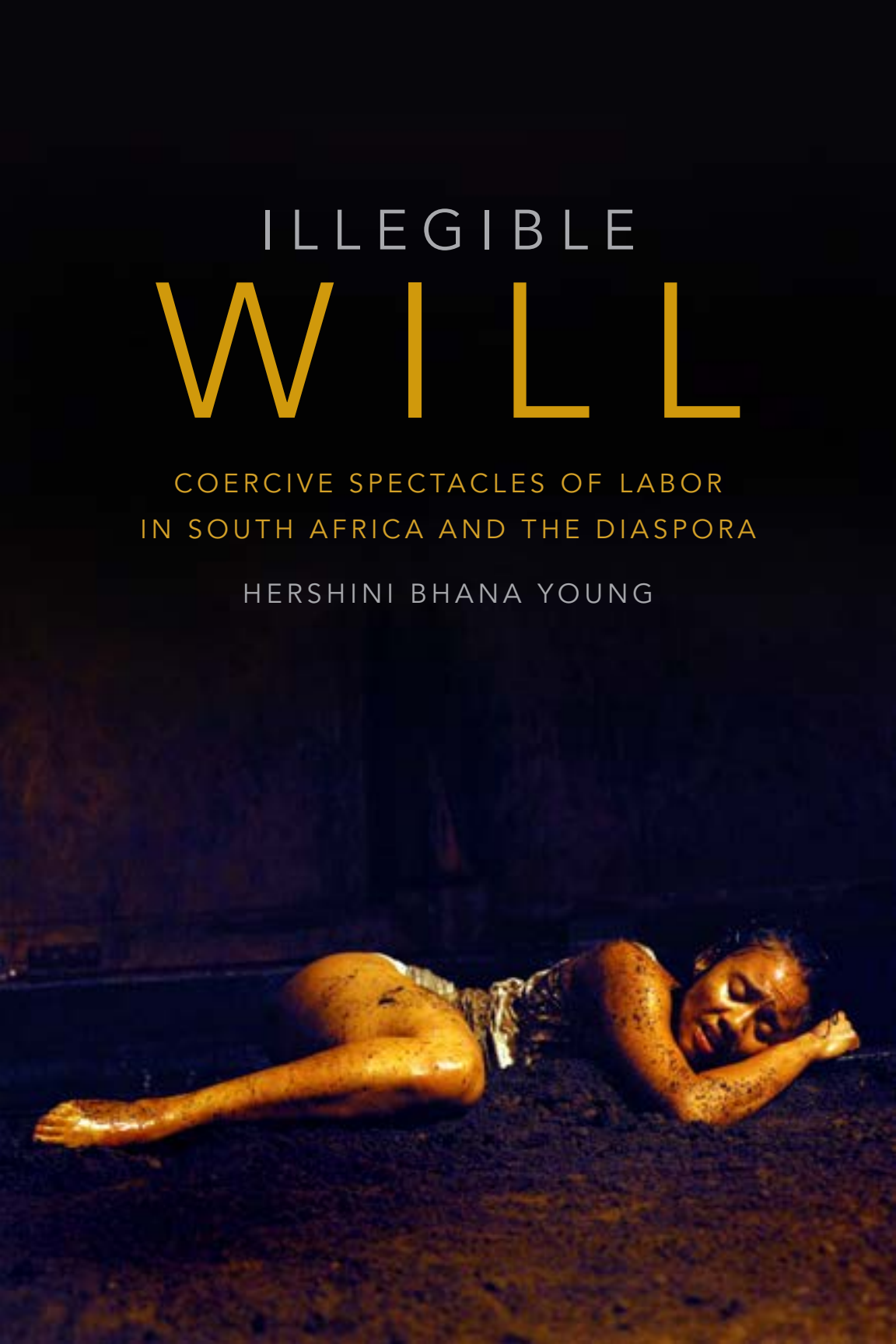
ILLEGIBLE WILL

COERCIVE SPECTACLES OF LABOR IN SOUTH AFRICA AND THE DIASPORA

HERSHINI BHANA YOUNG



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in South Africa and the Diaspora

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FOR MY FATHER

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Between my last book and *Illegible Will*, my life has undergone a series of sea changes. The term is particularly apt, as in its original context, Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, a sea change suggests a metamorphosis that follows drowning. These pages represent the drowning and the metamorphosis, the watery grave and the sunlight.

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INTRODUCTION

Imagine a beginning—always arbitrary. A woman stands on stage in London, clad in a black dress that hugs every curve. Across the Atlantic in New Orleans, a group of women wearing high-necked blue dresses, with well-oiled hair and scrubbed fingernails, answer questions from buyers eager to procure a deal. These women, separated by an ocean, know nothing of one another. They cannot even dream one another up. These women have everything to do with one another. And with us.

This volume attempts an excavation of the historical and present-day limits of liberal, capitalist notions of individual agency. It does so by exposing the continuities between the forms of labor literally embodied in slavery, indenture, and the commodified raced and gendered spectacle. *Illegible Will* is structured around a series of disparate and far-flung (geographically and temporally) case studies/performances, which include the tragic life of Tryntjie (a Madagascan slave at the Cape of Good Hope), a novel by Andre Brink, Indian indenture in Natal, the Miss Landmine Angola beauty pageant, Saartjie (Sarah) Baartman's time in London, Joice Heth (one of P. T. Barnum's first freak shows), and Yvette Christianse's brilliant novel *Unconfessed*. By juxtaposing "case studies" such as these, my historiographic approach situates southern African performances within African diasporic circuits of meaning. I do not mean to suggest that these historical case studies are teleological explanations. Instead, as C. Riley Snorton writes, these "prior moments and events . . . foreshadow [black will's] emergence to suggest that our contemporary moment finds precedents in other times and places" marked by a crisis of meaning in black will.[1]

This book is deeply indebted to the works of performance and disability scholars such as Saidiya Hartman, Joseph Roach, and Rosemarie Garland Thompson. Intervening in histories that privilege the written, I argue that everyday performance practices such as selling beer and sighing or limping reveal a diasporic repertoire of shifting creative and embodied responses to imperialism that exceed the textual and verbal. This study, then, attempts what Dwight Conquergood has described as "a riskier hermeneutics of experience, relocation, copresence, humility and vulnerability: listening to and being touched by the protest performances of [subjugated] . . . people."[2] Chapters on Miss Landmine Angola or Sarah Baartman for example, are obvious exemplars of this approach as I analyze pageant participants' poses, the spectacle of their disability or Baartman's "rude" and reluctant demonstrations of her musicality. However, one of Performance Studies' most radical contributions lies in its refusal to simply replace the romance of textual authority with the seductive immediacy of performance. In "Performance: Blunders of Orpheus," Joseph Roach suggests that over-privileging the living repertoire can result in the widening of the gap between performance studies and textual studies. Should they neglect the textual "resources that stand behind the critique and representation of social differences," performances could find themselves "adrift in the present, unmoored from prior [imagined or known] iterations of them."[3] Performance scholars, then, must be attentive to the complex interaction between textuality and embodied memory. We must know when to remember and when to reinvent and when to search out fugitive traces and echoes of prior moments in the gloom.

Illegible Will struggles with how best to think through and write about embodied practices/repertoires of behavior as inextricable from literary and historical claims. As numerous scholars such as Saidiya Hartman and Diana Taylor insist, reading the textual for the performative and making the archival performative lead us toward an understanding of history and performance as overlapping modalities that distill meaning from the past. Robin Bernstein argues that the historical and the performative work together, "with neither form of knowledge . . . pre-existing the other. Within each scriptive thing, archive and repertoire are one."[4]

It is for these reasons that I use performance studies as a methodology in chapters that seem less obviously about performance, such as those dealing with the contemporary novel *Unconfessed* or the narrative history *Rogues, Rebels and Runaways*. Whether textually based or embodied, the various scenes in each chapter then are about making meaning through performative histories of

transatlantic and trans–Indian Ocean circuits and exchanges. The construction of racialized bodies via the spectacle, as well as the creation of various viewers and consumers, becomes the engine and the function of the historical circulation and exchange that this book traces.

When faced with the undocumented "event," performative histories have a unique ability to alter how we make history and conjure memory. Moving away from understanding the past as only chronological and behind us, Diana Taylor asks us to imagine it "as also vertical, as a different form of storage of what's already here. Its iterative, recurrent quality functions through repeats, yet breaks out of them." The "repetition with difference" of performance offers an alternate modality for thinking about an always reiterative history. Taylor goes on to say that the "bearers of performance, those who engage in it, are also the bearers of history who link the layers past-present-future through practice."[5]

How does one engage performatively with the archive as a vertical and chronological space?[6] How does one remember histories that depart from traditional notions of the archive and archival process? Anjali Arondekar suggests that "even as the concept of fixed and finite archive has come under siege, it has simultaneously led to an explosion of multiple/alternate archives that seek to remedy the erasures of the past."[7] In her attempt to "queer the archive," what I have described as reading the archive performatively, Arondekar proposes "a different kind of archival romance, one that supplements the narrative of retrieval with a radically different script of historical continuation."[8] Rather than presuming one can find what has been missing, Arondekar theorizes a reading practice that departs from the assumption that recovering lost or new evidence can somehow excavate illegible subjectivities. Instead of the search for an object that leads to a subject, the scholar's search should be for a subject effect: a ghostly afterlife or a space of absence that is not empty but filled. In other words, rather than insisting on excavating factual evidence that may or may not be there, but that can never adequately fill the holes in the archive, my work performs politically urgent narrations or informed critical conjurings, a method at which some historians might balk. Given the dearth of traditional archival material written by and about black people, what is required is an engagement "with the material imprint of archival evidence as a 'recalcitrant event.'" To do this requires moving beyond arguments about missing or present documented evidence into what Arondekar calls "the realm of narration."[9] Such an engagement requires navigation across disciplines: a remapping of the disjunctures, chasms, and nodes of connection between different

historically located fields of knowledge that can help us more fully flesh out the afterlife of black diasporic subjects.[10]

My manuscript relies heavily on the primary research done by historians such as Clifton Crais and Pamela Scully and Nigel Penn to provide new insights into the political dynamics of certain black historical actors and to problematize standard assumptions about their subjectivity. That I rely on the primary research of others might be construed as a weakness of this manuscript, and to some extent it is. But the focus of *Illegible Will* is on exploring the *process* of reading the archive across existing literatures and connecting fields. How do historians and other thinkers, given their particular investments and theorizations of the archive itself, encounter black presence and absence? What kinds of associative thinking are possible if we look at how historians attribute historical will rather than simply being reassured that they have located evidence of its existence?

Illegible Will thus attempts a queer imaginative conjuring through critical theories of redress. The filled empty spaces call out for critical imaginings or alternate visions that suggest moments in which agency could reside. These critical imaginative moments lie side by side with hegemonic discourses, providing not only an avenue to think through the power of historical fiction but also a way to reconceptualize the relationship between historical process and narrative structure. While not necessarily empirically true, these performative moments offer us equally valid outlines of history's afterlife. Black performance studies thus provides me with a messy theoretical body, as well as with a methodology that can animate, suture together, and disrupt disciplinary investments in writing black histories.

Alexander Weheliye reminds us that black (performance) studies has to account for how the field contributes to the creation of primary, particular objects of knowledge such as black culture.[11] Using the work of Hortense Spillers and Sylvia Wynter, he suggests that instead of a descriptive field, black studies must operate as mode of knowledge production. For Weheliye, this mode allows us to theorize the "ideological and physiological mechanics of the violently tiered categorization of the human species in western modernity, which stand counter to the universalizing but resolutely Europe-centered visions embodied by bare life and biopolitics . . . without demoting race and gender to the rank of the ethnographically particular, instead exposing how these categories carve from the swamps of slavery and colonialism the very flesh and bones of modern Man."[12] I am careful not to use the term "black" uncritically in this project to suggest a uniform and shared identity

that is unmoored in time and space. *Illegible Will* resides in the uneasy and fraught spaces among specific African peoples, African Americans, and various other peoples whom modernity has excluded from a "humanity" that is coterminous with white, liberal Man. Along with Weheliye, scholars such as Oyeronke Oyewumi and Chandra Mohanty warn against falsely universalizing methodologies and constructs that can either retroactively map contemporary meanings onto historically located bodies or, under the guise of universality, use naturalized Western concepts such as "gender" while subjugating indigenous worldviews and systems of meaning.[13]

In keeping with black performance studies as a mode of knowledge production, I set transatlantic sites in conversation with one another not so much to apply the same universal identitarian categories to different historical situations as to map their uneven development and application. I place seemingly disparate performative sites in conversation with one another precisely because racialized bodies across the diaspora were displayed and defined against one another while also being compared to the bodies of their viewers, all in order to develop modern transatlantic systems of race and gender that enable capitalism and its attendant modes of political power. The differing sites become coherent *as sites* only in their relationship to one another.[14] The coherence of these sites is precarious because systems of power constantly change, necessitating time-specific performances of blackness. Race, as Ann Stoler writes, "is a discourse of vacillations. It operates at different levels and moves not only between different political projects but seizes upon different elements of earlier discourses reworked for new political ends."[15]

It is important to remember that racial formations, as Stoler tells us, are "shaped by specific relations of power and therefore have different histories and etymologies."[16] In her comparative study of race, class and gender, Zine Magubane pays close attention to these histories and etymologies. As a result, she is loath to propound "a general theory of the articulation of race, class, and gender that is capable of explaining the very different social relations of, for example, England in the nineteenth century and Brazil in the twenty-first . . . [Rather the] utility of historical case studies [or performances] lies less in their ability to generate a totalizing theory than in their ability to suggest ways of looking at the world or at social situations that may be taken up and deployed, with modification, in other contexts."[17] Magubane wishes to foreground what might be called a diasporic methodology that highlights the connections between economic processes and racialized gender. In other words, as Stoler insists, discourses of sexuality, race, and labor must be placed

"within a common frame as productive sites in a broader process of [the] normalization [of the white bourgeois body]."[18] I would amend Magubane's diasporic methodology to foreground performance. I argue that the connections between economic processes and racialized gender are embodied, tactile, and repeated with difference by various actors in a wide array of locations. These actors re-imbue blackness with meaning through their performances so that it is historically located but also always new.

The population at the Cape during the seventeenth century was phenotypically, religiously, linguistically, and culturally very diverse, with slaves originating from areas such as Malaysia, Mozambique, the Indian subcontinent, and Madagascar. Also included were Khoikhoi and Baastard Hottentots (the children of slave or settler men and Khoisan women) who, while legally exempt from slavery, joined the ranks of coerced labor. Although blackness in the Cape during this period was not the inflexible naturalized racial category that it imagined itself to be later, it would still be a mistake to think that color prejudice did not affect slaves such as Tryntjie of Madagascar, whom I discuss in chapter 2. As the renowned historian John Edwin Mason argues, while the Cape "had yet to elaborate a well-developed racial ideology, 'respectable' whites subscribed to a pervasive color prejudice that cut across divisions of class, ethnicity, and religion."[19] This color prejudice, though unstable and not yet forged into the rigid concepts of race that some argue were "firmly established" by 1820,[20] articulated a link between the inherent deviancy of the "nonwhite"/less human and systems of coercive labor. The attempts to define slavery revolved around a racialization of coerced labor that gradually cemented the mutable links between race and slavery itself. The scientific codification of older racial prejudice became crucial to the justification and structural development of the slave trade and imperial policy. As whiteness became essential to the category of the human, slavery and other forms of coerced labor began to be inextricable from notions of blackness.

An example of racialization that uses the phenotypic to fuse slavery with blackness can be seen in the struggles around the racial classification of the Khoikhoi, or "Hottentots," as they were derogatorily known. By describing "Hottentots" as "fair"-skinned, seventeenth-century and some eighteenth-century travel writing threatened to disrupt the growing codification of race into a "visual science" of skin color that underpinned slavery. This literature on the Khoikhoi insists that they are not black or brown but yellow, tawny, fair-skinned, with their babies being born white-skinned. For example, Linda Merians describes how, in a report to the members of the Royal Society, John

Maxwell "describes 'Hottentot' skin color as 'naturally as White as ours,' . . . 'a race onto themselves' [and therefore] *'unfit' for slavery*."[21] Subsequent historical changes to this racial discourse result in the "Hottentot" being the exemplar of the primitive. Sarah Baartman's putative elongated labia and steatopygia are re-read, not only as signs of lesser humanity, but also as evidence of fitness for enslavement. Blackness, as Magubane reminds us, is a variable, historically located tool, etched onto the body and intimately linked to capitalist systems of labor.[22]

Recalcitrant Bodies

The performance scholarship I will be engaging with insists not only on the materiality of the body, but also on what Taylor calls performance's manipulation and experimentation of historically located notions of embodiment.[23] My work builds on performance scholars in its focus on southern Africa and site-specific spectacles of laboring bodies. How well does black performance theory travel, given that there is no universal, transparent notion of the (black) body? What does the performing body look like from the vantage point of the Cape of Storms, for example, where the Indian and Atlantic oceans break against each other?

The famed African scholars Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff remind us that "the body . . . cannot escape being a vehicle of history, a metaphor and metonym of being-in-time."[24] Similarly, Magubane asks us to consider how "embodiment articulates the evolution of capitalism and colonialism."[25] As Timothy Burke cautions, one cannot simply translate a local African or African American vocabulary for the body into a more general scholarly language because understandings of the body as a unit of analysis are not consistent across time and space. Burke suggests, "Regarding the body as an invariably significant or coherent subject in any culture must be regarded as a suspect notion; the body as a subject is specifically a product of the peculiar and convoluted history of Western and Christian insistence on mind/body duality. . . . In particular, bio-power . . . makes sense only in reference to historically specific and modern figurations of the body in Western history, and thus has dubious relevance to the pre-colonial and perhaps even contemporary cultural experiences of many Africans."[26] Burke's argument sets the groundwork for Weheliye's warning that biopolitics as a mode of analysis often figures racial difference as a primitive vestige located prior to contemporary thought as such. Weheliye suggests instead that the "conceptual tools of racialized

minority discourse augment and reframe bare life and biopolitics discourse" by inhabiting "the nexus of differentiation, hierarchy, and the human" and imagining different modes of being human that do not center on the liberal bourgeois Man.[27]

The case studies in all of the chapters work through the temporal and geographic specificities of the body. Consider, for example, the Miss Landmine Angola pageant, as discussed in chapter 3. As Neville Hoad points out, largely unemployed, amputee contestants have "very little in common with a standard-bearer pageant like Miss World beyond adherence to the basic generic form of a pageant [and its typical contestant]."[28] The material body, what it stands for, how it is represented, and how gender or beauty or any number of discourses are embodied and inscribed has everything to do with what Hoad describes as the "enormously complicated set of transnational exchanges, precisely connected at the level of the economic to the global histories and their libidinal economies" that led to the military conditions that caused these women's injuries in the first place."[29] The history of the West's encounter with the Other has pivoted around the creation of the injured spectacle of Otherness. The ways in which women's bodies were viewed and represented underwrote the (sexual) exploitation of those bodies that is essential for the capitalist appropriation of empire.

Illegible Will claims that in order to open up the question of agency, coercion, and consent, one needs to prevent the collapsing of the material and discursive body. I wish to engage not with the body functioning as a symbolic surrogate for personhood but with the messy realities of bodies that bleed, heal, dance, and die. In a chapter titled "Rotten Worlds," Elizabeth Povinelli tracks the discursive production of a large sore on her shoulder. Studying the way in which her sore is framed by doctors, healers, and colleagues as they offer various explanations, treatments, and affective responses, Povinelli distinguishes between two social aspects of embodiment that she terms corporeality and carnality. For Povinelli, corporeality functions as discursive strategy, while carnality emphasizes a material, fleshy body located in an environment. She distinguishes between these bodily registers "in terms of the difference between flesh as a juridical and political maneuver and flesh as a physical mattering forth of these maneuvers."[30] The fact of flesh is not opposed to discourse, instead "the uneven distribution of the flesh—the creation of life-worlds, death-worlds, and rotting worlds—is a key way in which . . . [individual agency and social constraint] are felt, known, and expressed."[31] In many ways, this formulation is indebted to Hortense Spillers's argument about the

distinctions between "body" and "flesh" revolving around captive and non-captive subject positions.[32] Spillers posits that "before the 'body' there is the 'flesh,' that zero degree of social conceptualization that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse, or the reflexes of iconography. . . . If we think of the 'flesh' as a primary narrative, then we mean its seared, divided, ripped-apartness, riveted to the ship's hole, fallen, or 'escaped' overboard."[33] Like Povinelli's carnality, Spillers's flesh is not a natural substrate that exists prior to racialization. Rather, it is crucially produced through acts of violence. The unprotected, ungendered slave body becomes what Spillers calls a text *and* a methodology for reading life and death, subjugation and survival.

Understood, then, as both flesh and body, Povinelli's body is subject to numerous, often incommensurate discourses. Contemporary science might understand her sore as a symptom of staphylococcus or anthrax spores, whereas culturally prejudicial discourses might read the lesions as evidence of the "filthiness" of Aboriginal communities where she works. Conversely, Aboriginal communities themselves might diagnose her sore as the result of contact with a living, breathing ancestral site. While all these discourses exist simultaneously, they are differentially empowered. For instance, as Povinelli and Kim DiFruscia discuss, the diagnosis of staphylococcus is more likely to be taken as scientifically true than one about ancestral contact.[34] But no matter how the sore is understood (a matter of vital importance in terms of treatment), it causes the material body to sicken. And, as Povinelli points out,

> Depending how one's body has been cared for, or is being cared for, it sickens it in different ways and different degrees. . . . And this slow corrosion of the life is part of the reason why, if you are [a person of color], your life runs out much sooner than [that of white people]. And if the state provides you rights based on longevity . . . but you are dying on average ten to twenty years sooner than non-Indigenous people, then the carnal condition of your body is out of sync with the apparatus of recognition. . . . Carnality therefore becomes vital to understanding the dynamics of power.[35]

The body and the flesh, corporeality and carnality, therefore become crucial to understanding the dynamics of power that crosshatch the African diasporic body as each chapter works through notions of labor, illness, and performance.

This idea of material embodiment is distinct from the social and structural death discussed by Achille Mbembe and Orlando Patterson. Theorizing dance and gesture, death and dying, I wish to add a fleshy carnality to the discourse

of necropolitics to more adequately open up questions of will and personhood. Povinelli's discussion of the material deterioration of bodies and the state's interest in certain people's (and not others') longevity provides an opening to discuss what Mbembe terms "necropolitics," or technologies of control that subjugate life to the power of death.[36] Rather than revolving around various notions of state and individual autonomy, sovereignty becomes an exercise in defining life and controlling mortality. Mbembe writes that, under the conditions of necropolitics, "power is infinitely more brutal than it was during the authoritarian period. . . . If it still maintains its tight grid of bodies (or their agglomeration within camps or so-called security zones), this is not so much to inscribe them in disciplinary apparatuses as to better inscribe them, when the time comes, within the order of that maximal economy that has become the 'massacre.'"[37] Within site-specific, late modern colonial contexts, Mbembe describes the endless states of racialized terror such as continual warfare or (I would argue) the withholding and distribution of health care that lead to totalizing forms of domination over human lives and the control of death. This becomes particularly relevant in my chapter on indentured labor where the work accomplished by the death of the laborers ultimately proved more valuable than their labor when alive. Orlando Patterson's groundbreaking *Slavery and Social Death*, on the power relations that undergird plantation slavery, also recognizes the centrality of death in colonial regimes. Patterson's argument uses "bare life" and the politics of exception to think through master-slave Hegelian relationships. He argues that these relationships ultimately *produce* the slave through the slave's "social death."[38] His concerns are with the making of the slave through her negation, through her social unmaking.

Mbembe's and Patterson's social unmaking must be placed alongside the fleshy body's illness, decay, and death, or what could be called a material death. Looking at the body in a historically contextualized manner that incorporates material death and social death allows us to interrogate the politics around life-stealing labor that have become so normalized as to be rendered transparent. Thus, in the instance of the slave who works herself to death on the plantation, her rotting body as well as the social death she experienced as a slave reveal the embodied ways in which domination works. The interplay between her corporeality and her carnality gestures toward the plural notions of identity and agency that diasporic Africans were and are able to practice even within conditions of extreme violence.

To further explore embodied practices of agency, this volume also pays close attention to meaning-making forms of movement. My analyses of a pageant

contestant's pose as she awkwardly reclines next to a pool and of Sarah Baartman's slow recalcitrance as she appears on stage are attempts to write a history contextualized within the body itself. Gesture is not merely a product of socialization. Rather, as Carrie Noland reminds us, "The lived experience of executing a gesture is as important as the [culturally and historically specific] symbolic dimension of the gesture."[39] The body achieves a kinesthetic awareness of itself as nerves tingle, synapses fire, and the body creates and discovers itself. The symbolic dimension of gesture cannot simply be translated into verbal language. On the contrary, as Juana Rodriguez points out, "Sometimes the point of gesture is that it can register what cannot or should not be expressed in words. And sometimes it signals what one wishes to keep out of sound's reach."[40] In their emphasis on the kinetic, those things that one cannot say or does not want to say except with a hand caressing a cheek, rubbing, pushing, and falling, gestures refuse determined meanings as they constantly search for social connection. While gestures reveal what Rodriguez calls the "inscription of social and cultural laws [that] transform our individual movements into an archive of received social behaviors and norms," kinetic energy shapes and reshapes the body.[41] This embodied kinesis reroutes normative processes of meaning making, troubling social norms even while indexing them. Let us imagine the simple act of holding one's hands up, for example, as if a policeman is pointing a gun at one's chest. This gesture has accumulated a constellation of social meanings. It tells the police officer to pause and not shoot just yet. Through the careful raising of my arms and opening of my torso, I recognize the potential violence to my person embodied in the policeman's stance. The body of both police officer and suspect enact a culturally determined script of power and surrender, without which gesture would just be uninflected, meaningless motion. The plea "I can't breathe" or "Don't shoot" expressed through vulnerable torso and arms held to the sky accrues meaning as it resonates throughout the African diaspora. Yet each performance, even as it reiterates a culturally specific gestural vocabulary, houses the possibility of multiple other meanings. Thus, approaching a police officer (who may or may not have his gun drawn) with arms up is not so much a gesture of supplication as a threat, a parody of subservience. Instead of enacting my normative gestural role of freezing or supplicating, my gestures turn vulnerability into aggression. They refuse social scripts, demanding another type of relationality. Another example would be the Cake-Walk performed by slaves that mimicked the rigid, stiff movements of their owners. Slave owners perceived slaves' gestural vocabularies of straight limbs as flattering imitation.

What they overlooked was the West African belief that straight limbs characterized death. By taking on the characteristics of white dancers, Susan Phillips argues, slaves performed white ownership and exhibited control over the dead, thus countering the social death of slavery.[42] Or as Rodriguez writes, dance "reflect[s] how social forces exert corporeal power, and how as pulsating kinetic subjects, we find out own ways to groove to the tracks."[43] The example with the police officer and the Cake-Walk both reveal, according to Noland, how gesture becomes the connecting link between "discourses privileging the biological body, subjectivity, and somatic experience on the one hand and, on the other, discourses indebted to a deconstructive critique of embodiment as a staging of the body through structures of signification that are not necessarily the body's own."[44] Throughout *Illegible Will*, I hope to think through the historical and spatial contingencies by which gestures migrate, repeat, and acquire (new) meanings. The body as gestural archive and inventor, as monument and stylus, is paramount to any understanding of diasporic performance.

Time and Space

Despite covering large swaths of time, *Illegible Will* is a postapartheid study in that it tells stories that the grand drama of apartheid obscured for so long. Throughout the book, I render visible South Africa's long history of international contact that becomes apparent only following the end of apartheid and its myth of global isolation and autonomy. Thus, this book focuses on certain historical texts, cultural production, and moments while deemphasizing other, equally important ones. One of the most important forms of southern African labor that this manuscript does not discuss is migrant labor—whether we go as far back as the Mfecane (the dispersal and militarized upheaval that attended the consolidation of the Zulu kingdom in the nineteenth century) or focus narrowly on recent labor disputes in the South African mining industry. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, the South African mining industry has set up a transnational infrastructure of labor migrancy that transported workers from undeveloped "homelands" and rural townships to the mines, where these workers were crowded into a system of compounds. As Jonathan Crush and Clarence Tshitereke tell us, the mining industry has wielded significant authority over the management of migratory labor diasporas.[45] The story of the proletarianization of rural agricultural economies continues to be told. For example, Phaswane Mpe's

Welcome to Our Hillbrow (2001) highlights the centrality of migrant labor in the southern African landscape.[46] Showing how other African immigrants to South Africa are scapegoated as the primary carriers of HIV and AIDS, Mpe uses the trope of contagion to think through a contemporary Hillbrow, which is inundated with migrant workers desperate for paying jobs. While my study recognizes the importance of those laboring Southern Africans who remained relatively stationary and did not cross large bodies of water, I focus primarily on the wake of the Black Atlantic and the sea tack toward the Indian Ocean.[47]

The book thus crisscrosses oceans to include African Americans, black British, East Africans, Madagascans, Goans, and South Asians. It insists on recognizing the flow of labor both away from and toward the African continent. As a result, *Illegible Will*'s chapter on Indian indentured labor, in particular, makes visible the other ocean central to coercive labor regimes and largely occluded in the current, Paul Gilroy–derived academic discourse: the Indian Ocean. While there are several continuities between the Atlantic and Indian oceans in the historical performances of slavery and coercion, we need to trace the differences between these oceanic sites to keep from collapsing them into each other or ignoring one in favor of the other. "Narratives of migration, diaspora, settlement, and naming on and around the Cape of Storms" as Loren Kruger states, "introduce currents that blur new and old maps of cultural traffic."[48] A thoughtful perspective on Cape slavery necessitates the inclusion of the African continent and the Indian Ocean and Red Sea in the African diaspora. The dispersal of Africans across the Atlantic has had a near-monopoly in studies of the African diaspora, marked particularly by the popularity of terms such as "Black Atlantic." In particular, as Pier Larson reminds us, "the use of new social identities in the African continental portion of the diaspora during the age of enslavement was in many cases linked to a social amnesia of enslavement, differing from the formation of African American identities in the western Atlantic and their link to memorialization of trauma and victimization by enslavement."[49] While the transatlantic slave trade was the largest forced migration of Africans (approximately twelve million), many African slaves were captured and moved to destinations within the continent itself. One needs to also remember the numbers recounted by Larson, the trans-Saharan trade (nearly eight million), and the Indian Ocean and Red Sea trades (more than four million).[50] The African diaspora thus consists of intimately linked brutal dispersions that were transatlantic, trans-Saharan, trans–Indian Ocean, and internal to the African continent itself.

Thus, the slaves stolen from Mozambique who made the Cape their home are just as essential to the African diaspora as those who were shipped to the Caribbean and the United States.

Madagascar in particular has been overlooked and proves key to this project, particularly in the chapter on Tryntjie, a Madagascan slave at the Cape. The island is often considered a world apart, excluded from African studies and only sometimes included in South Asian history. However, as Larson posits, the island nonetheless represented a "cultural and economic crossroads and its peoples experienced a variety of slave trades between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries as both captives and captors."[51] Africans of the Indian Ocean diaspora were therefore subjected to a host of experiences that, while distinct, bear remarkable similarities to those of Africans who were crisscrossing the Atlantic Ocean. One needs to contest the marginalization of East Africa and Madagascar from historical considerations of slavery. Instead, this history needs to be located within what Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton call "imperial webs" that function as "systems of exchange, mobility, appropriation and extraction, fashioned to enable the empire-building power to exploit the natural resources, manufactured goods, or valued skills of the subordinated group. . . . These webs include systems of contact and exchange, and displays of power and domination, that shape the imperial landscape."[52] The stories of the various historical people in this manuscript enable us to situate Cape slavery, under the control of the Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (Dutch East India Company; VOC) from 1652 to 1795 within larger discourses of slavery.

While not as involved in the slave trade as its partner, the Dutch West India Company,[53] the VOC did need to supply the Cape Colony with slaves. Confronted with international competition for slaves and having been excluded from regions such as Dahomey and Guinea by the Dutch West India Company, the VOC looked at alternative potential slave markets such as Delagoa Bay and Ceylon. Thus, Cape slaves were not from West Africa and Central Africa but instead hailed mainly from Asia and the southwest Indian Ocean.[54] In the seventeenth century, most slaves were from Madagascar. The eighteenth century showed demographic shifts: early in the century, almost half the slaves were from India and Sri Lanka. Twenty percent were brought to the Cape via Batavia (modern-day Jakarta). Toward the end of the VOC's reign, the number of slaves from Asia had declined considerably as they were replaced by men and women from Mozambique. The total number of slaves

between 1652 and 1808 can be estimated at 63,000, comparable to the total number of slaves brought to the Americas in a single year.[55]

One-third of all slaves in the middle of the eighteenth century were owned by the VOC and housed in the company slave lodge in Cape Town that Worden describes, crucially for our later discussion, as "the best known brothel of the colony."[56] These slaves performed public works and any other services that the VOC required, such as carpentry and building. The rest of the slaves were privately owned and mainly performed domestic service on isolated farms and in independent households. Thus, Cape slavery was characterized by the small scale of slaveholding units as the average slaveholder had only ten slaves. This number must be qualified due to the presence of indigenous Khoikhoi laborers who worked alongside slaves but who, as Worden points out, "entered into a social structure already conditioned by the slave system, and although nominally free, became subject to similar means of coercion and control which were later to be applied in a modified form to Bantu-speaking laborers."[57] The small number of slaves and their intimate proximity to white masters, mistresses, and indigenous workers has sometimes been mistaken to suggest the mildness of Cape slavery. In actuality, slavery everywhere it existed operated by a brutal exercise of power over fungible slave bodies. In the Cape, the relative isolation of many farms where male slaves often outnumbered male colonists led to extreme forms of coercion and control. For evidence of such brutality, one need only glance at the Court of Justice's proceedings to find documentation of torturous punishments such as spanning a slave's body into *poolsche bok*.[58] Throughout the seventeenth century and eighteenth century, Cape law allowed the master to lay up to thirty-nine lashes onto a slave with a whip, *sjambok*, leather thong, rattan, cat-o'-nine-tails, or other such instrument as retribution for "domestic offenses" such as running away, neglect of duties, and impudence. Court records document how Justinus Rens beat his slave Camies with a sjambok for refusing to "bark like a Dog and Crow like a Cock."[59]

As was the case in most colonial transatlantic slave societies, male slaves greatly outnumbered female slaves. Only in the final years of the VOC's rule did female slaves exceed 25 percent of the slave population.[60] Female slaves in the records are characterized both by their absence and simultaneous overwhelming presence. These women's voices are missing, but their bodies are all over the records as subjects of racialized discipline. When going through the transcripts of trials from the Council of Justice between 1705 and 1794,

for instance, one is struck by the extent to which female slaves appear as victims of their owners and fellow slaves. Case after case tells us of female slaves such as Regina van Ternaten, who, after being whipped for absenteeism, was found dead in the veld, or Diana, who was whipped to death after her master ordered another slave named January to beat her.[61] The slave woman, Suzette Spencer argues, left "no written body of records, yet her body functions as both the invisible enigma and the open or naked surface upon which historians inscribe multiple narratives."[62] What all these cases highlight is an extensive cataloguing of women's bodies as sexual objects but a comparative absence of women's voices as subjects. The construction of black femininity is indexed by a historical invisibility that is not challenged but, rather, supported by the injured bodies of brutalized women that populate the archive's pages. As Nell Painter suggests, the "truth" about black female subjects lies in which critical methodologies we use to interpret their consenting and coerced bodies located within slavery's politics of violent intimacy.[63]

Consider the statement of an indignant Reverend William Wright of Trinity College, Dublin, who writes

> [Cape] slaves are in the habit of living in unrestrained concubinage . . . with Europeans. . . . Shall I enlarge on the effects of such a system? Is it necessary to tell the inhabitants of a Christian country, that when the law and usage sanctioned adultery, thus converting every private house into what should not be named in these pages, the tendency and effects of such a system must have been demoralizing in the extreme. . . . How unpleasant [to be exposed to a system] so general and so public, that it never shuns the light, and seldom excites a blush.[64]

Wright sees this sanctioned adultery as evidence that the "incurable evil of slavery" corrupts the European slave owner but not the slave, who is already morally lax and sexually wanton. Wright, as well as other diarists and travelers to the Cape, had difficulty grasping the meaning of the sexually exploitative behavior they witnessed. As Mason observes, these colonialists "refused to acknowledge the vulnerability and powerlessness and the overt and covert forms of coercion that forced the women into these liaisons [with white men]."[65] Rather than slave owners' being victims of their slaves, they were victims to their own sexualized and racialized performances of power. In the early 1770s, Anders Sparrman, a Swedish naturalist and abolitionist, shared a meal with a white overseer over which they discussed concubinage with slaves in terms that actualized Reverend Wright's deepest fears (or fantasies). Based on his

own sexual experiences, the overseer provided Sparrman with a sexual ranking of (slave) women according to their ethnicity, beginning with Madagascan women, who were the "blackest and the best," then Malabars, followed by Bugunese or Malays. The bottom of the list was reserved for Hottentots and then, "worst of all," white Dutch women.[66] Such a candid list reveals not only that the sexual enjoyment of slaves was common, but also that all of that erotic life was located in what Sharon Holland terms the "messy terrain of racist practice."[67] White male settlers sexually abused female slaves housed in the company Slave Lodge so routinely that travelers to the Cape complained that the women were the source of the high occurrences of venereal disease among white men.[68] O. F. Mentzel describes "female slaves . . . as always ready to offer their bodies for a trifle; and towards evening, one can see a string of soldiers and sailors entering the lodge where they misspend their time until the clock strikes 9 . . . Three or four generations of this admixture (for daughters follow their mother's footsteps) have produced a half-caste population—as mestizo class—but a slight shade darker than some Europeans."[69]As Wright observes, so blatant was the sexual abuse of slaves by white men that a *plakkaat* (an ad hoc ordinance used as common law in the Cape) was issued in 1678 prohibiting whites from openly going about the streets with slave women from the lodge. Such public behavior supposedly undermined the authority of European men. In 1685, High Commissioner Hendrik van Rheede of the East India Company noted during his visit to the Cape that many of the slave children in the Company's Lodge had Dutch fathers. To wit, he reiterated another plakkaat that he felt was being ignored, which prohibited sexual intercourse between female slaves and white men, as well as systems of concubinage. He also ordered that these "half-castes" be taught useful trades and emancipated upon adulthood.[70] Other plakkaats attempted to ensure that a slave woman who had children with her master could not be sold during his lifetime and that both she and her children would be entitled to their liberty when the master died.[71] These laws speak more to white anxieties than to the actual political dynamics of sexual violence. White men did not undermine their authority by identifying their slave mistresses or openly walking the streets with them, as Commissioner van Reede feared. Instead, such performances of sexual access reasserted the vulnerability of black femininity, thereby consolidating the power of white masculinity to sexually plunder at will. Black femininity became defined precisely through white sexual enjoyment and exploitation.

No matter how commonplace these repertoires might have been, it is important to note that (middle-class and upper-class) slave-owning society

did not legally, religiously, or socially condone sexual intercourse between master and slave. Both masters and mistresses took significant measures to hide what was occurring in their households and at the Slave Lodge. Perhaps the anxieties of white slave owners that they would be exposed revolved not so much around sexual reputation as around the dissolution of white paternity on which claims of slavery and freedom ultimately rest.

Recalcitrant Events and the Crisis in Liberal Notions of Agency and Consent

Using the concept of the laboring body, *Illegible Will* critically explores the liberal, binary notions of individual freedom and social constraint. The discursive ideals and fantasies of self-sovereignty and the value of individual freedom arise from the Enlightenment's basis in contractual democracy and speculative capital. According to Magubane, the shift to "capitalist social relations is always depicted . . . in terms of freedom and choice" as individuals are strongly "encouraged" to sell their labor.[72] Classic formal Marxism posits that workers are "free" under capitalism in that they are separated from the means of production and therefore have to work for an employer. Thus, the worker is "free" to sell his or her labor. The liberal state recognizes (with varying degrees of enthusiasm) workers' rights. As Donald Donham explains, this "ideological framework" implies that "everyone is seen as having something to sell (and buy), which concentrates efforts of encouraging exchange, the underlying assumption being that everyone benefits from smoother and ever more extensive exchange."[73] The failure of existing forms of capitalism to live up to these ideals is painfully obvious. Sara Ahmed shows us that even for Marx, property relations depend on "objects 'being willing' in such a way that they would be forced if they were not."[74] Bound or unfree labor, as I argue particularly in chapters 1 and 4, is not only created by and intimately connected to global capital flows.[75] The liberal discourse of an individual's freedom to sell his or her labor supports the ideological constraints of various inheritances such as race. The interplay of freedom and the tethers of race is essential to the creation of the liberal subject, as these concepts refract each other, bouncing the individual between liberty and constraint. The workings of ideology, constraint, and coercion are blatant in slavery and similar forms of unfree labor. However, commonplace distinctions between free and coerced labor become murky when we begin to look at specific historical cases. As Donham astutely formulates the matter, not only does free labor not exist in any uncontaminated form, but it also "reflect[s] a certain naturalization

of wage labor itself—in fact, an inability to see the complex mix of truth and falsehood, or ideology and reality, in all forms of labor control."[76]

Consent and coercion rests on an Enlightenment notion of the self in possession of a rational, self-contained individuality. The self becomes the core of subjectivity, what Rosemary Wiss formulates as the "center from which the person looked out and acted upon the world, and at the same time an object which could become self-conscious and subject to self-restraint."[77] The European, bourgeois man was the epitome of this conceptualization, with women, children, and Others (both male and female) needing various degrees of education and guidance to fully realize their selfhood. The political theorist Carole Pateman argues that consent, as a political theory in the seventeenth century and eighteenth century, rests on Lockean assumptions of participating human individuals naturally "free and equal" to one another who voluntarily or tacitly commit to enter into social relationships to preserve this freedom and equality. " 'Free and equal individuals,' to use Lockean terminology, own the property in their persons and their attributes, including their capacity and competency to give consent. Thus children were not competent and as such were unable to give consent. The individual is the 'guardian of *his* own consent.' "[78] Locke, according to Pateman, posited that fathers became patriarchs through the tacit consent of their sons. As a result of the marriage contract, wives were "naturally" subjugated to their husbands, accepting their will in all things concerning them both. Through marriage, women appeared to consent to the authority of their husbands in what was regarded as merely a formal acknowledgment of patriarchal power relations. Paradoxically, this naturalized subordination excluded women from the very definition of consenting individuality, for in the contractual arrogation of her will to her husband, a woman was no longer a "free and equal" individual within civil society. Thus, her consent, like her dissent, was rendered illegible.[79]

There have been many criticisms of Pateman's now famous critique of the (marriage) contract and women's ability to consent. For example, in "Demeaning of Contract," Carl Stychin insists, quite correctly, on the need for a more "nuanced analysis focusing on the conditions in which many women enter contracts [and an understanding that] the meanings of masculinity and femininity are subject to cultural contestation."[80] He goes on to critique Pateman for overlooking the possibility that "some women resisted the sexual contract throughout history and did manage to engage in forms of exchange in civil society."[81] I would further suggest the impossibility of adequately reconciling the marriage contract's resulting arrogation of women's will with

slavery and colonialism. A contract between person and property is largely meaningless in these contexts in which bodies and countries are occupied and relegated to terrains of otherness. The failure even to see a need to couch the violence of colonialism and slavery in contractual terms, for the most part, excludes the subjectivity of slaves and the colonized from liberalism's language of individual autonomy, choice, and coercion. As Spillers reminds us, our "plight [as African and diasporic peoples] marked a theft of the body—a willful and violent . . . severing of the captive body from its motive will, its active desire."[82]

Despite these limitations, however, Pateman's critique of the individual as a volitional subject proves useful when thinking about the institution of slavery. Consider the preoccupation in early abolitionist writings with the atrocious abuses of individual slaves by corrupted masters. Elizabeth Clark describes the cataloguing of various horror stories in early texts, such as Theodore Dwight Weld's *American Slavery as It Is: Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses* (1839). Documents such as these are replete with examples of individual atrocity—for example, the case of Thomas Jefferson's nephew who responded to a sulky slave by chopping off small bits of her body and feeding them to the fire until no part remained of the slave in the morning, or the case of a slave woman beaten to death with a fire shovel for the infraction of burning the dinner.[83] Terence Ball has posited that such meticulous documentation of devastating cruelty reinforces an individualist "ontology which holds that the world is composed of discrete, distinct, and wholly separate entities ('individuals'); therefore, causal—and coercive—relations are seen as contingent relations between individual elements."[84] Antislavery rhetoric in the early 1800s relied on the suffering black body. This figure, an individualized spectacle, was brutalized not by the system of slavery, but by his or her master. Abolitionists could critique slavery only via the white reader's identification with the authenticated spectacle of the suffering body of the slave which, as Saidiya Hartman develops, ran the "risk of fixing and naturalizing this condition of pained embodiment [and] exploit[ing] the spectacle of the body in pain."[85]

Using the same logic as the early abolitionists, slaveholders insisted that these documented instances of barbarity were anomalous; a result of a few "bad" masters or the overzealous application of discipline by otherwise well-intentioned owners. In this way, slave owners, too, circumvented critiquing the system of slavery, assuming and insisting that it was a generally benign and kind institution. Whether articulated from an abolitionist or pro-slavery perspective, this argument is premised on the existence of atomized, self-

determining individuals. What both early abolitionists and slave masters missed is that slavery is a process of commodification. Understood as a commodity rather than an individual, the fungible black body occupies interchangeable positions within systems of exchange. These positions are never new but, rather, inherited, passed on, and reinvented by those performers who occupied the roles previously. As Roach elaborates, "In the life of a community, the process of surrogation does not begin or end but continues as actual or perceived vacancies occur in the network of relations that constitutes the social fabric. Into the cavities created by loss through death or other forms of departure . . . survivors attempt to fit satisfactory alternates."[86] Individual people, whether Sarah Baartman or Thomas Jefferson's ax-wielding nephew, can be seen as such alternates. As Ball suggests, these historical figures "do not so much 'play' their roles as they are 'bearers' . . . of them."[87] In other words, one cannot read the embodied performance of a single individual slave or master without reference to other bodies and performances, whether similar or dissimilar. The staging of the slave's and master's bodies exists within specific semiotic flows of meaning where no one body can be understood without the apparitional appearance of other relational bodies within the circulation of commodities. Instead of an individualist ideology of liberalism, *Illegible Will* posits a relational ontology in which the meaning of objects and people is forged out of the relations between them. Therefore, to rehearse Ball's theorization, "causal—and coercive—relations hold between elements in a socially structured ensemble of relations."[88] The intentions and motivations of individuals thus are constituted and constrained by their systemic relations. The "good" master and "bad" master and the "caring" capitalist and "ruthless" capitalist have to be seen as one and the same because coercion is ultimately "a feature of structures" and integral to the workings of capitalism itself.[89]

By arguing for a relational ontology rather than an ideology of individualism, I am not suggesting that we abandon the individual labor contract. Rather, we need to reread the labor contract with a different set of eyes to return to the promise embedded in its actual form. Instead of an appropriation of the contract for individual gain in which one party sees the other as a means to a set of unshared ends, we need to think about how the relations enabled by a contract give rise to a limited set of shifting communal obligations. As Daniel Markovits develops, "Rather than deny that the contractual versions of community are thin and formal, or that it arises against a backdrop of self-interest, I argue that even the most self-interested, discrete, and purely transactional contracts . . . invoke the moral relations of respect and

community that . . . present the foundations of promissory and contractual obligation."[90] This "collaborative form of community," Markovits goes on to say, is not about ensuring and sharing the other party's ends. Rather than having all involved parties feel that "we want the same end thing," collaborative contractual community or a relational ontology shares a concern for the other person's point of view and demonstrates a mutual responsiveness to the joint engagement. So if two people contractually share the intention to go for a walk together, they may not want to walk to the same place, or one may have a sprained ankle and perhaps no longer wants to walk. Mutual responsiveness might entail walking on another day, slowing down, picking another path or an abbreviated route, or even bicycling to accommodate the shared intention, as well as the sprained ankle.[91] This may seem naïve when thinking about mine workers, for example, but the form of the contract presupposes a temporally delineated collaboration that can be the basis of a community built not around sameness but around a shared intentionality.

Using the issue of same-sex marriage legislation, Stychin similarly refuses to abandon the language of contract (no matter how patriarchal and racist) because it provides him with a useful tool with which to engage the limitations of liberalism and sentimentalism's gendered narratives of individualized romance.[92] Stychin moves beyond the traditional opposition between privatized ethical relationships that revolve around a non-self-serving desire and commercial relations that privilege the acquisition of property above all else. Rather than oppose self-interested commercial relations of exchange to patriarchal and racist familial relations of love or intimacy, Stychin asks us to yoke a reformulated notion of contract to relationships normally deemed private. He insists on what he terms a "relational contracting" that consists of collaborative intentional performances. Adjusted to historical and contextual specificities, this performative contracting revises the principle of self-gain characteristic of the classic contract. I illustrate this kind of collaborative, shared performance at the end of chapter 2, in which I discuss the contractual relations between a servant (the descendant of slaves) and her white master, a renter and her landlord.

By foregrounding a process of surrogation that moves away from individualist ontologies, I pay close attention to performative moments as they occur within a variety of sources: the archive, court cases, contemporary histories, novels, visual art, and websites. The shape and contours of these performances that bear the traces of forgotten surrogations allow me to speculate on absence and silences. They allow me to engage with the "recalcitrant event" by

critically imagining places where agency could reside. This project, then, is *not* a search for the "will" of black performers hidden within problematic representational and historical structures. Given that our access to the past relies on legal, criminal, and narrative records often written by deeply implicated and hostile adversaries, locating the agency of black laboring bodies is largely impossible. This is not to say that these bodies had no will. On the contrary: I have *no* doubt that within the constraints of domination, black historical figures made meaning that exceeded the confines set on them. They did it well and often and with significant results. However, as Arondekar suggests, moving away from the romance of retrieval means moving away from "giving voice" to those who have long been silenced. Instead of finding lost voices, my project asks about the possibilities of critical narration that engage with the absence instead of merely attempting to fill the void. By superimposing disparate aporias in the historical record, each chapter allows for "will" to be imagined and set into conversation with traditional historical evidentiary processes.

In some ways, my project overlaps with Ahmed's *Willful Subjects*. Rather than writing a history of "will," Ahmed turns to the "entangled emergence of will and desire" in various philosophic and literary works.[93] She assembles brief and episodic eruptions of the willful figure, creating a "willfulness archive" even as her own intentionality pushes at the boundaries of linear teleological histories. Her lovely reading, for example, of the Brothers Grimm's "The Willful Child" gives us a stubbornly determined female child who refuses to be buried, to submit, and to stop desiring. *Illegible Will* is less about assembling an archive of such "feminist killjoys" as about insisting that the illegibility of (black) will within the historical archive requires performative critical engagements with absence. The intimate loop of freedom and slavery and coercion and consent does not require a retrieval of willfulness or will-lessness. Taking up Spillers's charge that new grammars be invented for certain categories under crisis, the will of black diasporic bodies must be imaginatively and critically performed rather than simply unearthed.

An example of such a critical performance is *Cargo*, the seventh of a series of collaborations between two South African movement theaters, Jazzart Theatre and Magnet Theatre. According to the Jazzart Theatre's website, *Cargo* "uses performance to re-imagine the archive of slavery in the Cape, bringing it to the attention of a wider audience while linking the past to our present reality." At the heart of the performance is a stunning solo performed by Levern Botha as the historical figure on whom chapter 5 of this volume focuses: Sila

van der Kaap. The stage is covered in sand, with a shallow trough of water surrounding what appears to be a wall of a cargo hold. On each side of the wall, two women dressed in white salvage pieces of paper from the trough of water, alternating between reading aloud from them and placing the wet pages over the edge of the trough to dry. Botha moves across the stage, between land and water, reeling between the set of archival papers on the right and that on the left. When the women read aloud at different moments, Botha stops her movement across the stage to stand before them. A particularly poignant moment comes when the woman on the right reads out loud from archival criminal proceedings that outline van der Kaap's attempts to murder her children and then kill herself. The wet pages give us a reductive record of her actions while telling us almost nothing about her feelings and motivations. Botha's body, as she stands in front of the woman reading, breathing heavily with her arms held loosely at her sides, insists on the adequacy of the archive's words. Botha as Sila van der Kaap embodies archival absence and presence, the trace and the deep silence. When the woman stops reading and starts looking for more pieces of paper, Botha begins to repeat her heartbreaking choreography of vulnerability. She flings herself across the stage, falling and desperately pushing herself up, across land and water, between this archive and that, until it appears that she can no longer keep moving. She collapses, her body partly in the water, her head on the ground. Botha's performance of van der Kaap lies at the heart of my book. Flinging myself between this reading of the archive and that one, I gesture toward the seething absences of will. Listening to historians as they give us bare outlines, this book is a choreography of vulnerability and exhaustion as I struggle and fail to grasp the meaning of various historical characters. Instead, breathing heavily, I am left with the precious gift of their unintelligibility as I lie across the borders of history, fiction, and performance.

Chapter 1 begins with the repatriation of the body of Sarah Baartman. Instead of continuing the historiographic overemphasis on her body, I focus on issues surrounding her labor by turning to a court case in 1810 in which the African Association for Promoting the Discovery of the Interior of Africa brought suit against Baartman's exhibitors, Henrik Cesars and Alexander Dunlop. The association's claims that Baartman was enslaved converted her performance into a platform for debates about the "free" will of contractual labor. I argue that it is impossible to determine how willingly or unwillingly Baartman entered into a "contract" with Cesars and Dunlop. Her "will" becomes accessible only if we creatively read her performances in London

against other ethnographic performances of "will." Specifically, I imagine Baartman's "rude" performance of her "Hottentotness" alongside the performances of slaves in New Orleans as they stood on-stage for auction. The omnipresence of this transatlantic genealogy reinforces the hegemony of racialized spectacles of subjugated labor and the ongoing crisis around person and property. Also embedded within the performances of Baartman and auctioned slaves lie alternative theaters of memory that claim the resistance to and the injury of bondage as birthright.

Chapter 2 examines the strange case of Tryntjie. Kidnapped from the coast of Madagascar and brought to the Cape in 1696, Tryntjie surfaces in the records of the Council of Justice, where she was sentenced to public execution in 1713 for having had sex with her mistress's husband, Mennsink; the attempted poisoning of her mistress; and the murder of her "bastard" child. In *Rogues, Rebels and Runaways*, Nigel Penn attempts to recover Tryntjie's lost story.[94] Reading Penn's historical narrative using a literary eye, I continue my argument about the illegibility of "will" in the archive. "Rape," "desire," "love," "coercion," "fatal passion," "seduction," and "romance" all appear repeatedly to describe the relationship between Tryntjie and Mennsink. But none of these words come close to understanding what would drive a slave to "comply" year after year with her master's sexual and other dictates. The yoking together of captive person and property places our notions of consent and "will" in crisis. To critically reimagine her will, we can only examine the contemporary notions of submission and coercion that anchor our present-day understanding of habitual sexual violence. I thus end with an analysis of the recently deceased Andre Brink's historical fiction *The Rights of Desire*, in which the ghost of Tryntjie lies buried, literally and figuratively, under the house of the aging Afrikaner Ruben Oliver.[95] Brink's writing allows us to conclude that love between Mennsink and Tryntjie would require not just that they cared for each other but also the emancipation of Tryntjie and all other enslaved peoples in the Cape.

Chapter 3 uses the genealogical performances of disability by women such as Joice Heth, who was exhibited by P. T. Barnum, to understand the spectacle of Miss Landmine Angola, a beauty pageant organized by Morten Traavik for the survivors of landmine detonations in which the winners receive a prosthetic limb. Focusing on the staging of disability by Joice Heth, whom Barnum claimed was George Washington's mammy and 161 years old, I construct a genealogy of performance that links the freak show to the beauty pageant and the Miss Landmine Angola pageant. Bringing together disability studies

with performance studies, I show how disability is produced via the spectacle of Heth's contorted hands and unemployed Angolan women with amputated limbs lying next to sparkling pools. There can be no simple understanding of the "will" of Heth and her decision to be exhibited or of the unemployed Angolan women and their "choice" to participate in the pageant—not because their "will" and choices are absent but because their "will" remains largely illegible within structures of representation and history making such as P. T. Barnum's diary and the Miss Landmine Angola website, with its multiple links.

Chapter 4 complicates postapartheid portrayals of the origins of Indians in South Africa by comparing Natal indenture to the enslavement of Indians in the Cape and the indenture of the indigenous Khoikhoi. Using the work of Achille Mbembe and Jin-Kyung Lee, I argue that indentured plantation work constitutes a form of necropolitical labor that necessarily incurs physical and mental injury on a continuum with death. I thus turn toward various histories and historical fiction that describes the exceptionally high rates of suicide among indentured servants on South African plantations. Rather than describing suicide as exceptional examples of crisis premised on individual notions of free "will," suicide allows us to see the plantation in its various surrogations as a space that routinizes violence, overestimates the differences between enslavement and free labor, and underestimates the violence of "free labor." I conclude by turning to the critical reimagining of "will" in the short story "High Heels," from Agnes Sam's collection *Jesus Is Indian and Other Stories*.[96] Reflecting Sam's heritage as the descendant of kidnapped Indians forcibly brought to South Africa, these short stories think through notions of "will" around religious conversion and desire. In "High Heels," the negotiation over a pair of red shoes and a door behind a curtain articulates multiple queer religious and sexual allegiances. The story introduces a concept the final chapter develops in more detail: Gloria Wekker's notion of "mati work."[97] Mati work moves "will" beyond the liberal realm of the individual to a relational ontology and acknowledges self and community through the foregrounding of remembered and re-performed erotic acts of creation.

In chapter 5, Yvette Christianse's stunning historical novel *Unconfessed* takes up the challenge of theorizing "will" as queer relational performances of vulnerability.[98] The narrative of the novel spins out from a kernel of archival evidence about Sila van der Kaap, who was sentenced in 1823 to life imprisonment on Robben Island for the murder of her son Baro. We can never understand what motivated the historical van der Kaap to kill Baro, Christianse

writes. Knee deep in the Cape Archives, she asks, "How, then, does one approach a story whose referent is constantly circling back and around itself in the archive or, rather, constantly circling the moment in which a slave woman becomes the subject of legal action and punishment, namely that moment in which she killed her son?"[99] I argue that *Unconfessed* is less about murder than about relationships such as mothering in crisis both during and after official emancipation. The novel explores relationships predicated on shared vulnerability, debility, and "slow death": "All we have is each other and that too is our downfall."[100] Thus, *Unconfessed* figures "will" as the particular instantiation of three moments of relational ontology: van der Kaap learning to love the women and children on the island; her discovery of the power of laughter as a black noise that generates community; her ability to listen from a position of vulnerability. To be in relationship with another requires being undone and, in this way, to be remade relationally.

Illegible Will ends with an epilogue that discusses the photographer Zanele Muholi's "Queercide," a series of images that document violence against black African queers. The original "Queercide" photos were stolen from Muholi's hard drives and backup drives in 2012. I read these missing photographs by looking closely at another series of Muholi's photographs that include depictions of Katlego Mashiloane and Nosipho Lavuta. Through her exquisite portrayals of these two black lesbians, Muholi uses her camera to re-theorize "will" in ways that are queer, relational, and inextricable from homophobic and sexist violence in South Africa. The deliberate attempt to erase such women from the (visual) landscape constructs these women's "willful" desire in the spaces of vulnerability between them.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. C. Riley Snorton, *Nobody Is Supposed to Know: Black Sexuality on the Down Low* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 39.

2. Dwight Conquergood, "Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research," *TDR* 46, no. 2 (Summer 2002): 148.

3. Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 1079, 1081.

4. Robin Bernstein, *Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 12–13.

5. Diana Taylor, "Performance and/as History," *TDR* 50, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 83.

6. The modern archive is often invoked as a technical cipher for what Sven Spieker calls the "modern dream of total control and all-encompassing administrative discipline, a giant filing cabinet at the center of a reality founded on ordered rationality": Sven Spieker, *The Big Archive: Art from Bureaucracy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), 1. This archive's evidentiary power is thought to derive from its ability to simply register specific moments in time, ignoring the fact that the archive produces its own meaning.

7. Anjali Arondekar, *For the Record: On Sexuality and the Colonial Archive in India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 2.

8. Arondekar, *For the Record*, 1.

9. Arondekar, *For the Record*, 3.

10. Jennifer Wenzel defines "afterlife" as the "denot[ation of] relationships of people to time that produce multilayered dynamics of presence and absence, anticipation and retrospection": Jennifer Wenzel, *Bulletproof: Afterlives of Anticolonial Prophecy in South Africa and Beyond* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 5.

11. Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist theories of the Human* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 18–19.

12. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, 29–30.

13. Oyeronke Oyewumi, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1997). Chandra Mohanty, *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

14. Weheliye would insist here on the concept of racializing assemblages that "articulate relational intensities between human physiology and flesh, producing racial categories, which are subsequently coded as natural substances": Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, 50.

15. Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 72.

16. Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire*, 90.

17. Zine Magubane, *Bringing the Empire Home: Race, Class, and Gender in Britain and Colonial South Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 185–86.

18. Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire*, 92.

19. John Edwin Mason, *Social Death and Resurrection: Slavery and Emancipation in South Africa* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003), 32–33.

20. "By the end of the VOC period, the development of a heightened colour consciousness was spreading; as Giliomee stated, 'by 1820 a racial order was firmly established' ": Nigel Worden, *Slavery in Dutch South Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 151.

21. Linda E. Merians, *Envisioning the Worst: Representations of "Hottentots" in Early-Modern England* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2001), 26; emphasis added. Magubane makes a similar point, referring us to original travelers' accounts by John Barrow (1801), William Burchell (1827), Henry Lichtenstein (1812), Thomas Pringle (1834), and George Thompson (1827): Zine Magubane, "Which Bodies Matter? Feminism, Poststructuralism, Race, and the Curious Theoretical Odyssey of the 'Hottentot Venus,' " *Gender and Society* 15, no. 6 [2001]: 822.

22. Magubane, "Which Bodies Matter?," 823.

23. Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 4.

24. Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1992), 79.

25. Magubane, *Bringing the Empire Home*, 4.

26. Timothy Burke, " 'Sunlight Soap Has Changed My Life': Hygiene, Commodification, and the Body in Colonial Zimbabwe," in *Clothing and Difference: Embodied Identities in Colonial and Post-Colonial Africa*, ed. Hildi Hendrickson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 190–91.

27. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, 6.

28. Neville Hoad, "Miss HIV and Us: Beauty Queens against the HIV/AIDS Pandemic" *CR: The New Centennial Review*: 18. Hoad is talking not about Miss Landmine Angola but about the Miss HIV Stigma Free pageant, first held in Botswana in 2003. Its goals include the humanization and "normalization" of the person living with HIV, education about the pandemic, prevention, and treatment.

29. Hoad, "Miss HIV and Us," 26.

30. Elizabeth A. Povinelli, *The Empire of Love: Toward a Theory of Intimacy, Genealogy, and Carnality.* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 7.

31. Povinelli, *The Empire of Love*, 8.

32. Hortense Spillers talks about how African American women are so burdened by an excess of historical meanings that it is almost impossible for the "agents" buried under them to surface, except by inventing a new grammar: Hortense J. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (Summer 1987): 64–81. This formulation forms the backbone of Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*.

33. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 67.

34. Elizabeth A. Povinelli and Kim Turcot DiFruscia, "A Conversation with Elizabeth A. Povinelli," *Trans-Scripts* 2 (2012): 78.

35. Povinelli and DiFruscia, "A Conversation with Elizabeth A. Povinelli," 79.

36. Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," trans. Libby Meintjes, *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (Winter 2003): 12.

37. Achille Mbembe, "On Politics as a Form of Expenditure," in *Law and Disorder in the Postcolony*, eds. Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 324.

38. Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 35–76.

39. Carrie Noland, "Introduction," in *Migrations of Gesture*, eds. Carrie Noland and Sally Ann Ness (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2008), xiii.

40. Juana Maria Rodriguez, *Sexual Futures, Queer Gestures and Other Latina Longings* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 4.

41. Rodriguez, *Sexual Futures, Queer Gestures and Other Latina Longings*, 6.

42. Susan E. Phillips, "Physical Graffiti West: African American Gang Walks and Semiotic Practice," in *Migration of Gestures*, eds. Carrie Noland and Sally A. Ness (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 38.

43. Rodriguez, *Sexual Futures, Queer Gestures and Other Latina Longings*, 101.

44. Noland, "Introduction," xv.

45. Jonathan Crush and Clarence Tshitereke, "Contesting Migrancy: The Foreign Labor Debate in Post-1994 South Africa," *Africa Today* 48, no. 3 (Fall 2001): 49–70.

46. Phaswane Mpe, *Welcome to Our Hillbrow: A Novel of Postapartheid South Africa* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2001).

47. See Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

48. Loren Kruger, "Black Atlantics, White Indians, and Jews: Locations, Locutions, and Syncretic Identities in the Fiction of Achmat Dangor and Others," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 100, no. 1 (2001): 113.

49. Pier M. Larson, *History and Memory in the Age of Enslavement: Becoming Merina in Highland Madagascar, 1770–1822* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2000), xvi.

50. Larson, *History and Memory in the Age of Enslavement*, 272.

51. Larson, *History and Memory in the Age of Enslavement*, xix.

52. Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton, eds., "Introduction: Bodies, Empires, and World Histories," in *Bodies in Contact: Rethinking Colonial Encounters in World History*, eds. Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 3.

53. The Dutch West India Company not only supplied Surinam with slaves during the eighteenth century but also played a key intermediary role in the transatlantic trade: Nigel Worden and Gerald Groenewald, eds., *Trials of Slavery: Selected Documents Concerning Slaves from the Criminal Records of the Council of Justice at the Cape of Good Hope, 1705–1794* (Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Society for the Publication of South African Historical Documents, 2005), ix.

54. Worden and Groenewald note a few exceptions, such as the "chance capture of a Portuguese slaver with Angolan slaves aiming for Brazil in 1658": Worden and Groenewald, *Trials of Slavery*, xi.

55. Robert Shell, cited in Worden and Groenewald, *Trials of Slavery*, xii.

56. Worden and Groenewald, *Trials of Slavery*, 57.

57. Worden and Groenewald, *Trials of Slavery*, 4.

58. In 1754, Rachel Van de Caab was found guilty of collaborating with Joseph to poison their mistress with mercury. To make Joseph talk, their master spans his body into the *poolsche bok*, which leads to Joseph's suicide. In the *poolsche bok*, the slave's hands are tied together and placed over the drawn-up knees. A stick or some equivalent is placed under the knees and across the arms so the slave is unable to defend herself in any way. Slaves were usually undressed and whipped while in this position. This practice was widespread in the Cape from the seventeenth century on: see Worden and Groenewald, *Trials of Slavery*, 267n4.

59. Quoted in Mason, *Social Death and Resurrection*, 74

60. See Nigel Worden, *Slavery in Dutch South Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 53, table 5.1. In 1687, there were 230 male slaves, 44 female slaves, and 36 children. By 1793, there were 9,046 male slaves, 3,590 female slaves, and 2,111 children.

61. See "1749 Jon Lategaan" and "1740 Michiel Lourich," in Worden and Groenewald, *Trials of Slavery*, 276–81 and 176–87.

62. Suzette Spencer, "Historical Memory, Romantic Narrative, and Sally Hemings," *African American Review* 40, no. 3 (Fall 2006): 509.

63. Nell Irvin Painter, "Representing Truth: Sojourner Truth's Knowing and Becoming Known," *Journal of American History* 8, no. 2 (1994): 462–63.

64. William Wright, *Slavery at the Cape of Good Hope* (1831) (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 15.

65. Mason, *Social Death and Resurrection*, 95.

66. Quoted in Anders Sparrman, *A Voyage to the Cape of Good Hope: Towards the Antarctic Polar Circle, and Round the World: but Chiefly into the Country of the Hottentots and Caffres, from the Year 1772–1776*, trans. Georg Forster (London: G. G. J. and J. Robinson, 1785), 72.

67. Sharon Holland, *The Erotic Life of Racism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 46.

68. Worden, *Slavery in Dutch South Africa*, 59.

69. O.F. Mentzel, *A Description of the African Cape of Good Hope, 1787*, Vol. II (Cape Town: The van Riebeeck Society, 1944), 125.

70. George M. Frederickson, *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study of American and South African History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 81.

71. Wright, *Slavery at the Cape of Good Hope*, 19.

72. Magubane, *Bringing the Empire Home*, 15.

73. Donald Donham, *Violence in a Time of Liberation: Murder and Ethnicity at a South African Gold Mine* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), 110.

74. Sara Ahmed, *Willful Subjects* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 42.

75. Looking specifically at the gold mines in South Africa, Donham writes that the "stated purpose of racial separation was not just to maintain white purity and privilege, but also to protect black workers from the corrosive effects of market exchange, particularly in a world in which, as jural minors, they were seen as incapable of protecting themselves": Donham, *Violence in a Time of Liberation*, 111. The resulting paternalist bond undercut the idea of black South Africans as individual citizens with the rights of free labor to control the economic life of mine workers and to discourage unions that aimed to protect workers' rights.

76. Donham, *Violence in a Time of Liberation*, 111.

77. Rosemary Wiss, "Lipreading: Remembering Saartjie Baartman," *Australian Journal of Anthropology* 5, nos. 1–2 (1994): 19.

78. Carole Pateman, *The Disorder of Women: Democracy, Feminism, and Political Theory* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1989), 152; emphasis added.

79. Pateman writes, "The implications of the convention that a wife must bow to the authority of and be economically dependent upon her husband, who is 'head of the household,' are obscured more thoroughly in the late twentieth century than in earlier times, because it is now firmly held that marriage can properly be based only on the consent of two individuals. But this appearance of equality between two individuals cloaks the unequal status of husband and wife created through the marriage contract. . . . The contemporary significance of the contract theorists' reconciliation with patriarchalism has been hidden behind the liberal conviction that marriage is a matter of 'individual' choice": Pateman, *The Disorder of Women*, 153. According to Pateman, behind the language of individual choice lie structures of inequity that mask the meaninglessness of choice for certain participants caught up in its structures. Despite well-meaning feminist reinventions, the marriage contract itself is haunted by fundamental inequities that structure gender inequity. One need only think of the difficulties in extending the protections of rape law to married women raped by their husbands to be reminded that the consequence of entering into a marriage contract is the legal and social presupposition of a woman's "consent" to her husband's authority.

80. Carl F. Stychin, "De-Meaning of Contract," in *Sexuality and the Law: Feminist Engagements*, eds. Vanessa E. Munro and Carl F. Stychin (London: Routledge Cavendish, 2007), 79.

81. Stychin, "De-Meaning of Contract," 79.

82. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 67.

83. Elizabeth B. Clark, " 'The Sacred Rights of the Weak': Pain, Sympathy, and the Culture of Individual Rights in Antebellum America," *Journal of American History* 82, no. 2 (1995): 465.

84. Terence Ball, "Two Concepts of Coercion," *Theory and Society* 5, no. 1 (1978): 98.

85. Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 20.

86. Roach, *Cities of the Dead*, 3.

87. Ball, "Two Concepts of Coercion," 107.

88. Ball, "Two Concepts of Coercion," 98.

89. Ball, "Two Concepts of Coercion," 107.

90. Daniel Markovits, "Contract and Collaboration," *Yale Law Journal* 113, no. 7 (May 2004): 1450.

91. Sara Ahmed's "queer ethics of clumsiness" suggests something similar. She suggests an ethics of those who are not attuned to one another—those with various capacities and incapacities who clumsily bump into one another. "Corporeal diversity, how we come to inhabit different kinds of bodies . . . , would be understood as a call to open up a world that has assumed a certain kind of body as a norm. Rather than equality being about smoothing a relation perhaps equality [and I would add collaboration] is a bumpy ride": Ahmed, *Willful Subjects*, 51.

92. Here Stychin directly engages with Wendy Brown's famous argument that " 'the constitutive terms of liberal political discourse depend upon their implicit opposition to a subject and a set of activities marked "feminine" ' . . . a sexual division of labor, and a gendered antinomy between individual and family as well as in the terms expressing the respective ethos of civil society and the family; 'self-interest' on the one hand and 'selflessness' on the other": Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 81. Thus, Brown suggests that the usefulness of a language of rights is questionable.

93. Ahmed, *Willful Subjects*, 9.

94. Nigel Penn, *Rogues, Rebels and Runaways: Eighteenth-Century Cape Characters* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1999).

95. Andre Brink, *The Rights of Desire* (New York: Harcourt, 2000).

96. Agnes Sam, *Jesus and Other Short Stories* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1994).

97. Gloria Wekker, *Politics of Passion: Women's Sexual Culture in the Afro-Surinamese Diaspora* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

98. Yvette Christianse, *Unconfessed: A Novel* (New York: Other Press, 2007).

99. Christianse, " 'Heartsore': The Melancholy Archive of Cape Colony Slavery," *Scholar and Feminist Online* 7, no. 2 (Spring 2009). http://www.barnard.edu/sfonline.

100. Christianse, *Unconfessed*, 279.

CHAPTER 1. RETURNING TO HANKEY

1. Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 28.