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Physics of Blackness

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Quantum Baldwin and the Multidimensionality of Blackness

What do James Baldwin and the quantum—a discrete quantity of energy whose non-Newtonian behavior has made it one of the foci of theoretical particle physics—have in common? Notably, in the introduction to their volume *James Baldwin: America and Beyond*, Cora Kaplan and Bill Schwarz produce Baldwin as a puzzle, difficult to categorize based on his quantum-like, peripatetic movement: “In no department of his life was Baldwin ever won by the concept of ‘a straight line.’ We can see evidence of this in his prose . . . adding subclause to subclause and detour to detour. Even so, when Baldwin was alive many critics were keen to describe the trajectory of his writing life as if it had traveled along a straight line, from A to B.”¹ In other words, scholars have mistakenly used a wholly Newtonian spacetime to interpellate a quantum Baldwin, a misreading that may be limited to (mis)understanding not simply the spacetimes of Baldwin’s travel and written expression but the multidimensionality of his Blackness: “For too long one Baldwin has been pitted against another Baldwin, producing a series of polarities that has skewed our understanding: his art against his politics; his fiction against his nonfiction; his early writings against late writings; American Baldwin against European Baldwin; Black Baldwin against queer Baldwin.”² Kaplan and Schwarz pose both an argument and a challenge here that *Physics of Blackness* and this chapter specifically embrace: James Baldwin is an exemplar of a multidimensional Blackness that defies any attempt to make it follow a “straight line.” In addition to arguing that reading Baldwin’s career as a straight line produces a distorted and inaccurate portrayal, the editors assert that attempting to (mis)interpellate Baldwin through a linear spacetime can in effect “split” him into several single-dimensional selves. This chapter argues that using both linear spacetime and Epiphenomenal spacetime can help to reveal the intersections of those selves—the multidimensionality of his Blackness.

These valences of Baldwin are not in conflict with but instead intersect with the Black identities he explores in the essays in *Notes of a Native Son*. As this chapter will show, *Notes* provides a model for interpellating Blackness as multidimensional, which, in this context, means that “Black Baldwin” is not distinct from but intersects with “American” and “European” and (among other collective identities) “queer Baldwin.” According to Kaplan and Schwarz, approaching Baldwin as a set of intersections is not only productively insightful and more accurate than a strictly linear interpellation; it may also be the best way to honor his own self-interpellation: “[Baldwin’s] eye was always on the potential for establishing connections between contrary phenomena—even as their contrariness remained in place—rather than forcing disconnections and retreating to encampments. If we wish to make sense of Baldwin, we must do the same.” We can do the same by beginning, as the reader might have already anticipated, with theoretical particle physics and more specifically with Lisa Randall’s theory of multidimensionality.

As noted before, Baldwin’s “quantum” movement defies accurate graphing through a Newtonian spacetime. Baldwin does not always follow the Middle Passage epistemology’s trajectory but instead pursues other dimensions of his identity. Conceiving of collective identities as dimensions helps us, as they multiply, better understand the endless valences of Blackness in the Diaspora and intersects us with current theorizations in particle physics. In other words, interpellating identities free of linearity not only matters to Kaplan, Schwarz, myself, and a few others but in fact somewhat surprisingly connects us with attempts to understand nonlinearity as the true nature of our physical universe. Apparently, however, the physicist Lisa Randall does not find this surprising at all, as she explores and explains this multidimensionality in theoretical physics in part through the metaphor of human identities, my principal concern in this chapter.

Just as Baldwin belies any attempt to impose an “A to B” interpellation on him, so the behavior of subatomic particles as explained by quantum theory defies Newtonian laws of motion and gravity so thoroughly that physicists such as Randall have pursued the possibility of there being another spacetime that would unite and explain these dimensions. As I noted in the introduction, physicists have long sought a Grand Unified Theory: a set of common denominators that would capture, for example, the radically different behavior of subatomic particles and larger material bodies within the

same theoretical framework. *Physics of Blackness* argues that, in discursive interpellations of Blackness, such a unification is achieved by understanding the individual in the “now” as the site of intersection (rather than as a common denominator by which all Blackness can be subsumed).

In chapters 1 and 2, I showed how the dominant assumption that collective identity is constructed through historically based linear progress narratives creates a cognitive dissonance between these collective epistemologies and most Black individuals at various moments of interpellation. In Randall’s *Warped Passages: Unraveling the Mysteries of the Universe’s Hidden Dimensions*, our inability to imagine other dimensions might be explained by our having been falsely informed about the dimensions of our universe since birth:

The disinformation campaign began back in the crib, which first introduced you to three spatial dimensions. . . . Since that time, physical laws—not to mention common sense—have bolstered the belief in three dimensions, quelling any suspicion that there might be more.

But spacetime could be dramatically different from anything you’ve ever imagined. No physical theory we know of dictates that there should only be three dimensions of space. Dismissing the possibility of extra dimensions before even considering their existence might be very premature. Just as “up-down” is a different direction from “left-right” or “forward-backward” other completely new dimensions could exist in our cosmos. Although we can’t see them with our eyes or feel them with our fingertips, additional dimensions of space are a logical possibility.³

One can find a rough parallel here between Randall’s theory of “crib disinformation” and the claim of this project that discourses on collective identity, in this case specifically Blackness, also misinform our interpellations. While Randall focuses on how “common sense” blinds us to the possibilities of other dimensions, this project argues that it is the way in which we imagine and deploy linear spacetime in our dominant discourses that can “blind” us to interpellating discourses on collective identities that defy this linearity, such as James Baldwin’s *Notes*. As Kaplan and Schwarz point out, Baldwin has been split off into many “Baldwins” who possess only two to three dimensions each. The goal of their anthology, *James*

Baldwin: America and Beyond, is the goal of this chapter: to interpellate Baldwin through as many dimensions of Blackness as his postwar discourse manifests.

This is the only proper way to interpellate James Baldwin, a celebrated writer whose work spans African Diaspora literature and history as well as U.S., European, and postcolonial histories, literatures, and philosophies, thereby extending his interpellation far beyond the dimensions of Middle Passage Blackness, even as he connects to it. Randall admits that it is difficult to discuss the possibility of multiple extrasensory dimensions without first defining what a dimension is. To explain how dimensions correspond to qualities to be described or quantities to be measured, Randall cites human identities: “When you peg someone as one-dimensional, you actually have something rather specific in mind: you mean that the person has only a single interest. For example, Sam, who does nothing but sit at home watching sports, can be described with just one piece of information.”⁴ Randall then provides a simple timeline (an x graph, or simply a horizontal line) to “map” Sam through the hours he spends watching television. She then contrasts “Sam” to “Icarus Rushmore III,” whom she plots through an “xyz graph” (resembling a cube with three “dimensions”: age, residence, and number of times Icarus drives his car). What should we do, however, to map the dimensions of “Athena,” Ike’s sister?

An eleven-year-old who reads avidly, excels at math, keeps abreast of current events, and raises pet owls. You might want to plot this too. In that case, Athena would have to be plotted as a point in a five-dimensional space with axes corresponding to age, number of books read per week, average math test score, number of minutes spent reading the newspaper per days, and number of owls she owns. However, I’m having trouble drawing such a graph. It would require five-dimensional space, which is very hard to draw.

Nonetheless, in an abstract sense, there exists a five-dimensional space with a collection of five numbers, such as (11, 3, 100, 45, 4), which tells us that Athena is eleven, that she reads three books on the average each week, that she never gets a math question wrong, that she reads the newspaper for forty-five minutes each day, and that she has four owls at the moment. With these five numbers, I’ve described Athena. If you knew her, you could recognize her from this point in five dimensions.⁵

If one applies Randall's argument to Blackness, the case for more than three dimensions becomes quite clear, especially when we consider the broad and diverse panoply of extant discourses. It also reflects the complaint of discourses on "post-Blackness," which, I would argue, is most often expressed not as a *denial* of some dimensions (such as the Middle Passage) but as the desire to *add* more.⁶ This chapter works with Baldwin's critically acclaimed *Notes* because it offers an opportunity to consider the meaning of being a U.S. Black in the postwar world from multiple points in spacetime and finds him intersecting with other explicitly postwar discourses from the African and Black Diaspora that interpellate themselves through a postwar lens: Ivoirian folklorist and administrator Bernard Dadié's *Un Nègre à Paris*; playwright and novelist Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy*; and *Unsere Opfer's* (*Our Victim's*) oral histories of World War II in the words of Black African and Black Diaspora veterans from Mali, Senegal, Brazil, and Surinam.

This chapter shows how these writers interpellate themselves and thus their Blackness multidimensionally through a combined use of linear progress narratives and a postwar epistemology that reflects on the "now." They specifically do so in a way that invokes the first of the aforementioned Randall quotes that uses the concept of "directions" to explain our universe, whereby each direction corresponds to a distinct dimension. Linear spacetime, I argue, is largely limited to exploring only one direction mentioned in Randall, "up-down"; when interpellating Blackness as a collective identity, "up-down" denotes a vertical, hierarchical, and specifically heteropatriarchal frame. As this chapter will show, Baldwin himself sometimes invokes this direction alone: his exclusion of women from the vast majority of his essays in *Notes* and his tendency to use the Black male body to denote Blackness aligns with the most traditional uses of the Middle Passage epistemology.

At the same time, especially in *Notes*, Baldwin uses the moment of the postwar era to reinterpret Blackness. In his first two chapters, largely a denunciation of Richard Wright's *Native Son* and protest novels more generally, Baldwin condemns any interpellation of Blackness that *reduces* it to *only* a series of struggles and defeats against a white racism that once again successfully denies Blackness its "humanity." In other words, Blackness must be read outside of the wholly vertical, in which it can be interpellated only as the object of and, at best, a reactor against white racist agency.

In the last four chapters of *Notes*, but most specifically in "Encounter on the Seine: Black Meets Brown," Baldwin uses what I identify as a

horizontal interpellation of Blackness; that is, the African American encounters white men and Black men not as his superiors or inferiors but rather as peers who are equally disoriented by the postwar moment and who wonder to what degree the old hierarchies are still or will continue to be in play. This uncertainty between peers produces distinct dimensions—both horizontal *and* vertical—of Blackness in the postwar moment.

While I explore this topic more thoroughly later, a multidimensional interpellation of Blackness is also predicated on the assumption that Blackness possesses agency and involves choices. This does not mean that the Black subject is omnipotent; somehow to blame for his, her, or their social, political, and cultural marginalizations; or implicitly capable of ultimately overcoming any and all obstacles. It is instead to argue—as many textured and nuanced scholarly studies that interpellate Blackness through a Middle Passage epistemology have shown—that, above all else, Black subjects perform the full range of human emotions and actions and suffer from no genetic or biological proscription from any aspect of humanity due to the “impediment” of their racial designation. Rather than compose a laundry list of questionable behaviors, the goal of *Physics of Blackness* is to underscore the astonishing globality of Blackness, its location in so many spacetimes across the world and historical eras.

Notes of a Native Son collects published and previously unpublished essays that are nonetheless grouped into three coherent categories. Section I introduces the collection with three essays that focus on cultural tropes and creative works—Richard Wright’s *Native Son* and its purported conflation with Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*; racist tropes and their life and death in the contemporary moment of the mid-1950s; and Otto Preminger’s *Carmen Jones*, starring Dorothy Dandridge. Section II “returns” us to Baldwin’s New York childhood and experiences with a vicious, pervasive, and, he argues, potentially fatal racism.

The last section of *Notes* offers the greatest number of dimensions for interpellating Blackness given its emphasis on the postwar moment and horizontal interpellations. At the same time, Baldwin’s failure to interpellate women conceals a highly relevant dimension of Blackness in that moment. Yet because these chapters, especially “Encounter,” stress horizontal intersections with other postwar Blacks who might be traveling through Paris/Europe in those discursive moments, I use this frame to connect “Encounter” to Black discourses that could in fact have intersected with *Notes*’s thoughtfully peregrinating narrator.

Notes begins with a withering critique of Richard Wright and his masterpiece *Native Son* in “Everybody’s Protest Novel,” in which Baldwin excoriates Wright for having created a world-famous postwar characterization of Blackness that, to Baldwin, is little better than the nightmare figurations of white liberals and conservatives alike:

Bigger is Uncle Tom’s descendant, flesh of his flesh, so exactly opposite a portrait that, when the books are placed together, it seems that the contemporary Negro novelist and the dead New England woman are locked together in a deadly, timeless battle. . . . Bigger’s tragedy is not that he is cold or Black or hungry, not even that he is American, Black; but that he has accepted a theology that denies him life, that he admits the possibility of his being sub-human and feels constrained, therefore, to battle for his humanity. . . . The failure of the protest novel lies in its rejection of life, the human being [whose] categorization alone is real and cannot be transcended.⁷

Baldwin’s use of time is informative here: bigger is *not* the product of another time, but he is nevertheless a direct, linear descendant of Uncle Tom, thus emphasizing linear descent as the flaw. This linear descent is then linked to a “rejection of life” whereby the human is disallowed from transcending its category even as *time* is transcended by “deadly, timeless battle.” By understanding himself solely as a fixed effect created by a long series of causes and effects (as well as the same simple one: vicious racism creates the Black Other), according to Baldwin, Bigger restricts his own interpellation of Blackness to such a degree that he places himself outside of the category of human altogether. Whether slave or nominally free, the rebellious Black male is fated for death at the hands of a racist, white, capitalist structure.

Baldwin especially dislikes Bigger’s peaceful resignation to his impending electrocution because it is a choice that is no choice at all—falling into line with the grand history of oppressor against oppressed rather than, as Wright’s Bigger opines in the final chapters, the first time in which he feels he is “free.” Because Bigger’s “choice” is a fixed telos within his narrow self-interpellation, Baldwin rejects the possibility that this choice is anything more than a hollow signifier, empty of a true human being’s intention.

When a linear spacetime epistemology begins, as many Black diasporic epistemologies do, with object status—being enslaved, colonized,

relocated, and so on—the laws of cause and effect make it difficult to reverse the binary that is set in place, because oppression is asserted as the cause of all historical events (effects) in the timeline, excepting those events that are caused by a Black (resistant) reaction to an oppressor's action. Yet because it is a reaction to an action, we are again returned to a weird and dismally fixed race-ing of this Black physics, in which whiteness always retains the originary agency and, because origins dominate a linear narrative, white racism is always the central actor in Black lives now condemned to the status of reactors.

If, however, we add Epiphenomenal time to our interpellation here, the “now” is *foregrounded* by agency because Blackness begins as its own interpellation in the moment. At the same time, this moment is nuanced because it involves a potentially endless set of negotiations. Instead of the Black Subject being moved down a line through cause and effect as in a strictly linear interpellation, the Subject in the moment is variously informed by a variety of external and internal stimuli (what is witnessed and what happens; what is thought and felt) that also can intersect with one another. For example, I might watch an episode of a television show in one moment and laugh uproariously at what I find to be a daring but insightful joke about racism; in another moment, watching the same show and hearing the same joke, I might well have forgotten my previous reaction (or remember it, in whatever valence) and find myself ambivalent about or offended by the joke. In other words, I do not move through the world reacting in the same way to the same stimuli all the time—and perhaps this is because the stimuli are never the same because if not the space then the time has shifted (even if I am watching from my same place on the couch, I am doing so on different days).

This is both liberating and problematic to our lives, in which intellectual and behavioral consistency is more highly valued than its less predictable performances. It means that one does not always behave as one wishes, and for the Black Subject who seeks to adhere to a Middle Passage interpellation, the clarity of this linear timeline is often belied by the familiar complexity of lived moments. Similarly, the last paragraph of “Everybody’s Protest Novel” asserts agency as an ambivalent possession, but a possession nonetheless: “Our humanity is our burden, our life; we need not battle for it; we need only to do what is infinitely more difficult—that is, accept it.”⁸

While the “good news” here is that agency is intrinsic to interpellations effected through Epiphenomenal spacetimes, it comes with a series

of caveats that are less welcome. Agency here is not tied to concrete outcomes (born of concrete goals) but to the choice to notice and wonder at differences that the linear progress narrative struggles to wholly interpellate on its own, as these differences would encourage the exploration of other collective identities that at times split Blacks from one another. Unlike the moral and ethical dimension that tends to accompany such claims of the self-realized individual in Western philosophy—whether in Plato, Descartes, Hegel, or Nietzsche—the World War II/postwar epistemology does not understand “agency” or self-interpellation as a necessary good or an ethical triumph over humanity’s more “animal” or reactive nature. Rather, it understands the act of interpellation as simply beginning in the self (barring traumatic interpellation), and because interpellation begins with the self, it is not a reactive action but one of “choice.”

I tread on the concept of choice very carefully, especially given the long train of connotations and denotations it brings to Western histories of oppression. Individual choice is often understood as the cornerstone of Western democracy, with free will as its *sine qua non*. Here I separate choice from free will because in Western philosophy free will often assumes a “neutral” spacetime in which one can identify one’s truest, purest desire and act on it, unencumbered by “outside” influences. *Physics of Blackness* understands choice as the fulcrum of agency and denotes choice as the moment of interpellation that is not “free” of, but in fact intensely informed by, whatever in the physical and mental environment one notices in that moment. Given this multiplicity of ever-changing factors and the presence of choice in every moment (even when the choice is rather dismal or likely to lead to the same damaging result), choice—like the concept of free will—holds that human beings are ultimately unpredictable (one cannot be sure what someone will do in every single moment) rather than rationally predictable through the logic of cause and effect.

Lisa Randall’s *Warped Passages* discusses how quantum mechanics (a series of formulas that have influenced a range of scientific disciplines, including, of course, particle physics) breaks from “classical” physics by relying on probability formulas to predict the path of an individual subatomic particle. She notes that “quantum mechanics tells us that a particle can take any possible path from its starting point to endpoint. . . . Unlike classical physics, quantum mechanics does not assign a particle a definite trajectory.”⁹

While *Physics of Blackness* focuses mainly on interpellating the multidimensional manifestation of Blackness within influential creative, scholarly,

and media-borne discourses, this argument admittedly spills over into theorizing the subject's performance within the quotidian. As in Randall's description, the moment of Epiphenomenal interpellation for an individual, even when juxtaposed with the linear, bears similarities to the behavior of a subatomic particle. One makes an educated guess but cannot absolutely predict how, when, and why that individual will interpellate in that moment. To make matters yet more confusing, the individual is not a cohesive, coherent unit but a multidimensional accretion of attitudes and feelings, some of which might contradict others. "Choice," therefore, is not the ability of a discretely bounded mind or body but rather the inevitable unpredictability of "the one" who is also "the many." This is a scene of neither defeat nor triumph but simply a moment of endless possibilities, not all of which are positive or desirable.

Yet unlike Louis Althusser's famous example of being hailed by the police, according to which interpellation verges on the involuntary (the response is wholly reactive), here the act of interpellation is unpredictable. Because the postwar epistemology holds that the individual is *not* merely an accumulation of a series of linear events in the past, there is only the "now," and there are endless possibilities in any given moment. To be sure, some reactions would attract more bettors than others, but this *choice*, this possibility of reading oneself or not reading oneself into any number of collective identities that occur in the moment, is what distinguishes the postwar epistemology from the Middle Passage epistemology and, I would argue, is specifically what Baldwin's *Notes* asserts so strikingly and defends repeatedly.

The rejection of Blackness in "Many Thousands Gone" opens with an interpellation of the Black (male) subject in the United States as mistaking himself for a "series of shadows, self-created, intertwining, which we now helplessly battle," and one that may "not really exist." Then however, Baldwin frames this moment not as a specifically "Black" problem but as a human problem that imperils all subjectivities in this postwar moment: "Our dehumanization of the Negro then is indivisible from our dehumanization of ourselves; our loss of our own identity is the price we pay for our annulment of his."¹⁰ "Many Thousands Gone" then asserts that the true obstacle in the forward path of this bright young generation is mistaking themselves for objects of a history of white racism rather than as subjects in the "now":

Aunt Jemima and Uncle Tom are dead, their places taken by a group of amazingly well-adjusted young men and women, almost as dark, but ferociously literate, well-dressed and scrubbed, who are never laughed at, who are not likely ever to set foot in a cotton or tobacco field. . . . Some are bitter and these come to grief; some are unhappy, but, continually presented with the evidence of a better day to come soon, are speedily becoming less so. Most of them care nothing whatever about race, they want only their proper place in the sun and the right to be left alone, like any other citizen of the republic.¹¹

Baldwin establishes that the self-determination of the individual can produce a Blackness that effectively breaks from its history of objecthood (figures of ridicule; slaves and sharecroppers), a move that, he notes, is very “American” in its self-generated agency: “The making of an American begins at that point where he himself rejects all other ties, any other history, and himself adopts the vesture of his adopted land.”¹² Rather than switch to another linear history, the rhetoric here implies that the switch originates in the adoption, a taking on, or interpellation, of the “vesture,” literally and metaphorically clothing, a costume that indicates performance. Given the conjugation in the present tense (“adopts”), Blackness is interpellated through the “now” rather than through a cause-and-effect history. It is also, I would argue, produced as a choice.

Like my own argument about choice, which differentiates it from the concept of free will, the ability to choose does not preclude the oppressive intrusions of psychic, emotional, and intellectual violence faced by Blacks. The intimate details of the potential and pitfalls of such a moment of interpellation achieve all the more poignancy when the essays of Section II reveal the highly personal parallels between the national portrait of “Many Thousands” and the harrowing narratives of Baldwin’s life before Paris in “The Harlem Ghetto,” “Journey to Atlanta,” and “Notes of a Native Son.” Here, his reaction to the virulent and unrelenting racism of whites threatens to deprive him of his humanity altogether, and small wonder: if one always interpellates one’s Blackness in moments of anti-Black racism, the resulting identity is fraught with tension, anxiety, and hatred.

In the last essay of this section, Baldwin recounts a year in New Jersey in which the unbearable limits placed on his spacetime—where he is

allowed to be and when, and for how long—lead to the famous encounter that shows him that his very life is at stake if he does not escape these environs. Walking in and sitting down at a “whites only” diner, he waits for the inevitable rejection from the waitress. When she does indeed tell him that they “don’t serve Negroes here,” he hurls a glass at her and runs out in front of the angry white patrons and staff: “I could not get over two facts, both equally difficult for the imagination to grasp, and one was that I could have been murdered. But the other was that I had been ready to commit murder. I saw nothing very clearly but I did see this: that my life, my *real* life, was in danger, and not from anything other people might do but from the hatred I carried in my own heart.”¹³ While it is unrelenting racism that leads to his explosion in the diner, what is most instructive here is Baldwin’s recognition that it was not so much the whites’ deadly hatred that threatened him; *his own* hatred was the deadliest. In effect, rather than interpellating this moment as one in which he has been rendered wholly Other, the moment is foregrounded by choice—that is, how he *chooses* to react to the waitress’s refusal to serve him. It is only within a strict linear interpellation that a reaction is always already subsidiary to an action; within the “now,” when one chooses how to react, how to perform and interpret that moment, the range of possibilities produces reaction as both action and reaction. In other words, Baldwin’s trajectory, like Randall’s explanation of the subatomic particle, isn’t wholly predictable. Yet the linear progress narrative must also be used here because it tracks the collective, and the individual interpellation in the “now” thus achieves much of its validity through its dialogue and interaction with the Middle Passage epistemology.

“Encounter on the Seine: Black Meets Brown” strikingly incorporates a dialogic and diasporic metaphor, the Eiffel Tower, which triangulates the positionalities of Baldwin as a Negro *American*—that is, with nationality emphasized—and a “French African.” The analysis is flawed insofar as Baldwin tends to imagine the latter as a sounding board for the former, suggesting he would rather imagine than actually engage with another during this imagined encounter. Yet in a tradition starved for discourses that fruitfully explore differences between Black diasporic identities, this essay offers the opportunity to view U.S. Blackness through more than one prism, capturing distinguishable moments of interpellation, all of which are grounded in the postwar experience yet take in both pasts and futures.

The essay begins by seeking to separate myth from fact: gone are the glory days of Paris between the wars that so many Middle Passage epistemologies

notate. Here is a Paris still a bit hungry and ragged after a brutal occupation and a reluctant retreat by the Nazis. Baldwin walks us through the streets at eye level, horizontally, past the old haunts of Chez Inez and its adjacent neighborhoods in this postwar spacetime, and reflects on his compatriots. The “Negro American colony” is less a coherent collective than a set of individuals who intersect primarily through “Negro entertainers,” because they are the only ones “able to maintain a useful and unquestioning comradeship with the others.” The explanation of this situation startles: “It is altogether inevitable that past humiliations should become associated not only with one’s traditional oppressors but also with one’s traditional kinfolk.”¹⁴ The Middle Passage epistemology does not disappear when engaging with Black peers, but instead the vertical relations that define Blackness as subaltern are recalled by encounters with other U.S. Blacks; stunningly, white oppression is imagined when not present. Baldwin’s language invokes not only the presence but also the *dominance* of this epistemology in this moment. The manifestation of a phantom white oppressor is “inevitable,” clearly the effect of a cause over which the Black subject has no control. Most painfully, it is not witnessing a racist incident, nor hearing of one, that manifests a humiliated Blackness but the encounter with peer members, or “Middle Passage Blacks” from the United States, that does so.

Disquietingly, this vertical interpellation does not manifest when Baldwin’s “American Negro” encounters white American or Black African peers in Paris. This shift from U.S. Black encounters to encounters with white Frenchmen, white Americans, and Black French Africans is signaled when Baldwin’s narrator encounters the Eiffel Tower, which, he muses, “has naturally long since ceased to divert the French,” who also possess a tendency to view Blacks through a simplistic and overdramatically romantic lens: “All Negroes arrive from America, trumpet-laden and twinkle-toed, bearing scars so unutterably painful that all the glories of the French Republic may not suffice to heal them.”¹⁵ In this way, “Encounter” links the inability to reflect on the Eiffel Tower to the inability to interpellate Blackness through anything other than an intensely simplified version of the Middle Passage epistemology created for white French consumption. These conversations are distorting because “the Negro is forced to say ‘Yes’ to many a difficult question, and yet to deny the conclusion to which his answers point.”¹⁶

At this moment Baldwin’s essay switches to Epiphenomenal time, because the African American sees ambiguities in the multidimensionality of the “now,” not Middle Passage certainties provided by a fixed

notion of linear time: “His past, he now realizes, has not simply been a series of ropes and bonfires and humiliations, but something vastly more complex, which, as he thinks painfully, ‘It was much worse than that,’ was also, he irrationally feels, something much better. As it is useless to exco-riate his countrymen, it is galling now to be pitied as a victim, to accept this ready sympathy which is limited only by its failure to accept him as an American.”¹⁷ Unlike *Physics of Blackness*, which asserts the need to use both epistemologies together, Baldwin switches between these spacetimes. Suddenly, interpellating himself through the Epiphenomenal spacetime of the postwar epistemology serves as a *corrective* to his previous experience. By conversing with both white Americans and white Frenchmen in Paris, the Black American realizes (as the last lines of the quote spell out) that he need not manifest vertical interpellations in encounters with his countrymen and that the effect of assuming victim status through this interpellation is undesirable. This does not mean, however, that this will change how others see him; choice over one’s own interpellations does not extend to the ability to control how one is interpellated by others.

The story of the final encounter in this essay, occurring just two paragraphs away from that of his encounters at the Eiffel Tower, is that of the “Negro students from France’s colonies,” in which the Black American finds “the ambivalence of his [own] status thrown into relief.”¹⁸ There are many possibilities when one reflects on the meaning of the past in a moment. Baldwin writes that the African American is confused not by ignorance, a lack, but rather by a complexity that *exceeds* easy characterization.

The moment of encounter between the “Negro and the African” reflects the ambivalence and ambiguity Epiphenomenal time can produce. In language that is both illuminating and uncritically essentialist, “Encounter on the Seine” reveals the complexity behind what seems so simple a title:

They face each other, the Negro and the African, over a gulf of three hundred years—an alienation too vast to be conquered in an evening’s good will, too heavy and too double-edged ever to be trapped in speech. This alienation causes the Negro to recognize that he is a hybrid. Not a physical hybrid merely: in every aspect of his living he betrays the memory of the auction block and the impact of the happy ending.

The American Negro cannot explain to the African what surely seems in himself to be want of manliness, of racial pride, a maudlin

ability to forgive. It is difficult to make clear that he is not seeking to forfeit his birthright as a black man, but that, on the contrary, it is precisely this birthright which he is struggling to recognize and make articulate. Perhaps it now occurs to him that in this need to establish himself in relation to his past he is most American, that this depthless alienation from oneself and one's people is, in sum, the American experience.¹⁹

This passage first establishes horizontality, or some semblance of it, by positioning the two as facing each other yet divided by a fixed gulf of time that also connects them. This mutual alienation is no small obstacle, Baldwin notes, before moving to focus wholly on the interpellation of the "American Negro" through the "African" interlocutor, who nonetheless remains a cipher. This, one supposes, is the result of an encounter in which at least one party is unfamiliar with the collective identity of the other on an intimate, multidimensional level—perhaps the result of two linear progress narratives (i.e., fixed dimensions) intersecting with one another.

This interpellation is, of course, wholly masculine, which further increases the possibility that we have two mostly or wholly linear manifestations of spacetime in these moments. In such moments of writing, Baldwin may not have possessed very much information about Black Africans, which might explain why, despite the title, most of this essay focuses on U.S. Blackness. Yet by engaging here with Ivoirian writer Bernard Dadié's own anthro-travelogue through Paris, *Un Nègre à Paris* (*A Negro in Paris*), we can put these two texts into dialogue through this shared spacetime.

Both Dadié and Baldwin would have tales of departure and arrival to tell one another (perhaps in that night of goodwill and drinking mentioned by Baldwin). Through *Notes*, Baldwin relates an "emigratory" trajectory (more a matter of leaving New York than of moving to Paris) based on racist encounters that threatened to rob him of his multidimensional humanity. Dadié, by contrast, is leaving his countrymen for a trip of edification—to see the colonizer and colonial capital up close, as it were.

The travelogue begins, almost tongue in cheek, with the narrator excitedly announcing to his friends the "good news" that he finally has his ticket for Paris. Given his high expectations, the narrative foreshadows their collapse in grimmer moments of reality: "I'm going to see Paris, me, with my [own] eyes. However, I'll be a little like everyone else, I'll carry a halo, a perfume, the halo and perfume of Paris. I'm going to touch the

walls, the trees, cross paths with the men.”²⁰ The imagery here is a mixture of the vertical and horizontal: although encountering men and seeing (straight ahead) are experiences he will have in common with other visitors, he also admits that he won’t be encountering Paris as its peer but rather as one enchanted with its verticalities, boundaries, and influences.

Our narrator’s time in Paris is produced through a powerful divide between the ideal and the real, beginning with his frustrated attempts to secure a ticket for the flight. Unlike Veronica Mercier of *Heremakhonon*, Dadié’s interpellation on the plane is wholly vertical and thoroughly reminiscent of the moment of being Othered that is described by Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks*: “I am the only Negro among many white travelers. I take a window seat; no-one wants to sit next to me.”²¹ Bizarrely, upon arriving to the city, he makes a similar observation: “I look around: whites everywhere; white employees. Nowhere is there the head of a Negro; it’s really a white country.”²² This particular whiteness, as he also learns, bears little resemblance to that of its vaunted ancestry, often recalled in *Un Nègre à Paris* (e.g., Marat, Mirabeau, Tallyrand, Fouché)—allowing Dadié to perform his knowledge alongside those contemporary Parisians who fall so woefully short. In this moment, *A Negro in Paris* first appears to interpellate Blackness as isolated and likely subaltern, but as his journey unfolds, he sees a whiteness that is progressive only in its own eyes.

One of Dadié’s first visits in Paris—and a principal signifier for a theme to which he returns again and again—is to the Bastille and its capture by an antimonarchist crowd on July 14, 1789, signaling the downfall of absolute Bourbon rule in France. While “Encounter on the Seine” uses the Eiffel Tower to manifest a series of postwar comparisons between Middle Passage Blackness and colonized Black Africans, *Un Nègre à Paris* uses the Bastille to reflect on the heart of the French Empire and its own succumbing to a new capitalist climate of acquisition: “And for masters [the Parisian man] has Tallyrand and Fouché.”²³ Understanding nothing, or perhaps I understand it very well, that which matters most to him is to build his fortune on the shoulders of time. And to do this he runs to get ahead of the time that he awaits at the sidewalk café. . . . Don’t worry, time will not find him there, he will already be en route, having decided to slow the advance that was gained by not living.”²⁴ Beginning with “masters” (and two historical figures who are viewed as moneygrubbing and amoral to boot), Dadié’s observed Parisian is not free, instead seeking to enrich himself. Interestingly, Dadié posits that this man seeks to gain wealth by outpacing time

itself. This competitive asynchronous state provides material gains, but it does not allow for living “in the moment” as it were, suggesting that to interpellate oneself as in competition with linear time is no life at all.

With few kind words for this new modern lifestyle, which treats time as the tortoise to its fortune-seeking hare, Dadié also has little to say of the Eiffel Tower that “Encounter on the Seine” finds so useful for triangulating a postwar Blackness. Perhaps with a truer glimpse into the future than Baldwin’s in *Notes*, he dismisses the opportunity to admire this impressive industrial verticality to explore the Paris metro—which, as he notes with some satisfaction, is truly a “Negro” predisposition: “I have to laugh at those hordes of tourists climbing the Eiffel Tower or the Arc de Triomphe, these opulent clients of the rich hotels. . . . And what matters to me? The metro. One really has to be pure Negro to admire nothing in Paris but the metro.”²⁵ Dadié’s account adds another dimensionality here: not all Blacks will flock to the Eiffel Tower to wonder both at it and at their differentiated relationships to it. Some will be speeding underground, far more fascinated by “this gigantic underground spider” that connects all Paris. While the tourists doggedly climb upward to understand, Dadié’s desire to laugh suggests that he expects their efforts will not be nearly as rewarding as his own, given the ease of travel, not to mention its interconnecting reach (the Eiffel Tower, after all, extends in only one direction).

This emphasis on the horizontal, and on connection, extends to the second fascination of Dadié’s narrative—Parisian women. Indeed, the narrator’s focus on (white) Parisian woman is so varied and multifaceted, from the famous to the mundane, the glamorous to the repulsive, that he betrays his own claim of finding no Blacks in Paris—the encounter for *Un Nègre à Paris* features a Black African woman, “une ravissante Africaines des territoires Anglaises” (a delightful African woman from the British colonies) who is limited to English among Western languages, just as Dadié admits he can speak only French. This is a brief encounter in the extreme: “We smile at each other constantly. Same color in this country of whites and no means of connecting. If our color brings us together, everything else separates us. A gap that a multitude of smiles could not fill. What do you think?”²⁶ Rather than conflation, Dadié highlights intersection: they are both Black, but not alike; they meet rather than merge. As in “Encounter on the Seine,” here the narrator soberly notes that no amount of goodwill can overcome the gulf that separates them, and both men are quite serious about this. Baldwin’s “gulf” comprises three centuries of

time; Dadié is more absolute: this gulf is “everything” (“*tout*”). Most provocatively, Dadié sturdily rejects a central tenet of so many Pan-African, Afrocentric, Middle Passage, and Black nationalist ideologies by claiming that color may be a commonality shared among Blacks, but it is a poor foundation for connection when it is the *only* one.

Despite the depressing silence of the French African male in Baldwin’s “Encounter,” one can intersect it nonetheless with Dadié’s discourse on postwar Blackness in the West through the shared spacetime of Paris in the mid- to late 1950s. In a similar way, although *Un Nègre à Paris* also grants us a rather limited interlocutor (an African woman who cannot speak French), we can see the intersection of Dadié’s discourse in this moment with that of Ama Ata Aidoo’s *Our Sister Killjoy* because it is an extended, almost wholly internal monologue of the thoughts and views Dadié’s narrator seeks—that is, the postwar viewpoint of an Anglophone African woman from the (former) British colony of Ghana.

Like Dadié’s pilgrim (and lover of metros), Aidoo’s protagonist also feels quite alone in Europe—but she is traveling with a group of fellow Ghanaian students. Dadié finds a mixture of the atavistic and modern in Paris (for the most part, however, only in the metro), but Sissie encounters rural Germany and London and her interpellation through the modern, and her return flight home at the end of *Killjoy* creates a sensation of isolation rather than connection to Blackness.

Sissie, or *Our Sister / Our Sister Killjoy*, first greets us, Burma Shave sign fashion,²⁷ with “Things are working out” in the center of the first page, then “towards their dazzling conclusions . . .” on the next, and on the third,

. . . so it is neither here nor there,
 what ticky-tackies we have
 saddled and surrounded ourselves with,
 blocked our views,
 cluttered our brains.²⁸

Our Sister Killjoy is playing a game with us from the start, because reading the first page alone suggests optimism, but when added to the second page, especially with “dazzling,” this optimism becomes ambivalent because those “things” that were said to be in the *process* of being worked out in the first phrase are now *actually* in process, and therefore a bit more vulnerable to change. Nonetheless, these first two pages are used to gently

convince the reader that what we carry with us from earlier moments (“saddled and surrounded ourselves with”) possesses, literally, no spatial/directional relevance (“ticky-tackies”). Put together, one can read the first three pages as encouraging people to relinquish their worries to the fates—rendered, it should be noted, through a combination of Epiphenomenal time and the linear progress narrative, as multiple “things” work themselves through toward conclusions.

Killjoy consists largely of reflections on the dispossession and disempowerment of Black African women who find themselves encouraged to return to their “traditional” roles after the successful eradication of colonial regimes. In the first half, a triptych of parallels are drawn between the fascist orientation of Germany under Hitler, the almost equally constrained way in which a young German wife and mother must live in her village under watchful eyes, and the freedom Our Sister Killjoy, or Sissie, possesses in the now to wonder at this dismal cage rendered no more meaningful by a resentful but equally hemmed in and disempowered German husband (usefully named “Big Adolf”).

Killjoy is a prose-poem-cum-epistolary short story of a Black Ghanaian woman encountering a series of old and revised verticalities, opening with Sissie at a cocktail party hosted by the German ambassador to celebrate the unnamed travel fellowship she has been awarded. The chumminess of the primarily European dignitaries with their host—their horizontality—prevents her from learning exactly with whom she is dining: their emphasis on informality and first names renders them unknowable to Sissie, who could only recognize them through their positions in the Nigerian state—their verticalities. “It is fairly clear” she reflects, that she is the “only insignificant guest.”²⁹

In an explicit foreshadowing, the one “African . . . her fellow countryman,” known only to her as “Sammy,” fits right in with this elite and is eager to impress on her the honor of her award. “Time was to bring her many many Sammys,” she thinks—that is, “fellow countrymen” who interpellate themselves as successful postcolonial Subjects through the postwar European progress narrative and in turn attempt to interpellate her as their subaltern within this epistemology, a mentee (“He was very anxious to get her to realize one big fact. That she was unbelievably lucky to have been chosen for the trip”).³⁰

Aidoo, like Condé and Dadié, also uses the trope of flight to interpellate her transatlantic traveler. While *Heremakhonon* uses an airplane to

interpellate Veronica as both an empowered and disempowered Black diasporic cultural tourist, and Dadié highlights jet-age travel as almost the exclusive preserve of whites, *Killjoy's* Sissie is effectively segregated. The flight attendant assumes she must be accompanying the two “handsome Nigerian men” at the *back* of the plane and ushers her to their row, ignoring the seat assignment on Sissie’s ticket. While Condé emphasizes the horizontality of the plane and its movement between times and spaces, Dadié and Sissie experience a distillation of European colonial hierarchies—while on the passenger list, they are ontologically separated Others among white European Subjects. Yet Aidoo adds one complication: these passengers, explicitly located “in the back” by the text, also turn out to be among the Fellows who were awarded this trip. Multidimensionality creates ambivalence in the moment: was the flight attendant racist by herding Sissie to the back of the plane to be with the other Blacks, or had she either guessed or known that Sissie was traveling as a scholar on the same junket as the two Nigerian men? In any event, Sissie relates that she had a lovely time.

Killjoy offers neither a progress narrative nor an antiprogress narrative. Like *Un Nègre à Paris*, it provides a series of moments in which the false promises of progress are pointed out and analyzed. Progress, both texts argue, produces yet more verticalities, more hierarchies, rather than the egalitarian set of peer relations Ghana and France respectively claim in the two texts. In what he asserts to be a natural predilection on the part of Black (male) subjects to embrace modern technology that enhances living—such as the metro’s ability to connect people across vast distances in short amounts of time—Dadié holds out hope for his African countrymen if not the white West. Aidoo adds more dimensions to this equation by seeing the former colonies and the former colonizers as much more deeply intertwined—damningly so, because it is their shared hierarchies, their heteropatriarchies, that impede what Sissie so desperately seeks from her countrymen: recognition and understanding.

Sissie intersects with Marija, both women in their early twenties whose relationship to one another cannot be fully understood by the dimensions of race or gender, nationality, sexuality, or class. The particular moment in which they are meeting is of key significance, but there is no “where” or “when.” Although this will be the focus of chapter 4, it is useful to note here that framing the “where” and “when” through the postwar era is especially amenable to the interpellation of these two women’s relationship

because Nigeria's changing status as a postcolonial power rich with oil wealth is emerging just as Germany is seeking to accommodate its past into a Marshall Plan postwar present. Within this frame, one need not assume that these women's race and gender automatically lock them into a postcolonial heteropatriarchy—that is, a vertical interpellation in which their status as women places them at the bottom of both nations' social hierarchies, and Sissie's Blackness places her “below” Marija. Instead, the postwar epistemology interpellates Sissie's Blackness as multidimensional, a Nigerian woman and scholar who, with her nation's blessing, has traveled to Germany and encountered Marija, a perfect *Hausfrau* who appears almost suspended in a spatiotemporal stasis. Indeed, that Marija must worry over the villagers' assessment of her in this role every time she steps outside, and that she is married to “Big Adolf” and has given birth to “Little Adolf,” reinforces the notion of a Subject almost wholly interpellated through heteropatriarchal forces. As the naming indicates and reinforces, Marija's identity is no more than the medium through which yet another oppressive German(ic) Adolf begets his eponymous son and heir.³¹

In *Killjoy*, Sissie and Marija's encounters produce both implicit and explicit queerness; in queer theory, the failure of their relationship to conform to the heteropatriarchal logics explained before means that they are “queering” those logics, or subverting them. When Marija plans to get Sissie alone (Big Adolf at work, Little Adolf alone upstairs) and kisses her, Sissie pushes away and slaps her in surprise. At first, Sissie attempts using spacetime to understand the moment: “And now where was she? How did she get there? What strings, pulled by whom, drew her into those pine-lands where not too long ago human beings stocked their own funeral pyres with other human beings, where now a young Aryan housewife kisses a young black woman with such desperation right in the middle of her nuptial chamber?”³² Although Sissie attempts to understand her spacetime, she assumes (although *she* is the one asking the question) that the interpellation is in fact due to “strings pulled” by someone else. She locates Germany on a linear timeline, just one step out of the savage irrationality of barbarian culture (humans using other humans as firewood), and where Marija is “Aryan,” which this quote denotes as primitive. Marija's attempted seduction is one of desperation, also hierarchically interpellated, because as a “housewife” who kisses another woman in the space of the “nuptial chamber,” she is violating that order by seeking a queer sexual alignment.

This emphasis on hierarchical interpellation is foreshadowed in the moments when Sissie and Marija first meet up for this evening and Sissie first silently interprets Marija's confession that she wishes just to get away from Little Adolf to spend time with her as a "Heresy / In / Africa / Europe, / Everywhere."³³ Two pages later, Marija's statement that she is happy that Little Adolf is a boy because she cannot have any more children is reflected on by Sissie as, unlike the previous statement, quite within this (global) heteropatriarchal order: "Any good woman / In her senses / With her choices / Would say the / Same."³⁴ Yet this kiss between her and Marija, which was followed by an almost involuntary slap from the former, like an outraged woman protecting her honor, confuses Sissie. It is, after all, a suddenly horizontal moment in which Marija is neither wife nor mother but potential lover, to which Our Sister responds through a displaced verticality: "Sissie looked at the other woman and wished again that at least, she was a boy. A man."³⁵

When she interpellates herself as a Nigerian woman, Sissie sees the impossibility of relating what has just happened to her family and friends back home within a heteropatriarchal logic: "What do you say even from the beginning of your story that you met a married woman? No, it would not be easy to talk of this white woman to just anyone at home," pointing to the lack of an epistemological framework through which she could interpellate this moment for people at home—and with a married white German woman to boot. Yet *Killjoy* does not restrict itself to the vertical here either—or rather, it reveals how queerness for Sissie is always deeply imbricated within the vertical: her recollection of erotic play with her fellow boarding school girls is recalled through the hailing of the outraged schoolmistress: "Good Heavens, girl! / Is your mother bush? / is your father bush? / Then / Why / Are / You / Bush?"³⁶

In this recollection, same-sex desire between schoolgirls is interpellated as "bush," recalling the behaviors of Nigerians before British colonialism that linger still outside the civilized urban centers. Here queerness isn't the dastardly and humiliating legacy of the colonizers but rather operates wholly outside of their spacetime. In her recollection, Sissie adds a sad postwar twist in which she imagines telling the "Miss" that this behavior is no longer "bush," "But a / C-r-i-m-e / A Sin / S-o-d-o-m-y"—in other words, now condemned in her society, viewed as criminal in Christian and English legal terms. Here, *Killjoy* suggests, the hierarchy of British colonialism has left its legacy by refashioning the Nigerian past to reflect the

bigotries of the former, now rendering Sissie unable to do more than wish that the desire between her and Marija could be legitimated by one of them being male. Strikingly, it is neither Marija's married status nor their racial difference that is named here as the obstacle, but heterosexism, suggesting that in this moment of interpellation, the heteropatriarchal logics of colonizer and colonized now coalesce in the postcolonial and postwar era.

This coalition of Black West African and Western European heteropatriarchies informs not only the rest of *Killjoy* but also other works by Aidoo, such as her short story collection *No Sweetness Here*. This coalition marginalizes the Black African woman, but it also troubles the postcolonial African state as a whole: in the second half of *Killjoy*, Sissie fights a losing argument against her expatriate countrymen in London who reject her call to serve their fledgling and needful nation. By interpellating themselves through a heteropatriarchal Western definition of progress and cosmopolitanism rather than Sissie's strict (and rather punitive, as it seems, based on little more than the need to serve through sacrifice) postcolonial heteropatriarchal spacetime, *Killjoy* shows how vertical structures such as heteropatriarchies inevitably simplify into purely phallic ones. Promised privilege by virtue of their gender (and sexuality), some male bodies, such as those Sissie encounters, will seek ever more power, bypassing the Black hierarchy should another heteropatriarchy promise yet greater privilege. Sissie writes, albeit without hope of a favorable reply, against what she sees as an emerging interracial heteropatriarchal alignment between Black African and white European men: "My Brother, if we are not careful, we would burn out our brawn and brains trying to prove what you describe as 'our worth' and we won't get a flicker of recognition from those cold blue eyes."³⁷

In response to Dadi's "What do you think?" Sissie might ecstatically embrace the opportunity to interpellate herself through this hailing, not unlike her final recollection to her old lover: "Sitting yourself down in a chair, right opposite me and with the smile around your eyes, you saying, 'I know everyone calls you Sissie, but what is your real name?'"³⁸ In other words, Aidoo suggests that Dadi's Black Anglophone African woman might actually prefer to be engaged not as a "Black sister" but as an individual who, in this "now" of encounter, seeks a peer rather than (hetero)patriarchal relationship. Dadi's comment that their Blackness is not enough to join them might be an indication that he would be quite happy to converse with his Anglophone acquaintance as two individuals

rather than as Subjects who achieve identity only through a Pan-African or Afrocentric progress narrative.

In Baldwin's "Encounter," the "Negro American" seeks to explain his want of manliness to his French African acquaintance; Dadié's narrator looks for no such explanation, but he does wish he could engage with an Anglophone sister he encounters in Paris. As an Anglophone sister, Sissie has much she wishes to say and, unlike in these other postwar texts, ends with the desire to be asked questions rather than have answers provided. One cannot pretend that these exchanges would be idealized diasporic moments in which Blacks from different parts of the globe find communion, however brief: after all, Sissie has made clear she is tired and frustrated with the preponderance of male voices talking about freedom yet doing nothing. Instead, as my reading of Dadié's and Aidoo's construction of encounters suggests, Sissie and the protagonist of *Un Nègre à Paris* might actually seek an exchange that is *not* grounded in their diasporic identities created by a Pan-African progress narrative rooted in white European colonialism and racism (i.e., as Black African Subjects with a precolonial past now emerging from the colonial into the postcolonial) but instead one that is grounded in the identities they find most useful in the "now." In other words, they might, exactly as the French, bypass Baldwin's Eiffel Tower and its signification of those complex histories of racist oppression, leaving his Black American *seeking* an interlocutor rather than facing one.

"Encounter on the Seine" imagines the intersection of two Black men from separate parts of the Diaspora, but it limits itself in its imaginings, as Black veterans from World War II belong to almost every continent. In this moment the largely oral but also narrative history *Unsere Opfer Zählen Nicht: Die Dritte Welt im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (*Our Victims Do Not Count: The Third World in the Second World War*) offers a much broader variety of narratives. The largest category is of course that of soldiers, Black men who were forcibly recruited across the European and Japanese colonies, including the British-held Solomon Islands and their commonwealth of Australia, which brought aboriginal men into training, as well as the French protectorate over the greater part of the Polynesian islands.

Yet it was not just European powers conscripting the men in their colonies through which Blackness and the World War II/postwar moment intersect. By foregoing a linear narrative to reach all these men and women who served in World War II, *Unsere Opfer* instead uses geography and thus becomes one of the few narratives of the Second World War that comes

so close to fully denoting that world and all its relevant geographies. As a result, horizontal relationships are revealed within the vertical, such as Brazil's decision to send Black troops to (now Allied-friendly) Italy, revealing a Brazil-Italy connection that most dominant narratives, focused as they are on the most powerful nations of the Allies and the Axis, will bypass, thus foreclosing or delaying the manifestation and recognition of those Black identities. As veteran Danilo de Andrade recounts it, his experience liberating Italy bears little difference to that of white troops: "Simple. With a block of chocolate one could score the most beautiful Italian women"; this is in contrast to Astrogildo Sacramento's experience of having Italian villagers rub the soldiers' skin to see "if the color came off."³⁹

While only briefly rendered, Sacramento's story manifests the same interesting nuance as the final essay in *Notes*, "Stranger in the Village." "Encounter on the Seine" ends with the encounter between the Black American and the Black French African soldier in a moment of ambiguity. The essays sandwiched between "Encounter" and "Stranger in the Village," "A Question of Identity" and "Equal in Paris," focus on interpellating the U.S. Black male through the U.S. postwar experience in Paris and through the Parisian male collective, respectively. In the first essay, Baldwin expands on the ambiguity of encounter between Black Americans and their white countrymen who, no longer bound by the social mores of the United States, are unsure about how to engage with one another but also seek to avoid performing the racist hierarchy that is a hallmark of the U.S. nation-state in the immediate postwar era. In the second essay, a series of misunderstandings lands Baldwin in jail, which, he argues, did not lead to an interpellation of his Blackness as subaltern but as horizontally intersecting with Parisian habits and customs, including a justice system that treats everyone with equal and often confusing doses of insouciance, indifference, and heavy-handedness. He is "equal in Paris," Baldwin opines, because his Blackness does not place him either above or below the law, which treats all Parisians equally (badly).

The grandest statement *Notes* makes on Blackness in the postwar moment, however, is interpellated through his experiences in a small and isolated Swiss village in "Stranger in the Village." Not unlike the way in which Dadié embraces his metro and sadly notes some of the strange habits of the Parisians, and not unlike the way in which Sissie, when confused by sexual desire, imagines Marija as the latest descendant of murderous barbarians, Baldwin frames modernity as closer to Blackness than whiteness.

Baldwin plays a rhetorical trick in “Stranger,” one common to precolonial narratives, in which the capacities and abilities of Europe are displaced from the cosmopolitan metropolis of Paris to a less populated and more rural hamlet in Switzerland. When he writes that no American, Black or white, can return to this village, he implies that this tiny hamlet *is* Europe because Americans, by virtue of not being able to go “back,” have once been there. Because this place is small, we cannot take Baldwin literally here—we cannot imagine that very many Americans, in seeking Europe, think first of this tiny village or its equivalent, as we might should he have used Paris as his example. One might instead see the metaphor of a progress narrative here, in which civilization is marked by the move from rural, isolated villages to large, thriving metropolises or, more significantly, by the ability of a place’s denizens to interpellate Blackness as part of the modern world:

The time has come to realize that the interracial drama acted on the American continent has not only created a new black man, it has created a new white man, too. No road whatever will lead Americans back to the simplicity of this European village where the white men still have the luxury of looking on me as a stranger. I am not, really, a stranger any longer for any Americans alive. One of the things that distinguishes Americans from other people is that no other people have ever been so deeply involved in the lives of black men, and vice versa. This fact faced, with all of its implications, it can be seen that the history of the American Negro problem is not merely shameful, it is also something of an achievement. . . . This world is white no longer, and it will never be white again.⁴⁰

Just as W. E. B. Du Bois’s *Souls* successfully linked antiracism to progress, creating an image of the racist as rural and backward, so Baldwin’s “Stranger” successfully links Blackness in the West with the entrance of Western modernity. America, the quote suggests, is ahead on this progress narrative, Europe behind, because the former recognizes the Black American, however reluctantly, as part of the modern Western nation-state. This essay does not condemn all Europe to the backwaters of this timeline; *Notes*’s emphasis on the freedoms to be found in Paris for the Black American suggest that it is “European villages” that are located in the past, while modern cities where Black men can travel with ease are sites of progress and civilization. This meaning of Blackness is then extended to the world:

if modernity is changing the world, and Blackness signifies the entrance to modernity, then logically the “world is white no longer.”

The Eiffel Tower was created to celebrate France’s indisputable entry into the ensemble of “first world” nations whose economic might could be symbolized through this architectural marvel of mass and industrial technology. Yet as Baldwin, Paul Gilroy, Lerone Bennett Jr., and many others remind us, the history of the Middle Passage is deeply intertwined with the Modern Era of industry and science in Europe—with the latter deeply dependent on the *intelligent* labor of millions of African Americans who worked both on agricultural plantations *and* in corporate industries, first as slaves, then as exploited (but not technically owned) workers. The relationship of both Baldwin and Dadié to the Eiffel Tower is ambivalent: as both Hegel and Marx would assert, while both share in its triumphant creation and the freedom of the French to display it, they are disallowed from owning their labor in the public sphere.

There is an interesting difference here, too: it is likely that the French African soldier at this time finds his and his father’s generations forcibly interpellated through the vertical power of French national-colonial agendas, while the U.S. Black would likely read his nation’s history as a step forward toward sociopolitical equality for Black men. If we imagine the Eiffel Tower and interpret its steel girders as timelines, we can see them reflecting these intersecting histories and realize that one can read those timelines as soaring upward, crashing downward, or zigzagging, creating an image of intersection without homogeneousness. When we read Baldwin’s, Dadié’s, and Aidoo’s discourses on postwar Blackness through this image, we can see all this. These three discourses on postwar Blackness, like the girders of the Eiffel Tower, intersect yet retain important differences.

They intersect where all three assert that Blackness best understands this postwar moment and all the relevant spacetimes that intersect. Baldwin notes the complexity of Blackness—the ease with which it significantly intersects with a range of postwar identities. Dadié argues that Blackness embraces and uses modernity to seek diverse and broad connections while whiteness seeks no life, only an endless pursuit of material wealth. Aidoo’s is the most complicated because it rejects the simplified view provided by the first two authors, in which the postwar world is one of encounters between Black men and white men in their struggles for supremacy and self-determination. Instead, to return again to the Eiffel Tower as a trope for postwar Blackness, *Killjoy* shows the preponderance of verticalities

in the structure, despite (or perhaps because of) all the intersections. In Aidoo's text, Black African women face a daunting series of challenges and erasures in the postcolonial African spacetime. Whereas we might read Baldwin's "Encounter on the Seine" as encouragement to ponder how it was Black male labor that built the Eiffel Tower and white male ownership that allows them to use it as a signifier of white Western national might, *Killjoy* bluntly points out that in this battle between men for control of the postwar world, it is women, Black and white, who will always be the casualties. Read through our trope, Aidoo is simply stating that, regardless of its color, the Eiffel Tower will always be a phallic-shaped paean to power.

Unserer Opfer's oral histories show us that as long as the concept of power remains vertical, or hierarchical (like phallic towers, obelisks, and the Washington Monument), it is not just women who will always be interpellated as subaltern but the vast majority of men as well. This is because *most* texts that protest asymmetries of power nonetheless wish to retain some of these hierarchies and simply switch their position (or that of their collective) from the bottom to the top. Writ large, World War II also reflects this paradox, as those nations that dubbed themselves the Allies, fighting for the right of all people to self-determination, were all brutal colonizing regimes, whether in South America, the Caribbean, Africa, Asia, Oceania, or South Asia.

Even "Encounter," which seeks connection between postwar African Americans and Francophone Black Africans, uses troubling hierarchies in its sweeping statements on the collective mind-set of the latter: "This bitter ambition is shared by his fellow colonials, with whom he has a common language, and whom he has no wish whatever to avoid; without whose sustenance, indeed, he would be almost altogether lost in Paris. They live in groups together, in the same neighborhoods, in student hotels and under conditions which cannot fail to impress the American as almost unendurable."⁴¹ By reading them so disparagingly as "colonials," Baldwin invokes a vertical interpellation, their dimensionality collapsed into one of a subaltern Other, suggesting that he is attempting to retain multidimensionality for his African American *flâneur*. After all, what is most striking about *Notes* is its refusal to interpellate the African American in Paris vertically. Upon encountering white American men, the two are more tongue-tied, confused as to their relation to one another in this postwar spacetime, raising an interesting comparison with Sissie and Marija, in which Black Subjects wonder at how to interpellate the whiteness they

encounter and their own relationship to it. However, in *Notes*, as in *Killjoy*, Black African men are overwhelmingly interpellated through a colonialist spacetime in which, whether colonized or recently postcolonial, they remain “in-between”: above Black women but below white men. Through these considerations, the metaphor of the Eiffel Tower now suggests a hierarchy of Blackness, a structure that supports horizontality but, at the end, is vertical: Baldwin’s “Negro American” is a far more complex, reflective human being than the vague collective of the French African in *Notes*.

These hierarchies are not limited to “Encounter on the Seine”: even as *Notes* provides these spaces for Blackness to intersect, it closes down others, not simply through being unaware or unreflective, but through explicit foreclosure. That is, Baldwin’s interpellations sometimes reveal highly vertical logics that act against his ultimate ideals. This, I would argue, is the threat of the Eiffel Tower metaphor: that it is easy to collapse back into hierarchical thinking.

The last part of Geraldine Murphy’s essay “Subversive Anti-Stalinism: Race and Sexuality in the Early Essays of James Baldwin” engages with this problem: it goes where many Baldwin scholars fear to tread—his implicit and sometimes explicit hierarchization of bodies and his very human bigotries and phobias that we recognize in our now and can thus see existing unrealized in the personal experiences he narrates. Murphy locates these failed moments through rhetoric: where it turns from respectful, sympathetic, careful, and considered—as when considering a peer—to denigration and insult. In other words, it is when the interpellative rhetoric shifts its interpellative viewpoint from the horizontal to the vertical, either looking up in wondrous awe or, in this case, looking down with contempt.

Murphy begins with Baldwin’s problematic rhetoric in “Everybody’s Protest Novel,” pointing out that his is not an intellectual critique of Wright’s work but rather a critique based on the suggestion that Wright and Beecher Stowe are “locked together” in battle, “this web of lust and fury” where “Black and white can only thrust and counter-thrust, long for each other’s slow, exquisite death.”⁴² This section adds nothing to the argument and at best is juvenile, at worst phobic, as if the two authors’ creative claims are as grotesque and amoral as the idea of the two of them having sex.

“Subversive Anti-Stalinism” ties its critique to Baldwin’s discussion and defense of homosexuality through “Cold War liberalism,” asserting that “Baldwin staked the male homosexual’s claim for the same kind of complex subjectivity he had demanded for the African American.” Murphy

writes that “the title of his most explicit postwar statement, ‘Preservation of Innocence’ (1949), suggests his strategy for reconciling homosexuality and Cold War liberalism.”⁴³ Yet as William A. Cohen notes in his review of *Another Country*, gender is “rigidly fixed” for Baldwin. Murphy concurs, pointing to *Giovanni’s Room* and the “models of essentialist feminine masochism and passivity” that characterize his female characters in his novels. While I would argue that the misogyny Murphy finds expressed by David and Giovanni is ambiguous, possibly descriptive rather than prescriptive, Giovanni is often a painful stereotype of the sexually ambiguous and effete Mediterranean male, one who falls victim to floods of tears and crimes of passion over his virtue, while David, described as “blonde and gleaming,” is the stereotypical white American butch—perhaps in turmoil within but outside always projecting a stony masculine strength. In other words, it is not coincidental that “Encounter on the Seine” chooses such a phallic structure to interpellate only male Subjects.

Equally if not more important is Baldwin’s almost exclusive use of “he” in *Notes* as well as the majority of his essays, late or early, when discussing the “Negro.” Murphy never comments on this, but in her critique of Baldwin she does remark that “Baldwin was essentially a critic of heterosexism rather than sexism” and “he wasn’t above deploying gender categories to his own advantage. Suspect as a gay man, politically and psychologically, Baldwin was more eager to appropriate masculinity than revise it.”⁴⁴ In other words, whether consciously or not, Baldwin is not seeking to upend gender hierarchies but to manifest equal, or horizontal, relations between men across racial and sexual boundaries. In “What Does It Mean to Be an American? The Dialectics of Self-Discovery in Baldwin’s Paris Essays,” Kingston University scholar James Miller has shown how Baldwin’s “On the Discovery of What It Means to Be an American”⁴⁵ describes an all-male world in which the only Black female to emerge is Bessie Smith, who brings out the “nigger” in him.⁴⁶ Smith is hailed as an icon for strong Black womanhood in Black feminist discourses, but Baldwin’s reference is at best ambivalent: “[Smith] helped me to dig back to the way I myself must have spoken when I was a pickaninny.”⁴⁷

This blindness—the marginalization of women, sometimes even of queerness—is of course quite common to many discourses from the postwar era, underscoring that, while the World War II and the postwar epistemology offer multiplicity, they are far from delivering it in every moment. If nothing else, this highlights the difference between the dominant way in

which these eras are narrated—through linear spacetimes—and the ways in which they are thus distorted.

Chapter 4 of this book, “Axes of Asymmetry,” explores the material effects of that distortion—that is, when World War II is narrated through linear spacetime and how Epiphenomenal time proves a useful remediating agent. More specifically, after noting the way in which discourses on the African Diaspora in World War II starkly reveal the asymmetrical socioeconomic and political clout of distinct Diaspora collectives, the chapter then points to a stunning erasure—that is, the histories of hundreds of millions of Black African women in the war.

It is hard to find these women, I show, when histories of Africa from both Africa and the West coalesce in their verticalities to produce a spacetime narrative that effectively bars the majority of women from acknowledgment. By dividing African histories into, roughly, three periods, all of which signify one period of specifically white domination from the late nineteenth to the mid- to late twentieth century, the history of Africa is reduced to a simple notation depending on whether white men or Black men were in power. All the other people, events, histories, changes, and so forth are erased because they fail to be recognized, ironically, as meaningfully intersecting with the ramifications of European colonialism. In other words, while it is women who are most obviously erased, most Black African men are erased from this as well—or else reduced to statistics.

Aidoo’s *Killjoy* focuses on this problem of coalescing hierarchies—specifically Black African and white Western heteropatriarchal logics of interpellation. It is also *Killjoy* that provides the first solution to this problem of a linear history that marginalizes if not erases female agency—a solution that will be explored and further expanded on in “Axes of Asymmetry” but is briefly outlined here.

By beginning with Epiphenomenal time, the fact of her existence, her movement, *Our Sister Killjoy* effectively inserts Sissie into an otherwise forbiddingly patriarchal spacetime—not unlike the way in which Condé manifests Veronica through the fact of her present existence. This incursion is most subversive in Sissie’s queer encounter with Marija. Although “nothing really happens,” the text upends a patriarchal linearity by creating same-sex desire as “bush” and “bush” as that which lies outside the colonial spacetime, both temporally and spatially—that is, performances that used to predate, but now defy, colonial laws and mores.

“Bush” literally refers to a space, but now it also enjoys a complex time of being precolonial (because it is “bush”), colonial (we know the colonial rulers frowned on it as illegal and immoral behavior), and postcolonial in that Sissie recollects it through the frame of the colonial past. “Bush” now signifies practices and performances, like same-sex desire, that not only manifest as anticolonial but also link to interracial encounters outside of Africa. “Bush” becomes a signifier of the multivalent Epiphenomenal moment that is subsumed by no one linear spacetime but intersects with all of them. In a moment of queer desire, one that she notes bars her from interpellating herself as queerly desiring on the linear spacetime that marks precolonial, colonial, and now postcolonial Ghana, Sissie uses her “bush” memory to reflect on how and where this queerness does manifest in her “now.” It does so in the romantic admiration of a postwar German housewife toward a Black African woman;⁴⁸ it does so in that African woman’s displaced expression of wishing she were a Black man so that she might have a sexual affair; and it does so in the scandalized tones of a colonizing white female teacher in Ghana, in the unspoken reference to erotic play in the school between the girls and the also vaguely referenced practice of same-sex desire that precedes colonial rule. Queerness, then, *Killjoy* shows us, is not nonexistent in linear timelines but is manifested at the intersection of those timelines (postwar Germany and postcolonial Ghana). Far from being marginal and therefore isolated, Aidoo shows us how queer desire actually links and connects, producing richly layered, textured moments.

Our Sister Killjoy’s “bush” strategy is a useful and necessary corrective to the “Eiffel Tower Effect”⁴⁹—when hierarchies like heteropatriarchy coalesce to produce a grand vertical structure that easily incorporates horizontal relationships and is not challenged by them but perhaps made even stronger. Despite its multiplicities and erratic movement, its defiance of linear graphing, both white and Black discourses on World War II often resemble the Eiffel Tower in that they are composed of many intersecting strands but generally move vertically rather than horizontally—that is, linear spacetimes and their hierarchical arrangements create a mostly vertical structure. Yet as “Axes of Asymmetry” shows, once Epiphenomenal time is added to this interpellation, World War II and the postwar era offer astonishing possibilities for manifesting Blackness as it intersects across the globe and reflects back profound nuances on the human condition.