Drew University

WHOSE GOTTA HAVE IT?

RACE, GENDER, AND VIOLENCE IN THE SONG OF SONGS

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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

The biblical Song of Songs presents an erotic world punctuated by interludes of violence. What role does this violence play in constructing the narrative world of the Song of Songs? What group(s) benefit from the violence? Is the violence reflective of the post-exilic community's psychosocial anxieties? In what ways do race, gender, and spatial location affect how certain bodies are perceived and treated within this narrative world? And, how and why do similar acts of violence appear in modern American culture? Several analogues exist between the world of the Song and America's sexual and racial landscape, in that that both worlds are composed of the intersecting social structures of ethnocentrism/racism, sexism, and patriarchy. In order to illustrate these cultural and structural similarities this project engages a bi-directional approach, using the unnamed woman as a lens through which to read the violence perpetrated against modern black women, and vice-versa. In order to do this, this project begins with a primer on the Song's genre, cultural provenance, and history of interpretation. Acknowledging but moving away from traditional allegorical interpretations, this study engages the Song's overt sexual language and the social issues of gender, race/class, and space that its scenes of violence imply. Next, this project considers the poem's application of specific verbiage and character conventions in its portrayal of the unnamed woman as a transgressive "other." Building upon her figuration as "other," the penultimate chapter compares the violence inflicted upon the unnamed woman in the domestic (1:6) and public spheres (5:7) to the similar instances of violence perpetrated against Spike Lee's character, Nola Darling in the1986 and 2017 films *She's Gotta Have It*. Ultimately this project shows the resonances between the Song's violent inscription of a gendered social dynamic reflective of post-exilic Israel's vassal submission and modern instances of race-and gender-based violence in America that reflect a culture rooted in racism and sexism.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Description of Project and My Social Location

When I was fifteen, my best friend Carrie and I read the Song of Songs for the first time together aloud in my room. Through fits of laughter we simultaneously read and recorded in our journals a list of qualities we wanted in our future husbands. Having both been brought up in the Assemblies of God Church and primary school we had been taught to view our bodies, specifically our virginities as something to be valued and protected. There was no room for a discussion of sexual desire, our changing bodies, our attraction to boys. Sex was meant only for marriage; we had to wait. So, because we couldn't talk about wanting to talk about sex, let alone speak openly about our own burgeoning sexualities, we tacitly devised an "acceptable" way of broaching the subject: we read from the Bible. And yet, the very act of reading the Song of Songs felt dangerous, bordering on sinful because it spoke plainly and explicitly of sex and bodies. It is telling of our total indoctrination into our churches' "cult of purity" that the only way in which we could talk about/around sex or sexuality was from within the context of marriage.[1] In reading the Song of Songs we had to project ourselves into the future, imagining ourselves as brides wishing for our future husbands. Sex for the sake of

[1] I can attest to the emotional damage and sexual dysfunction conservative traditions can have on young women's bodies and psyches. The perpetuation of a religious culture that prizes female purity over all else, sacrifices women for the sake of maintaining a patriarchal system. Struggling with sex and sexuality is a common theme among feminist Christian authors, such as Jessica Valenti, whose book addresses the psychological and physiological repercussions of purity culture. Jessica Valenti, *The Purity Myth: How America's Obsession with Purity in Hurting Young Women* (Berkeley: Seal Press), 2009.

pleasure, masturbation, or sex outside the bonds of marriage would not cross our minds as viable options until many years later.

I can laugh at this memory now, but it remains a bit sad that these two young women felt even momentary guilt (and let's be honest, shame) for reading a book of the Bible. For this reason and many others, the Song of Songs intrigues me. Why is it present in the Bible? What did it mean to its intended audience? And what does/can it mean to us as modern readers? I remain intrigued by the Song because I want to be as sex positive as the Shulammite; I want to throw myself fully into eroticism. But, those learned associations of sex with shame, guilt, or dirtiness have a way of taking root in the psyche and the body. Like pulling weeds from a garden, ridding oneself of those nagging feelings of shame and disgust can seem like a never ending process. Much like my fifteen-year-old self, I still read the Song as a work that speaks explicitly of sex and love, but now, with the distance of time and education, I can read it without shame and guilt recognizing it as a liberative text that celebrates human sexuality.

The Song of Songs tells the story of two lovers, who despite their unmarried status, offer themselves fully to one another. There is no judgment, doubt, self-loathing or shame, only mutual love and pleasure. And, on the part of the female lover there is agency equal to that of her partner. What a remarkable thing to find within the Bible, a book that otherwise demonizes or discourages expressions of female sexuality! And yet, parts of the Song give me pause, namely the instances of violence perpetrated against our young female lover. If the Song, as a work of erotic literature, is meant to be read as a dream or a fantasy, why is punishment present at all? What role does violence play in constructing the narrative world of the Song? What group(s) benefit from the portrayal of

such violence? Is the violence meant to meet the psycho-social needs of the audience and its author(s)? What social structures are reinscribed through the violence present in the Song?

I seek to answer these questions by reading the unnamed woman through the lens of modern race and gender relations, arguing that the violence embedded in ancient text reflects the social dynamic of imperial dominance and vassal submission, and reinforces socially ingrained gender dynamics and sexual ethics. What do we see when we gaze upon the dark and comely woman tending her vineyard in the full light of day? Is it different than what we see when we encounter that same woman in the streets at night? In other words, how does race, gender, and location affect the ways in which certain bodies are perceived and treated? I am not arguing that the violence committed against the black woman in the Song of Songs is a biblical mandate to commit acts of violence against black women. I am arguing that the violence directed at the unnamed woman in the Song of Songs can tell us something about the culture that created this narrative, just as the "cult of purity" I experienced in adolescence can teach future scholars about early 21st century western sexual ethics. In relating this ancient text to modern times, I locate several analogues between the world of the Song and America's sexual and racial landscape which are composed of the complex and intersecting social structures of racism, sexism, and patriarchy. In order to illustrate these cultural and structural similarities, this project will engage a bi-directional approach, using the Song of Songs as a lens through which to read the violence perpetrated against modern black women in the spaces of the street, the domestic sphere, and the violence embedded in the male gaze.

This dissertation is wide reaching in that it seeks to contribute to the ongoing discourse surrounding race, class and gender in America. As a white, cisgender woman, native Kentuckian, and first generation college graduate I approach these issues of race, class and gender with self-awareness of my own privilege and a commitment to interrogating it. I understand that I benefit from the very racial, gendered, and class dynamics I aim to critique, and I acknowledge that I participate in the devaluation of black women's bodies by virtue of my own whiteness. Growing up in the American south, I have seen and heard, from various generations of white men, a form of malevolent sexism that has labeled black women as hyper-sexual or animalistic. I have also seen and experienced southern misogyny in the form of benevolent and/or paternalistic sexism that placed white women on pedestals. Both forms of sexism contain elements of explicit and implicit violence that work to delimit the power and agency of women.

However, for the purposes of this project I will focus my attention to the violence committed against the "dark and comely" woman in the public domains of the vineyard and the street, the private space of the home, and through the violence embedded in the male gaze. Using a bi-directional approach, this dissertation seeks to use the Song of Songs as a lens through which to read the violence perpetrated against modern black women who transgress gender through sexual and spatial autonomy, and as a way of understanding how geographic/ethnic and gender difference can be used to narrativize trauma. Placing this ancient erotic text into conversation with the modern world exposes the parallels that exist between past and present conceptions of race, gender, beauty, and power and how these themes are recycled in narratives of trauma.

Ultimately this project invites all readers to better understand themselves and their worldviews so that they/we might recognize the humanity in others. This is no easy task, but requires self-knowledge and a critical awareness of how our culturally-and historically-ingrained perceptions of race, gender, and space instruct us to act towards others. Part of this journey towards self-awareness requires acknowledging one's racial, gendered or class based privileges, and gaining an understanding for how these factors affect the ease and/or difficulty with which one is able to move through the world. Understanding our privileges can give us empathy for the unequal treatment of others, but empathy is not enough. Rather, we must actively challenge and work to change the culturally and historically contingent rules that underpin America's heteronormative, patriarchal, and often times racist status quo.

This push for systemic change has been foregrounded in recent months as (in the midst of a global pandemic) cities across America and the world, are protesting police brutality, specifically the recent killing of George Floyd, a forty-six-year-old unarmed black man who was suffocated under the knee of a white Minneapolis, Minnesota police officer on May 25, 2020.[2] The fact that my reference to George Floyd's death is now

[2] Aside from a growing social consciousness around the frequency of police brutality and the need for systemic change, Americans are also facing the mishandling of a global pandemic which has disproportionately affected black and brown communities, leading scholars and reporters alike to address the racial inequalities in healthcare access. Furthermore, many people of color are frontline workers, whose experiences reveal the intersections of racial and economic inequality in America. These concurrent threats caused by the current administration's inept and malevolent responses to the pandemic and police brutality are demonstrative of its willful resistance to apprehend the lives of large swaths of America's citizenry. See, Christen Linke Young, "There are Clear, Race-Based Inequalities in Health Insurance and Health Outcomes," Brookings Institution, February 19, 2020, accessed September 4, 2020. https://www.brookings.edu/blog/usc-brookings-schaeffer-on-health-policy/2020/02/19/there-are-clear-race-based-inequalities-in-health-insurance-and-health-outcomes/. See also, Don Bambino Geno Tai, MD, MBA, Aditya Shah, MBBS, Chyke A. Doubeni, Irene G. Sia, Mark L. Wieland, "The Disproportionate Impact of COVID-19 on Racial and Ethnic Minorities in the United States," Clinical Infectious Diseases, (June 20, 2020): 1, accessed September 4, 2020, https://academic.oup.com/cid/advance-article/doi/10.1093/cid/ciaa815/5860249.

somewhat dated, given the more recent police shooting of Jacob Blake in Kenosha, Wisconsin on August 23, 2020, speaks to the enormity of this problem. Blake survived being shot seven times in the back, after having broken up a domestic dispute outside his apartment building, but is now paralyzed from the waist down.[3] These grievous acts of police brutality bring to mind the scholarship of Judith Butler, whose monograph *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* approaches American violence with an historical awareness of the lives that have traditionally been unrecognized, devalued, or unprotected by the state. Butler writes

> The epistemological capacity to apprehend a life is partially dependent on that life being produced according to norms that qualify it as a life or, indeed, as part of life. In this way, the normative production of ontology thus produces the epistemological problem of apprehending a life, and this in turn gives rise to the ethical problem of what it is to acknowledge or, indeed, to guard against injury and violence.[4]

It is astounding to watch, year after year, as the lives of white gunmen are "apprehended" by the state, while black lives continue to be degraded. In these instances, whiteness is recognized and respected by law enforcement, who treat their bodies with care.[5] These white domestic terrorists are offered the presumption of innocence in spite of

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[3] John Eligon, Sarah Mervosh and Richard A. Oppel Jr, "Jacob Blake Was Shackled in Hospital Bed After Police Shot Him," *New York Times*, August 30, 2020, accessed September 4, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/28/us/jacob-blake-shackles-assault.html.

[4] Judith Butler, "Introduction: Precarious Life, Grievable Life," in *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2009), 3.

[5] Shelby Police Department, "Dashcam Video of Dylann Roof Arrest," June 23, 2015, accessed September 4, 2020. On June 17, 2015 a twenty-one-year-old white supremacist entered the historic Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina shooting and killing nine worshipers. Below is the dashcam video of Dylann Roof's peaceful arrest in North Carolina: https://www.nytimes.com/video/us/100000003760024/dashcam-video-of-dylann-roof-arrest.html. Cf. Haley Willis, Muyi Xiao, Christian Triebert, Christoph Koettl, Stella Cooper, David Botti, John Ismay and Ainara Tiefenthäler, "Tracking the Suspect in the Fatal Kenosha Shootings," *New York Times*, August 27, 2020, accessed September 4, 2020. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/27/us/kyle-rittenhouse-kenosha-shooting-video.html. This visual reporting tracks the movements of the counter-protester/out-of-state agitator, seventeen-year-old Illinois resident Kyle Rittenhouse, who fatally shot two protesters in Kenosha, Wisconsin on August 25, 2020. The protesters who were murdered by Rittenhouse were protesting police brutality in the wake of Jacob Blake's August 23, 2020 police shooting. In the final video you see

overwhelming evidence of their guilt, while black and brown people continue to be indiscriminately brutalized due to a combination of outright racism, and unchecked implicit biases.[6] One such instance that has remained under public scrutiny is the police killing of Breonna Taylor in Louisville, KY on March, 13, 2020. Taylor was fatally shot by plainclothes police officers during a botched raid on her apartment, and unlike the swift firings and indictments that followed George Floyd's murder, progress in this case has been slow. Frustrations over the delay in justice for Breonna have been echoed throughout social media and beyond. One such prominent voice has been that of the recording artist and entertainer, Megan Thee Stallion, who used her platform on Saturday Night Live and in her New York Times Op-ed to advocate for black women. She wrote,

> I recently used the stage at "Saturday Night Live" to harshly rebuke Kentucky's attorney general, Daniel Cameron, for his appalling conduct in denying Breonna Taylor and her family justice. I anticipated some backlash: Anyone who follows the lead of Congressman John Lewis, the late civil rights giant, and makes "good trouble, necessary trouble," runs the risk of being attacked by those comfortable with the status quo…. But you know what? I'm not afraid of criticism. We live in a country where we have the freedom to criticize elected officials. And it's ridiculous that some people think the simple phrase "Protect Black women" is controversial. We deserve to be protected as

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Rittenhouse approaching the police with hands up, his semi-automatic weapon in full view. Law enforcement do not seem to perceive Rittenhouse as a danger, despite the fact that he is holding a weapon of war. In the video several armored vehicles pass him by in route to help injured victims. This instance of law enforcement apprehending the life of a white criminal can be contrasted with numerous instances of police brutality against innocent black individuals. Cf. with the ongoing reporting of Ailsa Chang and Rachel Martin, "Summer of Racial Reckoning," *National Public Radio*, August 24, 2020, accessed September 4, 2020. https://www.mprnews.org/story/2020/08/24/npr-special-summer-of-racial-reckoning.

[6] Michelle Alexander, "The Color of Justice," in *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, revised edition (New York: The New Press, 2012), 106-8. Addressing racialized views on criminality that emerged in the nineteen-eighties and nineties, Alexander writes that, "Once blackness and crime, especially drug crime, became conflated in the public consciousness, the 'criminalblackman,' as termed by legal scholar Kathryn Russell, would inevitably become the primary target of law enforcement. Some discrimination would be conscious and deliberate, as many honestly and consciously would believe that black men deserve extra scrutiny and harsher treatment. Much racial bias though, would operate unconsciously and automatically—even among law enforcement officials genuinely committed to equal treatment under the law."

> human beings. And we are entitled to our anger about a laundry list of mistreatment and neglect that we suffer.[7]

In conjunction with her call for justice in the case of Breonna Taylor, Megan Thee Stallion's op-ed referenced her own recent experience of assault, in which she was shot twice by a man at a party as she walked away from him.

> My initial silence about what happened was out of fear for myself and my friends. Even as a victim, I have been met with skepticism and judgment. The way people have publicly questioned and debated whether I played a role in my own violent assault proves that my fears about discussing what happened were, unfortunately, warranted…. After a lot of self-reflection on that incident, I've realized that violence against women is not always connected to being in a relationship. Instead, it happens because too many men treat all women as objects, which helps them to justify inflicting abuse against us when we choose to exercise our own free will.[8]

Aside from the socially pervasive objectification of black women's bodies, Megan Thee Stallion goes on to note how black women, in particular, struggle against being labeled as angry or threatening when they advocate for themselves and their fellow women of color. Her observations on the interconnectedness of gender, race, and violence in modern American society is apropos to this entire project, which seeks to put the social world and violent experiences of the unnamed woman in Song of Songs into conversation with the similar social world and violent experiences of contemporary black women. A remarkable constant between the narrative world of the Song and America's current state

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[7] Megan Thee Stallion, "Megan Thee Stallion: Why I Speak Up for Black Women," *New York Times*, October 13, 2020, accessed October 19, 2020. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/13/opinion/megan-thee-stallion-black-women.html. Cf. Richard A. Oppel Jr., Derrick Bryson Taylor and Nicholas Bogel-Burroughs, "What We Know About Breonna Taylor's Case and Death," *New York Times*, October 2, 2020, accessed October, 19, 2020. https://www.nytimes.com/article/breonna-taylor-police.html. Much criticism has been directed at Kentucky's attorney general, Daniel Cameron, who attempted to withhold the release of grand jury testimony. On Oct. 2, recordings of about 15 hours from the grand jury inquiry were released. The audio files shed light on what evidence jurors considered when choosing to indict Mr. Hankison, who blindly fired ten shots into Taylor's apartment, and declining to bring charges against the other police officers involved in the shooting.

[8] Ibid.

of civil unrest is that acts of violence committed by men or members of the state are viewed as a reflection of the victim(s) of abuse rather than a reflection of those in power and the structures that continue to validate their brutal actions.

Megan Thee Stallion's assault, as with the Song of Songs, and later with Spike Lee's reflections on black femininity in a patriarchal America, make reference to abuses of power in public spaces. At issue in all three cases is the manner in which black bodies, particularly the bodies of black women, are perceived by those in power, in spaces where patriarchal and/or state-sanctioned power is typically unchecked. We would do well to remember that such negative and ultimately destructive perceptions of black and brown bodies did not develop in a vacuum, but are culturally and temporally contingent. Referencing America's current racial power dynamic, Paul C. Taylor writes of modernity as "a racial project," asserting that

> What we think of as the modern world brought itself into being in part by crafting and acting out narratives about who and what counted as civilized, or human. This narrative was anchored in the conflation of certain European cultural practices with the idea of the human as such, and with a profound myopia about the actual depth, meaning, and interdependence of the various forms of human practice. And it resulted, at its worst, in a simplistic, self-aggrandizing vision of human social progress, according to which some peoples, mostly in (certain bits of) Europe, had figured out how to lift themselves above a barbaric world of uncivilized, non-western darkness. They had become, in a word, modern. And they were, in general, white.[9]

[9] Paul C. Taylor, "Assembly, Not Birth," in *Black is Beautiful: A Philosophy of Black Aesthetics* (Oxford: John Wiley & Sons), 2016, 8. "To stress the modernity of the race concept is to accept that the world's most influential racial practices are important, but of course not totally, discontinuous from their antecedents in the pre-modern world. This is not an especially controversial point, though people quibble over where to draw the relevant temporal boundaries over what counts as a modern race concept. But the basic point is clear: after the fifteenth century or so, ideas about the structure, character, and capacities of different human types came to shape human affairs on a scale never seen before."

This narrative is continuous with our current systems of institutionalized racism, exemplified by unrelenting instances of police brutality, in which violence against black and brown bodies is justified through a persistent labelling of those bodies (and communities) as dangerous, criminal or transgressive and in need of punishment or correction.[10] In a similar way the unnamed woman's body, by virtue of her gender, race/title, dress, and spatial location(s) is perceived as aberrant and worthy of social control/correction. In line with Taylor's "racial project" the Song's narrative world makes reference to an underlying social hierarchy from which the unnamed woman is either excluded or punished. It is with an awareness of this narrative formula that this project explores the "otherness" of the Song's enigmatic, unnamed woman, considering what her differences can teach us about the returning Judean communities' post-exilic anxieties.

Outline of Dissertation

This exploration takes the following shape: first, in chapter two I contextualize the Song, considering both its cultural provenance and its history of interpretation, and briefly discuss the methods and theoretical lenses used throughout the project. The theoretical lenses chosen allow for a granular examination of the unnamed woman's unique figuration as a spatially and sexually transgressive woman of indeterminate origins. For this reason, I apply critical race theory to the unnamed woman's self-described blackness, and a combination of space theory, anthropological analysis and sociology to the protagonist's gender and spatial locations. Lastly, literary trauma theory

[10] For a comprehensive history of policing in America see, Khalil Gibran Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

will be applied to the violence inflicted upon the unnamed woman; this will include a consideration of the kinds of group dynamics that trauma and diaspora produce.

Chapter three builds upon chapter two's historical and theoretical foundation, arguing that the violence committed against the female protagonist points to a male authorship's conflicted desire for this sexually free woman, who personifies the allure and the dangers presented by the surrounding dominant cultures. In fact, it appears that the poet's fantasies are mitigated by episodes of punishment in order to affirm Israel's own cultural mores that the poet (whether singular or composite), as an authoritative figure, is tasked with upholding, even from within the relative freedom of the erotic genre. For example, the poet(s) slips back and forth between the realms of fantasy and the consequences of the real-world through the plot devices of social censure (1:6), physical violence (5:7), and the violence embedded in the male gaze (7:1-2). These examples of violence function to control the unnamed woman's sexual and bodily autonomy, but they also seem to remind the audience/reader that the social rules remain in effect and apply to them. In this way, the Song is at once a fantasy and a warning (though whether to women only remains a question).

Chapter three also addresses the Shulammite's race (as intimated in 1:5) and contextualizes her within the cultural confines of ancient marriage and gender norms. Of note are her self-designation as "dark," and the title "Shulammite" both of which distinguish the female lover from her counterparts and literary foils, the daughters of Jerusalem.[11] After addressing the lover's race and cultural location within ancient

[11] Roland E. Murphy, *The Song of Songs: A Commentary on the Book of Canticles or the Song of Songs*, ed. S. Dean McBride, Jr (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1990), 180-85.

marriage and gender mores, I explore the vineyard as a physical and metaphorical space for the expression of female sexuality. The author's use of the vineyard metaphor has a long history within love poetry, and although the scene depicts the woman as being in control of her vineyard (her body/sexuality), the fear that she might be violated in this isolated, bucolic location remains.[12] Aside from the vineyard the theme of fertility can be seen through the repetition of the mother's house, a space for intimacy and safety.[13] The unnamed woman twice brings her lover to her mother's house, each time mentioning her own conception, but otherwise the text is lacking in a concern for procreation. In contrast to the safety of the mother's house, the male dominated space of the city streets seethes with danger. When the unnamed woman ventures into this domain, she is stripped and beaten by the city watchmen (5:7). Given Israel's history of trauma, these interludes of violence seem to reinforce the patriarchal power structures and gendered spatial mores under which the colonized audience was expected to adhere. Ultimately, the violence perpetrated against the unnamed woman reveals the fragmented and conflicted consciousness of the post-exilic poet and their audience, regarding this alluring, yet controversial woman.

Chapter four builds upon the previous chapters' discussion of race in the ancient world, and compares the unnamed woman's violent encounter in the street (5:7), as a black woman, to the violence inflicted upon Spike Lee's character, Nola Darling. In the original 1986 film Nola is raped by her eldest lover for engaging in polyamory, whereas

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[12] Jennifer L. Koosed, "Ruth and Boaz," in *Gleaning Ruth: A Biblical Heroine and Her Afterlives* (Columbia, The University of South Carolina Press), 2011, 72-81.
[13] Michael V. Fox, "Love and the Lovers in the Love Song," in *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press), 1985, 313-15.

in the 2017 Netflix adaptation Nola is assaulted in the street by a stranger while walking home alone at night. Engaging both the Nola of 1986 and the updated Nola of 2017 alongside the woman of the Song allows the recurring shared themes of bodily ownership, sexual exclusivity and sexual pollution to emerge in force.[14] Paul C. Taylor's philosophy of black aesthetics, and the sociological insights of R.W. Connell serve as means to unpack how the Shulammite's perceived "blackness" and location in the vineyard (1:5) the streets (5:7) and in her mother's house (3:4; 8:5) seem to contribute to assumptions about her racial, economic or social status, which in turn affect her autonomy, and the way her body is treated by the men she encounters in these locations. Nola's assault and the violence committed against the unnamed woman in 5:7 is also examined through the lens of the grotesque, which reifies the idea of sexual pollution. Finally, an application of Sheila Lintott and Sherri Irvin's feminist reclamation of sexiness reexamines the reactions to Nola's little black dress and the objectification of the unnamed woman by a group of unspecified viewers (7:1). This alternative means of visually consuming bodies seeks to see individuals as "sexy subjects" rather than "sex objects."[15]

The final chapter aims to answer this project's titular question: Whose gotta have it? Whose gotta have the violence, and why? Building upon the unnamed woman's figuration as "other" posited in chapter three, this chapter analyzes two instances of

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[14] Eve Levani Feinstein, "Purity and Pollution Ideas in The Hebrew Bible," in *Sexual Pollution in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2014, 11-41. For example, in the 1986 film Jamie, Nola's eldest lover wants to claim Nola for himself. In a fit of rage over her polyamory, Jamie rapes Nola in her home rendering the very body he so longed to possess grotesque. Hearkening back to the original film, the Nola of 2017 becomes repulsive/polluted in the eyes of her would-be assailant when she rebuffs his advances.

[15] Sherri Irvin and Sheila Lintott, "Sex Objects and Sexy Subjects," in *Body Aesthetics*, ed. Sherri Irvin, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 299-317.

violence through the lens of literary trauma theory: the violence in the streets (5:7) and the violence imbedded in the gaze of the unspecified viewer (7:1). My contention is that the Song of Songs expresses the community's exilic and post-exilic trauma through instances of sexualized violence, in which the unspecified other functions as a receptacle into which the community can pour their negative affect.

Through the convention of the travesty, I argue that these two instances of violence allow the community to escape their reality temporality by embodying the characters of the guards and the daughters of Jerusalem/unidentified speakers, who treat the unnamed woman with violence (5:7) and fascination or distain (7:1). In other words, these collective characters accommodate the attraction for a marginal audience to mimic and /or identify with those in power. However, the unnamed women's social status and the harm she encounters are more closely aligned with Israel's lived experiences of humiliation under foreign subjugation. Consequently, the community *could* also, and conversely, view themselves as the unnamed woman made low, in which case they not only live under surveillance and in fear of their colonizer, but they are also capable of perpetrating violence upon themselves.[16] Psychologically, the Song is complex and avoids categorization, but its manifest violence appears to function as a means for the post-exilic community to process and integrate their current state of subjugation into their communal identity as YHWH's chosen people.

[16] Such a reading aligns with the marriage metaphor, from which the Song seems to borrow, though this metaphor does not map perfectly onto the Song as the Divine figure is absent from the text.

CHAPTER II

LITERARY BACKGROUND, HISTORY OF INTERPRETATION, THEORIES AND METHODS

Sifting Through Stones

When I was twenty-four I had the opportunity to participate in an archaeological dig in the Jezreel Valley, my first such experience in the field. As a student of biblical studies, fascinated with biblical archaeology, I was eager to find something significant hidden within my small patch of earth. It was with this spark of enthusiasm that I would, from time to time, convince myself that a fragment of unearthed basalt was a mortar or some other type of hand tool. Holding this precious "finding" in my hands I would present my argument to our dig leader, Dr. Ebling, saying, "Can't you see the flat side, made smooth from repeated pounding?" Or "Doesn't that look like a thumb indentation, lovingly or resentfully created through years of wear?" Each time Dr. Ebling would look up at me with a wry smile, take a moment to ponder my earnest questions, and then comically and without looking for stray students, toss the stone behind her saying, "it's just a rock." With a feeling of defeat, I would return to my square to continue digging.

While writing this dissertation on the literary enigma that is the Song of Songs, I have often thought back to my interactions with Dr. Ebling and the lessons she taught me about discernment and perseverance (and not taking myself too seriously). When sifting through the Song's expansive corpus of translations, interpretations, and commentary, I have frequently asked myself, "Is this *just* a rock?" And, when the answer (so often) is

"yes," I reluctantly, and with pained expression, toss the unsubstantiated idea, return to my books, feet dragging, and continue (re)searching. At almost every turn of this research project I have felt as if I were getting further away from what I thought I knew about the Song of Songs. But, over the past year and a half I have come to accept that the Song's resistance to literary categorization, dating, usage and so much more, is simply part of its enduring mystery and charm. Its difficulty, mitigated by its uncanny beauty, is why scholars continue to wrestle with it. Given its complex history of interpretation, I have compiled a number of scholarly perspectives and general consensus on some of the Song's most enduring classificatory issues. The following primer is the foundation upon which this project is built. This chapter also contains brief summaries of the main theoretical lenses through which the Song of Songs, particularly its instances of violence, will be viewed throughout this project.

HISTORICAL AND LITERARY BACKGROUND

Authorship, Dating, and Literary Unity

The title Song of Songs is derived from the Hebrew noun *sîr*, meaning "song" and appears here in the singular and plural construction, *sîr hassîrîm*. The title also contains the superscription, *ăser liselomah*, typically translated as "by Solomon." In his commentary on Canticles, Marvin Pope notes that such constructions (i.e. Holy of holies or king of kings) are meant to indicate the superlative nature of the noun in question. For this reason, Pope translates the title with editorial superscription (1:1) as "The Sublime

Song of Solomon."[1] Furthermore, Roland E. Murphy and Elizabeth Huwiler note that whoever contributed the superscription seemed to have had 1 Kings 5:12 [4:32] in mind, in which Solomon is said to have authored more than one thousand songs and some three thousand proverbs.[2] Despite its expressed connection to Solomon, few scholars have attempted to date the Song to the Solomonic era (10th century BCE). However, Gillis Gerleman suggests that the text's portrayal of love and the lovers reflects a relatively early period in Israel's cultural history influenced by Egyptian art and literature, leading Israelite culture to pursue an interest in human beauty.[3] In line with Gerleman, Gerhard von Rad associated the Song's literary themes and topoi with what he referred to as the period of Solomonic "Enlightenment," or Solomonic humanism.[4] For example, "[S]olomon's interests as a naturalist and a poet in the flora and fauna of his world, I Kings 5:13 [4:32E], and the Canticles profusion of natural imagery and names of plants and animals have been alleged in favor of the traditional view of Solomon's authorship."[5]

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[1] Marvin Pope, *Song of Songs: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1977), 294-5. See also, Marcia Falk. "Notes to the Poems," in *The Song of Songs: A New Translation and Interpretation* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1990), 166. Both Pope and linguist Marcia Falk note that the relative particle *ăser,* meaning "relating to" does not recur in the rest of the Song, which instead uses the proclitic article *se* (thirty-two times). Pope argues that the presence of the oft omitted *ăser* renders the superscription suspect as a possible editorial addition that was not part of the original composition. Furthermore, the presence of the preposition *le* in front of Solomon's name, *ăser liselomah* forms a construction that implies authorship rendering the *ăser* redundant. Cf. Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds, "Psalms," in *The Jewish Study Bible: TANAKH Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 1281-2. In their preface to the book of Psalms, Berlin and Brettler address the superscription, *ldvd*, meaning "a psalm of David," which appears before a number of psalms either attributed to or associated with David. Like the Song of Song's attribution of authorship to the beloved figure, Solomon, "These superscriptions are not original to these psalms, but reflect early interpretive additions that derive from the notion of David as author of the psalms."

[2] Roland E. Murphy and Elizabeth Huwiler. "Introduction: Song of Songs." In *New International Biblical Commentary: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1999), 240. Roland E. Murphy, "Introduction," in *The Song of Songs: A Commentary on the Book of Canticles or The Song of Songs,* ed. S. Dean McBride, Jr. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 3- 5. Cf. Pope, 23.

[3] Pope, 24.

[4] Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology, Vol 1: The Theology of Israel's Historical Traditions*, tr. D.M. G. Stalker (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 55, 425-32.

[5] Pope, 22.

Although the Song does bear resemblance to Egyptian love lyrics, as we will later discuss, Murphy remarks, in contradistinction to Gerleman and von Rad, that "One may as easily posit a Persian period date, when pertinent cultural traditions were both reviewed and widely diffused in the ancient Near East."[6] Gerleman's and von Rad's attempts to date the Song to the Solomonic period have little textual support and seem to be based in the legends of love, lust, and luxury associated with King Solomon, rather than linguistic and historical evidence.

In a similar vein Michael V. Fox argues that the attribution of the Song to Solomon neglects to take into consideration that Solomon remained a famous character known for his wealth, numerous wives, and literary capabilities. Given his mythology, various late compositions were attributed to him. Additionally, Fox notes that the geographical mentioning of Tirzah (6:4) as parallel to Jerusalem cannot be used to date the Song to the time period in which Tirzah served as the capital city of the northern kingdom (from the time of Jeroboam son of Nebat to 870 BCE when Omri moved the capital to Samaria) because,

> Even when Tirzah ceased being capital to the north, it was not forgotten. In later times people would have known about it at least from the same sources as we do. The mention of Tirzah in parallel with Jerusalem does, on the other hand, show that the Song, or at least that particular unit (6:1-10), was not written during the United Monarchy, when Tirzah had not yet become the northern counterpart of Jerusalem.[7]

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[6] Murphy, *Song of Songs*, 4.

[7] Michael V. Fox, "Language, Dating, and Historical Context," in *The Song of Songs: and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 186-93.

Linguistically, the association of the Song with a northern dialect, as S.R. Driver suggests, is rejected by Fox, who argues that the Song resembles Mishnaic Hebrew and Aramaic. Pope and W.F. Albright attest to certain literary, lexical and grammatical parallels between the Song and Ugaritic texts, suggesting an early, or at least pre-exilic dating of the Song on philological grounds.[8] By contrast, most contemporary critical commentators favor a post-exilic date, noting the scant evidence to support a Solomonic connection, a lack of concrete geographical, historical or political references, and most significantly, the presence of Aramaisms and late Persian loan words.[9]

Emphasizing this point, Fox argues that the Song was orally transmitted over centuries during which time the language was continually modified and updated.

> But whereas *revision* seeks to make an old text more comprehensible while maintaining its content essentially unchanged, dynamic, free transmission (known in the study of folk poetry as *Zersingen*; see chapter 4) is not constrained by fidelity to an original text, but rather continually produces new poems out of old ones. If that was the way the Song was transmitted, it is pointless to speak of the Song as "really" being much older than its linguistic garb. Its present linguistic garb is all we have, and we have no way of reconstructing an earlier stage in its history (as we might do with a text that is more time bound). *This* song is, to judge from its linguistic characteristics, postexilic and probably Hellenistic, and we have no way of even speculating reasonably about the earlier forms from which it supposedly evolved.[10]

Like the Song's date of composition, the gender of its authorship remains a point of scholarly contention. For instance, feminist scholars, such as Renita Weems and J. Cheryl Exum have suggested that the Song was written by a female poet, given the text's

[8] Pope, 27.
[9] Ibid., 405.
[10] Fox, 190.

uncommon focus on a female protagonist.[11] And while it is possible that women's voices shaped the oral transmission of the Song, it seems more likely that the poet(s) or final redactor(s) were male given that very few women received formal education in the ancient world.[12] Still, Murphy notes that nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible is love described in such effusive terms, suggesting that a female authorship may be the cause.[13] This assertion, ostensibly rooted in the western socialization of men and women, erroneously implies that men are less likely than women to write gushingly of love and sexual desire.

Taking a firmer stance on the poet's gender, Andre LaCocque decisively argues for a female authorship, basing his hypothesis upon his reading of the Song as a subversive, or at least contesting piece of literature. He writes

> A female author is hiding behind the Shulammite character of the poem. Remarkable, for instance, is the fact that the majority of the discourses are set in her mouth and that, if the lover speaks often and lengthily as well, it happens several times that his utterances consist of citations from her speeches. She has the first and the last word in the poem.[14]

Additionally, Fox notes that the poem's speaker is not the author, but rather a *dramatis persona*, through whom the author can creatively express his/her musings on love. He

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[11] Renita Weems, "Song of Songs," in *Women's Bible Commentary, expanded edition*, eds. Carol A. Newsome and Sharon H. Ringe (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 168. Cf. J. Cheryl Exum, "Song of Songs," in *Women's Bible Commentary, 3rd ed.*, eds. Carol A, Newsome, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jaqueline E. Lapsley (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 247.

[12] Norman K. Gottwald, "The Literary History of the Hebrew Bible," in *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 95. Cf. Pirjo Lapinkivi, *The Sumerian Sacred Marriage: In Light of Comparative Evidence* (Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2004), 20; 220-22. By contrast to most ancient women, the daughter of King Sargon, Enheduanna, was highly educated and wrote extensive Sumerian hymns. Cf. Samuel Noah Kramer, "The Sumerians: History, Culture, and Literature," in *The Sacred Marriage Rite: Aspects of Faith, Myth, and Ritual in Ancient Sumer* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969), 20-2.

[13] Murphy, "*Song of Songs*," 70.

[14] Andre LaCocque, "Introduction: Methodological Presuppositions" in *Romance She Wrote: A Hermeneutical Essay On Song of Songs* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1998), 41.

writes, “The author's absence is, however, a carefully wrought illusion. The author is present behind the scenes, communicating to us attitudes about the personae by shaping their words, determining their responses, and setting many of the norms by which we are to understand and evaluate the characters.”[15] While Fox takes a less firm stance than LaCocque on the matter of the author’s gender, he concedes that “The Song is *her* song...” given that there is no scene from which the woman is absent. “All events are narrated from her point of view, though not always in her voice, whereas from the boy’s angle of vision we know little besides how he sees her.”[16] In this way, the author *is* a woman, insofar as the voice of the primary speaker is that of a woman.

As for the Song’s unity, Murphy asserts that “The individual poems themselves attest a world of imagery, a literary style and form, and a pathos that point in the direction of a unified composition rather than a mere anthology.”[17] Of significance to this study, Fox finds evidence for unity in the development of the unnamed woman’s relationship with her brothers. For example, in 1:5-6 the unnamed woman is vexed by the limitations her brothers have placed upon her, making her tend to family duties rather than pursue her lover. Even as she is being punished, the unnamed woman is determined to eschew her brothers’ demands and find her lover (1:7), a repeated offense that fits well with the Song’s theme of seeking and finding.[18] Francis Landy also identifies the poem as a

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[15] Fox, 258.

[16] Ibid., “Sex Roles and Distinction,” 309. Fox goes on to note that the girl is given a fuller social context, through the brothers, mother's house, and her companions. Of him, we receive only the scant information that he is a shepherd and has companions (1:7; 8:13).

[17] Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 3.

[18] Ibid., 79. Murphy notes the parallel units: in 3:1-5 and 5:2-8 suffice to establish the theme. These key passages describe the unnamed woman’s nocturnal search through the city for her missing lover. The former concludes with the sudden union of the lovers, while the latter concludes with the city watchmen beating and stripping the unnamed woman who, in this instance, was unable to locate her lover. These passages will be given further attention in chapter three and four of this project.

literary unity "[b]ecause of its thematic coherence, its erotic mode; and in part because of the reappearance of the same elements in diverse contexts, as leitmotifs, refrains, episodes that repeat each other with variations, confluences of images."[19] This can be seen through the unnamed woman's thrice repeated refrain to "not awaken love" as well as her two nighttime dalliances in the city street. In both instances (3:4; 5:7) the lovers are reunited, but in the latter repetition the unnamed woman is beaten and stripped by the city watchmen (5:7), a serious variation in theme which will be addressed thoroughly in chapters three and four of this project. Further evidence for literary unity can be seen through the poem's ending, in which the brothers, though still doubting their sister's maturity, agree in principle to give their sister in marriage and to adorn her generously (8:8-9).[20] Even though the text seems to affirm marriage through the brothers' willingness to offer their sister's hand, the ambiguity of the poem's ending contributes to its cyclical nature, allowing the game of love to continue despite the lingering promise of marriage set sometime in the indefinite future.[21] Cheryl Exum notes that the poem lacks a

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[19] Francis Landy, "Beauty and the Enigma: An Enquiry into Some Interrelated Episodes in the Song of Songs," in *Beauty and the Enigma: And Other Essays on the Hebrew Bible* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2001), 37.

[20] Fox, 218. Song of Songs 8:8-9 (Jewish Study Bible, TANAKH Translation).
"We have a little sister,
Whose breasts are not yet formed.
What shall we do for our sister
When she is spoken for?
If she be a wall,
We will build upon it a silver battlement;
If she be a door,
We will panel it in cedar."

[21] Pope, *Song of Songs*, 697-701. The final verses of the poem circle back to the beginning through the use of bucolic setting, namely the vineyard, garden, and the mountain of spices, all of which seem to function, as before, as metaphors for the woman's body. The ambiguous verb in question, *bĕraḥ*, seen here in the imperative form has been traditionally interpreted as "flee" or "be swift." Scholars are split as to whether the command is meant to be interpreted as "flee" towards or *away from the* unnamed women. However, the ambiguity of the final verb fits well with the overall tenor of the poem, which vacillates between episodes of separation and reunion.

tidy conclusion, which "[G]ives love an ongoing and timeless quality... so that the poem, like love itself, will not come to an end."[22] The Song's cyclical nature further supports its interpretation as a literary unity.

Cultural Provenance and Social Function

Along with the issues of authorship, dating, and unity emerges the question of the Song's cultural provenance. For centuries scholars have questioned whether the Song is a product of "low," popular culture or "high," courtly culture. The scholarly debate over this question is split thusly:

> Those who favor associating the work with popular culture posit its origins in concrete social settings, such as ancient Israelite celebrations of betrothal and marriage. On the other hand, those who view the Song as a refined literary creation attribute its composition and transmission to the educated elite of ancient Israel.[23]

However, relegating the Song to the ranks of either "high" or "low" culture remains a difficult task because love poetry was ubiquitous in the ancient world. It existed across all strata of society, and over vast periods of human history, leaving modern exegetes without a credible means of discerning what was "popular" or "cultivated" by ancient Israelite standards. In addition, the social function of the Song remains unclear. As discussed earlier, the scholarly divide between classifying the Song as a work of "high" or "low" culture is related to the debates over how the text was used. That is to say, did the Song serve a practical or a dramatic purpose? In support of its practical usage,

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[22] Exum, 247.

[23] Murphy, 4- 5. Murphy dates the Song as a post-exilic work given its substantial use of Aramaisms and Persian loan words.

Michael Fishbane cites the Mishnah (*Ta'an* 4:8), which mentions joyous outdoor festivals held in midsummer and again at Yom Kippur,

> [W]hen 'young maidens of Jerusalem' went dancing in the vineyards and called to the youths to pick a mate. On this occasion, two verses were cited from Proverbs (31:30-31) and one from the Song of Songs: 'O Maidens of Zion, go forth and gaze upon King Solomon wearing the crown that his mother gave him on his wedding day, on his day of bliss' (3:11). The latter recitation depicts the Song as used during popular celebrations, when young love was celebrated with prenuptial hoopla. Such celebrations may have been considerably older, for there is an ancient biblical account about annual dances next to the vineyards (Judg 21:19-23). Perhaps these were the occasions when such love lyrics were composed and gathered into cycles of songs.[24]

Judges' account of the young women of Shiloh being abducted by the Benjaminites, lying in wait by the vineyards, is troubling and adds an aspect of danger to the unnamed woman's singular presence in the vineyard (1:5). With one passing intertextual allusion, the erotic nature of the poem is interrupted by lurking threats. This pattern is repeated throughout the Song as the unnamed woman is faced with repeated obstacles and social sanctions, always at the hands of men who wield power over her movements.

In contrast to Fishbane, Fox concludes that Canticles did not serve as part of ancient Israelite marriage ceremonies, because the speaking couple are not a bride and groom, and are never properly married within the Song. Furthermore, the Song never expresses things that would be appropriate in wedding festivities, such as the hope that the two young lovers will spend their lives together, or that they will produce children. However, Fox concedes that, "[I]t may well have been sung at weddings as part of the

[24] Michael Fishbane, "Introduction," in *The Jewish Publication Society Commentary: Song of Songs* (Philadelphia: JPS, 2015), xxiii.

general entertainment, along with timbrel playing, dances, and songs of all sorts, for the general theme of love would certainly be suitable to the wedding atmosphere."[25]

Scholars who read the Song as a dramatic work argue that each character or chorus was meant to be performed by *dramatis personae*. To this end, Pope notes that

> The grounds for the dramatic view consist of the fact that the book presents speakers and dialogue without introductory statements or transitional directions and that where action or account of speech are given in the third person, as in 3:1ff, 6ff, 5:2ff, 8:8ff, the narrator appears to be one of the actors. The poet-author nowhere appears. Thus if the book is a unity, and if there is a plot, we have the basic features of drama.[26]

However, those who argue against a dramatic reading consider the lack of general agreement as to the number of *dramatis personae*, the unclear action and assignment of speech to the speakers, and the paucity of stage directions as indicators that the Song did not serve a dramatic function.[27] Aside from the Song's pattern of verbal and thematic repetition, which could suggest a possible dramatic reading, scholars have also identified prosody within the Song, as it is a clear work of poetry. To this Murphy notes that

> The prosodic devices encountered--such as alliteration, paronomasia, chiasmus, and *inclusio*—are varied enough to constitute a virtual textbook of Hebrew prosody. Yet here too the sense that emerges from close analysis is one of great stylistic homogeneity, suggesting common authorship of most if not all of the major units.[28]

Contra to Murphy, Falk argues that the presence of repeated words, phrases, refrains and motifs can be explained "[b]y viewing the text as a collection of separate poems derived from a common cultural source." Falk goes on to argue "[t]hat the Song

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[25] Fox, 231.
[26] Pope, 35.
[27] Ibid. Cf. Roland E. Murphy, *Wisdom Literature: Job, Proverbs, Ruth, Canticles, Ecclesiastes, and Esther* (FOTL 13; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1981), 100.
[28] Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 85.

was originally oral literature, that is, orally composed and transmitted. Oral transmission accounts not only for recurrent themes and motifs but for the exact duplication of specific phrases and lines."[29] Falk's argument against literary unity and a single poet/author adds yet another layer of complexity to this text, which at every turn resists clear categorization. However, whether we read the Song as a practical (festive) or dramatic work, its primary intention is to discuss human sexual love, and most modern scholars would agree that it does so in an incredibly sophisticated and mellifluous way.

Genre and Form Criticism

As with the question of the Song's cultural provenance, scholarly opinion is divided as to whether the Song should be understood as a work of "folk" or "school wisdom." To this Murphy remarks that "Here, too, a doubtful distinction is sometimes drawn between the cultural lore generated and nurtured within the Israelite family or the general populace and the higher 'wisdom' supposedly cultivated in courtly circles."[30] To this end, Murphy writes

> To attribute the poems wholesale to an unknown *Volkspoesie*, or folk poetry, seems to neglect the fact that we are dealing with highly sophisticated poetry. The wealth of symbolism, the large number of hapax legomena, and the high literary quality would suggest that this is *Kunstdichtung*, poetry produced by an educated class. Not much more can be said, for we have as yet no clear criteria for judging and factoring out "popular" from "artistic" poetry.[31]

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[29] Marcia Falk, "The Literary Structure of the Song," in *Love Lyrics from the Bible: A Translation and Literary Study of the Song of Songs* (Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1982), 65-6.
[30] Murphy, *Wisdom Literature*, 6-9. Here Murphy writes on the setting of wisdom literature, stating, "The general situation is didactic, and it may be in the context of family or tribe, the court school, or the postexilic scribal school." C.f. Leo G. Perdue. "Conclusion," in *Wisdom Literature: A Theological History* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 326-47. Perdue notes that scribes and sages worked in a variety of social and professional roles including in the Temples, courts and school both during and after exile. He also details the historical evolution of Israelite wisdom, which was heavily influenced over time by surrounding dominant cultures, most notably Egyptian, Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman.
[31] Ibid., 103.

The association of the Song with either "folk" or "courtly" wisdom has to do with its placement in the *kĕtûbîm*, "Writings" section of the Torah, which also house the Hebrew Bible's three works of uncontested wisdom: Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. The Song's precarious association with wisdom literature is related to its long and complicated history of interpretation and its supposed Solomonic authorship. Even still, the Song does not easily fit within the genre of wisdom literature which tends to focus on

> [u]niversal human concerns, especially the understanding of individual experiences and maintenance of ordered relationships that lead both to success on the human plane and to divine approval. Unlike the other wisdom books housed in the *kĕtûbîm*, the Song makes no mention of God nor does it describe how to avoid folly and lead a successful life.[32]

However, both Judaism and Christianity have resolved the relative paucity of the Divine figure through allegorical interpretations; wherein the "husband" represents the Lord and Israel, the "bride" or Jesus the "husband" and the church the "bride." Even though the allegorical interpretation brings God into the narrative, it does not sufficiently explain the Song's association with wisdom. Rather, the Song's supposed Solomonic authorship, as intimated by the book's superscription, contributed to both its canonicity and its placement next to the other works of wisdom attributed to Solomon: Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.[33] Nevertheless, Brevard Childs asserts that "The Song is wisdom's

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[32]Marc Zvi Brettler, "Introduction: Ketuvim," in *The Jewish Study Bible, TANAKH Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1275-9. Nevertheless, Brettler notes that there is little uniformity between the three wisdom texts of Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. "Indeed, the three wisdom books in this collection are remarkably different from one another and do not form a clear unit: Proverbs, in contrast to Job, suggests that the righteous are rewarded and do not suffer, while Ecclesiastes, in contrast to both Job and Proverbs, is deeply skeptical of the utility of wisdom."

[33] Fishbane, xx-xxi. "The Song is one of three biblical books traditionally attributed to King Solomon, along with Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. According to R. Hiyya Rabba, the king wrote all his works at once, in old age, and while inspired by the Holy Spirit—and the Song of Songs was his final one. Another opinion, attributed to R. Yonatan, stated that the Song was written first, then Proverbs and lastly Ecclesiastes—a sequence explained by the proclivities of the human life cycle: 'When a person is young,

reflection on the joyful and mysterious nature of love between a man and a woman within the institution of marriage."[34] His claim, however, is unsubstantiated as the text only alludes to marriage (3:6). Furthermore, the Song's "[e]thos is anything but wisdomlike. Whereas wisdom exhorts its disciples to be deliberate and to keep their balance in all circumstances, the lovers in the Song display their impetuous and passionate feelings, without regard for what society—not to mention sages—considers as propriety and poise."[35] Although it resides in the *kĕtûbîm*, ostensibly for its Solomonic authorship, it does not appear that the Song was ever meant to function as a work of wisdom.[36] However, one instance in which the Song bears some resemblance to sapiential literature is through the female protagonists repeated refrain to the daughters of Jerusalem, "Do not wake or rouse love until it pleases!" This thrice repeated leitmotif shifts the mood of the poem and reveals the character's inner thoughts. Instead of reveling in love as before, the unnamed woman reflects on love's powerful and overwhelming grasp. And with her new found knowledge and experience she instructs her fellow sisters to be cautious when awakening love.

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he recites song lyrics; when he matures, he says parables; and when he becomes an elder, he speaks of vanities ad follies.'"

[34] Brevard Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 575.

[35] Andre LaCocque, "Introduction: Methodological Presuppositions," in *Romance She Wrote: A Hermeneutical Essay On Song of Songs* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1998), 8.

[36] See 1 Kings 10-11 (JSB, TANAKH Translation) which details Solomon's prolific wisdom, his many wives and concubines, some of whom led him astray, and the splendor of his palace. Just as the association with Solomon helps to elucidate the Song's placement within the Writings, it also aids in explaining the Song's overt sexual themes and imagery, as Solomon is portrayed as a prolific writer and lover of many women. Lastly, as a collection of love songs or poems, compiled and redacted over centuries, the Song also bears resemblance to Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and Persian love songs and literature.

HISTORY OF INTERPRETATION

Canonization and Allegorical Interpretation

Like its dating, authorship, and cultural provenance, the circumstances leading to the canonization of the Song of Songs remain obscure, with most scholars reasoning that canonization was due in part to the text's supposed Solomonic authorship, its cultic significance, or its alleged allegorical interpretation(s).[37] However, some rabbinic sources offer dissenting opinions as to whether the Song of Songs *should* have been canonized. One such dispute arose in connection with another book said to have been authored by Solomon, Qohelet. In this instance some rabbis found that the Song of Songs "defiled the hands" meaning that it was sacred, and hence a canonical text, while others opined that Qohelet did not "defile the hands." When Rabbi Jose suggested that the Song of Songs canonicity was disputed, Rabi Aqiba emphatically retorted

> Perish the thought! No man in Israel ever disputed about the Song of Songs, that it did not defile the hands. The whole world is not worth the day on which the Song of Songs was given to Israel, for all the scriptures are holy, but the Song of Songs is the Holy of Holies; if they disagreed, it was only about Qohelet that they disagreed.[38]

Pope goes on to note that "Rabbi Aqiba's regard for the Song of Songs as a veritable Holy of Holies moved him also to protest what he regarded as its profanation in secular spaces, protesting that 'He who trills his voice in chanting the Song of Songs in banquet houses and treats it as a sort of song (*zĕmîr*) has no part in the world to come.'"[39] Rabbi Aqiba would no doubt be horrified by the "profane" readings that modern scholars have

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[37] Murphy, *Song of Songs*, 5.
[38] Pope, 19. Cf. Mishnah, Yadayim III 5.
[39] Ibid. Cf. Tosefta, Sanhedrin XII 10.

offered, which tend to read the Song's eroticism in literal rather than allegorical terms. Rabbi Aqiba's concern over the usage of the Song in secular settings speaks to the religious value of the text, which, when read allegorically, visualizes the loving (and at times turbulent) relationship between YHWH and his chosen people.

Speaking for the Song's inclusion in the Jewish canon, Otto Eissfeldt writes, "The fact that the Song of Songs was taken into the canon, and its use as festal scroll at Passover…, are due probably to the allegorical interpretation of its chief characters."[40] In addition, Fox notes that "[f]ragments of the Song at Qumran show that the Song was written and had attained a degree of sanctity before the first century CE."[41] Later Christian allegorical readings, seeking to mitigate the overt sexual language and imagery of the Song, interpreted the loving relationship as occurring between the Church as the bride and Christ as the bridegroom, which only slightly emended the Jewish allegorical interpretation, which saw the bride as Israel and the groom as YHWH.[42]

The early Christian expositor, Hippolytus of Rome (d. 235 CE) understood the Song as part of Christian salvation history. "Thus the Song is taken to be Solomonic prophecy of the end of the 'old' covenant and the beginning of the 'new'; Israel is replaced by the church as the object of God's love."[43] His medieval successor, Origin read the Song as depicting the relationship between God and the individual human soul. Building upon Hippolytus, Origen's allegorical interpretation served to construct and maintain "a Christian worldview, providing the intellectual mechanism to effect a

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[40] Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 485.
[41] Fox, 189.
[42] Murphy, *Song of Songs*, 11-28.
[43] Ibid., 15.

synthesis between Old Testament witness to God's providential love for humankind and what was confessed to be the preeminent display of that love in the Christ event."[44] By contrast, Stephen D. Moore interprets the Christian allegorical readings through a queer lens, pointing out the homoerotic elements embedded within. He writes

> But whereas the enabling assumption of the literal readings is that the Song concerns the mutual attraction between a male and a female, the enabling assumption of the allegorical readings is that the Song concerns the mutual attraction between two males: between a community or individual, on the one hand, classically conceived as male, and a divine being, on the other hand, also conceived as male.[45]

In recent years the Song's allegorical interpretation has begun to wane, not discounting Moore's innovative interpretation, creating avenues for discussing the Song's overt sexual language and imagery. This present project utilizes such recent scholarship to discuss the unnamed woman's aberrant sexuality and spatiality through the lenses of gender, race, and space.

THEORIES AND METHODS

Critical Race Theory

The critical race theory (CRT) movement "[i]s a collection of activists and scholars interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power."[46] In contrast to conventional civil rights and ethnic studies discourses, CRT explores the ways in which race, racism and power intersect with economics, history,

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[44] Ibid., 17.
[45] Ibid. Stephen D. Moore, "The Song of Songs in the History of Sexuality," in *Church History: Studies in Christianity and Culture* 69, no 2 (2000): 331.
[46] Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, "Introduction," in *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* (New York: The New York University Press, 2012), 3.

context, group and self-interests, and even feelings and the unconscious.[47] Critical race theory was built upon the insights of two previous movements: critical legal studies and radical feminism. Given its feminist influences and articulation of race as a social construct, critical race theory is a relevant lens through which to read the Song's "black and beautiful" protagonist. Furthermore, critical race theory's focus on "racial realism," or the tangible, material effects of racism, are apropos to the real-world violence perpetrated against the Song's black female protagonist.

Gender Theory

Gender theorists, much like critical race theorists, have come to view the conventional gender binary as culturally and socially constructed, and not based in biology. Judith Butler's scholarship, specifically, challenges the traditional linkage of biological "sex" with gender, positing in its place a theory of gender as performative and socially constructed. Butler writes, "[t]the distinction between sex and gender serves the argument that whatever biological intractability sex appears to have, gender is culturally constructed: hence, gender is neither the causal result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex."[48] For Butler, gender performance, rather than biological "sex," creates gender; and the gender that is publicly performed is often based on internalized gender norms. Butler's view is influenced by the works of Simone de Beauvoir, who presciently observed that "One is not born a woman, but rather becomes one."[49]

> Simone de Beauvoir's formulation distinguishes sex from gender and suggests that gender is an aspect of identity gradually acquired. The distinction between sex and gender has been crucial to the long-

[47] Ibid.
[48] Judith Butler, "Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire," in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 8.
[49] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 301.

> standing feminist effort to debunk the claim that anatomy is destiny; sex is understood to be the invariant, anatomically distinct, and factic aspects of the female body, whereas gender is the cultural meaning and form that that body acquires, the variable modes of that body's acculturation.[50]

Having been influenced by Beauvoir's scholarship, Butler recognizes the social nature of human beings, and understands that being viewed by the social audience will inevitably contribute to the manner in which sexed bodies perform (or are socialized to perform) in the world.

In her 1988 essay "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," Butler compares gender performance to stage performance. However, she astutely notes that gender performance occurs in the real-world and is therefore more restricted and regulated (by norms and conventions) than stage performances, wherein the audience tacitly agrees that reality will be temporarily suspended.[51] In contrast to Butler's comparison, the Song, as a work of erotic literature that might have served a dramatic function, fails to fully suspend reality.[52] Rather than allowing the unnamed woman to eschew gender norms without recourse, as one might expect from a work of fantasy, the poem intermittently reinscribes social mores through its episodes of punishment. Even still, Butler's framing of gender as socially constructed will be pertinent to this project as it explores how the violence inflicted upon the

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[50] Judith Butler, "Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's Second Sex," *Yale French Studies, no. 72, Simone de Beauvoir: Witness to a Century* (1986): 35-49.
[51] Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." *Theatre Journal vol. 40, no. 4* (1988):519 - 531.
[52] Fox, 253-6. "[t]he Egyptian love songs, and probably the Song of Songs, were meant to be sung by singers of the kind depicted in countless Egyptian paintings, stelae, and statuettes, they are furthermore dramatic in the fundamental Aristotelian understanding of drama as *mimesis*: the singers represent personae before an audience."

unnamed woman, in both the domestic and public spheres, has to do with her refusal to adhere to gender norms.

Gender and violence coalesce in Butler's more recent monograph, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* in which she addresses how subjectivity is produced, recognized, or erased based upon accepted cultural hierarchies. Butler's interdisciplinary social analysis of subjectivity, bodies, and violence is apropos to the final two chapters of this dissertation which read the violence inflicted upon the unnamed woman first through the lenses of race, gender, and space, and finally through the psychoanalytic framework of literary trauma theory.

Space Theory

In her monograph *Space, Place and Gender,* Doreen Massey reflects upon the state of her field, noting the lack of a standard definition for "space" and the paucity of scholarly explorations into the intersections of space and politics. She is particularly critical of the fields exclusion of feminism, noting that its fixation with the intersections of production/capitalism and space have neglected to address the relationship between gender and space. Having been influenced by the scholarship of Henri Lefebvre, Massey acknowledges the "[i]mportance of considering not only what might be called 'the geometry' of space but also its lived practices and the symbolic meaning and significance of particular spaces and spatializations."[53]

[53] Doreen Massey, "Politics and Space/Time," in *Space, Place, and Gender* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 250-1. Cf. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 1991), 3.

As for a standard definition of "space," this present project rejects the idea of space as stasis, or in opposition to time and thus politics, as Ernesto Laclau has suggested.[54] Rather, "[i]f spatial organization makes a difference to how society works and how it changes, then, far from the realm of stasis, space and the spatial are also implicated (*contra* Laclau) in the production of history—and thus, potentially, in politics."[55] An application of Massey's interdisciplinary definition of space to the real and metaphorical spaces of the Song, most notably the vineyard and the city streets, will allow for a more nuanced discussion of how time (culture and history) and gender (historically contingent social mores) contribute to the maltreatment of the unnamed woman.

Literary Trauma Theory

Lastly, literary trauma theory provides scholars with an interdisciplinary theoretical framework for acknowledging the historical context(s) and psychological impact(s) of the traumatic events embedded within narratives. This theory was born out of literary and cultural studies and incorporates current psychological and neurological breakthroughs, especially those pertaining to the biological mechanisms of traumatic memory, and more recently, to communal memory and intergenerational trauma. Literary trauma theory became popularized in the 1990's at Yale University through such seminal works as Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub's *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (1992), Cathy Caruth's edited collection *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995) and her 1996 monograph titled *Unclaimed Experience:*

[54] Eernesto Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time* (London: Verso, 1990), 68. "Politics and space are autonomic terms. Politics only exist insofar as the spatial eludes us."
[55] Massey, 254.

Trauma, Narrative and History. In recent years' literary trauma theory has shifted its focus from individual trauma narratives as a means to recovery to neurobiological understandings of communal trauma, communal memory, intergenerational trauma and their narrative representations.

The first wave of literary trauma theorists, most notably Cathy Caruth, Dori Laub and Shoshanna Felman, were firmly embedded in the deconstructionist theorization of trauma that emerged from Yale University in the 1990's. These theorists relied heavily on Freudian psychoanalysis, the deconstructive contributions of Paul de Man and Geoffrey Hartman, modern diagnostic classifications of traumatic pathology, as well as on the neurobiological insights of Bessel van der Kolk and Judith Herman. What resulted from this interdisciplinary influence was a theory that explored the traces of traumatic memory embedded within literature and testimony and how the narration of trauma might aid in recovery.

In the first wave of literary trauma theory, its foundational claim was that language was incapable of capturing the truth of traumatic events. In other words, traumatic memories are "unspeakable" because words inevitably fail to recreate or fully represent the traumatic event. Having been steeped in the Yale school of thought with regard to the ostensible "gaps" that exist between trauma and memory, Caruth developed "a psychoanalytic post-structural approach that suggests trauma is an unsolvable problem of the unconscious that illuminates the inherent contradictions of experience and language."[56] For Caruth and her colleagues, traumatic experiences shun knowledge and

[56] Michelle Balaev, ed. "Literary Trauma Theory Reconsidered," in *Contemporary Approaches in Literary Trauma Theory* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 1. For more on the notion of "the black hole" of trauma, see Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, "Bearing Witness or the Vicissitudes of Listening," in *Testimony: Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992),

attempts to represent traumatic events within literature or narrative are referential or symbolic at best. Yet, the work of representation through art and literature or through the more literal language of testimony is key to the treatment of and recovery from trauma. The first wave's view of trauma as "unspeakable" did not consider representation to be futile, but rather to be meaningful attempts to grasp events that could never be fully known. Such seems to be the case with the Song of Songs, which uses figurative and symbolic language to "speak" to unreachable traumas.

For the purposes of this project (see chapter V), literary trauma theory will be applied to three of the Song's instances of violence (1:6; 5:7; 7:1) as a means of uncovering the meaning and purpose of violence within this erotic work. It is my contention that these violent interludes against a woman who is characterized as "other" through her color (class and/or racial difference; see chapter III) spatial locations, and sexual behavior, allow the traumatized diasporic community to imagine themselves as powerful and in control of their ancestral land and its inhabitants when, in reality, Israel during the time in which the Song was composed, existed under the control of a series of foreign overlords. Like so many of Israel's ancestral stories, the Song of Songs seems also to express communal trauma.

64-65, wherein the survivor's silence or inability to put words to their trauma is referred to as "the black hole," which swallows up words and memories.

CHAPTER III

UNCOVERING THE TRANSGRESSIVE BODY:

RACE, GENDER, SPACE, AND VIOLENCE IN THE SONG OF SONGS

> [T]he deepest meanings and values of North Atlantic modernity and of the worlds it has shaped have involved the peculiar ambivalence that we find in the Song of Songs: the determination to treat black bodies as paradigm cases of human ugliness, coexisting uneasily with varying degrees of admiration, fascination, and desire for these same bodies.
>
> Paul C. Taylor[1]

A question that has received less attention in scholarly discourse is the purpose of the Song's violence. Commentators have tended to gloss over the Song's violent interludes, barely acknowledging the brothers' control in 1:6, and skillfully dodging the outright violence of 5:7 by reading it as a dream sequence.[2] Scholars have offered a more fulsome response to 7:1, but nevertheless, the verse warrants a deeper analysis of the animosity or fascination embedded in the speakers' gaze. No scholarly consensus on the identity of the speakers exists, thus opening up the possibility that the gawkers are men. This adds a sinister quality to the scene, in which the unnamed woman is potentially exposed to the violence embedded in the male gaze.[3] What is lacking in previous

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[1] Paul C. Taylor, "Dark Lovely Yet And; Or, How to Love Black Bodies While Hating Black People," in *Black is Beautiful: A Philosophy of Black Aesthetics* (West Sussex: John Wiley and Sons, Ltd, 2016), 106. The title of Taylor's chapter makes reference to the age-old debate over the proper interpretation of the *vav* conjunction located in 1:5. Significantly, it can be read as either "I am black *and* beautiful," or "I am black *but* beautiful."

[2] Roland E. Murphy, *Song of Songs: A Commentary on the Book of Canticles or the Song of Songs* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 146-7;165-171.

[3] Michael V. Fox, *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 157. Cf. Roland E. Murphy, *Song of Songs: A Commentary on the Book of Canticles or the Song of Songs*, ed. S. Dean McBride, Jr (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 185.

analyses of these instances of violence is any consideration of the violence's desired effect upon the intended audience or an adequate contextualization of the social mores embedded within the poem, specifically those related to race, class, and gender. Therefore, the following chapter seeks to remedy this paucity of attention with a thorough historical contextualization of the spaces in which violence transpires and a socio-historical exploration of the female body that is punished.

Throughout the poem the unnamed woman is intentionally cast as an outsider. For example, the poet depicts her as a dark skinned, sexually active, unmarried woman of indeterminate origin. In establishing the unnamed woman as "other," the poet borrows aspects of transgressive womanhood gleaned from the narratives of Israel's heroines, the goddess tradition, and the lives of prostitutes. All of these women, real or fictitious, occupy a precarious position within the social consciousness, because their behavior and self-presentation often defies gender and spatial norms. It is curious that from within this work of erotic literature the female protagonist is repeatedly punished for her sexual and spatial transgressions. If the Song is to be read as a dream or a fantasy, why is punishment and the fear of punishment present at all? What role does the threat of domestic and public condemnation play in constructing the narrative world of the Song? With these questions in mind, this chapter will engage the historical, cultural and literary scholarship of Marvin Pope, Roland Murphy, Michael V. Fox and others as a means of unpacking the figuration of the female lover, the meaning of her punishment in the vineyard and the streets, and the purpose of her presence in her mother's house.

Aside from the unnamed woman's aberrant sexual activity, which renders her as "other," this chapter is also concerned with uncovering whether the violence imposed

upon the unnamed woman in 1:6 and 5:7 is suggestive of racial and/or ethnic bias. For this reason, I will also employ the scholarship of critical race theorists, Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic to address both ancient and modern conceptions of "race." By addressing "race" in the ancient Near East, I hope to come to an understanding of how the unnamed woman's blackness might have been perceived by the Song's intended audience, and if the social sanctions imposed upon her are suggestive of "racial" or ethnic tensions in the wider post-exilic community. In order to unpack the complex and identity-laden concept of "race," a clear delineation between "race" as it was understood in ancient and contemporary times must first be made. An historical and cultural contextualization of the title/description "Shulammite," ancient Near Eastern marriage practices, her clothing, and her spatial locations will follow.

"Race" in the Ancient Near East

Ethnocentric thinking is not absent from the ancient world or biblical texts, but difference, for the ancients, was predicated on the grounds of cultural variation and geographic origins, rather than color. And color was not considered a biological marker of difference, as it came to be understood in the new world. Rather, "Like every other society known to human history, the ancient Middle Eastern people harbored all kinds of prejudices and hostilities against those whom they regarded as 'other.' But the 'other' was primarily someone who spoke another language (the prototypic barbarian) or professed another religion (the Gentile or heathen or—in Christian and Islamic language—the infidel)."[4] To this point, Ashley Montagu asserts

[4] Bernard Lewis, "Race," in *Race and Slavery in the Middle East: An Historical Enquiry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 17.

> From the earliest times, the emotional attitude that one's own ethnic group, nation, or culture is superior to others, has been a concomitant of virtually every culture. Within any society, in earlier times, men might be persecuted or made the object of discrimination on the grounds of differences in religion, culture, politics, or class, but never on any biological grounds such as are implied in the idea of racial difference.[5]

According to Bernard Lewis and Ashley Montagu, race in the ancient world was not viewed as a marker of biological difference, but was instead predicated upon cultural and sometimes geographical differences. In support of this view, Rodney Sadler opines that "Diversity marks the biblical world as people of varying hues interacted constantly in the Levantine crossroads of the ancient world."[6] In similitude to Sadler, Lewis's scholarship warns against the urge to map modern racial tension onto ancient texts, writing that

> Where modern scholarship has discerned racial tension and hostility, it has been in the earlier sense of race as an ethnic or national group, such as the Egyptians, the Assyrians, the Israelites, and others defined by language, culture, and religion. Though the ancient civilizations of the Middle East show considerable diversity, there is no great racial difference between their peoples.[7]

Similarly to Lewis, Frank M. Snowden asserts that "An inclination to discriminate on the basis of readily observable physical differences, it has been suggested, is lessened

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[5] Ashley Montagu, *Man's Most Dangerous Myth: The Fallacy of Race*, 6th edition (London: Sage Publications, Inc., 1997), 59. Montagu concedes that in ancient Greece and Rome, notions of racial superiority were sometimes suggested by esoteric groups, but that such ideas never took root in mainstream thought.

[6] Rodney S. Sadler, Jr., "Can a Cushite Change His Skin? Cushites, 'Racial Othering' and the Hebrew Bible," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 60, no.4 (Oct 2006): 402. The title of Sadler's article makes reference to a passage from Jeremiah (13:23), in which the prophet, seemingly familiar with the color of Africans asks "Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots?" Furthermore, Snowden notes that "To wash an Ethiopian white" was a common expression in the Greek and Roman world, used to describe the futile labors or the un-changeability of nature. Cf. Frank M. Snowden, Jr., "Who were the African Blacks?" in *Before Color Prejudice: The Ancient View of Blacks* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 7.

[7] Lewis, 17. Lewis goes onto note that in pictorial representations, foreigners are distinguished by their clothing, beards, hair and other accoutrements rather than by physical features.

in white societies that have always had blacks in their midst."[8] Yet, Snowden concedes that "[r]eactions to African blackness, however, differed in other areas of the Mediterranean world, where blacks had not been, as in Egypt, a familiar part of the daily scene."[9] Ultimately, Snowden takes a cautious stance on the so-called "numbers theory," citing the lack of intense or systemic color prejudice in the ancient world. Lewis echoes this sentiment in his own scholarship, citing that there were no slave races in the ancient world, slavery was based upon conquest not color. "Foreigners, especially barbarians, were enslavable. Conquest confirmed the belief and, through the universal rule of enslaving the conquered, provided it with practical application."[10]

The shift from ancient ethnocentrism and systems of enslavement based on conquest to ideas of racial superiority can be seen through the fabrication of difference espoused by the European slave trade. For this shift, Montagu points to the subjugation of "infidels" decreed by the papacy in 1455 as a watershed moment in racialist thinking. She writes, "The net effect of this decree was the official sanction for the enslavement of Blacks, indigenous Americans, and other "infidels," for their benefit, of course: the salvation of their souls and their admission into God's Kingdom."[11] In the wake of the 1455 decree European slave trade proliferated and along with it notions of racial

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[8] Frank M. Snowden, Jr., "Towards an Understanding of the Ancient View," in *Before Color Prejudice: The Ancient View of Blacks* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 67.
[9] Ibid., 5.
[10] Lewis, 18.
[11] Montagu, 60-1. These false narratives of difference can be seen through the changing views expressed by European explorers over some two hundred years of colonial expansion, for example Christopher Columbus, in his famous letter to Ferdinand and Isabella announcing his discoveries, wrote, in March of 1493, of the great friendliness of the Indians. Columbus described them as "[a] loving uncovetous people, so docile in all things that there is no better people or better country…They loved their neighbor as themselves and they had the sweetest and gentlest way of speaking in the world, and always with a smile." Montagu goes on to note that "By the middle of the sixteenth century the Spaniards had decided that these same Indians were 'lazy, filthy pagans, of bestial morals, no better than dogs, and fit only for slavery, in which state alone there might be some hope of instructing and converting them to Christianity."

superiority. By fabricating "differences" between slave and master, those in power were able to justify the treatment of enslaved groups.

A Modern Definition of "Race"

Critical Race Theorists (CRT) recognize two variant schools of thought regarding race: the "idealist" and the "realist" or economic determinist view. The former understands race as a social construction, not a biological reality, while the latter "holds that though attitudes and words are important, racism is much more than a collection of unfavorable impressions of members of other groups. For realists, racism is a means by which society allocates privilege and status."[12] Most modern scholars find race, as a marker of biological difference, to be a product of the modern world. Given that the ancients did not view racial/ethnic difference as rooted in biology, this chapter will look at race (and relatedly, gender) through the "realist" lens, as the unnamed woman's perceived difference, based on race (or class), contributes to her harsh treatment.

Ambivalent Attractions: Race and Beauty

This fabrication of difference espoused by the Trans-Atlantic slave trade can be clearly seen in the New World through Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia,* in which he supports the enslavement of Africans on the basis of moral and physical differences. He writes

> The first difference which strikes us is that of colour… [T]he difference is fixed in nature, and is as real as if its seat and cause were better known to us. And is this difference of no importance? Is it not the foundation of a greater or less share of beauty in the two races?" Jefferson goes on to write, "The circumstances of superior beauty, is

[12] Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, "Hallmark Critical Race Theory Themes," in *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 21.

> thought worthy of attention in the propagation of our horses, dogs and other domestic animals; why not in that of man?[13]

For Taylor, Jefferson's focus on racialized aesthetics marked a shift in racialism, which later "[G]ave us scientific racism and, eventually, eugenicist state policies."[14] Yet, even as Jefferson espouses a racialist aesthetic in his private notes, in his personal life he maintained a long-term sexual "relationship" with an enslaved woman, Sally Hemings, with whom he fathered several children. Christina Sharpe, addressing the uncomfortable use of the word "relationship" to characterize the union between slave and master, defines such racialized social transactions as "monstrous intimacies." Her definition highlights the connections between aversion and desire, sex and admiration, race and beauty present in the slave-master "relationship."[15] For Sharpe, the power differential between the slave and master stymies what otherwise might have blossomed into a *proper* intimacy. She writes, "Intimacies become monstrous in part because white supremacy short-circuits the social and phenomenological transactions that might otherwise develop around phenomena like desire and attraction, and skews them in the direction of violence and domination (while pretending that it does otherwise.)"[16]

Jefferson later reflects upon the commingling of desire, aversion and power embedded in the master-slave "relationship" stating, "There must doubtless be an unhappy influence on the manners of our people produced by the existence of slavery

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[13] Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, in *Writings*, ed. Merrill D. Peterson (New York: Library of America, 1984), 264-265. Cited in Paul C. Taylor, "Dark Lovely Yet And; Or, How to Love Black Bodies While Hating Black People," in *Black is Beautiful: A Philosophy of Black Aesthetics* (West Sussex: John Wiley and Sons, Ltd, 2016), 111.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Christina Sharpe, "Introduction: Making Monstrous Intimacies, Surviving Slavery, Bearing Freedom," in *Monstrous Intimacies: Making Post-Slavery Subjects* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 5.

[16] Ibid.

among us. The whole commerce between master and slave is a perpetual exercise of the most boisterous passions, the most unremitting despotism on the one part, and degrading submission on the other."[17] Jefferson's reflection seems to blame slaves for the barbaric behavior of their masters, and is suggestive of his discomfort with his own ambivalent desires for the black bodies that he owned and over whom he held power.

The Jefferson-Hemings "relationship" is germane to the fascination, revulsion and desire placed upon the body of the Song's "black and beautiful" protagonist. I do not mean to draw an equivalence between the unnamed woman and Sally Hemings, but rather to highlight the complex relationship that exists between race and/or class, beauty, and desire. Sally Hemings was a real enslaved woman whose sexual exploitation can be directly linked to the institution of slavery. The unnamed woman, however is a literary figure whose cultural provenance and social location within the poem is much harder to pin down. She is not a slave, but her color and gender do seem to contribute to the manner in which her body is socially controlled.

The unnamed woman's subtle references to color (1:5) and its inimical relationship to beauty appears as follows:

5. I am black and beautiful,
   O daughters of Jerusalem
   Like the tents of Kedar,
   Like the curtains of Solomon.
6. Do not stare at me because I am swarthy,
   Because the sun has looked upon me.
   The sons of my mother became angry with me,
   They made me guard the vineyards,

[17]Taylor, 116. Again, from Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Query XVIII, "On Manners."

My own vineyard I did not guard.[18]

Similarly, to antebellum (and sometimes modern) American beauty standards, the unnamed woman's reference to her darkened skin offers the modern reader a view into ancient colorism and/or class prejudices. This notion is echoed in Renita Weem's scholarship in which she offers the possibility that this sun-darkened woman may be the victim of class discrimination as opposed to ethnic or racial prejudice. "The argument [being] that in ancient Oriental culture the light-complexioned women who had the luxury of remaining indoors during the day was preferred over the dark-complexioned woman who was constrained to labor outdoors in the sun."[19] To these verses, Fox decisively asserts that

> This blackness, of course, has nothing to do with race. The darkness caused by the sun was associated with a lower social status, for only those who could afford not to work outdoors could retain a fair complexion….Furthermore, if the Shulammite wished to defend blackness, she would not need to explain what happened to make her black.[20]

Fox's point is well taken, especially when we consider the description of the woman in the Song as "black and/but beautiful." It is entirely possible that the ancient community, familiar with varying hues of brown and black skin, found the unnamed women to be black *and* beautiful. Emphasizing this point, Rodney Sadler writes

> Differences in phenotype are often described in our contexts by the notion of "race." "Racial othering" in an attempt to classify observable differences in human physiognomy and thereby to categorize distinct human sub-species groups. The concept is not innocuous, however, because "racial" thought is not just phenotypically descriptive; it also

[18] Elizabeth Siegelman, Comprehensive Exam 2: Exegesis and History of Interpretation (Madison, NJ, 2018), 1. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.
[19] Renita J. Weems, "Song of Songs" in *Women's Bible Commentary: Expanded Edition*, eds. Carol A. Newsome and Sharon H. Ringe (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 167.
[20] Fox, *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs*, 101.

> tends to be ontologically prescriptive, correlating perceived physical differences with qualitative differences in the nature of being. "Racial othering" is not just an acknowledgement of difference in appearance; it inevitably becomes an assessment of human worth, frequently establishing hierarchical relationships between differing types of humanity.[21]

Sadler's scholarship encourages contemporary readers to be mindful of the modern forms of racial othering to which we have been exposed in order to avoid applying them to ancient texts and their literary characters. Therefore, it is with caution and an eye towards historical contextualization that I approach the "black and/but beautiful" woman in the Song.

The Meaning of Blackness in the Song of Songs 1:5

In the *Song of Songs* 1:5 the unnamed woman describes herself as *sehôrāh ʻănî ve-nā'vāh*, "I am black and/but beautiful" a phrase that has garnered a great deal of scholarly debate over the centuries. The primary interpretive issue with v. 5a has to do with the Hebrew conjunction *ve*, which can be translated as either "and" or "but." For example, the Septuagint translates the *ve* into the Greek *kai*, meaning "and" whereas the Vulgate translates "*kai*" into either the Latin *sed*, "but" or *et*, "and." Therefore, the phrase can be translated as "I am black *and* beautiful" or "I am black *but* beautiful," the implications of which have been the subject of debate since early Christianity. Pope notes that "Effort was made to mitigate the blackness with the rendering *fusca*, 'dark' rather than *nigra*, 'black,' as reflected in citations by early Christian expositors which waver between *nigra* and *fusca*, between 'and' and 'but' (*et/sed*), and in the terms for beauty,

[21] Sadler, "Can a Cushite Change His Skin?," 386-7.

pulchra/speciose/formosa."[22] Biblical scholar Stephen Moore succinctly remarks that "Rarely has a simple conjunction carried so much cultural freight."[23]

For example, the Vulgate's translation, *Nigra sum sed Formosa*, "Black I am, but comely" emphasizes the adversative relationship between the woman's self-described blackness and beauty. In reference to the exegesis that sought to erase or downplay the unnamed woman's negritude, Pope writes, "The mitigation of blackness to sunburnt brown may be bolstered by numerous poetic parallels in praise of the beauty of dark damsels and nut-brown maidens. He then quotes Theocritus's praise of the dark Levantine beauty, from his *Idyll*, "The Reapers." He writes

> Bambyca fair, to other folk you may a gypsy be;
> Sunburnt and lean they call you; you're honey brown to me.[24]

Despite Theocritus's pastoral poems, which idolize the bucolic worker, other poems are suggestive of color prejudice. For example, Pope references a Palestinian folk song, which prizes the light complexioned damsel over the darker skinned maid:

> Between the brown and the white (sc. girls) I wasted my life.
> The white one are twice refined sugar, wrapped in silk,
> And the brown ones are perfume of crystal vases, prescribed for the sick.[25]

As we can see, sentiments for dark-skinned damsels were varied in the ancient poetry, as they are in modern works of popular culture. Considering the unnamed woman's blackness from a linguistic perspective, Marcia Falk notes that the Hebrew

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[22] Marvin Pope, *Song of Songs: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1977), 307-18.
[23] Stephen Moore, "The Song of Songs in the History of Sexuality," in *God's Beauty Parlor: And Other Queer Spaces in and around the Bible* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 58.
[24] Pope., 311. Cf. Theocritus, *Idyll* X, "The Reapers."
[25] Ibid.

word for "black," *šāhôr* as it first appears in v.5a, is doubled in v.6a appearing as *šĕharhōret.* Some scholars have interpreted this doubling as diminutive, translating the noun as "a little black" or "blackish" but Falk finds such readings counterintuitive, concluding that the doubling suggests intensification.[26] As mentioned above, the term "black," *šāhôr* may not necessarily refer to the speaker's race so much as to her class. She, unlike the privileged city-dwelling daughters of Jerusalem, was forced to work in the sun, therefore her skin is blackened, drawing attention from her presumably paler onlookers. To this Weems remarks

> The protagonist assumes, whether correctly or incorrectly, that her blackish complexion, which she claims was the result of having been put to labor by her brothers in her vineyard, made her the object of the stares of her female companions, the Jerusalem daughters (1:5-6). Whether the women stare at her out of admiration, prejudice, or curiosity one can only guess from the other statements in the poetry.[27]

Taking a firmer stance towards the implied adversative relationship between blackness and beauty, Pope remarks "The notion that the blackness of necessity implies the antithesis of beauty has some support in biblical usage, since bodily health and beauty are described as white and ruddy in the Song of Songs 5:10 and in Lamentations 4:7f." Yet Pope concedes that "[t]he equation of beauty and health with whiteness or ruddiness and the opposite with blackness can apply only where ruddy/white is the normal skin color; it has no meaning with respect to innate blackness which has its own beauty."[28] Given the historical, literary and social grounding listed above, we can conclude that the language of fascination or discrimination surrounding the unnamed woman's blackness is

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[26] Marcia Falk. "Notes to the Poems," in *The Song of Songs: A New Translation and Interpretation* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1990), 169.
[27] Weems, 167.
[28] Pope, 307-8.

more likely related to cultural (geographic, class or religious) differences than to a conception of innate, biological difference. For the purposes of this project, I will refer to the unnamed woman as "black *and* beautiful" as her beauty is never in doubt. And as for her blackness, it is undecidable—a referent to either ethnic or class differentiation.

What's in a Name? The "Shulammite" Uncovered

Aside from her color, the unnamed woman is set further apart from her literary foils, "the daughters of Jerusalem" by her title, "the Shulammite" (7:1). This title has held a variety of meanings for scholars over the decades, the most prominent of which include the cultic, geographic, and Solomonic explanations. The cultic explanation links the title to the epithet, Šulamānîtu, an appellation for the Mesopotamian goddess of love and war, Ishtar.[29] The geographic interpretation associates the title with the town of Shulem/Shunem (modern-day town of Sûlam) located near the plain of Jezreel in northern Israel (e.g. Joshua 19:18; 1 Samuel 28:4).[30] And lastly, the Solomonic interpretation has associated the unnamed woman with Abishag, the young and beautiful Shunammite woman who was assigned to warm the bed of the aging King David (1 Kings 1:3; 15; 2:17-22), though this interpretation is based on slim findings. Alternatively, the title Shulammite could be derived from the name Solomon and/or the word Shalom, meaning peace, wholeness, or wellbeing. In this way the title can be understood as "the Solomoness," "the peaceful one" or "the one with whom all is well."

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[29] Ibid., 598-600.

[30] By contrast to Sadler's biblical examples from Genesis 9:18-27; Josh 9:1-27; Ezra 9-10, we cannot assume that the Shulammite's blackness ties her geographically to Cush (Egypt), because she describes herself as geographically tied to Shunem/Shulem as mentioned above.

The title's association with the word *shalom* is no doubt meant to remind the post-exilic reader/hearer of Jerusalem, their beloved city of peace.

If we follow the geographic explanation, we are led to ask: Is the unnamed woman meant to be taken as a foreigner given her self-designated title, "the Shulammite" (7:1)? According to Fox, "the Shulammite," *haššulammit* is commonly thought of as a gentilic of the place name Shunem. "Nevertheless, Shunem is not called Shulem in the Bible, and Eusebius' identification of Shunem with the village of Shulem near the Jezreel is a guess."[31] Fox instead derives *šūlammît* from the noun '*šūlam*, which he renders in its adjectival form as "the perfect, unblemished one."[32] The "perfection" of the unnamed woman is spoken with sincerity by her lover, but the epithet is used somewhat teasingly by the daughters of Jerusalem. To this end, Fox remarks that "The Shulammite's defensiveness in 1:5 implies that her companions had some doubts about her "perfection," and calling her "most beautiful of women" (5:9) and "perfect one" (7:1) may be their jocular response to her assertion that she is lovely."[33] Through this teasing language, distance is maintained between the unnamed woman and her foils, the daughters of Jerusalem, who never seem to fully accept her into the fold.

Is this teasing in retaliation to the unnamed woman's hubristic insistence upon her own beauty and sexual prowess? As mentioned above, the title/description could be read as identifying the unnamed woman with Jerusalem, in which case she *is* a "daughter of

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[31] Fox, *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs*, 157-8.
[32] Ibid.,158. Fox writes, "It is better to derive *šūlammît* from a noun **šūlam* of the pattern *quttāl/qūtāl* (admittedly rare), whose meaning would be "perfection," and to take *šūlammît* (pointing *šūlāmit*?) in its '*nisbe'* form. The formation of adjectives (which in turn may function as nouns) by the addition of the gentilic *yod* is very common in mishnaic Hebrew."
[33] Ibid.

Jerusalem," whom the other daughters intentionally shun. What is their motive? Is the unnamed woman perhaps a descendent of those communities that remained in Israel during the diaspora? If so, is the unnamed woman's figuration representative of internal othering? In addition, the unnamed woman's beauty and unspecified "otherness" might be understood as posing a threat to the ostensibly "returning" daughters of Jerusalem, who understand themselves as having a rightful claim to the highly desirable male lover (and his land?). If read in this way, the Song seems to communicate the reforms of Ezra-Nehemiah, in effect reminding the audience of the type of women they *should* desire and the type of woman they should strive to be: a (returning) dutiful daughter of Jerusalem not a disobedient "remainee."[34]

A hint of tribal viciousness can be read into 7:1, in which the daughters of Jerusalem or an unspecified group of speakers command the unnamed woman to (re)turn and face them, apparently so that they might gaze upon her beauty. They urge her to

[34] Mario Liverani, "The Priestly Option: The Invention of the Solomonic Temple," in *Israel's History and the History of Israel,* trans. Chiara Peri and Phillip R. Davies (London, Equinox Publishing Ltd., 2003), 332-3. Here Liverani addresses the hostilities that existed between the returning Israelite population and the peoples who had remained in the land during the exile, with specific reference to Jerusalem and the temple. He writes, "Appointed, then, to draw up the country's laws, and enforce them with imperial authorization, Ezra expanded the theological and political implications of his mandates considerably. Claiming total non-cooperation with 'the people of the land' and the supreme authority of the law of God (ratified by the emperor, but locally enforced unconditionally), Ezra initiated a new phase in Judean history. The temple-city, closed to the surrounding populations but open to believers of the same religion from the diaspora, was governed by the priesthood as the only legitimate representative of the Law. The drafting of the Law ended with Ezra, as did the historiographical enterprise; prophets ceased their activity and the priesthood in Jerusalem assumed full power." Cf. James D. Purvis, "Exile and Return: From the Babylonian Destruction to the Reconstruction of the Jewish State," in *Ancient Israel: From Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple*, ed. Hershel Shanks (Upper Saddle Ridge, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999), 227. "There is no doubt that the population of Judah decreased significantly in the Exilic period and that in the restoration period the population remained small. By the time of Nehemiah, however, there was significant and important growth and change in the demographics of Judah. The biblical tradition that the land was denuded of its people in the early sixth century BCE is simply an overstatement by the editors of 2 Kings and Jeremiah or a fiction imposed by the Chronicler to promote the idea of sabbatical rest for the land. The rebuilding of the Jewish population took several hundred years; it was not until the second century BCE that there was a sizable Jewish population in Judah and Jerusalem."

> Turn back, turn back,
> O Maid of Shulem!
> Turn back, turn back,
> That we may gaze upon you.[35]

To this imperative, *sûbî*, the unnamed woman caustically or playfully responds

> Why will you gaze at the Shulammite
> In the Mahanaim dance?[36]

The meaning and speaker of this response has garnered a great deal of scholarly debate, with Fox asserting that the speaker is the male lover defending his bride from the unspecified speakers who stare at her with great interest, as if she were a common dancer roaming the camps of soldiers.[37] Pope, on the other hand, identifies the speaker as the unnamed woman and defines the term as the "dance of the two camps" reading *maḥănāyim* as the duel form of the word *maḥăneh*, "camp."[38] Pope goes onto to derive the unique description from the Hebrew forms *māḥôl* and *mĕḥôlāh*, "[a]pparently from the 'hollow' root *ḥ(w)l,* 'whirl,' 'dance.'"[39] In this vein, J. M. Sasson cautiously suggests that the term could be interpreted as "a double company," referencing the Akkadian *mēlutu*, a series of games and festivities in honor of the goddess Ishtar. To this end, Sasson asserts that the term could be indicative of two groups of performers participating in song, dance and ritual sporting.[40] In support of Sasson's theory, Pope mentions that

> The martial affinities of the Akkadian cognate *mēlutu* in connection with the war-goddess Ishtar are of particular interest in view of the application of *mĕḥolāh* to the choral celebration of David's martial

[35] Song of Songs 7:1, *Jewish Study Bible, TANAKH Translation.*
[36] Ibid.
[37] Fox, 158.
[38] Pope, *Song of Songs*, 603. Pope goes on to note that such words generally occur in association with terms for music, musical instruments, and singing on joyous occasions, in opposition to mourning. Cf. Murphy, 185.
[39] Ibid., 601.
[40] Ibid., 602.

> exploits, I Sam 21:12 [11E], 29:5, and the construct relationship of *měḥolāh* and *ḥănayim*, "two (army) camps," in the present passage.[41]

The association of the goddess Ishtar with ritualistic festivities helps to contextualize Murphy's reading of this hapax legomena as the "dance of two camps," while also reminding the reader of the similarity between the title/description "the Shulammite" and *Šulmanitu*, the alleged cognomen of Ishtar of Jerusalem.[42]Alternatively, the unnamed woman could represent the "camp" of those who remained in the land of Israel during exile, while the daughters of Jerusalem/unidentified speakers could represent the "returnees" who look upon her with fascination or distain. The motives of the speakers remain unclear, making it possible to read animosity or captivation into the verse. Lastly, the stares of the unspecified viewers coupled with the possible setting of a ritualistic/festive dance bring to mind the abduction of the girls of Shiloh (Judg. 21:21). In this instance of violence, set during a time of festival, the men of Benjamin hid in the vineyards of Shiloh, and as the girls of the town joined in the festival dance each man abducted a "wife." In similitude with the Song, the ambush at Shiloh subverts the sexualized space of the vineyard, transforming it from a celebratory venue (real and metaphoric) to a space of terror and toil. Although the speakers in 7:1 are not specified as men, the ambiguity of the interaction adds to the tension of the scene, as the viewer's motives and true feelings for or about the dark beauty remain opaque.[43]

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[41] Ibid., 603.
[42] Roland E. Murphy, *Song of Songs: A Commentary*, 185.
[43] Ibid., 181. "The identity of the speakers in v 1a is also uncertain. One might infer that they are males, in view of the gender uses in the reply in v 1b; so NEB reads 'companions' of the bridegroom. But there have been other instances where the masculine plural seems to be used in a general sense (2:5, 15). Hence the command has been attributed to the Daughters of Jerusalem."

Even though the Shulammite lives within the walled city of Jerusalem (5:7) with companions who bear its name, and cavorts with an ostensibly native lover, she remains set apart from both the daughters and the sacred city. Her lot as an unspecified outsider is to endlessly seek and find her lover. Significantly, their relationship never progresses to the point of marriage, which could spell inclusion into the Israelite community. The choice of the poet to leave the Song's protagonist unnamed, save for the brief mention of a title, or more likely, description "the Shulammite" (the perfect one) speaks to her otherness. Without a name, we are less able to categorize her geographically, ethnically or symbolically. Her identity remains unresolved, as does the community's relationship to her.

In the Hebrew Bible, names are often used to imbue characters with meaning, to foreshadow events, or to offer the reader a window into the characters' psyches. For example, the authors of Ruth play with the names Naomi, "my sweetness" and Marah, "bitter" in order to express Naomi's feelings of divine abandonment.[44] Likewise, the unnamed woman's lack of a name contributes to her mysterious and enigmatic nature. In place of a meaning-filled name, the poet repeatedly presents "perfection" as the unnamed woman's key attribute. This focus on physical beauty and sexual allure could, of course, be credited to the Song's genre. However, in this instance it seems that her superlative beauty is meant to set her apart from the daughters of Jerusalem, thus reinforcing her otherness. In line with this, the poet borrows aspects of both the goddess tradition and the alien woman trope in order to cast the Shulammite as both desirable and transgressive.

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[44] Danna Nolan Fewell, "Space for Moral Agency," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, vol 40.1 (2015): 85. Cf. Ruth 1:20-1, *The Jewish Study Bible, TANAKH Translation.*

Aspects of the previously mentioned cultic and Solomonic explanations for the Song's canonization coalesce when we consider the Shulammite's association with the goddess Ishtar and her consort, Tammuz, who is also known by the divine name Shelem. Pope offers further credence to the cultic interpretation by connecting the Song to a collection of Canaanite paschal songs, which describe the love between the sun god Tammuz and the moon goddess, Ishtar.[45] To this end, T.J. Meek identifies Solomon with Shelem (Tammuz), and "the Shulammite" as a cognate name for Ishtar of Jerusalem. This association of the Shulammite with Jerusalem makes the textual distinction between her and her counterparts, the daughters of Jerusalem, all the more intriguing. Is the Shulammite meant to be read as the love goddess of Jerusalem, warning the mortal women of the city against the pitfalls of love? Or, is she a dark-skinned laborer defending her beauty and social worth to her paler, privileged counterparts? Because the Song borrows from a variety of poetic, cultic, practical and less likely, dramatic traditions, the poet(s) seem to have constructed a composite character, who is at once a (future) bride and a goddess. In this way, the unnamed woman is paradoxically touchable and controlled, unattainable and powerful. She is a fantasy upon which the authors, and by proxy, the audience, can process their ambivalent desires for a lover who transcends social boundaries or, perhaps, is even a foreigner.

In support of this hypothesis, Murphy compares the Shulammite to the caricatured "alien woman" mentioned in Proverbs 7:5-27. In both instances the women are portrayed as physically alluring and skilled in lovemaking, traits typically associated with the *zārâ,*

[45] Murphy, 180-85. Additionally, Pope notes that in 1914 O. Neuschotz de Jazzy "identified Solomon with Osiris and his feminine counterpart, the Shulammite, with Isis, and Jerusalem, the City of Peace, with the abode of the dead." Cf. Pope, 598-600. For more on the meaning of the title Shulammite see, Fox, 157-8.

nŏkriyyâ, "alien woman."[46] In the case of Proverbs, the foreign woman attempts to use her "smooth words" to seduce young men into acts of adultery, as her husband is away on a business trip and she is alone in her home. By contrast to the lasciviousness of Proverbs's alien woman, the unnamed woman is faithful to her lover, though they conduct their affair outside the bonds of marriage. Additionally, the alien woman's occupation of the streets functions as a parodic reversal of the unnamed woman's seeking/finding of her lover in the city streets (3:1-4). Both women act brazenly in this public space, laying hold of men and kissing them (Prov 7:13; Cant 3:1-4). But, while the former does so with the intention of ensnaring *any* foolish man who passes her by, the latter flees the safety of her mother's house out of an overwhelming desire to be in the presence of *one* specific man, her lover.

By contrast to the "alien woman," Proverbs 5:18-19 praises marital sex, describing the sexually dutiful wife as "[a] lively hind, a graceful doe," language that is reminiscent of the unnamed woman's fidelity and delightfulness as a lover. The praising of the faithful wife in Proverbs is meant to encourage husbands to remain faithful to their wives and to avoid the type of women who would draw them into acts of infidelity.[47] For instance, Proverbs' wisdom teacher deepens the contrast between the faithful wife and the alien woman by couching the alien woman's wiles as more than just a threat to the social fabric, but as an existential threat:

Her house is a highway to Sheol
Leading down to Death's inner chambers.[48]

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[46] Ibid., 69.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Proverbs 7:27, *The Jewish Study Bible, TANAKH Translation.*

This sentiment of fear is echoed by the Song's final message:

Love is fierce as death,
Passion as mighty as Sheol[49]

The Song's violent interludes make plain the risks involved in being consumed by this kind of overpowering love. The violence also reiterates that fidelity does not safeguard the unnamed woman from social opprobrium, specifically the anger of family (1:6), the violence of society's guardians, the dangers of the night (5:7) or the teasing/fascination of peers (7:1). Even still, these risks and their social consequences are immediately forgotten (by the lovers and the audience) upon the lovers' reunions. To this Fox writes, "It is love that binds lovers together as closely and constantly as a seal upon the heart and arm and that makes one as vehemently possessive as the grave, which gets what it wants and holds it forever."[50] In this way, the poet vacillates between questioning and advocating for an all-consuming love. Furthermore, the poet's puzzling combination of the highly valued trait of female fidelity with the more threatening exercise of female sexual autonomy is demonstrative of the author(s') struggle to wholly demonize the unnamed woman, as was so thoroughly done with the "alien woman" of Proverbs. It may be that the Song, as a work of erotic literature, is better positioned than Proverbs, a work of conventional wisdom, to play with eroticism and social mores. Yet, even the Song's eroticism cannot fully suppress the community's social anxieties, which slip in and out of view, pulling the reader from the idyllic world of the Song and back into the returning community's gendered, spatial, social, and economic concerns.

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[49] Song of Song 8:6, *The Jewish Study Bible, TANAKH Translation*.
[50] Fox, 315.

The Song is no doubt a work of erotic literature, but certain aspects of the narrative, specifically the woman's thrice repeated adjurations to the Jerusalem daughters and the above mentioned testimony to the power of love, are reminiscent of wisdom's didacticism. So, just as the poem grapples with the audience's desire for the unnamed woman, it also struggles to specify the kind of love/relationship the audience/community *should* want. When put into conversation with the prohibitions against exogamy set forth by Ezra-Nehemiah, and the caricatured figure of the "alien woman," the Song's ambivalence towards the Shulammite can be better understood.

Images of Fertility: The Metaphoric and Economic Significance of the Vineyard (1:6)

The sexual symbolism of the "vineyard" is well established in ancient Near Eastern literature and cultic practice. For example, the metaphor of the woman/bride's vulva as a garden/vineyard is common amongst Sumerian and Ugaritic Sacred Marriage songs, which refer to the "plowing" of the field/garden by the husband/god.[51] However, as Fox observes, "Canticles, like the Egyptian love songs and unlike the Sacred Marriage liturgies, is not interested in woman's fertility. Even when describing the land blossoming, the Song emphasizes not fecundity but beauty. Sexuality in the Song is a human desire and a bond between two individuals, not the source of universal plentitude."[52] For comparison, Samuel N. Kramer offers several excerpts from Sacred

[51] Ibid., 325. Cf. Judges 14:18 in which Samson uses a riddle "What is sweeter than honey, /And what is stronger than a lion" to conceal his prior actions: eating honey from the skeleton of the lion he has previously killed (14:5-9). In a response that both references his foreign wife's sweetness, and creates an oppositional relationship between himself and the Philistines, Samson responds "Had you not plowed with my heifer, / You would not have guessed my riddle!"
[52] Ibid., 242.

Marriage songs that are reminiscent of the Song of Songs. In one such composition the goddess Inanna exults in her fertility, saying

> He has brought me into it, he has brought me into it,
> My brother has brought me into the garden.
> Demuzi has brought me into the garden,
> I strolled [?] with him among the standing trees,
> By an apple tree I kneeled as is proper.
> Before my brother coming in song,
> Before the lord Demuzi who came toward me…
> I poured out plants from my womb,
> I placed plants before him, I poured out plants before him,
> I placed grain before him, I poured out grain before him.[53]

By contrast, the Song's vineyard scenes abandon the theme of fertility replacing a communal need for the fecundity of the land with an individual (or perhaps, communal) desire for pleasure. This shift is generally understood by Kramer and others to mean that the Song was used primarily for entertainment purposes and did not serve a cultic function. Although the Song maintains the dual meaning of the vineyard as a physical place and a representation of the woman's own sexuality, neither the land nor the woman *need* to produce fruit. One can see the shift away from fertility and towards beauty and pleasure in 1:6, which uses the vineyard as a metaphor for the woman's body/sexuality:

Do not stare at me because I am swarthy,
Because the sun has looked upon me.
The sons of my mother became angry with me,
They made me guard the vineyards,
My own vineyard I did not guard.[54]

From a social and economic standpoint, the vineyard in which the unnamed woman works seems to belong to her family, as she is sent to tend the land by "the sons of her

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[53] Samuel N. Kramer, *The Sacred Marriage Rite* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969), 101.
[54] Elizabeth Siegelman, "Translation, Exegesis and History of Reception: Song of Songs 1" (second comprehensive exam, Drew University, 2018), 1.

mother," presumably as punishment for her sexual dalliances. The female protagonist's defiant tone directed towards her brothers is evidenced by her use of the construction *benî 'imî*, meaning "sons of my mother," a term used to distance herself from her male relatives. The reason for the absence of a father figure remains unclear, but the lack of paternal authority necessitates that the brothers step in as the male leaders of the household, tasked with regulating the movements of their sister.[55] The brothers' attempt, however, remains ineffective because their sister turns her labor into sport, playfully alluding to her own desirability and sexual impropriety stating, "My own vineyard I did not keep."[56] The double determination, *karmî šellî*, "my vineyard which is mine" functions as an emphatic reference to the maiden's sexual maturity and activity.[57] Pope concurs noting that "[t]he reference presumably is to the maiden's body and specifically her sexual parts. If the brothers made her a guardian of chastity, she did not protect her own."[58] This possessive language tells the reader/hearer in no uncertain terms, that the female protagonist recognizes her body as her own. She has and will continue to exert control over it, despite her brothers' efforts to guard her. She finds herself to be beautiful despite her darkened skin, and her lover, as an outside observer, agrees.

The lack of concern over the fertility of the land (or the unnamed woman) continues in verse 7:13, which reads

Let us go early into the vineyards;
Let us see if the vine has flowered,
If its blossoms have opened,
If the pomegranates are in bloom.

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[55] Fox, 300-03.
[56] Murphy, 128. Vineyards are a well-known sexualized symbol within the erotic genre that often allude to sexual activity and/or fertility.
[57] Pope, *Song of Songs*, 326.
[58] Ibid., 326.

There I will give my love to you.[59]

In this verse the vineyard appears as a physical rather than a metaphorical space. Even though the description of the vineyard as "blooming" and "flowering" refer to vegetal fertility, it also hearkens back to the sexual maturity of the unnamed woman intimated through the metaphorical use of the vineyard in 1:6. In both instances the vineyard, physical or metaphorical, is described as a space primarily designated for pleasure rather than fecundity.

Further contextualizing the aberrant sexuality of the female protagonist, feminist biblical scholar Phyllis Trible astutely compares the garden imagery of the Song to the Edenic "tragedy of disobedience" present in Genesis 2-3, wherein human disobedience results in punishment and pain, most notably for women, in the form of birth pangs. In this way, Trible argues that the Song redeems female autonomy, specifically freeing sexuality and desire from the essential work of procreation.[60] The Song therefore seems to function as a variation on a theme suggesting that the garden and, in this case, the vineyard may not be exclusively associated with toil or, as mentioned prior, the fertility of the land. However, the vineyard is not free of social constraints, because it functions as a site of the unnamed woman's punishment.

Stepping out of the world of metaphor and into the real spatial location and practices associated with vineyards, historians and archaeologists Phillip J. King and

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[59] Song of Songs 7:13, *The Jewish Study Bible, TANAKH Translation*.
[60] Phyllis Trible, "Love Lyrics Redeemed," in *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 152-161. See also, Phyllis Bird, "Images of Women in the Old Testament," In *Religion and Sexism: Images of Women in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Rosemary Radford Reuther (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), 75.

Lawrence E. Stager note that "[i]n ancient Israel, harvesting the grapes was a joyous occasion accompanied by celebrating, feasting, shouting, and rejoicing as the family members treaded the grapes, slipping and sliding in their bare feet."[61] Such a joyous image of flowing new wine, crushed and ground underfoot, is sexually suggestive and fits well within the overall theme of the Song which repeatedly inserts the play of lovemaking into the contexts of ancient agricultural and festal traditions.[62]

Some scholars identify the Song's setting as springtime, given its verdant descriptions of nature. For example, Fox observes that "The girl's developing sexuality is adumbrated by images of blossoming trees and ripening fruits. The external world in the spring of the year is in harmony with the internal world of the lovers in the spring of their lives."[63] However, the Song's references to vineyards and booths are evocative of the grape harvest and subsequent autumnal festival of sukkot.[64] The vineyard no doubt

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[61] Phillip J. King and Lawrence E. Stager, "The Means of Existence," in *Life in Biblical Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 99-100. For more on the intersection of agriculture and human sexuality/fertility within the Hebrew canon see Jennifer Koosed, "Ruth and Boaz" and "Agricultural Interlude No. 3," in *Gleaning Ruth: A Biblical Heroine and Her Afterlives* (Columbia: The University of South Carolina Press, 2011), 72-93; 94-102. The image of crushed grapes during the harvest, a time associated with feasting and celebration, bears resemblance to the sexually charged threshing floor scene in Ruth 3, which intermingles agricultural production with human fertility.

[62] Mario Liverani, "Self-Identification: The Invention of the Law," in *Israel's History and the History of Israel*, trans. Chiara Peri and Phillip R. Davies (London, Equinox Publishing Ltd., 2003), 355. Writing of the changes made to these annual festivals both during and after exile Mario Liverani opines that: "In ancient times the Book of the Covenant scheduled three festivals, all agrarian, during which the people went and gathered (*hag*) at the sanctuaries; the festival of unleavened bread (*maṣṣōt*), another celebrating the cereal harvest (*qāṣîr*), and a third for the fruit harvest (*'āsîph*). These were part of the Canaanite calendar whose New Year fell in the autumn. With the exile and the adoption of the Babylonian calendar (with the new year at the spring equinox), the three festivals fell on the night of the full moon of the first month ('Passover', followed by a week of unleavened bread), 50 days later ('Weeks') and on the night of the full moon of the seventh month ('Booths'). Obviously in returning to Judah all these festivals (*haggîm*) became centralized in Jerusalem."

[63] Fox, 162.

[64] King and Stager, 98. King and Stagers' description of the festive booths erected during harvesting, also brings to mind the female lover's description of the lovers' verdant outdoor accommodations. Cf. Song of Songs 1:16, *The Jewish Study Bible, TANAKH Translation*.
"Our couch is in a bower;
Cedars are the beams of our house,
Cyprus the rafters."

functions as a metaphor for the unnamed woman's body/sexuality, but it is also a space associated with the harvest festival, which might lead a reader to wonder: does the unnamed woman always defy spatial and social norms? Or perhaps, is her aberrant behavior part and parcel with the festive atmosphere of the Song? In other words, is the Song a work of carnivalesque literature? Mikhail Bakhtin defines the carnivalesque as a narrative framing in which

> The laws, prohibitions and restrictions which determine the system and order of normal i.e., non-carnival, life are for the period of carnival suspended; above all the hierarchical system and all connected forms of fear, awe, piety, etiquette, etc. are suspended, i.e., everything that is determined by social-hierarchical inequality among people.[65]

Andre LaCocque's carnivalesque interpretation of the Song is underpinned by his overall argument for a subversive female authorship. He contends that the author is a singular female poet, whose work, because it is "Not inscribed within the framework of societal approval of the union between two families of the clan…" functions as "[a] pamphlet, that is, and 'off limits' literary production."[66] In addition to this, LaCocque categorizes the Song as a work of Midrashic intertextuality, contending that "Every passage in Canticles refers to well-known Israelite traditions and cannot be interpreted independently of them."[67] For example, LaCocque reads Cant 2.16; 6.3; 7.10, "My

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These verses describe the shared home, *battenu* of the lovers, richly constructed of cedars, *'ărāzîm* and cypresses, *bĕrôtim*. In this instance, the noun *qôrôt* is better understood as "beams" than "walls" (as it has been interpreted in other parts of the Hebrew Bible, I Kings 6:15, 16) given the Song's recurrent use of bucolic scenery, and alfresco sexual encounters (1:7, 8, 17). Cf. Pope, 360-2. In line with King and Stager, T.J. Meek found the house to be suggestive of the open air booths of Sukkot. Meeks also noted that during the Adonis festival, booths were erected containing the images of Adonis and Astarte in representation of their marriage. Even though the lovers are never explicitly identified as gods the description of their luxuriant home seems to borrow from Sacred Marriage liturgy.

[65] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics,* ed and trans. Caryl Emerson, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1984), 101.

[66] Andre LaCocque, "Introduction: Metaphorical Presuppositions," in *Romance She Wrote: A Hermeneutical Essay on Song of Songs* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1998), 51.

[67] Ibid., 65.

beloved is mine and I am his" as an imitation of Lev 26.12, "I became your God and you became my people." Ultimately, LaCocque defines the Song as work of carnivalesque, in that he reads certain passages, such as the one listed above, as parodies of religious language, which he suggests are meant to elevate Eros and make fun of the "establishment."[68]

Aspects of the Song certainly resemble the carnivalesque, particularly the unnamed woman's sexual and spatial agency; and she does appear at times to poke fun at the establishment, especially through her jocular admission to her companions, that counter to her brother's wishes, she has not guarded her own vineyard (1:6). Yet LaCocque's carnivalesque assessment fails to acknowledge the instances in which representatives of the patriarchal establishment restrict the female protagonist's movements. In addition, rather than caricaturing authoritative bodies, the Song seems to affirm social hierarchies and gender norms through the punishment inflicted upon the unnamed woman by her brothers, who represent the family (1:6) and the city patrolmen, who represent the state (5:7). If the Song were truly a work of carnivalesque, the social hierarchies would be temporarily suspended, as Bahktin suggests. Instead, the Song seems to reflect many aspects of "normal," non-carnival life, wherein a sexually active unmarried woman is chastised by her brothers, and censured by public officials. If anything, the Song veers away from the playful irreverence of the carnivalesque and into the grotesque, especially when the woman is beaten and stripped in the city streets.[69]

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[68] Ibid., 64.

[69] Fiona C. Black, "Uncovering the Grotesque Body," in *The Artifice of Love: Grotesque Bodies and the Song of Songs* (New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 64. "Quite apart from investigating another way to read the Song's figurative language, a grotesque reading, in locating readers at the margins in this way, could situate them in an ideal position to ask challenging questions of the Song's politics of representation and gender."

In line with Israel's agricultural and festal traditions, which seem to undergird the Song's narrative, King and Stager explain that "[s]tone watchtowers (*migdālîm*) were constructed in the vineyards to guard the ripening fruit. During the harvest season the Israelites lodged in the vineyards in booths made from branches and vines, from which practice the feast of booths developed."[70] The surveillance of the valuable fruit prior to harvest is echoed in 5:7 in which the women's body (previously described as a vineyard, 1:6) is surveilled and punished by the guardians of the city. By contrast to the valuable fruit, the city watchmen perceive the unnamed woman as low in value, and because of this they punish rather than protect her. However, this public humiliation does not shatter the woman's self-conception, reduce her ardor for her lover, or devalue her in anyway in the eyes of her lover. Rather, in a subsequent verse, the unnamed woman's lover compares her to Solomon's vineyard:

> Solomon had a vineyard
> In Baal-hamon.
> He had to post guards in the vineyard:
> A man would give for its fruit
> A thousand pieces of silver.
> I have my very own vineyard:
> You may have the thousand, O Solomon.
> And the guards of the fruit two hundred![71]

This verse reiterates the woman's value in the eyes of her lover, as well as their fidelity to one another. The verse poetically asserts that Solomon's vineyard required many keepers, but *this* vineyard (the body of the beloved) is kept by and for one person only. By comparing his lover to such a valuable piece of property, he makes plain that his lover is

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Blacks' focus on "readers at the margins" is apropos to this project, as the following chapter explores the intersections of race, gender, and violence in the domestic and public spheres; and the final chapter views the grotesque body through the lens of literary trauma theory.

[70] King and Stager, 98. See also, Fox, 314-15.

[71] Song of Song 8:12, *The Jewish Study Bible TANAKH Translation*.

priceless, and that her body/his vineyard belongs to only one man. In line with LaCocque's carnivalesque interpretation, Fox asserts that "If the vineyard of Solomon alludes to his harem (a thousand wives) as seems likely, this sentence makes fun of the great king who possessed so many women that he could not keep their 'fruit' to himself."[72] This focus on the lover's fidelity, coupled with their illicit sexual relationship is demonstrative of the poet(s) vacillation between praise and censure. In this way, the audience is never fully lifted out of the realm of the real.

King and Stager also mention the traumatic scene in Judges 21:21 in which the young women of Shiloh dance around the vineyards at harvest time, only to be abducted and raped by the Benjaminites hiding in the vineyards. This text attests to the celebratory nature of the grape harvest, an occasion in which all able- bodied workers, including women would have been utilized, but it also conveys the hazards of working the harvest. This socio-cultural and literary contextualization of the vineyard as a space of work, play, and occasionally, danger helps us to understand the brothers' concern for their sister. Like the guardians of the vineyard, the brothers are tasked with protecting a valuable asset: their sister's hand.

King and Stager go on to note that, from a socio-economic and spatial standpoint, a vineyard functions as a sign of a permanent society:

> Because it requires several years before vines yield grapes of high quality, only a stable society can successfully engage in productive viticulture and exploit its economic advantages, especially in export. Some continuity in time is also required for the labor-intensive task of

[72] Fox, 175.

> building and maintaining the hillside terraces on which the vineyards thrive and grow during the summer drought. [73]

The inclusion of the vineyard in the poem fits within the erotic genre, but might also support the notion that the unnamed woman comes from a wealthy family, or is herself a landowner. Fox, however, noting to the contrary, states "[w]e are hardly to suppose that the girl owned her own vineyard or that she could complain in this context about a financial loss that her brothers caused her. Rather we are to understand that she has not been able to tend to her needs as a woman, but has been forced to stay within the confines of her own family."[74]

As King and Stager have indicated, a vineyard would not produce a profitable product until many years after the first grape harvest. Like a valuable crop of grapes, the brothers can see that their sister is "maturing" and that her burgeoning sexuality is in need of controlling. But, by stating, "my own vineyard I did not guard" the unnamed woman not only alludes to her rejection of familial rules, but also to her sexual activity,

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[73] King and Stager, 98-101.

[74] Fox, 102. Cf. Marten Stol, "Women's Rights of Inheritance," in *Women in the Ancient Near East*, (Berlin: De Gruyter Inc., 2016), 301-2. In this section Stol notes that some women, during the Babylonian and Neo-Babylonia periods, were able to inherit if they had no living brothers who could lay claim to the land and other assets of the father. Recall that the Song does not culminate in marriage, wherein the unnamed women would traditionally receive monies and potentially inherit land, as specified in her dowry. The Song therefore does not indicate that the vineyard belongs to the unnamed woman, but rather is the property of her father (who does not appear in the poem), under the control of her brothers. With reference to the significance of land inheritance in the ancient Near East, Stol offers a biblical example of the transferal of land to daughters. In this example from Numbers 27:3-4, the five daughters of Zelophehad appeal to Moses to inherit their fathers' lands: "Our father died in the wilderness. But he was not among the company of Korah which combined together against the Lord; he died for his own sin and left no sons. Is it right that, because he had no son, our father's name should disappear from his family? Give us our holding (*'a ḥuzzā*) on the same footing as our father's brothers.' Upon consulting with God about the problem Moses receives the answer that the following rule should now be applied: "When a man dies leaving no son, his inherited property (*naḥa lātō*) is to pass to his daughter' (Numbers 27:8)."
Stol explains that "It was of course considered important for the property of Zelophehad to remain within the tribe. Since he had fathered five daughters, it was felt that there was only a minimal chance that a boy would be born." Stol offers an array of "real life" examples from ancient Assyrian and Babylonian testaments, which bequeath land and other assets to daughters in lieu of a living son or wife who can act as head of the household.

desirability, and decadence. She does *not* describe herself as a necessity, as indicated by the goddess Inanna pouring forth grain from her womb, but rather she describes herself as a vineyard—ripe for the picking. The vineyard imagery therefore functions in its traditional way, as a sexually connotative metaphor, but also as a symbol of status and luxury.[75] References to wine and other expensive goods associated with Solomonic royalty, such as spices and perfume appear throughout the Song, which lift the reader/hearer out of the mundane and into a world of fantasy. However, this flight of fancy is short lived as we recall the reason for the woman's presence in the vineyard, metaphorical or literal: punishment at the hands of her brothers.

As a work of erotic literature the Song offers an idealized heterosexual relationship that vacillates between pushing back against established socio-cultural norms while at the same time affirming patriarchal mores, specifically those related to women's sexuality and freedom of movement. By forcing their sister to work in the vineyard the brothers seem to be motivated by a desire to diminish their sister's beauty in order to stymie her sexual appeal, and by proxy her sexual activity in an effort to maintain her virtue and economic value. Because of this, the gender of the unnamed woman rather than her perceived racial or class identity seems to stand as the greater marker of her difference and the main cause of her bodily restriction in verse 1:5-6 (and later in 5:7).

Sex, Gender, and Violence: Marriage in the Hebrew Bible

In the introductory chapter to his monograph *Jewish Families* Jonathan Boyarin examines rabbinic views on exogamy, assimilation, gender, marriage and procreation,

[75] Kramer, *Sacred Marriage Rite*, 101.

specifically referencing the Babylonian Jewish community's focus on preserving Jewish lineage through arranged marriage. He argues that this practice prevented assimilation, but also reflected the value placed on noble blood found in Persian culture. In this way, the communal focus on preserving a Jewish lineage demonstrates both a resistance to and an acquiescence to certain aspects of the dominant culture.[76] Furthermore, the restrictions on exogamy implemented by Ezra and Nehemiah reveal an attempt to create and maintain a separate post-exilic Jewish identity.[77] Nevertheless, Michael Satlow's study, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity* exercises scholarly caution noting that "Many texts say what ought to be done, but the prescriptions are not necessarily descriptive."[78] If the Song is to be understood as a work of popular culture as Thorkild Jacobson suggests, the text seems to betray some of the poet's and audiences' social anxieties surrounding sex, intimacy, and public scrutiny. Is this because the lovers are unmarried, as Fox suggests? Or is it as Weems sees it, that "They are two lovers whom society, for inscrutable reasons, sought to keep apart, perhaps because they were from different classes, from

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[76] Johnathan Boyarin, "Terms of Debate," in *Jewish Families* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2013), 17-62.

[77] James D. Purvis, "Exile and Return: From Babylonian Destruction to the Reconstruction of the Jewish State," in *Ancient Israel: From Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple*, ed. Herschel Shanks (Washington, DC: Prentice Hall, 1999), 222-9. Cf. Mario Liverani, "The Priestly Option," and "Self-Identification and the Invention of the Law," in *Israel's History and the History of Israel*, trans. Chiara Peri and Philip R. Davies (London, Equinox Publishing Ltd., 2003), 332;352. "The realignment affected by Nehemiah was essentially fiscal and administrative, but it also addressed the problem of mixed marriages and the community's rejection of those without the necessary requirements." Liverani goes on to note the priests religiously motivated concern over exogamy: "Well aware of the dominant influence of mothers in the upbringing of children, the priests feared that the spread of mixed marriages would inevitably compromise the stability and exclusivity of the Yahwistic faith and cult." Cf. Ezra 9:1-15; 10:1-44; Nehemiah 13:23-31, *The Jewish Study Bible, TANAKH Translation*. These chapters' voice Ezra and Nehemiah's concern over the purity of the returning remnant, which has ostensibly been tainted by the presence of foreign wives. Both leaders instruct the men to dispel these foreign women, and ask God's forgiveness for the community's sins. Embedded in both texts are theological fears of incurring God's wrath, through the religious and cultural threats posed by foreign women.

[78] Michael Satlow, "Introduction," in *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), xxxiv.

different ethnic backgrounds, or of a different color."[79] It is unclear from the text if the unnamed woman is a foreigner, but at any rate, her figuration as a sexually and spatially transgressive woman functions to separate her from the "daughters of Jerusalem."

Therefore, episodes of male anger, first with the brothers in 1.6 and later with the city watchman in 5.7, disrupt the idyllic nature of the erotic poem, drawing the reader/hearer back into the real-world expectation of female abstinence, while at the same time alluding to the presence of aberrant behavior. Furthermore, the desire of the brothers to control the virginal integrity of their sister seems to represent authorial slips, which inadvertently pluck the reader/listener out of the alternate reality of the erotic poem and back into the racial, gendered, and social constraints of ancient Palestine. These slips betray a male authorship who, even when writing fantasy, maintain established patriarchal mores. To this end Exum writes, "Female eroticism in the Song is paradoxically celebrated and controlled, but it does not ever seem to be successfully controlled, either by the woman's angry brothers ('my own vineyard I did not keep') or by the watchman who beat her (she continues her search and eventually finds her lover)...".[80] This oscillation between desiring a sexually active female partner and fearing that very same sexual power reveals the discomfort that the poet and by proxy, the community/audience seems to have with overt female sexuality. This ambivalence is further manifested by the unnamed woman's mixed desire for and anxiety over kissing. For example, in 1:2 she longs for her lover's kiss saying, "let him kiss me with the kisses

[79] Renita J. Weems, "Song of Songs," in *Women's Bible Commentary, Expanded Edition*, eds. Carol A. Newsome and Sharon H. Ringe (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 167.
[80] J. Cheryl Exum. "Ten Things Every Feminist Should Know the Song of Songs," in *The Song of Songs: A Feminist Companion to the Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 31.

of his mouth." This desire is followed by an awareness of social restrictions, in which the unnamed woman wishes

> If only it could be as with a brother.
> As if you had nursed at my mother's breast:
> Then I could kiss you
> When I met you on the street.
> And no one would despise me.

Exum suggests that this concern over public acts of affection reveals that the female protagonist "[h]as internalized social constraints."[81] It is telling that even from within the imagined world of the erotic poem our protagonist's body requires male control, and that even her voice is used to reinforce patriarchal social mores. Alternatively, the Song seems to provide a space in which the authorship and their reader/audience can wrestle with their mixed feelings and desires for this aberrant woman. But, who exactly is she? As discussed above, the unnamed woman's unrestrained sexuality is reminiscent of the foreign woman trope (Proverbs). From this figuration are we meant to intuit that she is a foreigner? While her title/description "the Shulammite" succeeds in setting her apart from her foils, the daughters of Jerusalem, it is not indicative of a specific geographic or ethnic difference. Her color is also inconclusive. The first references to blackness in 1:5-6, which could function as a marker of racial and/or class difference is echoed in 7:3, in which the woman's belly is described as a heap of wheat. Fox offers that "The trait shared by the belly and a heap of wheat may be a gentle curve and a tawny hue (assuming that the Shulammite was exaggerating her blackness in her earlier complaint, 1:5-6).[82] Collectively these differences render the

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[81] Ibid.
[82] Michael V. Fox, *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 159.

unnamed woman an unspecified "other" and it is upon this blank canvas that the poet is able to grapple with the varying threats to Israel's cultural identity in a post-exilic world. It was unnecessary for the poet(s) to define the unnamed woman as a specific "other" and by borrowing from a variety of literary traditions and cultural mores the poet(s) was able to create a nondescript "other" with whom the community can endlessly wrestle. However, her "otherness," which might even hint at foreignness, does little to deter the audience from desiring her, thus the poet works to diminish her appeal by punishing her, effectively reinforcing patriarchal mores and post-exilic mandates against exogamy.

As previously stated, the Song's language and imagery bears some resemblance to ancient Egyptian and Mesopotamian love literature, fertility rites, and Sacred Marriage liturgies, though the Song's lovers conduct their affair outside of the bonds of marriage.[83] Thus, the mutuality expressed in the poem does not necessarily reflect acceptable or laudable behaviors from within real ancient marriages or courtships, where a sexually active bride would not have been celebrated.[84] Speaking to the risks associated with rejecting chastity, Weems asserts that

> It is virtually impossible to talk about women's sexuality in the Old Testament without also devoting attention to Hebrew marriage customs: sex and marriage went hand in hand. In fact, sex in ancient Israel was completely confined by law to marriage; any deviations, according to the law codes, bore fatal consequences for women and severe penalties for men. A woman's sexuality was the exclusive property of her husband or whatever man was head of her household.[85]

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[83] Ibid., 3-63. See also, Roland E. Murphy, "Introduction," in *Song of Songs: A Commentary on the Book of Canticles or the Song of Songs*, ed. S. Dean McBride, Jr. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 41-56.
[84] Renita J. Weems, "Introduction," in *Battered Love: Marriage, Sex, and Violence in the Hebrew Prophets* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 5.
[85] Ibid., 3-4.

Citing the religious teachings of Ben Sirah (42:9-13), which laments that a daughter is a "[s]leep-disturbing worry," Fox notes that "[s]exual intercourse between a man and a woman who is neither married nor betrothed to someone else is not explicitly forbidden in the Bible. In the earliest stratum of biblical law, it is, however, viewed as a violation of the property rights of the girl's father, inasmuch as it reduces the bride-price she should bring in."[86] Given this historical, cultural, and literary grounding the content of the Song seems to challenge one of Israel's most highly valued social norms and institutions: marriage, and by proxy, family because, as mentioned prior, the lover's sexual liaisons have nothing to do with procreation.[87] However, the Song might affirm one of Israel's most highly cherished communal values: fidelity. Fox notes that although the Song does not culminate in marriage, it does imply marriage and values fidelity through the use of terms such as "my bride" and through the lovers' intense commitment to one another.[88]

When read allegorically, the Song implies fidelity to God, a basic tenet of Israelite monotheism and communal identity. In her monograph, *Battered Love: Marriage, Sex, and Violence in the Hebrew Prophets,* Weems expounds upon the prophets' use of the adulterous wife trope to represent Israel's strained relationship with YHWH. She argues that the metaphor of the unfaithful wife has "[c]ontributed to the overall impression one gets from the Bible that women's sexuality is deviant, evil and dangerous."[89] Furthermore, such concerns over female sexuality, even metaphorically employed, offer the modern reader a view into the patriarchal social world of ancient Israel—a world in

[86] Fox, 314-15.
[87] Ibid, 239-43.
[88] Ibid., 315.
[89] Weems, *Battered Love*, 5.

which the bodies of women, particularly their virginal integrity, were closely guarded, and into a time when fidelity to one's lover (or God) would not necessarily protect you from outside forces.

In similitude to the unfaithful wife and foreign woman trope, the Song also depicts the unnamed woman as behaving in ways typical of prostitutes, in that she distances herself from her family unit and engages in non-procreative sex with a man to whom she is neither betrothed or married. Like a prostitute, the unnamed woman is socially independent and sexually active. Furthermore, her sexual autonomy poses a threat to the institutions of marriage and family, yet her beauty and allure brim with the possibility that she might entrap a man in marriage through pregnancy or usurp his household from a wife who has been unable to provide children. Conventional Babylonian wisdom attests to such fears. For example,

> Never marry a prostitute; her husbands are legion! Neither an *ištarītu*, called after a goddess (?), nor a *kulmašītu*, who is approached by many, will support you in your difficulties, but will make fun of you in your quarrels. With her there is no respect or modesty.[90]

> The house that she entered will be scattered. Whoever marries her has no stable life.[91]

The view that marrying a prostitute could spell doom for a man's household has to do with the fact that prostitutes typically existed outside the bounds of conventional

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[90] Marten Stol, "Prostitution" and "Temple Prostitution," in *Women in the Ancient Near East* (Berlin: De Gruyter Inc., 2016), 416-18; 421-34. While some prostitutes, such as the supposed *qadištu* "holy women" occupied positions of cultic authority, there were also women who were forced into prostitution by their family members, adoptive family members, or chose prostitution in order to support themselves after divorce or widowhood. Slaves could also be forced into prostitution.
[91] Ibid.

marriage and family, and were therefore seen as unfit to be wives and mothers.[92] And although the unnamed woman is never identified as a prostitute, and remains faithful to her lover throughout the poem, by borrowing from well-known literary tropes of transgressive women and from the profession of prostitution, the poet(s) signals to the audience that this woman is atypical, and perhaps even a bit dangerous. The unnamed woman's similarity to the prostitute, specifically her spatial location on the margins of society, will be addressed shortly, when we discuss the violence committed against the unnamed woman in the city streets.

The Mother's House: Intimacy and Fertility in the Domestic Sphere

Unlike the vineyard (or the city streets), the mother's house is a space where the lovers can engage in acts of affection without fear of social reprisals. To this end Fox notes, "Within Canticles sexual intercourse does not consummate marriage. Rather, marriage will consummate sex: the lovers are already enjoying sexual pleasure, but they want public acceptance of their union in marriage as well."[93] On both of the occasions (3:4; 8:2) in which the female protagonist brings her lover to her mother's house, the reader/hearer sees glimpses of social awareness and fear of condemnation. Aside from social anxiety, these mother's house scenes, like the vineyard scenes, allude to fertility. For example, in the first instance the female lover alludes to her own conception, stating, "I brought him to my mother's house, to the chamber of she who bore me."[94] By contrast

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[92] Ibid., 414. By contrast to conventional wisdom, two parts of formulas in a legal handbook for notaries indicate that it was possible to marry a prostitute:
"He lifted her from her status as a prostitute from the street. He married her in her status as a prostitute. He returned her drinking-house to her. He let her enter his house. After that he took a holy woman from the street. He married her in her status as a holy woman out of love for her."

[93] Fox, *Song of Songs and Ancient Egyptian Love Songs*, 313-15.

[94] Song of Songs 3:4. *The Jewish Study Bible, TANAKH translation*.

to the vineyard, the second scene refers to her mother and her mother's house as a place of carnal learning, suggesting that mothers provided their daughters with intimate information to prepare them for wedded life.[95] Unlike the Solomonic grandeur evoked by the vineyard, the topoi of the mother's house brings the audience (and the lovers) back down to earth. The space of the mother's house also flips the matrimonial script: rather than joining the *beyt-'ab*, "father's house" as a woman would do in marriage, the unnamed woman invites her lover to her mother's home, placing herself in a position of control. Addressing the Song's reversal of gender roles and overall eschewal of the economic conventions associated with ancient Near Eastern marriage traditions, LaCocque writes

> There is no mention in the Song of the fathers of both personae, an omission which is all the more surprising since an unmarried girl was dependent on her father prior to becoming dependent upon her husband. The reason for such a shift is that the poem sets out, not to celebrate a couples assent to a socially conventional wedding, but to sing love 'undisciplined,' that is, the innocence of the erotic bond, considered from outside of its social environment and of its matrimonial institution.[96]

The lovemaking purposefully defies the transactional nature of the dowry, which offered economic assurances to the woman, and the promise of virginity and sexual exclusivity for the man. Rather than adhering to the ceremonial and transactional aspects of

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[95] Ibid., 8:2:
I will lead you, I will bring you
To the house of my mother,
Of she who taught me—
I would let you drink of the spiced wine,
Of my pomegranate juice.

[96] Andre LaCocque, "Introduction: Methodological Presuppositions," in *Romance She Wrote: A Hermeneutical Essay on Song of Songs* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1998), 52.

marriage, the unnamed woman gives freely of her love without her father (or brothers') consent and without consideration for social or economic consequences.

It is noteworthy that the aggressor in these scenes is the female lover who, despite the punishment she receives, continues to exert autonomy. In the first mother's house scene the unnamed woman seeks her lover in the public square and when she fails to find him quickly, enlists the help of the city watchmen. The verse reads

> I met the watchmen
> Who patrol the town.
> Have you seen the one I love?
> Scarcely had I passed them
> When I found the one I love.
> I held him fast, I would not let him go
> Till I brought him to my mother's house,
> To the chamber of she who conceived me.[97]

Later, in 5:7, this sequence plays out very differently. When the unnamed woman fails to locate her lover, she is beaten and stripped by the watchmen, ostensibly for being "out of place" in the city streets at night. As a result of this violent street scene (5:7), the final mentioning of the mother's house indicates a heightened or perhaps renewed awareness of social rules,

> If only it could be as with a brother
> As if you had nursed at my mother's breast:
> Then I could kiss you
> When I met you in the street,
> And no one would despise me.
>
> I will lead you, I will bring you
> To the house of my mother,
> Of her she who taught me—
> I would let you drink of the spiced wine,
> Of my pomegranate juice.[98]

[97] Song of Songs 3:3-4, *The Jewish Study Bible TANAKH Translation*.
[98] Ibid., 8:1-2.

Building upon the first scene's (3:4) oblique allusion to sexual congress, in her final reflection on public affection and overwhelming desire (8:1-2) the unnamed woman seems to instruct her lover in the ways of love making—knowledge she no doubt gained from her mother. Is the male lover, and by proxy the audience, threatened or aroused by her carnal knowledge? Perhaps both, but the remainder of the poem does not adequately reveal the male lover's inner thoughts and the poem's conclusion is notoriously ambiguous. For example, the imperative *berah*, "flee/bolt" leaves the reader to wonder if the unnamed woman is calling for her lover to return or to flee from her (8:14). This ambiguous command contributes to the cyclical nature of the poem, and fits well with its theme of seeking and finding.[99] Its inconclusiveness leaves the door open for the reader/hearer to flee and return to this woman, who is at once threatening and alluring.

Aside from the themes of seeking and finding, the leitmotif of fertility appears in the form of the mother's house. The presence of this twice repeated space remains curious because it is evocative of procreation and motherhood, in a poem otherwise averse to procreation. Fox suggests that the mother's house functions as a space that is supportive of the lover's relationship, seemingly assuaging the community's fears surrounding public shaming for amorous contact between unmarried youth.[100] The repetition of hiding in the mother's house, indeed seems to speak to the illicit nature of the relationship and the risks that the lovers take when meeting in public places.

Therefore, the mother's house reinforces gender-based social rules and betrays an authorship, who for unclear reasons, chooses to include these mores within a narrative

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[99] Marvin Pope, *Song of Songs: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1977), 697.
[100] Fox, 166; 300-02.

world otherwise suspended from reality. In oppositions to this view, LaCocque reads the Song as an "[o]ff-limits literary product" that stands in opposition to ordinary social structures.[101] Yet, despite her assertions of autonomy, the unnamed woman is still at turns subjected to the control of both familial and larger social structures (a theme which we will continue to explore in the following chapter). In this way the poet's complex psycho-social concerns, regarding sex, marriage, and class are revealed through the strategic placement of the unnamed woman in the vineyard (1:5) and the mother's house (3:4; 8:2), both of which fall within the purview of the family. Relatedly, the street scenes (3:3-4; 5:7) speak to the social and gendered conventions enforced by the State and under which the poet and community live. To write cavalierly about illicit sexual liaisons between unmarried youth might function to tacitly endorse such behaviors, which the poet(s), as an ostensible arbiter of social conventions, was not at liberty to do. In this way, the poet is able to manifest a fantasy—the lovers still engage in sexual activity—but they do so from within the socially acceptable confines of the mother's house.

In the scenes of violence, we see the home (the brothers in 1:6) and the state (the watchmen in 5:7) stepping in to restrict the unnamed woman's autonomy. We also see that her beauty and sex appeal are powerful enough that her lover risks his own safety and reputation to be with her. "He twice sneaks up to her house at night, once inviting her away, once asking to be let in. Now the Shulammite is not living alone; she is living in her mother's house together with, or at least near, some irritable brothers. So the boy too is taking chances."[102] With the Song's resonant message that "love is strong as death"

[101] Andre LaCocque, "Introduction: Methodological Presuppositions," in Romance She Wrote: A Hermeneutical Essay On Song of Songs (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1998), 51.
[102] Ibid., 324.

(8:6), we should hardly be surprised to find that these teenage lovers would risk social opprobrium or violence in order to be together. This assessment fits well with the Song's narrative arc in which the unnamed woman, in the name of love (and lust), risks her bodily safety and reputation by leaving the protection of her mother's house for the dangers and thrills of the city streets.

Playing with Space: Gender and Violence in the City Streets

In their monograph *Gender and Power*, R.W. Connell opines that "The Street as a milieu shows the same structures of gender relations as the family and state. It has a division of labour, a structure of power and a structure of cathexis."[103] In the case of the Song, this patriarchal power structure is manifested through the city watchmen's harsh treatment of the unnamed woman. In this same vein, Elizabeth Wilson's scholarship reminds us that the streets constitute a unique danger to women (or female identifying persons) because the streets are a zone typically occupied by men, and the setting in which unpredictable intimidations may occur, from catcalling to rape.[104] Furthermore, the streets are implicated in the established gender dichotomy, which places women in the private sphere of the home and men in the public realm of the streets. To this end, Wilson writes that "Prostitutes and prostitution recur continually in the discussion of urban life,

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[103] R.W. Connell, "Gender Regimes and Gender Order," in *Gender and Power: Society, the Person, and Sexual Politics* (Oxford: Polity Press/Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1987), 134. Police brutality directed at black men is a clear example of cathexis, in that the state fixates on a specific subset of the population, classifying them as a threat and disproportionately targeting them for abuse or punishment. In this way, black men come to represent a monolithic object of fear, which strips each man of his particularity and humanity. The same classification and targeting of specific bodies can be applied to the mistreatment of women in the streets, specifically during the nighttime. In these instances, women, regardless of wealth, status, or color are at a higher risk of being socially interpreted as an available sex object, which renders their bodies vulnerable to sexual harassment and/or assault.

[104] Elizabeth Wilson, "Into the Labyrinth" and "Cesspool City: London," in *The Sphinx in the City: Urban Life, the Control of Disorder, and Women* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1991), 10; 27.

until it almost seems as though to be a woman—an individual, not part of a family or kin group—in the city, is to become a prostitute—a public woman."[105] By asserting sexual and spatial independence outside of the home, the unnamed woman becomes vulnerable to misinterpretation and abuse. Wilson goes onto note that "Women without men in the city symbolize the menace of disorder in all spheres once rigid patriarchal control is weakened. That is why women—perhaps unexpectedly—have represented the mob, the 'alien,' the revolutionary."[106] Wilson's sociological insights help us to makes sense of the guards hostile reaction, seemingly triggered by the unnamed woman's gender defiance and their fear of losing patriarchal control over both women and the space of the city. It seems then that the unnamed woman's spatial location and lack of male accompaniment "communicated" key information to the guards about her subjectivity, effecting how they "saw" her and subsequently how they could treat her body in the highly regulated space of the streets. In this violent scene the unnamed woman is stripped and beaten by the city guards, ostensibly for defying gender-specific spatial norms. But, before delving into the verse, let us first explore some other aspects of the woman's behavior and self-presentation which seem to signal to the guards that they could abuse her.

Recall that the unnamed woman describes herself (1:5) and is described by others, as a superlative beauty (6:1; 7:1). Yet, as we shall see, beauty does not safeguard women against violence, especially in the public space of the street. In her book *Survival of the Prettiest: The Science of Beauty*, psychologist and researcher Nancy Etcoff elucidates the biological and psychological forces that contribute to human perceptions of beauty.

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[105] Ibid., 8.
[106] Ibid., 157.

Relatedly, her colleague, Stephen Davies addresses the paradoxical relationship between physical beauty and social practice and their dual contribution to attraction. Etcoff argues that even though the number of features and properties about a person that can be viewed from a sexual perspective are vast, some aspects of beauty remain constant across cultural lines, revealing a set of internal standards that evolutionary psychologists work to decode. For example, men and women with more symmetrical faces and bodies are more highly favored by interested partners and some studies have indicated that symmetrical females are more fertile than their asymmetrical counterparts.[107]

The lovers in the Song proudly advertise their beauty, youth, and by proxy, their fertility through descriptions of each other's nubile bodies. They accomplish this through the use of interactive speech, specifically the *wasf*, a formulaic song of praise describing their lover's body part by part, typically from head to toe.[108] For example, in 4:1-5 the male lover describes his companion from head to breasts, comparing her eyes to doves, her hair to a "flock of goats streaming down mount Gilead." He marvels at her straight, white teeth, likening them to "a flock of shorn sheep, come up from the wash, all of whom bear twins." He remarks that her lips are "like a scarlet thread," her cheek a "slice of pomegranate," her neck "like the Tower of David," and her breasts, soft and

[107] A.P. Moller and R. Thornhill, "Bilateral Symmetry and Sexual Selection: A Meta-Analysis," *American Naturalist*, 151 (1998): 174-192. Humans "[t]end to be guided in their judgments by mechanisms that detect symmetry and averageness as well as exaggerated markers of femininity in women's faces. This suggests that the general geometric features of a face that give rise to the perception of beauty may be universal, and the perception of these features may be governed by circuits shaped by natural selection in the human brain." Cf. Nancy Etcoff, "Feature Presentation," in *Survival of the Prettiest: The Science of Beauty* (New York: Anchor Books, 1999), 163.

[108] Fox, *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs*, 128; 228; 315. Canticles is unique because it shows the lovers interacting through speech, whereas similar Egyptian love poetry uses dramatic monologue or soliloquy to describe its lovers.

symmetrical "like two fawns, twins of a gazelle."[109] The physical features that the lover identifies as beautiful are continuous with the aesthetic qualities that modern observers find appealing, such as dazzling eyes, lustrous hair, straight teeth, long elegant necks, and symmetrical breasts.[110] That we find allusions to symmetry and other markers of youth and fitness in ancient love poetry lends credence to Etcoff's findings that perceptions of beauty are shaped by natural selection and hardwired into the human brain. To this end, Stephen Davies concedes that facial and bodily symmetry appear to be robustly cross-cultural, and are considered in the judgment of both sexes. Davies, in line with Etcoff argues that men (in heterosexual sexual attraction) find youth and fertility to be sexually attractive, writing that "The most common explanation for this ingrained preference suggests that what is assessed as attractive is fertility."[111]

Nevertheless, in his critical review of evolutionary psychologists' accounts of sexual attractiveness, Davies argues that sexual attraction is only partly based on "skin deep" physical beauty insisting that "[s]exual attraction and attractiveness are bound up generally with social performance."[112] Pertinent to our study of the violence inflicted

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[109] Song of Songs 4:1-5, *The Jewish Study Bible TANAKH translation*.

[110] Etcoff, 133-166.

[111] Stephen Davies, "And Everything Nice," in *Body Aesthetics*, ed. Sherri Irvin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 128. Cf. Etcoff, 191-95. Cf. Devendra Singh, "Adaptive Significance of Female Physical Attractiveness: Role of Waist-to-Hip Ratio," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 65 (1993): 293-307. This preference for bodies that signal fertility has been observed through psychologist and researcher Devendra Singh's numerous studies of waist-to-hip ratio (WHR), in which men find women with a WHR of .70 (meaning the waist is seven tenths as large as the hips) to be the most attractive. In conjunction with the "gynoid" (hourglass) shape being perceived as the most aesthetically pleasing, studies have also linked waist-to-hip ratio with women's reproductive potential. This visual focus on fat deposits as indicated by BMI or estrogen induced body shape, strongly suggest to a potential mate that a woman's body is fit to bear children, thus shaping heterosexual male sexual preference.

[112] Davies, 134. Even still, Davies contends that the correlation between WHR and fertility is far from perfect, because a woman with a low WHR might not be fertile because of where she is on her monthly cycle, because she is in the first trimester of a pregnancy, or because ovulation has been suppressed by lactation. "In other words, it may be that men's taste for female bodies is more for fat deposits than for body shape. Indeed, it has been suggested that attractiveness is judged by BMI in nutritionally challenged

upon the unnamed women are the social practices of self-presentation, social competence, and behavior all of which can contribute to or detract from feelings of attraction. In this vein, the "dark and comely" woman is perceived as sexually attractive by her lover, presumably for her youthful beauty, while other aspects of her self-presentation and social performance are interpreted as punishable by the city watchmen, namely her dress and spatial location. Significantly, the unnamed woman's social practice and self-presentation in the street is not unprecedented within the biblical text or related ancient Near Eastern texts, specifically the goddess tradition. It is fitting that the poet would borrow from the goddess tradition in the figuration of the unnamed woman because, "Myths about goddesses often express concepts and tensions concerning sexual roles and relationships, both personal and social."[113] The same can be said of Israel's heroines, who often defy gender mores in pursuit of their goals. What is striking about the unnamed woman, however, is that she is punished for transgressing gender boundaries, while her literary counterparts are often rewarded or able to avoid consequences.

For example, Ruth uses her feminine wiles to secure a future for herself and her mother-in-law, Naomi. By sacrificing her body and cultural identity (as a Moabite) ostensibly for the wellbeing of her mother-in-law, Ruth is rewarded with an respectable

societies and by WHR only where food is plentiful." Cf. Etcoff, 192. "In a study of five hundred women who came for artificial insemination to a clinic in the Netherlands, fat distribution actually made more of an impact than age or obesity on the probability of a woman's conceiving. A woman with a waist-to-hip ratio below .8 (small waist and an hourglass shape) had almost twice as great a chance of becoming pregnant as did a woman whose waist-to-hip ratio was above .8 (thicker waist and more tubular shape.)" The association of WHR with fertility is epitomized by the colloquialism "birthing hips" which refers to the strategically placed fat deposits typically found on women's hips and thighs, which ensure that "[t]he body has enough stored calories to successfully complete a pregnancy and lactation even during an ensuing famine."

[113] Neil H. Walls, *The Goddess Anat in Ugaritic Myth*, (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 62.

marriage and increased social standing.[114] In an imaginative rereading of Ruth, one could envision an alternative outcome, in which Ruth, like the unnamed woman, is beaten and stripped for venturing into the streets alone at night to seek out Boaz. While the unnamed woman's nighttime risk-taking mirrors the adventures of Ruth (and Tamar), the unnamed woman's purposes are less aligned with the patriarchal status quo or Jewish cultural continuity than her literary counterparts. In the Song, her mission is self-serving and her sexuality is used not for the good of others or for the future, but for her own immediate pleasure. Therefore, her actions, which fall outside the gender paradigm, are deemed worthy of punishment.

Relatedly, the unnamed woman also bears resemblance to ancient Near Eastern fertility goddesses, who paradoxically transgress gender, space, and sexual norms, while also sustaining order to the cosmos. For example, the Song contains vestiges of the Sumerian Sacred Marriage liturgy, "hieros gamos," in which the sexual union of the god and goddess brings fertility to the earth.[115] In the Sumerian and Greek contexts, it is thought that perennial cultic rituals were associated with the Sacred Marriage, in which the king and a priestess acting as surrogates for the divine couple, would ritually reenact

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[114] Danna Nolan Fewell and David Miller Gunn, "Notes on Part I," in *Compromising Redemption: Relating Characters in the Book of Ruth* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), 115. In this work Fewell and Gunn argue that Ruth's bold actions force the hand of Boaz who, "as a pillar of society," has a reputation to uphold.

[115] Marvin Pope, *Song of Songs: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday & Company), 1977, 145-7. See also, Roland E. Murphy, "Introduction," in *The Song of Songs: A Commentary on the Book of Canticles or the Song of Songs* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press), 1990, 48-57. Murphy finds scant evidence from the cuneiform texts to support the cultic interpretation of the Song's provenance and literary contents. Cf. Samuel Noah Kramer, "The Biblical 'Song of Songs' and the Sumerian Love Songs," Expedition 5 (1962) 25-31. Cf. Thorkild Jacobson, "Fourth Millennium Metaphors. The Gods as Providers: Dying Gods of Fertility," in *The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 1976, 23-73. and Jacobson, *The Harps that Once…:Sumerian Poetry in Translation* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 1987. Both Kramer and Jacobson locate textual support for the cultic interpretation in the cuneiform texts.

the sacred union. In this way, "The sexual congress of the human actors who incarnated divinities acted by sympathetic magic to cause fertility and productivity in all nature."[116] It remains unclear as to whether actual sex took place between the surrogates, and as for ancient Israel, there is no evidence that the Song ever served a cultic function despite its clear resemblance to the Sacred Marriage liturgy. By contrast, Marten Stol asserts that

> Alternatively, it has been suggested that in this ritual Inanna did not function so much as the goddess of love but as the dominant goddess of the pantheon. By having a direct relationship with her the king ensured the security of his country. It is the maintenance of kingship that was crucial to the ritual, not fertility, as scholars often think.[117]

In line with Stol's assessment of the Sacred Marriage, fertility is downplayed in the Song, as the purpose of the lovers' rendezvous is pleasure not procreation. Yet, the unnamed woman resembles the goddess in a number of other ways.[118] For example, she

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[116] Marten Stol, "Sacred Marriage," in *Women in the Ancient Near East*, trans. Helen Richardson-Hewitt and Mervyn Richardson (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 653. Cf. Tikva. Frymer-Kensky, "In the Body of the Goddess: Goddesses in Nature," in *In the Wake of the Goddess: Women, Culture and the Biblical Transformation of Pagan Myth* (New York: Ballantine Books,1992), 54.

[117] Stol, 653.

[118] Roland E. Murphy, "Canticles (Song of Songs)" in *Wisdom Literature: Job, Proverbs, Ruth, Canticles, Ecclesiastes and Esther* (William B. Eerdmans, 1981), 103. For more on the cultic interpretation see, S.N. Kramer, *The Sacred Marriage Rite: Acts of Faith, Myth, and Ritual in Ancient Sumer* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969), 85-106. The main proponents of the cultic interpretation, H. Schmokel and S.N. Kramer claimed that Canticles was dependent upon the Tammuz-Ishtar cult. Cf. Pope, 419. "Exponents of the cultic hypothesis have seen in the theme of searching and finding, or not finding, and the encounter with the city patrol, a parallel with the myth of Ishtar's Descent to the Netherworld in which the goddess parleys with the guards of the seven gates of the infernal city, supposedly rescues her lover, all of which ends in a sacred marriage… Apart from the Mesopotamian myths, it should be stressed that we can now adduce parallels to the search motif from sources much closer in space and time to the biblical Canticle, viz. from the Ugaritic myths. "The unnamed woman's disrobing in 5:7 parallels Inanna/Ishtar's descent, in which she is stripped of her finery prior to entering the Netherworld naked. In line with Meek's identification of the Song with the dying and rising god mythology, Pope's scholarship also mentions the ill received 1914 cultic interpretation of Oswald Neuschotz de Jazzy, who read the black beauty of the Song as the black Egyptian goddess Isis lamenting the death of Osiris.
Despite the convention of seeking and finding present in the Song, Murphy is unconvinced by the cultic interpretation asserting that it raises more problems than it solves. I am apt to agree with Murphy's assessment, as the Song does not seem to have served a ritual or cultic function in ancient Israel, and the unnamed woman's resemblance to the goddess is scant, at best. Cf. Pope, 145-153; 419. For example, like the goddess, the woman in the Song repeatedly defies spatial norms, by venturing out of the social proscribed space of the domestic sphere and into the streets, a space often associated with prostitution and/or the goddess Inanna/Ishtar.

is rendered as a nubile, sexually active bridal figure, but never as a mother. To this end Neil Walls notes that "Inanna/Ishtar never exhibits maternal characteristics in Mesopotamian myth, and her attributes of fertility and fecundity are secondary to her position as an erotic, non-procreative goddess."[119] In a similar way the unnamed woman embodies the highly valued and necessary procreative potential expected of women, but she remains forever free from the constraints of marriage, motherhood or mortality. In other words, she remains a fantasy. Yet, this fantastic, idealized woman is made low by her brothers (1:6) and later the city watchmen (5:7) thus mitigating her resemblance to the irrepressible goddess. Therefore, rather than reading the lovers as divine figures, whose separation is representative of the natural seasons, it is possible to read them, as Fox does, as a "[a] distinct unit within society."[120] In this way, the unnamed woman's resemblance to the goddess functions as a further indication of her "otherness." In addition, the convention of seeking and finding enables the poet to build tension between the girl and her immediate society, some of whom oppose her behavior. For instance, prior to the violent incident of 5:7, the unnamed woman *seeks* and *finds* her lover in the streets (3:4). In this scene she briefly interacts with the city watchmen, asking them "Have you seen the one I love?" The watchmen do not have time to respond because, as the woman discloses, "Scarcely had I passed them / When I found the one I love."[121]

In a repetition of this scene (5:7), the unnamed woman again encounters the city patrolmen in route to a reunion with her lover, but in this instance she fails to swiftly reunite with her lover, whose immediate presence in 3:4 seems to have protected her

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[119] Walls, 46.
[120] Fox, *Song of Song and the Egyptian Love Songs,* 301.
[121] Song of Songs 3:3-4, *The Jewish Study Bible, TANAKH translation*.

from social censure. It is unclear from the text if the city watchmen she encounters in 5:7 are the same as from the prior scene, and the reader/hearer unfortunately, does not receive the internal thoughts of the watchmen, but their actions speak to the social mores of the time as well as to their social function. Even if they are not the same watchmen from 3:4, primed to pass judgment upon the woman based upon their prior experience with her, their actions indicate that they find her to be out of place, and that her presence in the streets is worthy of punishment. In this way, the woman's social performance transgresses her gender and her spatial location renders her body vulnerable to violence.

This scene of violence (5:7) has traditionally been avoided or glossed over by commentators, who have read it as a dream or fantasy, given that the preceding verses describe the woman as sleeping: "I was sleeping, but my heart was awake: / Hark! My lover knocking!"[122] In this "door episode" the unnamed woman appears to be either dreaming or fantasizing about her lover coming to her bedroom door.[123] Similarly to the vineyard metaphor in 1:5, the "door" seems to function as a reference to the woman's body and sexuality. For example, the man entreats his lover to

> Open to me, my sister, my friend,
> My dove, my perfect one!
> For my head is wet with the dew;
> My hair, with the moisture of the night.

The unnamed woman replies to his euphemistic request to enter her "room" with a series of suggestive lines:

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[122] Murphy, *The Song of Songs: A Commentary*, 165. Murphy writes that "עֵר ("awake") stands in deliberate contrast to יְשֵׁנָה ("sleeping"). Hence a dream of fantasy is a reasonable interpretation, even if the text is ambiguous. The woman proceeds to relate an experience she had while in this state."

[123] Ibid., 146. "It is a strange fact that the mother is so frequently referred to in the work: 1:6; 3:4; 6:9; 8:2, 5. In Song of Songs 8:2 the house of the mother again plays a role as a haven to which the young woman can bring the man." Cf. Fox, 118; 166.

> I rose to let in my beloved;
> My hands dripped myrrh—
> My fingers, flowing myrrh—
> Upon the handles of the bolt.[124]

This double entendre is evocative of masturbation, and supports the general interpretation of chapter five as a dream or fantasy interlude. Yet, this idyllic scene of female pleasure is interrupted as soon as the woman leaves the safety of her mother's house and ventures into the streets to seek out her lover. By contrast to the streets, the mother's house is a space where the lovers can be affectionate towards one another, the social rule being that they cannot (or should not) show affection in public because they are unmarried. The "door episode," which follows the pattern or seeking and finding observed in 3:1-4, is demonstrative of the gender stratification of space.

The unnamed woman's figuration as sexually active and spatially mobile has led many scholars to read her through the lens of prostitution; because, unlike married or betrothed women who belonged to a family unit, a *zānâ* "prostitute" was unattached and able to exercise a modicum of sexual and spatial agency.[125] For instance, Stol writes that prostitutes in the ancient Near East were often described as one 'standing on the street', 'standing on the quayside', 'walking over the quay' or 'walking through the city.' "All of

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[124] Song of Songs, 5:5, *Jewish Study Bible, TANAKH Translation*.

[125] Pope, *Song of Songs*, 331. Alternatively, the unnamed woman's veil has led scholars, particularly advocates of the cultic interpretation, to link the unnamed woman to the qêḏēšāh, "sacred prostitutes" or "holy women" associated with the cult of Inanna/Ishtar. According to Pope, the "holy women" dedicated to the temple of Inanna/Ishtar wore head coverings, ostensibly to distinguish themselves and their cultic function from low-class prostitutes or slaves. Cf. Marten Stol, "Temple Prostitution," 419. Citing internal evidence for the existence of sacred prostitution Stol cites a tablet from Nuzi which "[r]ecords that a girl, on account of her father's debt, was to be dedicated to the goddess Ištar and used 'for whoredom.' According to Stol, "This confirms that cultic prostitutes really did exist." Cf. Tikva Frymer-Kensky, "Sex and the People," in *In the Wake of the Goddess: Women, Culture and the Biblical Transformation of Pagan Myth* (New York: The Free Press, 1992), 200-02. Still other scholars doubt that cultic prostitution was ever practice in the context of Israel's Temple cult.

these indicate behavior demonstrated outdoors. According to the Nuzi texts, a woman who stood on the street was there because she had no family ties. In Sumer and Babylonia the woman on the street would easily be taken for a prostitute."[126] As for the unnamed women she does not seem to "play the whore" with ulterior motives, as Tamar and Ruth do, rather she seems to be wrongly perceived as a prostitute by the city watchmen based upon her location in the street at night, and perhaps in part, because of her veil (which we will address shortly). To this end, Stol remarks that "A prostitute could ply her trade most easily at night, a time when it was known that respectable women such as housewives would not allow themselves to frequent the streets."[127]

Stepping out of the real-world of ancient prostitutes, let us consider the story-world of ancient Near Eastern mythology, wherein the goddess of love, Inanna/Ishtar is often portrayed as a prostitute. Stol mentions two such instances in which the goddess presents herself as a whore in the public sphere:

Whenever I stand in the doorway of the drinking-house, I am the whore that the man knows.

> Inanna, harlot, you set out to the drinking-house (…)
> My lady, you dress yourself in just one garment like a nameless person,
> You put around your neck the egg-shaped beads of a harlot,
> You seize a man from the drinking-house …
> Inanna, your seven paranymphs are bedding with you.[128]

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[126] Stol, 399.

[127] Ibid., 403. In addition to this, both Stol and Joan Goodnick Westenholz refer to a compendium of legal terminology used in the training of scribes and notaries to assert that "The location of the qadištu-woman is the street. This is a legal definition of her status within the sociological structure of Akkadian society, since the street was a place where people not belonging to organized households congregated. Thus, the social position of the qadištu is hardly different from that of a prostitute. Cf. Joan Goodnick Westenholz, "Tamar, Qĕdēšā, Qadištu, and Sacred Prostitution in Mesopotamia," *Harvard Theological Review* 82, no.3 (1989): 251.

[128] Stol, 427-8.

In the ancient world, prostitutes were socially independent women with sexual agency, meaning that their bodies were not subject to a husband, so the resemblance of the unnamed women to both the goddess of love and prostitutes seems an intentional move on the part of the poet, who continually portrays her as socially detached and sexually agential.

> In Sumerian the usual word for prostitute has two elements, *kar.kid*, a combination of 'harbour' and 'to work'. In Akkadian the word that is used is *ḫarīmtu*, which literally means 'a woman who is separated'. It is derived from a root etymologically related to that of Hebrew *ḥerem* 'excommunication' and Arabic *ḥarīm* 'harem.' The idea of her being separated should be understood as referring to her social isolation, although prostitutes were an accepted fact of life... In general, it is assumed that the Sumerian term kar.kid (Babylonian *ḫarīmtu*) indicated a prostitute, but J. Assante, whose view is shared by many others, holds a totally different opinion. She sees the terms as a title for a woman who stands outside the patriarchal milieu and goes her own way, alone and self-sufficient.[129]

In Assante's view, the word *ḫarīmūtu* indicates the status of an independent woman, her class within society, and not her profession. "Any woman, whether virgin or whore, could attain this status. On many occasions she acquired it through her mother, meaning that her mother was also independent, a divorcee or a widow. Her sexuality was thereby liberated, not channeled as it would have been with married women or priestesses."[130] An application of Assante's assessment of the term *ḫarīmūtu* to the figure of the unnamed

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[129] Ibid., 399; 417-18. Cf. J. Assante, "The kar.kid / ḫarimtu, prostitute or single woman? A Reconsideration of the Evidence," *Ugarit-Forschungen* 30 (1998): 5–96. A similar approach is found in I. M. Diakonoff, "Women in Old Babylonia Not Under Patriarchal Authority," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 29, no. 3 (1986): 225–238.

[130] Ibid., 399; 417-18. "Literary texts emphasize this freedom, so that there the word whore is appropriate. But when ordinary people are called *ḫarīmtu* the word whore is not appropriate. An ordinary woman who 'goes out' is no whore, but she is simply leaving her family to be free. If she is 'on the street' it is not for any ulterior motive. All kinds of people went on the street, for it was a fun place to be and afforded an opportunity to enjoy the freedom of the day. The drinking-house was the place where people could relax with a beer under the surveillance of the landlady, a place where single women in particular liked to go. But after the Old Babylonian period Assante agrees that things changed and there was a 'radical shift in attitudes towards independent women.'"

woman supports her unconventional behavior. Recall that the unnamed woman distances herself from her brothers 1:6, by referring to them as "the sons of my mother." Additionally, the text repeatedly asserts that she is neither a wife or a bride. In fact, she resembles the maiden aspects of Inanna/Ishtar in that she remains forever young and on the cusp of marriage and possibly pregnancy, because of her sexual activity. Unlike the poet's female audience, the unnamed woman's life and body are never fully dominated by the institutions of the state or the family through marriage and childbearing, which ultimately benefit the heteronormative power structures. Having recognized her appeal as a sexual partner, and the threat her actions pose to patriarchal power structures, the poet(s) is pushed to intermittently punish her transgressive character, by way of the brothers and the city patrolmen, who represent the very institutions she threatens: the family (1:6) and the state (5:7).

Even though she embodies fidelity, her sexuality falls outside the boundaries of gender and the institution of the family. By imbuing the unnamed woman with attributes associated with the goddess and prostitutes, and by placing her within the social settings of prostitutes, the poet is able to create a composite character who is both powerful and socially independent. In doing so the poet vacillates between praise and fear of the unnamed woman, thus allowing the audience to wrestle with their ambivalent feelings of desire for and fear of this autonomous woman. While the unnamed woman is sexually and spatially agential in ways that warrant her comparison to both the goddess and the whore, her punishment at the hands of state representatives warrants further analysis, with particular attention paid to her clothing.

Her Outward Appearance: Gender, Clothing, and Violence

Gender, like race, is a socially constructed concept and as such it reaches far beyond biology, manifesting itself in social rules and expectations that regulate and constrict self-presentation and social practice.

> The notion that there might be a 'truth' to sex, as Foucault ironically terms it, is produced precisely through the regulatory practices that generate coherent identities through the matrix of coherent gender norms. The heterosexualization of desire requires and institutes the production of discrete and asymmetrical oppositions between 'feminine' and 'masculine,' where these are understood as expressive attributes of 'male' and 'female.' [131]

To this R.W. Connell asserts that the established biological binary is insufficient in accounting for the complexity of social life. "Society therefore *culturally elaborates* the distinction between the sexes. Clothing is a familiar example."[132] As observed above, gender plays a role in both scenes of punishment, but it appears that the unnamed woman's clothing, which is specifically mentioned in 5:7, contributed to her harsh treatment at the hands of the city patrolmen. For example, in 5:7 the unnamed woman is described as wearing a *rĕḏîḏ,* a "mantle" or "veil," which the city watchmen violently strip from her body. According to the BDB the word *rĕḏîḏ* can be read as a "wide wrapper" or "large veil."[133] In the Septuagint *rĕḏîḏ* is translated as *theristron*, which is

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[131] Judith Butler, "Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire," in *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 23-4. "The cultural matrix through which gender identity has become intelligible requires that certain kinds of "identities" cannot "exist" -- that is, those in which gender does not follow from sex and those in which the practices of desire do not "follow" from either sex or gender. "Follow" in this context is a political relation of entailment instituted by the cultural laws that establish and regulate the shape and meaning of sexuality."
[132] R.W. Connell, "The Body and Social Practice," in *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 73.
[133] Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, eds. *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1906), 921.
The term *rĕḏîḏ* appears only one other time in the Hebrew Bible, in Isaiah 3:23 in a list of women's finery.

designated as a light mantle worn in summer.[134] Further contextualizing the "veil," Stol mentions that veiling was often part of ancient Near Eastern marriage rituals, as well as an indicator of a woman's virginal status and her adherence to social standards of modesty. For example, when Rebecca sees her future husband, Isaac approaching in the distance she "took her veil (*ṣā'îp*) and covered herself."[135] Stol notes that this was not a legal action, but rather an act of decency and modesty.[136] Because the unnamed woman is never formally married to her lover during the course of the Song, though a future marriage is implied, her veil is less likely related to marriage rituals than to other social contexts in which veils were worn.

Before parsing the violence in the street, let us first look to a similarly misunderstood veiled woman, Tamar, of Genesis 38. In the Song, neither the terms *zānâ,* "prostitute" nor *qêḏēšāh,* "sacred prostitute/holy woman" appear, as they do in Genesis 38. In this instance Tamar wears a veil, presumably so that her father-in-law, Judah will not recognize her. The general consensus is that Judah perceives Tamar to be a prostitute, a *zānâ* not because of her veil, but because of her location on the road/street. Later in the narrative when Judah's friend seeks to locate the woman to pay her for her services to Judah, he enquires as to where he might find the "holy woman," *qêḏēšāh* ostensibly to save his friend public embarrassment, for having sought out a prostitute. By contrast to

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[134] Marvin Pope, *Song of Songs: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1977), 527. Cf. Gen 24:65; 38:4, 19, *The Jewish Study Bible, TANAKH Translation*. Pope also notes that the Septuagint also uses *theristron* to translate *ṣā'îp*, "veil," a word associated with disguise, and an identifying marker of a holy woman, or sacred prostitute, qêḏēšāh Cf. Joan Goodnick Westenholz, "Tamar, Qĕdēšā, Qadištu, and Sacred Prostitution in Mesopotamia," *Harvard Theological Review* 82, no. 3 (1989): 245-65.

[135] Gen 24:65, *The Jewish Study Bible TANAKH translation*.

[136] Stol, *Women in the Ancient Near East*, 28.

Tamar's intentional disguise, the unnamed woman hopes to avoid disguise, asking her lover

> Where do you pasture?
> Where do you lie down at noon?
> Lest I become as one who covers herself
> Beside the flocks of your companions.[137]

The term "one who covers oneself," *'ôtĕyāh* is difficult to translate within the context of poetry. However, Pope and Murphy note that the term "veiled" appears in other biblical texts, typically within the context of mourning (2 Sam 15:30) or as a sign of the harlot (Gen 38:14-15) as discussed above.[138] Murphy argues that the female lover seems to refer to some sort of covering or disguise that she will be forced to wear if she does not know where to find her lover during the noon hour. She does not seem to want to be identified by his companions in the field, though the Song offers no explanation for this secrecy.[139] Does the woman need to hide her identity because of the premarital nature of the affair? If so, this verse, like the anger of the brothers expressed in v.6c, seems to slip out of the idyllic world of the poem and back into the patriarchal reality of the poet's audience, wherein the young woman seeking out her lover in the light of day might invite the unwanted attention of her shepherd/lover's male companions.

By contrast to the dark city streets, the woman cannot so easily hide in the sunny fields. In a way that is reminiscent of Ruth's gleaning in the fields of Boaz, we are left to wonder of the myriad dangers the unnamed woman might face outside the city walls,

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[137] Song of Songs 1:7, *The Jewish Study Bible, TANAKH Translation*.
[138] Pope, 330.
[139] Roland E. Murphy, *Song of Songs: A Commentary on the Book of Canticles or the Song of Songs*, ed. S. Dean McBride, Jr. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 131.

specifically potential misperceptions of her status and/or value in the less regulated bucolic spaces, wherein molestation or rape could more easily occur.[140] Significantly, at the center of both Ruth's and the unnamed woman's stories is a man, whose mere presence functions to protect both from social misconceptions, which could invite abuse. For Ruth this occurs in both the fields and on the threshing floor (Ruth 2:8-9; 3:6-13).[141] Whereas for the unnamed woman, her man is able to ensure her protection in the pasture and the city street (1:7; and 3:4).[142] In this way, we could intuit that the unnamed woman wants to know where she can find her lover as to ensure that she is protected from the unwanted attention of other men, but such forethought does not occur in 5:7, in which the unnamed women appears to recklessly enter the streets half-dressed. Additionally, Pope remarks that the woman wants to know where she can find her lover so that she does not have to "[r]esort to the devices that Tamar used."[143] In this instance Tamar "plays the whore" in order to force her father-in-law, Judah to fulfill the mandates of levirate marriage (Gen 38), whereas the unnamed woman wants society to recognize the legitimacy of her relationship—she does not wish to hide her face.[144]

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[140] Stol, 263. Stol notes that "The laws often take into consideration the place where the incident happened, which Landsberger calls 'crime-scene casuistry'. No reason for distinguishing different locations is found except in Deuteronomy 22: 23–27, which makes a betrothed girl guilty if she was seduced in the city, where she could have shouted for help. But if it happened in the field she was innocent, for calling for help would have been in vain."

[141] Danna Nolan Fewell and David Miller Gunn, "Naomi and the Threshing Floor," in *Compromising Redemption: Relating Characters in the Book of Ruth* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), 78-9. In the latter example, entering the threshing floor undetected by other (drunken) men and identifying the correct man in the dark of night, is particularly important to ensuring that the redemption/entrapment unfolds as planned.

[142] Ibid., 37; 98-101. Cf. Ruth 2:8-9. In this scene Ruth, a foreign widow asks to be treated as a native by requesting to glean in the fields of Boaz. Boaz, having been apprised of Ruth's marital status and dedication to her mother-in-law, acts to protect Ruth from harm. He instructs her to glean only in his fields, and goes as far as to instruct his men not to molest her.

[143] Pope, 331.

[144] In this instance, Tamar takes matters into her own hands when Judah neglects to marry Tamar to his son, Shelah the next levir, for fear that he might also die as his brothers Er and Onan before him. It remains

In his comprehensive tome, *Women in the Ancient Near East*, Stol writes of a set of Middle Assyrian laws detailing which women were entitled to the privilege of wearing a veil in public. He writes

> Those who could wear the veil were free women, a concubine in the company of her mistress, and a priestess who was married. But an unmarried priestess, a prostitute or a slave could not wear a veil. They walked bareheaded on the street. If anyone saw a slave or a prostitute wearing a veil, they had to report it straight away to the authorities and the punishments were severe.[145]

According to Stol's scholarship prostitutes and slaves were deemed unworthy of the dignity and status afforded by a veil and were likely aware that falsely signaling such status could result in punishment.[146] Given these social rules we could read the unnamed woman as a prostitute (*zānâ*) seeking to hide her vocation by taking on the clothing of a married or betrothed woman, but such an interpretation does not fit well given what we know about the unnamed woman from the Song. For example, she has a family, specifically brothers who seek to control her sexual exploits (1:5-6) for the purpose of securing a marriage for her in the future. (8:8). The Song also speaks frequently of the lovers' unwavering devotion to one another, a prostitute could hardly promise fidelity to a sexual partner. By contrast, Fox suggests thoughtlessness in the woman's choice of clothing as opposed to a calculation, writing that "[t]he *rĕḏîḏ* appears to be little more than a veil of light overcloak, and we are to imagine the Shulammite running about the

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unclear as to whether Tamar sets out to "play the whore," as the veil attests. She could have donned the veil and intercepted Judah to remind him of her betrothed status. It is Judah who thinks she is a whore and propositions her. It is at this point that Tamar adopts the script of the "whore."

[145] Stol, 24-5.

[146] Ibid. "A veiled prostitute was given fifty strokes of the cane. Pitch was also poured on her head in what has been described as a 'mirror punishment', where pitch was applied instead of a veil. The person who brought her for judgement could take possession of her clothes, but no-one could take her jewelry."

city hastily dressed and half-naked."[147] This image adds a sinister element to the women's eventual stripping and beating. She is young, beautiful, alone and, perhaps, scantily clad. The guard's violent response presents a commingling of sexual arousal and contempt. To this end Francis Landy writes

> Because humans project their emotions onto the source of arousal, the destructive, sadistic impulses evoked by Beauty are attributed to Beauty itself. It is Beauty that causes people to 'lose their heads,' and is responsible for dangerous explosions of irrational feeling. This is especially pernicious when Beauty is identified with women, and thus contributes to the discourse of misogyny. One might say—a popular myth concerning rape or sadism—that the victim deserves what she gets, for she provokes it through her very presence. Then the beautiful woman becomes the bad woman, the temptress, mingling polarities of adoration, fear and fascinated contempt.[148]

In the case of the Song, the unnamed woman's beauty coupled with her clothing and presence in the city streets incites both desire and rage from the city watchmen, who visually consume, control, and punish her body. Landy posits that encounters with beauty create a tension between desires and control. By way of explaining our human ambivalence for beauty, Landy points to the mythic figures of Dionysus and Apollo, whose basic natures and roles within Greco-Roman mythology are diametrically opposed. Dionysus represents the creative and destructive forces that inspire excess (wine and sex) and chaos, while Apollo represents the Greek ideals of order, control, and reason. In this way the guards embody two divergent masculinities: the chaotic, destructive tendencies of Dionysus and the controlled, orderly attributes of Apollo.[149] The

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[147] Michael V. Fox, *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Song* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 146. Fox also references an Egyptian poem in which a girl, "[a]lso agitated by love and desire, says that her heart's flight has made her unable to dress herself properly."
[148] Francis Landy, "Beauty and the Enigma: An Inquiry into some Interrelated Episodes of the Song of Songs," in *Beauty and the Enigma: And Other Essays on the Hebrew Bible* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc., 2001), 40.
[149] Ibid.

tension between the guard's sexual arousal and civic duty, their vacillation between the masculine poles of Dionysus and Apollo, are expressed through their actions: they both beat and strip her (5:7).

Conclusion and Future Directions

In opposition to the guard's violent outburst, stands the figure of the male lover who wholly appreciates and loves the lively and transgressive unnamed woman. These polarized examples of masculinity offer the reader/hearer two variant perspectives on this enigmatic woman: that she is worthy of punishment, and that she is perfect (as intimated by her title/description, the "Shulammite"). This polarized perspective fits with the Song's overall ambivalent tone, as observed through its episodes of violence. In this way, the poet presents a woman who is both desirable and dangerous; attractive and transgressive. And based upon the community's ever changing socio-historical circumstances, the audience is able to slide between these two poles of masculinity: the guards and the lover; at turns hating and loving the "other" in a way that mirrors their own experiences as colonized outsiders returning to their ancestral land to find it populated with remainees and controlled by Persian authorities. In this way, the female lover also seems to represent the allures and the dangers of foreign culture and assimilation. By punishing her, based upon existing social mores and narrative conventions, the poet provides the audience with catharsis vis-a-vis this amorphous "other."

When we envision the unnamed woman's body beaten, stripped and lying in the public and anonymous space of the street, we are forced to ask ourselves, do I still *like* this woman? Do I still *want* this woman? The answer, of course, is complicated, hence

the vacillation between bouts of punishment and sexual enjoyment. The audience and poet voyeuristically consume both the unnamed woman's pleasure and her pain, which is illustrative of a community struggling to decide what to do with her. That the Song alludes to marriage (8:8-10), but never culminates in marriage is demonstrative of Israel's ongoing negotiations around exogamy, assimilation, and the maintenance of a separate cultural identity in a post-exilic world. In this way, the poet's ambivalence towards her, as seen through acts of violence (1:6; 5:7), is bound up in Israel's perennial negotiation of identity in the face of foreign occupation, the pressures of assimilation, and the allure of exogamy, leitmotifs found in other sections of the Hebrew corpus. Given her defiance of sexual mores and her allusion to land ownership (1:5), she represents not only a social threat, but also an economic threat to the post-exilic Israelite community.

Embedded in the land of Israel, and aware of the community's struggle for self-definition and regeneration, the poet "plays" with space and in doing so destabilizes readers/hearers. Even though we encounter a sexually active woman strategically placed in a vineyard, a space much associated with fertility and family, we do not receive a bride, a goddess or a mother. Rather, we are given a male fantasy of an ultimately desirable woman, a sexual play-thing free from the constraints of motherhood, but still subjected to the social mores of men. This image resonates deeply with me as I contemplate how modern social constraints limit women's movements and self-expressions. With this in mind, let us explore how the unnamed woman's experiences of violence and social control in the domestic (1:6) and public sphere (5:7) can serve as a tool to examine the similar treatment of Spike Lee's modern cinematic character, Nola Darling.

CHAPTER IV

S/HE'S GOTTA HAVE IT: BLACK FEMALE SEXUALITY IN THE SONG OF SONGS AND ON THE SCREEN

In the Netflix revamp of his 1986 film *She's Gotta Have It*, Spike Lee explores the familiar territory of his native Fort Greene, Brooklyn delving into the aftershocks of the 2016 election, gentrification, feminism, and the black lives matter movement. In his 2017 adaptation Lee's heroine, Nola Darling, resembles his original 1986 character but with some significant updates. For instance, while the Nola of 2017 remains a young, black, visual artist living and working in Forte Green, Brooklyn, rather than being merely polyamorous, Nola is also bisexual. In the original film she dates three men and is portrayed as vaguely bi-curious. In the updated version, however, she juggles four lovers: three men, Jamie, Greer and Mars, and one woman, Opal.[1] A constant in both the 1986 and 2017 versions is that Nola is unapologetic about her artistic and sexual freedom of expression; yet, despite her efforts to escape the conventional expectation of female monogamy, her body remains at risk of violence by virtue of its color, gender, and location in a patriarchal world. In a similar way, the self-possession of the "dark and comely" woman we encounter in *Song of Songs* fails to protect her from the perceptions, biases, and violence of the wider social context upon which her story-world is based.

[1] Unlike the 1986 version in which Opal is portrayed as a sinister and predatory caricature of a lesbian, the 2017 edition presents Opal as a fully formed person with whom Nola seeks a monogamous relationship at the end of season one. Season two begins eighteen months into Nola and Opal's relationship. The disillusion of this long-term relationship functions as an artistic and emotional catalyst for Nola.

Despite both women's attempts to transcend gender, race, and sexual norms, they remain subjected to the control of both familial and larger social structures.

Addressing the complicated intersections of masculinity and power, Arthur Brittan notes that, within western culture, "[M]en are commonly described as aggressive, assertive, independent, competitive, insensitive, and so on."[2] These traits are so closely associated with masculinity that they are often thought to be innate. Instead these traits belong to the "[i]deology of patriarchy" that "[j]ustifies and naturalizes male domination."[3] In general, gender theorists find the established gender binary to be a social construction consisting of "attributes that constitute culturally approved notions of 'masculinity' and 'femininity.'"[4] Applying gender theory to biblical texts, feminist biblical scholar Cheryl B. Anderson notes that the construction of gender is polarized creating a paradigm of male dominance and female submission, which inevitably leads to violence. Aside from the social limitations of gender, race or perceptions of race contribute to the treatment of these women. As discussed prior, race has come to be understood by some factions of the academy as a 'social construction,' meaning that "[r]ace and races are products of social thought and relations. Not objective, inherent, or fixed, they correspond to no biological or genetic reality; rather, races are categories that society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient."[5] Still others ascribe to the 'realist' understanding of race, noting the tangible effects of racism and racist institutions

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[2] Arthur Brittan, *Masculinity and Power* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 3-4.
[3] Ibid., 4.
[4] Cheryl B. Anderson, "A Survey of the Laws on Women in the Book of the Covenant and the Deuteronomic Law," in *Women, Ideology, and Violence: Critical Theory and the Construction of Gender in the Book of the Covenant and the Deuteronomic Law* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 77.
[5] Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, "Introduction," in *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 8.

on the lives and bodies of people of color. Realists view racism as "[a] means by which society allocates privilege and status."[6] As a scholar I can understand race to be a social construction but, as an outside observer, I can hardly deny the tangible social realities of race in America. Because this project seeks to analyze how race and/or perceptions of racial difference contribute to the bodily treatment of our two female protagonists, the 'realist' definition of race will be applied throughout this chapter.

To illustrate how race, gender, and historical contexts contribute to the policing of black women's bodies, I offer four examples: two from the *Song of Songs* and two from Lee's narrative world, including one scene from his original 1986 film and one scene from his 2017 Netflix adaptation. In these related episodes both Nola and the unnamed woman are punished by relatives (1:5), an intimate partner (1986) or assaulted in the street by strangers (5:7; 2017). In order to demonstrate the cultural and structural similarities between these two narratives, this essay will apply Paul C. Taylor's philosophy of black aesthetics, space theory, and Fiona Black's analysis of grotesque figuration to these depictions of violence against our sexually free, black female protagonists.

Historical Context of the Song and Lee's Narrative Worlds

As a unit of erotic poems most likely composed during the post-exilic period, the Song of Songs offers modern readers a glimpse into the poet(s) Persian influences and

[6] Ibid., 21.

post-exilic anxieties, which I argue are expressed through sequences of violence.[7] To this end Renita Weems writes

> The fundamental assumption here is that poets, like ancient and modern speakers, design their messages with a specific audience in mind; to instruct, build upon, defend, challenge, or correct prevailing assumptions. In other words, literature is inescapably political. In the case of the *Song of Songs,* the subtle defensive tone of the book hints [that] the poet understood that some of the aspect(s) of the lover's relationship were in contradiction to prevailing norms. She builds off her assumptions about her audience and exploits their own utopian desires, as she attempts to uncover and debunk the respectable prejudices of her audience in her defense of their right to love one another.[8]

As previously discussed, some of the 'respectable prejudices' of the Song's intended audience were likely related to ancient sexual ethics, in which the onus of female virginity lay in the hands of men, specifically fathers. In addition to the issue of premarital sex, the Song brings race and/or class into the conversation through the women's self-described blackness.

Given its protagonist's subtle defensive tone, how might the Song potentially affect its audience? This question is provoked by the Song's placement within the *Writings*. Leading this reader to wonder: was the Song meant to instruct the audience? It

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[7] Roland E. Murphy, "Introduction," in *The Song of Songs: A Commentary on the Book of Canticles or The Song of Songs,* ed. S. Dean McBride, Jr. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 4- 5. As previously mentioned, Murphy dates the Song as a post-exilic work given its substantial use of Aramaisms and Persian loan words. Cf. Michael V. Fox, "Language, Dating and Historical Context," in *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 189. Fox concurs with Murphy, adding that the Song's language resembles Mishnaic Hebrew, leading him to conclude that the Song's language is not earlier than the Second Temple period. See also, Michael V. Fox, "What the Love Songs Were Used for: Function and Social Setting," in *The Song of Songs: and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 227-42. Fox notes that the Song could have functioned as a courting or marriage song, as a sacred marriage liturgy, or as the less likely love magic. He also notes of later midrashic interpretations which read the Song as a mystical allegory, describing the quest of the individual soul for God. For more on the later Christian allegorical readings, which sought to mitigate the overt sexual language and imagery of the Song see Murphy, 11-28.

[8] Renita J. Weems, "Song of Songs" in *Women's Bible Commentary: Expanded Edition*, eds. Carol A. Newsome and Sharon H. Ringe (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 167.

seems unlikely that the Song, as a work of erotic literature, was meant to function as wisdom; though allegorical interpretations have lent credence to the Song's placement alongside the wisdom texts' ascribed to Solomon. To my mind, the 'wisdom' proffered by the Song lies in its episodes of violence, which instruct the audience via a reinforcement of existing social mores along racial/class, gender, and sexual lines.

Similarly, to the 'wisdom' of the Song, Spike Lee's narrative can be interpreted as a warning to his audience. As much as Lee's 1986 film pushes back against gendered sexual conventions in the black community, it can also be understood as a cautionary tale, exploring what *can* happen to a black woman who chooses to 'have sex like a man.' Lee's modern cinematic take on blackness stems from his identity as a black man coming of age in 1980's Brooklyn. As Melvin Donaldson notes, "The actual experiences of black men, Lee contends in his films, result from the intersections of race and economics, usurping black men's access into power structures." [9] Consequently, the policing of black women's bodies by a patriarchal society that also disenfranchises black men, can lead to the displacement of anger onto the bodies of black women at the hands of black men, a trope that is played out in Lee's 1986 film and 2017 adaptation.[10] The threads of gender-

[9] Melvin Donaldson, "Inside Men: Black Masculinity in the Films of Spike Lee and John Singleton," in Millennial Masculinity: Men in Contemporary American Cinema (Detroit: Wayne State University, 2012), 225.

[10] Paul C. Taylor, "Assembly, Not Birth," in *Black is Beautiful: A Philosophy of Black Aesthetics* (West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, 2016), 17. This chapter lacks the space to fully address the display of black masculinity presented in the violent street scene. But, Taylor's insights can help us to historically contextualize the scene. He writes, "The twentieth-century struggle for black emancipation, whether waged by reformists or revolutionaries, remained for too many a struggle for black heterosexual manhood, with emancipation imagined as both condition and consequence of the black man assuming his rightful place at the head of the black family and/or nation. This patriarchal and phallocentric stunting of black liberatory aspirations notwithstanding, decolonization is, in part, a matter of uprooting the structures of 'objectification and dehumanization' that inform and sustain the colonial and neo-colonial projects. To the extent that the hegemonic conceptions of sex and gender are among these structures, the convergence of nationalism and patriarchy thus indicate the incompleteness of the decolonizing projects."

based violence that run between the world of the Song and Lee's narratives are grounded in real social rules meant to restrict the movements of women. The role of gender is clear, but how much does race and/or class play into the violence perpetrated against our female protagonists? The purpose of this chapter is to explore the complex collisions of gender, race/class and space, and to come to an understanding of why and how such strikingly similar acts of violence can be found in both an ancient work of erotic literature and the contemporary cinematic works of Spike Lee.

Somatic Aesthetics: Beauty, Representation, and Violence

The unnamed woman of the Song describes herself as "black and/but beautiful," a description which has been traditionally interpreted as a reference to class, as her skin has been darkened through labor in the sun. To this, Weems suggests that the woman speaker, forced by her brothers to tend the vineyards (v.6a), may be the victim of class prejudice, which accounts for her defensive tone. Weems also suggests that it is possible to read the lovers as differentiated by race or class.[11] As established in the previous chapter, contemporary understandings of race do not have direct analogues in the ancient world. Rather, race for the ancients functioned as a marker of geographical difference, not as an indicator of one's place in a biological hierarchy.

Because race in the ancient world cannot be easily mapped onto modern understandings of race, this project will avoid the application of contemporary American racial and class tensions onto this ancient text, and will instead investigate the significant similarities that exist between these women and their narrative worlds. For this reason, I

[11] Weems, 168.

leave open the possibility that the unnamed women's blackness may be perceived by outside viewers as a marker of racial difference, class difference, or a combination of the two. This ambiguity is meant to ease the comparison between Lee's clearly African American protagonist and the Song's 'black and/but beautiful' unnamed woman.[12]

Addressing the complex interplay between perception and representation Paul C. Taylor offers a two-fold philosophy of somatic aesthetics, which includes "sarkaesthetics" and "somaesthetics."[13] He writes

> One of these has to do with the way the body is regarded from the outside, as 'an object grasped by our external senses.' This is the body treated as an object of aesthetic value, and as an object of representation. The other kind of somatic aesthetic has to do with embodiment—with the way the body is experienced, as it were, from the inside. We achieve the second orientation to the body not by way or representations presented to the external senses but through the 'inner' senses of proprioception, which enable us to treat the body not as an object of aesthetic value but as a medium or site for the creation of aesthetic value.[14]

For sarkaesthetics, the viewer's valuation and assigned representation of a given subject depends upon the external attributes or adornment displayed on that particular body. Alternatively, somaesthetics allows for the body to be valued from the inside, and understood by the body's inhabitant as a space for the creation of aesthetic value, or

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[12] Race and class are inextricably connected in the African American experience, as racist institutions and legislation have been implemented since the time after Reconstruction to create and maintain an underclass of black people. Lee uses gentrification as a tool with which to address the racial and socio-economic changes taking place in Fort Greene, a predominately black section of Brooklyn. As an artist Nola constantly struggles to pay her rent. The specter of eviction looms heavy in the background of Lee's narrative, demonstrating how wealthy whites are able to usurp and transform the community, oftentimes displacing black people who have lived in Fort Green for generations.

[13] Taylor, 107. Taylor term "sarkeasthetics" uses the Greek word *sarx* in a way similar to that of the New Testaments writers: to distinguish the body from the spirit or soul. This term has been used to refer to the fallenness of sinfulness of the body, but Taylor chooses to use the non-evaluative sense of the word. *Sarx* for Taylor refers to the body as observed from the outside, whereas *soma* is used to refer to the body as experienced internally.

[14] Ibid.,108.

simply as a feeling of being at home in one's own body. Both Nola and the unnamed woman embody a combination of sarkaesthetics and somaesthetics: their black bodies represent something to the outside viewer that neither woman can control; and both women find contentment and pleasure in their bodies and have autonomy over them. The women consider themselves beautiful and they use their bodies as sites for the creation of aesthetic value by adorning themselves in clothing that makes them feel beautiful and powerful, but also, intentionally or unintentionally, attracts the attention of outside viewers.[15] Addressing the enigma of beauty as it appears in the Song, Francis Landy writes of the "[p]owerful charge of repressed feeling" that can occur when one encounters beauty, followed closely by the simultaneous "[w]ish to destroy it and the wish to preserve it."[16] This puzzling drive both to attain and to destroy beauty will be addressed through the violent interludes that disrupt the idyllic world of the Song (1:6; 5:7) and Lee's hopeful, yet realistic, narrative worlds (1986; 2017).

The Necessity of Fidelity: Gender, Race, and Violence in the Domestic Sphere

In both the Song and Lee's narrative worlds, female fidelity is of utmost importance.[17] This necessity is based in the sexual mores of both the ancient and contemporary world, and because of this the reader/hearer can assume that the women's lack of chastity and/or fidelity have contributed to their harsh treatment. In fact, both protagonists tell us as much. Both the Song and *She's Gotta Have It* begin from the

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[15] Ibid. Taylor writes that sarkaesthetic practices, "which involve styling the body in accordance with rules for its presentation and visual consumption, are intimately related to somaesthetic practices of bodily stylization."

[16] Francis Landy, "Beauty and the Enigma," in *Paradoxes of Paradise: Identity and Difference in the Song of Songs* (Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1983), 142.

[17] When read through an allegorical lens, the Song's focus on fidelity can be understood as a reference to Israel's religious identity as God's chosen people—Israel's election theology.

female protagonists' point of view, allowing them to explain what has happened to them in their own words. Just as Nola speaks directly to the camera/audience to narrate her story, the unnamed woman speaks directly to the daughters of Jerusalem/audience. To begin, the unnamed woman says

5. I am black and beautiful,
O daughters of Jerusalem
Like the tents of Kedar,
Like the curtains of Solomon.
6. Do not stare at me because I am swarthy,
Because the sun has looked upon me.
The sons of my mother became angry with me,
They made me guard the vineyards,
My own vineyard I did not guard.

Regarding the woman's blackness Weems asserts that

> The protagonist assumes, whether correctly or incorrectly, that her blackish complexion, which she claims was the result of having been put to labor by her brothers in her vineyard, made her the object of the stares of her female companions, the Jerusalem daughters (1:5-6).Whether the women stare at her out of admiration, prejudice, or curiosity one can only guess from the other statements in the poetry.[18]

The protagonist's self-designation, *šāhôr*ah *anî venavah* "I am black and/but beautiful," is defensive, indicating her awareness that the color of her skin, either innate or acquired has set her apart from her counterparts, the daughters of Jerusalem. In the next phrase the unnamed woman takes on a defiant tone through her use of the construction *benî 'imî*, meaning "sons of my mother," a term used to distance herself from her male relatives.[19] The brothers' attempts to control their sister remain ineffective because the female lover

[18] Weems, 160, 168.
[19] Michael V. Fox, "Love and Lovers in the Love Songs," in *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 300-03. The woman's father is never mentioned, though mothers, either the mother of the male or female lover, are mentioned on seven occasions.

turns her labor into sport, playfully alluding to her own desirability and sexual impropriety stating, "My own vineyard I did not keep."[20] The double determination, *karmî šellî*, "my vineyard which is mine" functions as an emphatic reference to the maiden's sexual maturity and activity.[21] This possessive language tells the reader/hearer in no uncertain terms, that the female protagonist recognizes her body as her own. She has and will continue to exert control over it, despite her brothers' efforts to guard her. In line with Taylor's somatic aesthetics, the unnamed woman seems to recognize her body as both "[a] site for the creation of aesthetic value" and "[a]s an object of aesthetic value."[22] She finds herself to be beautiful despite her black or blackened skin, and her lover, as an outside observer, agrees.

Furthermore, the desire of the brothers to control the virginal integrity of their sister seems to represent an authorial slip, which inadvertently plucks the reader/listener out of the alternate reality of the erotic poem and back into the racial, gendered, and social constraints of ancient Palestine. For example, the earliest stratum of biblical law does not explicitly forbid sexual intercourse outside of marriage. Rather, such eschewing of chastity violated the property rights of a girl's father and reduced the daughter's bride-price.[23] Because the father is not mentioned in the Song of Songs, his absence requires the brothers to protect their sister's virginity. The brothers see monetary value in their

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[20] Roland E. Murphy, *The Song of Songs: A Commentary on the Book of Canticles or The Song of Songs*, ed. S. Dean McBride, Jr. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 128. Vineyards are a well-known sexualized symbol within the erotic genre that often allude to sexual activity and/or fertility. See also, Marvin Pope, Song of Songs: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1977), 326. "The reference presumably is to the maiden's body and specifically her sexual parts. If the brothers made her a guardian of chastity, she did not protect her own."

[21] Pope, 326.

[22] Taylor, *Black is Beautiful*, 108.

[23] Fox, 315.

sister's body, and punish her for diminishing their returns. They banish her to the vineyard perhaps as a ploy to distance her from her lover, to reduce her desirability through exposure to the sun, or as a means of securing as much labor as possible from her prior to conceding her to marriage. Neither the brothers' plan nor larger social constraints, as we will shortly observe in 5:7, deter the unnamed woman from seeking out her lover.

Throughout the poem the lovers remain exclusively devoted to one another. To this Fox writes

> The Song does assume a sexual ethic, but the sexual virtue cherished is not chastity. It is fidelity: unquestioned devotion to one's lover, a devotion that can make one risk the anger of family, the teasing of peers, the violence of society's guardians, and the dangers of the night to reach and unite with one's lover.[24]

This pointed adherence to fidelity stands in stark contrast to the Song's unquestioned references to premarital sex. The sex that occurs in the Song is not taboo, it is natural and experienced without shame. "While a society with strong religious strictures on unmarried sexual activity might well produce a "naughty" literature that toys with forbidden fruit, it is surprising to find such a society producing a poem that accepts premarital sexuality so naturally that it does not even try to draw attention to its own liberality."[25] However, Fox notes that there are vast areas of Israelite life, society, and attitudes that we know little about, because the majority of preserved texts served religious or ideological functions.

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[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid., 414-15 "In the case of Canticles, it was not the book itself but an interpretation of it that served religious purposes."

This vacillation between supposed liberality and the enforcement of social rules through the paternal restrictions of the brothers, reveals the authorship's ambivalence for the fantasy woman they have created. They are at once attracted to her sexual magnetism and fearful of what her boundary crossing might mean or how it might manifest itself in Israelite society. Because of this, the authors are compelled to punish their protagonist in order to reinforce the patriarchal status quo and remind the audience that, though they might get swept up in the story, they themselves remain tied to established social rules. It is striking that, even as the authors create this sexually aberrant woman, they cling to one of Israel's most highly valued social boundaries: fidelity.[26]

And yet, at the end of the verse the authors flaunt the unnamed woman's resilience to punishment through the sexualized language and narrative space of the vineyard. It is they who place upon her lips the playful and defiant words, "my own vineyard I did not keep," a line that foreshadows the remainder of the Song, which details the lover's clandestine liaisons. In this way the Song's authors cycle through desiring a sexually active female partner and fearing that very same sexual power. It is telling that the authorships' response to their own discomfort with overt female sexuality is to punish the very character they themselves have created. Even from within the imagined world of the erotic poem our protagonist's body requires male control, which reinforces the social hierarchy and associated gender mores of the authors' and, by proxy, the audiences', social world. The unnamed woman is not real, per se, but she represents real women. The social controls to which she is subjected are real and would have been imposed upon

[26] Fidelity in marriage, particularly the fidelity of women, was essential for ensuring paternity. Paternity was inextricably linked to the transferal of land to legitimate heirs. Fidelity to YHWH is also a significant part of Israelite identity. Jewish and Christian allegorical interpretations have read the Song as depicting the singular love between God and Israel.

flesh and blood women in ancient Israel. It is with these real women in mind, both ancient and modern, that we turn our attention to Spike Lee's contemporary "dark and comely" woma(e)n, the similarly enigmatic Nola Darling.

Fidelity Continued: Race, Gender, and Violence in Lee's Narrative World

"They would come from far away
And often gather there all day
To show their love
And see which one would stay
But to her it mattered not
For loyalty was not her lot
Her answer was for not for them
To know"
-*Nola*, Lyrics by Felix Arndt, Score by Bill Lee

The theme of fidelity pervades Lee's original (1986) version of *She's Gotta Have It*, prompting the audience to grapple with their own prejudices and cultural expectations with regard to sex, gender and race. By contrast to the unnamed woman's trademark monogamy, Nola rejects the social convention of fidelity to one man, choosing polyamory instead. Reflecting upon the film's radical portrayal of black female sexuality, Manthia Diawara writes

> It is clear to me now that a large part of the success of the film depends on the audience's desire for a modern and independent character like Nola in the black community. Nola's role is threatening, yet attractive, because she appropriates the stereotype of the promiscuous black woman and redeploys it as an expression of her modernity.[27]

Similarly, to the woman in the Song, Nola is penalized for choosing to engage in sexual relationships that fall outside her social norms. However, in Nola's case her unjust

[27] Manthia Diawara, "Homeboy Cosmopolitan," in *In Search of Africa* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 259.

punishment comes at the hands of her intimate partner Jamie rather than from her family. In this scene Nola is raped by her eldest lover because of her decision to remain polyamorous. Jamie's assault functions as the crescendo of the film and afterwards Nola breaks off her relationships with all three men, choosing celibacy instead.[28]

By wanting to possess Nola completely, Jamie effectively extinguishes the overt sexuality that first drew him to her. Through the rape Jamie subverts the act of love making, which he had previously desired to have exclusively with Nola. For example, during the rape Jamie asks "whose pussy is this?" to which Nola tearfully responds, "It's yours."[29] Jamie seems to view Nola's body as an object to be possessed. Ultimately, his act of violence transforms her body from an idealized representation of a desirable mate into a wretched, hated, and grotesque object that no longer holds aesthetic value. Jamie sacrifices Nola's body in order to restore balance to the gender paradigm, and in doing so erases the internal aesthetic value that Nola had intentionally cultivated. In this way, the vibrant woman we met at the start of the film is left traumatized and cowed. Jamie's abusive actions go so far as to nullify the very title of the film "She's Gotta Have It." As the victim of a sexual assault, Nola no longer wants *it*, but now Jamie no longer wants her either. As Jamie leaves Nola's apartment he says, "Yeah, I'm trying to dog you the best I can, and what bothers me is I enjoyed it."[30] By confessing his violent behavior Jamie includes himself in the grotesque figuration. To this Diawara observes

> Jamie's is the most compelling of the three male voices, and therefore the one most capable of exposing Nola as an unreliable narrator. In fact, Nola's sexuality, which is expressed through masturbation, the

[28] Spike Lee, dir. 1986. *She's Gotta Have It*. 40 Acres and a Mule Filmworks. DVD, MGM, 2008. Rape scene: 1:07:37- 1:10: 27.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid.

> desire for multiple partners, lesbian relations, and sadomasochism, is so threatening to black male viewers that they automatically identify with Jamie's point of view…But the male viewer's identification with Jamie is not without problems…When he arrives at Nola's home he rapes her, because he believes that it is not love that she needs. He commits rape to punish her, and to take his revenge on her. Male viewers back away from Jamie at this point, feeling guilty and ashamed.[31]

Nola's polyamory has insulted, and to a certain extent, emasculated Jamie, and because of this he takes away her bodily autonomy. Through the rape Jamie regains power and extinguishes the overt sexuality that had first drawn him to Nola.

Nola's sense of control in her home and command over her aesthetic value are shattered through Jamie's rape, which not only deprives Nola of her bodily autonomy, but also upends the sexually free space she had constructed for herself and shared with her lovers. Lee demonstrates the transformation of Nola's space through his camera work, which pans away from Nola softly crying face down on her bed, and towards the wall behind her. Lee focuses on a mural of gaping, clownish townsfolk who bear witness to Nola's ordeal. The mural is layered with newspaper headlines, one of which reads "honor students slain by cops." By panning the camera to the mural, Nola's personal tragedy loses its specificity and becomes grouped in with the myriad of systemic injustices memorialized on her wall. The faces seem to reflect the community's varied reactions to these injustices including the rape: some faces are stoic, helplessly watching, others are full of sorrow, and still others are scornful, suggesting that Nola (and perhaps the honors student) bears some responsibility for her grotesque-ified state.

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[31] Diawara, 261.

Image 1.[32]

[32] Lee, 1986. In this on-set photograph Lee stands in front of the mural dressed as the character Mars, Nola's youngest lover and a street-smart Brooklynite. In the mural prominent black leaders are featured such as Malcolm X (top center). Around the faces are newspaper clippings detailing violence against the black community, most notably, instances of police brutality.

The climactic rape scene, in which Jamie abandons any hope that Nola will conform to social norms and become his faithful girlfriend, can be juxtaposed to the earlier park scene in which Jamie treats Nola to a birthday picnic and private ballet performance in Fort Greene Park.[33] At this point in the film Jamie thinks that if he treats Nola like a girlfriend, buying her gifts and treating her to novel and romantic experiences, that he can woo her into monogamy. The park scene is also significant for its use of color; it is the only scene shot in color, engendering the park with a *Wizard of Oz* type aura. This of course, is a deliberate cinematic reference. In the scene Jamie instructs Nola to close her eyes and say "There's no place like home. There's no place like home. There's no place like home." When she opens her eyes they have been transported from her apartment to Fort Greene Park and the film has changed from black-and-white to color, as if to signal a transition from reality to a dream world. Analyzing Lee's use of the metaphor of "[p]ublic-space-as-home" Diawara notes that "The park, and by extension, Brooklyn thus constitute a black nationalist space which is contrasted to Manhattan, across the bridge. According to the myth, black men feel at home in Brooklyn and do not have to resist stereotypes there."[34] We see this through the ease with which Jamie, a native Brooklynite comfortably inhabits the space of the park. It is the space where he

[33] The ballet dancers perform to the song Nola; whose lyrics I have used throughout the chapter. This choice of song is strange given that Jamie's elaborate birthday celebration is meant to entice Nola into an exclusive relationship. The lyrics describe Nola's polyamorous lifestyle and seem to foreshadow her impending rape. "There she goes on her merry way, though she's only queen for a day." Indeed, Jamie makes her a queen for a day, but when she refuses to see him exclusively, he rapes her, an act which effectively reduces her stately form to that of a crumpled and grotesque object. Lee uses the score to the song *Nola* in the opening credits to his 2017 adaptation of *She's Gotta Have It*. He also uses the lyrical version as Nola's ringtone, which interrupts her birthday celebration with Jamie. In the scene Mars calls to wish her a happy birthday while she is eating cake in bed with Jamie. Jamie is frustrated that her full attention is not on him. Though the Jamie of 2017 is not sexually violent, he remains possessive of Nola. Because he is older and more conventional, Jamie is the least able of Nola's lovers to cope with her polyamory.

[34] Diawara, 265.

brings Nola to celebrate her birthday, where he gossips about Nola with her other lovers, Mars and Greer, and where he is interviewed by the omnipotent camera. In this way the park is not only a space for leisure, but also a cultural space for black men. It is a space in which black men can be free.

Similarly, the private, domestic space of Nola's bedroom, which serves as the narrative setting of most of the episodes in the film, also functions as a space in which Nola's lovers can be free, but this freedom is mediated by Nola's polyamory. Each lover can express himself sexually in Nola's bedroom, but it is never far from his mind that he is not the only man enjoying the space or Nola's body. For example, during the rape Jamie imagines (and the audience sees) what it might look like when Mars and Greer 'fuck' Nola. He angrily asks, "Is this the way you like it? Does Greer do it like this? What about Mars? Who else!? Who else!?"[35] To this Diawara observes "[W]hen the other characters try to construct their image of Nola, they always end up in her bedroom, under her control."[36] Yet, this control is short-lived. Through the act of rape Jamie takes control of Nola's body and by proxy her bedroom. Much like the vineyard, which is usurped and transformed into a space of punishment by the brothers, Jamie's rape takes over Nola's body and her bedroom, spaces that represented and facilitated her sexual

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[35] Lee, 1986, 1:09:40-1:10:15.

[36] Diawara, 260. C.f. *She's Gotta Have It*. 2017. "#DaJumpOff (Doctrine)," directed by Spike Lee. Season 1, episode 1. Aired November 23, 2017 in Netflix. In his 2017 adaptation Lee takes the space of the bedroom a step further, making it the sole space in which Nola makes love to her partners. When Jamie asks "How come we only make love in your bed?" she replies, "You know I can only make love in my own loving bed." She goes on to chide Jamie, noting that they can't make love in his bed because he is married and has a middle school aged son at home. This affair becomes a moral flashpoint in season two of the series. Nola's rules of engagement are another way in which Lee flips the script and confronts his viewers with a sexually dominant black woman acting in ways not often associated with women. Like a man, Nola demands her lovers come to her.

independence. Jamie, like the brothers, is able to relinquish Nola's bodily and spatial autonomy when her actions do not benefit him or acquiesce to his ordering of the world.

As specified earlier, the brothers are economically and socially motivated to safeguard their sister's virginity. From the brother's point of view, and by proxy that of the intended audience, the sister is their property (the father is mysteriously absent in the Song), and she has no right to claim autonomy over her own body and sexuality. From within the confines of ancient marriage laws, their sister's flouting of sexual autonomy shames them. Their punishment is a means of taking back control. And on the part of the authors, the punishment reinforces social rules and familial structures by which the audience is meant to abide.[37] Relatedly, Jamie's violence reveals the injustice he feels he has endured. He punishes Nola because her sexual behavior has enraged, shamed and emasculated him. Because Nola is a self-styled, modern black woman who defies social containment, she is worthy of punishment and 'correction' even from within the safety of her home.

Location and Representation: Gender, Race, and Violence in the Streets

"There she goes on her merry way
though she's only queen for a day
Boy and girl often take this world
so you better mind what you say"

-*Nola*, score by Bill Lee

[37] Roland E. Murphy, *The Song of Songs: A Commentary on the Book of Canticles or The Song of Songs*, ed. S. Dean McBride, Jr. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990),198-9. The brothers do offer their sister's hand in marriage at some indefinite time in the future (8:8-10). The use of the "wall" metaphor in these verses has garnered much scholarly debate with some arguing that the wall represents the unnamed woman's chastity, while others argue that the wall indicates that the brothers will sequester their sister in order to maintain her chastity.

Thus far we have seen bodily restrictions placed upon the unnamed woman within the context of the family (1:5). Now let us turn our attention to the state-sanctioned violence imposed upon her in the city streets:

7.
a. I met the watchmen
b. Who patrol the town;
c. They struck me, they bruised me.
d. The guards of the walls
e. Stripped me of my mantle.[38]

In this second instance of violence the woman is beaten and stripped by the city watchmen seemingly for being in the streets, a space which R.W. Connell refers to as an "[i]nstitution" dominated by men.[39] Additionally, the streets are an environment with particular social relations, and unwritten scripts. Connell opines that the streets can be both "[b]attleground" and "[t]heatre" noting that

> People convey messages about themselves by dress, jewelry, posture, movement, speech. The street is one of the greatest theatres of sexuality and styles of masculinity and femininity…The Street as a milieu thus shows the same structure of gender relations as the family and state.[40]

To this end, J. Cheryl Exum notes that the woman's ordeal in the streets "[r]eflect the social mores and expectations of a patriarchal society, in which men enjoyed a social freedom that women could not expect to share."[41]

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[38] Song of Songs 5:7, *The Jewish Study Bible, TANAKH Translation*.
[39] R.W. Connell, "Gender Regimes and the Gender Order," in *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 132-141. Connell notes that the streets are a space often associated with the intimidation and harassment of women.
[40] Ibid.
[41] J. Cheryl Exum, "Song of Songs," in *Women's Bible Commentary, Twentieth Anniversary Editions, Revised and Updated*, eds. Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 252.

This violent encounter of 5:7 stands in stark contrast to the woman's previous innocuous encounter with the watchmen, *hašmᵊrîm,* in 3:3-4. In this prior scene the female protagonist asks the watchmen if they have seen her beloved, but before they are able to answer, the lovers are reunited. Is her failure in chapter 5 to discover the man at once, as in 3:4, enough to account for her physical beating, as Murphy suggests?[42] Or is being an unaccompanied woman in the street at night enough to warrant this violence?[43] In order to answer this question, let us consider the contrasting picture of the *hašmᵊrîm* in the book of Esther (2:3) where they function as harem guards. In this instance the guards, as we might assume, protect the bodily integrity of the king's harem. By contrast, the guards in the Song use their state-sanctioned authority to harm the unnamed woman, rather than aiding her in finding her male companion or returning her safely to her mother's house.

The spatial locations of the guards and the authoritative bodies that employ them seem to affect the manner in which the women in their care are treated. For instance, the women of the harem are "safely" kept (held captive) within the private space of the king's palace for the enjoyment of the king. The watchmen protect/control the harem because their bodies belong to the King. The unnamed woman, on the other hand, belongs to herself and chooses her lover, going as far as to seek him out in the street. Her presence in the street seems to be interpreted as an affront by the guards, who respond to her with sexual sadism. According to Elizabeth Wilson, "The protection and control of women have everywhere gone hand in hand, but cities have posed a challenge to men's

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[42] Murphy, 171.

[43] This current essay lacks the space to adequately address this specific form of violent masculinity that seems to appear within policing and military bodies. This topic will be addressed in the following chapter.

ability to retain their hold. The city is the zone of individual freedom. There, the ties of family and kinship may be loosened and avenues of escape may open up."[44] Indeed, the unnamed woman uses the street as an escape from family ties, namely the watchful eyes of her brothers (though she returns to the domestic safety of her mother's house with her lover in tow after both encounters with the watchmen in 3:4; 5:7), but the city also poses dangers for unaccompanied women. Writing on the place of women in the streets of Victorian London, Wilson opines that "One effect of the new anonymity of the great city was that women became more vulnerable to the 'male gaze.'"[45] In a similar way, the unnamed woman's presence in the street make her a target for observation, misinterpretation, and harassment, as respectable women did not venture out into the streets at night.[46] The unnamed woman does not acknowledge that her lone presence in the streets at night is objectionable, but the watchmen find her at fault and administer punishment. Wilson goes onto note that in Victorian England

> Popular literature was filled with tales of encounters between the respectable and the rough. Journalists and reformers (Josephine Butler, for example) wrote of occasions when respectable women were mistaken for prostitutes with alarming consequences such as arrest and detention. The very fact that such mistakes could occur undermined ancient beliefs in the 'natural' distinctions between ranks, or, in modern nineteenth-century parlance, classes. In the same way, the possibility that a virtuous woman could be mistaken for one who has 'fallen' made the barriers of convention and respectability seem fragile indeed.[47]

Prostitution was a fact of ancient life, and was not illegal as it is in our modern times, but prostitutes also occupied the margins of society. As previously mentioned, the Hebrew

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[44] Elizabeth Wilson, "From Kitsch to the City Sublime," in *The Sphinx in the City: Urban Life, the Control of Disorder, and Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 16.
[45] Ibid., 27.
[46] Marten Stol, "Prostitution," in *Women in the Ancient Neat East* (Berlin: De Gruyter Inc., 2016), 403.
[47] Wilson, 30.

term *ḥerem,* meaning "excommunication," is indicative of a prostitute's social status: she did not belong to a family, and therefore lacked men who could protect her or provide swift recourse in instances of abuse.[48] Based upon this historical contextualization, it can be intuited that the guards perceive the unnamed woman to be a prostitute with little social capital, therefore they can treat her as they please. In perceiving her as a prostitute, a person whose social function was to be an object of desire and sexual fulfillment, the guards are able to justify their objectification of her body. Furthermore, their own social station insulates them from punishment. As representatives of the State there is no recourse to their own abusive actions. [49]

In the scene, the guards strip the woman of her "mantle," *rĕḏîḏ*, a word that appears only one other time in the Hebrew Bible.[50] Given the paucity of this word scholars have long debated its meaning, with some reading "mantle" as a cloak meant to protect the woman from the night's cold, as a frock possibly associated with sacred prostitution and the goddess, Ishtar, or as a garment of modesty; while still others view the mantle as some other unspecified garment.[51] Did the guards find her to be beautiful?

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[48] Stol, 399; 417-18.

[49]Aubrey Clayton, The Statistical Paradox of Police Killings, *Boston Globe*, June 11, 2020, accessed August 21, 2020.https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/06/11/opinion/statistical-paradox-police-killings/. The guard's abuse of power brings to mind the many recent instances of police brutality against people of color in modern America. Cf. Fatima Jamil, The Thrill and Fear of 'Hey, Beautiful,' *New York Times*, Opinion, June 30, 2017, accessed August 21, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/30/opinion/trans-sexual-assault-black-women.html?searchResultPosition=4. Aside from the racial bias embedded in America's system of policing, the unnamed woman's gender in the precarious space of the street, evokes yet another related issue: the abuse and killing of trans women, especially black trans women. Unfortunately, this project lacks the space for a fulsome discussion of this urgent issue. However, a future direction of this project contends that a trans reading of the Song's unnamed woman would allow for a continued discussion of the streets as an "institution" ruled by men as well as a liminal queer milieu where aberrant sexual self-expression can be either praised (carnival) or scorned. Addressing the complicated relationship between beauty, desire and violence, Fatima Jamil details the thrills and fears of existing as a black trans woman in New York City.

[50] "Mantle," *rĕḏîḏ* appears in Isaiah 3:23 in a list of items of female finery.

[51] Marvin Pope, *Song of Songs: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New

Powerful? A vulnerable and easy target? A woman of status? A common laborer? A goddess? Or a whore? In other words, what did her body, by virtue of its blackness, adornments, and location represent to the city watchmen? The open-endedness of the poem and its borrowing of motifs from both the goddess and Sacred Marriage traditions and the erotic literature of the ancient Near East make it difficult to define the unnamed woman's social status, race or geographic origins. Suffice it to say that her gender, color, clothing and presence in the city streets are enough to incur the wrath (and the arousal) of the city guards.

The poem has established that the woman finds herself to be beautiful and that her lover agrees, yet her particular aesthetic in the space of the streets offends the guards. Do they treat her poorly because of her color? Given the lack of racialist thought in the ancient world, it is more likely that the women's treatment could be attributed to class stratification and socially mandated gender norms than racial difference. From her presence in the city streets in 3:4 and 5:7, one can assume that the woman lives within the

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York: Doubleday & Company, 1977), 527. Translating *rĕḏîḏ* as "veil" is a possible interpretation because both "mantle" and "veil" (*ṣā ʿîp*) are translated by the LXX as *theristron*, "a light mantle worn in summer" or a "veil." It is worth mentioning that the word for "veil," *ṣā ʿîp* does not appear in the Song of Songs, though it does appear in Gen 24:65; 38:14, 19, where Rebecca and Tamar are described as "covering" and "wrapping" themselves. Rebecca covers herself as an act of modesty, when first encountering her future husband, Isaac. Whereas, Tamar veils/covers herself in order to disguise her identity from her father-in-law, Judah as a means of tricking him into fulfilling the mandates of Levirate marriage. The intimation (and necessity) of disguise can also be observed in Ruth 3:3; 14, in which Ruth ventures out at night to find Boaz on the threshing floor, in order to secure (or entrap) redemption/marriage. Disguise is repeated again in v.14 when Boaz, in order to protect Ruth's modesty, or his reputation, instructs her to leave the threshing floor in the early morning "[b]efore one person would distinguish another, for he thought, "Let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor." For a literary critical and feminist interpretation of Ruth see, Danna Nolan Fewell and David Miller Gunn, *Compromising Redemption: Relating Characters in the Book of Ruth* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press), 1990.

The mystery and intrigue surrounding the veil is related to its association with disguise and its connection to sacred prostitutes (*qĕḏēšāh)* and the goddess Ishtar. Reading *rĕḏîḏ* as "veil" as opposed to "mantle" leaves open the association with the goddess, sacred prostitution, and disguise all of which help us to make sense of the violence inflicted upon the Shulamite, who was perhaps mistaken for a prostitute. Or as an allusion to the previously mentioned Inanna/Ishtar myth.

walls of Jerusalem, but this does not necessarily indicate that the woman is of a higher class. In his archaeological excavations of Judah and Jerusalem during the Persian period rebuilding projects of Nehemiah, Ephraim Stern uncovered evidence of a population boom.[52] James D. Purvis notes that "Nehemiah also enforced legislation on mortgages, loans, and interest for the betterment of the economic life of the Judahite citizens (Nehemiah 5). He repopulated Jerusalem by means of a public lottery in which one-tenth of the Jewish population was moved into the city (Nehemiah 11.)"[53] Lastly, based upon the multiple interpretations of the woman's "mantle" mentioned above and in the prior chapter, it remains unclear as to what the guards "see" in the woman when they respond to her with violence. This leads a reader to wonder, do they dislike the body they see, or perhaps do they like it too much? Their violence seems to reveal a complicated passion for this beautiful black woman. A passion that puts them in a compromising position, because as representatives of the state and as men who belong to and benefit from a patriarchal system, they seem both to desire her and to feel the strong urge to punish her for her audacious sense of self and claim to autonomy.

The Song's aura of surveillance is personified by the city watchmen. In fact, they seem to fill the role of omnipotent viewer otherwise occupied by God. Aside from the ever-present gaze of male authority represented by the city watchmen, the audience too takes part in this voyeurism, looking in on the lovers' pleasure as well as the young woman's pain. In her summary of the Song, J. Cheryl Exum poses several questions to

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[52] Ephraim Stern, *Material Culture of the Land of the Bible in the Persian Period 538-332 B.C.* (Warminster, UK/Jerusalem: Aris and Philips/Israel Exploration Society, 1982), 226.
[53] James D. Purvis. "Exile and Return: From the Babylonian Destruction to the Reconstruction of the Jewish State," in *Ancient Israel: From Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple,* Revised and Expanded, ed. Herschel Shanks (Upper Saddle Ridge, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999), 224.

modern readers, namely does the man's description fetishize or objectify the woman's body? Additionally, she asks, "Is the Song then voyeuristic, since the poet presents these bodily descriptions not just for the lovers' but for that of the poem's readers?"[54] A determination of voyeurism as the poem's function is ultimately left up to the individual reader to make, but given the text's erotic genre, it seems clear that the lovers and their world are meant to be seen and enjoyed by the audience perhaps in the context of marriage and/or betrothal ceremonies as Fox earlier suggested, or for other festive contexts as Fisbane has surmised.[55]

The strange and violent interlude of 5:7 leaves the viewers to decide for themselves, based upon communal mores and their own experiences, if the violence was warranted or abhorrent. Either way, the lack of divine intervention seems to reiterate the authors' viewpoint: that the woman has brought the violence upon herself through her defiance of social rules. If we are to take the Song as a sapiential work, the lesson offered is simple: ladies, remember your place in the social hierarchy and recall that your spatial location should be in the home not the street. And yet, a mixed message is also sent to the audience in that the unnamed woman is not deterred by her punishment. After she is beaten and stripped, she continues to seek out her lover, find him and bring him back to her mother's house for a tryst. The fact that the unnamed woman brushes off this violent encounter points to a male authorship, seemingly unaware of how a real flesh-and-blood woman might respond to such deliberate physical violence. But this resilience

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[54] J. Cheryl Exum, "Song of Songs," in *Women's Bible Commentary, Twentieth Anniversary Editions*, Revised and Updated, eds. Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 251.

[55] Michael V. Fox, *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 231. Cf. Michael Fishbane, "Introduction," in *The Jewish Publication Society Commentary: Song of Songs* (Philadelphia: JPS, 2015), xxiii.

also directs the reader/hearer back to the Song's theme of love as an overpowering and all-consuming force. For the unnamed woman, love (and lust) push her to risk physical danger and social opprobrium in order to reunite with her lover. The author's own ambivalence towards punishment allows the audience to grapple with their own mixed desire for and socialized reflex to control this sexually free woman. Additionally, the female protagonist's lack of fear seems odd, and once again points to a male authorship that is either unaware of or uninterested in expressing how a real woman might respond to such deliberate gender-based violence. For example, her maltreatment does not diminish her sex drive or deter her from breaking social rules—she successfully reunites with her lover in the very next scene. In this way, the clever authors produce a sexual fantasy and a paradigmatic victim. Perhaps the violence is simply a part of the (likely male) poet's sexual fantasy?

In a similar way, desire and violence commingle in our final example from Lee's 2017 Netflix adaptation. In this scene Nola is leaving her friend Clorinda's Fort Greene apartment alone at night to return to her own apartment down the block, when she is catcalled by a disembodied voice. When she does not respond "appropriately" to his verbal advances, the assailant rapidly appears grabbing Nola by the wrists and shouting into her face. Nola frantically wrests herself away from the assailant who seems both amused and confused by the fear and rage his words and actions have elicited.

As Nola runs away the assailant yells after her, "Fuck you, then. I don't want that stank pussy anyway. Motherfucking black bitch." Because she has rebuffed him, he claims to no longer want her body, which he originally labeled as "sexy." His angry words are meant to degrade Nola and to assuage his own bruised ego. The viewer can see

the frustration in the man's face and hear a tinge of regret in his voice, for example, as he watches Nola run away, he yells, "fuck, shit."[56] As the camera pans away from the assailant Lee focuses on the flashing red crosswalk sign which seems to echo both the danger of the street and the rage of Nola's assailant. As the light changes to "walk" we see Nola sprinting away and are left to wonder if the assailant is going to follow her. Alarmingly, at the time of the attack, the streets are not deserted. In fact, during the incident two cars pass by the intersection; yet no one comes to Nola's aid. Like the absent deity of the Song, the omnipotent city fails to provide Nola with a hero. Like the Song's audience and the original Nola's painted townsfolk, the modern viewer voyeuristically and helplessly views Nola's pleasure and her pain.

This violent street scene is cleverly foreshadowed at the beginning of the episode; a convention which Lee recycles from his original 1986 film. In the opening minutes of the episode we encounter Nola in the city streets in daytime, where she emphatically states "I love walking the beautiful and nitty gritty streets of New York City, but sometimes walking the beautiful nitty gritty streets, as a woman can be, well, brutal."[57] What follows is a comically rendered series of ever inventive and detailed catcalls from both men and women. The catcalling at the end of the episode, however, takes on a sinister tone. Lee relays this danger to the audience through his camera work, which is uneven and taken from the perspective of the attacker, prowling behind Nola as she walks

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[56] *She's Gotta Have It.* 2017. "#DaJumpoff (DOCTRINE)" directed by Spike Lee. Season 1, episode 1. Aired November 23, 2017 on Netflix. Accessed march 1, 2020. https://www.netflix.com/watch/80117554?trackId=14170286&tctx=2%2C15%2C4348599f-2e96-4be8-b6fb-bd504e8bdb0a-12456016%2C3c67329e-8c51-41f7-b3f4-51479056176f_17695498X3XX1603224041248%2C3c67329e-8c51-41f7-b3f4-51479056176f_ROOT%2C. 31:42-32:37.

[57] Ibid., 2:59-4:50.

towards her apartment. The daytime catcallers are limited in that they cannot physically access Nola without being seen by others, especially during the busy and crowded daylight hours. The nighttime attacker however, is able to hide in the shadows, with both the night and the city architecture functioning as accomplices, allowing the verbal attack to escalate into a physical assault. Here Lee toys with both the ubiquity of catcalling in the vast and anonymous space of the streets, and the lurking problem of never knowing when an innocuous comment might turn physically violent. These scenes reinforce what Elizabeth Wilson refers to as the "[u]nconscious bedrock of western culture," an internalized male-female dichotomy that has translated into a conception of city culture as pertaining to men. "Consequently, women have become an irruption in the city, a symptom of disorder, and a problem: the Sphinx in the city."[58] When Nola does not reciprocate the curiosity and the desire expressed by her assailant, his words and actions become vicious and violent, and remind the viewer that the streets, in the day or night, are not a welcome space for women.

Taylor's definition of somatic aesthetics leads us to ask: what might Nola's black body walking home alone at night represent to the catcaller? What does he see when he looks at her? It seems as though the aesthetic value he has placed upon her body, predominantly that he finds her to be "sexy," affects the manner in which he verbally and physically approaches her. When he is rebuffed, the assailant's words become biting and dehumanizing, reducing Nola to a sex object—a disembodied pussy that he no longer

[58] Elizabeth Wilson, "Into the Labyrinth," in *The Sphinx in the City: Urban Life, the Control of Disorder, and Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 9. Wilson's reference to a woman in the city as a Sphinx imbues her with power, but like the mythological Sphinx, a woman in the city is viewed with a mixture of curiosity, desire, and malice. She is never fully in control in the city because the city is, by design, unpredictable: full of danger and delight—you never know which one will greet you as you turn the corner.

claims to want. In this scene Lee laments that, even though modern black women have more social and economic autonomy than they once did, their bodies remain subject to the constraints of a patriarchal world wherein their aesthetic value and representation in the eyes of the male viewer can affect the ways in which their bodies are treated in both the private or public spheres. Nola may be in control of her own aesthetic self-styling and her spatial location, but she is *not* in control of how that aesthetic is perceived and valued by society.

For example, Nola is dressed in an amber-colored velvet halter-top paired with a flowing full length shirt. Like the unnamed woman, Nola wears a thick woolen 'mantle' to protect her from the night's chill. Adorning her neck is a choker of small, white seashells with matching dangling earrings. Nola wears her hair naturally, proudly flaunting her African roots through a curly and voluminous shoulder length bob that is as untamed as her sexuality. Her aesthetic is reminiscent of the African goddess Òṣun, a recurring figure throughout the both seasons of the Netflix adaptation.[59] Her clothing speaks to how she views herself: as a beautiful, powerful and free black woman. In this scene Lee seems to purposefully evoke a goddess through Nola's attire and projection of confidence and control.[60] Nola adorns herself with the colors and objects associated with Òṣun, but unlike the goddess she is not immune to the powers or the whims of men. As a

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[59]Joseph M. Murphy and Mei-Mei Sanford, ed., *Òṣun Across the Waters: A Yoruba Goddess in Africa and the Americas* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001). Òṣun is an African river goddess associated with beauty, love, sexuality, and sacred shells and river stones.

[60] Paul C. Taylor, "Assembly, Not Birth," in *Black is Beautiful: A Philosophy of Black Aesthetics* (West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, 2016), 15-27. Nola's mind is 'decolonized' in that she recognizes that black is beautiful. She finds herself to be beautiful and sexy and she projects this confidence out into the world, attracting the attention of many as evidenced by the aforementioned daytime catcalling scene and the nighttime street assault. Lee's characters are aware of the ways in which white supremacist ideologies have taken root in black communities, leading some black people to think of themselves as ugly. Nola is a particular example of black beauty and self-love.

mortal woman her self-stylization and freedom of movement are stymied in the daylight through unrelenting catcalls and fully halted in the night by the ever present threat of heteropatriarchy.

Lee is attuned to the issue of gender based violence, but rather than spending time on the assailant's immature masculinity, Lee explores black masculinity through Nola's three lovers, and their varied, disappointing responses to her assault. For example, Jamie, her eldest lover tells her "you gotta call the cops," while Greer, a fitness fanatic advises her "you gotta learn jujitsu," and Mars, the least mature of her lovers says, "you gotta let me beat his ass."[61] Nola's lovers are so thoroughly socialized to view the streets as a space exclusively belonging to men that they fail to critique the attacker's actions and instead question Nola's response to the attack, instruct her on preventative measures, or try to assuage their own helplessness with displays of masculine puffery.[62] Despite these brief forays into the psyches of Nola's lovers, Lee's focus remains on Nola and the unfolding of her particular aesthetic and artistic expression in the wake of her assault.

Like the unnamed woman, Nola is resilient. Her assault does not deter her from living her life fully in the world, and it is through her politically resonant art that she

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[61] *She's Gotta Have It*. 2017." #BOOTYFULL (SELF ACCEPTANCE)," directed by Spike Lee. Season 1, episode 2. Aired November 23, 2017. Netflix. Accessed March 1, 2020. https://www.netflix.com/watch/80129568?trackId=14170289&tctx=2%2C15%2C4348599f-2e96-4be8-b6fb-bd504e8bdb0a-12456016%2C3c67329e-8c51-41f7-b3f4-51479056176f_17695498X3XX1603224041248%2C3c67329e-8c51-41f7-b3f4-51479056176f_ROOT%2C.

[62] Jamie's response that Nola should call law enforcement is tone deaf, in that he neglects to consider that a black woman calling the police at night might lead to further difficulties for Nola rather than punishment for her assailant. This presents yet another issue of perception. How might police officers interpret Nola alone on the street? What might they assume about her based on her presence in the street? Based on her blackness? Her gender? Her beauty? I will apply these questions to the unnamed woman in the following chapter which will explore the motivations of the city watchmen that assault her in the streets of Jerusalem (5:7).

begins to process her rage and make meaning from the incident. In fact, Lee ends episode one not with the assault, but with Nola defiantly installing her "My Name Isn't" campaign in the streets under the cover of darkness.[63] Through her feminist art campaign, Nola plasters the black-and-white photos of her black female subjects, accompanied by red block letter messages such as "my name isn't ay yo ma" onto the city walls. Here, the black, white, and red colors of the street assault, as seen through the uneven camera work and a focus on the changing crosswalk signal, are reclaimed through Nola's art. Her street art seeks not only to reclaim the black female form from the oppressive male gaze, but also to reclaim the space of the street. In this way, Nola's art functions as a warning to would-be assailants that black female bodies are not for their consumption. In fact, Nola's art flips the gaze allowing the eyes of her subjects to surveil the streets and for their impassioned voices to echo in empty corridors: "My Name Isn't...!"

[63] *She's Gotta Have It*. 2017. "#DaJumpoff (DOCTRINE)" directed by Spike Lee. Season 1, episode 1. Aired November 23, 2017 on Netflix. Accessed March 1, 2020. https://www.netflix.com/watch/80117554?trackId=14170286&tctx=2%2C15%2C4348599f-2e96-4be8-b6fb-bd504e8bdb0a-12456016%2C3c67329e-8c51-41f7-b3f4-51479056176f_17695498X3XX1603224041248%2C3c67329e-8c51-41f7-b3f4-51479056176f_ROOT%2C.

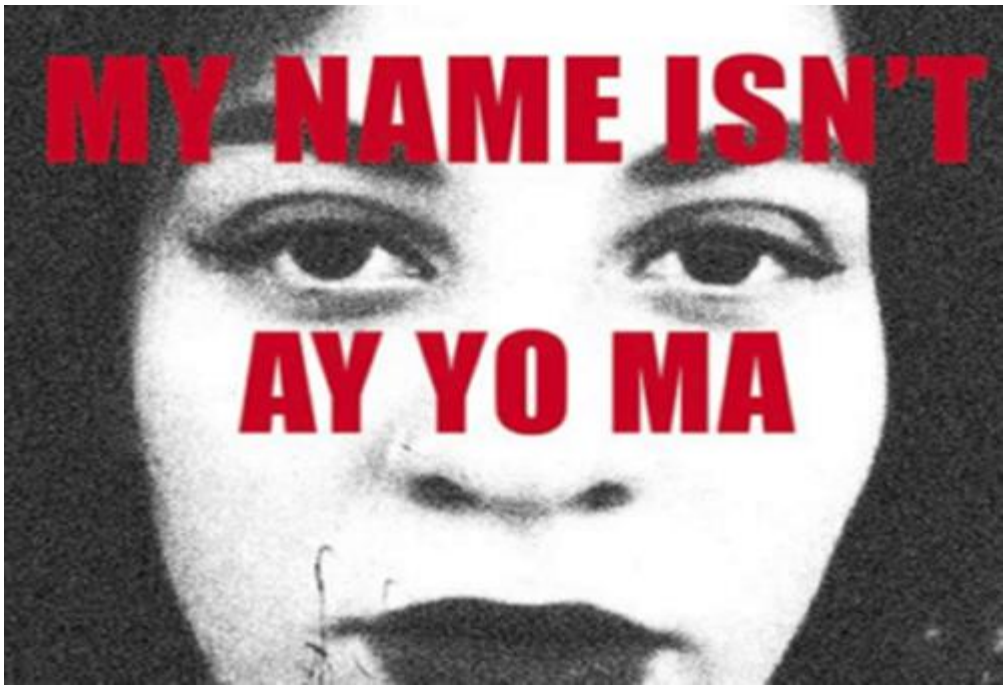

Image 2. [64]

[64] Nola's street campaign is based on the street harassment series created by the Brooklyn based artist, Tatyana Fazlalizadeh. Tatyana Fazlalizadeh, *Stop Telling Women to Smile*, 2017, Brooklyn. For Fazlalizadeh's full street harassment series and other recent works see, http://www.tlynnfaz.com/Stop-Telling-Women-to-Smile.

Image 3. [65]

[65] Ibid. This is an image of the actress who portrays Nola, DeWanda Wise, in which she intentionally echoes the biting words of her attacker. After Nola frees herself from his grip and begins running towards the safety of her apartment, the audience hears the assailant scream this invective in Nola's direction: "Fuck you then, I don't want that stank pussy anyway. Motherfuckin black bitch!" Cf. *She's Gotta Have It*. 2017. "#DaJumpOff (Doctrine)," directed by Spike Lee. Season 1, episode 1. Aired November 23, 2017 on Netflix. Accessed March 1, 2020. 31:42-32:37.

Beauty and the Grotesque Body: Male Aggression and Female Submission

In both the Song and Lee's modern take on black female sexual freedom, patriarchy restricts how these women are able to move their bodies through the world. By placing Nola's unique black female aesthetic on a collision course with an aggressive form of black masculinity, Lee shatters the idyllic world he has crafted and confronts the viewer with the lurking realities of women's everyday lives.[66] Like the authorial slips of the Song, Nola's catcalling scene also pulls the viewer out of the hopeful and structured world that Nola Darling has crafted for herself, leaving us to grapple with the frustrating coexistence of stultifying institutions and social rules that push back against America's ever-expanding sexual ethics and gender mores. Additionally, like the unnamed woman, Nola Darling is not a real woman, *per se*, but a creation, a fantasy or idealization upon which Lee can creatively explore and address interrelated issues of gender, race, and sexuality in modern African American culture.

Both Nola and the unnamed woman are transgressive figures, because they seek sex for pleasure, and venture out alone into spaces typically dominated by men. By slipping into masculinity both sexually and spatially, the women are exposed to the full force of patriarchal retaliation. To this end, Fiona Black notes that women who "masquerade" as men are at risk of grotesque figuration because they upset the gendered power balance.[67] Black goes on to say "That which is fetishized blurs the lines between

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[66] Melvin Donaldson, "Inside Men: Black Masculinity in the Films of Spike Lee and John Singleton," in *Millennial Masculinity: Men in Contemporary American Cinema* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2012), 225.

[67] Fiona C. Black, "Uncovering the Grotesque Body," in *The Artifice of Love: Grotesque Bodies in the Song of Songs* (New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 112.

imagination and reality, or that which is desired and that which is attainable."[68] Both Nola and the unnamed woman adopt attributes typically associated with masculinity, namely sexual and spatial autonomy, which seem to render them simultaneously attractive and grotesque to certain male viewers. Nola's sexual assault stands as a clear example of how the fetishization of black women who intentionally transgress gender norms, fails to insulate these women from the larger social constraints of monogamy or relegation to the domestic sphere. Even these desirable boundary crossing women are expected to abide by established social rules, or at the very least, not be surprised when they are treated badly for rejecting them. These hegemonic conventions of acceptable womanhood are congruous with Judith Butler's thoughts on the apprehension of life:

> These normative conditions for the production of the subject produce an historically contingent ontology, such that our very capacity to discern and name the "being" of the subject is dependent on norms that facilitate that recognition. At the same time, it would be a mistake to understand the operation of norms as deterministic. Normative schemes are interrupted by one another, they emerge and fade depending on broader operations of power, and very often come up against spectral versions of what it is they claim to know: thus, there are "subjects" who are not quite recognizable as subjects, and there are "lives" that are not quite—or, indeed, are never-recognized as lives.[69]

When Nola and the unnamed woman dare to assert their subjectivity by crossing the boundaries of gender and sex, they are punished by a patriarchal system which blames them for the violence perpetrated against them, while at the same time assigning dehumanizing and objectifying language to their bodies. In this way, the grotesque body is transformed from a human subject to an abject, disposable object.

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[68] Ibid.
[69] Judith Butler, "Introduction: Precarious Life, Grievable Life," in *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2009), 4.

In line with Butler's assessment, Margaret Miles understands the female body as especially implicated in grotesque figuration "[b]ecause of its particular association with sex and reproductivity. In pregnancy, menstruation and intercourse, the female body loses its integrity and ceases to be the 'closed, smooth and impenetrable body' that serves as the symbol of individual, autonomous and 'perfect' existence."[70] Miles goes on to assert that the "[b]odies of women who were perceived to be perpetually engaged in sexual activity, such as those of prostitutes, were thus quintessentially grotesque; they epitomized the penetrable body, the body shaped by lust, the permeable body that produces juices and smells."[71] Miles puts the grotesque "open" body in contrast to the paradigmatic "enclosed garden" of the Virgin Mary.[72] Unlike the Virgin Mary, the female lover in the Song freely admits to leaving her own garden, or in this case, vineyard, unguarded (1.5). She then presents herself unaccompanied in the streets (5:7) and is publicly shamed.

In Lee's modern (1986) take, Nola's polyamory leads to the grotesque figuration of her body through rape. Lastly, the Nola of 2017, similarly to the unnamed woman, is bruised and frightened by the stranger she encounters on the city street. During this encounter the assailant violently yanks Nola towards him, at which point the audience can hear the fabric of her coat tear from the force of his grip. The darkness of the street coupled with the sound of her clothing ripping is evocative of the street scene in the Song in which the unnamed woman is stripped of her mantle. Both incidents are traumatic, yet

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[70] Margaret R. Miles, *Carnal Knowing: Female Nakedness and Religious Meaning in the Christian West* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 153
[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid.

the ripping of cloth might be the most sinister element mentioned, in that stripping renders each victim more vulnerable to other nefarious actions.[73] Nola's attacker abuses his outsized power in the public realm, just as the guardians in the Song. His actions bruise Nola's body, and his words, "I don't want that stank ass pussy anyway," transform her body from desirable to grotesque.

Towards Sexy Subjectivity: An Alternative to Sexual Objectification

Nola's violation, while alarming, is also commonplace, especially to a female-identifying audience. Women go out into the world anticipating that we will experience harassment; we are socialized to "always be prepared"—so much so that we carry mace, attend self-defense classes, and talk to a friend on the phone while walking alone in parking garages or to our homes at night. Being aware of these realities, Lee includes an exchange between Clorinda and Nola that is all too familiar to many women and female identifying persons. As Nola leaves Clorinda's apartment to walk to her own, Clorida hugs her goodbye, saying "I know you just live down the block, but call me." To this Nola jokingly retorts, "okay mom." Nola's flippant remark is demonstrative of how mentally taxing hypervigilance can be. Nola knows that the world can be dangerous, and

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[73] Michael V. Fox, "Sacred Marriage," in *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 239-241. Cf. Pirjo Lapinkivi, "The Descent and the Ascent," in *The Sumerian Sacred Marriage: In the Light of Comparative Evidence* (Helsinki: Institute for Asian and African Studies, University of Helsinki, 2004), 189-194. Cf. Neal H. Walls, "The Maiden Goddess" and "Violence and Passion," in *The Goddess Anat in Ugaritic Myth* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 77-94; 107-116; 166-74. See also *Inanna/Ishtar's Descent to the Netherworld,* an Akkadian/Sumerian myth in which Tammuz/Dumuzi descends into the underworld and Inanna/Ishtar seeks him out. When Inanna/Ishtar tries to enter the netherworld the guards strip her of her finery. With each piece of clothing and/or jewelry Inanna/Ishtar becomes less powerful. In a similar way, the clothing that Nola wears imbues her with confidence and power. When her coat is ripped by her assailant her power is diminished. Her aesthetic value as intimated to the outside world through her dress goes unrecognized and disrespected. Similarly, the removal of the unnamed woman's mantle exposes her and diminishes her power and aesthetic value. In other parts of the poem, however, the unnamed woman is adorned with clothing and objects that are evocative of the goddess and function to elevate the Shulamite.

having to constantly be reminded of it (even by a caring girlfriend) is frustrating. The onus of hypervigilance requires women to think about how their bodies and aesthetic(s), on any day, at any time, or in any space might be perceived and (de)valued by outside observers. It is a constant weight.

This perpetual self-assessment brings to mind Margaret Atwood's observation on this particularly vexing aspect of female socialization. She writes, "You are a woman with a man inside watching a woman. You are your own voyeur."[74] The near-constant worry that a tight fitting skirt, a low cut blouse, or a pair of high heels (that make *you* feel good!) might "invite" unwanted attention from outside viewers, pervades women's minds and keeps them from fully expressing themselves both aesthetically and spatially. Furthermore, this persistent self-policing of our own bodies in space prevents women from seeing themselves (and others) as "sexy subjects" rather than "sex objects." This, of course, has to do with Western heteronormative hierarchies of beauty and social worth, which shape women's views of their own bodies. To this end, Sheila Lintott and Sherri Irvin write

> Sexual objectification in a male-dominated and heteronormative society functions to reduce women to objects to be used at the discretion of men. Women are socialized to believe that sexiness is essential to their value as persons and are moreover socialized to accept a narrow conception of sexiness, one that excludes large portions of the population from being considered sexy. Under these conditions, sexiness is not something a woman can secure for herself; it is not 'up to her.' To be sexy, in this ordinary sense, is to satisfy a set

[74] Margaret Atwood, *The Robber Bride* (New York: Random House, 1993), 434. Full citation: "Male fantasies, male fantasies, is everything run by male fantasies? Up on a pedestal or down on your knees, it's all a male fantasy: that you're strong enough to take what they dish out, or else too weak to do anything about it. Even pretending you aren't catering to male fantasies is a male fantasy: pretending you're unseen, pretending you have a life of your own, that you can wash your feet and comb your hair unconscious of the ever-present watcher peering through the keyhole, peering through the keyhole in your own head, if nowhere else. You are a woman with a man inside watching a woman. You are your own voyeur."

> of standards for appearance and behavior that are an outgrowth of a specific, societally shaped, heterosexual male gaze.[75]

Both Nola and the unnamed woman satisfy socially proscribed standards of appearance in that they are repeatedly recognized by their lovers and outside observers as beautiful and sexy; yet they fail to meet patriarchal standards of behavior, which render their bodies vulnerable to punishment or a diminishment in social value. For example, Jamie finds Nola's body and infectious personality to be desirable, but her resistance to monogamy ultimately renders her repulsive in his eyes. In fact, Jamie is so affronted by Nola's sexuality that he rapes her to avenge his own bruised ego (1986). Lee's updated Nola (2017) is "sexy" according to her assailant, but when she refuses to verbally engage with him, his opinion of her swiftly changes from sexualized "compliments" to invectives, which illustrate just how much her value has diminished in his eyes—she is no longer "sexy," but a "stank pussy" that he no longer claims to want.

As for the unnamed woman, her body, specifically her sexual autonomy, is first policed by her brothers (1:6) and later subdued by the city watchmen (5:7). In both instances her aberrant behavior and spatial locations are implicated in her punishment—she is not acting as a "respectable" young woman should, therefore she is worthy of punishment from members of the patriarchal hierarchy. The message remains consistent throughout the Song and Lee's narrative worlds: women who shun social mores will be punished; and women's bodies and sexualities are not for themselves but for men to use in service of their own pleasure or in perpetuation of patriarchal institutions (the family and society). For example, the brothers are motivated to maintain their sister's economic

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[75] Sheila Lintott and Sherri Irvin, "Sex Objects and Sexy Subjects," in *Body Aesthetics*, ed. Sherri Irvin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 299-300.

value. By controlling her sexuality and by proxy, her reproductive potential, they are better positioned to procure a sizable bride price in the future. The brothers understand their sister's sexiness in the biological sense but they also have an awareness of her captivating beauty, which motivates their banishing her to the vineyard as punishment (1:5). To use Lintott and Irvin's terms, the brothers are able to understand their sisters sexiness in the "prurient sense" in that they tacitly acknowledge through their punishment that their sister's beauty arouses the sexual interests of others.[76] But, their focus on her reproductive potential prevents them from understanding their sister's sexiness as part of her subjectivity rather than something that they can use for their own economic gain. They are unable/unwilling to assimilate her prurient sexiness into their conception of her, because her sexual behavior exists outside of the patriarchal social norm that they benefit from upholding.

This linkage between sexiness and reproduction is evolutionarily hardwired, in that human beings tend to find youth and fertility to be sexy.[77] The Songs resemblance to Sacred Marriage liturgy attests to this human preoccupation with fertility both vegetal and human. In the case of the Sacred Marriage, the ritualistic union of the gods brings about the fertility of the land, which ensures the survival of the people.[78] But if we extrapolate this literary undergirding to the wider community, the Song's frequent allusions to verdant agricultural scenes can be read as sending a powerful message to women: a lush vineyard is sexy; a withered field is not. In their chapter "Sex Objects and

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[76] Ibid., 305.
[77] Nancy Etcoff, "Pretty Pleases," in *Survival of the Prettiest: The Science of Beauty* (New York: Anchor Books, 1999), 72-4. Cf. Lintott and Irvin, 302-4.
[78] Samuel Noah Kramer, "The Sacred Marriage and Solomon's Song of Songs," in *The Sacred Marriage: Aspects of Faith, Myth, and Ritual in Ancient Sumer* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969), 85-106.

Sexy Subjects," Lintott and Irvin reject this narrow, biological sense of sexiness, which is linked to conventional attributions of beauty, proposing in its place an ethical shift towards respectful attributions of sexiness that "[a]ppreciates a plurality of bodies, sees sexuality as tied to subjectivity, and is not morally suspect."[79] For Irvin and Lintott, sexiness is a crucial element to selfhood, therefore, "[a] persistent failure to recognize another's sexiness can be tantamount to a failure to recognize them as a subject—as a person."[80] They go on to note that

> Respecting sexiness involves seeing others not (only) as sex objects but necessarily as sexual subjects: human beings who are in charge of their sexual agency. Their appeal is intrinsic to them: in comes from them, rather than being defined by externally imposed standards, especially those associated with oppressive social forces.[81]

Both Nola and the unnamed woman recognize themselves as sexy subjects. In fact, a large part of their figuration is wrapped up in their sexual expression and comfort with their own bodies, but the outside world consistently fails to apprehend them as whole sexual beings. Furthermore, "[s]uch failures can reinforce stigmas, particularly race-based ones, that diminish people's self-worth and reinforce their subordinate social position."[82] As black, beautiful, and sexually agential women, both Nola and the Shulammite are confronted by outside viewer's perceptions and reactions to their bodies and behavior.

For example, the brothers (1:6), city watchmen (3:4; 5:7), and daughters of Jerusalem/ unidentified speakers (7:1) recognize the woman as worthy of either

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[79] Lintott and Irvin, 306.
[80] Ibid., 300. In the wider context of this chapter Lintott and Irvin address how bodies that fall outside this narrow frame of sexiness can and should be recognized as sexy subjects. They speak specifically of the culturally desexualized bodies of post-menopausal women and the disabled.
[81] Ibid., 306.
[82] Ibid., 305.

correction or attention because of her striking beauty and spatial location. In this way, the viewers see that the woman's beauty and sexuality are valuable, but only from within the proscribed social settings of marriage and the home. Outside of these institutions and spaces the unnamed woman is exposed to the patriarchal rules of her brothers and the city guards, and to the gawking, perhaps, even prejudicial stares of her companions/unidentified spectators.[83] For instance, in 7:1 the unnamed woman is solicited by her companions/anonymous chorus to

> Turn back, turn back,
> O maid of Shulem!
> Turn back, turn back,
> That we may gaze upon you.

If we imagine the speakers as a group of unidentified men, the scene takes on a sinister quality, as they ask the woman to turn towards them so they might gaze upon her beauty. However, if we read the speakers as the daughters of Jerusalem, their tone, in similitude with 1:5-6, could be interpreted as either mocking or questioning the unnamed woman's beauty.[84]

In a line which echoes her earlier objections to the stares of her companions (1:6), the Shulammite asks her demanding onlookers

> "Why will you gaze at the Shulammite
> In the Mahanaim dance?"[85]

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[83] Michael V. Fox, *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 155.
[84] Ibid., 155-8. Cf. Marvin Pope, *Song of Songs: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1977), 595-614. Cf. Roland E. Murphy, *Song of Songs: A Commentary on the Book of Canticles or the Song of Songs*, ed. S. Dean McBride, Jr. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 181-5.
[85] Song of Songs 7:1, *Jewish Study Bible, TANAKH Translation*.

Contra to Pope and Murphy, Fox identifies the speaker of this defensive and/or teasing question to be the male lover, rather than the unnamed woman. Such a reading, while plausible, is disempowering to our otherwise feisty protagonist. Additionally, reading the speaker as the unnamed woman corresponds with her earlier interactions with the daughters of Jerusalem, in which she defends her beauty despite having been exposed to the sun (1:5-6) asserting that

I am black and beautiful,
O daughters of Jerusalem
Like the tents of Kedar,
Like the curtains of Solomon[86]

The women's confidence in her own beauty is repeated by her use of the *maḥănāyim* dance as a comparative term.

The comparison of the woman to the "*maḥănāyim* dance" is puzzling and varied in the scholarship, with Fox understanding the question as a rebuke spoken by the male lover to "[t]he girl's companions for looking upon her disdainfully as if she were a common dancer who roams the camps of the soldiers (or possibly, the shepherds)."[87] The verse does not seem to indicate that the unnamed woman is participating in a dance,

[86]Marcia Falk, "Notes to the Poems," in *The Song of Songs: A New Translation and Interpretation* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1990), 168. For Falk, the latter two verses function as parallel comparisons of the woman's blackness to the "tents of Kedar" and the "curtains of Solomon," both of which she considers to be "dark and attractive veils. Cf. Pope, 320. By contrast, Schmokel and E.F.F. Bishop argue that the tents of Kedar, typically made from black goat hair, similar to modern day Bedouin tents, are placed in contrast to the lighter colored wall hangings of the king's palace. Their argument implies that verse 5c place the dark/black lover in contrast to the paler daughters of Jerusalem, whom they associate with the curtains of Solomon's palace in v. 5d. Pope dismisses this analysis as "fanciful" noting that "The bride is both black and beautiful, like a Bedouin tent." Cf. Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, eds. *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1906), 438. Additionally, the noun '*ōhel*, generally refers to tent curtains, and more specifically to the curtains of the tabernacle (Ex 26; 36). Lastly, the noun '*ōhel*, "tents" is followed by the noun *yĕrî'ôt*, "curtains" or "pavilions" thus forming a parallelism between v. 5c and v.5d.

[87] Fox, 158.

though the command to "(re)turn," *šûbî*, has been interpreted by Pope to mean "leap."[88] Contra to Pope, Fox avers that

> *Come back, come back*: ŠWB never means "to pivot," or "to whirl" as in dance, so there is no basis for the common idea that the speaker here is a group watching the Shulammite dance and urging her on. Rather we must understand the call as spoken by some group that is calling her back from somewhere, apparently the nut garden. The speakers, in surprise or in skepticism, want to look her over.[89]

Though the unnamed woman stands her ground during this interaction, she remains an object of fascination or derision, whose body and sexuality is perpetually under the scrutiny of others. For example, the subsequent *wasf*, ostensibly spoken by the unspecified group, describes her body from foot to head in objectifying and sexualizing terms.[90] For example, they compare her rounded thighs to jewels, her navel to a rounded goblet, her belly to a heap of wheat, and her breast, to two fawns. This *wasf* on the lips of viewers other than her lover render her body objectified, even if their words are praising her superb beauty. In line with Lintott and Irvin's scholarship, the unidentified speakers assign worth to the unnamed woman based upon external, conventional standards of beauty—they fail to apprehend her as an embodied subject. Furthermore, her title/description "*Shulammite*" "perfect one/perfection," essentializes her beauty. Such essentialization is echoed in *She's Gotta Have It* (2017) when Mars admiringly says to Nola "you so black perfect." Mars later refers to Nola as "a freak," a label which she

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[88] Pope, 595.
[89] Fox, 157. Cf. Murphy, 185. Cf. Pope, 604. Murphy defines the line as a reference to the "dance of the two camps," an unknown phrase which Pope compares to the so-called sword dance, a modern Near Eastern custom.
[90] Song of Songs 7:2-6, *Jewish Study Bible, TANAKH Translation*. See also, Fox, 158. Fox reads the *wasf* (7:2-7) as coming from the mouth of the male lover as opposed to the unspecified group. Cf. Murphy, 185. Murphy notes that the speaker is a member of the unspecified group, but that elsewhere in the Song the *wasf* is spoken by the man (4:1-7; 8:5-7).

vehemently rejects because of the sexist rhetoric associated with the term. In this way, Mars, like the daughters of Jerusalem/unidentified speakers, fails to recognize the sexy subjectivity of the woman he is visually consuming, objectifying her instead.

In the opening scene in his 2017 revamp of *She's Gotta Have It*, Lee addresses the sexually objectifying label "freak" through a soliloquy spoken by Nola from the comfort of her "loving bed," a character in and of itself in the series. She says

> I would like you to know the only reason I'm doing this is because folks think they know me. They think they know what I'm about, and the truth is, they don't know *me*. Any-who, if in the end this helps some other people out then that's cool too. I consider myself abnormal, but who wants to be like everybody else? Not I. Some people call me a freak, and I hate that word. I don't believe in it or better yet, I don't believe in one word labels. But, whatcha gonna do? Ya feel me?[91]

Nola's leading questions betray an awareness of how the world perceives her, and her playfulness is reminiscent of the unnamed woman's question to the unidentified speakers,

"Why will you gaze at the Shulammite
In the Mahanaim dance?"[92]

Both women know why they are being looked upon, but underneath their questions lies a desire to be more fully known, to be recognized for more than just their outward beauty and overt sexiness.

This desire for subjectivity is borne out in season one of *She's Gotta Have It*, in which Nola grapples with her lover's persistent inability to see her as a whole person—as

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[91] *She's Gotta Have It*. 2017. "DaJumpoff (DOCTRINE)," directed by Spike Lee. Season 1, episode 1. Aired November 23, 2017. Accessed March 1, 2020. https://www.netflix.com/watch/80117554?trackId=14170286&tctx=2%2C15%2C4348599f-2e96-4be8-b6fb-bd504e8bdb0a-12456016%2C3c67329e-8c51-41f7-b3f4-51479056176f_17695498X3XX1603224041248%2C3c67329e-8c51-41f7-b3f4-51479056176f_ROOT%2C.

[92] Song of Songs 7:1, *Jewish Study Bible, TANAKH Translation*.

a sexy subject rather than a sex object. This problem of objectification is succinctly exemplified in season one, episode three, when Nola, in the wake of her assault, purchases an expensive little black dress that makes her feel confident and powerful. She wears the dress on three separate occasions: once on a dinner date with Jamie, to a concert with Mars, and to Greer's home, where he is concluding a photoshoot. On all three occasions Nola is confronted with her lover's objectification of her beautiful black body in that sexy little black dress. The events of this episode are foregrounded by Nola's first appointment with Dr. Jamison, a young, black, and female psychologist whom Nola is seeing in order to cope with her recent assault.

Our introduction to Dr. Jamison begins in that classic Spike Lee style, with Dr. Jamison speaking directly to the camera/audience saying, "Do I have to give up an essential part of my self-expression, in order to survive? That's Nola's question."[93] In the next frame, Nola sits anxiously before Dr. Jamison, steeling herself for the session. Tearfully she says, "I feel violated. Anxious, like I wanna cover up and hide, even from the men in my life." To this Dr. Jamison asks Nola to tell her a bit about the men she is dating. Nola, smiling and giggling replies, "They're all really different. They feed me in distinct ways." Her face grows serious as she says, "Sometimes I feel like they're all threatened by my sexuality and I'm sick of feeling like I have to make decisions based on the male gaze."[94] In response to Nola's instinct to hide after her assault, Dr. Jamison says, "[y]ou could wear a full burka, show only your eyes, and men will still harass you. The

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[93] *She's Gotta Have It*. 2017. "#LBD (LITTLE BLACK DRESS," directed by Spike Lee. Season 1, episode 3. Aired November 23, 2017. Accessed March 1, 2020. https://www.netflix.com/watch/80129569?trackId=14170289&tctx=2%2C15%2C4348599f-2e96-4be8-b6fb-bd504e8bdb0a-12456016%2C3c67329e-8c51-41f7-b3f4-51479056176f_17695498X3XX1603224041248%2C3c67329e-8c51-41f7-b3f4-51479056176f_ROOT%2C.

[94] Ibid.

solution isn't covering up, it's finding a way to assert your power and to move through the world with confidence." Dr. Jamison ends the session by encouraging Nola to do something that brings her joy, "Exercise, wear something that makes you feel confident, try something new, something that makes you feel good. Don't let fear dictate your choices and don't forget to breathe." It is after this session that Nola purchases the little black dress, attempting to put Dr. Jamison's advice into action.

On the first occasion that Nola wears the little black dress, Jamie takes her to New York's famous River Cafe. Upon seeing Nola, Jamie is both aroused and concerned over the shortness of the dress in the upscale setting. As they walk to their table Jamie mutters "Don't get me wrong, I love your little black dress, but goddamn this ain't exactly a nightclub in Miami, if you know what I'm saying." With an expression of frustration and incredulity, Nola defiantly offers her coat to the waiting host who is seating them. Once seated Jamie places his sports coat over Nola shoulders in an attempt to cover her. Nola drops the jacket to the floor ignoring his imposition of modesty. Later, in an attempt to assuage her hurt feelings, and ingratiate himself, Jamie asks "Can I come up? This back dress has been speaking to me all evening." Nola replies "Ah, so now you like my black dress?" "Oh true that" he replies. She says, "That's not the impression I got at the River Cafe." Jamie tries to explain away his paternalistic behavior, by telling her that he was feeling a little "protective." Maintaining her composure and control over the conversation, despite her frustration, Nola remarks that she doesn't appreciate Jamie's "cognitive dissonance." To this Jamie whispers, "You know, honestly Nola, if you don't want the attention, you shouldn't be wearing this black dress." Taken aback by this comment Nola asks, "Excuse me?" To this question, Jamie, without hesitation, opens the

front of Nola's coat and gazes down at her body in the dress. With a look of shock and indignation, Nola takes the coat from Jamie's hands, covers herself, and walks up the stairs to her apartment, leaving Jamie alone on the sidewalk.

This scene, foregrounded by Nola's first therapy session, perfectly encapsulates her frustrations over how her lovers perceive her and treat her body based upon her self-expression. To this end Lintott and Irvin write, "Genuine sexual expression comes from and is for the sake of individuals, as opposed to aiming to conform to some external ideal…. Identifying genuineness in sexuality, then, involves, empathy."[95] Jamie is unable or unwilling to understand that the dress is for Nola, not for him. Furthermore, he is unable to separate Nola's sexy body in the sexy dress from patriarchal social standards that might label her as "attention seeking."[96] For example, Jamie wants Nola all to himself, and her body in that black dress makes him fear that others might want her too (and that Nola, alluring and polyamorous as she is, might want other men). Men want sexy and/or sexually adventurous women, but they tend to want them only for themselves. I refer to this phenomenon as "the lady in the streets but a freak in the bed" paradox, in which men do not want *their* sexy woman to occupy spaces where other men might see and/or attempt to lay claim to them.[97] This socially accepted phenomenon allows Jamie to blame Nola for his poor behavior (look what *you* made me do) rather

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[95] Sheila Lintott and Sherri Irvin, "Sex Objects and Sexy Subjects," in *Body Aesthetics*, ed. Sherri Irvin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 307.

[96] Jamie's remarks are also wrapped up in the rhetoric surrounding rape cultures, which seeks to blame women for abuse they experience in the world. We are all familiar with the oft used refrain, "she was asking for it" with reference to a short skirt or a little black dress.

[97] *She's Gotta Have It*. 2017. "DaJumpoff (DOCTRINE)," directed by Spike Lee. Season 1, episode 1. Aired November 23, 2017. Accessed March 1, 2020. In this episode, Lee addresses the sexist labeling of sexually agential women as "freaks" a label that is seldom assigned to men, who are expected to be sexually agential. Through his male characters, Lee explores the notion that men want "freaky" women, but that they still demand fidelity from these women, whom they view as both desirable and transgressive.

than admit to himself that Nola's sexuality, specifically her polyamory, threatens his masculinity.

A similar scene plays out when Nola wears the little black dress to a concert with Mars. While there Nola is noticed by the artist who pulls her on stage and dances with her for mere moments. Immediately after this brief encounter, a concert goer aggressively hits on Nola, and as a means of getting out of the situation, Nola shoves him away. Mars's subsequent defense of Nola nearly turns into a fight with the other man. Upon leaving the concert venue Mars says, "You know what the problem is? That black dress, it's like black-on-black crime." Nola replies, "Are you saying my black dress is to blame?" To this, Mars's remarks that the dress is going to get him killed; to which Nola emphatically replies, "You know what, this (gesturing to her body in the dress) has nothing to do with that dude's stupidity, that's on him." Mars tries to interject with a "yeah, but" to which Nola ardently states, "No, no, no, no, no yeah, but. I wear whatever the hell I damn well please. End of story. I'm not gonna let some fuckboy interfere with my flow." Mars attempts to interject again, and Nola angrily says, "Don't even start with me. If you can't deal with the black dress then maybe you can't deal with me, Mars. Because I will not be intimidated."[98] By contrast to her earlier encounter with Jamie, in this scene Nola is empowered to speak her mind, and Mars as her younger and more eager to please lover, is receptive to her message.

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[98] *She's Gotta Have It*. 2017. "#LBD (LITTLE BLACK DRESS," directed by Spike Lee. Season 1, episode 3. Aired November 23, 2017. Accessed March 1, 2020. https://www.netflix.com/watch/80129569?trackId=14170289&tctx=2%2C15%2C4348599f-2e96-4be8-b6fb-bd504e8bdb0a-12456016%2C3c67329e-8c51-41f7-b3f4-51479056176f_17695498X3XX1603224041248%2C3c67329e-8c51-41f7-b3f4-51479056176f_ROOT%2C.

In the final wearing of the little black dress Nola surprises Greer at his apartment, where he is concluding a photoshoot with a British boy band. Greer, like the other lovers, is transfixed by the dress, and asks if he can photograph Nola. During the impromptu photography session Greer becomes increasingly aroused to the point where he begins to ignore Nola's protests and demands that he stops photographing her. Eventually she pushes his phallic like camera lens away from her face, saying "I'm not one of your goddamn models...I don't want to be captured, or posed, or possessed, okay? You know what! Fuck this, fuck you, fuck all of you!"[99] In this moment Nola reaches her breaking point. The audience, who has witnessed all three unsatisfactory interactions, understands Nola's conflation of her three lovers, while Greer, incredulous to Nola's sudden rage, looks on puzzled as she swiftly exits his apartment.

On her way back to her apartment, a dejected Nola runs into her landlady, Ms. Ella, who tells her, "Nola, you wear that black dress well, baby…You know what Coco Chanel said? Look for the woman in the dress. If there is no woman, there is no dress." Nola smiles and breathes a sigh of relief at these words. As she ascends the steps to her apartment Ms. Ella looks up with a loving and knowing smile and says, "Show 'em what you got, baby." To this, Nola opens her leather jacket exposing the dress and her body. She lifts her face to the sky and smiles, letting Ms. Ella and the world see her. This final scene of Nola in the dress bookends her original encounter with Jamie, wherein he exposes her to the world without her consent. The reassuring voice of Ms. Ella echoes the earlier advice of Dr. Jamison, as both black women know that Nola is facing a world that is full of people who will not empathize with her aesthetic choices, as Lintott and Irvin

[99] Ibid.

would encourage us to do, but even still they encourage her to face the world with confidence and authenticity.

To this end Lintott and Irvin opine that "[f]ull-fledged sexiness, normatively conceived, is not a property that can be attributed to a person without attention to their subjectivity: sexiness is a way of being, a process, not a possession."[100] The unnamed woman is beaten and stripped by patriarchal authorities (5:7) for her assertion of sexual agency. They do not empathize with her aesthetic or spatial choices. The unnamed woman's only true ally is her lover, who seems to approach viewing her as a sexy subject in that he never faults her for her eschewal of social rules. Furthermore, their mutual use of the *wasf* to describe the outward beauty of the other mitigates what might have been a one-sided objectification. Ms. Ella's comment gets at the heart of Lintott and Irvin's ethical shift, in that Ms. Ella recognizes the woman inside the dress as a "sexy subject" rather than a sex object. Ms. Ella knows that it is the woman that makes the dress sexy. Without a sexy subject there would be no dress. Nola has an advocate in Ms. Ella, while the unnamed woman only has her lover. Even still, the unnamed woman uses her agency as a means of projecting sexy subjectivity to the viewers and detractors who would dare to objectify or contain her. The women navigate their respective worlds with as much authenticity and confidence as they can muster, if only the world could see them (and everyone else too) in all of their sexy magnificence.

Conclusion and Future Directions

In both narratives, the female protagonist seeks sex for her own gratification from outside the context of marriage, and yet her body remains subjected to restrictive

[100] Lintott and Irvin, 301.

patriarchal mores based on the established paradigms of conventional beauty standards and of male domination and female submission. The maintenance of these paradigms within both the narrative world of the Song and Lee's modern examination of black femininity reveal just how culturally ingrained these archetypes of gender and beauty remain. However, I concede that Lee's updated version of Nola and her paramours takes an unflinching look at modern sexual ethics while also showcasing Lee's evolution as a storyteller and cultural critic. Even still, there remains much to explore and dissect, specifically his many complex black male characters and their masculinities, which unfold more fully in the second season of his adaptation. As for Song, this resilient woman refusing to conform to familial or social pressures and unabashedly crossing the boundaries of gender and space continues to intrigue. With this in mind, the following chapter seeks to read the violence committed against the Shulammite through the lens of literary trauma theory. As was established in chapter three, the unnamed woman is characterized as an outsider. This final chapter will build upon this othering, positing that the post-exilic poet displaces the community's rage onto this unspecified "other" who seems to represent some of the more infuriating aspects of their current state of subjugation. Furthermore, this chapter aims to explore the kinds of gender specific power dynamics that trauma and displacement seem to produce and/or recreate.

CHAPTER V

WHOSE GOTTA HAVE IT?

VIOLENCE THROUH THE LENS OF LITERARY TRAUMA THEORY

"If there is one thing the Jewish people has never suffered from, it's amnesia."

-Isaac Bashevis Singer

In the prior chapter we witnessed Nola's creative response to trauma, which reclaimed the space of her assault (the city streets) while at the same time functioning as a public service announcement to would-be catcallers to respect women. Nola's artwork pushes the viewer to recognize each woman as a subject whose life and internal world has value outside of her aesthetic appeal. In line with Nola's artistic processing of trauma, this chapter will argue that the Song's violence serves a therapeutic function in that it bears witness to Israel's traumatic history and complex, post-exilic negotiation of identity and space. In this way, the Song's intervals of violence provide the returning Judean community a narrative framework from which they can imaginatively reflect upon their history of trauma and creatively confront their current colonial status within their own ancestral land.

Writing on the complexities of Judean identity formation during the Achaemenid period, Berquist writes that "[t]he texts of Persian Yehud recognize identity as unclear, inconsistent, and always contested. These texts are much more likely to use terms such as *hagolah* and *'am ha-'aretz* to signify identity while arguing about how these groups

relate to each other."[1] Rather, than basing Judean identity in geography, nationality or religious affiliation, Berquist applies the sociological lens of role theory, acknowledging that Judah's collective identity was formed overtime and shaped by a combination of imperializing and decolonizing forces. In the case of the returning community, Berquist writes that

> National identity is both Persian and Yehudite; what this combination means to each individual is highly fluid and always a product of internal conflict. Ethnicity participates with pluralization as one element, and identity operates within a shifting complex consisting of family identity, clan identity, geographical identity, and imperial identity.[2]

The community's uncertainty regarding their identity and role in Persian Yehud is evident in texts such as Ezra-Nehemiah, but also present in the Song of Songs, in which the ethnically, geographically, and religiously ambiguous unnamed woman is at intervals associated with and shunned by the sacred city of Jerusalem and its standard bearers, the Daughters of Jerusalem. In this way, the Song's violence reproduces a group dynamic of hegemonic patriarchy that is mapped onto the body of the unnamed woman, who seems to represent the threats to Judean identity posed by the "people of the land" and/or the Persian Empire.

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[1] Jon L. Berquist, "Constructions of Identity in Postcolonial Yehud," in *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period*, eds. Oded Lipschits and Manfred Oeming (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 56.
[2] Ibid., 58-58; 63. For example, "Nehemiah 5:7–8 depicts Nehemiah's perception that the deep divides between different groups in Judah were between kin; this argues against a primarily ethnic identity. The populace of Judah included identity groups that did not match the categories of genealogical or genetic proximity as much as affinities of language or location." Attesting to the slipperiness of post-exilic Judean identity, Berquist notes that prior scholarly reliance upon a geographical argument can be challenged by both biblical and epigraphical records demonstrating that "[i]dentity was not restricted to the environs of Jerusalem but related to places such as Elephantine, Samaria, Babylon, and even al-Jahuda." Similarly, the religious basis of Judean identity has been disrupted by archaeological records showing both non-Yahwistic religious practices within Judah and Yahwistic practices within the regions of Babylon and Egypt."

Speaking to the precarious position of the returning community, Knoppers writes that "It is the community in the ancestral homeland, not the Judean community in Babylon that faces more than its share of struggles. The community of repatriates in Yehud requires repeated interventions from expatriates to regain its way."[3] On a related note, Knoppers also offers that "[i]n most cases of interactions between related communities geographically set apart, the community rooted in the ancestral land would represent the established community, and the diasporic community would represent a colony or dependent community, but in Ezra these roles are in many ways reversed."[4] The violence embedded in the Song therefore, seems to reveal a less than confident returning community, grappling with their role as a vassal state, as foreigners within their own ancestral land.

Recall from chapter two of this project, that the unnamed woman is characterized as an outsider through her figuration as a sexually and spatially agential woman of color (race and/or class difference), distinguished from her peers by the title/description, the "Shulammite," (the Solomoness or the perfect one). This present chapter will build upon this figuration, considering how the unnamed woman's otherness and femaleness renders her body vulnerable to punishment by the state (1:6; 5:7) and exposes her to the objectifying and threatening gaze of unspecified viewers (7:1). Through the lens of literary trauma theory, this chapter will also consider what the vulnerable and beaten body of the unnamed woman might have represented to the Song's intended audience, the

[3] Gary. N. Knoppers, "The Construction of Judean Diasporic Identity in Ezra-Nehemiah," *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 15, no. 3 (2015): 20.
[4] Gary N. Knoppers, "Ethnicity, Genealogy, and Change: The Judean Communities of Babylon and Jerusalem in the Story of Ezra," in *Community Identity in Judean Historiography: Biblical and Comparative Perspectives* (Winona Lake: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009), 148

returning community. Special attention will be paid to the Song's use of metaphor and the literary convention of the travesty, wherein the sparse and conflicted post-exilic community imagines themselves as moral agents, punishing the unnamed woman for her untoward actions. With the ancient audience in mind, this chapter sets out to answer this project's titular question: "Whose gotta have it?" Whose gotta have the violence? And why?

Traumatic Memory and Communal Trauma

Literary trauma theory "[i]s concerned with the ways that trauma may be encoded within texts, on the ways that texts may function in witnessing to trauma, and on the ways that texts may facilitate recovery and resilience."[5] The first wave of trauma theorists asserted that trauma disrupts the usual meaning-making systems of the brain, and that traumatic memories are often fragmentary and delayed, concluding that the truth of the event can only be known indirectly through literature, film and other art forms. The second wave of trauma theorists, however, challenged this notion arguing instead that traumatic memories can be recalled and spoken in their literality. The second wave was also interested in uncovering the culturally mediated representation of collective memory and intergenerational trauma.

In recent years the field of trauma studies, with the help of social theorist Jeffrey Alexander and the French philosopher and memory researcher Paul Ricoeur, has branched out into discussions of collective memory and collective trauma. According to Alexander, collective trauma differs from individual trauma in that it threatens the

[5] Elizabeth Boase and Christopher G. Frechette, eds. "Defining 'Trauma' as a Useful Lens for Biblical Interpretation," in *Bible Through the Lens of Trauma* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 10.

identity of the group rather than just the individual. And while trauma has been traditionally defined as an external event that overwhelms the individual's ability to cope, social suffering can be caused by the same such events (war, genocide, pandemic, religious, ethnic or economic conflicts). Similarly to the research of Shoshana Felman, Dori Laub, and Judith Herman, the psychological effects of collective trauma can be mediated through what Alexander refers to as the "trauma process."[6] This process involves the transformation of collective memory into a meaningful narrative that reestablishes a social identity. Furthermore, Ricoeur identifies collective memory as related to individual memory due to human intersubjectivity.[7] Therefore, what is termed collective memory is less about memory and more about the establishment of a shared story of social suffering that is agreed upon by a specific group and accepted by an audience. Similarly, the intergenerational transmission of trauma is, according to clinical psychologist Yael Danieli, intrinsic to human history and "[h]as been thought of, alluded to, written about, and examined in both oral and written histories in all societies, cultures, and religions."[8] These communal narratives are socially and culturally constructed; the group decides what is to be remembered and what is to be forgotten. It is only the most meaningful and identity-affirming of stories, written by authors, social leaders, or intellectuals that remain in circulation, while others may be abandoned over time. Expanding the field of narrative representation into the realm of biblical studies,

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[6] Jeffrey Alexander, *Trauma: A Social Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), 98. Cf. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, "Bearing Witness, or the Vicissitudes of Learning" and "An Event without a Witness: Truth, Testimony and Survival," in *Testimony: Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 57-74; 75-92. Judith Herman, "Terror," in *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 1997).
[7] Paul Ricoeur, "Personal Memory, Collective Memory," in *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 93-96.
[8] Yael Danieli, ed, *International Handbook of Multigenerational Legacies of Trauma*, (New York: Plenum Press, 1998), 2.

Elizabeth Boase and Christopher Frechette assert that symbolic representations such as poetry, art, or religious ritual can be understood as part of the meaning making process and that literary symbolization can function as a cultural response to collective trauma. "Such nondiscursive symbolic forms may be conceptualized broadly as part of the trauma narrative." [9]

In the field of trauma studies, collective trauma and individual trauma are not defined as opposing experiences, but rather as united by the notion of intergenerational trauma, the idea that trauma is communicable from one generation to another. This phenomenon has been studied most thoroughly in Jewish survivors of the Holocaust, but can be observed in many different populations, for example the indigenous peoples of North America, African Americans, and to be sure, the survivors of this current global pandemic. In each instance, the historical trauma was/is multigenerational, with physical, psychological, and cultural consequences that stretch far beyond the death of a single generation. Given the ongoing nature of intergenerational trauma, scholars such as Laura Brown have criticized the first wave's definition of trauma as a single, isolated event. Such a narrow and exclusionary view of trauma neglects to address how prolonged exposure to systemic oppressors such as racism, sexism, poverty or colonialism effect groups.

As Danieli observes, the effects of intergenerational trauma can range from the psychological to the molecular. The field of epigenetics, which explores the manner in

[9] Boase and Frechette, 7. For more on the application of literary trauma theory to the Bible, see David M. Carr's recent monograph *Holy Resilience: The Bible's Traumatic Origins* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).

which gene expression can be modified and passed down from generation to generation as a result of prolonged trauma, is a growing area of interest for exploring the inter-subjectivity of trauma.[10] The future of the field, as Rodi-Risberg suggests, requires the development of a culturally knowledgeable trauma theory that considers cultural differences in the ways that trauma is understood and comes to be represented in narratives, testimonies, and other art forms. Such a pluralistic trauma theory, would generate more diverse views regarding the relationship between language and experience.[11] This present chapter lacks the requisite space to delve into the fascinating field of epigenetics, but endeavors instead to present a historically contextualized application of trauma theory and literary trauma theory to the psychically wounded post-exilic community: the Song's intended audience. Before addressing the Song's enigmatic instances of violence, let us first attend to the circumstances that led to Israel's diaspora, return, and subsequent literary response(s).

Israel and Judah's Real and Narrativized Trauma

During the eighth century BCE, the small nation of Israel maintained a tenuous relationship with Assyria, pledging oaths of allegiance to the emperor, and incorporating Assyrian gods into their worship as a means of survival. During this time, any resistance to cultural assimilation was met with violence. Israel's rebellions were never successful, and resulted in the killing of more people thus reducing Israel's population, impeding any future rebellions. Finally, in 722 BCE, the Assyrians permanently destroyed Northern Israel, wiping the kingdom of Samaria off the map. In his monograph *Holy Resilience*,

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[10] Danieli, 2.

[11] Marinella Rodi-Risberg, "Problems in Representing Trauma," in *Trauma and Literature*, ed. J. Roger Kurtz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 112-3.

David M. Carr details Assyria's systematic dismantling of Israel's monarchy, writing that "[t]hey permanently removed thousands of surviving Israelites, anyone who could conceivably lead a rebellion, and moved in peoples from other parts of their empire to take over the exiles' homes and fields.[12]

Some Northern Israelites escaped to the Southern kingdom of Judah, where they were accepted by King Hezekiah. Around this time myths of Jerusalem's inviolability began to emerge, a sentiment which was bolstered by Judah's miraculous survival during the Assyrian siege of 701 BCE.[13] Judah managed to survive under both Assyrian and Babylonian rule until an uprising started by King Jehoiakim resulted in the plundering of the Temple and a depopulation of Jerusalem's elite to Babylon in 596 BCE. A similar uprising under the kingship of Zedekiah in 587 BCE, in which he ceased paying tribute to Babylon, led to the utter destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple complex, along with a second wave of urban exiles to Babylon in 586 BCE. To this Carr remarks that

> It is hard to imagine that such events could fail to traumatize a people. Thousands had died in battle. Yet more had starved in besieged cities. By the end, Jerusalem and much of Judah was in ruins, with its urban population dead or in exile. Rural settlements continued to the north and south of Jerusalem, and the Babylonians used older administrative centers to keep collecting taxes. But Judah had lost both its monarchy and its holy city, and the authors of the Bible found themselves in exile.[14]

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[12] Carr, 25-6. Carr concludes that "There have been rumors ever since about the lost tribes of Israel, but little else survived of the specifically northern alliance that bore the name Israel." Such a trauma unsurprisingly produced rumors and lore around the so-called "lost tribes" of Israel, because such narratives helped the surviving community access and mourn all that had been lost.

[13] Ibid., 41-6.

[14] Ibid., 68-9. "These events severely undermined two core beliefs of the Judeans: that Jerusalem was the invulnerable city of God and that God would make sure that an heir of David would always be king in Jerusalem."

For the peoples of Israel and Judah, subjugation and exile under the Assyrian and Babylonian empires were shattering events, whose ramifications pervade much of their narrativized history.

A generation later, those returning to Israel under the edicts of the Persian emperor Darius, carried along with them the scars of exile; the fifty-five year forced exile meant that many Judeans died on foreign soil and that their children, born abroad, had never set foot in the land of their ancestors. This lack of a physical connection to the land of Israel and Jerusalem, in particular, did not mean that the exiled community had forgotten about their homeland. Rather, many biblical texts attests to a communal memory of all that had been lost.[15] For example, Lamentations, a book whose title alone corroborates a communal mourning over the destruction of Jerusalem, combines Israel's feelings of divine abandonment, culpability, and internal anguish in a few short verses,

> My heart turns over inside me.
> For I have been such a rebel.
> Outside, the sword bereaves;
> inside it is like death.[16]

By contrast to Lamentations, which speaks directly to the traumas of the Babylonian exile, the Song projects itself backwards in time to the imagined splendor and divine

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[15] Ibid., 73. Cf. Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, "Biblical Lamentations and Singing the Blues," in The Oxford Handbook to Biblical Narrative, ed. Danna Nolan Fewell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016,) 550-52. For example, Smith-Christopher terms Lamentations as a work of "posttraumatic literature," arguing that it served as a narrative of reconciliation between the Hebrews and their God in the wake of the Babylonian destruction. Using Robert Niemeyer's scholarship on post-traumatic narratives, Smith-Christopher argues that Lamentations fosters posttraumatic growth, noting that "[d]emonstrably healthy profiles of postloss adaptation are consonant with the view that resilient survivors are able to assimilate loss into their existing self-narratives in a way that does not radically undermine the central themes of their life stories, and indeed, may even affirm them."

[16] Lamentations 1:20, *Jewish Study Bible, TANAKH Translation*.

connectedness of the Solomonic era. It is through this narrative world that the audience is able to inhabit the Jerusalem of old, and imagine a united Israelite subjectivity.

Diagnosing the Community: The Song of Songs as Trauma Narrative

The psychiatric condition commonly known as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) was first acknowledged in the American Psychiatric Association's (APA) *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-III (DSM-III)* in 1980. The DSM-III's diagnostic criteria identifies the characteristic symptoms of PTSD to include "[r]e-experiencing the traumatic event; numbing of responsiveness to, or reduced involvement with, the external world; and a variety of autonomic, dysphoric, or cognitive symptoms" brought on by an event "[o]utside the range of usual human experience."[17] The DSM-III originally classified PTSD as an anxiety disorder, and noted that the associated symptoms could be experienced by both individuals (rape or assault survivors) and groups (military combat or natural disasters). Furthermore, in line with Sigmund Freud's early insights into the latency of traumatic pathology, the DSM-III notes that the onset of acute PTSD symptoms often occurs within six months of the trauma.[18]

In the APA's most recent edition, the *DSM-V* (2013) PTSD was been moved from anxiety disorders to a new section titled "[t]rauma and stress-related disorders." In

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[17] The American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-III* (Washington D.C: American Psychiatric Association, 1980), 236-9.

[18] Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*: *Studies on Hysteria* (1893-1895), vol. 2, trans. and ed. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1948), 7. Prior to the establishment of the DSM-III criterion, the symptoms now associated with PTSD were most commonly attributed to combat survivors; the symptomology was often referred to as shell shock, war neuroses or delayed stress syndrome. Freud likened the delayed presentation of pathology to an infectious disease with an "incubation period." Cf. Sigmund Freud, "The Function of the Dream," in *Dream Psychology: Psychoanalysis for Beginners*, (Bridgewater, MA: Signature Press, 2007).

addition to this shift in classification, the scope of events that result in PTSD pathology has been constricted to events that include "[a]ctual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence."[19] This updated definition purposefully narrows the range of events that can be classified as traumatic. For example, psychosocial events such as divorce and job loss, could be experienced as traumatizing, but are not considered traumatic events under this definition because they do not include the immediate threat of death or bodily harm. While the *DSM-V* focuses on the immediacy and dire threat of the event in question, psychiatrists Bessel van der Kolk and Judith Herman tend to focus on the overwhelming nature of traumatic events, defining trauma as an inordinately stressful event that overpowers existing coping mechanisms, rendering the victim(s) helpless and terrified.[20] Herman and van der Kolk have based their view of trauma upon Freud, who understood trauma to be a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind. Furthermore, Freud perceived psychic wounds, unlike simple bodily injuries, to be experienced too unexpectedly to be fully assimilated into the victim's conscious memory.

Freud was also struck by the *literality* of traumatic dreams and flashbacks, which challenged his own understanding of the unconscious and the role of dreaming as a space for wish fulfillment, whose images contained symbolic rather than literal meaning. For Freud, these intrusive literal images/flashbacks could not be understood as unconscious

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[19] American Psychiatric Association. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. 5th ed*. (Arlington: American Psychiatric Association, 2013), 271.

[20] Bessel van der Kolk, Alexander C. McFarlane and Lars Weisaeth, eds., "Trauma and Memory" and "The Black Hole of Trauma" in *Traumatic Stress: The Effects of Overwhelming Experience on Mind, Body, and Society* (New York; London: The Guilford Press, 2007), 279. Cf. Judith Herman, "Terror," in *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 33.

desires and could therefore not be interpreted for their unconscious meaning.[21] By contrast to Freud's view of traumatic dreams and flashbacks as uninterpretable precisely because of their literality, the biblical authors'/redactors' literary responses to and distance from the traumatic events they narrate open segments of the Hebrew Bible up to symbolic interpretation. For instance, the poetry of the Song seems particularly ripe for symbolic interpretation, especially its interludes of violence.

Addressing the importance of bearing witness to trauma, psychoanalyst Dori Laud has suggested that psychic trauma "[p]recludes its registration;" it is "[a] record that has yet to be made" and in order for the survivor to integrate the trauma into their present life, they must bear witness to the event.[22] The literary theorist, Geoffrey Hartman also acknowledges the need to bear witness to trauma, co-founding with Dori Laub the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale. Aside from his work on remembering the Holocaust, Hartman's scholarship also takes an ethical and a clinical approach to the relationship between words and trauma, viewing literature as a way to "read the wound."[23] Hartman's ethical approach considers the political, cultural, and religious implications embedded in works of literature; viewing such creative works as

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[21] Sigmund Freud, "Section 1: The Historical Premises," in *Moses and Monotheism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1939), 84. In this, his final monograph, Freud attempts to trace the history of the Jewish people and their monotheistic religious tradition. He argues that Moses was an Egyptian priest, who after the death of the religious reformer, Pharaoh Akhenaten, took Egypt's temporary monotheistic belief system (in the sun god Aten) to the peoples who would become the Jews. Freud's historical analysis, while intriguing, is suspect for many reasons, not the least of which is dubious dating. For example, Freud places Moses and the exodus from Egypt as occurring directly after the reign of Akhenaton in the fourteenth century BCE, when the first historical record of the people of Israel did not appear until ca. 1230 BCE, on the victory stele of Pharaoh Merenptah. Cf. Mario Liverani, "Palestine in the Late Bronze Age," in Israel's History and the History of Israel (London: Equinox Publishing Ltd., 2003), 24-5.

[22] Shoshanna Felman and Dori Laub, "Bearing Witness, or the Vicissitudes of Learning," in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 57-91.

[23] Geoffrey Hartman, "On Traumatic Knowledge and Literary Studies," *New Literary History* 26, no. 3 (1995): 537-63.

both a testimony to and a representation of trauma. And yet, like Caruth, Hartman acknowledges the limitations of both cognition and representation, concluding that figurative language could access "traumatic knowledge" but never fully capture it or represent it without distortion.[24]

In line with Caruth's and Hartman's insights into the relative inaccessibility of traumatic memory, the Hebrew Bible does not stand as a completely accurate or literal recounting of Israel's tragic past. Rather, it stands as an example of what Jeffrey Alexander refers to as the "trauma process," in that the authors/redactors transform Israel's collective memory into a coherent social identity. The collective memories embedded in Israel's historiography are evocative of real events but, because the final composers and/or redactors are separated from the historical events by both time and space, they utilize metaphor, humor and a myriad of other literary techniques to communicate Israel's past and negotiate their communal identity. This narrative spin, however, does not negate the truth within the text, but speaks to the fragmented nature of traumatic memory and its often latent arrival. Writing on Freud's insights into the latency of traumatic memory, Caruth asserts that trauma is

[24]Ibid. 537. Cf. Felman and Laub, 9. Hartman's Yale colleagues, professor of French and comparative literature Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub address the human impulse to linguistically represent trauma, defining the act of bearing witness as threefold: being a witness to oneself (Laub himself was a childhood survivor of the Shoah), being a witness to the testimonies of others, and being a witness to the process of witnessing itself. In their edited work *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History,* Laub and Felman explore the ways in which testimony is not simply a function of historical transmission but also a means to healing. See also, Susannah Radstone, "Trauma Theory: Contexts, Politics, Ethics," *Paragraph* 30, no.1 (2007): 13. In documenting the communal trauma of the Holocaust, Felman and Laub assert that traumatic memories can be unlocked and assimilated through the communal process of witnessing and testifying. However, this intersubjective view of traumatic memory is at odds with the field of neurobiology, which understands traumatic memory to be dissociative. Cultural theorist Susannah Radstone notes that "[i]n practice, trauma theory's emphasis on witnessing as well as on pathologies of dissociation demonstrates that it draws on both strands." Even though Felman and Laub view the speaking of trauma and the witnessing of another's traumatic narrative to be reparative they ultimately find words to be inadequate representations for the enormity of the events in need of narration.

> [m]uch more than a pathology, or the simple illness of a wounded psyche: it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is otherwise unavailable. This truth, in its delayed appearance and its belated address, cannot be only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language.[25]

The pathologies of eyewitness survivors of the Assyrian and Babylonian exiles are inaccessible to us, though it is safe to assume, based upon the above mentioned scholarship, that such world-shattering traumas could elicit symptoms consistent with a modern day PTSD diagnoses. Yet, what we have inherited is the evidence of Israel's "trauma process" in the form of the Hebrew Bible.[26]

For van der Kolk traumatic memories are fundamentally dissociated from verbal-linguistic-semantic representations, meaning that traumatic events are not subject to the usual "declarative," "explicit" or "narrative" mechanisms of memory and recall. Rather, van der Kolk views traumatic memory as "iconic" or "sensorimotor," a level of cognition he likens to that of a child, which eschews linguistic or symbolic representation.[27] In line with van der Kolk, Caruth asserts that trauma so profoundly fragments the psyche that the event in need of narration can never be fully accessed or pieced back together into a coherent whole. To this end, van der Kolk asserts that traumatic events narrow the consciousness of the individual, sometimes developing into a complete amnesia of the

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[25] Cathy Caruth, "Introduction: The Wound and the Voice," In *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (Baltimore: John's Hopkins Press, 1996), 4.

[26] The themes of exile run throughout the Hebrew Bible, though not all of its books were influenced by Israel's trauma(s). The specter of exile appears most frequently in the Hebrew Bible's historical and prophetic works, which seek to make historical and theological sense of Israel's perceived divine abandonment.

[27] van der Kolk, McFarlane, and Weisaeth, 279-302.

experience, perhaps because extreme emotional arousal interferes with hippocampal memory functions.[28]

Nearly a century before the works of van der Kolk and Herman, French psychologist Pierre Janet argued that intense emotional experiences could lead to the formation of continuous or retrograde amnesia."[29] Janet also noted that when people become too upset their memories could not be properly transformed into a neutral narrative, this resulted in a "phobia of memory," which splits the traumatic memory from ordinary consciousness. In a move than intuited the later works of Sigmund Freud, Janet noted that the traces of trauma would emerge psychosomatically through obsessive preoccupations, or traumatic flashbacks. Thus Janet's hypnotic treatment argued that by retrieving traumatic memories, within the therapeutic context, patients could experience catharsis, make meaning from the memory, and assimilate the memory into their consciousness.[30] Building off of Janet's intuitions, Judith Herman posits that, in order to treat trauma, one has to access a sufficient depository of traumatic memories, fragmented and difficult to verbalize though they may be, in order to construct a coherent trauma narrative. For Herman, this project of "meaning-making" helps the survivor to integrate the traumatic event into their life story and to reorganize or reconstruct their shattered

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[28] Ibid., 282. For more on the brain's processing of traumatic memory see, S.A. Christianson, "Emotional Stress and Eyewitness Memory: A Critical Review," *Psychological Bulletin*, 112, (2002): 284-309; and S.A. Christianson, "The Relationship Between Induced Emotional Arousal and Amnesia," *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology* 25, (1984): 147-160.

[29] Ibid., 285-87.

[30] For more on Janet's hypnotic treatment see, Onno van der Hart, Paul Brown, and Bessel van der Kolk, "Pierre Janet's Treatment of Post-Traumatic Stress," *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 2, no. 4 (1989): 1-11. This view of trauma as inherently forgettable held by both Herman and van der Kolk originated with French philosopher and psychologist, Pierre Janet who understood the pathology associated with post-traumatic stress to be a disorder in memory that affected survivor's ability to act normally in the world.

assumptions and beliefs.[31] Such seems to be the case with the Song of Songs. Even though the poet is unlikely to have been an eyewitness to the traumas of exile and the challenges posed by returning, s/he transmits and creatively renders what is "known" or remembered by the community through interludes of sexualized violence.[32]

As Herman mentions, the narration of trauma is central to the healing process, but Breuer and Freud also emphasized the importance of emotional discharge as part of the cathartic treatment that would later become "talk therapy," writing that "[r]ecollection without affect almost invariably produces no result."[33] Many parts of the Hebrew Bible *are* affective, eliciting a multiplicity of responses from or serving as an emotional resource for their intended audience(s). Through a variety of literary formats, from historiography and prophesy to humor, and, as I will soon suggest, erotic literature, Israel's trauma and need for catharsis pours forth.

The Songs Literary Modes: Poetry, Allegory, and Travesty

As a work or erotic poetry the Song operates in a variety of ways. In fact, the power of the Song and our academic obsession with it lies in its multiplicity. To this end Alter writes that

> Poetry and fiction, as literary theorists from the Russian Formalists and the Anglo-American New Critics onward have often observed,

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[31] Herman, 155. For Herman the recovery process unfolded in three stages: the establishment of safety, remembering and mourning the trauma, and reconnection with ordinary life. Herman concedes that, "Like any abstract concept, these stages of recovery are a convenient fiction, not to be taken too literally. They are an attempt to impose simplicity and order upon a process that is inherently turbulent and complex." For more on the mind-body connection of trauma recovery see, Bessel van der Kolk, "This is Your Brain on Trauma" and "The Imprint of Trauma," in *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York: Penguin Books, 2014), 51-89; 173-186.

[32] Michael V. Fox, "Language, Dating, and Historical Context," in The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 187-90. Recall that the Song is notoriously difficult to date, with most scholars pointing to a Second Temple period of composition based on the Song's linguistic features, which resemble mishnaic Hebrew rather than classical biblical Hebrew.

[33] Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud, *Studies on Hysteria* (1895), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* trans and ed. James Strachey (London: 1955-74), 6.

> involve a condensation of meanings, a kind of thickening of discourse, in which multiple and even mutually contradictory perceptions of the same subject can be fused within a single linguistic structure.[34]

In line with Alter's insights, the Song of Songs has been interpreted in a variety of ways, some of which have embraced its overt eroticism, while others have worked to suppress it. For example, modern readings have abandoned the Song's long history of allegorical interpretation, reading it instead as a story of young and abiding love. Such readings take the Song's eroticism literally, yet paradoxically avoid attending to its instances of violence.

By contrast, allegorical readings have tended to accept the violence inflicted upon the unnamed women as part of Israel's troubled relationship with YHWH, but have failed to explicate the violence further. For the rabbis of the second century CE, the Song's capacity for metaphorical communication made it possible to read its theme of seeking and finding as an allegory for Israel's perceived divine abandonment. In this way, the male lover comes to be understood as the Divine Presence of God, and the female protagonist as the perpetually searching (and never fully satisfied) diasporic community. For example, Pope has noted that

> The period between the destruction of the Temple, A.D. 70, and the revolt of Bar Kokhba, A.D. 132, apparently saw the development of the normative Jewish interpretation of the Canticles as an allegorical account of the history of the relationship between the Divine Presence of God, the Shekinah, and the Community of Israel from the Exodus from Egypt onward.[35]

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[34]Robert Alter, "Composite Artistry," in *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, Revised and Updated (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 191.

[35] Marvin Pope, *Song of Songs: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1977), 92.

In similitude to the Song's allegorical interpretation of exile and foreign subjugation, the prophetic book of Hosea theologized Assyria's dominance in Canaan through the metaphor of the father-child relationship, in which YHWH withholds paternal love because the community has rebelled by worshipping foreign gods. Yet Hosea's message grows harsher still, when he insists that the things the people are doing to end Assyrian domination are actually making it worse. "When his people try to gain divine support through worshiping Baal, it is like they are 'playing the whore'(Hosea 5:3)."[36] An augmented version of "playing the whore" resurfaces in the Song of Songs through the figure of the sexually and spatially agential unnamed woman, whose behavior, according to patriarchal standards, is worthy of punishment/correction. By portraying the unnamed woman as sexually and spatially aberrant, the poet provides the community with an unspecified "other" upon whom they can displace their frustrations regarding their colonial status vis-à-vis the Persian empire. The poet, having been aware of Israel's social constraints, knows that s/he cannot risk open criticism of hegemonic powers, so they cleverly recycle the familiar figure of the sexually and spatially transgressive women as the target of their anger. Additionally, the community's ambivalence towards the unnamed woman, who is both alluring and alarming, speaks to their own conflicted relationship with empire: they both love and hate it.

In similitude to Israel's works of humor, which skillfully conceal the true target of Israel's ire, the Song of Songs employs the literary convention of the "travesty," as a

[36] David M. Carr, "The Birth of Monotheism," in *Holy Resilience: The Bible's Traumatic Origins* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 27. "The very altars Israelites build to atone for their sin only aggravate it. Hosea preaches, "Ephraim keeps building altars for his sins, these very altars are themselves a sin" (Hosea 8:11). He even proclaims that Israel's golden calf and other divine symbols incur God's wrath and will be destroyed. In Hosea's view, Israel's unfaithfulness to God, its worship of Baal and devotion to divine images, are precisely why it suffers under Assyrian oppression."

means of narratively expressing and processing their ambivalent relationship with imperial forces and/or the peoples who currently occupy their ancestral land. Fox defines the travesty as

> [a] type of fantasy, a disguise that an author, and also a reader, may put on in order to escape temporarily from their usual place in society without abandoning their 'selves' through ecstasy or possession. Such a disguise allows an abandonment of one's ordinary situation by identification with a character outside one's usual station in society. It is not the characters, but the author and the reader, who put on 'disguises' by identifying with the fictional characters.[37]

Fox finds the travesty to be at best, awkwardly applicable to the Song, locating it in the "royal disguise" that the lovers take on when describing one another.[38] But, I find this application to be too narrow, contending that the travesty appears in the form of hegemonic disguise, allowing the community to imagine themselves first as the brothers (1:6) then as the city patrolmen (5:7) and finally as a group of unidentified speakers who sexually harass and taunt the unnamed woman (7:1).

Land, Gender, and Trauma in the Song of Songs 1:6

The land of Israel is inextricably connected to the community's identity as YHWH's chosen people. In fact, the land is so intertwined with Israel's history and identity that it remains the subject of great debate to this day; with the land, like its people, remaining unsettled. Bearing in mind those returning from Babylon to find their ancestral land inhabited by "the people of the land," the vineyard, both real and metaphoric, is evocative of the status and economic autonomy that the returnees seek to regain. Therefore, the woman's claim to the vineyard/her body is doubly problematic

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[37] Michael V. Fox, *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 293.
[38] Ibid.

because of her gender and her figuration as an outsider. Recall that the unnamed woman is not necessarily of Israelite origin, as intuited by her title/description, the "Shulammite," which could refer to an unspecified geographic location or, more likely to her beauty. Either way her "otherness" in conjunction with her eschewal of gender mores allows for the brothers as representatives of the patriarchal power structure to step in and punish her.

In this scene the brothers respond to their sister's sexual impropriety in an inimical fashion, banishing her to manual labor in the vineyard under the harsh sun. This punishment is meant to decrease their sister's beauty and ostensibly stymie her sexual liaisons. By characterizing the Shulammite as a sexually transgressive woman, the audience is able to justify their hatred based upon patriarchal social mores, and imagine themselves as the brothers: strong and in control of their land and their sister, particularly her sexuality and its economic value. In this vein, Renita Weems notes that "In ancient Hebrew culture, in particular, part of what it meant to be a man was to protect the sexual purity of the women in the household—whether that be the sexual behavior of the man's wife/wives, his daughters, his sisters, even his mother."[39] Furthermore, the unnamed woman's sexual autonomy is reminiscent of Hosea's metaphor of the adulterous wife, and as previously discussed, the unnamed woman also bears resemblance to the foreign woman trope found in Proverbs. By borrowing elements from both of these prominent

[39] Renita Weems, "'Is She Not My Wife?' Prophets, Audiences, and Expectations" in *Battered Love: Marriage, Sex, and Violence in the Hebrew Prophets* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 43-4. Writing on the metaphor of the adulterous wife in the prophetic literature, Renita Weems asserts that, "[H]ebrew women were expected to be modest, chaste, industrious, deferring, and willing to submit to male authority…A woman who acted contrary to this threatened the social order. More importantly, she brought shame and dishonor upon the man/men who ruled over her household (*bêt 'āb*, "father's house"). In particular, a wife who engaged in sexual relations with other men threatened the purity of her husband's bloodline. The prophets portrayed Israel's relationship with God in marriage imagery in order to play upon men's fear of women's sexuality and their assumptions that women posed a threat to male honor and status."

examples of aberrant womanhood the poet is able to form a composite figure who is at once alluring and loathsome. This lovable yet punishable woman could represent Persia, a civilization with whom Israel is intimately connected, but whose power and presence in their ancestral land they collectively resent. The community wrestles with their ambivalent feelings towards the unnamed woman just as they struggle with Persian imperial rule, knowing that their own identity and survival is intertwined with Persia. As Berquist remind us, "National identity is both Persian and Yehudite; what this combination means to each individual is highly fluid and always a product of internal conflict."[40] Alternatively, the unnamed woman could represent the threat and allure of exogamy posed by both the remainees and the current imperial forces under whom they find themselves. Prohibitions against such couplings found in Ezra-Nehemiah attest to an internal struggle over maintaining a separate Jewish identity or assimilating with the cultures present in the land.

An Urban Escalation: Violence in the City Streets in the Song of Songs 5:7

As previously mentioned, the Song's setting in the sacred city of Jerusalem is in part related to its being the seat of the Davidic line of kingship; Jerusalem also held religious and national significance as an inviolable city. But, in the prophetic literature Israel is often described as a terrorized woman or a city under siege. As previously discussed, the prophet Hosea envisioned Israel's relationship with God as that of a husband who is married to a prostitute. To this end, Carr writes that

> Ancient marriage involved many things—love, procreation, and raising of children, often a partnership in producing food and goods as part of a small-scale farm. It also involved reciprocal obligations of

[40] Jon L. Berquist, "Constructions of Identity in Postcolonial Yehud," in Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period, eds. Oded Lipschits and Manfred Oeming (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 58.

> husband and wife: the husband was to protect and provide for his wife, while his wife was expected to be sexual with her husband and her husband alone. Ancient laws prescribed harsh penalties for adulterous wives and the men who had sex with them. A married woman who had sex outside her marriage faced possible death, or at least stripping, humiliation, and shaming if discovered by her jealous husband.[41]

Such an historical contextualization deepens our understanding of the events of 5:7 in which the guards beat and strip the unnamed woman. In addition to the imposing setting of Jerusalem's inner city, the watchmen who guard the inviolable walls of the city epitomize patriarchal institutions; and their punishment of the unnamed woman attests to this, in that they punish her ostensibly for her violation of both gender and spatial social mores.

In the city the unnamed woman is vulnerable to the whims of other men, who might misinterpret her for a whore or an adulteress. If read through the lens of the travesty one could imagine the post-exilic community temporarily adopting the disguise of the city watchmen for two reasons: to live out a fantasy in which they are able to protect Jerusalem from foreign inhabitants, represented by the lascivious unnamed woman, or to temporality inhabit the social world of the watchmen, wherein they are able to wield an unchecked power that is reminiscent of the imperial powers under which they currently find themselves. By imagining themselves as the city watchmen, guarding Jerusalem, the community is able to offload their sadness and anger over the city's destruction (586 BCE) onto the body of the unnamed woman, who represents empire and/or those who remained during the exile. Alternatively, the beaten and stripped unnamed woman might represent the collective Israel, in which case the community

[41] Carr, 29.

simultaneously embodies the guards and the unnamed woman: effectively beating and hating themselves for their current stripped-down status.

Dance, Dance Revolution? Internal Conflict in the Song of Songs 7:1

In this final scene, a subtler form of violence occurs when the unnamed woman briefly interacts with a group of unidentified speakers who implore her to "(re)turn" so that they might gaze upon her. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the speaker's imperative that the Shulammite *šûbî*, "turn," "return," or "dance," likely refers to the group's desire to gaze upon the woman's beauty. However, the unnamed woman's jocular of hostile retort to the group's command raises further questions. She responds to the unidentified speakers by asking, "Why will you gaze at the Shulammite / In the Mahanaim dance?"[42] Her question compares the speaker's fascination with her to those who would watch a group dance. Furthermore, her use of the title/description Shulammite distinguishes her from the group of gawkers, who some scholars identify with the daughters of Jerusalem.[43] Recall that the daughters of Jerusalem had previously doubted the unnamed woman's beauty and sexual prowess.[44] However, if we take seriously the possible setting of a dance in a camp full of men, this interaction takes on a more sinister tone.

The unnamed woman's titular and/or descriptive separation, "Shulammite" coupled with her somewhat defensive response to the unidentified group lends credence to Murphy's interpretation that 7:1-7 takes place in the setting of a dance, specifically a

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[42] Song of Songs 7:1, *Jewish Study Bible, TANAKH Translation*.
[43] Michael V. Fox, *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 158.
[44] Ibid., 158. Cf. Song of Songs 1:5; 5:9; 7:1.

"*maḥănāyim"* dance, or "dance of the two camps."[45] Such an interpretation fits well with the lens of the travesty, in which case the "two camps" could represent the internal conflict that existed between the remainees and the returnees. Additionally, the two camps might represent the returning community's dual identity: Persian and Yehudite. As previously mentioned, Pope reads the *maḥănāyim* dance as related to the *mēlultu*, a festival of games associated with the Akkadian goddess Ishtar. In line with this festive tradition, the image of two groups locked in a battle dance, for the purposes of war or entertainment, serves as a powerful reminder of the internal conflict that existed between these "two camps": those who remained and those who returned; or those who align with Persian and those who sought to create a separate Judahite identity.[46]

In addition, Sasson asserted that "[r]ather than a round dance the *māḥôl/mĕḥōlāh* consisted of antiphonal singing, a double group of performers including females, musical accompaniment, and ritual sporting. The term *maḥănāyim*, "a double company, was one of the grounds for Sasson's understanding.[47] The notion of a festive call and response aligns with the Song's possible function as a dramatic work. By contrast, Murphy asserts that "Canticles is a dialogue, but not a drama; it lacks any real conflict."[48] Such an assertion neglects to address the Song's instances of violence or the conflict embedded in the unnamed woman's prejudicial treatment by the daughters of Jerusalem (1:5; 5:9, and possibly 7:1). A "dance of two camps," for sport or war, speaks to the returnees' complex relationship with their own identity and their relationship to the "people of the land" and

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[45] Roland E. Murphy, *Song of Songs: A Commentary on the Book of Canticles or the Song of Songs*, ed. S. Dean McBride, Jr. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 185.
[46] Cf. Genesis 32:1-3, in which Jacob prepares to meet Esau. In these verses Jacob names the place where the two meet "Mahanaim," meaning two camps; one remaining (Jacob) and one returning (Esau).
[47] Pope, 602.
[48] Roland E. Murphy, "Canticles (Song of Songs)," in *Wisdom Literature: Job, Proverbs, Ruth, Canticles, Ecclesiastes, and Esther*, (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981), 100.

the Persian empire. In this same vein, the sexual harassment intrinsic to the group's imperative reinforces the woman's aberrant figuration, while at the same time revealing the community's ambivalent desires to assimilate with empire and/or the remainees.

Closing Remarks: "Speaking" Trauma

Trauma theorists and practitioners working in the field of trauma recovery do not always agree that trauma leads to traumatic amnesia. This understanding of trauma as an event that defies understanding and that can only be expressed through symbolic or figurative allusions, belongs to the first wave or literary trauma theory spearheaded by Caruth, Laub and van der Kolk as mentioned above. But, the second wave of trauma theorists, in particular, clinical psychologist and experimental psychopathologist Richard McNally, has called the long assumed link between trauma and forgetting into question. In his notable monograph *Remembering Trauma*, McNally writes "It is ironic that so much has been written about the biological mechanisms of traumatic psychological amnesia when the very existence of the phenomenon is in doubt."[49] McNally's main argument in *Remembering Trauma* can be summarized as such: "[t]raumatic amnesia is a myth, and while survivors may *choose* not to speak of their traumas, there is little evidence that they *cannot*."[50] Throughout his work McNally critiques Caruth's assertion that trauma can only be "spoken" through figural rather than literal language, arguing instead that trauma is both memorable and describable. McNally also challenges the neurobiological insights of van der Kolk and Herman, pushing back against the notion of

[49] Richard McNally, "Theories of Repression and Dissociation," in *Remembering Trauma* (Cambridge: The Harvard University Press, 2003), 182.
[50] Joshua Pederson, "Toward a Revised Understanding of Literary Trauma Theory," *Narrative* 22, no. 3 (October 2015): 334.

traumatic memory as inherently dissociative, arguing instead that increased levels of arousal enhance memory, rather than fragment it, by directing attention to the central features of the arousing event at the expense of peripheral features.[51] Recent neuroimaging studies have supported McNally's assertion, demonstrating that activity in the hippocampus and the amygdala are increased when subjects are exposed to either negative or positive emotional arousal.[52]

Furthermore, McNally's research undermines the two most crucial tenants of Caruth's literary theory of trauma: the assumption that traumatic memories are "unregistered" and "unclaimed" as well as the idea that traumatic memories evade literal, verbal representation.[53] In essence, McNally alleges that proponents of traumatic amnesia conflate an unwillingness to think about trauma with an inability to do so. Contrary to van der Kolk's dissociative theory of trauma, McNally writes: "That memory for trauma can be expressed in physiologic reactivity to traumatic reminders does not preclude its being expressed in narrative as well." In support of this assertion McNally cites English professor Lawrence Langer's documentation of Holocaust survivor's detailed testimonies

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[51] McNally, 48-50. See also, S.A. Christianson, "Emotional Stress and Eyewitness Memory: A Critical Review," *Psychological Bulletin*, 112: 284-309.

[52] McNally, 62-66. For more on the neurobiological studies of the hippocampus and amygdala see, L. Cahill, "Modulation of Long-term Memory Storage in Humans by Emotional Arousal: Adrenergic Activation and the Amygdala," in J.P. Aggleton, ed. *The Amygdala: A Functional Analysis*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 425-445. McNally also references a promising pharmaceutical study which tested whether accident survivors who received the beta-blocker, propranolol shortly after arriving in the emergency room, would prevent the development of PTSD symptoms. This study found that most survivors reported few stress symptoms at follow-up, regardless of whether they had received the propranolol or the placebo. However, patients treated with the propranolol were significantly less physiologically reactive when listening to an audio recording describing their accident than those patients who had received a placebo. This study suggests that the swift administration of drugs that stem the activity of the amygdala may reduce conditioned fear responses to reminders of the traumatic event. See also, Roger Pitman, et al., "Pilot Study of Secondary Prevention of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder with Propranolol, Biological *Psychiatry, 51* (2002): 189-192.

[53] Pederson, 336.

of their experiences. Similarly to Felman and Laub's findings, Langer's research challenged the first wave's view of traumatic memory as inherently dissociative, providing avenues for healing through the recovery and assimilation of traumatic memories into meaningful narrative(s).[54]

While McNally concedes that the memory of trauma may be altered, he rejects the notion that it is absent. Rather, McNally and his colleagues argue that theorists should shift away from the first waves' focus on the inevitable and inaccessible "gaps" in victims' recollections of trauma, and instead concentrate on interpreting victim's accessible narratives. Professor of philosophy and trauma survivor Sharon J. Brison, in a similar manner to Felman and Laub, extols the healing power of narrating trauma:

> In contrast to the involuntary experiencing of traumatic memories, narrating memories to others […] enables survivors to gain more control over the traces left by trauma. Narrative memory is not passively endured; rather, it is an act on the part of the narrator, a speech act that defuses traumatic memory, giving shape and a temporal order to the events recalled, establishing more control over their recalling, and helping the survivor to remake a self.[55]

Like McNally, Brison rejects Caruth's notion that trauma is unspeakable, viewing such an assertion as disempowering to survivors by portraying them as unable to testify to their own trauma.

Another notable second wave theorist is the historian Dominick LaCapra whose writings work to challenge the assumptions held by Caruth, particularly her claim that literature, as opposed to historiography or psychoanalysis, has a special power to witness

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[54]McNally, 180-185. See also, Lawrence Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).

[55] Sharon Brison, *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 71.

to trauma."[56] As an historian LaCapra is concerned with Caruth's event-based model of trauma, which for him runs the risk of universalizing psychic pain and depoliticizing trauma by avoiding the importance of specific historical events and problems. LaCapra's critique of Caruth is in part related to her conception of history as accessible only through trauma, and that trauma can only be transmitted through literature, rather than represented in its literality.[57] She writes "[h]istory, like trauma, is never simply one's own … history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other's traumas."[58] LaCapra pushes back against Caruth's global view of history as trauma, noting its dubious inclusion of perpetrators in this "wounded culture" and its lack of historical specificity.[59] Yet, Caruth's insights remain valuable to the field of biblical studies, precisely because segments of the Hebrew Bible creatively articulate Israel's history of trauma and, through coded language, implicate the specific political players involved.

In conclusion, these interludes of violence disrupt the Song's otherwise celebratory mood, introducing the seemingly incongruous attitudes of rage and prejudice. However, these affective eruptions demonstrate the poet's awareness of the post-exilic community's need to exercise their own feelings of lowliness and powerlessness through the only means available to them: literature. To this end, viewing Israel's narrativized history through the lens of literary trauma theory aims to uncover the ways in which the

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[56] Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 183. LaCapra asks, "Why may discourse on the literary accomplish this extravagant feat while psychoanalytic (and historiographical?) theory does not?"

[57] Cathy Caruth, "Unclaimed Experience: Trauma and the Possibility of History (Freud, Moses and Monotheism)," in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 18.

[58] Ibid. 24.

[59] Marinella Rodi-Risberg, "Problems in Representing Trauma," in *Trauma and Literature*, J. Roger Kurtz, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 112-113.

Song of Songs, an unlikely messenger, "speaks" to Israel's trauma. Rather than simply recounting the community's glorious past, unique relationship with YHWH, or providing them with a source of levity, the Song also seems to function as a cathartic work. And, the catharsis that the Song offers is characteristically complex, commingling consensual sexual release with instances of sexualized violence. It is interesting that we should find sexual and gender based social mores within a work that is ostensibly meant to free the reader/hearer from the normal constraints of reality. Yet, if the travesty is broadly applied to the Song, the sexualized violence fits, because it enables the audience to embody any of the characters: the lovers, the brothers, the daughters of Jerusalem, or the guards, temporarily taking on their social station, point of view, and actions.

By punishing (the brothers in 1:6; the guards in 5:7) or teasing (7:1) the unnamed woman for her color, sexual impropriety, or sexual prowess, the poet knowingly includes Israel's social mores, creating tension between the characters, allowing for playfulness and catharsis. In this way, the individual reader/hearer can either eschew social rules through identification with the unnamed woman or accept social mores through identification with the male authority figures and/or the modest daughters of Jerusalem. The power of the Song lies in its multiplicity of meanings and openness to interpretation: it can provide the community with comfort, adventure, or serve as a narrative space to discharge post-exilic confusion. The violence, therefore, serves the psychic needs of the community who struggle to differentiate themselves over and against the people of the land, and the pull of assimilation posed by Persian rule. The Song's violence is a tool that the community can wield towards themselves and others as they struggle through the long and arduous process of identity formation.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Parallel Commencements

This project is the product of not only my graduate studies, but also my personal journey as a daughter and woman of faith. As mentioned in the introduction, my academic fascination with religion and religious institutions is influenced, at least in part, by my conservative religious upbringing. The academy, by contrast to my strict Assemblies of God church and school setting, has been a place where I, as a skeptic, could fit in and find fellow disillusioned misfits. Still, I have always felt rather jealous of people who were/are connected to their religious upbringing and/or religious community. I especially wished that I had been raised Jewish, like my dad and his siblings, for a time, had been. In graduate school I focused on the Hebrew Bible rather than the New Testament as a means of accessing my Jewish heritage. Ironically, I recently discovered, through the magic of DNA testing, that my dad is not the biological son to our family's absentee patriarch, Edward Siegelman. Contrary to what I had thought my entire life, we have no Jewish heritage. This has surprised everyone, myself included, and forced us to reassess our relationship to this part of our long assumed family history. To a certain extent, I had built my identity around this name: Siegelman, so much so that I focused my studies on the Hebrew Bible and kept my last name when I got married. Still, it is quite comical that I should uncover this key bit of information mere weeks before my

dissertation defense, in which I write of patriarchal social mores, female sexual autonomy, and Israel's collective trauma and subsequent negotiation of identity.

In concluding this project, I cannot help but read my grandmother's infidelity and the social constraints that kept her from embracing her sexual subjectivity through the lens of the unnamed woman who, by all accounts, is the polar opposite of my grandmother. For example, the Shulammite and her lover share a mutual affection, their lovemaking is free from shame, and is non-procreative. My Nana, on the other hand, having found herself in an abusive marriage, sought solace in the embrace of an Italian bartender (I do not know if he was married at the time), my dad's biological father. I do not blame my grandmother for her behavior; in fact, I am honestly a little impressed by her sexual autonomy, given that I only knew her to be a chaste and devout woman of God. However, it does sadden me to think of how desperate and lonely she must have been in her marriage to seek out the affection of a stranger. Her rebellion was in a way an act of differentiation, a claim to her own identity and bodily autonomy, which had been subsumed by my grandfather's observant Jewish family and by the stultifying expectations of mid-century marriage and motherhood.

After my grandparents' divorce in 1969, my dad built a narrative around the sparse information he had about the Siegelman family, which he passed on to me and my siblings. To this end, Daniel L. Smith-Christopher writes that "[s]cholars who understand the central importance of stories to human self-understanding have sometimes asserted that this is so central to the human condition that we ought to replace our self-designation

of homo 'sapiens' (wise) with homo 'narrans' (storytelling)."[1] My and my family's narrative about who we thought we were has changed and will continue to change in the wake of discovering our dad's paternity (or current lack thereof). Yet, I know that we will survive this loss/change because we have each other. So, just as this dissertation explores the themes of gender, sexuality, trauma and growth, so too does my parallel family history project. But, rather than viewing either as a capstone, both projects are simply jumping off points, as my academic work is only just beginning and my personal journey of self-discovery and self-actualization is ongoing.

So (Now) What?

Having reached the end of this degree, I have been reflecting upon on my first semester of coursework and remembering how Dr. Johnson-DeBaufre encouraged us to ask the question "so what?" as we wrote our first essays for her "Ancient Judaism" course. This question rings in my ears every time I sit down to write and pushes me to reflect on who my intended audience is and how my scholarship might be actionable in the real-world. If there is one thing that Drew has instilled within me, it is that our scholarship must actively work towards building awareness and social change, in order for us to live up to our responsibilities as teachers, activists, and persons of faith. With that said, the "so what?" of this project is wrapped up in the persistent presence of gender and race based violence in modern American culture (and American history broadly). By connecting Spike Lee's reflections on America's present (and the recent past of the 1980's) with the ancient timeframe in which the Song of Songs was composed, this

[1] Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, "Biblical Lamentations and Singing the Blues," ed. Danna Nolan Fewell, in *The Oxford Handbook to Biblical Narrative* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 551.

project has emphasized how both worlds rely on racial and gender based violence to maintain a system of hetero-patriarchy that benefits the few at the expense of the many.

The future directions of this project will include similar critical comparisons, meant to facilitate a discussion of the morally ambiguous and often indifferent spaces of the street and the prison. For example, a Trans reading of the Song would allow for a continued discussion of the streets as an "institution" ruled by men as well as a liminal queer milieu where free self-expression can be praised (carnival) or scorned (grotesque). Such a reading would discuss the cultural perceptions of trans-bodies, specifically the grotesque figuration of transwomen of color.[2] In addition to a trans reading, I aim to undertake an imaginative continuation of 5:7, wherein the unnamed woman of color is mistaken for a prostitute, beaten, stripped and detained by the city watchman. Such a scene echoes the lived realities of overly policed women of color in city environs (sex worker or not) and will allow me to address the grotesque figuration (and animalization) of black women's bodies within the contexts of the street and the prison.[3] This

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[2] Fiona C. Black, "Uncovering the Grotesque Body" and "Revealed and Concealed: The Grotesque Body in the Song of Songs," in *The Artifice of Love: Grotesque Bodies and the Song of Songs*, (New York: T&T Clark), 2009. Are black women's bodies considered grotesque by authoritative figures because of their location in the streets? Are their body's grotesque simply because they are black? Because they are female or passing as female? Or are these "out of place" bodies *made* grotesque at the hands of authoritative figures and institutions because of their spatial location, gender or race? Who gets to decide what bodies are beautiful? Does beauty ensure the protection of that body from violence or violation?

[3] Elizabeth Wilson, "Cities of the American Dream" in *The Sphinx in the City: Urban Life, the Control of Disorder, and Women*, (Berkeley: University of California Press), 1991. See also, Lynda Johnston and Robyn Longhurst, "Sex and the City" in Space, Place and Sex: Geographies of Sexualities (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers), 2009. Johnston and Longhurst address the "punitive policing and public order acts" are designed to "purify" and gentrify zones associated with prostitution and/or homosexual activity deemed unseemly by "normal" society, that is heterosexual, monogamous, family oriented and middle-class residents. The language of purifying particular portions of the city associated with prostitution or homosexuality activity function to further marginalize vulnerable minorities such as sex workers and people whose sexuality fall outside of the established norm, by classifying them as dirty or immoral. See also, Michael A. Burayidi and Mamadou Coulibaly, "Image Busters: How Prison Location Distorts the Profiles of Rural Host Communities and What can be done about It," Economic Development Quarterly, May 2009, v. 23: 2, pp. 141-49. Prisons are typically located in rural areas with predominately white populations and provide jobs for those communities, while the prison population itself is composed

imaginative continuation would also compare the masculinity and outsized power of modern corrections officers to that of the abusive night watchmen. By exploring the murky relationship between power and desire, I aim to critique the larger systems of racism and sexism that allow for dehumanization and/or sexual violence to occur on the street and within the prison setting.[4] Butler frames such violations it terms of "apprehension" and "recognition," noting that "Not all acts of knowing are acts of recognition, although the inverse claim would not hold: a life has to be intelligible *as a life*, has to conform to certain conceptions of what life is, in order to become recognizable."[5] The prescient issues of assault (and murder) against trans-women of color and sexual violence within prison, make plain Butler's framing. These are but a few examples of the lives that are not recognized by modern American culture.

Writing this conclusion, on the eve of an historic election has left me at a loss for words. I am overwhelmed by the injustices and the indifference to injustice I see. Where do we go from here? How do we move forward as a nation? Speaking as an educator, I

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of mainly black and brown people coming from outside the community. This article explores the ways in which prisons in rural communities change the demographic composition of the town's population, as portrayed by Census Bureau data, making them unattractive locations for industry. See also, Patricia Case, "Using Prisons to Stimulate Demographic Change: Understanding One Community's Concerns," Theory in Action, 2009, Vol 2: 1, pp. 110-121. In this article Case explores whether or not prisons located in rural areas increases minority populations. Her study speculates that an increase in minority residents that leads to improved economic outcomes might motivate the siting of more prisons and the incarceration of more minorities.

[4]Associated Press, "Feds to Probe Sex Abuse Claims at New Jersey's Women Prison," Star Tribune, May 16, 2018, accessed March 3, 2019, http://www.startribune.com/feds-to-probe-sex-abuse-claims-at-new-jersey-women-s-prison/482803331/. The watchmen (*shamarim*) make an interesting case study for exploring ancient constructions of masculinity. I would then like to connect the watchmen's violent (and perhaps sexually motivated) actions to the spate of sexual assaults by prison guards that took place at the Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women in 2017 and 2018. See also, Jaclyn Freidman and Jessica Valenti, eds. Lee Jacobs Riggs "The fantasy of acceptable "non-consent": why the female sexual submissive scares us (and why she shouldn't)" in Yes means yes!: Visions of Female Sexual Power & a World without Rape (Seal Press, Berkeley), 2008.

[5] Judith Butler, "Precarious Life, Grievable Life," in *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2009), 7.

believe that we can move forward, but that such movement must include a substantive engagement with and acknowledgement of our racist and sexist past and its present legacies. Engaging in these conversations in our classrooms, churches, homes, and communities matter because once the veil of ignorance has been lifted, returning to the status quo can be an onerous task that requires a high level of cognitive dissonance to reestablish the safety of stasis.

The work of unsettling individuals from their long held assumptions and cherished privileges is an ongoing task, and much like the discomfort that students might experience in the biblical studies classroom, asking people to shift or expand their relationships to gender and racial politics can be anxiety provoking. To this end, Delgado and Stefancic speak of "perspectivalism," which explains how things look from the perspective of individual actors, to help others understand the predicament of intersectional individuals. They also offer "multiple consciousness" as a teaching tool, which holds that most of us experience the world in different ways on different occasions, because of who we are.[6] In the few instances in which I have reached out to family members about their political, religious and social belief systems during this season of political unrest, I have reminded them, as I do with my biblical studies students, that being uncomfortable won't kill you, and that I'll be there with you every step of the way. My mission is not to shame people, because shame is a poor motivator, but rather to be a vulnerable educator and conversation partner who can present variant viewpoints. I know no other way, and the stakes are too high to stand idly by and just hope for the best.

[6] Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, "Looking Inward," in *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 62.

I strongly believe that it is our job as educators, faith leaders, and activists to engage critically with the world and to work towards justice—even if we make ourselves and others temporarily uncomfortable in the process.

Returning to the Vineyard/Garden

It seems that human beings are culturally obsessed with the figure of the deviant woman. The biblical narrative itself begins with the prototypic woman, who having sought knowledge is swiftly punished. What intrigues me most about this episode and its artistic reverberations is that as much as we sexually desire this deviant woman, we also yearn to subdue her, to extinguish her light. Both Nola and the unnamed woman are seekers of knowledge in the form of sexual pleasure, and for this they are punished by men who are threatened by their sexual allure and autonomy. In her monograph, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, Trible reads the Song of Songs as a redemptive text vis-a-vis the tragic punishment of the original Edenic couple, referring the Genesis 2-3 as "[t]he hermeneutical key with which I unlock this garden."[7] She goes on to write

> That narrative [Genesis 2-3] began with the development of Eros in four episodes: the forming of the earth creature, the planting of the garden, the making of animals, and the creation of sexuality. Alas, however, the fulfillment proclaimed when *'îš* and *'iššâ* became one flesh disintegrated through disobedience…. Clearly, Genesis 2-3 offers no return to the garden of creation. And yet, as scripture interpreting scripture, it provides my clue to entering another garden of Eros, the Song of Songs. Through expansion, omission, and reversals, this poetry recovers the love that is bone of bone and flesh of flesh. In other words, the Song of Songs redeems a love story gone awry.[8]

[7] Phyllis Trible, "Love's Lyrics Redeemed," in *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), 144.
[8] Ibid.

Trible is correct in her assertion that the Song "[r]ecovers the love that is bone of bone and flesh of flesh," in that the lover's relationship is egalitarian, but this seems to be all that the Song redeems. Trible notes that as far as the lovers are concerned, "[t]here is no male dominance, no female subordination, and no stereotyping of either sex."[9] Yet, she neglects to substantively address the unnamed woman's punishment at the hands of her brothers (1:6) and the city patrolmen (5:7) who wield power over her bodily autonomy in the private sphere and physically assault her in the public domain. This project has sought to remedy the relative paucity of analysis on the Song's interludes of violence through an historical contextualization of ancient gender and spatial norms as presented by the poet. And through this research I have asserted that the unnamed woman's brutal treatment at the hands of men was the result of her deviant social practice, which transgressed established gender mores.

To this end, R.W. Connell writes

> The social definition of men as holders of power is translated not only into mental body-images and fantasies, but into muscle tensions, postures, the feel and texture of the body. This is one of the main ways in which the power of men becomes 'naturalized,' i.e. seen as a part of the order of nature. It is very important in allowing the belief in the superiority of men, and the oppressive practices that flow from it, to be sustained by men who in other respects have very little power. The importance of physical aggression in some of the major forms of working-class masculinity is familiar.[10]

Connell's words give me pause, and render me particularly mindful of the recent mobilization of militia groups, some of whom are intending to use intimidation tactics at

[9] Ibid., 161.
[10] R.W. Connell, R.W. "The Body and Social Practice," in *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 85.

polling locations to suppress voter turnout. These groups embody a violent subsection of "working-class masculinity" that is threatened by the political mobilization of both women and people of color. The commingling of violence and masculinity to which Connell refers also appears in the Song of Songs through the figures of the brothers (1:6) and the city patrolmen (5:7), both of whom use their social capital and/or physicality to subdue the unnamed woman. And as previously discussed, Nola's body and sexuality are usurped by Jamie (1986) through the act of rape. His sexual outburst is in direct response to his own feelings of powerlessness in their relationship. Nola's insistence on remaining polyamorous is more than his masculinity can take, so he wields sexual violence against her in an act that both deprives her of bodily autonomy and restores his own social power.

The equilibrium that Jamie seeks is based in the outdated "sex role theory," in which gender roles are understood as learned, socialized, and internalized. Sex role theory asserts that one either conforms to gender norms and is rewarded, or deviates and is punished. Rather than being attuned to the wider social, political, economic and racial structures that demand rigid gender performance(s) sex role theory is narrowly focused on personal agency. "Ultimately, then, role theory is not a social theory at all. It comes right up to the problem where social theory logically begins, the relationship between personal agency and social structures; but evades it by dissolving structure into agency."[11] Relatedly, the sexualized punishments inflicted upon Nola and the unnamed woman, by members of the patriarchal social hierarchy, are further complicated by race and spatial location, which delimit their agency and self-expression. The social worlds of

[11] Ibid., 50.

the Song's audience and Lee's audience are of course, separated by time, space and genre, yet intractable elements of patriarchal structures and social mores remain continuous between the two story-worlds, stifling the women's agency and blaming them for the abuses they experience. So, what happens when the Shulammite meets Nola Darling? In my imagination, these two "black and beautiful" women stand boldly in the street, look into each other's eyes, and share a moment of mutual recognition, understanding that their wounds and the structures that caused them are the same.

In my mind I also see my twenty-five-year-old grandmother, in a rare moment of solitude, dressing for her job as a cocktail waitress. I see her donning her uniform—a small, white fitted men's dress shirt that leaves little to the imagination. I see her sheer tights glistening under the thin shift. "*Oh Elizabeth, I would never show off that much leg, but that was the uniform!*" she explained, embarrassed. "Well yeah, Nana, that's how you make tips," I retorted matter-of-factly. That my grandmother's youth and beauty was leveraged by her husband to support their growing family, speaks to how socially ingrained the control of women's bodies by men truly is. In contrast to the unnamed woman's brothers, who restrained her sexual autonomy in order to preserve her economic worth, my grandfather understood his wife's economic potential and exploited her for his own gain. And then, when she had the "audacity" to exert sexual autonomy, to seek intimacy with a partner who reveled in her beauty rather than exploited it, he beat her in an effort to terminate the product of that illicit union.

Just as the violence committed against the unnamed woman and Nola Darling can be historically contextualized, so too can the violence inflicted upon my grandmother. Her story is not uncommon—an abusive marriage, an affair, a closely guarded secret. So

many families are making discoveries similar to mine due to the availability and affordability of DNA testing. Given this new reality, it is my hope that these discoveries will create, as they have in our case, room for families to discuss difficult topics such as sex, violence, trauma and identity. Perhaps if we are able to speak openly and critically of the social structures and expectations that often lead to violence against women and women of color, we might be able to extricate violence from sex, and create the vineyard/garden in our own lives and relationships, a space where love that is bone of bone and flesh of flesh can be realized.

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