the novel's major narrative threads is the preparation for the journey to Scotland. Though this journey to Scotland is the core narrative event, there are other forms of travel that the novel examines, allowing for other possible meanings and figuration of travel to operate throughout the novel. Another understanding of 'tukwan' emerges from a Ghanaian indigenous understanding of death. Amongst the Ewes and the Akan, for instance, death is figured as a journey. As a result, when a person dies, money and other essential goods are buried with the deceased. In addition, there is an unknown backstory of how the community and its members came to be where they are currently. Yet it is clear from their names and descriptions we get of some of the characters that they might be from different parts of

Ghana, and somehow became incorporated into this community. For instance, the character Moro, whose primary occupation is selling grilled meat, seems to come from Northern Ghana, and Lawyer Tay seems to be from the coastal regions along the Atlantic Ocean. The novel does not dwell on how each member of the community came to live in Tukwan, but it suggests that they were each taken from around the country. The physical and mythical travels and encounters in the novel all provide an understanding of what travel could mean and do in the world.

From the novel's beginning, travel guides the narrative. The inhabitants of Tukwan are protesting an attempt by workers from the Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly to demolish a building. This protest is simultaneously an act of subversion ("What have we to do with Kumasi since it banished us for subversive activity, for refusing to listen to all the songs of the ancestors? (1)), and a kind of recruitment aimed at the traxcavator[148] driver, Kaki. The inhabitants of Tukwan need Kaki and his equipment to construct the tarmac for their journey. Kaki, after witnessing the Tukwans threats to feed him and take care of him, and avenge any destruction he and his machines might create confesses feeling "torn between tearing down the building and tearing off his work clothes to go and hug and join these people who were ready to be so kind and so cantankerous" (2). Tukwan's forceful yet silent subversion convinces the traxcavator driver, Kaki, to join them. Once he does, however, he can no longer return to Kumasi to inform them that the banished town is thriving. Indeed, the Tukwans require the services of Kaki in order to build a tarmac for the airplanes that will take them to their sister-town in Scotland, Levensvale.

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[148] As far as I can tell, "Traxcavator" was a name brand of the Trackson Company of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The word "Traxcavator" came from combining "tractor" and "excavator".

Tarmacs, throughout, the novel are not fixed enclosed spaces designated for the landing and taking off of airplanes. Because there are no airports to act as the border to the nation-state, the tarmac in *Woman of the Aeroplanes* marks the designated space for the landing and take-off of flights. However, these tarmacs can be, and are, repurposed to meet the needs of the members of the community. Thus, the tarmac in the novel is not solely for the uses of an airplane. For instance, before the Tukwans arrive in Levensvale, they send a telegram ahead informing their host that due to the trailers that they have attached to their aircraft, the tarmac needs to be curved at "an angle of forty-five degrees for the last fifty meters of stopping" (74). When the Tukwans arrive, however, they see a drunk man sleeping on the tarmac making their landing a difficult, albeit comical, feat. Later in the novel, when the Tukwans return home to bring some more goods, and they soon realize that Moro, one of the Tukwans, has turned the tarmac into a guava farm and created a "poorly constructed" tarmac at another location close to the forest (165). When the travelers return to Levensvale, the tarmac has been moved again, and raspberries have been planted in its stead (198). These relocations of the tarmac are possible because the people of Tukwan and Levensvale are not constrained by the same restrictions as a conventional town or locale is by airports and their attendant regulations. This allows for the tarmacs to be relocated to accommodate the needs of the people. In some ways, this act of relocating these landing zones are reminiscent of the ever-changing "bus stops" of trotros where the passengers and drivers determine which areas are best delineated as bus stops. The persistent moving and relocation of the tarmac is evidence of how both Tukwan and Levensvale exist beyond the strictures of the typical nation-state.

The incessant movement of the tarmac is mirrored by the Tukwans approach and relationship to the aeroplanes, as well as the modifications they make to it. Acquired by Pokuaa

during her trip to Scotland, the aeroplanes are only partially the catalyst for the Tukwan's journey. Interestingly, there is very little information about the airplanes. For instance, there is no information about the kind of aircraft these planes are or their model. What seems important is that they are imbued with vitality by their owner, Pokuaa, who perfumes them every morning with "frangipani lavender" (6). The airplanes are a means for the community to establish trade roots with a community in Scotland. And it is understood among the Tukwans that this trade deal will bring them economic prosperity. As we learn in the novel, the airplanes are held in trust for the town to buy them by "exporting palm-nuts and cassava to a sister town in the UK" (6). The structures and materials necessary for air travel are not absent per se in Tukwan, instead, they exist in extra-ordinary ways. For instance, in place of a pilot, Kwame Atta, the town's trickster-like character who is also its "chief inventor," can fly the 'aeroplanes' with the help of magic, the birds serve as navigators, and the seats made of "dry hardened moss" (46 and 68).

In addition to the mechanical and technical knowledge of flying the aeroplane, the Tukwans have to devise a system of determining who is selected to embark upon this journey, and who remains in Tukwan (68). The process of choosing the sixteen travelers is reminiscent of the kinds of visa interviews that European and American nations demand from African travelers. Unlike conventional visa interviews, where one has to expend significant resources, the interviews are conducted by Kwaku de Babo and Pokuaa. In the interviews, each of the major characters makes a case for why they want to travel or remain in Tukwan. For those who choose to remain, it is simultaneously a protest against the kinds of violence meted out to African travelers, and in some cases, an understanding of their limitations or the aspirations to rule Tukwan. Moro, one of the characters who choose to remain, reasons, "anyway I am not going to any cold land where every day the primitive people there will force me Moro the great cola

farmer with Allah on my lips, to prove whether I'm human or not! What sort of deep and filthy nonsense is this! I will not go to such a primitive place" (51). Moro's assertions suggest an understanding of the racialization functions. He understands that once he is in Scotland, his blackness becomes entangled with historical, structural, and systemic structures that will force him to confront his humanity. Though we learn later in the novel that Moro aspires to acquire some of the power that the leaders of Tukwan possess, he nonetheless emphasizes that not all who live and work in Ghana and elsewhere on the continent desire to migrate elsewhere.

The assessment procedure allows Laing to reveal key characters and describe some of the peculiarities of life in Tukwan. Francis Ngaboh-Smart argues that the assessment of travelers is not merely an exercise in "quantifying" the inhabitants, but a "fundamental mode of recording the individuality of each traveler" and a means to understand the "secrets of what [they] was doing before being pulled into the strange time of [the] village" (91 (Laing 27)). These assessments are versions of the formal visa assessment procedures that African travelers must undergo. During these interviews, travelers must produce arduous quantities of proof of their economic and social situation. The Tukwans, while conducting their version of these assessments, do not replicate the strictly economic and social requirements. They adopt an equitable process where two of the leaders of the town, Pokuaa and Kwaku de Babo, visit each inhabitant to have a conversation about their reasons for desiring to stay or travel to Scotland. By so doing, they eschew confessionary structure where travelers must divulge their motivations in order to require the requisite documents of travel. During the town hall meeting to determine the criteria for delineating who gets to travel and who does not, the community is disinterested in responding to Pokuaa's interrogatives about how much information is required from travelers. When Pokuaa asks whether the assessment should reveal the "secrets of what everybody was

doing before being pulled into the strange time of the village," she is met with silence (27).

Pokuaa's subsequent questions: "Are we going to see how thieves, murderers, and destroyers

came to be admitted to this place? Are we going to praise this town-village for being free and

new when we all know there are big gaps in our hearts and minds…" remain unanswered (27-8)?

The debates that follow leads nowhere, and everywhere, and when the final call is made, only

one person, Kwaku de Babo, volunteer to assist in the vetting process.

It is no surprise, therefore, that the novel subverts all embarkation processes. In true

Tukwan fashion, the departure is a moment to reassert the ontological integrity of all things. The

narrator reports that while some of the inhabitants are away "ever animal, human, thing, or

presence was to be treated as an equal in being, in principle, to everything else" (65). Within this

edict, the two airplanes embark upon their journey to Levensvale. The two airplanes have been

re-engineered, so each has a "wooden trailer suspended miraculously at the back and crowded

with palm-nuts and cassava" (67).

> So there were two aeroplanes afloat with their cargo trailers, aeroplanes
> surrounded by two clouds of similar shape that made the fuselage cough. The
> seats were made with dry hardened moss at the request of Pokuaa, so that if
> anyone were to shed a tear for the future, there would be slime to receive it.
> Everything else was normal for small jets, even when the complaints that Sala
> was taking too long in the ridiculously small toilet of the plane opposite to the one
> his father was it. … The two planes could communicate, and thus one
> conversation that was not finished in one could end up in the other. (68)

These airplanes are reconstituted to meet the needs and aspirations of the travelers from

Tukwan, yet they do not escape the normative problems experienced by passengers of an

airplane. For instance, the bathrooms are described as too small, and both are occupied

for too long. Later, when one of the airplanes runs out of fuel, it simply lands on the other

one, and "a hole in the upper fuselage of the lower-lip aeroplane" is created "so that

anyone could crawl from one plane to the other one" (79). These airplanes are reconstituted out of necessity to allow for ways of being in the air that defies conventional logic of aviation.

Landing, Deplaning and Immigration

It is with the meeting between the Tukwans and Levenvales that the same economy of colonial relationality re-emerges with a difference. Faced with the prospect of meeting the Tukwans for the first time, Margaret Mackie refers to her "prospective guests" as "Gold Coasters" because it was more "romantic than calling them Ghanaians" (71). Margaret's insistence on referring to the Tukwans within the matrix of defunct colonial identities, Gold Coasters instead of Ghanaians, allows Margaret to re-script the political history of a people for the convenience of sounding 'romantic.' The right to name oneself, that *ur*-right that is often denied to black people and black women specifically, is again re-imposed on the Tukwans. The name that they have chosen is inconvenient for Margaret, whose act of re-naming reconstitutes the Tukwans with the colonizer-colonized matrix that independence sought to break. It is a matrix of power that pre-supposes the dominance of whiteness and Europe, and the savagery of Africans. Laing is quick to intervene in Margaret's re-naming of the Tukwans, by depicting her desire to "go native" as it were. Margaret's illicit desires are manifested as her longing to "wear a tama, so that she could unite her waist to Africa; and perhaps so that she could unite her waist to Africa; and perhaps she could be introduced to aboloo too" (72). "Tama" is a piece of cloth women usually wear by wrapping around their waist. "Tama" also refers to women's clothing that is made from Dutch wax textiles, which are popular in many West African countries. In particular contexts, "tama" allude to intercourse. Indeed, due to Akan's reliance on tone to convey meaning, words like "tama" can also be easily be made to have sexual connotations in

certain semantic contexts. In other words, Margaret's desire to wear "tama," in *Woman of the Aeroplanes*, is followed by her desire to "unite her waist to Africa" (72). By suggesting that Margaret has a repressed desire to as it were "go native," Laing critiques the uncritical views that often inhibit encounters between African and the world.

Margaret is not the only one guilty of these thoughts. Ed, another inhabitant of Lavensvale, imagines the Africans to be "coming in coins of expectation" with their "drums and inventions, in little aerial skits oven Glen Coe, ready to drum a dirge for the McDonalds now, while eating palm soup spoonless" (77). As happens with Margaret, the narrator undermines Ed's character by gesturing towards his drinking and his laziness. Yet the association of the Tukwans with commodity and money value persist well beyond Ed. It exists in the trade relations that see the Tukwans bring goods from the continent in exchange for trade relations. It is the underlining agreement that allows for the Tukwans to purchase the aeroplanes in the first place. Indeed, the leading female character, Pokuaa is associated with trade and economic relations, and it is her dexterity in trade that leads to the acquisition of the airplane and the trade agreement that would allow the Tukwans to pay for the aeroplanes. Pokuaa's business acumen goes hand-in-hand with the sexual desires that characters from Tukwan and Levensvale thrust onto her. Roy Mackie, the leader of Levensvale, is in love with her, yet Pokuaa does not return his affectations. Kwame Atta, the trickster-like inventor of Tukwan, is also in love with her, yet Pokuaa's silence, or unresponsiveness, leads him to make assumptions about what her silence could mean.

Upon arriving in Scotland, the Tukwans encounter the long arm of immigration. When they disembark from the aeroplane, the Tukwans decide to sing the Akan version of the Ghanaian national anthem. The anthem, "Yen ara yen asaase ni" in an attempt to lay claim to,

and assert, their belonging in Levensvale.[149] The anthem, composed by Ghanaian musicologist

Ephraim Amu, invokes patriotism and belonging by arguing that by virtue of their forefathers'

struggle, Ghanaians have a right to their land. Distanced from the original context in which the

song is composed, the song nonetheless invokes a sense of belonging that is historically

conferred through struggle and bloodshed. Though the Tukwans never explicitly make the kind

claim that Saleh does in *By the Sea* when he re-categorizes himself as one of the objects taken

from Zanzibar to be cared for by the British and thus demands to be allowed access into the

British nation-state, by singing "Yɛn Ara Asase Ni," the Tukwans allude to an entitlement to

Levensvale specifically, and Scotland at large (88).

The Tukwans singing of "Yɛn Ara Asase Ni" upon deplaning is explained in the novel to

be part and parcel of the implicit entitlement of belonging that travel engenders. This ideology

certainly conforms to Euro-American understanding of belonging in the global village. As the

narrator says, "in order to win the world, the Tukwan visitors were singing, 'Yen ara yen asaase

…' down the glen. Travelling on the travelling earth proved the world belonged to all, Babo

thought" (88 emphasis mine). These claims of belonging, as made available via air travel,

smacks of the early rhetoric around aviation as opening up the world and allowing for global

travel and belonging on a scale never before possible. However, for black African travelers who

historically have been restricted or subjected to additional screening, the claim to land via travel

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[149] "Yɛn Ara Asase Ni" was composed by Ghanaian musicologist Ephraim Amu (September 13th 1899-2nd January 1995). Amu in 1929. This song is view by many to be the unofficial national anthem of Ghana and often performed during official events. "Yɛn Ara Asase Ni" is a patriotic song that begins with the lines: "Yɛn Ara Asase Ni" which translates literally as "this is our land." The song goes on to detail how "our" forefathers shed their blood to purchase or lay claim to their right to the land. The chorus of the song, "Ɔman no sɛ ɛbɛyɛ yie oo!/ Ɔman no sɛ ɛrenyɛ yie oo!/ Ɛyɛ nsɛnnahɔ sɛ, ɔmanfo bra na ɛkyerɛ", which translates as, "if the nation is to thrive/ if the nation is to thrive/ it will depend on the character of its citizen.

has been a "difficult" if not unattainable possibility.[150] Thus Laing assumes a kind of worldliness

for his characters, but it is one that is almost immediately repressed.

There is some historical foundation, however fragile, for this claim of belonging. The

first has resonances with Saleh's claim. As part of the United Kingdom, Scotland benefitted from

the resources that were taken from British colonies, and thus by laying claim to the land, the

Tukwans are laying claim through the resources that were taken from Ghana and used to

"develop" the United Kingdom. The second is rather unusual, and it is through Ghana's president

Jerry John Rawlings (popularly known as J. J. Rawlings) whose father is Scottish. At the time

when *Woman of the Aeroplanes* is published, Rawlings had been in power since the overthrow of

Hilla Limann in December 1981. Though Rawlings was raised by his Ghanaian mother, it is

possible that the reference to Scotland, might in part, reference to the way that Scotland emerges

in Ghanaian politics both through Rawlings. Laing himself has also spent some time in Scotland

where he undertook a degree at Glasgow University. According to Brenda Copper, Scotland

remains one of the "sources of Laing's often exciting, cosmopolitan regard for international

syncretisms" (156). Copper further explains that this affinity with Scotland that one encounters

in Laing's novel is as a result of Scotland's own marginality in terms of culture and economics

(156). In an interview with Copper, Laing expressed his affection for Scotland and his

experience there, saying: "I fell in love with the hills and isolated streams, pines, mist etc. My

acquittance with Europeans was already extensive in Ghana before I left for Scotland. I view

people without colour except for specific purposes, artistic or otherwise. I am married a

Scotswoman but have been living in different continents since 1981. I made no emotional

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[150] Drawing on Samantha Pinto's conception of "difficult" to describe relational terms "regarding conflict and community together and to think about how that may relate to bodies of literature, rather than just to the bodies represented in literature" (5)

difference between European literature/art and the African equivalent" (qtd. Copper 157).

Though Laing can claim to not see "color" and to have a deep affection for Scotland, his

characters in *Woman of the Aeroplanes* are certainly aware of race and how it affects forms of

belonging.

The sense of belonging that the people of Tukwan seek to cultivate through this anthem

of national belonging is immediately shattered when they come into contact with the

"Immigration Officers On Duty" (88). Mackie, their Levensvale host, assures the travelers that

the Lord Provost has cleared their visit, yet the officers insist on evaluating the travelers'

documents:

> Immigration John spoke at last, though Immigration Jessie kept silent, probably
> with the pressure of the disdainful triumph on her face. 'We believe not all of the
> party has visas, we believe; nor do we consider that the proper quarantine
> procedures were taken for the accompanying birds and animals, goats if you care
> to have the proper description. Also it may be considered a threat to the public to
> have the aeroplanes landing the way they did. (88)

The ensuing exchange between the Tukwans, Mackie, their Levensvale host, and the

Immigration officers are instructive. Mackie fears that the antagonism of the Immigration

officers would lead the Tukwans to take their business elsewhere. The immigration officers,

seeing their role as the deputized power of the state to regulate access into the nation, insist on

checking the Tukwans documentation. The novel re-enacts the theatre of that is often confined to

interrogation rooms at the airport. Mackie and the other inhabitants of Levensvaleans are never

the objects of these interrogations. Once confronted with these immigration officers, the

Tukwans resist being interpellated as Other by the security arm of the state. The police are

ultimately called upon to deal with the belligerent travelers. True to its narrative mode, the police

prove ineffective when the Tukwans use magic to run them out of town. The novel exaggerates

these systems of managing national borders, but it depicts the immediate and often violent treatment of African travelers. If we accept that Laing critiques a certain form of cosmopolitanism, then we must also accept that in depicting these border-crossing security structures, Laing is revealing the excessive forms of securitization that African travelers encounter.

Undermining the "authorities" of the state has material effects. These effects are best seen through Aba, who stowed away on the airplane and who is frightened by the ontological proof that would be demanded of her. The narrator says: "Aba was crying because she feared she was going to be asked to prove that she was a human being whose soul was fit to be admitted into the Benighted or Blighted Kingdom" (92). It is worth noting that what Aba fears is having to prove that she is human and possesses a "soul" fit to be admitted into Scotland. It is not enough to look or be human; once one leaves the nation-state, one has to possess proof of one's being. When one fails to have the requisite documentation, one becomes what Carole Boyce Davies calls a "deportable subject." Davies explains that occupying the position of the "deportable subject" means that one is simultaneously criminalized and rendered stateless (951). It is this double-edge sword Aba rescripts as the imperative to prove her humanity. Coming from a community within a nation that does not know of their presence, proving one's state affiliation would be no easy task.

Aerial *Trotro*

One of the most provocative ideas that Laing examines in *Woman of the Aeroplanes* is the aerial trotro. The trotro in Ghana emerged as an urban fixture in 1952, and according to Jennifer Hart, it was named after "the 3-pence fare charged for all routes between the suburbs and the center of Accra" (380). The trotro gradually replaced the "mammy wagons," which were

constructed locally by building a "wooded body…upon an imported metal chassis and outfitted

rows of wooden seats" (Hart 380-1). By the time Laing's *Woman of the Aeroplanes* was

published, trotros had become part of the urban landscape. Over the years, trotros have acquired

the reputation for circumventing traffic laws, at times as dubbing the average worker by

increasing their fares suddenly. Like the matatu in Nairobi, the trotro remains a vital part of

Ghanaian transportation and culture. Inspiring newspaper columns and writers, it is seen as a

quintessential part of the Ghanaian urban landscape.

When Laing proposes the airplane as allowing for aerial trotro service, it is possible to

read as an opportunity to re-engineer the airplane and re-envision aviation to suit the needs of the

local African context. It could also be a veiled critique of the exorbitant prices of flights from

African countries, and to African countries. At the time *Woman of Airplanes* was published, it

was popularly known that a direct flight from one Africa country to another was more expensive

than flights that were routed through former imperial metropoles. Though this might still be the

case, I nonetheless want to consider how the failed implementation of aerial trotros provides a

pathway to the elusive potentiality of aviation on the continent.

In the preceding chapters, I have argued that a developmental perspective to aviation in

Africa is unable to account for the complex network of racial discrimination and violence,

recognition and its entanglement with the economic desires of transnational mobility, and the

conflict of sexuality made visible in the airport. Further, I argued that the airplane's perceived

distance from blackness is shown in Ellison's entanglement of the airplane with the structures

and systems of racial violence to be closer and more intimate than earlier imagined. In Laing, the

looming possibility of what the novel describes at times as the "forthcoming trotro service of the

sky" allows for a reimagining of the skies through a transportation phenomenon that emerges

from a local or rooted understanding of how transportation can respond to the aspirations and needs of people (123). The fact that Laing imagined the train, to be threatened by the "trotro aeroplane" suggest an understanding of how rail transportation might potentially be affected the aerial trotro.

Laing's aerial trotro is never fulfilled in the scope of the novel. Because upon their final return to Tukwan, the travelers and those they left behind have to struggle to keep their autonomy from the nation-state. They are in danger of losing their immortality and being incorporated forcefully into the Ghanaian nation. They are forced to give up their aerial aspirations to attend to this of survival. Yet the seed they planted exists in their young children who have forged lasting bonds with companions in Levensvale, and in Aba's marriage to a Scottish man Angus, Mackie's son. The dream of flight and travel that is so quotidian that is accessible to everyone is nonetheless a part of the dream of the past, present, and future.

Anyidoho's "AfricanaAirways," to return to where this chapter began, and Laing's "aerial trotro" might not yet have materialized. But cities across the African continent have more direct flight routes now than they did when both Laing and Anyidoho were writing, respectively. Ghana recently made visa applications upon arrival an option for all travelers, easing the process for those bearing passports from African countries, not part of the West African economic block (ECOWAS). Across the continent, there have been investments in airport construction that have leveled the assumed distance between Africa and the West. Yet there are reverberations of imperial logic through concerns of contagion and disease, for instance. During the 2014-2016 Ebola outbreak, concerns over traveling Africans and Africa itself as a source of contagion were heightened when several US citizens contracted the disease. It is no secret that the ease of travel and mobility that the air, airplane, and airport allow facilitates the spread of contagious diseases.

The creation of AfricanaAirways or even the aerial trotro will affect some change in the way

black and African travelers move through the world.

CODA:

Some Personal and Analytical Considerations at the End of Flight

The first time I traveled on an airplane, I was eight years old. My mother, my sister, and I were finally going to Norway to stay with my father, who had been living in Norway for his graduate studies since I was five years old. I vaguely remember struggling to sleep, and at one point, deciding that kneeling and putting my head on the seat was the only comfortable position possible in an airplane. Unsurprisingly the air hostess came over and told my mother I could not sleep that way. I barely slept on what seemed like the endless hours between Ghana and Norway. I had, at that time, the limited and rigid palate of an eight-year-old, and was only capable of eating chocolate and drinking coca-cola. When we arrived in Bergen, my sister ran to my dad and hugged him while I held on to my mother, unable to recognize the man my sister insisted was our dad. The easy and close relationship I had with my dad through letters somehow did not materialize in the person who now, after three years, was within hugging distance. This memory of travel and mobility has insistently re-emerged for me as I come to the end of this project. It is a memory full of questions I did not realize I had. For instance, why was I so uncomfortable? Why wasn't I able to recognize my father? And why had my sister and I felt so different compared to the other kids we encountered on these flights?

Perhaps I am plagued by this memory now because the allure of air travel in the early 90s in Ghana was so strong that to be seen at an airport was synonymous with actually flying. In some way, the dreams of flight that Apagya's models sought after became somewhat real for a family like mine. We had not only managed to go to the airport; we had succeeded in procuring a visa, a ticket, and ultimately flying out of the country. Attaining the dream of transgressing national boundaries comes at the prize. It reconstitutes you as valuable in the eyes of those who

remain grounded, unable to achieve such dreams of flight. In the world beyond the nation-state,

if you are African and black, your name becomes too difficult to pronounce, your hair too tightly

coiled and "wooly" to be beautiful. And your blackness is reanimated by histories and narratives

beyond that you can no longer disavow. To examine transnational mobility and movement by

being attentive to the technologies of travel, and to the kinds of shifts and transformations that

these travels irrevocably engender, particularly in Black travelers, is in part, to find ways to

understand this experience that is a part of me, and beyond me.

As I finish writing this project, there is a global pandemic that has reconstituted daily life.

It has spread to every continent. In many countries, including the United States, where I am, and

Ghana, where I am from, varying travel bans and restrictions have been imposed in an attempt to

curtail the spread of the virus. Having originated in Wuhan province in China, COVID 19, has

since spread to a hundred and fifty-two countries, areas, or territories (152). As of today, March

17th, 2020, there are 173,355 confirmed cases globally and 7019 deaths. By all indication, the

number of people who have the virus is significantly higher than the number of confirmed cases.

And the numbers will certainly increase. Panic and anxiety reign as pictures of empty shelves,

and products such as toilet paper, hand sanitizer, and disinfectants are no longer available to the

average consumer.

Air travel is one of the industries most affected by COVID-19. Beyond concerns of

cleanliness, are questions of proximity and identity. How would one know if someone on the

flight has been exposed to the virus? There are deep worries about the movement of people as a

fundamental catalyst to the global spread of the virus. Indeed, the initial cases reported in places

like Italy, Ghana, Jamaica, and many places in the world, were carried by people who arrived via

airplanes. In a short period, the virus has dramatically affected the notions of connectivity and

mobility that air travel and aviation embody and celebrate. The air, airplane, and airport now signify the spread of the disease. This current situation re-scripts the foreigner. Now in as much as air travel brings the pathological body per excellence of the foreigner, it also brings with it the citizen who might have been infected elsewhere. The ocular evidence of alterity that allowed countries in Europe and the United States, for instance, to screen and monitor travelers, has proven ineffective because the virus is unseen and undetected in both foreigners and citizens. Its carriers cannot be distinguished by sight.

For airline companies noting the sharp drop in passengers, as documented by the hashtags #emptyplane or #emptyflight, started looking for ways to reassure passengers. The virus was, in essence, "bad for business"[151]. Operating on a slot system where airlines were in danger of losing lucrative routes and time slots, if they did not utilize them, most airlines took to flying empty planes or ghost planes. They commissioned public campaigns aimed at reassuring passengers that airplanes were not "putrid dishes of germs" but had state of the art air filtration systems that could filter out any diseased air. Ultimate, the global spread of the virus has curtailed travel, particularly via air, leading to governments around the world instituting various travel bans in order to control the spread of the virus and its deadly effects on the elderly and the immune-compromised.

This current state of affair, though temporary, brings into sharp focus how air travel and aviation has fundamentally led to a global connectedness unimaginable when in 1905, the Wright brothers succeeded in flying their airplane. It is even a far cry from what the neatly dressed black men and women in the oxcart witnessed after they posed for English-born photojournalist James

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[151]See https://www.cnn.com/travel/article/airport-slots-ghost-flights/index.html

H. Hare in 1908 just before he photographed the Wright brothers' flights at Kill Devil Hills. That technological feat those black men and women bore witness to that day would, over a century later, become the primary ways that COVID-19 would spread around the world. Amid this crisis, it has emerged, perhaps unsurprisingly, for most scholars of Black and African Studies who study the ongoing systemic and structural inequalities, that black people are leading in the fatalities across the United States. There are longer historical reverberations here too, with the spread of AIDS in the 80s and 90s across black communities in the United States and throughout the African continent, and more recently, the Ebola crisis in the 2000s in West Africa. In each of these outbreaks, there have been longue dureé effects for black travelers.

What this project has sought to do is to provide a means of understanding the entanglements between air travel and blackness by being attentive to the constitutive parts of this form of travel, namely, air, airplane, and airport. *Dream of Flight: Literary Mapping of Black Geographies through the Air, Airplane, and Airport* interrogates what is made visible when we approach transnational travel and mobility from a literary trajectory that begins with air. That takes seriously the relationship between black vernacular traditions that imagined air as a site for flight, imagination, and rescripting the bodily deprivation of the dungeon. It subsequently investigates how technologically mediated flight, via the airplane, revised, repurposed, and replaced these imaginaries of flight. It further examines how the architectural and surveillance structures created to manage flight, often also managed and limit the movement of black people globally. It ends with an analysis of a novel that imagines alternative possibilities of flight.

It is my hope that these analyses of African and African diasporic literary texts provide a new vocabulary for understanding air, airplane, and airport within genealogies of mobility and

movement. They are, as COVID 19 and other such tragic events reveal, an intimate part of what it means to move and travel in our contemporary era.

In seeking to re-orient critical theoretical and analytical terms that have been significant to the way we think about and study transnational travel and movement, I wanted to show how blackness reanimates and extends the way we see, know, and experience the world of travel. It is my sincerest hope that it allows us to imagine and hope for ways to breathe, to fly, and to land freely someday.

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