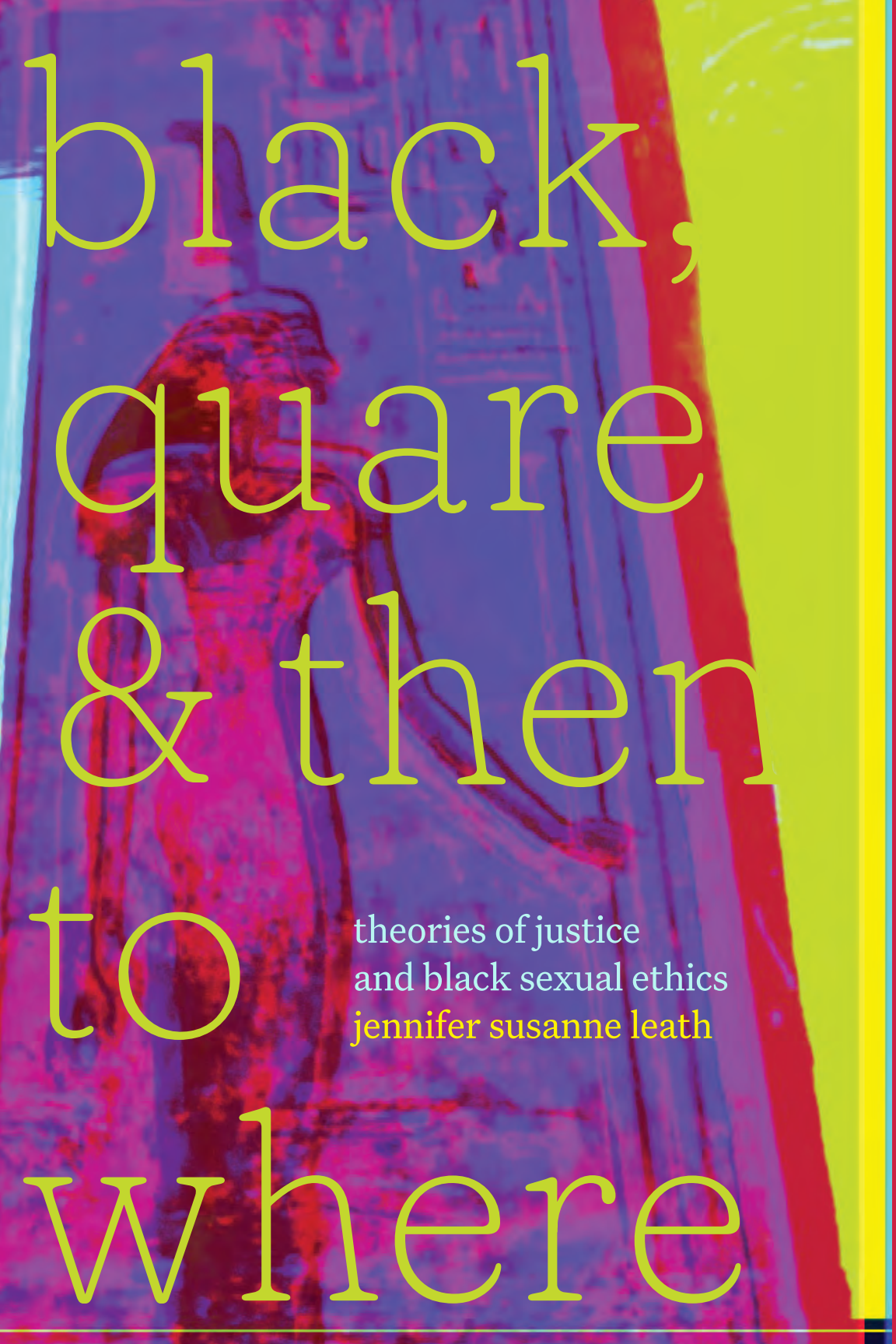
black, quare & then to where
theories of justice
and black sexual ethics
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Religious Cultures of
African and African Diaspora People

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To the Divine spark and stardust of us all
To Maât and for maât
To the Nubians
To Hatshepsut
To Mama and Mimi, Poppie and Papa
To Mom & Dad
For Axé

contents

Part II justices

preface

Sometime in 2018 I had an idea for a sermon series: Second Sunday Sex Sundays. At the time I was serving as the pastor of Campbell Chapel AME Church in Denver, Colorado. About fifty-five people came to church each Sunday; there were about 135 members. About two-thirds of this predominantly Black church were over seventy years old. I am still not quite sure why I could not shake the burden of preaching this series that would address various aspects of sexual life, Black experience, and Christian teachings. It was not merely that I am quare or had some need to work out a reconciliation of my own beliefs and practices with respect to sexuality. It was not merely for the challenge of addressing muted issues.

Something would not release me from the assignment. Even when members complained, when my presiding elder and bishop urged a different course, when my mother pleaded that I stop, when counselors and colleagues questioned my agenda, when I experienced an unanticipated spiritual drain, when I found myself the target of unsolicited interest: even then I still felt obligated to preach. The topics for the ten months during which I preached through this series were: "Opening Conversation: Let's Talk about Sex," "Sexual Abuse," "Sex outside of Marriage," "Sexual Orientations," "Gender Identities," "Put a Ring on It: Marriage," "Hold Up: Fidelity," "Polyamory," "Sex? (Meh) Over It," and "Pornography and Fantasy Lives." To this day, those sermons were the hardest I've ever had to prepare and preach. Most

Sundays, I offered members handouts of the series to aid in teaching and preaching on these subjects; I met with the Sunday School to engage in more dialogue about these subjects as well. Over the course of this period, a basket of candy and condoms was kept outside of my office (a member's idea). I set up a box that invited comments about the sermons. By the end of the series, I was grateful to have survived—and grateful for those who took this journey through to the end.

A woman in her early nineties had written a comment: "My son and I have no problem with gender." It is hard to explain how and why, but this note touched my soul. It felt like an inexplicable affirmation. Though she named gender, I knew and could feel that she meant more. It was about the series. It was about my preaching. It was about me as her pastor. It was about sexuality. It was her way of saying that she had love for me, for her church, and for others, regardless of their sexual orientation and/or gender.

"No problem": what does it mean to have "no problem"? Perhaps it meant that she felt there had been no harm done, no violation of rights, no infringement on rights, no recognized injustice, no desire to create or participate in an injustice. To me, "no problem" also recognized the spiritual work at hand. Maybe she was saying: Because this is not a problem, I/we do not know why it's necessary to address these matters. Maybe she was saying: Because this is not a problem, I/we do not mind you addressing these matters (and, perhaps, are glad that you are doing so). "No problem" was such an interesting phrasing because in so many ways the series was a problem for many. It exposed and parsed some of the most private, wounded, rewarding, and complex aspects of Black life, community, and faith. And whether my congregants recognized this or not, I intended it as an exercise in spiritualizing sex as a matter of personal and communal justice.

Around the same time, I designed and taught my course Queer Theory, Religioethics, and Activism. Each week, students not only read the work of queer theorists of color but also encountered sacred texts of various religious traditions. I asked my students to read these texts queerly, meaning from the perspective of queer theory. I had drawn the sacred texts from Hebrew and Christian, Hindu and Buddhist, Ifá and Muslim traditions. By the middle of the quarter, it was clear that students were having spiritual experiences and divine encounters in the classroom space. In a sense, this was an exercise in sexualizing spirituality (i.e., an inverse echo) as a matter of personal and communal justice.

In both the ecclesial and the academic space, there are constant reminders that handling sex and gender, religion, and race is handling the holy. Handling these together is like pursuing a glimpse of G*d. Speaking to these matters at once as a matter of personal and community ethics—and hearing the cries for justice seeping from the interstices of this discourse—is like singing with the Divine. Together, sex and gender, religion, and race do not make sense. Apart, sex and gender, religion, and race do not make sense. And so stories of sex and gender, religion, and race often go untold. The ethics and theories of justice that might help describe, define, and refine approaches to sex and gender, religion, and race (especially for Afrodiasporic people and communities) often go uncharted. "No problem" is a problem when individuals and communities have no way to harness the power of sex and gender, religion, and race for purposeful living; it is a problem when rigorous, explicit conversation, teaching, preaching, and praxis with respect to these subjects is always eschewed, verboten, taboo, disgraced, and out of reach.

Others have thoroughly rehearsed the difficulty of discourses on sexuality in society and in ecclesial spaces. However, the relationship of these discourses to deeper questions of justice through the lived experiences of Afrodiasporic people—and the ethical approaches of Afrodiasporic people—has been largely unexamined. This book revisits Black sexual ethics as a pathway into the rhizomatic sphere of justice theories. With great hope for just spiritualizations of sexuality and sexualizations of spirituality within and beyond Afrodiasporic contexts and communities, I embark upon this quare-womanist-vindicationist journey. For those who say "no problem," I hope this book is confirmation and embrace of all we can be when we allow new (and old) visions of justice to take root in and branch out of us.

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introduction Introducing Maât

Names and purposes are entangled matter. How we are named and how we name ourselves impacts who we are and anticipates what we do. Names can be invocations of purpose. Names can be expressions of intention. Through names and purposes, we ask these two fundamental questions: Who are we, and why are we here? For Afrodiasporic people, the answers to these questions are especially complicated. Without clarity about origins, the process of naming and discernment of purpose is compromised. Still, we undertake the creative processes of naming, purposing—and (re)situating. This book is quare—and a quare testament. *Quare* is, first, a transliteration of E. Patrick Johnson's US southern Black grandmother's way of saying *queer*.[1] And *quare* is an appellation of what Afrodiasporic culture expresses when it is also self-affirming as queer (i.e., gender and sexually variant). This book is womanist—and a womanist testament. Womanist is, first, as Alice Walker put it, "from the black folk expression of mothers to female children, 'You acting womanish,' i.e., like a woman."[2] This book is vindicationist—and a vindicationist testament. Vindicationist is, first, concerned with the Wynterian and Fanonian projects of expressing the full, agentive dignity, integrity, personhood, and humanity of Afrodiasporic peoples while grounding this expression in African sources. This book is a call to transdimensional justices through the filters of Black sexualities. This book is a vocation—and a vocational testament. As I am called (also) to be a quare-womanist-vindicationist,

I.1: This image of Maât is found in Nefertari's tomb in the Valley of the Queens. The hieroglyphs drawn across the top of this image that sits atop a threshold in the tomb show the cartouche of Nefertari followed by a narrative; the iconic single feather of Maât that is worn as part of her headdress evokes the Hall of Judgment and the significant role of Maât and her single feather in weighing the heart (symbolizing the morality) of the deceased. Maât's wingspan suggests both what she is and represents (justice) and how she functions as herself, embodying that which she represents. *Source:* Jamie Marriage, "Almighty Women: Indomitable Goddesses," Geek Girl Authority, February 14, 2017, https://www.geekgirlauthority.com/almighty-women-indomitable-goddesses/.

these names align with my purpose through this book: shining light on Afrofuturist possibilities for thinking through and practicing cultivation and maintenance of justices in the glow of African origins, Black women's lived experiences, and persistent insistences to be free, and Blackqueer "acting up."[3] To understand *justices*, the first task of this text is an introduction to one whose name means justice and whose purpose is to cultivate and sustain justice: Maât. If you share in the vocations of Blackness, Africa and its diaspora, womanism, or quareness, this book (re)considers Maât and *maât* (i.e., Maât's conceptual correlate) as offerings to be received and shared for fresh manifestations of justice—in all the places, in all the ways.

Maât, the ancient Egyptian *nṯrt* of justice and truth, she who bears a feather as her headdress, the oft-winged feminine manifestation and adjudicator of right order, is the first fruit of this quare-womanist-vindicationist project.[4] References to her in "Maxims of the Prime Minister Ptahhotep" (circa 2450 BCE) are among the earliest and most prominent philosophical and material manifestations of Maât. Maât is at the heart of "wisdom literature, instructions, maxims, teachings . . . cultivated in ancient Egypt from the Old Kingdom (2780–2260 BCE) to the Late Period (1085–333 BCE)."[5] Théophile Obenga describes and defines *maât* as "the combination of Jus-

tice and Truth, the supreme moral law."[6] And, as Obenga explains, *maât* is part of a framework of virtuous living where "virtue can be taught" and the "discipline for teaching it embraces both science and conscience, knowledge and consciousness, a consciousness inseparable from the responsibility of governing the polity."[7] Obenga writes:

> Egyptian morality lacks neither high purpose nor nobility. It is a moral system which . . . aimed at shaping the good [person]. . . . It was a practical morality, or to be more precise, an "eclectic morality." It began by recognizing responsibility, then moved on to offer the training required to fulfill it. Its goal was the strict duty of living in tune with *Maât*. . . . Egyptian morality was . . . civil and secular, profoundly focused on the life of the community. Its moral foundation, of course, was an imperative law, that of *Maât*, Truth-Justice. *Maât*, a transcendental law, also taught human beings, in practical terms, how to live as dutiful members of their communities, how to assume future political and administrative responsibilities, how, in short, to behave as social beings.[8]

As such, those who aspire to be attuned with *maât* are vocationally accountable and responsible to community—and, more precisely, a community of right order.

If *maât* (as concept and applied principle) begins with a framework of community, my primordial premise is that gender diverse and sexually diverse Afrodiasporic communities (co)exist within broader cultural community contexts. Gender variance and sexual diversity are givens in all cultures—even nonhuman cultures. However, this diversity has historically been used as leverage—intraculturally and interculturally—for establishing and maintaining hegemonic power. If, instead, a community of right order built on the premise that empirical (i.e., what is) gender-sexual diversities are also normative (i.e., what should be) gender-sexual diversities—there would be provisions at every level and in every context for the fact of such diversities. Thus, the question this project seeks to answer with respect to *maât* is not simply about what *maât* is, but what *maât* is in a queering project. And, more precisely: What is *maât* in a quareing project—a quareing project as one that begins with the celebrated fact of melanin, gender, and sexual diversity? So what distinguishes a quare approach from a queer approach? While a queer understanding of *maât* might emphasize theories and practices of gender-sexual conscious justice, a quare understanding of *maât* might draw from the lived experiences of those who honored and practiced *maât*. In this quare

(read: already womanist, vindicationist, *and* Blackqueer) spirit, I invoke Hatshepsut, the woman pharaoh who reigned from 1473 to 1458 BCE, adopted *maât* in the title she took upon her coronation, and disrupted the theological order by situating Amun as one who upholds and answers to Maât.[9] Obenga further explains *maât* in this way: "On the universal level, the concept of *Maât* 'expresses the harmony of the elements as clearly established each in its right place.' This is the concept of the ordered Whole, the cosmos." *Maât* operates on universal, political, and individual levels and is "order, harmony, and supreme wellbeing."[10] In this way, Maât invites those who would learn of her—and apply the principles she is and represents—to everyday life in community, to harmonious and holistic order through complementary balance. This suggests that we all have roles to play, cosmic assignments to fulfill—and that, although we may have individuated responsibilities as we play our roles and fulfill our assignments, these responsibilities are not discrete. Our roles and assignments are acted out in relationship with others and the roles and assignments of others. Collectively, Maât invites us to cooperative complementarity. In a queering project, readers might get squeamish with worry that calls for complementarity might lean into inversion theories' traps of dualistic, cisgender-reifying, heteronormativities. After all, Maât is reputed to have been Djehuty's consort—and pharaohs who invoked Maât modeled their sexual praxes according to the drive to produce a viable male offspring by any means necessary.[11] In this quareing project, however, there are other expressions of Maât's complementarity. In new and quare ways, Hatshepsut puts Maât on the sociopolitical, geographical, and moral map. Hatshepsut was a pharaoh who thought, felt, and acted—and sometimes acted up; a pharaoh who loved her culture and community and oriented herself with respect to gender and sexuality in ways that stabilized and promoted the social organization and governance that were the bedrock of her culture and community.[12] She cultivated and sustained balance insofar as she leaned into a path that was "odd or slightly off kilter." "On the political level," Obenga notes, "the concept of *Maât* works against injustice. It is in the name of *Maât* that the pharaoh subjugates rebels and dominates foreign lands."[13] Queerly, Maât offers the pink-washing language and persona of a flailing—though, by some measures, sexually liberated and aesthetically robust—monarchy. Quarely, for Hatshepsut, the concept, *maât*, and name of Maât are deployed for shade throwing and gender role disruption that challenge the unequivocal inevitability of male leadership. Building on Michel Gitton's work, Obenga notes that "on the individual level, '*Maât* embraces specific rules for living in concert

with moral principles.' Whoever lives according to these rules and principles achieves universal order in his or her own life, in practical terms, and lives in harmony with the ordered Whole."[14] Queerly, there is virtue in what others may deem too marginal. Quarely, the pageantry of the stage together with the practice and performance of religious, social, and physical rituals becomes the bedrock for claims of moral agency and political potency in the persona of Hatshepsut. She plays by the rules, acting in the play of pharaonic regency; through her diligence, she establishes balance. As Obenga explains of pharaonic inscriptions, "The most accomplished, useful and appropriate human actions are circumscribed in the cosmological order, as symbolized by the way the pharaoh's name is written inside a circular cartouche, a perfect geometrical shape representing the vitalizing sun."[15] And for Hatshepsut, suspected of having a long-term affair with one of her male architects after the death of her husband-brother, *quare* may not be found in queer sexual acts characterized by sexual desire for one's own gender but rather is circumscribed in her cartouche through which Hatshepsut lays claim on Maât—and claims Maât has laid a claim on her—as she has become. And is it not also quare that Hatshepsut and Amun's priests in her day declare Hatshepsut as the offspring of Amun and her earthly mother and that Hapshepsut is "Maatkare (The Soul of Re Is Truth)" (i.e., Hatshepsut's self-selected throne name)?[16]

Maât as a concept is distinct from, but also comparable to, the idea of justice that has been inherited from "the Homeric Greek concept of *dike*." As Maulana Karenga puts it, *dike* is similar to *maât* "'insofar as it functions as a regulating force of the natural order.' But it differs from Maat in that it is a fatalistic, restrictive and 'negative force, one that prevents change or development and holds the cosmos in a static situation.' *Dike* also contrasts with Maat as a 'positive moral force working to right wrongs and to maintain a moral order.' *Dike* was originally amoral and developed later with essentially the role of punishment."[17] And the images of justice do make a difference. Consider justice as the blindfolded woman with scales—and the history of this image. Interestingly, the blindfold was not always a part of the image of "lady justice." It seems that her blindfold appeared in time to keep her from seeing much of the transatlantic slave trade.[18] In *More Beautiful and More Terrible: The Embrace and Transcendence of Racial Inequality in the United States*, Imani Perry quotes Langston Hughes's poem "Justice":

> That Justice is a blind goddess
> Is a thing to which we blacks are wise.

Her bandage hides two festering sores
That once perhaps were eyes.[19]

Even as the "blind goddess" does, so too the image of Maât—with her outstretched wings and decisive feather—transforms the experience of justice. Maât opens new quare-womanist-vindicationist possibilities for this research because her impact is multidimensional, and she offers relevant guidance for discerning and embodying right order. Maât is a hermeneutic (of) justice: interpreting right order according to the gravity of cultural context and the mass (or energy) of the heart.[20] Maât is performative justice: visually rendered and embodied in ways that evoke action, movement, and multiplicity. Maât is constructive justice: the companion of counsel to the wise, the offering of the righteous for the sake of social order, to the glory of the Divine, and in the name of eternal posterity. Maât's right order is balance.[21] Too, Maât's right order is a balance of interpretation, action, and creation.

Movements with Maât: Chapter Outlines

Having introduced Maât and the potential of a Maâtian theorization of justice as the foundation for a new direction in Black sexual ethics, *Black, Quare, and Then to Where* opens with part I, "Quare-Womanist-Vindicationist Movement." The chapters in this first part of the book provide descriptions of, definitions for, and connections between quare, womanist, and vindicationist. These first two chapters, chapter 1, "A Prolegomenon to Justice Hermeneutics and Black Sexual Ethics," and chapter 2, "Naming (and Transforming) Justice: (Re)Imagining Black Sexual Ethics," frame these connected terms of the discourse and situate them in relation to three other key conceptual categories—justice being the most significant, alongside politics and physics. Part II, "Justices," explores various doings and beings, theorizings and practicings of justices. The chapters in this section are 3, "Flying Justice: Sun Ra's ~~Sexuality~~ and Other Afrofutures"; 4, "Heterexpectations: Jumping the Broom, Marriage, Democracy, and Entanglement Theory"; 5, "Dancing Justice: Just Black HomoSexualities"; 6, "Ancient Mixologies: Joel Augustus Rogers and Puzzling Interracial Intimacies"; 7, "Black Web: Disrupting Transnational Pornographies for Post(trans)national Humanalities"; and "Conclusion: Re-Covering Maât." Each chapter in part II of *Black, Quare, and Then to Where* moves with Maât and *maât* (i.e., justice/s) in different ways. However, each of these chapters consistently integrates an intersec-

tion of Black sexual lives and experiences, vindicationist voices, the political implications of this analysis of Black sexual ethics as it reorients justice, a scientific connection that can be made through the study of physics, and a way that these elements altogether might change the thinking-doing-being of *maât* (i.e., justice/s).

Chapter 1 introduces womanist, quare, vindicationist, Black, Black religion, and physics as co-constitutive terms of discourse in this book. Interlocutors in this chapter include Alice Walker, E. Patrick Johnson, W. E. B. Du Bois, Charles H. Long, Barbara Holmes, and Chanda Prescod-Weinstein. The close relationship between womanist and quare (as its heir)—as well as their rootedness in Blackness, religion, and physics suggests that quare theory and praxis may be an important foundation for contemporary theories of justice dedicated to Black futures. Maât is a critical aspect of vindicationist histories—redactions of which are promising for a fresh perspective on Black sexual ethics. The groundwork is laid for how justice performs and is performed as a wonder of physics, religion, Blackness, sexuality, and gender.

Chapter 2 presents and evaluates various theories of justice—and approaches to (doing) justice. The themes of quare, womanist, and religion are more tightly woven and threaded through the needle of justice. Acknowledging the vindicationist voices of Yosef Ben-Jochannan, John Henrik Clarke, and Frances Cress Welsing—and tempering these voices with that of Cheikh Anta Diop—this chapter disrupts heteropatriarchal trends in traditional vindicationist approaches. Diop's appeal to "sovereign experience"—and its complementarity with the womanist imperative that situates Black women's experiences as the primordial noetic sources—is explained. Through a reoriented vindicationist appeal to Maât, possibilities for justices are imagined and given new theoretical and practical life. Maât is reconsidered in terms of what she actively, presently does (personified and as a concept)—and what it means for those who pursue a righteous path to do *maât*.

Chapter 3 takes up ~~sexuality~~ as an aspect of Black sexuality and the musician Sun Ra as a primary vindicationist voice for this discourse. I introduce the term ***~~sexuality~~*** as a way of signifying both the tranversing and transcending of sexuality that is characteristic of Sun Ra and others who understand their vocational paths to include chosen celibacy, induced or natural asexuality, and variations of gray asexuality.[22] Sun Ra's voice is supplemented with some of the writings of Cheikh Anta Diop, Ayi Kwei Armah, and Théophile Obenga. With Sun Ra, born of Saturn, the chapter considers the role of order in black holes as a way of helping to think about political organization and democracy

in extraterrestrial terms. Cosmic order, movement, and contents are aspects of physics that intrigued Sun Ra and inform the possibilities this chapter imagines for flying justice.

Chapter 4 takes up marriage as a site for Black sexual expression and engages the vindicationist voice of Frances Cress Welsing. This chapter explores the fluidity of entanglements that characterized the lives of enslaved people of African descent in the United States. The impossibility of marriage for so many—or the ritualized reduction of marriage to broom jumping—is evaluated as a parallel to the impossibility of (full) democratic citizenship for people of African descent. The institution of marriage is considered as a "heterexpectation" that becomes the foundation of the nation-state.[23] Entanglement theory gives spring, bounce, and direction to the possibilities of jumping justice.

Chapter 5 takes homosexualities, explicitly quare sexualities, and post-heterosexualities in Afrodiasporic experience as its point of departure. With an emphasis on Black churches as primary sites of moral formation and implicitly and explicitly specified sexual ethics, this chapter reviews some of the recent work of the artist Joseph Lamar. Joseph's contemporary vindicationism complements the earlier vindicationist voices of George G. M. James and Aimé Césaire. This chapter gestures toward the ways that Black churches' (mis)handlings of sexualities, in general, and homosexualities, in particular, create stressful conditions of intrainstitutional politics and compromise the relevance of these churches to broader national and transnational political contexts. This chapter imagines individual and collective moral agents who dare to say: I do not just want to participate in "the power," I want to transform it. The relationship between classical and quantum mechanics is invoked and evaluated with new rhythms of dancing justice.

Chapter 6 listens for the vindicationist voice of Joel Augustus Rogers in thinking about interracial intimacies and racially hybrid identities. The voice of Frantz Fanon is also introduced as a vindicationist interlocutor through the lineage of Négritude. Linking antebellum interracial violences with the evolution of the carceral state, this chapter pushes back against Rogers's defense of interracial intimacies with an acknowledgment of the ways that sexual violence and "systemic sexual surveillance" have been pillars of white supremacy and white heteropatriarchal expressions of hegemony. Anarchy is presented as an incomplete, but relevant (and potentially necessary) political rejoinder to contemporary US governance that renders democracy perenni-

ally anemic. Anarchy signifies a tragic hybridity—and, perhaps, hybridity calls forth a tragic anarchy—neither of which can get a handle on justice completely. The complexities of electromagnetism help convey puzzling justice.

Chapter 7 takes a close look at pornography and, to an extent, sex work in the lives and experiences of Afrodiasporic people. Being and coding justice becomes a way of thinking about globalization, transnational discourses, and the need for post(trans)national discourses. A *dunia* terraspheric orientation enables fresh imagination about how to be moral, how to be human, and how to think, talk, and be about the metaphorical and physical resolutions of "tantalizing tensions."[24] Through his narrative research approach to Maât, notwithstanding the deeply disturbing accounts of his sexual history, Karenga provides a foundational vindicationist voice for this chapter because of his unparalleled study of Maât.[25] The philosophical work of Sylvia Wynter provides a foil for Karenga's vindicationist approach, extending the spirit of Négritude. Together, Karenga's emphasis on Maât and Wynter's humanism recode and ontologize justice/s.

A layered conceptual approach that expands the applications of Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectionality far beyond critical race theory and Hortense Spillers's interstices far beyond the discipline of English and "Papa's Maybe" informs the analysis presented in this book.[26] Attention to categories of race, class, gender, sexuality, capital, empire, and domination are fundamental to the work of cultural and religious institutional critique; *Black, Quare, and Then to Where* endeavors to critically apply these categories to cultural and religious institutional spaces with balance. The political implications of such critique are dramatic challenges to the very organizational structures of governance in specifically secular and religious spaces.

This book is for students, scholars, and researchers of Black religion interested in more thoroughly destabilizing occidentalism and reclaiming Egyptian vindicationist contributions. This book is for Black church members and leaders who are interested in discerning ways to pursue sexual holiness while dropping sexual piety, false modesties, and hypocrisies, who are interested in being politically (terraspherically/*dunia*) relevant, and who are interested in cultivating actualized and whole conspirators for justice/s. This book is for Black sexual beings who want to do justice/s both in the streets and in the bed (i.e., sex, sexual intimacies, and relationships). This book is written for theorists of justice who are unashamed to prioritize Black outcomes and impacts as a first concern for theories of justice—and who recognize the

value of doing this. This book is also for theorists of justice who are able and willing to identify and respond to epistemic and material spaces of great(est) human contribution and vulnerability (i.e., sex). This book is written for other leaders of religious and academic institutions who are invested in disruptions of fundamentalisms. Above all, this book is written for people who love Afrodiasporic people and culture in ways eternal, unconditional, and beyond words. If any or all of these audience descriptions include you, know that I am writing to you. This book should empower you to cultivate and express moral constellations and sexual ethics. These constellations and ethics should be (1) liberative, (2) epistemologically shrewd, and (3) true (in a *maâtian* sense). Thus empowered, you can redefine justice/s such that our transformed theories of justice/s reflect (1) cultural context, (2) personal and collective inspiration and complementarity, (3) postconservativism, and (4) dynamism with perpetual maintenance.

(And Then) To Where?

Maâtian justice/s are doing and being a lot here. And, frankly, Maât is neither top nor bottom, but versatile as she, too, is doing and done to, and regards the equitable beings and doings of others. Maâtian ethics as they are presented in this book on theories of justice and Black sexual ethics are altogether quare. Quare justice/s may have grammar, vernacular, and code, but they are also switching as needed for the dignity of the persons and communities sheltered in the shadow of Maâtian wings. José Esteban Muñoz speaks of queer theory and queer identity as fundamentally futuristic. It releases the "here and now" and focuses with intention, devotion, and perseverance on the "then and there."[27] Unlike a Moltmannian Christianity, there is no preoccupation with the "already" that is "not yet."[28] There is only and always a steady gaze on the future. In concert with the wisdom of ancient Egypt, this is a focus on "the rising sun," the "new day begun," and the ultimate sign of eternity.[29] This is the "morning by morning new mercies we see."[30] A quare Maâtian utopia is always on the horizon as the dynamism and maintenance of justice/s are honored—and blackqueerness and queerblackness, quareness, and Blackness and queerness "keep on keepin' on" in fantastically transformative style.[31]

Where this text takes us is not about geographic location. This book has a moral destination. This book is not about diverse Black sexualities uncovered and legitimized as much as it is about how we name, tell the truth about, and

I.2: This photograph taken on August 7, 2021, at the Temple of Seti I depicts a common representation of Maât. Maât is in the hands of a royal person, in this case Seti I, for whose honor the temple was built; Seti I is offering Maât to Amun Ra. It is common for Maât to be depicted in the hands of pharaohs, queens, nobility, and others for whom these ancient artifacts were built. The offering of Maât reflects honorably on the one who offers her, the one to whom she is offered, and Maât (i.e., the offering) herself. The one who makes the offering is concerned with and committed to justice. The one who receives the offering is concerned with and committed to justice. Justice is a good in and of itself. This image is especially powerful because the kneeling Maât not only wears her iconic feather but also herself offers the only symbol (and principle) more substantive and prominent than she is with respect to morality and righteousness: the ankh, a symbol sometimes called the key of life, a testament to the connection between the Kushite sources of the Nile and the river that flows through Egypt, a tribute to the very heart of the human, the manna of everlasting life. *Source:* Photo by author.

honor our "sovereign experiences."[32] I am after a justice that takes "sovereign experiences"—especially the most intimate experiences of our sexual selves—as primary source material for theorizing about justice. When we acknowledge the most complex aspects of our sexual circumstances, we uncover implicit and explicit moral constellations and ethical codes. Our sexual ethics manifested in and through our sovereign experiences are not to be policed or baptized in a Christian wash of occidental Victorian bath salts. Politics of respectability are not for (all/any? of) us. Our sexual ethics manifested in and through our sovereign experiences teach us right from wrong, just from unjust, true from untrue, a light soul ready for eternity from a heavy soul that can bear existence no more.

Maât's measure is her own. Far be it from me to say how her feather handles the dust, the grime, the stickiness, the excretions of hybridities born of oppression. I cannot know how her feather manages the matter of equity in unequal and inequitable circumstances. It is clear, however, that Maât's feather does imply that we each answer for ourselves—and that we must be preparing and prepared to do so. Maât's truth does imply that the answers our lives yield personally are inextricably linked with how we show/ed up in community. Maât invites us to watch and guard and take care with respect to our moral consumptions.

The work of Maât in each of us who accepts our role and responsibility as a moral agent is a new balance. For those of us who continue to research, write, learn, and teach: it is the responsibility of the Western academy to stop lying about its roots and to acknowledge the lies that are at the core of its roots. We must be on task, assuring a reorientation—and, perhaps, multiplication—of epistemic center/s. For those of us working out our soul's salvation (also as sexual beings) in religious and secular institutions, variously interested in the existence of Afrodiasporic people: Maât invites us to lay aside the shame that does not register on her balance. For those of us recovering from our judgmentalism and learning to love a fuller version of our Afrodiasporic sexual selves: Maât invites us to concentrate on our own sexual and relational health and to discern ways that we, ourselves are and should be accountable as sexual and relational beings in community.

Instead of writing of justice, *Black, Quare, and Then to Where* speaks of justices. It is so that there are higher justices to which this project appeals—justices that can be arranged in relation to one another, contingent upon particular contexts and conditions. Unlike offensive rankings of oppression, certain appeals to certain forms of justice attain more than and/or in ways that

others do not. This book takes up the question of how the priority of some justices vis-à-vis other justices might be adjudicated. Not all justices, not all claims to justice, not all appeals to justice are (created) equal. For those of us who carry the revolutionary spirit of forerunners like Malcolm X who insisted that our justice be realized "by any means necessary," Maât adds "for as long as necessary."[33] She tells us that we must continue to assert our dignity. Truth and justice/s begin with the integrity of our being, our personhood, and our communities that affirm our being and our personhood.

notes

Introduction

1 Johnson, "'Quare' Studies," 1–25.
2 Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, 80.
3 Crawley, *Lonely Letters*, 4–5 and elsewhere; Johnson, "'Quare' Studies."
4 This term is a feminine singular form of *nṯr*/*netcher* (masculine singular) and, from this transliteration of ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics, is often translated as *goddess* in English—though the terms *goddess* or *goddesses* do not adequately capture the senses of Egyptian deities, mythological or religious characters, and/or the royalty who adopt aspects of the divine—or to whom aspects of the divine are ascribed. The plural form is *nṯrw*/*netcherw*. Obenga, *African Philosophy*, 27.
5 Obenga, *African Philosophy*, 187.
6 Obenga, *African Philosophy*, 203.
7 Obenga, *African Philosophy*, 201.
8 Obenga, *African Philosophy*, 202–3.
9 Amun is the "Hidden One," the central deity of Thebes, king of the deities in the Middle Kingdom and nationally worshipped in the New Kingdom; Amun eventually merged with Ra, the sun deity, becoming Amun-Ra.
10 Obenga, *African Philosophy*, 191 (quoting Michel Gitton, "La cosmologie égyptienne"), 606.
11 Djehuty or Djehuti is a *nṯr*, also known as Thoth, associated with the moon, writing, and knowledge. He presided over all scholars and scribes. He is

primarily shown as an ibis-headed chimera; however, the baboon is sometimes used to depict Djehuty instead of this theriocephalic form.

12 Cooney, *Woman Who Would Be King*.

13 Obenga, *African Philosophy*, 191–92.

14 Obenga, *African Philosophy*, 191–92.

15 Consistent with Obenga's explanation of the levels of Maât, Maulana Karenga writes, "*Maat is rightness in the spiritual and moral sense in three realms: the Divine, the natural and the social.* In its expansive sense, *Maat is an interrelated order of rightness which requires and is the result of right relations with and right behavior towards the Divine, nature and other humans.* As moral thought and practice, *Maat is a way of rightness* defined especially by the practice of the Seven Cardinal Virtues of truth, justice, propriety, harmony, balance, reciprocity and order. Finally, as a foundation and framework for the moral ideal and its practice, *Maat is the constantly achieved condition and requirements for the ideal world, society and person*, i.e., the Maatian world, the Maatian society, and the Maatian person." Karenga, *Maat*, 10–11; Obenga, *African Philosophy*, 191–92.

16 Cooney, *Woman Who Would Be King*, 103.

17 Karenga, *Maat*, 9–10, quoting Tobin, "Maʿat and DIKE," 113–14.

18 The Portuguese completed their first transatlantic slave trade voyage to Brazil in 1526. The oldest known depiction of a blindfolded lady justice is found in Bern, Switzerland, and dated 1543; the Gerechtigkeitsbrunnen (fountain of justice), of which the blindfolded lady justice is the feature figure, was sculpted by Hans Gieng. Caviezel, Herzog, and Keller, *Kunstführer durch die Schweiz 3*, 320.

19 Hughes, *Collected Poems*, 31; Perry, *More Beautiful and More Terrible*, 121.

20 Consider Albert Einstein's theory of special relativity and its infamous equation $e = mc^2$ (where energy equals mass multiplied by the speed of light squared) alongside the role of Maât (and Maât's feather) in ancient Egyptian formulations of Judgment Day when the human heart is accounted righteous if it weighs less than Maât's feather. Einstein, *Relativity*.

21 Importantly, as Kara Cooney points out, the Maât of ancient Egypt was largely understood in the hieroglyphic records (primarily accounting for the perspective of the pharaonic elite) as the defender of the monarchy and culturally privileged class. Thus, balance in ancient Egypt was often interpreted as that which established and maintained pharaonic, monarchal order. However, (in theory) the qualities that distinguish the hearts of the righteous are identified according to what individuals have done (i.e., performed) in their earthly lives. Being part of the pharaonic line alone does not accord righteousness to individuals. Complicating the experience of Maât is the fact that many within the ruling elite are consistently claiming Maât, claiming their own righteousness—especially in their funerary designs. Cooney, *Woman Who Would Be King*; Mertz, *Temples, Tombs, and Hieroglyphs*.

22 I make this choice following the lead of Dianne M. Stewart and Tracey E. Hucks, who, in *Obeah: Africans in the White Imagination* and *Orisa: Africana Nations and the Power of Black Sacred Imagination*, volumes I and II of *Obeah, Orisa, and Religious Identity in Trinidad*, explain their orthographic interventions. Stewart notes that an awareness of "Afropessimist analytical interventions in black studies" leads her to "place terms such as 'world' and 'worldmaking' under erasure using the strikethrough feature (~~world~~, ~~worldmaking~~) to signal that [her] use of these words emerges from religious studies frameworks (rather than philosophical theories) concerning the role of sacred poetics (religious ideas, practices, symbols, myths, and invisible powers, deities, and spirits) in orienting Africana communities as they navigate their environments." She continues: "Similarly, mindful of the Afropessimist argument that blacks have no access to the human, when appropriate, I experiment with the terms '~~human~~,' ~~humanity~~, and '~~human being~~'" (*Orisa*, xii). While my use of the strikethrough feature does happen to be applied in a religious studies framework, it is not primarily an indicative of a distinction between philosophy and religion. Rather, I deploy the strikethrough feature to signify erasures and access with respect to sexuality as a fundamental aspect of humanity—as well as transcendent and transversing movement. Consistent with Stewart's response to Afropessimist indictments, I argue that sexuality is not and cannot be the same for ~~humans~~, ~~humanity~~, and ~~human beings~~ as it is for humans, humanity, and human beings; ~~humans~~, ~~humanity~~, and ~~human beings~~ have orientations, identities, and practices that refer to ~~sexuality~~.

23 Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*; Žižek, "Hegel on Marriage."

24 Delbert, "Scientists Might Have Just Stumbled." *Dunia* is Kiswhahili for *world*. I use this alongside *terrasphere* to signal difference of place and difference of theoretical and practical approach to thinking about world organization. Here, through the Kiswahili, in concert with many vindicationists before me, I make this linguistic move as part of a nod to Pan-Africanism and its methodologies. I also think there is unique value in utilizing the Kiswahili here because it is a trade language with a Bantu base—having Arabic, English, and German roots. It is part of a protoglobalization narrative. However, in conjuction with the (Latin-rooted) *terrasphere*, *dunia* signals the contemporary, the historic, and the (culturally and otherwise) hybrid all at once.

25 Wesley Kabaila, who self-identifies as "an advocate of Kawaida since 1967, a member of the Us Organization" from 1967 to 1985, serving as its vice chair 1979–85, writes in an open letter:

> It is my opinion, that one of the reasons it remains believable that Dr. Karenga is a police agent in some circles, is because he has been dishonest about his involvement in the torture of two sisters, for which he served 4 years and his current wife, Tiamoyo served a stint also. I wish to state here, unequivocally, that he and his wife not only tortured these two

sisters for a period of over 3 weeks, but also directed two young brothers in the torture also. Prior to this period of torture, he also locked up his first wife, Haiba, in a tiger cage that was housed in the garage of a home he leased in Inglewood, California. Dr. Karenga also hit on wives of some of his closest confidantes and I personally know of one sister, who is writing a book in which she asserts that he attempted to rape her. . . .

My question is, how can Dr. Karenga continue to call himself a High Priest of Maat or Master Teacher, when the very principles he writes about, seemingly do not apply to him.

In sum, I challenge those of us who still consider ourselves Kawaida advocates, to demand from Dr. Karenga an apology for the continued lying, which has affected the credibility of those of us who have defended him. But even more than that, he owes an apology and release to the sister he tortured and to her family which was threatened if she broke silence about her true torturer. If we, who consider ourselves revolutionary, do not check and challenge this kind of behavior, then our revolution is not even worth fighting for. I respect and recognize Dr. Karenga, for his theoretical and practical contributions to our struggle, but that does not excuse his torture tactics of [a] young (18) black woman, lying about it to his followers or the masses, and the continuing cover up of it, although he has already been convicted and served the time.

"On Dr. Maulana Karenga: An Open Letter by Wesley Kabaila." See Griffin, "Op-Ed," for an explanation of another approach to acknowledging both Karenga's contributions and inexcusable faults. Also note two reports regarding Karenga's conviction and sentencing: *New York Times*, "Karenga Arrested on Coast"; Einstoss, "Karenga Sentenced."

26 Spillers, *Black, White, and in Color*; Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins."

27 Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 29.

28 Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*.

29 I cite lyrics of the Negro national anthem and include these lyrics here in their entirety:

> Lift every voice and sing
> Till earth and heaven ring,
> Ring with the harmonies of Liberty;
> Let our rejoicing rise
> High as the listening skies,
> Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.
> Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us,
> Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us.
> Facing the rising sun of our new day begun,
> Let us march on till victory is won.

Stony the road we trod,
Bitter the chastening rod,
Felt in the days when hope unborn had died;
Yet with a steady beat,
Have not our weary feet
Come to the place for which our fathers sighed?
We have come over a way that with tears has been watered,
We have come, treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered,
Out from the gloomy past,
Till now we stand at last
Where the white gleam of our bright star is cast.

God of our weary years,
God of our silent tears,
Thou who hast brought us thus far on the way;
Thou who hast by Thy might
Led us into the light,
Keep us forever in the path, we pray.
Lest our feet stray from the places, our God, where we met Thee,
Lest, our hearts drunk with the wine of the world, we forget Thee;
Shadowed beneath Thy hand,
May we forever stand.
True to our God,
True to our native land.

Johnson, "Lift Every Voice and Sing"; NAACP, "Lift Every Voice and Sing."

30 Kee, *Cambridge Annotated Study Bible*, Lamentations 3:22–23; Anderson and Henderson, "Great Is Thy Faithfulness," Hymn #84.

31 Crawley, *Lonely Letters*, 4–5 and elsewhere. The phrase "keep on keepin' on" that Carlton Pearson quotes "Mother Sherman" as saying is also common Black church vernacular. Pearson, "Mother Sherman Story."

32 Diop, *Civilization or Barbarism*, 370.

33 In 1960, Frantz Fanon stated in an address to the Accra Positive Action Conference: "Violence in everyday behaviour, violence against the past that is emptied of all substance, violence against the future, for the colonial regime presents itself as necessarily eternal. We see, therefore, that the colonized people, caught in a web of a three-dimensional violence, a meeting point of multiple, diverse, repeated, cumulative violences, are soon logically confronted by the problem of ending the colonial regime by any means necessary" (*Political Writings*, 654). Echoing this sentiment, Malcolm X stated in a 1964 speech in Harlem: "Anytime we know that an unjust condition exists and it is illegal and unjust, we will strike at it by any means necessary. And strike also at whatever and whoever gets in the way"; putting it even plainer: "That's our motto. We want

freedom by any means necessary. We want justice by any means necessary. We want equality by any means necessary" ("Malcolm X's Speech at the Founding Rally"). The writers of the 2017–21 television series *Black Lightning* expand on this concept articulating a central call-and-response mantra at the heart of the character and leadership of Principal Jefferson Pierce (also known as Black Lightning) at Garfield High School (Berlanti, *Black Lightning*):

> *JEFFERSON PIERCE: Where's the future?*
>
> STUDENTS: Right here.
>
> *JEFFERSON PIERCE: And whose life is this?*
>
> STUDENTS: Mine.
>
> *JEFFERSON PIERCE: And what are you gonna do with it?*
>
> STUDENTS: Live it by any means necessary.

One. A Prolegomenon

1 Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, 80. Also see Cox Jackson, *Gifts of Power*.
2 Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, 82.
3 Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, 81–82.
4 Margulies, *Roots*; Dash, *Daughters of the Dust*; Leath, "Revising Jezebel Politics."
5 Young, *Black Queer Ethics*.
6 Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*; Cohen, "Deviance as Resistance"; Townes, *Womanist Ethics*.
7 Tinsley, *The Color Pynk*, 5. Consider Tinsley's terminology and definition:

> Black Femme-inist
>
> (with apologies, love, and reverence to Alice Walker and E. Patrick Johnson)
>
> (1) n.—A Black-identified member of the LGBTQIA+ community who embodies resistive femininity. Believes that the dismantling of misogynoir, femmephobia, and transmisogyny are necessary for Black freedom. Knows that Black freedom is necessary for the dismantling of misogynoir, femmephobia, and transmisogyny. Can be cis or trans, binary or nonbinary, AFAB (assigned female at birth) or AMAB (assigned male at birth). Is creative with race, gender, and sexuality, recognizing that creativity is not a luxury for those of us who are Black, queer, feminine, and never meant to thrive.
> (2) adj.—Loves other Black femmes, erotically and politically. Practices collaborative solidarity. Recognizes the reality of nonbinary vaginas