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The purpose of this work was to analyze haunting narratives in cinematic texts,

exploring the significance of gendered and racialized violences on the screen while

contending with the normalization of these violences in reality. With this work, I have

closely examined abstractions of gender and race in horror films which depict hauntings

and which re-inscribe socially constructed ideologies of femininity and masculinity as

gendered scripts of the body, as well as blackness and whiteness as racial inscriptions,

and the ways in which they are defined against one another. I achieve this discussion

through connecting social phenomena in our material world with the abject hauntings of

gendered and racialized subjects in the supernatural film – ghostly interruptions,

unresolvable injustices, and death as possibility for resistance. Inhabiting spaces which

are both of this world and the afterworld, these phantasms are the known and unknown,

and yet, their ethereal presence is revealing of our earthly ideologies regarding violence,

victimization, and injustice.

THE HAUNTED GROUND WE WALK ON:

(UN)KNOWABLE GENDERED AND

RACIALIZED SUBJECTS

by

Sherronda J. Brown

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Approved by

_____
Committee Chair

APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis written by SHERRONDA J. BROWN has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Chair_____

Committee Members_____

_____

_____
Date of Acceptance by Committee

_____
Date of Final Oral Examination

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CHAPTER I

"ONE NEED NOT BE A CHAMBER TO BE HAUNTED"

> When someone dies in the grip of a powerful rage, a curse is born. The curse
> gathers in that place of death. Those who encounter it will be consumed by its
> fury.
>
> *The Grudge* (2004)

I find the haunting narrative to be one of the most significant forms of storytelling, especially in its cinematic form. Therefore, this thesis engages with cinematic haunting narratives and the constructions of gender and race within them. Reading several horror films through a feminist lens, I argue their significance as cultural artifacts which call up the history of gendered and racialized violences. This introductory chapter begins this discussion by exploring and defining aspects of the haunting narrative which I identify as the most significant to this work and the ways I see them connecting with larger social phenomena.

The horror genre and its subgenres normalize characters, plots, and themes, through their re-creation across countless texts, especially in the ways in which gender and race function within them. This project investigates the links in the social collective (un)conscious and the recurring themes of the cinematic haunting narrative. Navigating through several films from this subgenre of horror, I raise questions about the normalization and (re)production of violences and highlight the elements and themes that permeate these texts in a discussion about the constructions of gender and race and the

limited ways in which they operate within familiar haunting narratives. These constructions are reproductive of the image of woman as the naturally vulnerable victim and of man as the inherently dangerous victimizer. Black subjects are rendered as characters which are indelibly linked to the horrors slavery, as they are nearly always imagined as lynching victims and only appear when the narrative is explicitly invested in engaging in a conversation about race relations (though, the conversations are not always productive in the ways that they perhaps intend to be). These patterns of plot, theme, and character development in fiction are all reproductive of culturally accepted ideas of gender and race and the relationship of certain bodies to the reality of violence.

With this project, I bring together writings from multiple disciplines, beyond feminist film studies, which are concerned with the philosophical, the sociological, the cultural, the psychological, and more. At times, the films I discuss support larger claims that I make about social relations, while at other times, I situate my argument within the films. It is my contention that there are gaps in the canon of feminist film criticism which provide an opportunity for this work to address areas which have been left partially or completely unattended. I am hopeful that it will also be a significant contribution to the conversation surrounding gender and race in horror and will be an open door to more areas of discussion and exploration. There is extensive feminist scholarship on horror films, critiquing the sexual repression of young people in slasher films, the pervasiveness of violence against women in body horror, and the overbearing/emasculating maternal figure in serial killer narratives, among many other themes which reveal social biases surrounding gender, race, sexuality, and class. Scholars like Barbara Creed, Laura

Mulvey, and Carol Clover have expertly examined the genre, producing widely recognized terms such as "The Final Girl", "The Monstrous-Feminine", and "The Castrating Mother". Robin Wood, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, and others have developed and expanded theories and discussion on cinematic monsters and their connection(s) with the cultural imagination – shared moments, feelings, ideologies – as a subject of "pure culture" (Cohen, 4). There are countless feminist film scholars examining the role(s) of gender, race, class, sexuality, etc. in the horror genre; however, as far as I can gather from my own incursion into feminist theory and film criticism, none of these works have analyzed films with ghosts and hauntings in the way that I intend to with this thesis. The prominent themes which I address are as follows: 1) the ways in which cinematic haunting narratives become marked by gender and race in reproductive ways, 2) the putative social ideologies of gender and race in relation to violence and victimization and the ways in which they permeate these films, 3) how societal fears become continually manifested within them, 4) the ways in which the gendered and racialized violences depicted in these films at times echo gendered and racialized violences in reality, and 5) the significant role that historical traumas play in the construction of haunting narratives.

In my second chapter, I discuss gendered violences. Specifically, those committed against female bodies and the ways in which cinematic haunting narratives reaffirm dominant social ideologies about the inherent dangerousness of male bodies, the natural vulnerability of female bodies, and the inevitability of the "pathological feminine" Other. I find that traditionally "weak" female subjects are provided with the possibility for resistance through their death and exact their vengeance in horrifying ghostly form, while

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male ghosts in similar narratives have a considerably different presence – intruding upon

people's lives and inciting terror to feed an insidious need to victimize others. *Maleness*

in these texts determines an inherent and perpetual association with violence and power,

in strong contrast to *femaleness,* which is conceived of as defenseless and/or deranged

until the female subject is provided with agency in death as a vengeful ghost.

Chapter III is a journey through the world of the socially dead, to find tales of

black ghosts (of which there are very few), using Barnard Rose's horror phenomenon,

Candyman (1992) as my focus. Slavery is forever written upon the black body in white

imagination, and, as such, it is difficult to imagine black characters in the horror genre

who are not connected to slavery in some form. In this chapter, I contend with the

constant depiction of the enslavement of and violence (explicit or implied) against black

bodies on screen. I dare to imagine alternate and unfamiliar narratives in which other

violences, likewise sanctioned through systemic oppressions and institutional racism,

become visible. The chapter is a lament on the continual depiction of black bodies only as

strange fruit in cinematic texts to entertain (white) American audiences, reading it as a

continuation of the impossible colonial project, but it is also, in some ways, a call to

make the illegible legible.

In Chapter IV, I wander among the literally dead – among the zombie/racial

Other, which I read as a ghostly subject – exploring its connections with the empire of

chattel slavery and the institutional regulating and mutilating of black bodies. *The*

Walking Dead's character of Michonne serves as one point of analysis in a discussion of

the ways in which she and other black women in haunting narratives adamantly resist the

arrest of black bodies. The other focus of the chapter brings this discussion in conversation with the historical/cultural significances of the zombie as it relates to social conceptions of the black body and its curious relationship with current illustrations of social resistance. I believe that the zombie/ghost subject and the resistance of black subjects in haunting narratives provide a context for a unique reading of such events.

Here, I would like to note that my usage of the terms "female" and "male" and, likewise, "woman" and "man," or "feminine" and "masculine," refers to traditional conceptions of gender presentation, performativity, and embodiment. I do not wish to erase trans*, genderqueer, and otherwise non-binary identities/bodies from a discussion such as this; however, their unfortunate exclusion from this work is essentially due to the fact that their identities/bodies have been largely excluded from the cinematic haunting narratives which I am analyzing. With the exception of *Insidious Chapter 2* (2014) (which details the account of a serial killer, forced to dress as a girl during his childhood by his lunatic mother, who dresses as a woman now in order to evade recognition and capture *only* while he is hunting/killing young women), I have yet to find a tale of haunting with a character who does not completely align with conventional ideals of sex and gender. This glaring absence of non-binary identities/bodies in these narratives certainly beckons further exploration and analysis, as they too experience gendered/racially-based sexual and reproductive violences (which are often expressly coded with intentions of "correcting", punishing, or fully eradicating their non-heteronormative queerness) and are often conceived of as deviant persons or as non-persons. Perhaps this is a project which I will take up in the future, as I view it as a

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supremely important inquiry which would undoubtedly yield compelling and valuable

conclusions.

I would also like express that, while my primary interest in chapters three and

four is to discuss black bodies – both haunted and haunting – as racialized subjects, I do

not intend to neglect whiteness or white bodies. Though it is often thought of as such,

whiteness is not devoid of race, impenetrable, or untouchable. It is not a clean surface,

being neither featureless nor shapeless. It too is inscribed with criterion and precepts, and

arrives at its place of privilege through avenues which are paved with constructed ideas

of race; however, ideas of whiteness are constituted in opposition to and through hostility

towards blackness, "the yardstick by which most peoples in this nation measure their

worth – by something they are not" (Holland, 16). Whiteness is a system of ideas. It is a

property that only certain bodies and identities can lay claim to. Invasion of the white

space is an assault on whiteness; it violates the concept of what whiteness is and the

belief that no one else should have access to it. It is a space upon which black bodies are

not allowed to encroach, and a property which black identities are not allowed to lay

claim to. The white body is also a racialized subject, but one which is privileged through

such as process.

> I would argue that some bodies are "constant" in that they are "tattooed by
> historical circumstance" again and again. Bodies are marked – by sex and/or
> pigmentation – so they are not subjected to discourse so much as discourse is
> constructed around certain bodies so that others may survive, thrive, and evolve.
> Power is literally felt and realized differently depending on loci of race, sex, and
> sexuality. In this theoretical complex the dead figure as the folk with no recourse
> to discourse. If they have no discourse of their own, no defense, whose discourse

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must they borrow in order to speak? And if they have their own discourse, how do they move from the supposed void of death to find voice? (Holland, 32)

In "Death and the Nation's Subjects", Sharon Holland takes up the relationship of the dead to the nation-state, writing: "Even though knowledge of death fuels all cultural activity, social and cultural customs prohibit us from conversing about death, dying, or the dead in the course of living. [S]uch a discussion is long overdue and absolutely necessary to an understanding of how some subjects, in particular black subjects, function in the culture" (15). Engaging in this "long overdue" discussion about the dead in an effort to understand how certain subjects/bodies/identities function within the culture (and on the screen), and in order to address the aforementioned gaps that I see in feminist film criticism, this thesis poses and attempts to answer these questions, which will be addressed through a focused discussion of (un)knowable gendered and racialized subjects: What do ghostly manifestations in cinematic haunting narratives reveal about how we think about certain bodies and their relationship to violence, victimization, and (in)justice? Who gets to be vengeful and what kind of rage is justifiable? What are the implications of (re)producing the image of woman as victim and man as victimizer in haunting narratives? How do we contend with the seemingly limited vision of a black ghost whose haunting is nearly always informed by their blackness? What can we (un)learn in exploring these narrow perceptions of femininity, masculinity, and blackness in haunting narratives, as well as within the sociological imagination? And are we normalizing these violences by reproducing them in film?

Holland's piece uses *Menace II Society* (1993) as its primary focus in an in depth discussion of black life and black (social) death in cinema. Its main character relays his story from beyond the grave – from the margins – in a film which takes up inner city violence and racial discrimination. Holland observes that black subjects, in a constant existence of social death, always speak from the margins, "beyond the periphery", and their voices are essential to the historical narrative, especially as it involves the relationship between the nation-state and the dead. The continued colonial project is invested in ensuring that the dead remain dead in every sense; that they cannot speak from beyond the grave, for "[s]hould they rise and speak for themselves, the state would lose all right to their borrowed and/or stolen language" (Holland, 28). Haunting narratives present opportunities for those voices to be heard and for us to engage with them. Legacies, that might otherwise be lost or forgotten, live on through them.

Past as Revenant, Death as Possibility

> The past is a very determined ghost, haunting every chance it gets.
> Laura Miller, *Butterfly Weeds*

A haunted space is not limited to a building or a concrete structure. The space can be any vessel, empty or not, which houses a ghost, a specter, an apparition. In this work, I define a haunting as a phenomenon which occurs when a vessel (the mind, the body, a doll, a dwelling, an institution, etc.) is permeated by an unrelenting phantom presence or interruption. Often, that presence is driven by the abject need/desire to consume life, and this is the sort of presence with which I am principally concerned. Thus, the haunting

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narratives which I am analyzing all tell the stories of ghosts – apparitions, phantasms, wraiths, spirits, ghouls, specters – and hauntings which are propelled by the exacting of vengeance and/or the annihilation of life. I define a ghost as the disembodied or grotesque form of something once alive, which now wanders among the living. Ghosts are specters, what is there and is not there. In my reading of ghostly hauntings in cinematic texts, I make the claim that ghosts revive the history of violences transpired, revealing that, essentially, all spaces are haunted spaces because all spaces are sites of historical trauma. The ghosts in these films attach themselves to living bodies, so that when those bodies move throughout other spaces, those spaces become haunted as well.

I believe that we are all haunted by ghosts of historical traumas, but none more so than those of us who are relegated to social margins, which is why this work is concerned with gender and racial Others. We understand our place in the world through our gendered and racial identities, and also through our relationship to death. Othered persons tend to live in closer proximity to death in our world in which the social order values whiteness, maleness, and "normalcy" above all else. The hauntings which occur in these narratives are almost exclusively concerned with gender and racial Others; a trend which I view as a product of the history of socially/state-sanctioned violence against certain bodies. Hauntings allow audiences to engage directly with a story which is fundamentally about the untold stories of these Othered subjects.

> [W]hat if we were to entertain another hypothesis about the relationship between the living and the dead: What if some subjects never achieve, in the eyes of others, the status of the "living"? What if these subjects merely haunt the periphery of the encountering person's vision, remaining, like the past and the

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ancestors who inhabit it, alone with the dead – seldom recognized and, because of the circum-Atlantic traffic in human cargo or because of removal, often unnamed? (Holland, 15)

The ghosts of past institutions, bodies, social structures, and ideas haunt across multiple spaces. They remain, in their evanescent form, especially those which have committed unspeakable traumas – the global chattel slavery of black bodies, Native American genocide and assimilation boarding schools, reproductive violences against women of color especially, the spectacle lynchings of black bodies, etc. – and as we move throughout the world, those ghosts follow us and there is no space which remains untouched. They are revealed to us in the prison industrial complex kept alive through racist and capitalist schemes, the legislation of women's reproductive rights driven by sexist ideologies, the continued cultural, environmental, and sexual/reproductive violation of Indigenous peoples validated by colonialist and white supremacist attitudes. These institutions owe their existence to past violences, and they continue to cause new traumas; traumas which are made possible through the haunting of past injustices.

Every trauma forms a memory which is relived again and again. Memories are imprints; they serve as reminders of the horror(s) of the past, travelling across borders and pushing their way into our lives to ensure that they are never forgotten, so that traumas committed against individual bodies impact the larger social body and forever remain in the social memory. However, there is too often a denial that these traumas occur, or the depth of the impact that these violences had/have. There is also a (re)committing of violences against those bodies which initially experienced the (often

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state-sanctioned) trauma. This social amnesia is a psychological defense. The memory of historical violences gets denied in order to protect the social psyche from identifying with the trauma.

Death becomes the remedy for this social sickness, whether material death or social death, because the rage of the state's victims must be contained. Rage reveals things suppressed/repressed. Rage pulls back the social fabric to call attention to things long "forgotten", inciting fear which radiates throughout the social body; fears which then become manifested upon the screen, as clear monstrosities and ghosts out for vengeance. The difference between live victims and dead victims is that the dead are not bound by any sort of societal rules or earthly laws. Thus, death becomes the threshold which vengeful ghosts must traverse – and the ghosts which I investigate here are indeed vengeful. It operates as a form of liberation and possibility for victims to become victimizers, for inactive subjects to become active agents, for the invisible to become visible. In the cinematic haunting narrative, death is a necessary abjection and provides possibilities for a resistance which many characters do not have access to as living subjects.

Necessary Abjection and Monstrous Manifestations

Each of the works of scholarship discussed in this introductory chapter engage with themes which are central to my arguments. They are all, in some way, concerned with death, the nature of haunting, and/or monstrosities developed as a symptom of terrors committed against the body. I view the vengeful spirit as a significant form of monstrosity, and the authors introduced here establish multiple frameworks within which

I situate my discussion of gendered and racialized ghosts in cinematic texts and the ways in which they become distinctly constructed according to social ideologies surrounding violence and victimization.

Abjection is defined by Julia Kristeva in several ways in her *Essay on Abjection*, one of which describes it as that which upsets, disturbs, or undermines some established order or stable position. It lies between what we might ordinarily take to be absolute, "natural" opposites. The presence of an abject figure, a ghost, indicates that there has been a disruption of the "natural" margins. She writes that the abject is that which "does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (Kristeva, 4). The abject is what makes us most uncomfortable because it forces us to confront the fragility of our socially defined or "natural" borders. Ghosts, the spirits of those once alive yet not completely dead, are indeed abject in this way – they exist in a space which lies between what we think of as the distinct binaries of life and death. The presence of a vengeful ghost signals a disturbance of multiple borders. They are at once alive and dead, victim and victimizer, just and unjust, within past and within present, corporeal and incorporeal, there and not there, known and unknown.

Before one becomes an abject figure which roams the reach between worlds as a dead/undead spirit, one is first an abject figure as a corpse. "The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost form of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us" (Kristeva, 4). And so, the abject corpse, the state of death,

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gives way to the abject apparitions in these haunting narratives. Death functions as possibility for further and further abjection and forms of resistance for the ghosts within these narratives, allowing the ghosts to become abject forces which reside in the space between life and death, able to move freely throughout both worlds.

Barbara Creed's "Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection" engages with Kristeva's essay**.** The monstrous-feminine describes all things "about woman that is shocking, terrifying, horrific, abject" (Creed, 67). History has shown us that the body of woman has been feared and misunderstood in ways which (re)produced oppressive and repressive structures against women in various cultures and societies, and these gender inequality structures, such as the governing of female sexuality and reproductive rights, have often also been racialized. This fear has sparked cultural monsters, mythologies, and folktales about the dangers of woman, why she should be feared, and why the feminine should be avoided, shamed, regulated, and devalued. Classical and modern horror stories are riddled with feminine monsters, as Barbara Creed points out. She explores Kristeva's definition of abjection and applies it to her vision of the monstrous-feminine.

> This, I would argue, is also the central ideological project of the popular horror film – purification of the abject through a 'descent into the foundations of the symbolic construct'. In this way, the horror film brings about a confrontation with the abject (the corpse, bodily wastes, the monstrous-feminine) in order, finally, to eject the abject and re-draw the boundaries between the human and non-human (Creed, 75).

Here, Creed argues that the abject images in the horror film are created for the express purpose of destroying them to reassert "normality"; the symbolic order is disrupted in order for it to be restored and to reassert its power/value. Conceptualizing the monstrous-feminine as an abject subject, Creed views the (re)creation of the monstrous-feminine and the subsequent destruction of her (or, rather, the unsuccessful attempt at destroying her) as a manifestation of an anxiety within the symbolic order which seeks to oppress female power and repress/control female sexuality. I view the vengeful female ghosts in the haunting narratives of *Shutter* (2008) and *The Woman in Black* (2012), to be discussed in Chapter Two, as clear de*monstrations* of Creed's monstrous-feminine, as their hauntings serve as retaliation for gendered violence against them; sexual and/or reproductive violences.

Fans of the horror film are often elated at the appearance of cinematic monsters, anticipating the violence that will inevitably ensue. They revel in their terror. "The modern horror film often 'plays' with its audience, saturating it with scenes of blood and gore, deliberately pointing to the fragility of the symbolic order" (Creed, 74). Audiences crave the blood, the mutilated body, the strewn bits of fleshy pulp – the abject. Though blood does not often flood the screens of the films which I am analyzing, they are abject in their own right in that they "play" with the audience, inciting fear, and disrupting the "symbolic order" with a dead/undead presence which is/is not there. Not only that, but the ways in which people speak about their horror film experience is abject in itself: "It scared the shit out of me" or "I almost pissed my pants" or "It made me sick". The expelling of these "horrors within", our bodily waste, is what allows us to stay alive. If

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not for waste expulsion, we would be engorged with excrement, vomit, and bile, and would die drowning with our own waste. We would become ghosts. "If dung signifies the other side of the border, the place where I am not and which permits me to be, the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything. It is no longer I who expel, "I" is expelled" (Kristeva, 4). In this unconscious way, the horror film experience itself becomes abject, marked by the expulsion of vomit, excrement, and urine, if only figuratively, and it is an experience which horror audiences anticipate and enjoy. The experience is abject in multiple ways, but especially in that the audience exists somewhere between pleasure and dread, fear and amusement.

Robin Wood's work complements Sigmund Freud's "The Uncanny" in his discussions of things which incite fear and dread within us. Wood believes that we can read our culture through our cultural artifacts. "An Introduction to the American Horror Film" cites the horror film as a unique space to work in as it is a text which "responds [to culture] in the most clear-cut and direct way, because central to it is the actual dramatization of the dual concept, the repressed/the Other, in the figure of the Monster" (Wood, 113). According to Wood, the monsters that we create in our horror films can be read as manifestations of our most deeply situated cultural/societal fears and anxieties, many of which are concerned with the sexuality of the Other.

Wood's interpretation of horror films and cinematic monsters says that what we see in these films is the stuff of nightmares. They are the manifestation of cultural fears. Freud's theory of the uncanny is that all things which are unfamiliar to us incite fear by revealing to us that which has been repressed. "The 'uncanny' is that class of the

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terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar" (Freud, 1). What becomes repressed is any desire which may be seen as loathsome or socially unacceptable, and is therefore tucked away in the recesses of the psyche; both the individual and cultural psyche. If we consider Wood's argument in conjunction with Freud's, then our cultural and cinematic monsters are derived from what is uncanny and in turn *become* the uncanny. Cinematic monsters are manifestations of cultural fears; our culture represses (suppresses and oppresses) that which it fears and that repression arises again in the monsters that we create in the horror film. Sexual energy is the first repression that Wood takes up in his essay, citing it as the most repressed force in our society. "The 'ideal' inhabitant of our culture will be the individual whose sexuality is sufficiently fulfilled by the monogamous heterosexual union necessary for the reproduction of future ideal inhabitants" (Wood, 109). He continues by discussing sexuality in various forms, such as bi-sexuality, female sexuality, and the sexuality of children. From Dracula and Nosferatu to Michael Meyers and Jason Vorhees, the uncanniness of sexual energy gets revealed to us in horror movies in ways that situate it as a literal monster on the screen.

Freud writes that the uncanny "undoubtedly belongs to all that is terrible—to all that arouses dread and creeping horror" (1). Wood elaborates on the theory of the uncanny that Freud details for us by taking the Other into consideration. The concept of the Other also directly contributes to Freud's discussion of the uncanny because the Other is that which is unfamiliar to us. It exists outside of socially defined boxes; outside of that which is safe, normal, or civilized – it is abject. Thus, the Other can be people of other

cultures, races, genders, sexualities, religions, classes, and/or political systems. Wood argues that the horror film responds to both the repressed and the Other by manifesting the two on the screen as a monster. Everything that we have repressed, resurfaces as the cinematic monster which incites fear, making it the uncanny, and because the culturally created monster falls outside of the realm of the "normal," it then becomes the abject Other as it threatens the barriers of "normality". In the horror film, (symbolic) order cannot be restored until the monster (the repressed/abject Other) is vanquished by the story's hero, who represents "normality". And so, our remedy to struggling with the repressed/Other in society, is to (attempt to) kill them in our cinematic creations, just as Barbara Creed discusses with the creation and (attempted) destruction of the monstrous-feminine. Above all, the monster Other is a threat to/interruption of normality.

Monsters (cinematic, literary, and otherwise) are representative of the cultural imagination; the stuff of nightmares, revealing societal fears (of the Other). They force us to confront these anxieties, and, as stories of fear and dread are the spaces where our cultural monsters most often dwell, the horror genre presents itself as the most opportune site to investigate monstrosities. In my reading of these films, the ghostly manifestations of haunting narratives are unequivocally cinematic monsters. They are the abject and the uncanny; imagery which respond to societal fears of/anxiety surrounding gendered and racial Others.

Monstrosity is inescapably linked with the traversing and knocking down of borders; the monster is *always abject*. It exists in a fantastical realm and dismantles defined borders (ideologies, systems, hierarchies, binaries, etc), "demand[ing] a radical

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rethinking of boundary and normality. The too-precise laws of nature as set forth by science are gleefully violated in the freakish compilation of the monster's body" (Cohen, 6). Its habitat is a purely conceptual locus outside of the symbolic order, but it also seeks to overturn it. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen writes that the monster is a creature which can at once "terrify and interdict [and] evoke potent escapist fantasies; the linking of monstrosity with the forbidden makes the monster all the most appealing as a temporary egress from constraint", arguing that we distrust and loathe the monster as we simultaneously envy the freedom that is possesses as an abject figure, and perhaps even "its sublime despair" (16). It is always linked to the forbidden places and practices which all or most of us might desire. This in itself is an abject experience, the loathing of a desire for an abject figure. Here, I find connections with Kristeva's work, in which she identifies the abject thing as a subject which "beseeches, worries, fascinates desire, which, nonetheless, does not let itself be seduced. Apprehensive, desire turns aside, sickened, it rejects...But simultaneously, just the same, that impetus, that spasm, that leap is drawn toward an elsewhere as tempting as it is condemned" (19).

With *Monster Theory*, Cohen reminds us that monsters are the things that we have created. We have given them life. Monsters are our descendants and our ancestors. Our past and our future. "They always return. And when they come back , they bring not just a fuller knowledge of our place in history and the history of knowing our place, but they bear self-knowledge, *human* knowledge – and a discourse all the more sacred as it arises from the Outside. . . They ask us why we have created them" (Cohen, 20). We learn about what is *within* through the representations that we create of the *outside*.

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Cohen's *Monster Theory* provides a framework for better understanding the origins,

motivations, and functions of the cinematic monsters which I investigate in this work.

Reading all of these pieces together as frameworks to analyze the films gives me

the opportunity to make unique connections and seemingly impractical assertions about

the themes, narratives, and characters within them. In *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and*

the Literary Imagination, Toni Morrison writes about the "Africanist" presence in

popular American literature and the influence that black Americans, or "American

Africanists", have had on the American literary canon. With this innovative work, she

offers an alternate understanding of characters in the work of Poe, Twain, Hemingway,

and more. The themes which these author were able to explore with their protagonists –

themes of liberty, masculinity, virtue, ascendancy – are all made possible by the

"Africanist" presence in the West, as the success of whiteness could only be understood

when read against the failure and inferiority of unfree black bodies. While considering

the production of the many characters in American literature, she writes: "But things go

awry. As often happens, characters make claims, impose demands of imaginative

accountability over and above the author's will to contain them" (Morrison, 28). Though

Morrison's exploration is limited to literary texts, I find that I am able to apply this

interpretation to cinematic texts as well. The characters are conjured images, made

things. Their actions are not their own, but they are those of their creators. However,

there are moments in which the characters in these tales transcend their own narratives

and their own conditional existence as figures of imagination. These are the moments in

which I am able to read them as resisting against patriarchal and racist power structures

which perpetuate violences against gender and racial Others. This work is effectively

about real-world violences, their social significance, and how they become manifested in

cinematic haunting narratives. In the following pages, I converse with the dead.

CHAPTER II

GENDERED SPECTERS, SCRIPTED BODIES

A ghost is an emotion bent out of shape, doomed to repeat itself time and time again until it rights the wrong that was done (*Mama*, 2013).

The female body is a receptacle; a receiving gender. It is the designated canvas upon which patriarchy paints its violent colors fraught with anxiety and fear of feminine power. The female body itself serves as a site of memory and trauma, forever marked by a sociological history of female oppressions, chief among those, sexual and reproductive violences. The male body, in contrast to the female, exists as the actor of agency and power. It is a dominating entity, exercising its "natural" authority granted to it through a patriarchal social system. Its relationship with history has been one of considerable dispensation, having been revered as the superior gender; the strong and rational man. In this chapter, I contend with the sociological ideals which construct these gendered bodies and the (dis)embodiment of gender in the ghostly manifestations of cinematic haunting narratives.

The female ghost has often experienced the loss of a child or some form of male-perpetrated violence in life, such as sexual assault. She remains in our world so that her story can be (re)told. This ghost haunts in spaces where injustice(s) occurred against her during her life, and she will often attach herself to a living body, which allows her to

travel and haunt across multiple spaces. The memories of those injustices get relived, and

anyone who passes through the spaces inhabited by those memories are touched by them.

In the most tragic cases, the memories grab hold of passersby and remain with them until

they are completely consumed. Such is the case with Megumi, the ghost of *Shutter*

(2008), and Jennet, the ghost of *The Woman in Black* (2012), the primary films which

will be the focus of this discussion. What should be fundamentally understood about the

female ghost is that she craves life and she is out for vengeance. The above quote makes

the claim that a ghost, "an emotion bent out of shape", lingers here in the temporal world

in order to right a wrong that was done. However, I find that in the films which I am

analyzing, the original miscarriage of justice is so great that it can never be forgiven; it is

a wrong which can never be righted.

I argue that the vengeful female ghost is a manifestation of societal fear of

powerful/enraged female subjects, especially those who retaliate against gender violence

committed against them, often by men, or those who step outside of the conventional

model of femininity; it is about women *out of place*. The pain that tethers them to the

living world after their death in these fictional stories is a very real and frequent pain

experienced in reality: sexual and reproductive gender violences (though these are not the

only forms of violence experienced by women in the material world, nor are these

violences exclusively perpetrated against female bodies). Yet, according to these films,

only in death can these women be feared (by men). Only in death can they

deconstruct/destruct patriarchal violence. In this way, narrative texts like *Shutter* and *The*

Woman in Black subvert traditional ideals about passive and weak femininity by having

women unleash their rage. However, they also reinforce the concept/image of woman as victim. Furthermore, the limited ways in which their characters are commonly constructed – as wife, girlfriend, or mother – frame them as being wholly identified by their heteronormative relationship to others.

The male ghost manifests with a dreadfulness which is no less terrifying than that of the consuming wrath of the female ghost; however, his rule of terror is generally not inspired by any form of injustice. Most commonly, he is a victimizer in life and continues to be a victimizer in death, often having experienced white and/or male privilege, and he rightly deserves his gruesome demise, like the murder of Freddy Krueger by the parents of the children he abused in *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984), or the death of serial killer Charles Lee Ray in *Child's Play* (1988), the film which launched of the popular Chucky Franchise. As with the tales of vengeful female ghosts, these narratives reinforce our association of men with violence and victimization. In the social/cultural narrative, the role of "victim" is associated with women and the role of "victimizer" with men. This work ultimately illustrates how haunting narratives rely on the societal acceptance of the constructed relationship of women and men to victimization and violence. Ideologies of female passivity render women as inactive victims in life, without agency, while ideas about masculine aggressiveness allow men to be active agents in life *and* in death. The female body is inherently vulnerable to violence and the male body is an inherently dangerous perpetrator of violence: this is the cultural narrative that is needed in order for

the complementary narratives of male (dis)embodied and female (dis)embodied ghosts to remain legible.

Jocelyn Hollander and other scholars of Sociology will be instrumental in my examination of the relationship of the female body to the larger social body, specifically its functions within society as a sexual and maternal being, as well as the male body and the ways in which it is conceived of as active and threatening. Again, I will discuss the perpetual state of victimhood in which women seem to reside in the sociological imagination, with rape and child loss being the most pervasive versions of inevitable suffering, and the space of victimizer to which masculine subjects are continually relegated. Throughout these texts, there is also a common thread of mental instability among the female ghosts which is not present among their male counterparts, and this is a phenomenon which this chapter will also take up, arguing that this pattern of mental instability with female subjects is representative of what Camilla Griggers has termed as the "pathologized feminine."

This discussion of Megumi in *Shutter* and Jennet in *The Woman in Black* is concerned with the literal and figurative ghosts of history and how they impact individual bodies as well as the social body/imagination. I plan to situate these films in a social and cultural context, exploring how deeply situated ideas about/fears of femininity and masculinity translate on the screen and then become a (re)productive spectacle of "normalized" gender violence. Throughout this exploration, I will also discuss two

significant themes which I see connecting these films and other haunting narratives:

unresolvable injustices and ghostly interruptions.

Gender Violence and Ghostly Vengeance

> Both witchcraft and hysteria were characterized from earliest times as having a remarkable, and sometimes, interchangeable, sexual component . . . it was perfectly reasonable to restrict and to convert […] behavior into a norm of compliancy and dependency (Allison and Roberts, 257).

David Allison and Mark Roberts study the history of hysteria and its relationship

with the female body, drawing a direct thread through history to witch-hunts and the

pathologization of witchcraft. Throughout history, hysteria was the dominant diagnosis

for women who violated laws of quiet, passive femininity. It was defined as an affliction

that would occur if the uterus were dehydrated; "it would tend to float and wander about

the woman's body in search of moisture, thereby causing great distress. If the woman

failed to menstruate, on the other hand, similar physical and mental symptoms would

occur, including delusions (paraphrosune), depression, and madness (mania)" (Allison

and Roberts, 243). Allison and Roberts note that Robert Brudenell Carter,

British physician and author of *On the Pathology and Treatment of Hysteria*, relied

greatly on negative cultural stereotypes about women in framing his arguments about

hysteria and its prevalence among female subjects, ultimately positing that women's

"emotional sensibilities" were responsible for their hysterical disorders, and that they

were less equipped than men to deal with their issues. "Thus, he would remark, '[i]f the

relative power of emotion against the sexes be compared... it is seen to be considerably

greater in the woman than in the man, partly from the natural conformation which causes the former to feel, under circumstances where the latter thinks' (pp. 201-202)" (Allison and Roberts, 245). The rational man is able to *think* during situations in which the hysterical woman is only able to succumb to her *feelings*.

In an essay which investigates the significance of gender in the infamous Salem Witch Trials, Issac Reed notes that "accused witches tended to be women out of place – the poor and homeless, the childless, or, alternately, women who had inherited property for lack of brothers (Karlsen, 1998)" (216). As with the cases of hysteria, it was the women who went against traditional femininity, *women out of place*, who were targeted. Hysterical women and witches become monstrosities against gendered scripts of the body, and the attempt to demonize and eradicate either is an attempt to remake the established order which prescribes that women be compliant sexual and maternal beings, governed by their husbands, and without rights to property ownership.

Kristeva explores "the different ways in which abjection, as a source of horror, works within patriarchal societies, as a means of separating the human from the non-human," and the normative from the non-normative (Creed, 68). Creed reiterates in her work that the abject refers to that which disrupts order and boundaries. Considering Kristeva's theory in relation to Creed's, I contend that the monstrous-feminine – the vengeful female ghost, the hysterical female subject, the witch in alliance with the Devil – is abject because she threatens to break down borders of femininity and masculinity, good and evil, and protective and destructive forces. "Normal" femininity is maternal; it

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is nurturing and passive in the social imagination. Though there is a cultural fear of the feminine, that fear is derived from the dominant ideology that women are of a weak and frivolous sex. When the feminine becomes a monstrosity, it disrupts ideas about what it means to be feminine; what it means to exist in a female body.

The witch-hunts, according to Reed, came about through the society's participation in and connection of "three symbolic formations: 1) a set of understandings concerning the nature of women; 2) a series of related binaries that mapped the world around the opposition male: female; and 3) a (gendered) epistemology of supernatural causality concerning the effective relationship between the invisible and the visible world" (Reed, 222). This, I believe, reflects my own arguments about abject gendered specters in this chapter; the hauntings are conceived of through cultural understandings of relations between the genders of the male-female binary.

> She herself is a haunted house. She does not possess herself; her ancestors sometimes come and peer out of the windows of her eyes and that is very frightening. She has the mysterious solitude of ambiguous states; she hovers in a no-man's land between life and death, sleeping and waking.
> Angela Carter, *The Lady of the House of Love*

"Stanko (1995, 56) writes that 'the reality of sexual violence . . . is a core component of being female and is experienced through a wide range of everyday, mundane situations" (Hollander, 84). Consider the mundanity of everyday situations such as the language of violence and property in conversations about sex, the constant threat of street harassment which women experience, and rape "prevention" discourse that places

the responsibility of prevention on women. In these everyday conversations, ideas about

interactions between men and women are constructed through ideas about "traditional"

passive/weak femininity and active/aggressive masculinity. Jocelyn Hollander's study in

"Vulnerability and Dangerousness: The Construction of Gender through Conversation

about Violence" uses every day, "mundane conversations" as a way to investigate

Stanko's claim.

> Vulnerability to violence is a core component of femininity, but not masculinity. Relatedly, potential dangerousness is associated with masculinity, but not femininity . . . these ideas are pervasive, widely shared, and constructed through interaction: through routine patterns of behavior and communication that replicate and reinforce existing ideas about gender (Hollander, 84).

In this work, I focus on common, everyday haunting narratives. They are

"mundane conversations," a discourse – repetitive, derivative cinematic texts – and

through reading these texts, I come to a conclusion which echoes Hollander's argument:

Gender is always-already present in discussions about violence, and violence is always-

already present in discussions of gender.

Our bodies come with scripts. Gender cultivation begins even as we are still in the

womb and continues throughout childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. We are

constantly learning about our gendered relationships to aggression, violence, power, and

control, as well as gendered societal expectations and permissions; "the body and its

perceived relationship to violence are fundamental to the meaning and practice of

gender" (Hollander, 88). When women and girls are taught to be quiet, compliant, and

delicate, in order to align with societal concepts of what it means to be female-bodied, silence in victimization and endurance of abuse simply become extensions of performing girlhood and womanhood; embodying femininity. Megumi and Jennet both abjectly resist the traditional "mundane" expectations of female subjectivity and embodiment, but this resistance *only* becomes possible through death and *dis*embodiment. In life, they are vulnerable. In death, they are dangerous.

As part of their gender cultivation, men and boys are bombarded with (c)overt messages assuring them that girls and women belong to them, exist for their pleasure, and are to be controlled by them – even through (or especially through) the use of violence. Their masculinity is nourished through "mundane conversations" ensuring them that it will always be associated with dominance and power, which they can use to hurt women and girls. Hollander writes that "as boys grow older, they become identified with stereotypes of masculinity, which center on strength and invulnerability," so that male aggression is considered as just another aspect of boyhood/manhood, because, for males, aggression has been promoted as a way to assert control over other bodies (95). Controlling the bodies of others, especially women, is at the center of embodying masculinity; an embodiment which male ghosts are granted even in their disembodied form. This is illustrated in films like *100 Feet* (2008), in which an extremely abusive husband and police officer, killed by his wife in self-defense, returns as a disembodied spirit to terrorize her even further and intimidate anyone who attempts to help her. *6 Souls* (2010) features the ghost of a false-prophet who murdered his own

daughters and now harvests the souls of non-believers and holds them inside his

body. Death does not offer new possibilities for male ghosts in the same way that it does

for female ghosts. It is not the possibility for abject resistance which they are granted in

their disembodied form, but, rather, it is the possibility for their dangerous bodies to

become supremely abject, haunting across infinite spaces.

When the vengeful/monstrous-feminine appears in *Shutter*, *The Woman in Black*,

and similar films, her vengeance is unleashed so that others can experience a violence

and terror similar to that which she once experienced, and those who attempt to destroy

her or quell her rage are invested in re-establishing a "normality" where gender violence

against women occurs, but the victims endure it in silence. Even when haunted subjects

attempt to appease the ghost, acknowledge her presence, and recognize her suffering, she

is unforgiving. The transgressions committed against her are entirely unresolvable. For

the abject ghost of the monstrous-feminine, death becomes the possibility for the

disembodiment of femininity through the outlet of her rage. As discussed in chapter one,

the initial abjection of death begets further and further abjection.

The ghost of *Shutter* is a young Japanese woman whose haunting manifests most

significantly in photographs. Photographs which are meant to capture memories and

sweet moments are instead intruded upon by her spectral figure. The haunted subjects in

this text are newly married couple, Ben and Jane. After moving from New York to Japan

for Ben's work as a photographer, they soon become haunted by the ghost of Ben's

former lover, Megumi. Photographic intrusions and other disturbances become constant

events in the couple's lives; however, Jane is the one who recognizes this as a haunting and works to uncover the ghost's story. Megumi leads Jane to the vital clues about who she is and about what happened to her. She haunts to tell a story and when Jane makes the connections, she realizes that Megumi has been with them all along. Hidden among Ben's belongings, Jane finds photographic evidence of Megumi's rape, witnessed by Ben years ago when he first lived in Japan. He witnessed it, helped to facilitate it, and took photos of it. Megumi called out to him as his two closest friends tugged at her clothing, pressed themselves against her body, and posed for Ben's camera. She begged him to save her, but he did nothing.

Her rape was meant to function as a means of control. Having sunk into a depression after the unexpected passing of her disapproving father, she clung to Ben, her lover, for comfort. Rather than consoling her in her time of bereavement, Ben pulled away, interpreting her depression as a kind of hysteria; an obsession with him. Feeling that she was too clingy, he developed a plan with his friends to take compromising photos of her and use them as leverage to push her out of his life. Ashamed, alone, and heart-broken, Megumi committed suicide in secret following the rape, and this is why she haunts him, most significantly in photographs.

> All across the world, these images have always appeared, connecting us with the unseen. And I think they try to tell us something . . . unrequited love, maybe you've had an unfinished business with a dead relative. Could be your father, mother, children. I've seen pictures where living people have appeared. I think it's a case of strong emotions making themselves heard . . . Why all the effort if you don't have something to say? (*Shutter*, 2008)

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The haunting is unnerving and relentless. Megumi is abjectly there and not there, intruding upon every aspect of Ben's life, as well as Jane's, even appearing in their bed one night, kissing Ben with a long eel-like tongue and causing him to choke on insects and black slime. When Jane begins investigating her story in an attempt to subdue her ghostly presence, Megumi's body is discovered rotting in her home. They honor her with a funeral and lay her to rest, but this does not satisfy her ghost. The film climaxes with Jane's sickening discovery of the incriminating photographs and she is horrified to learn of her husband's involvement with the rape, and worse, with his ability to deny accountability in the role that he played in Megumi's death. Jane storms out, angry and disgusted, declaring that she will not spend her life with him. After which, we see Ben attempt to confront Megumi directly. He moves frantically about the apartment, snapping photos with his camera and screaming, demanding that Megumi reveal herself. In frustration, he launches the camera across the room, inadvertently photographing himself as it shutters with a bright flash. When he retrieves the camera from the floor, he is staggered by the image of Megumi's white legs dangling from his shoulders. He has been unknowingly carrying Megumi with him all along.

There is a cultural cognitive dissonance surrounding rape and sexual assault. We accept that women and girls are inherently vulnerable to rape, yet we often deny that rape occurs as often as it does. We define certain rapes as "legitimate" and others as not. Survivors face social backlash and public shaming after revealing their rape, and apologists excuse sexual violence as a "natural" aspect of manhood. Megumi's story is a

premier example of the gender violences which are regularly committed against female bodies. Her rape is about the patriarchal control of female bodies and emotionality, not about sexual desire or gratification. This is a form of violence that is symptomatic of a patriarchal system which ensures men that they are entitled to control and ownership of others, especially women, but are not expected to control their own bodies and are, in fact, encouraged towards (sexual) aggression. This is why it makes "cultural sense" for a characters like Ben and his friends to resort to sexual violence as a means of control over Megumi.

Under the tyranny of patriarchy, above all, the female body exists as a producer of the state's subjects. Women are sexual and maternal objects. *The Woman in Black* is one among many haunting narrative which sets forth the story of a ghost out for vengeance after the loss of her child, which I conceive of as a form of reproductive violence. In this text, Arthur, a young lawyer, is still reeling from the death of his wife during childbirth four years ago. He now struggles to care for his young son, Joseph, and has reluctantly taken an assignment that requires him to travel. He must spend a week apart from Joseph, but they are both kept content by the thought of reuniting at the train station at the week's end. Arthur must travel to Eel Marsh estate in the English countryside to process the legal documents and contracts of a recently deceased client of his law firm, Alice Drablow. Upon his arrival to the small, secluded village, its patrons are immediately hostile towards him. The innkeeper attempts to turn him away and people rush their children inside as he passes by their houses. The innkeeper's wife, though she is kind to him,

encourages him to move further inland, but Arthur is determined to complete his assignment. Without this work, he cannot support his son.

The old house, Eel Marsh, has an eerie presence, with a small family cemetery in front and vines creeping up the stone face of the structure. He is welcomed by the fog of sea mist and the cawing of crows. He goes immediately to work and among the documents of Alice Drablow, he finds the death certificate for Nathaniel Drablow, age seven. During his short stay there, for a few hours on a dreary, grey afternoon, he sees a woman in the cemetery, dressed all in black, but when he goes to look closer, she has disappeared. That same afternoon, he witnesses the death of a girl from the village after she drinks lye and chokes on her own blood. On his next visit to Eel Marsh, he stays through the night to work and has terrifying supernatural experiences. Doors open by themselves, candles go out, mechanical toys dance and rattle, and finally he sees the face of the woman in black and learns her story. On old drawings, Alice Drablow has scribbled: *She will haunt me to the grave*. Reading further, Arthur learns that Nathaniel is the son of Alice's sister, Jennet Humfrye, and he was taken away from her and adopted by Alice, after she was (seemingly arbitrarily) deemed "mentally unfit." The film does not offer any explanation for this mental illness diagnosis, nor does it deliver an image of a living Jennet. We see her only as a ghostly figure draped in black, forever in mourning, and we hear her voice when Arthur reads her letters written to Alice. Shortly after she was separated from her son, the boy drowned in the marshes just beyond the house and his body was never recovered. "I will never forgive you," Jennet writes to Alice. "Rot in

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Hell." Arthur is tormented by a host of apparitions for the remainder of the night. He is

confronted by dead children in the yard, he sees Nathaniel arise from the marshes,

drenched in the black sludge, and make his way to the house, and he witnesses the

reenactment of Jennet's suicide when she leaps from a rocking chair with a noose

hanging from a beam in Nathaniel's room and her neck snaps loudly. Jennet haunts

everywhere. The next day, when another girl dies by setting herself ablaze, Jennet's

figure is there, staring through the fires and the smoke.

> She's always there . . . Whenever she's been seen, on the causeway, on the marsh, in the grounds of the house, however briefly and whoever by, there has always been one sure and certain result . . . in some violent or dreadful circumstance, a child has died. So many . . . so many children. So many children (*The Woman in Black*, 2012).

In retaliation for child loss/reproductive violence, she returns to the world of the

living to take other people's children, and she makes them take their own lives, echoing

her own suicide. After learning her story and experiencing her haunting at Eel Marsh, and

in a desperate attempt to save his own son from the vengeance of the woman in black,

Arthur dives into the marshes to retrieve Nathaniel. Miraculously, he is able to find the

boy and bring him back to his room at Eel Marsh. He lays the putrefied remains of his

tiny body on the bed, surrounds him with old cards and letters written to him by his

mother, and winds up his toys. They play merry little tunes as he awaits the terrifying

presence of Jennet. She finally appears with a deafening shriek, hovers over Nathaniel's

body, and then dissipates. Arthur then buries the child's remains with Jennet's in the

family cemetery near the house.

At the train station, as Arthur is meeting his son and his nanny, Jennet appears

again, along with the ghosts of all the children she has taken throughout the years. As a

train pulls into the station, the young Joseph is compelled to walk onto the tracks and

Arthur tries to save him. Even after Nathaniel has been returned to her, Jennet continues

to haunt, ultimately taking Arthur and his son to the world of the dead as well. Our only

comfort comes from seeing Arthur's wife and knowing that he and Joseph have been

reunited with her in the afterworld.

Megumi and Jennet are both abject ghostly interruptions in their respective tales.

They interrupt the lives and the progress of those who they haunt. This interruption is

perhaps most evident in one particular inciting scene of *Shutter*. Ben and Jane first

encounter Megumi while driving on a dark road on their first night in Japan. Jane is

behind the wheel and she swerves to avoid a lone female figure draped in white, but she

fails and the woman's body crashes into the windshield and is propelled into the

darkness. Ben and Jane are on a path to a new life, to celebrate their new marriage and

the beginning of their life together, but their progress is halted by a supernatural presence.

Megumi is a literal and figurative interruption on the road to their new life and she

continues to interrupt their progress, as she did so terrifyingly on the dark road. Megumi

invades multiple aspects of their lives. She insists upon being seen, heard, and

remembered. She is on the road, in the dark room, in the photography studio, in the

apartment, on the train, in New York, in Japan. Everywhere. Jennet likewise haunts relentlessly in multiple spaces and continually interrupts Arthur's work at the Eel Marsh house.

Shutter and The Woman in Black present the best opportunities for me to discuss the concept of unresolvable injustices, as they both most clearly demonstrate that the harms which the women have experienced will always be remembered and will never be forgiven. Neither of these women are satisfied by the offerings made to them in efforts to purge their spiritual presence, and they never will be. Throughout Shutter, we see Ben stretching and massaging his neck and shoulders in an effort to relieve a mysterious pain and tension. He sees a physician and has x-rays taken, but the doctor can find nothing to explain his pain or the pressure on his neck. When the nurse takes his weight, she is confused by the number on the scale, which reads much higher than it should. Megumi has become a literal weight on Ben's shoulders, an abjectly (in)corporeal burden that he carries with him as he moves about the world. He is haunted, and, therefore, every space that he enters into becomes haunted by the ghost of his past. Megumi wants him to forever live with the weight of what he has done. The injustice that he committed against her is unresolvable. From Shutter, we learn two crucial things about haunting: 1) the ghosts of the past stay with us, and 2) injustices of the dead can never be resolved. These are two lessons which are reinforced by other haunting narratives, like The Woman in Black. In the end, Jennet's injustice is not resolved by her reunion with her son and she

continues to take others to the world of the dead in retaliation for her initial loss. This is reflected in her declaration that she will *never forgive*.

Megumi's eternal perch on Ben's shoulders and Jennet's scathing promise to never forgive are both means of speaking from beyond the grave which indict those who have committed violences against them, and I read them as forms of resistance against social systems which continually work to silence the (socially) dead and deny their trauma. Ben has gone about his life without acknowledging the trauma that he caused Megumi and has actively worked to keep his involvement a secret. In the beginning Ben claims not to see and not to know Megumi. He refuses to acknowledge the trauma that he caused her. He denies it, therefore, it is invisible to him in the same way that real-world oppressions often are invisible to those who perpetuate, participate in, and benefit from them. That refusal to acknowledge is yet another form of violence, and it is a violence which Megumi and Jennet rebel against.

The U.S. bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan in 1945 was not only an immediate devastation of two large cities, but it was also transgenerational reproductive violence. Irradiated in the mother's womb, a child with radiation poisoning is statistically far more likely to suffer major congenital malformations, abnormally small brain size, and severe mental retardation. After the explosions, black rain began to fall, full of dirt, dust, soot, and highly radioactive particles. High levels of residual radiation remained on the ground and in the water supply for an extended period, and many who did not directly experience the bombs were affected years after "Little Boy" and "Fat Man" set the sky

ablaze. The blast in Hiroshima left eerie shadows of people who disintegrated on the ground and across the few structures that remained standing – ghosts frozen in time. Photos were taken of these ghostly shadows and of the large-scale damage of the cities in the aftermath of the bombs. It was complete desolation, the likes of which had never been seen or experienced before. However, Western nationalist and imperialist interests kept this proof hidden from American citizens for over twenty years. The photos were evidence of the state-sanctioned violence abroad, and their censoring was a deliberate denial of Japanese suffering.

I present this history here as another way of reading the juxtaposition of Megumi's Japanese female body and Ben's Western white male body, his violence against her as a means of discipline and imperialistic control, and his refusal to acknowledge accountability for said violence. Given the significance of secret photos as confirmation of an unspeakable act of violence and intimidation in the film, and the suppression of photographic evidence of atrocities in Japan in our reality, I find that connections are easily drawn between the two. I do not claim that the filmmakers consciously made these connections. *Shutter* is, after all, a Western appropriation of the Japanese horror thriller of the same name released in 2004. Rather, I am saying that ghosts of historical traumas, like the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and its aftermath, can reveal themselves in cinematic texts, even in the most uncommon and unexpected ways.

It is revealed that Megumi has been with them for a long time, even in New York, but the inciting events of the film take place in Japan. An idea persists that the membrane between the natural and the supernatural is much thinner in the Eastern part of the world – an idea which can surely be described as Orientalism – and I am certain that this belief factors into the immense popularity of Western re-makes of Asian haunting narratives, such as *The Grudge* (2004), *The Ring* (1999), *Dark Water* (2003), and *The Uninvited* (2009). And especially since cinematic texts such as these depict vengeful female ghosts who are almost exclusively white or Asian. I do not interpret the sexual violence against Megumi as being wholly informed by her racial identity (though a case could possibly be made for such a reading); however, I do see aspects of her haunting set predominantly in Japan influenced by Western Orientalist ideals.

"She herself is a haunted house"

Ideas about the susceptibility of women to sexual violence and the penchant for men to perform such violences "are based, in part, on shared beliefs about gendered bodies. Female bodies are believed to be inherently vulnerable and not dangerous to others because of their . . . physical vulnerability to rape. Male bodies, in contrast, are seen as potentially dangerous to others because of their [...] potential use as a tool of sexual violence" (Hollander, 84). Because ideas about gender performativity are naturalized, these ideas about gendered violences are therefore normalized, and I see these ideas evident in haunting narratives like *Shutter*, *The Woman in Black*, and the others which I have mentioned, and I further theorize that these representations are also

influenced significantly by shared beliefs about gendered psychologies, which also reinforce ideas about the embodiment of gender.

In investigating instances of gender violence in haunting narratives, I find it imperative to also examine the recurrence of the "pathologized feminine" represented in these films. The pattern of mental instability is apparent within these texts, as the women have been committed to a mental institution or displayed some form of (perceived) mental instability prior to their death or even *in* death. *Gothika* (2003) and *The Ward* (2010) both depict the specters of young women, victims of brutal rape and torture, who haunt in women's mental institutions until their stories are revealed. In *Mama* (2013), a woman's ghost haunts after falling from a cliff while escaping from an asylum and losing her baby. In my analysis of these cinematic haunting narratives, and numerous others, I find that the pattern of sexual and reproductive gender violence is apparent, as is the pattern of mental illness or impairment among female subjects (See Table 1 on page 110). This pattern supports my claim that the haunting of the vengeful female spirit is, among other things, a (mal)adaption to the patriarchal environment which allows for and thrives on injustices and gender violences committed against the female body.

The story of Genie, which Camilla Griggers presents in "Breakdown," is a deeply unsettling one. Relayed secondarily from Russ Rhymer's *Genie* (1993), Griggers uses the staggering account of a girl abused, kept naked and "chained to an infant potty chair for thirteen and a half years" under the oppressive rule of her father, and identifies her as the epitomized representation of the pathological reproduction of femininity and the

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production of femininity as pathological (107). Griggers argues that femininity becomes

disordered/pathological in order to adapt to a disordered/pathological socialization, and it

is an argument which I echo here in regards to vengeful female ghosts.

> Genie is only one instance of suburban feminine breakdown, but her story makes
> visible the frightening social fact that femininity as a cultural category is
> constituted partly as a potentiality for receiving and signing the flow of social
> violences, that the feminine position is constituted as such within a nervous
> system producing women as victims/survivors, self-mutilators, dysfunctionals,
> and designated crazies. Within that ground of being, to adapt (to not suicide) is to
> (mal)adapt. And the potentialities of that (mal)adaptation are subject to any
> number of policing and surveillance mechanisms typically organized around
> suppressing and channeling the relation between memory and affect in the
> antiproduction of desire (Griggers, 109).

Ideas about violence and aggression "are so integral to notions of gender that they

seem 'natural' and thus are largely invisible in daily life. [T]hese beliefs about male and

female bodies are as much socially constructed as they are true representations of reality"

(Hollander, 85). These social constructions lead to acts of violence as well as institutional

violences against female-bodied persons, systematic violences like rape and reproductive

violence are normalized in society and become (re)produced in cinematic haunting

narratives in a way which calls up ghosts of historical traumas. Various cultural norms

sanction the use of violence as a device operated by the more powerful to subdue and

control the weaker. Along with cultural gender inequality, these codes enrich gender-

specific violence against women and produce victims like Megumi, Jennet, Genie, and

her "equally traumatized and impoverished mother" (Griggers, 108). Though Megumi

and Jennet are fictional characters, unlike Genie and her mother, these two women are

illustrations of real-world circumstances which countless women have experienced.

Female bodies and behavior become pathologized as a part of a cycle which will continue

as long as gender-identity cultivation, "mundane conversation" about gender, is reliant

upon archaic notions of passive/vulnerable femininity and active/dangerous masculinity.

Griggers argues that "rehabilitation" and "recovery" are impossible states because

"normalcy" is an impossible state, as they are all subjective. Oppressed bodies are

eternally haunted by terrors which rile beneath the surface. "In the scenario of the

breakdown and its aftermath, 'recovery' territorializes for the social the breakdown's

deterritorialized zones, relocating the subject within a zone of functionality and

intelligibility while screening the machinic working of various social institutions"

(Griggers, 105). Even in the stages of "recovery", if a patient no longer displays the

behavior which was seen as evidence of their psychosis, the terrors which first caused

their (mal)adaptions will still exist. If we do not seek to remedy the root cause(s) of their

affliction, then it can never be truly healed. Thus, "rehabilitation" and "recovery" are

labels to mask the social issues that produce the patients/customers of the mental health

and psychopharmacology industries.

Considering that most of the people who pass through this system are female-

bodied, it is significant that an overwhelming amount of the women in haunting

narratives with female ghosts have also been patients of the mental health industry or

have been perceived of as "crazy" or "unstable." There is a history of perceived female

hysteria and it has been used to justify violences against female bodies and to absolve

victimizers – whether it be an abusive husband, a rapist, a physician, or the nation-state –

of the traumas which they (re)produce. Ben uses Megumi's hysteria to justify the

malicious planning of sexual violence against her, while Alice uses Jennet's madness to

take away her son without any justifiable evidence. There are countless ghosts of these

traumas, and it is a haunting which undeniably persists. The pathological feminine, it

seems, is an inevitability, because *she herself is a haunted house*. As such, the female

subject is always-already haunted, and is always-already haunting.

Genie responds to her emotionally and physically abusive (dys)functional

suburban family home with "silent pain, dementia, psychoneurological reorganization,

and self-mutilation" (107). She has a breakdown, what Griggers defines as a (dis)location

of the subject "in the turbulence between body mnemonics and the machine mnemonics

of the social, between the workings of the organic body and the social constructions of

the face and its social landscapes" (105). Megumi's perceived break from reality,

Jennet's assumed mental instability, and Genie's anxieties incarnate the pathological

(re)production of femininity and the (re)production of femininity as pathological; as the

Other. "To adapt to the flow of terror passing through her home, to go on being in that

suburban bedroom, meant to adapt in a social space in which there was no adaptation that

was not "maladaptation" (Griggers, 109). And so femininity has no recourse but to

become disordered – *monstrous* – in its pathology "in order to adapt to a pathological and

disordered socialization" which demands "compliancy and dependency" from its female

subjects, in which socially accepted ideologies and practices promote gendered

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violence(s) against women, and in which female subjects who do not remain compliant and dependent become cultural monstrosities. To adapt is to (mal)adapt.

The haunting of the vengeful female ghost, the monstrous-feminine, becomes a (mal)adaptation to the terrors of the individual female body. In this way, the individual terror becomes the social terror and forever imprints itself upon the social memory. The construction of masculinity as rational and mentally sound perpetuates the myth of female hysteria and reasserts the value of masculinity and male-bodied persons. Ben and his friends are able to assert this valued and superior masculinity through their sexual violence against Megumi in order to control her female body and emotionality. While the reproductive violence that Jennet experiences is not directly at the hands of a male perpetrator, I include her and similar ghosts in this discussion because haunting as retaliation for reproductive violence seems to be limited to female bodies, or the disembodied forms of female subjects.

Reproductive violence is not exclusive to women, and yet, there are no haunting narratives which I can find that depict the vengeful ghost of a man seeking to avenge the death of his child. The female subject, as a maternal being, is eternally tied to childrearing and the "feminized sphere of domesticity" (Freeman, 34). And so, as filmmakers conceptualize justifications for why female ghosts might seek vengeance, child loss, along with sexual abuse, become the leading motivations – except in cases when those violences are also racialized. The ideas about gendered bodies which keep

women perpetually in this limited characterization are the same ideas about gendered

bodies which preclude men from it.

> The body becomes a site upon which culture is 'written'. Thus, the maternal body
> cannot simply be a biological phenomenon. It has to be one that is inscribed by
> culture, which gives meaning to the body. [It] is not that culture replaces the
> material, but that the material cannot be separated into a 'real' world outside
> culture that is unmediated by the ways in which people make sense of that world
> (Woodward, 19).

Cultural artifacts, like the cinematic haunting narratives which I examine here, are

extensions of the "real" and material world, and they help us to understand our existence

and our place within it. As they continue to paint representations of female and male

subjects which rely upon socially accepted ideals about gender embodiment and

performativity, those ideas are reinforced and validated. In this way, haunting narratives

with female ghosts and male ghosts work in tandem to (re)produce ideas about gendered

bodies and gender performativity in relation to violence, both reaffirming the

implications that the other makes.

CHAPTER III

"A STRANGE AND BITTER CROP"

> There are very few living narratives of black people: we literally speak from the dead (Holland, 21).

The institution of slavery and its investment in the genocide of black life and culture seem to be the only legible forms of violence which have been committed against black bodies. Other forms of violence, in fact, are often not conceived of as violence at all, or are framed as *necessary* violences committed by the benevolent nation-state. Therefore, a black ghost whose death is not indelibly linked to slavery is inconceivable in haunting narratives and, arguably, in the social imagination. This chapter will converse primarily with "How much did you pay for this place?' Fear, Entitlement, and Urban Space in Bernard Rose's *Candyman*" in an analysis of the black ghost and the seemingly limited way that blackness is conceived of in the paranormal realm. In this piece, Briefel and Ngai make large claims about those who experience haunting in horror films, and by extension, provide an intriguing framework for understanding the haunting itself, especially that of Candyman in the urban space of Cabrini-Green housing projects. The work of Sharon Holland will also be foundational in my discussions of blackness in haunting narratives here, as I argue that black bodies are already rendered as abject subjects, inhuman monsters, even before their ghostly materialization in supernatural texts. Our social construction of race separates human from non-human, rendering black

bodies as already non-human, monstrous, and (socially) dead; *necessary abjections* which reify the value of whiteness and "normality". For the few black ghosts who appear in these narratives, this renders them as exceptionally abject; as ghosts of those who were never human and never alive in the social imagination. Monsters begat from monsters.

Black ghosts carve out their own space(s) to haunt, separate from the "traditional" haunting narrative. They are indeed similar to the (white or Asian) female ghosts, in that they seek vengeance for violence committed against them, but the violence which black ghosts have experienced is markedly different, as it is always a racialized form of violence. Having been lynched for entering into a space where they were not "supposed" to be, and, in doing so, corrupting the white body, I read their haunting – their refusal to be gone from this world – as a form of resistance. Much like the films explored in chapter two, *Candyman* and the other texts to be discussed here do not always offer themselves so easily to a reading such as this, but I find that it is imperative to consider those things which are not so apparent to the eye in our consumption and analysis of media narratives. As I am reading these black ghosts as exceptional abjections, their defiant lingering in the world of the living cannot be ignored, especially alongside a discussion of the constant (in)corporeal racist violence that black bodies experience; a violence which is explicitly invested in removing them from the living world altogether. I see the social death of the black subject as a form of containment, while reading their physical death in horror as a form of liberation, opening up possibilities for resistance against said containment, but because their reasons for haunting are directly related to slavery and/or racial tensions,

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these spirits become constructed as characters which are wholly informed by their bitter

blackness.

> Southern trees bear a strange fruit,
> Blood on the leaves and blood at the root,
> Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze,
> Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees.
>
> Pastoral scene of the gallant south,
> The big, bulging eyes and the twisted mouth,
> Scent of magnolias, clean and fresh,
> Then the sudden smell of burning flesh.
>
> Here is fruit for the crows to pluck,
> For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck,
> For the sun to rot, for the trees to drop,
> Here is a strange and bitter crop.

Nina Simone thought that "Strange Fruit" was an ugly song, the ugliest song she

had ever sang or heard. "Ugly in the sense that it is violent and tears at the guts of what

white people have done to my people in this country," She said. "It really, really opens up

the wound completely [to] think of a man hanging from a tree, and to call him *strange*

fruit" (1969 Interview). There are moments throughout this entire thesis, but especially in

this chapter, which are both born out of and hindered by ugly, ghostly interruptions. In

trying to perform my duties as a scholar, trying to go about my life, scheduling meetings

and adhering to deadlines, my progress is repeatedly interrupted. Once, by the story of

Michael Brown when he is shot down and again months later when the Ferguson Grand

Jury fails to indict Darren Wilson for his murder. I am interrupted by cultural

conversations and social reactions to the black teenager, who was unarmed and on his

way home from the store. A familiar story, indeed, calling back to Trayvon Martin, an unarmed black teenager on his way home from the store. I am continually reminded that America yearns still for the pungent taste of *strange fruit*.

Again and again, I am interrupted. By Eric Garner. By Tamir Rice. And so many others. Their stories embolden me, and I take to my writing desk and the words pour out of me with a fury, but after long moments of contemplating their/my blackness, their/my perceived dangerousness, the denial of their/my humanity, and the denial of their/my life, I arrive at a place where I feel the crushing weight of the horrible things I am trying to grapple with in my academic work. The words I am trying to find will not lend themselves to my use. I can feel them in the back of my throat. I can taste them on my tongue, but I cannot speak them and I cannot write them. I feel the sting of tears behind my eyes and the pang of loss in my chest. I find myself surrounded by ghosts, unable to deny their presence, and unable to move past them without fully acknowledging them. Ghosts continually interrupt my life at various turns, sending me into fits of creativity while writing about their traumas, and stifling me at other moments when confronted with their horror, with the ugliness of it all. Talking to ghosts with a broken heart is grueling business.

Black Abjection and White Property

> The *bodies* of black folk? . . . It ought to be a matter of the *souls* of black folk – precisely those souls that for entire epochs of European history have been denied spirit and intelligence. Yet have not these peoples also been denied their bodies, their multifarious bodies – bodies of the Earth and the world, bodies of nature, culture, and history? Have they not been denied their erotic and intelligent bodies, their free bodies? (Krell, 103)

A haunting is most often – especially in Western cinematic and literary texts – an invasion of white space, white property, and white stability. And this is especially true when the ghosts are non-white, as the bodies of persons of color are already seen as invading whiteness in the natural world. "In the imagined life of a United States citizen, black subjects constantly haunt and therefore threaten the stability of the working nation. This black subject retains a certain amount of anonymity by being "spirit" or "ghost" by being disembodied but, simultaneously recognizable as black and residing in poor urban spaces" (Holland, 23-24). This is one way in which black bodies are already abject in the material world, by existing as already disembodied, non-human, and non-living. When the black subject becomes a spectacle as an incorporeal presence in the haunting narrative, it inhabits further abjection and practices resistance by further intruding upon white spaces and haunting white subjects.

The ghost of *Candyman* haunts with violent retribution. As the film begins, we hear the deep timber of his ominous voice: "They will say that I have shed innocent blood. What is blood for, if not for shedding? With my hook for a hand, I'll split you from you groin to your gullet" (*Candyman*, 1992). Helen Lyle is co-writing a graduate thesis with her colleague, Bernadette, on urban legends, and stumbles upon rumors of Candyman during their research. As told to Helen by a teenaged girl, the legend says that Candyman's "right hand is sawn off, and he has a hook jammed in the bloody stump. And if you look in the mirror and say his name five times, he'll appear behind you, breathing down your neck" (*Candyman*, 1992). Helen and Bernadette are both fascinated

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and excited by this tale; however, the film only follows Helen in her investigation of the legend and her experiences with Candyman.

She learns that he "lives" at Cabrini-Green, a low income housing project on the North side of Chicago in an impoverished black community, and it is said that he recently murdered a woman there named Ruthie-Jean. Helen is immediately eager to visit the site of this murder. While searching through newspapers on a university computer to find more details on the killing of Ruthie-Jean, she finds headlines about Cabrini-Green reading "Unsolved Murders","21 Brutal Deaths", and "Serial killer at large". One story which captures her attention exclaims in bold font: "What killed Ruthie-Jean? Life in the Projects". Bernadette reluctantly accompanies Helen to Cabrini-Green, uncomfortable and cautious about being in the dangerous part of town and entering the apartment of a murdered woman, but Helen displays no such caution. In her fervor, she disregards the suffering of Ruthie-Jean; "It's just a derelict apartment," she says, and is unmoved by the poverty and danger of the Cabrini-Green complex. There, they meet Anne-Marie, a young single mother, who describes the horrific experience of hearing Ruthie-Jean's murder and calling for help. "I dialed 911," she laments. "Nobody came. Nobody came" (*Candyman*, 1992).

Helen and Bernadette eventually learn the story of Candyman's origins from a fellow academic who has been studying Candyman and urban legends for more than ten years. His voice is calm, but his eyes are intense as he relays the tale:

> The legend first appeared in 1890. Candyman was the son of a slave. His father had amassed a considerable fortune from designing a device for the mass-

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producing of shoes after the Civil War. Candyman had been sent to all the best schools and had grown up in polite society. He had a prodigious talent as an artist, and was much sought after when it came to the documenting of one's wealth and position in society in a portrait. It was in this latter capacity that he was commissioned by a wealthy landowner to capture his daughter's virginal beauty. Well, of course, they fell deeply in love, and she became pregnant. Poor Candyman! The father executed a terrible revenge. He paid a pack of brutal hooligans to do the deed. They chased Candyman through the town to Cabrini-Green, where they proceeded to saw off his right hand with a rusty blade. And no one came to his aid. But this was just the beginning of his ordeal. Nearby there was an apiary; dozens of hives filled with hungry bees. They smashed the hives and stole the honeycomb and smeared it over his prone naked body. Candyman was stung to death by the bees. They burnt his body on a giant pyre and scattered his ashes over Cabrini-Green (*Candyman*, 1992).

Later, mocking this story and the fantastical urban legend told to them by white middle class teenagers, Helen and Bernadette stand before the mirror in Helen's apartment, leaning over the bathroom sink in anticipation and unease, chanting together slowly, "Candyman, Candyman, Candyman, Candyman…" Helen alone finishes the summoning call with a dramatic and confident "Candyman!" Nothing happens, and the two women giggle at the silliness of it all. Weeks later, however, after her unapologetic intrusiveness at Cabrini-Green has left her injured by a mortal man who carries a hook and has merely taken on the *name* of Candyman, Helen finally encounters the chilling phantom of the *real* Candyman. He beckons her to come unto him, speaking in elegant language about his legacy which lives on in the very urban legends which Helen finds to be so absurdly fabricated. "I am the writing on the wall, the whisper in the classroom," he breathes. "Without these things, I am nothing. So, now I must shed innocent blood" (*Candyman*, 1992).

Following her otherworldly encounter with Candyman, Helen awakens to a woman's deafening screams. She finds herself on Anne-Marie's bathroom floor, in a daze and covered in blood. Following the sound of Anne-Marie's cries, Helen comes into the living room to find the decapitated head of Anne-Marie's dog on the floor and the young woman weeping over her son's empty crib. She violently grips and shakes the wooden frame which drips with blood and clangs against the wall sprayed red with gore. Anne-Marie's infant son, Anthony, has been taken by the ghost of Candyman and Helen has been framed for the baby's murder. Candyman makes her a deal: in order to negotiate the return of Anthony unharmed, she must offer herself to him.

After suspicions of Trevor's (her husband) affair are confirmed when she finds him in their apartment with one of his undergraduate students, she abandons hope of returning to her normal life and surrenders herself to Candyman in order to save Anthony. Again, she finds herself hypnotized by the ghost's spellbinding power and awakes to the sounds of Anthony's cries coming from beneath the rubble outside in the Cabrini-Green courtyard, a heap of discarded furniture piled up for a community bonfire party. She climbs onto the structure and crawls through the debris in search of the baby. There, Candyman finds her and attempts to hold her hostage as the people of Cabrini-Green set the wreckage ablaze. Helen is ultimately able to escape Candyman and save baby Anthony, crawling out of the pyre with her back and hair aflame, while Candyman burns (again). In the end, she succumbs to her burn injuries and the people of Cabrini-Green remember her as a savior after her death.

In "'How much did you pay for this place?' Fear, Entitlement, and Urban Space in Bernard Rose's *Candyman*", Aviva Briefel and Sianne Ngai provide a detailed exploration of *Candyman* and its significance as the first horror production of its kind, reading it alongside the likes of *Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984) and *Friday the 13th* (1980) in which the haunted are middle class white subjects and the haunter is of working class origins, but is also white. These hauntings take place in white middle class neighborhoods where the haunted are the teenage children of secure homeowners. As such, Briefel and Ngai read this proprietorship as the prerequisite for haunting and the right to be fearful. In this way, being haunted is a privilege of the white middle class and fear itself becomes an estate, a property which only certain persons are able to claim ownership of. They present this thesis: "[B]ecause all horror or Gothic narratives derive from this point of private proprietorship, one that produces anxieties about proprietorship in general, these narratives subsequently establish anxiety as a form of emotional property" (71). When this piece was first conceived in 1996, the notion of private proprietorship as a prerequisite for haunting, and thus as a prerequisite for the right to fear, was certainly a valid reading, considering that the dominant haunting narratives took place in the homes of white heteropatriarchal families. However, since horror tales during and after the 1990s tend to include more and more hauntings which take place outside of private homes and hauntings which move about multiple spaces, following the haunted throughout the world, I would like to look beyond the ownership of private property in reading haunting narratives, especially *Candyman*. Instead, what seems to be a prerequisite for being haunted and, especially, the "right to fear" is simply whiteness. At

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the very least, a specific kind of white property. Indeed, even in *Candyman*, the film

which their theory on private ownership as prerequisite for haunting is born out of, the

haunting of Helen takes place in multiple spaces and outside of her home.

> The contrast between the different relations of the haunted and haunter to the
> property at stake makes the question of proprietary rights central to the horror
> film. If home ownership as the starting point for horror narratives automatically
> entitles homeowners to fear, then it would seem also to exclude non-property
> owners from having their own rights to anxiety. The struggle we see in the horror
> film is not only a struggle over property, but a struggle over who has the right to
> be afraid (Briefel & Ngai, 72).

Despite the fact that they have "homes", the fear of the people at Cabrini-Green is

seen as irrational by the white people within the film. Helen and Bernadette's thesis is

about the absurdity of the urban legend about Candyman (though Bernadette is a biracial

woman of color, she is not read as such. She is even told that she does not "belong" at

Cabrini-Green, along with Helen – "White folks don't never come here 'cept to cause us

a problem," Anne-Marie says to them both). When the people in Cabrini-Green call the

police, they do not come, just as no one came to help Candyman when he screamed as

racist "hooligans" lynched him for impregnating a white woman; for invading white

property. The lynching of Candyman both reinforces the non-humanness and inferiority

of blackness while also reaffirming the existence of (white) female subjects as objects

and property to be owned and preserved.

The Cabrini-Green housing project is not owned by its black residents, in contrast

to Helen's condo, which was originally built as a government housing project but was

ultimately billed as expensive condominiums because of its location. Unlike Cabrini-

Green, located on "the other side of the tracks", there is nothing to separate Helen's apartment building from the Gold Coast. The title of Briefel and Ngai's work "How much did you pay for this place?" directly references the fact that Helen and Trevor in fact own their home, as this is a question posed to Helen by Bernadette after learning the building's history, to which Helen responds, "You don't want to know." Their residence is a private space, while Cabrini-Green is essentially a public space, and thus, a white space. It is still white property, though it is populated entirely by low-income black citizens. They have no claim of ownership, therefore, their fears are invalid, whether it be the fear of a hook-handed ghost or of the real-world violences in impoverished urban areas and communities of color. I find it significant that Cabrini-Green is built upon the same ground where Candyman was murdered and his ashes were spread; in an already haunted space. It seems that the people who live at Cabrini-Green apartments were fated to be haunted by virtue of their blackness. After all, it is their blackness which relegates them to this impoverished urban space on the other side of the tracks, a space expressly created for the isolation and containment of its residents – effectively a space of social death.

It is also interesting, and revealing, that the newspaper that Helen reads asks "What killed Ruthie-Jean?", rather than asking why emergency services ignored a murdered woman's calls for help because of where she lived – a loaded space with a distinct history and exemplification of anti-black racism and violences, physical and otherwise, committed against black bodies. No one came to Ruthie-Jean's aid as she was being murdered, just as no one came to Candyman's aid as he was being lynched.

Furthermore, the "What" in this question is significant. "Life in the Projects", it seems, is populated with "Whats", rather than "Whos"; with things, rather than people. The denial of humanity and denial of life continually associated with blackness is reinforced again and again in the haunting narrative (and this is a subject which will be fully discussed in my fourth chapter with the zombie/racial Other). Moreover, does "Life in the Projects" mean to answer the preceding question in the title, "What killed Ruthie-Jean?" Did simply being in project housing kill Ruthie-Jean? And, considering the state of social death in which these people exist, can there truly be "life" in the projects? If these people are constantly surrounded by death, then what have they to be fearful of in Candyman?

Helen investigates Candyman, calls upon him, in order to disprove his existence and to prove that the fears of the people in Cabrini-Green are invalid. "What's with the arsenal, Bernadette? We're only going eight blocks." She mocks Bernadette for her caution. She thinks that the neighborhood is "attributing the daily horrors of their lives to a mythical figure", but, even though Candyman is a phantasm, he is very real. He represents the ghosts of the past, the ghosts of slavery, and those ghosts affect the everyday lives of these people, in the form of racial discrimination, particularly in the racist legislation of the Reagan-Bush era which further disenfranchised already disadvantaged and impoverished people of color in inner-city housing projects. Helen's privileged position as a white woman and an outsider deludes her into thinking that she knows the reality and experiences of the people of Cabrini-Green better than they do. She denies their trauma, declaring it a myth – a myth which later manifests in the form of Candyman's ghost. In the mind of the privileged white subject, the fears of black subjects

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cannot be real or legible or valid. Acknowledging them as such would require the

privileged to confront the many injustices which white agents have imposed upon black

bodies throughout history and the ways in which contemporary privileged white subjects

– racist or not – continue to benefit from them. They must disidentify with the trauma,

deny its very existence, in order to avoid accountability of their place in the historical

narrative and in current society.

Helen acknowledges her privileged existence and her whiteness only once, after

she has been assaulted by the serial killer who takes on the moniker of "Candyman" in

order to incite an already established fear associated with the urban legend. She says to

Bernadette, "Two people get brutally murdered and the cops do nothing. Whereas a white

woman goes in there and gets attacked, and they lock the place down." But, ultimately,

she does not care about the horrors of being black and poor in an urban landscape. She

notes that "an entire community starts contributing the daily horrors of their lives to a

mythical figure", but the extent of her interest is in her fascination with the urban legend

itself, not with how abject forms of violence disproportionately affect this community,

not with why these *daily horrors* exist to begin with or how her investigation into their

lives from the perspective of a privileged white subject reifies negative ideas about

blackness. Briefel and Ngai write:

> Released in 1992, the year officially ending the Reagan-Bush regime, Bernard
> Rose's *Candyman* marks an interesting deviation within the genre by introducing
> African Americans, figures most obviously excluded from the restricted suburban
> landscapes of prototypical films such as *Nightmare* and *Friday the Thirteenth*, as
> both killers and victims. Significantly, the setting shifts from a middle-class
> enclave to the Cabrini-Green housing projects in Chicago. This shift dramatizes

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Candyman's distance from earlier films by directly acknowledging a type of social fear that seems furthest removed from the concerns of the traditional horror film: the everyday reality of urban violence in low-income neighborhoods (74).

But does it really shift? While *Candyman* does include imagery which had yet to be seen in the popular horror film at the time of its release (though, I would argue that *Candyman* does not belong in the category of "slasher films" with *Nightmare* and *Friday the Thirteenth* and the like), the haunting of Helen happens predominantly outside of Cabrini-Green. She only has one encounter with the ghost of Candyman there, and Candyman, the serial killer, is quickly removed from the narrative after he attacks her. Once he has been arrested, there are no more immediate dangers for the black residents of Cabrini-Green to be afraid of, at least none that the film conceives of, as the phantasm of Candyman is solely fixated on haunting Helen. In fact, there are no instances in the film where the residents of Cabrini-Green are in danger of being haunted by the *real* Candyman. Rather, he haunts in the white imagination. It is not the people of Cabrini-Green who (re)tell the urban legend of a mirror-man with a hook. Helen and Bernadette hear this exclusively from white middle class teenagers. The Candyman with a hook which the people of Cabrini-Green speak of is a physical being terrorizing their community by committing serial murders. Cabrini-Green is not haunted in the way the film tries to convince us of, and seems to be nothing more than a convenient backdrop for the narrative. This story is exclusively about Candyman's haunting of Helen and is ultimately about her virtuous whiteness defeating his blackness.

Clive Barker's novella, "The Forbidden", from which Bernard Rose's *Candyman*

was adapted, features a pale-white ghost with blond hair and bright red eyes haunting in a

low-income working class English community – a far less fantastic and far less terrifying

figure. After reading Barker's short story, I find myself intrigued by Rose's new vision of

Candyman, and I ask: What is significant in the decision to focus on a real impoverished

community of people of color at Cabrini-Green in Rose's film adaptation (and a great

deal of the film was shot on location there), and to place a white damsel/heroine at the

center of the narrative? With *Candyman*, there is a clear opportunity to provide

commentary on institutional racism and the genocide of black bodies throughout history,

but the film instead presents us with the vision of a monstrous black male figure lusting

after and terrorizing a white female. Rather than centering Candyman, the titular

character, it centers Helen in the story. Again, we are presented with the image of

virtuous whiteness. But, considering the long history of the white hero or heroine who is

so unexceptionally reproduced in Hollywood projects, would a non-white hero or heroine

even be legible? Likewise, would a non-white damsel or haunted subject be legible in a

haunting narrative such as this?

The film ends with Helen's transformation from a haunted subject into a haunting

figure. She now practices Candyman's method of haunting, appearing behind Trevor

after he speaks her name five times before the bathroom mirror, mourning her death.

Gripping Candyman's hook in her hand, she stabs him and slits him "from groin to

gullet", emitting an orgasmic moan as she revels in his agony. Thus, the story ends with

the defeat and literal (mis)appropriation of blackness. Nevertheless, I find value in

Candyman. Briefel, Ngai, and others, read Helen as a reincarnation of Candyman's lover, citing this as the primary reason that she is haunted by his ghost, but I offer an alternate vision of Helen's haunting. Though he does say to her, "It was always you, Helen," and while the "romantic" relationship between Helen and Candyman does indeed call back to his illegal union with a white woman which led to his murder, what I find to be more significant than his desire to possess Helen is his need to be *believed* in by her. He calls out to Helen: "Believe in me. Be my victim. . . Do you believe in me? . . . Your disbelief destroyed the faith of my congregation. Without them, I am nothing" (*Candyman*, 1992). Candyman needs people to believe in him. He needs a congregation to revere him and bow to his horrific being. In the same way that Megumi and Jennet remain abjectly in the living world so that their stories of sexual and reproductive violence are (re)told, Candyman demands that his story be (re)told so that he is remembered and his power is believed in; so that the trauma he experienced forever remains a part of the larger historical narrative. I see his character's looming presence as a resistance against structures which benefit from the systematic dehumanization and extermination of blackness. Helen challenges his authenticity and the legitimacy of his story, and this, I believe, is what principally brings about Candyman's haunting – his ghostly interruption of her co-authored thesis – and it is a haunting which requires that we remember and grapple with the legacy of racialized violence against black bodies. Helen's disbelief cannot be tolerated.

> The ghost gives body to memory, while reminding us that remembering is not a simple or even safe act (Brogan, 29).

In contrast to *Candyman*, *The Skeleton Key* is about black vengeance winning out over whiteness. Caroline Ellis, a New Orleans Hospice Aid, takes a position as a private caregiver to Ben Devereaux, who appears to have suffered a stroke, at an old plantation home in the bayous. Ben's wife, Violet, is a cantankerous middle-aged woman, always secretive about the house and about the events surrounding Ben's mysterious stroke in the attic. At the house, she also meets the Devereauxs' young estate lawyer, Luke Marshall, who reassures Caroline that Violet is a nice woman who is simply emotionally distraught over the impending death of her husband. Within a few days, Caroline discovers a secret room in the attic and learns of the plantation house's dark history (though it is no more dark than the history of any former slave plantation), in which two black servants and descendants of slaves, Mama Cecile and Papa Justify, were lynched because they were caught performing a Hoodoo ritual with the plantation owners' children.

Caroline begins to suspect that Ben believes that something supernatural is responsible for his condition, but because his stroke has left him unable to speak, she must perform her own investigation into the world of Hoodoo, delving deeper and deeper into a world of mystery and magic. She discovers an old phonograph recording of Papa Justify, called the "Conjure of Sacrifice", along with other Hoodoo spells, including a "Spell of Protection". After observing some peculiar behavior, Caroline believes that Violet is a potential danger to Ben and devises a plan to escape from the plantation with him, but this plan is foiled by Violet. When she manages to get away and seek the help of Luke Marshall, she is shocked to learn that he is helping Violet carry out her insidious

plans, though Caroline does not yet know what they are. He takes her back to the

plantation where he and Violet struggle to subdue her, and she eventually makes her way

to the attic and begins to carry out the "Spell of Protection". However, Violet informs her

that the spell is meant to keep a person trapped there, rather than to protect them from

harm, and Caroline must believe in the magic in order for the magic to work; it just

happens to be working against her. Caroline's body is taken, to be used as a vessel for

Mama Cecile, and she is now trapped inside of Violet's aging body. It is revealed that

Luke's body houses the spirit of Papa Justify and that Luke has been trapped inside of

Ben all along.

Since their lynching, Mama Cecile and Papa Justify have taken control of various

white bodies in order to continue "living". Their continued presence, though they no

longer inhabit their own bodies, is a form of resistance which I read as notably different

from that of Candyman's character. Theirs is a literal invasion of white property/space as

they both inhabit white bodies and "live" in a former plantation home, which is

historically a space which allowed for, greatly benefitted from, and was sustained through

the enslavement, rape, abuse, and genocide of black bodies. Their prospering in this

space, in the home of the people who hung them from a tree in their front yard and

burned them alive, is undoubtedly a deliberate act of defiance against the institution of

slavery and its aftermath which relegated them to a place of social death as black subjects

during their lives. While this film offers (for me) a more satisfying tale of the possibilities

for black resistance in death, it still aligns with the narrative of slavery and its legacy as

the only legible form of violence for the audience. "Ultimately, a system such as slavery

might be abruptly halted, but its dream lives in the peoples' imagination and becomes fodder for both romantic fictions and horrific realities" (Holland, 14-15). Again, the black body, material or phantasmal, is forever linked to the institution of slavery, and that link is continually studied in fictional renderings of black characters, and especially so in haunting narratives.

The characters of Helen and Caroline both embark on quests which might most aptly be described as anthropological. It is their own search for knowledge of a culture unlike their own which ultimately leads to both of their demise. What does it mean that this white knowledge production – a continuation of the colonial project – seems to be the entry in to stories about black ghosts in these tales? It perhaps would have made more sense if *Candyman* had been Bernadette's story, or if *The Skeleton Key* had placed a black woman at the center of the narrative, but white supremacy in the film industry dictates that a white body always be at the forefront of our stories, especially horror tales such as these which require the audience to identify with the terror that haunted characters experience. What does it mean to place white bodies at the center of these stories about vengeful blackness, even though whiteness prevails, to some extent, in one and not in the other? Perhaps the truth is that we need a white body to experience the haunting in order to identify with the character and their fear.

Mama Cecile, via Caroline's body, laments, "I wanted a black one this time," as she takes a long drag on her skinny cigarette. Papa Justify, using Luke's form as a conduit, wraps his arms around her waist and pull her close to him. "You know the black ones never stay," he breathes. These ghosts have no desire to inhabit or possess white

bodies, and yet they are forced to do so in order to "live". It is something which they cannot escape. Meanwhile, Candyman's haunting is notably motivated by his desire to possess a white body, though in a dissimilar way. It is something that he aspires towards, ultimately fails to achieve, and is defeated by in the end. It seems that there can be neither a non-white victim nor a non-white hero in these narratives. There can be no non-white victims of Mama Cecile and Papa Justify's body-snatching vengeance and there can be no non-white hero against Candyman's hook-handed retribution.

> According to Stuart Hall, the traumatic character of colonialism rests in power to make one see and experience him or herself as Other. 'It is one thing to position a subject or a set of peoples as the Other of a dominant discourse,' writes Hall. 'It is quite another thing to subject them to that 'knowledge,' not only as a matter of imposed will and domination, [but also] by the power of inner compulsion and subjective con-formation to the norm.' This 'conformity to the norm' breeds systems of nihilistic behavior and self-destruction that results in high incidents of violence, incarceration, unemployment and undereducation in some segments of the African American community (Henderson, 16).

We seem to find it difficult to imagine a black body in pain unless that pain is associated with racist violences related to slavery in these horror stories, or a black subject which has the "right to fear" and can be haunted in the way that Helen and Caroline are haunted. There is a particular, culturally accepted image of blackness, of what it should look like in order for the audience to feel sympathetic towards the suffering of the black body. Popular anthology television series *American Horror Story* set its third season in a witch coven in New Orleans and details the story of a group of white witches locked in a turf war with black Voodoo queens, descendants of Tichiba of the infamous Salem Witch Trials. A significant portion of the season adapts the true story

of Madame Delphine LaLaurie, an elite socialite known for torturing and murdering slaves in the attic of her mansion. Never in this show's history (although there are only four seasons thus far) has it featured so many characters of color, before or since, all of which are tortured slaves or descendants of slaves. Indeed, white supremacist ideology is principally based upon the "degradation of black bodies in order to control them.' This system is best sustained 'by convincing them that their bodies are ugly, their intellect is inherently underdeveloped, their culture is less civilized, and their future warrants less concern than that of other peoples'" (Henderson, 16). It is invested in controlling the image of our present and our future, and also of our past, limited portions of our past which serve white supremacist projects. The past is never further away than the "thickness of skin". The ghosts of chattel slavery live on in black skin. The two cannot be divorced from one another, it seems. The black body, by virtue of skin color, is/must be forever linked to the institution of slavery, whether or not it has been enslaved.

Blackness as Monstrosity

> It is possible to make at least two broad contentions here: a) that the (white) culture's dependence on the nonhuman status of its black subjects was never measured by the ability of whites to produce a "social heritage"; instead it rested on the status of the black as a nonentity; and b) that the transmutation from enslaved to freed subject never quite occurred at the level of the imagination (Holland, 15).

In Chapter II, I discussed Camilla Griggers' conception of the pathological feminine and the (re)production of the female subject as the pathological Other through its (mal)adaptation to an oppressive patriarchal social structure. Blackness likewise gets

(re)produced as the pathological Other, arriving at the place of monstrosity and social death through its pathologization. If (mal)adaptation is the only appropriate response to terrors in the nervous system of the suburban home under oppressive/abusive patriarchal dominance, then rage is the only appropriate response to systemic oppressions, institutionalized racism, and state-sanctioned violence(s); a rage which Susan Stryker takes up in "My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix." She relays her frustrations with the ways in which the reconstructed transgender body gets abhorred, dreaded, exploited, disavowed, and browbeaten by society, often most vehemently by members of the queer community.

> Like the monster, I am too often perceived as less than human due to the means of my embodiment; like the monster's as well, my exclusion from human community fuels a deep and abiding rage in me that I, like the monster, direct against the conditions in which I must struggle to exist (Stryker, 238).

Stryker's monster is "a created being, a made thing", an embodiment of Frankenstein's monster (240). It does not meet the criteria for humanness, and therefore, is not entitled to human rights. The made creature signals a loss of personhood or illuminates the fact that personhood has never been granted. The transgender body is a monstrosity to heterosexuality and the gender/sex binary, while the black body is a monstrosity to heteropatriarchal whiteness. It is the socially dead monster, the racial Other, but its death is produced by the state through the devaluing of blackness and dehumanization of black bodies. Institutionalized racism both actively enforces the value

and superiority of whiteness and endorses the dehumanization of black bodies and identities.

This racial Other is carefully pieced together and animated by its creator, and like Frankenstein's monster and the other monstrosities which I discuss in this work, the racial Other responds to its subjugation with rage and takes up the project of battling the flawed system in which it exists. Forced into a space of social death, the racial Other sometimes uses violence as a means of catharsis; an outlet for its rage. The rage of the racial Other is the subject of Richard Wright's *Native Son*, the story of a 20-year old black man in 1930s Chicago named "Bigger" – Wright's clever euphemism for the racial slur. Living in unthinkable poverty with his mother, brother, and sister in a one room apartment on the south side of the city, Bigger struggles daily with discrimination, oppression, fear, anger, and the burden of reluctantly providing for himself and his family through unsavory, sometimes illegal means. He has no expectations for his life and begrudgingly accepts that he cannot aspire to anything other than lowly, underpaid labor with his poor education. With the great, looming entity of whiteness hovering over his head each day, Bigger is ruled by his own frustration and fury, using violence as a catharsis for his anger and as a response to intense fear.

> These were the rhythms of his life: indifference and violence; periods of abstract brooding and periods of intense desire; moments of silence and moments of anger – like water ebbing and flowing from the tug of a far-away, invisible force. Being this way was a need as deep as eating (Wright, 31).

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Blackness is a monstrosity both before and after physical death. The black body is always-already abject and always-already a monstrosity against the "normalcy" of whiteness. This is evident in the manifested monstrosity of Candyman after his invasion of whiteness by falling in love with and impregnating a white woman, and also in the monstrosity of Mama Cecile and Papa Justify following their invasion of whiteness through the sin of practicing black culture, Hoodoo, in a white space.

Bigger and Frankenstein's monster, and, likewise, the ghosts of *Candyman* and *The Skeleton Key*, are remarkably similar in their response to being oppressed, hated, and feared. "Like the monster, the longer I live in these conditions, the more rage I harbor. . . It is a rage bred by the necessity of existing in external circumstances that work against my survival" (Stryker, 244). As a black woman, keenly aware of the ways in which my blackness has caused me injury, emotional and otherwise, I am often asked why I am angry. I am asked where my rage comes from, and I shake my head at the absurdity of the question.

Lauryn Hill performs her song, "Black Rage," with melancholy and fury. She answers, again and again, that ceaseless question: *Where does black rage come from?* The melody haunts the ears with its beauty and anguish. Set to the tune of "My Favorite Things," a happy and heartening song, the refrains of "Black Rage" are tangled with misery.

> Black rage is founded on two-thirds a person
> Rapings and beatings and suffering that worsens,
> Black human packages tied up with strings,
> Black rage can come from all these kinds of things.

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Black rage is founded on blatant denial,
Squeezed economics, subsistence survival,
Deafening silence and social control.
Black rage is founded on wounds in the soul.

When the dogs bite, when the beatings,
When I'm feeling sad,
I simply remember all these kinds of things and then I don't fear so bad.

Black rage is founded: who fed us self-hatred,
Lies and abuse while we waited and waited?
Spiritual treason, this grid and its cages
Black rage was founded on these kinds of things.

Black rage is founded on draining and draining,
Threatening your freedom to stop your complaining.
Poisoning your water while they say it's raining,
Then call you mad for complaining, complaining.

Old time bureaucracy drugging the youth,
Black rage is founded on blocking the truth.
Murder and crime, compromise and distortion,
Sacrifice, sacrifice, who makes this fortune?

Greed, falsely called progress,
Such human contortion,
Black rage is founded on these kinds of things

So when the dog bites, when the beatings,
And I'm feeling sad,
I simply remember all these kinds of things and then I don't fear so bad.

Free enterprise, is it myth or illusion?
Forcing you back into purposed confusion.
Black human trafficking or blood transfusion?
Black rage is founded on these kinds of things.

Victims of violence both psyche and body,
Life out of context is living ungodly.
Politics, politics, greed falsely called wealth,
Black rage is founded on denial of self.

Black human packages tied and subsistent,
Having to justify very existence.
Try if you must but you can't have my soul.
Black rage is founded on ungodly control.

So when the dog bites, and the beatings,
And I'm feeling so sad,
I simply remember all these kinds of things and then I don't fear so bad.

Easily as ugly as Nina Simone's "Strange Fruit" – if not more so – it, too, "tears at the guts" of a violent antiquity. Our historical fabric is stained crimson, saturated in blood spilt from black bodies (and other marginalized subjects). The vengefulness of black slaves and their descendants is "legitimate" and legible to horror film audiences, but what would it look like if we were to imagine black ghosts who were not limited to this kind of haunting?

I look for more haunting narratives with black bodies, stories of (state-sanctioned) violences against black bodies and black communities which are not directly related to chattel slavery and its immediate aftermath. Where are the stories about black trans* men and women murdered in racist, transphobic, and/or transmisogynistic hate crimes? Where are the tales about inmates who've died enslaved in the prison industrial complex founded on and maintained through institutional racism? What about the people who have starved or been made homeless because of chronic poverty in black communities? Where are the ghosts of young men like Trayvon Martin, Kimani Gray, or Michael Brown, or the forlorn spirits of the parents who mourned their loss? Where do they haunt? People like Sean Bell and Amadou Diallo have died in a hail of bullets from police firearms for simply existing in their black body in a public space. Those with

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mental illnesses, like Dontre Hamilton, Ezell Ford, Tanesha Anderson, and Aura Rosser, have been executed because their lives held no value in the eyes of police officers, and it was easier to put them down than to talk them down. Black women have called for help, but instead have been raped and abused by officers like Daniel Holtzclaw; officers who claim to protect and serve. Thousands of black women have been forcibly sterilized and felt the pain of an empty womb; never to nourish hungry babes with milk from their breasts, never to experience the radical act of mothering black children. Countless black youth have been lost and never found; abducted and never searched for while portraits of angelic white faces flood our newsfeed. I ask, where are their stories?

"As intellectuals and consumers of popular culture we are left to think very differently and deeply about what meaning a narrative-in-death has for black subjects and representations of blackness in the popular national imagination" (Holland, 28). We have the images of Candyman, Mama Cecile, and Papa Justify, but where are the others? Where is their "narrative-in-death"? I search for them, for their faces, for their blood, for their ghosts, and I find nothing. I search for their life and their death, and all I find is the likes of Candyman, the phantasmal black body with a hook for a hand and bees in his mouth. I find Mama Cecile and Papa Justify, disembodied spirits who harvest young white bodies for vessels. I find the familiar, the safe, the unchallenged story of old-time lynchings; of *strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees*, but none of that *strange and bitter crop* which is so often found lying cold and bloody on the street in this era. I find, again and again, that slavery is forever written upon the black body.

CHAPTER IV

OLD MONSTERS, NEW FLESH

> Emmett Till's dead body reminded us that the bad old days are never farther away
> than the thickness of skin, dark skin that some pale-skinned people claim the
> prerogative to strip away, burn or cut or shoot full of holes. It is not an accident
> that the hacked, dead face of Emmett Till looks inhuman. The point of killing and
> mutilating him, inflicting the agony of his last moments, was to prove he was not
> human.
>
> John Edgar Wideman, "The Killing of Black Boys"

Misappropriated from Haitian Vodou culture with racist/colonialist

misconceptions about the animality and disposability of black (slave) subjects, zombies

are represented now across countless media texts as hollow vessels with an endless

craving for the consumption of life, doomed to forever roam in haunted spaces. This

concluding chapter will be an excursion through the world of the literally dead and the

socially dead, who are often one and the same, discussing black survival, resistance, and

ultimate abjection in the popular television series and episodic haunting narrative, *The

Walking Dead.* The show presents many opportunities for critical analysis, perhaps most

notably with the unrivaled character of Michonne and her relationship to the zombies on

the show. I use her character as a significant point of analysis, as she is arguably the most

popular subject in the haunting narratives of Western media texts – possibly in their

entire history – who is both black and female, and it is interesting to me that her character

resides in this particular world of abjection and death. I find Michonne to be the most

incredible and most striking character whom I have encountered in all of the haunting narratives discussed in this thesis.

This chapter has three specific aims. The first is a focused exploration of zombification and blackness, the historically constructed links between the two, and the implications that *The Walking Dead* has as a haunting narrative which regularly features and relies on the existence of zombie subjects. As for the second, it is a discussion of Michonne's resistance through unprecedented survival in *The Walking Dead* and her character's place among other black/female subjects in haunting narratives. The violences which are committed against non-white women in these stories are often interracial gendered *and* racialized violences. To address this phenomenon, I look to Sethe's suffering and the resurrected presence of her dead baby in *Beloved* (1998) and the agony of Sara Tidwell in *Bag of Bones* (2011), both sexually assaulted by white men, and victims of child loss and vicious anti-black racism. In haunted spaces, where black/female subjects exist almost exclusively as victims of sexual, reproductive, and/or racialized violences, Michonne thrives as a relentless warrior, refusing to resign to victimhood. In this way, she practices a resistance which is (dis)similar to other black/female subjects in haunting narratives. Here, I examine Michonne as a resilient character while also offering an analysis of the racialized zombie subject and its significance as a historical/cultural icon which has been reproductive of ideas of blackness; ideas which inform the conception of black characters in media texts. Ultimately, I bring these two lines of inquiry together in a discussion of black movement(s) and/as profound demonstrations of active and abject resistance against

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oppressive social systems. The limited ways in which black subjects are represented in fictional texts can greatly impact how black bodies are understood in reality, and this has real implications for black lives.

I – Black Subjects and/as Zombie Subjects

I begin with the history of the zombie/racial Other and its relationship to Western media texts. In my introductory chapter, I defined a ghost as "the disembodied or grotesque form of something once alive, which now wanders among the living." I also termed a haunting as "a phenomenon which occurs when a vessel (the mind, the body, a doll, a dwelling, an institution, etc.) is permeated by an unrelenting phantom presence or interruption"; a presence which is often driven by the abject need/desire to feed on the living. Following this, what is a zombie – a mindless, soulless thing devouring all life in its path – if not a ghost, and what is their pitiful presence – a relentless shadow and reminder of what once was – if not a haunting? My primary claim stands: ghosts revive the history of violences transpired. In this investigation of the cultural and historical significances of the zombie, I read the zombie as a ghost and its story as a haunting narrative which continually calls up a history of state-sanctioned violences committed against black bodies, and which is indisputably about the fear of blackness and the denial of black life. The project of placing zombies in a historical and cultural context is not novel. It is work that has certainly been done before, with great care and attention, but reading these creatures as ghosts in this particular way – as conduits for the resurgence of past traumas, as transformative emblems for present and future social insurrections, and as optimum forms of abjection through which to conceptualize certain methods of (black)

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resistance – is a task which has not yet been completed, to my knowledge. I believe that reading zombies in such a way provides opportunities for new insights to become evident, especially in my discussion of manifestations of historical traumas and social fears projected onto the Other.

I acknowledge that it would be tremendously problematic to simply equate the state of existing materially in a black body with the state of existing supernaturally as an undead zombie/ghost subject. While this work draws connections with zombification and blackness through their constructed relationship to abjection and (social) death, it does not conflate the two as indistinguishable beings. Rather, this discussion seeks to highlight the ways in which zombies have been, and at times continue to be, constructed/(mis)understood through ideologies about the inferiority and perceived animality/non-humanness of blackness, while also examining the significance of Michonne's character as a black/female subject vehemently surviving and resisting arrest in an unending onslaught of the undead.

> I will knock down the Gates of the Netherworld,
> I will smash the door posts, and leave the doors flat down,
> And will let the dead go up and eat the living!
> And the dead will outnumber the living!
> *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, Tablet VI

Flesh-eating corpses have existed in the social imagination for centuries, and tales of these ravenous undead can be found across many cultures in folklore and mythology. In China, they are known as Jiang Shi. A ghost returns from the dead to devour the living as a retribution for not being properly buried. Scandinavian folklore has the Draugr, an

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undead Viking and an unstoppable behemoth who knows what it is and delights in its abjection. Revenants hail from Western Europe. They are spirits who become the hungry dead. Though they were never given the title of "zombie", these ancient visions of reanimated corpses and flesh-eating spirits lay the groundwork for our modern conception of the zombie.

The zombie is a premier example of abject horror, as it continually disturbs margins, especially those which distinguish between life and death. As discussed in my introduction, Kristeva argues that the corpse, "the cadaver […] cesspool, and death" is the utmost abject thing (3). However, working from the framework of her essay, I find that it is, in fact, the zombie and its racial Otherness which is the ultimate abjection, far more so than the unexceptional rotting corpse that lay still in its grave or the ethereal vengeful ghosts on which I have meditated in preceding chapters. The zombie/racial Other is abject on multiple levels beyond its interruption of life and death, and certainly in even more aspects than those that will be discussed in this closing chapter.

The zombies of old cinema are mindless and undead – or abjectly somewhere on the threshold between life and death – like our contemporary zombie, but lack the violent and insatiable taste for flesh with which we have become accustomed. They are merely slaves, monsters created through Haitian Vodou. While our contemporary undead flesh-eaters bare the name "zombie," it could be argued they are not zombies at all, theoretically, but that is not an argument that I will take up in this particular work. George Romero gets credited with taking the first step away from the Haitian Vodou zombie slave towards the modern zombie which devours the living with his independent

horror production *Night of the Living Dead* (1968). Romero and his colleagues combined

the image of the cannibalistic undead with the concepts of contagion and uprising in

order to create their "ghouls", and to comment on the protesting of black Americans

during the Civil Rights Movement. Romero's legacy has established a typical zombie

apocalypse narrative. It follows a band of survivors facing a siege of the undead, usually

barricaded in a structure; a house, an apartment complex, an office building, a shopping

mall, a prison, etc. They face impossible odds as they struggle to keep the group together

and stay alive; such is the case with our group of survivors in *The Walking Dead.*

I reiterate here that the monsters created in supernatural texts serve as

manifestations of our most deeply situated cultural/societal fears and anxieties. In early

zombie films like *White Zombie* (1932) and *I Walked With A Zombie* (1943), the racist

beginnings of the cinematic zombie creation are apparent. The deep social anxieties about

the disruption of the white heteropatriarchal family as well as the culturally constructed

myth of the black man's animal aggressiveness and his insatiable sexual appetite for the

"pure white woman" are evident in these films – as it is in *Candyman*. William Seabrook

popularized the Haitian zombie in the U.S. in 1929 with the well-received account of his

adventures in Haiti, *The Magic Island* (1929). In this book, he narrates his journey to

Haiti and tells of his investigation of the Vodou religion practiced by the natives there.

He claims to have seen dead men and women walking and working in the fields, but

these Haitian zombies are not tangibly dead black bodies, but socially dead black slaves.

Seabrook conflates the soul capture zombie mythology of the Haitian religion, brought

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from Africa with slave trade, with the social reality of the wrongful enslavement of black

bodies in which slaves are symbolically and socially dead.

To further draw connections with the history of the global business of the

enslavement of black bodies, I turn to the Caribbean islands where slave revolts broke out

against French colonizers. From 1791 to 1804, black slaves in Haiti attacked their white

owners and fought tirelessly against the French colonial rule, ending with Haiti declaring

its independence. This is one of the several occasions in the 1800s in which the name

"Zombi" was attributed to slaves who instigated revolutions against their masters and

lead their people to freedom from lives of captivity, violence, and capitalist oppression

(Kordas, 17). Thus, the word "zombie" became associated with black slaves and those

who aroused them to insult and defy their owners, dismantling racist institutions from

which white Americans and Europeans profited while black bodies suffered. The uprising

of restless and (rightfully) enraged black slaves against European hegemony incited a fear

in white Europeans, as well as white Americans, that the zombie was a force that would

seize from them their power over the racial Other. This white fear of violent and vengeful

blackness persisted throughout Jim Crow and the Civil Rights Era, and is consistently

apparent in the continued marginalization and criminalization of black bodies.

There are various versions of the zombie in the Haitian Vodou tradition. It might

describe a soul that had been stolen from a person for healing purposes or simply to bring

good luck, or a zombie could be someone who donated their body to the Vodou gods as a

sacrifice to be used as a vessel for their will (Kordas, 16). However, filmmakers only

appropriated one form: a mindless and soulless body, often a resurrected corpse robbed

from its grave in order to enact its master's bidding, working in fields and sawmills and harvesting crops. This description of the zombie, mindless and soulless, certainly resembles racist ideas about the limited intellect of black people – animality, lack of sentience, and the ability to perform mindless labor – ideas which undoubtedly have perpetuated since the abolition of chattel slavery. In her essay, Kristeva explores "the different ways in which abjection, as a source of horror, works within patriarchal societies, as a means of separating the human from the non-human" (Creed, 68). The early Western concept of the zombie as a cinematic monster indelibly linked zombification with blackness, constructing them both as non-human, or, rather, subhuman. The zombies were ideal workers, as the black slaves were, and so they both became the Other. In his "Introduction to the American Horror Film", Robin Wood identifies different ethnic groups within our culture as one of the figures which creates Otherness – the Othering of non-normative, non-human subjects – and pinpoints "myths of black sexuality, "animality," and inferiority as a constructed Otherness which can be easily projected (112). It is an Otherness which becomes projected both on the black body and on the screen. This perceived Otherness, the animality and disposability of blackness, has been used throughout history to justify violent, oppressive institutions, and it is continually used to draw and redraw connections between black bodies and the horrific image of the undead zombie presence. By virtue of its racist/colonialist inception, especially in Western cinematic culture, I view the zombie as a concept which can never truly be divorced from blackness and slavery, despite the fact that many of the zombies in

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contemporary texts are not the corpses of black people as they were in early zombie films.

It is quite strange to me that *The Walking Dead* does not have very many black zombies, given that the show is set in and around Atlanta, Georgia, a city which is predominantly populated by black Americans. The premiere of its third season introduces the infamous prison which is initially a safe haven for the primary group of survivors. The prison is certainly significant, in that it represents a long history of the dehumanization, oppression, and genocide of black bodies, and exists as a space which, in its inception, allowed for the insidious and conscious re-fashioning of slavery through the criminalization and imprisonment of black citizens. Black Americans make up approximately 13% of the U.S. population, yet constitute nearly 50% of all prison inmates. With higher rates of school suspension, juvenile detainments, and arrests than children of other races, black students are regularly funneled into the criminal justice system (read: industry). Facing disproportionate suspension and expulsion rates, black students are more likely to be arrested than any other race, and entering the juvenile justice system is an indicator that the child will also become incarcerated as an adult. More than twenty years of studies have provided sufficient evidence that this process begins in the early years of the education system, as young as the age of three. The preschool to prison pipeline directs black students – males especially – on a path to almost inevitable incarceration in state and federal prisons. *Black children never get to be human. Black children never get to be alive*. The prison industrial complex and its allied corporations actively and willfully contribute to the increased rates of incarceration in the

U.S. and the continued exploitation of free labor, primarily free labor performed by black bodies (read: slavery), frequently resulting in major human rights violations against already marginalized persons. It is in this loaded space that *The Walking Dead* is finally able to conjure up more black characters (dead or alive) than have ever appeared on the show, before or since. The walkers overrunning the structure and the surviving inmates encountered there are predominantly people (or zombies) of color.

This sudden appearance of so many black zombies and inmates certainly speaks to the pervasiveness of the racialized violence inherent to the prison industrial complex; a violence which the institution was born out of and designed to (re)produce without end (Theodore "T-Dog" Douglas notably remarks, "I bet I'm the only black man that's ever broken *into* a prison."). Furthermore, the bizarre normalization of such violence in this apocalyptic world and the precipitous visibility of characters of color is incredibly revealing of the ways in which this violence is normalized in reality. Blackness is always-already non-human, devoid of personhood, and the animality and disposability of blackness/non-humanness has been used throughout history to justify regenerative violent institutions. The prison system has become a multi-billion dollar industry and it relies on the marginalization, criminalization, and dehumanization of the racial Other. Slavery, as an industry and a global phenomenon, was foundational in the development of the prison industrial complex, and *The Walking Dead* briefly acknowledges the deliberate siphoning of black bodies into this system, but ultimately does not investigate the implications of its own suggestive representation of black characters in this space. Again, black bodies are tied to slavery in the haunting narrative, in that the majority of the zombie/ghost subjects

are only conceived of through their relationship to and connection with the space of the prison, and by extension and extremely close proximity, the industry of chattel slavery.

II – Black Women, "Strength", and Survival

Misconceptions and misunderstandings of the Haitian zombie were mixed with the gothic and expressionistic cinematic tradition of the early 1900s to create the earliest zombie films. Because of this misappropriation at the inception of the zombie subgenre, the zombie will always exist as the racial Other, especially because the standard narrative depicts the zombie disrupting a white heteropatriarchal family or family-like unit. *White Zombie* and its kin consistently re-establish order and reassert the value of whiteness and heteropatriarchy in their conclusion. Our modern zombie tales, however, forego the project of reconstructing stable foundations. These are bleak, hopeless narratives in which we expect no one to survive the onslaught of the undead army. While they often take up the project of upholding the value of whiteness and heteronormalcy, they do not return to the "normalcy" which is usually established in the beginning. They leave the world as a wasteland. It is in this wasteland that Michonne finds her strength in *The Walking Dead*. Constructed through racist histories, black subjects are seen as already (socially) dead/void of life and personhood, while female subjects are seen as without agency and power, especially vulnerable to harm – as discussed in the earlier chapters of this work. As reckoned sites of historical trauma, black/female subjects already exist as haunted subjects and in haunted spaces. By prospering in the zombie apocalypse, mercilessly wielding her sword against humans and zombies alike, Michonne resists expectations of the spectral black body and the subjugated female body. I view this is as

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part of the "Strong Black Woman" motif as I read her resistance alongside that of other black women in haunting narratives.

What I find most intriguing about Michonne is her rank as the character who can most easily navigate the borders of life and death, faring extremely well in the apocalyptic landscape and often literally walking among the dead. Her walk is confident. Her stride is effortless. She has bound two zombies in chains, chopped off their arms, and ripped out their lower jaws. She pulls them alongside of her as she moves throughout the world, and the stench of their rotting corpses protects her from the threat of a zombie attack. With her pets at her side, chains clamped around their throats, the other zombies ignore her or do not notice her presence at all. This is a testament to how adept Michonne is at navigating this apocalyptic landscape; however, what is far more impressive, is the fact that she is sometimes able to walk with zombies even without her pets at her side or the smell of rotting flesh upon her as deterrent. It seems as if she is already one of them, as if she is already dead, and the zombies only have a taste for *living* flesh. Others try to walk among the dead like Michonne, but fail to achieve it a seamlessly as she does. Michonne herself is ghost; haunted and haunting, and I read her as one of the utmost abjections in the narrative, even as she is still living.

Michonne's zombie pets hold great significance on the show and in this reading of it as a haunting narrative, especially in drawing connections with early (mis)conceptions of the zombie and its relationship with the chattel slavery of black bodies. They are not merely her pets or simply a means of survival/resistance and (sometimes) protection, but they are also her ghosts; reminders of traumas in her past life.

Her backstory is a tragic one. Pre-apocalypse, Michonne was the mother of a beautiful three year old boy, Andre Anthony, and she smiled often, happy in love with her boyfriend, Mike. Before meeting up with the show's main group of survivors, she was with another group of people who struggled to adapt to the new world. However, she quickly learned how to survive in a way that others were not able to, quickly surpassing others with her unique but useful skill set and becoming masterful with a Katana blade. One day, while she was out gathering food and supplies, their camp was overrun by zombies. She returned to find Andre dead, and Mike and their friend, Terry, dying. They had been too high to defend themselves or Andre from the onslaught. In her rage and anguish, she let them turn rather than "killing" them and made them into her slaves. In this way, Michonne enacts her own perverse form of haunting. Rather than her own ghostly figure remaining in the world, this is haunting in which she has forced those who wronged her to exist as the pitiful undead in endless servitude to her. She *wants* to be haunted by them, and gets great pleasure from what she sees as their suffering.

These men, in their zombie form, are the remnants of her former life; her mourning veil. "They got what they deserved. They weren't human to begin with," she says to a friend when they ask about her captives (Episode 3.14, "Prey"). She chopped off their jaws and their arms – their means of consumption – in order to carry them with her. Keeping them in this state is her way of punishing them, and herself, for not saving Andre. It is not until later that she discovers their usefulness as camouflage, but when the pets are no longer an asset to her, she disposes of them without hesitation. She views their enslavement to her, roaming the world as empty rotting corpses, as a far worse

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punishment than material death. And I see this enslavement, this walking death, as a reflection of the social death of black bodies within the business of chattel slavery.

"After" (Episode 4.9) provides a glimpse into Michonne's former life. We see her chopping fresh vegetables in the kitchen of a lavish high rise, her dreads styled in big curls with golden embellishments. Mike is there with Terry. As she finishes chopping the veggies, her knife becomes a Katana blade and we know that this is not a flashback; this is a disjointed dream. Little Andre comes bounding playfully into the room and she takes him up in her arms, laughing and cooing. Her life is comfortable and she is happy with her little family, but when Andre suddenly disappears from her embrace, Michonne emits a deafening scream, a cry of sorrow and the searing pain of loss. Mike and Terry suddenly stand before her with bloody, tattered clothing and blank staring faces. Their arms are gone. They are becoming her undead walker pets before her eyes. She awakens from this nightmare in a car on the side of the road with zombies looming outside, but rather than lingering on the memory of loss, she shakes it off and immediately continues her lonely travels.

This episode comes immediately after the group has suffered a great defeat, having lost the prison to the chaos that their nemesis, The Governor, has brought. In the midst of the madness, she is separated from the group and makes the choice to go off on her own rather than seek them out, and this is how she eventually finds herself having nightmares alone in a car on the side of the road. She captures two new zombie pets and wanders into the woods, surrounded by a mob of walkers. Left alone with her thoughts, she feels the cutting pain of remembering Mike and Andre so vividly. She walks in a

daze, unmoved by the death around her, until she sees a walker who reminds her of herself, with dark skin and long braided hair. For long, uncomfortable moments, she shuffles along next to her until she can no longer stand the pregnant silence; a foreshadowing of what her own walking corpse might look like if she were to completely give up and let the world take her – if *she* were to haunt the world in the way that she forced Mike and Terry to. With a swiftness, she slices her doppelganger in two, then proceeds to take out the entire herd of over twenty walkers, including her new pets. Finally, she gives in to tears. It is at this moment that she announces her return to the world of the living, so to speak. This purging is her statement: *I am not dead. I will survive. I will resist*.

This is the only moment during her entire residence on the show in which we see Michonne come close to a breakdown. Many other characters have been granted emotional breakdowns throughout the show and the audience is given the opportunity to linger on these moments with the characters. However, Michonne's emotional state is nearly always formidable anger or rage, and she is always, always a "Strong Black Woman". In fact, the only time that we see Michonne smile is when she is "mothering" Carl, the teenaged son of the show's main character, Rick. The creative choice to construct Michonne's character in this way is perhaps, at least in some ways, due to social assumptions and historically racist ideas about the inherent "strength" of black women – a concept which is born out of the perceived animality of black women as well as a social acceptance of the black woman as impenetrable to the violences committed

against her by white and black men alike – and their willingness to mother white children while being forcibly separated from or forbidden to mother their own.

Black survival is *always* resistance, but Michonne's is extraordinary in this hellscape. While *all* of the living characters in the series are haunted by the presence of zombie/ghost subjects, Michonne is an especially haunted character, most notably by her zombie pets that she carries with her when she is first introduced and by the painful memory of losing her son. The story of reproductive loss is a familiar one in haunting narratives, and one that seems to be exclusive to women, as discussed in chapter two. However, given its history, I believe that reproductive violence against black women requires a divergent reading.

Bag of Bones relays the story of Sara Tidwell, a popular jazz singer in 1939 who experiences sexual, reproductive, and racist violence simultaneously. She is forced to witness the drowning of her daughter while she is held down and raped by white men who enact the rape as punishment and as a way of laying claim to black women's bodies as a whole. It's a terrifying scene. She is aggressively approached by a young man named Max Devore in the woods after a performance at the town fair. He becomes enraged after she rejects his sexual advances by pulling away from his grip, kicking his shins, and declaring, "Liking my music doesn't buy you a right to me." She is immediately thrown to the ground. Her legs are pried apart and her underwear ripped off. Devore spits his venom at her, "You think that you can sing the way you do and get away with it, huh? You think you and your kind can boil our blood and not give us what we want when you're done?" He slaps her across the face and draws blood from her mouth. All the

while, Sara resists, refusing to show any fear and even laughs in his face and calls him a "little boy". Her daughter, Kisha, peeks out from the behind a tree, watching tearfully as her mother lay in the grass with her arms pinned down beneath four white men while the fifth moves unwanted between her legs. Sara looks up to see the trembling little girl and tells her to run home, but the other men go after her at Devore's command. There can be no witnesses to their crime. They drown Kisha in Dark Score Lake nearby while her mother begs for the girl's life to be spared. Following her rape, Sara is murdered, but not before she curses her rapist and his accomplices with her dying breath: "You and your kin are *cursed*! You and your sons are gonna do to your daughters what you done to mine. With your own hands, you will murder your daughters, and with their own hands, your sons are gonna murder their daughters. A curse on you and yours, *until you're all gone!*" This is why Sara Tidwell haunts and this why her story is investigated in the present day by Joanna Noonan. After her own untimely death, Joanna's husband, Mike Noonan, continues her research and becomes the story's main focus. Again, we have a white body placed at the center of a film which draws upon the history of a particular violence committed against black bodies. Sara's rape distinctly calls up the violences of chattel slavery, and experiences tied to black women's bodies (though, of course, black men have also been victims of racialized sexual and reproductive violence in different ways) throughout the long history of the institution and its aftermath.

Mike Noonan's grandfather was present at the rape and murder of Sara Tidwell. He was among those who were cursed. When Joanna becomes pregnant with what could potentially be Mike's daughter, she begins to search for the secrets behind the curse of

Dark Score Lake. The story of Sara and Kisha's murders has been kept secret for over fifty years by the five men who witnessed and participated in it, but the story has come to light now that Mike has learned of it from one of the guilt-ridden men who was there when it happened. I find that it is important to distinguish that the reason that the mystery of Sara Tidwell is investigated is not to expose the racist violence committed against her and her child, but in order to save the descendants of the men who raped and murdered her and her daughter from suffering her vengeance.

Joanna haunts her husband from beyond the periphery, leaving him clues and giving him direction to help solve the Tidwell mystery and assuage the haunting. "Lie still bag of bones", she says to him over and over. At the film's climax, Mike deciphers that "Lie still bag of bones" is a hint which translates into "Lye will still her bag of bones". Armed with this information, he finds Sara and Kisha's bodies in a shallow grave in the woods and dissolves their remains with lye. And so, the denouement of the film and the resolution to Sara's haunting is the literal destruction of her remains and that of her child. Rather than bringing her story to light and contending with her pain, this narrative resolves the haunting by effectively silencing her ghost.

The Reconstruction era is the setting for Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. The story is very explicitly about the power of memory and historical traumas returning to haunt in the present. In 1873, Sethe and her daughter, Denver, become haunted by the manifestation of a ghost which has dwelled in their home for eighteen years. The haunting is not peculiar to anyone who experiences it. They accept it as a reality. No one is afraid. As soon as Paul D, an old friend of Sethe's, begins to step over the threshold of

her home, he can feel the malevolent presence. "What kind of evil you got in there?" he asks, as red pulsating auras dance across the walls. "It ain't evil," Sethe says. "Just sad." Visions begin to overpower him, and he briefly sees a blood covered memory of Sethe standing in a barn holding a dead baby to her breast.

Eighteen years ago, Sethe's slave master, a vicious man who the slaves call Schoolteacher, came to recapture her and her four children after she had escaped the Sweet Home plantation in Kentucky and survived long, arduous journey to Ohio, giving birth to Denver along the way. When Sethe spots Schoolteacher riding up on his horse, she takes up her babies, races to the barn behind the house, and slams the door. Her screams from within are earsplitting, and the people around the house stand in horror as Schoolteacher and two other white men approach the barn with shackles in their hands. When they finally throw open the door, they find Sethe in a murderous fury. The two boys lay unconscious in the straw, having been bludgeoned with a shovel. Sethe has sliced the throat of her first-born daughter and is attempting to kill the newborn Denver, but the men stop her. Schoolteacher is appalled by her actions and returns to Sweet Home with empty shackles. The boys lived, but later ran off and never returned. Denver also survived, but the baby with the blood pouring from her neck died in Sethe's arms.

It is this baby who returns to haunt Sethe as an incorporeal presence for eighteen years, and then as a tangible body after Paul D arrives at Sethe's home and tries to drive her angry spirit out. The ghost is a young woman with baby-soft skin and unruly hair, and she calls herself Beloved. "Why you call yourself Beloved?" Denver asks. "In the dark, my name Beloved…I small in that place…Hot…Nothing to breathe down there. No room

to move…It's a lot of people down there" (*Beloved*, 1999). We are left to make our own

conclusions about what this place is. "The dark", I think, is perhaps the world of the dead,

the dejected and the forgotten, or an intangible sphere of memories. Sethe has spent her

post-slavery life willfully trying to forget its horrors. She suppresses the memories, even

as the baby's presence terrorizes her household, and Beloved's physical manifestation

immediately following the arrival of Paul D, whom she has not seen since she left Sweet

Home just before killing the baby, forces her to confront those memories.

Sethe's choice to kill her own child rather than have her be subjected to the

horrors of slavery, an existence in a world that would have almost certainly ensured

Beloved's own racialized sexual assault and reproductive violence, is unquestionably an

act of resistance. "I put my babies where they'd be safe," she says to Paul D, explaining

her decision. "They ain't at Sweet Home. Schoolteacher ain't got 'em… I'd rather know

they at peace in heaven than livin' in a hell here on earth" (*Beloved*, 1999). Sethe sees

death as their only escape and as preferable to enslavement; better a material death than a

spiritual death. Beloved's haunting can indeed be read as an act of resistance against the

erasure or silencing of her memory. When Paul D attempts to push the baby's long-held

presence out the house, she returns with an even more intense bodily manifestation and

remains until she has completely consumed the house and drained Sethe emotionally,

physically, spiritually, mentally, and financially.

Sara Tidwell is equally as defiant in her resistance against Max Devore, when he

aggressively propositions her, during her rape, and after he orders Kisha's murder, is

what propels her transgenerational haunting. She refuses to let the men or their

descendants live in peace in her death, just as she refused to remain silent or compliant during her attack. When Mike Noonan's investigation leads him to the unmarked grave in the woods, Sara's spirit is combative, fighting to keep him from pouring the lye over the remains. Mike is only able to succeed after the appearance of Joanna's ghosts and her confrontation with Sara's ghost. Sara resists until the end, during her rape and murder and even as Mike is trying to subdue her ghost.

A racialized form of reproductive violence is evident in *Bag of Bones* and *Beloved*, but this is not the case with Michonne. So, it seems that Michonne is unique as a black female subject among these narratives, in that her character's traumas are not informed by her blackness. However, I see the characterization of Michonne as still being influenced by conceptions of black womanhood, emotionality, and pathology, as are Sara and Sethe. Michonne and Sethe are the haunted, while Sara is the haunter, but I still find it useful to consider these three characters together in this analysis. While the characters featured in chapters two and three seemed to require the abjection of death in order to enact resistance, these three black women – a fugitive slave, a 1930s jazz singer, and a zombie apocalypse survivor – are written as characters who are able to vehemently resist without the liberation of physical death.

III – Black Movement(s) and/as Zombie Contagion

Consider, now, the multitude of people of color coming together with a single driving mission – though with varying motivations and tactics – in the Black Lives Matter Movement: to dismantle the established order. Gatherings sprout up all across the U.S. and around the globe. The world rallies behind communities of color in America,

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standing in solidarity. In Syria, Israel, Iran, Spain, London, and so many other countries, people line the streets and declare with loud voices that "Black Lives Matter" and "The World is Watching." In these uprisings, clear connections can be drawn with the "Zombi" slave rebellions, as both are distinct forms of ardent resistance against racist institutions. In light of this (not so) recent outcry against state violence by people of color (and allies), bearing in mind the fear of blackness and the denial of black life which allows for the perpetual committing of state violence disproportionately against black bodies, and considering the ways in which the haunting imagery of these violences calls up the trauma of chattel slavery, I feel that this project is of timely inception.

As I and other scholars have observed, the ideal vision of middle class American life, stability, unity, and homeownership, are continually decimated in haunting narratives, and this is especially true in the zombie apocalypse. The racial Other zombie horde is not made up of individual bodies with multiple motivations and tactics. Rather, it is a single body with a single mission: to dismantle the established order. It has been read by some as resembling slave revolts, Civil Rights protests, and other political riots by black Americans. Since the emergence of protesters in the Black Lives Matter Movement, several white Conservatives have written strong opinion pieces slandering demonstrators, calling them variations of "savages", "animals", "monsters", and perhaps most peculiarly, "zombies". The "Ferguson Zombie Apocalypse", as it has been named, is triggering for spectators/witnesses in different ways. While some of us recall images from the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s – 1960s, others are reminded of fictional zombie contagions. Put more simply, some see this revolution – a crescendo of black

bodies – as a beginning or a rebirth, while others see this as the literal end of the world;

as an apocalypse which will interrupt the progress of whiteness. Like the ethereal specters

which I discussed in my second and third chapters, the zombie subject is also a ghostly

interruption. Their interruption is of "human progress"; a "progress" which is based on

white supremacist, heteropatriarchal, and capitalist ideals. Therefore, #BlackLivesMatter

and/as a zombie apocalypse, for many, becomes a literal and figurative (ghostly)

interruption. And it is ironic (for lack of a better word) that in the social imagination, this

movement and other revolutionary movements are viewed as such. Meanwhile, chattel

slavery continues to be thought of as nothing more than a blemish, even though it should

absolutely be regarded as a major historical interruption, displacing an entire race of

people.

Black movements which are not dictated or controlled by others are a threat to

and an invasion of whiteness and white spaces. It is neither surprising nor coincidental to

me that white Conservatives have referred to Black Lives Matter demonstrators as

savages, animals, monsters, and zombies. This reinforcement of the non-humanness of

blackness is purposeful. In the face of black citizens declaring their humanity and the

value of black life, those who benefit from racist (and speciesist) social systems must

redraw the lines to reconnect blackness with non-humanness. *Black bodies never get to*

be human. Black bodies never get to be alive.

> Zombies have been regarded both as creatures of horror and creatures of despair,
> objects to be alternately feared and pitied. The very nature of the creature, a
> voiceless being lacking a will and intellect of its own, made the zombie a blank

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slate upon which the concerns, hopes, and fears of white Americans could be written (Kordas, 15-16).

Black bodies, too, are often conceived of as "creatures of horror and despair" which are both "feared and pitied." In the sociological imagination, the black body is "a voiceless being" without will or intellect. It is the "blank slate" upon which white America writes its "concerns, hope, and fears." In this way, black bodies become easily imagined as zombies through a white ascendant understanding. Again, it is the revolt of restless and (rightfully) enraged black bodies against an oppressive hegemony which incites fear in white subjects that the zombie is a force that will seize from them their privilege and oppression over the racial Other; an abject and uncanny source of dreaded horror which seeks to break down the established social order.

Michonne's perpetual movement/unrest in the world of *The Walking Dead* is a significant form of resistance for her character. Whenever she is still, which is seldom, she remembers past traumas and mourns her losses, which makes her more vulnerable to her dangerous surroundings. She is continually moving about in a world that has historically policed her movement as a black subject. The kinetic movement of black bodies in the world is always an invasion of whiteness, because public space is read as white space. The movement of Trayvon Martin through the suburban neighborhood, the movement of Michael Brown on the street, the movement of Eric Garner and CeCe MacDonald on city sidewalks, the movement of Marlene Pinnock alongside the highway; the movement of black bodies must be arrested because it is a trespassing of white

property. In the apocalyptic world, Michonne's constant movement and errant survival through this movement is epic, undeniable resistance.

In our material realm, this kinetic movement of black bodies has resulted in the ideological movement of #BlackLivesMatter. This secondary movement is also an invasion of whiteness and an interruption of ideologies of white supremacy which allows for the pervasiveness of white privilege and the genocide of black bodies. This ideological movement in turn sparks an abundance of physical movement by throngs of black bodies onto streets and sidewalks, blocking highways and forming barricades in front of government buildings, holding up signs and wearing "controversial" shirts and hoodies, further invading and trespassing upon whiteness and white spaces in a profound statement which spreads throughout the nation and across the globe, as well as in internet spaces with hashtags, blogs, and information and images often not disseminated by mainstream media. In watching Michonne fluently wade through the unrelenting surge of zombies in *The Walking Dead*, and in reading the thoughts of white Conservatives who refer to black protestors as animals and zombies, I return to this thought again and again: these various forms of black movement – kinetic, ideological, political – each inform one another in such significant ways, and are all so profoundly forms of resistance against oppressive and racist institutions. In this work, Michonne's perpetual movement in the world of *The Walking Dead* cannot be ignored, just as the revolutionary (in)corporeal movement(s) of black bodies cannot be ignored in our reality. Black movement and black survival is *always* resistance, and I read Michonne's survival through perpetual movement as extraordinary resistance.

However, in view of this interpretation, I find that it is imperative to pose whether a return to a pre-apocalyptic world is something that would be beneficial to a figure such as Michonne. It could be asserted that Michonne's immediate distrust of the "welcoming" community of Woodbury is not only due to its tyrannous leader, The Governor, nor is her constant movement exclusively about her survival or an intentional effort to escape ugly memories. Rather, she resists the idea of stability or a return to "normalcy" because such a return – a re-establishing of the dominant social order – would not make possible a less violent life for her. In fact, it almost certainly promises the insidious violences of existing as a black/female subject moving throughout a world categorized and evaluated by gender and race, which values whiteness and maleness above all else, and which perpetually criminalizes her existence and attempts to arrest her movement. After all, "normalcy" means to exist in a world which has regularly produced victims like Sethe and Sara Tidwell and their respective murdered daughters, and which excuses the deaths of Mike Brown and Eric Garner through the absurdly maintained doctrine that black bodies are always dangerous/monstrous. Additionally, the systematic killing of black youth is often read as reproductive violence against black parents, and in my opinion, it should always be understood as such.

We might read Michonne's lack of desire for "normalcy" as one of the moments which Toni Morrison spoke of in *Playing in the Dark*; a moment in which the character leaps from the page – or, rather, from the screen in this instance – to create meaning which was most likely not intended or considered by its creator, but a meaning which is substantial and illuminating, nonetheless. The new apocalyptic world, while fraught with

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extraordinary dangers, can in many ways be understood as less violent towards persons of color than our pre-apocalyptic reality, a harsh truth which the Black Lives Matter Movement continually reminds us of. Indeed, people of color have always lived in a disjointed reality, in which they have been disproportionately criminalized and targeted for/by state violences, in which their movement – in any form – has been and continues to be seen as inherently dangerous and warranting arrest.

Concluding Remarks

This thesis has been a glimpse into the world of the abject and the (un)knowable. I have wandered through haunted spaces with the intention of revealing their dreadfulness and splendor, and I have emerged with a deeper understanding of death and ghosts in haunting narratives. These filmic representations have been my comfort and my terror at various moments throughout this work, and I will forever remember them as nightmarish disturbances and inspirations. Inhabiting spaces which are both of this world and the afterworld, these phantasms are indeed the known and unknown, and yet, their abject presence is undoubtedly revealing of our worldly ideas regarding violence, victimization, and injustice. Connecting social phenomena in our material world with the hauntings of gendered and racialized subjects in the haunting narrative, I have explored themes of ghostly interruptions, unresolvable injustices, and death offering the possibility of resistance for (certain) marginalized bodies.

The nature of this project, conversing with the dead, has allowed for the exploration of ideas about gender, race, and victimization, drawing connections between social ideologies and ghostly manifestations on the screen, particularly ghosts who haunt

as retaliation against gendered and racialized violences. And it is often death which

functions as the *possibility* for this retaliation. For Megumi, Candyman, and others, death

becomes the possibility for rebelling against patriarchal systems which allow for the

continuance of sexual and reproductive gender violences against the female body, and

white supremacist systems which encourage and thrive through the dehumanization of

black bodies. I ultimately contend that ideas about gendered bodies and performativity

are foundational to the vengeful ghost haunting narrative, that ideas about violence are

always-already present in conversations about gender, and that ideas about gender are

always-already present in depictions of violence. I offer this argument in consideration of

the constant depiction of women as victims and men as victimizers in horror films,

producing characters such as Megumi and Jennet who can only retaliate in their ghostly

form in response sexual and reproductive violences. Not only that, but the continued

imagery of hauntings concerning black subjects as a phenomenon which can only occur

following racist violence in connection with chattel slavery and which can only be

brought to light through white knowledge production also presents a clear opportunity for

an investigation of ideas of blackness, and whiteness in relation to it, in supernatural

horror. The haunting of Megumi and Jennet looks markedly different than that of Sara

Tidwell or Beloved, while the haunting of black subjects like Candyman or Mama Cecile

and Papa Justify manifests differently than the haunting presence of the zombie/racial

Other in apocalyptic narratives. We conceive of ghostly subjects and those who they

haunt through their gendered and racial identities, and these conceptions reify already

constructed normalized ideas about gender and race, and violence and victimization. In

these films, ghosts are not only attached to spaces, but they are often also attached to living bodies. They latch on to people and objects so that they move throughout many spaces. The hauntings cannot be contained and they are revealing of the ways in which the abject presence of ghosts revives past traumas.

We are all, I believe, haunted by ghosts of history, but none are more haunted than those of us who live in closer proximity to death and violence than the privileged figures who benefit from patriarchal and white supremacist social systems and institutions which relegate certain gendered and racialized subjects to spaces of social death and subjugation. Our place in this world can perhaps be most easily understood through the examining of this expanse – the immediacy or remoteness of death and socially/state-sanctioned violences – and the possibility for such an understanding has crucially motivated this exploration of ghostly subjects which are distinctly marked by gender and race in significant ways. These marginalized subjects are, by virtue of their "inferior" social standing and connection with a history of state-sanctioned violence, always haunted and always haunting. The texts which I have discussed provide audiences with a convenient means to enthrall themselves with narratives which are profoundly about stories which have gone untold for too far long; stories about trauma and memory, violence and injustice, and the ultimate abjection of the ghosts of those who our society has long sought to contain within oppressive borders. In other words, haunting narratives present opportunities for the voices of the dead to be heard and for us to engage with the stories that they have to tell us. Legacies, that might otherwise be lost or forgotten, live on through them.

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Haunting is a constituent element of modern social life. It is neither pre modern superstition nor individual psychosis; it is a generalizable social phenomenon of great import. To study social life one must confront the ghostly aspects of it (Gordon, 7).

Nina Simone devastates me. Her voice, to me, feels like shards of glass. It slices at your skin and tries to crawl inside of you. Since the moment that I first heard her melancholy delivery of "Strange Fruit," heard that sweetness and agony all those years ago, I have loved it intensely. And the same is true of Lauryn Hill's "Black Rage." It is an intense love, but it is a difficult love. Nina Simone's description of her song as "ugly" is perfect. "Strange Fruit" and "Black Rage" are indeed quite ugly, but it is necessary ugliness and necessary truth. My love for them – my struggle with loving such ugly, ugly things – moves in tandem with my struggle in loving haunting narratives. They are of that same ugliness, telling of violence and injustice, historical and generational traumas, wars waged on the bodies of the female Other and the racial Other, of which I am both.

If I have achieved nothing else with this work, I hope that I have convincingly argued that there are such things as ghosts – apparitions, phantasms, wraiths, spirits, ghouls, specters – and that they haunt us all. The past itself is a revenant, reviving the history of violences transpired; a ghost which inhabits our social and individual spaces alike, and demands that we look upon its chilling visage. Between the boundaries of life and death, they are the (in)corporeal, the (un)known, (dis)embodied abjection. Here, at the end of this thesis, I hope that there can be no debate as to whether the ghosts are real or imagined; no question that they haunt the ground we walk on.

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APPENDIX A

FILMOGRAPHY

1. *Shutter*. Dir. Masayuki Ochiai. Perf. Joshua Jackson. Rachel Taylor. 20th Century
   Fox Home Entertainment, 2008. Film.

2. *The Woman in Black*. Dir. James Watkins. Perf. Daniel Radcliffe. Liz White. Cross
   Creek Pictures, 2012. Film.

3. *Candyman*. Dir. Bernard Rose. Perf. Virginia Madsen. Tony Todd. Propaganda
   Films, 1993. Film.

4. *The Skeleton Key*. Dir. Iain Softley. Perf. Kate Hudson. Peter Sarsgaard. Gena
   Rowlands. Jon Hurt. Joy Bryant. Universal Pictures, 2005. Film.

5. *The Walking Dead*. Dir. Frank Darabont. Greg Nicotero. Scott Gimple. Perf. Andrew
   Lincoln. Danai Gurira. Norman Reedus. Steven Yuen. American Movie Classics
   (AMC), 2010. Television.

6. *Bag of Bones*. Dir. Perf. Pierce Brosnon. Anika Noni Rose. Melissa George.
   Headline Pictures, 2011. Television/Film.

7. *Beloved*. Dir. Jonathan Demme. Perf. Oprah Winfrey. Danny Glover. Kimberly Elise
   Thandi Newton. Harpo Films, 1999. Film.

8. *Night of the Living Dead*. Dir. George Romero. Perf. Duane Jones. Judith O'Dea.
   Image Ten, 1968. Film

9. *White Zombie*. Dir. Victor Halperin. Perf. Béla Lugosi, Madge Bellamy, Joseph
   Cawthorn, John Harron, Robert Frazer. RKO Studios, 1932. Film

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10. *I Walked With A Zombie*. Dir. Jacques Tourneur. Perf. Frances Dee. Tom Conway. James Ellison. RKO Radio Pictures, 1943. Film.

11. *A Nighttmare on Elm Street*. Dir. Wes Craven. Perf. Robert Englund. Heather Langenkamp. Johnny Depp. New Line Cinema, 1984. Film.

12. *Child's Play*. Dir. Tom Holland. Perf. Catherine Hicks. Chris Sarandon. Alex Vincent. United Artists, 1988. Film.

13. *6 Souls*. Dir. Mans Marlind. Perf. Julianne Moore. Jonathan Rys Meyers. Jeffrey DeMunn. NALA Films, 2010. Film.

14. *100 Feet*. Dir. Eric Red. Perf. Famke Jansen. Bobby Cannavale. Ed Westwick. Grand Illusions Entertainment, 2008. Film.

15. *Insidious Chapter 2*. Dir. James Wan. Perf. Patrick Wilson. Rose Byrne. Barbara Hershey. Film District, 2013. Film.

16. *Gothika*. Dir. Mathieu Kassovitz. Perf. Halle Berry. Charles S. Dutton. Robert Downey, Jr. Penelope Cruz. Columbia Pictures Corporation, 2003. Film.

17. *The Ward*. Dir. John Carpenter. Perf. Amber Heard. Mammie Gumner. Danielle Panabaker. FilmNation Entertainment, 2010. Film.

18. *Mama*. Dir. Andrés Muschietti. Perf. Jessica Chastain. Nikolaj Coster-Waldau. Megan Charpentier. Universal Pictures, 2013. Film.

APPENDIX B

THE MONSTROUS/PATHOLOGICAL FEMININE
IN THE HAUNTING NARRATIVE

Film	Sexual/Male-Perpetrated Violence	Reproductive Violence/Child Loss	Mental Instability/Impairment
Shutter (2008)	X		X
The Woman in Black (2012)		X	X
Mama (2013)		X	X
The Grudge (2004)	X	X	X
What Lies Beneath (2001)	X		
Lady in White (1988)	X	X	X
Last Kind Words (2012)	X		
Gothika (2003)	X		X
Stir of Echoes (1999)	X	X	X
The Pact (2012)	X		
The Ring (2005)		X	X
Dark Water (2002)		X	
The Ward (2010)	X		X
Feardotcom (2002)	X		
The Victim (2006)	X		