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## Physics of Blackness

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## Axes of Asymmetry

The discipline known as Black Atlantic studies has, arguably, long escaped the confines of its explicit spatial and temporal parameters—at least informally. Scholars such as Ivan Van Sertima, Stefan Goodwin, Jeremy Lawrance, and John K. Brackett have uncovered Atlantic histories of Black Africans and Black Europeans who lived before “Blackness” was invented as a racial category—indeed, before “Europe” was conceived as an organizing identity for the Western part of the Eurasian continent.<sup>1</sup> The historians Edward Alpers (“The African Diaspora in the Indian Ocean”)<sup>2</sup> and Cassandra Pybus (*Black Founders*)<sup>3</sup> have complicated our understanding of Middle Passage trajectories, showing us Black slaves shipped to India, U.S. Blacks who owned Black slaves (slaves who were not loved ones purchased because they could not be freed under law), U.S. Black slaves who were taken with the British “First Fleet” to England’s new Australian penal colony, and an African slave trade that was not limited to West Africa but was active in East Africa, the Indian Ocean, and beyond.

Discourses that lean toward or even advocate a vertical or hierarchical organization for Blackness (wherein one body represents the many) typically exclude these Blacks from their purview, but they can be excluded even when the goal is quite the opposite—that is, to simply seek and recapture *all* the histories of the “Black Atlantic.” In “The Legacy of the Atlantic Program,” the famed anthropologist and former head of the Johns Hopkins University Atlantic Program, Sidney Mintz, reflects on the effects of these strictures on the program’s scholarly mission:

The limitations of [Johns Hopkins University’s] Atlantic Program, I suppose, had to do principally with a kind of conceptual problem that is difficult to explain concisely. One could say—and this has been my view of it all along—that the Program represented a particular epoch in the history of the world economy; and because it did, it had to do with a particular relationship among societies

and states, a relationship that over time has continued changing. Since, let's say, the zenith of this Atlantic system or this Atlantic economy . . . there has been a continuing rearrangement, renegotiation, reordering of relationships among regions and continents, and among states. In a sense, then, the Program had committed the participants to a particular history and geographical frame which is not always easy to leave behind.<sup>4</sup>

Here Mintz identifies “a particular history and geographical frame” as the cause of this “conceptual problem”—in other words, the arrangement of time and space as a theoretical analytic. He goes on to argue that “this Atlantic system” has experienced a “continuing rearrangement, renegotiation, reordering of relationships” that is reminiscent of Epiphenomenal spacetime in its emphasis on interpellations through horizontal, or peer, relations and its differing manifestations from moment to moment. This is contrasted against the “particular history and geographical frame” through which researchers were expected to create their projects, suggesting a stricture based on borders that interfere with this “continual rearrangement.”<sup>5</sup> Without meaning to, Mintz and his colleagues in the Atlantic Program found themselves restricted by borders of their own making.

I call this phenomenon “qualitative collapse”—that is, the collapse of meaningful, layered, rich, and nuanced interpellations (in this case, of Blackness) that occurs when seeking to interpellate the diversity of Blackness through the parameters of linear spacetime. I would argue that qualitative collapse happens far more frequently than we realize: as Mintz notes, he and other well-meaning, highly accomplished, and intelligent scholars realize that the seemingly neutral parameters they have chosen, such as the “Black Atlantic,” preclude the undertaking of research projects that I believe are vital to a more comprehensive understanding of Blackness. As *Physics of Blackness* has demonstrated already, it is often the implicit linearity we attribute to space and time that inhibits our research and causes a qualitative collapse of Blackness, in effect collapsing multiple dimensions of interpellation and generating paradoxes within the discourse, as the complexity of the construct runs up against the simplicity of strictly linear spacetime parameters.

This limitation against inclusive, diverse interpellations, or interpretations of Blackness that are rich, nuanced, and varied in their meaning, is hardly limited to scholars who engage with the Black Atlantic. This

frustrating failure to create cogent narratives that interpellate a collective's identity as diverse and complex (and therefore usefully applicable to understanding the complicated nature of that collective) has been noted as a problem for left-wing progressives by social scientist, feminist theorist, and geographer Doreen Massey. In her 1992 article "Politics and Space/Time" published by *The New Left Review*, Massey, in a section titled "An Alternative View of Space," writes,

A first requirement of developing an alternative view of space is that we should try to get away from a notion of society as a kind of 3-D (and indeed more usually 2-D) slice which moves through time. . . . Second, we need to conceptualize space as constructed out of interrelations and interactions at all spatial scales, from the most local level to the most global. . . . Third, this in turn means that the spatial has *both* an element of order and an element of chaos (or maybe it is that we should question that dichotomy also).<sup>6</sup>

Massey constructs these "requirements" in order to overcome dichotomous interpellations in which a Subject must be split one way or the other. This can also be understood as the collapse of dimensions, or ways of seeing and understanding (interpellating) the collective in all its diverse intersections with other collectives. Massey also argues that the interpellative space should incorporate "interrelations and interactions," or what *Physics of Blackness* reads as horizontality and, as I explain later, what Evan Mwangi terms "internal heteroglossia," or the need to focus on how members of a peer collective speak to one another rather than pose questions through an inhibiting analytical frame: linear spacetime. Massey usefully critiques ostensibly leftist poststructuralist theorists such as Fredric Jameson and Michel Foucault for divorcing the complications of space in their theorization of time. While Massey reads Jameson as initially calling for a corrective to this separation, her book *For Space* asserts that it has been used to negative effect in the process of interpellation, or "invention."<sup>7</sup> Yet, later in *For Space*, Massey almost wistfully acknowledges that the dream of realizing the potential of horizontality remains worth pursuing, even if it seems tantalizingly out of reach: "We know then that the 'presentness' of the horizontality of space is a product of the multitude of histories whose resonances are still there, if we would but see them, and which sometimes catch us with full force unawares."<sup>8</sup> Massey's use of "presentness" recalls

Epiphenomenal spacetime's emphasis on the "now," although here Massey has space alone in mind. Like *For Space, Physics of Blackness* also asserts that horizontal interpellations render a "multitude of histories whose resonances are still there" and can in fact be seen by us if we understand that moment of horizontal interpellation as the intersection of two spacetimes rather than of a separate time and space, as Massey seems to imply.

The solution I embrace in this chapter can also be inferred from Massey's third "requirement" quoted before: that there be both chaos and order. As shown throughout this book, by combining the fixity of linear spacetime with the chaos of unpredictable and immeasurable dimensions of interpellations, we can use the orientation provided by the fixed frame to then interpellate the diversity of that moment in all its manifestations in that spacetime.

Here I translate Massey's critique of limited 2-D/3-D interpellation as the moment of qualitative collapse when linear strictures erase or marginalize the interpellation of multidimensional Blackness—and may then "cast off" that part of its collective that is thereby deemed irrelevant or inauthentic. The first half of the chapter focuses largely on the World War II/postwar era, seeking to illustrate how it imposes limits even as it offers greater opportunities for interpellating multidimensional Blackness than are available when focusing only on the four centuries of the Middle Passage as a time frame, because it directly involves all collectives in the Black and African Diasporas: the Americas; Europe; North, West, East, Central, and South Africa; Australia and New Zealand; South Asia; Asia; the Middle East; and the islands of Oceania. At the same time, the very linear, vertical, and hierarchical way in which the Second World War is narrated in almost all dominant discourses creates exclusions that operate on a scale that equals if not surpasses that of the linear spacetime of the Middle Passage epistemology. The second half of this chapter therefore specifically examines how addressing this collapse in the now and reorienting one's question about these absences from the vertical to the horizontal can in fact help retrieve these lost collectives. Moving through my own research as well as studies conducted by others who are far more qualified than I am, the chapter shows how one can begin to secure answers to the question "What happened to the tens of millions of Black African women during World War II?" by reorienting the question from one based on vertical, hierarchical presumptions to one that seeks what Mwangi calls an "internal heteroglossia," or horizontal orientation.

One can see how space and time can become divorced from one another in theorization: it was Einstein who added space to Newton's concept of time, and Massey laments that the former somehow has once again become foreign to left-wing progressive theorizations. Yet Epiphenomenal time relies on an intersection of space and time, or spacetime, and in fact stresses this combination by using both space and time coordinates from the linear progress narrative in the production of the now.

Epiphenomenal time bears affinities with a phenomenological interpretation of time, because it insists that the time and place in which one uses one's senses to perceive and reflect always mediate one's interpellation through the "now." In philosophy, phenomenology holds that because our world can be observed and analyzed only through our senses, we can never claim to have unmediated access to it, to truly understand it independently of how our senses first present it to us. Consider how we experience time. We experience time in moments: moments of thought, observation, conversation, action, listening, daydreaming, fright, love—sometimes all at once. Some moments seem very long to us as we pursue a thought or activity; others incredibly brief. Some moments are wholly conscious and seemingly self-controlled (when we are clear as to where we are and what we are doing); others are almost unconscious, reluctant, or wholly involuntary; most fall somewhere in between. However, if one consciously interpellates a given moment in order to understand the multiple dimensions of Blackness that manifest then, the more resistant interpellations (that can happen in any moment) can be understood as representing an ambiguous set of productive possibilities rather than a limitation.

Whereas linear time understands the past, present, and future as chronological, Epiphenomenal time understands one spacetime: the moment of the now, through which we imagine the past and also move into future possibilities (walking, thinking, talking). *Physics of Blackness* argues that one cannot use Epiphenomenal time without first locating oneself where and when one is in that now, then locating where and when one's space and one's time are fixed by the construct of linear spacetime. Yet once located in the now on that linear timeline, the moment is freed for exploring a broad variety of intersecting spacetimes for Blackness, some of which may contradict interpellations that make sense in other moments. Linear progress narratives are, as it were, "allergic" to contradictory interpellations, almost forcefully expelling them from discourse, especially when they fail to cohere to the cause-and-effect dynamic that drives their

spacetime. Because they cannot interpellate dimensions of Blackness that offer nonlinear or nonprogressive interpretations (e.g., Equiano's possibly lying about his life), forcing nonprogressive narratives into linear narrative frameworks will cause a qualitative collapse of Blackness. Rather than capturing the full multidimensionality of Blackness, linear spacetime generates paradoxes that manifest through failed interpellation, or qualitative collapse, which can create an either/or Blackness according to which one must choose one interpretation over the other to reposition Blackness in that linear spacetime.

A common example of such a qualitative collapse can happen in moments of Black counterdiscourse if one attempts to interpellate a Blackness that predates its "invention" as a racist category in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>9</sup> When racist discourse falsely asserts that African peoples and their descendants have contributed nothing to world civilizations, firmly shoving them off the plane of "world" (or Western) "civilization," Afrocentrists respond by citing the empires of Egypt and its predecessor Kush, the former being one of the few African cultures acknowledged by Eurocentric historians as worthy of recognition. Without question, the continent of Africa boasts a number of civilizations (to explicitly meet the white European definition of the term: societies with permanent buildings, organized systems of government, and flourishing trade, as well as cultural or religious practices) that predate ancient Greece/Rome and should be included in dominant timelines of world civilizations. Most certainly the majority of peoples who ruled and contributed to these societies would meet our stereotypical notions of "Black" physiognomy. Yet were the Egyptians and Kushites "Black," at least within the qualitative dimension established by the linear progress narrative of the Middle Passage epistemology?

To historicize an identity within a linear progress narrative provides "order," as Massey puts it, or as this chapter specifies, origin, direction, and stability—but linear spacetime also complicates or even limits the historical fluidity of such an identity. One must pause at the Afrocentrists' counterracialization of Ramses (in response to Eurocentric attempts to read the ancient Egyptians as almost anything *but* African) and question the logic of what is being asserted here. As noted before, Ramses meets a stereotypical physiognomy, but he would not be called "Black," much less understand himself as matching *our* meaning of the term: a proud symbol of Black progress and its struggle for equal rights in a largely racist world.

The interpellation of Ramses is now paradoxical: he is either an oppressive African pharaoh or, as a “strong Black man,” a symbol of resistance to oppression. (Ramses of course owned bodies that one would recognize as Black slaves.) In order to determine what Ramses is, then, once again through the linear progress narrative (whether based on the Middle Passage, Afrocentric, postcolonial, or Pan-African epistemology), Blackness is split into “authentic” and “inauthentic,” “relevant” and “irrelevant.” Each individual considering this question then places Ramses in one category or another. (“Ramses, then, is relevant to our discussion of Blackness” or “Ramses, then, is not really Black.”)

When interpellated through the Middle Passage epistemology, Blackness has a limited set of *qualitative* values or denotations that link it to the events in that epistemology such as the commitment to collective and individual struggle, “racial uplift,” and the maintenance of strong communities through “traditional” or heteropatriarchal family structures. More generally, the Middle Passage epistemology (like other established Black linear progress or antiprogress narratives—e.g., Afrocentrism, Pan-Africanism, Negritude, Afropessimism)<sup>10</sup> also links all Black collectives across the Diaspora to the experience of racism and the need to overcome it—so how can Ramses II be “Black”? Even further, what does it mean for us to claim him as “Black”? It is hard to interpellate Ramses (or any of the other African kings, queens, leaders, intellectuals, politicians, scientists, etc., whose physiognomy we would acknowledge as stereotypically “Black”) within the qualitative definition of Middle Passage Blackness as making common cause with African Americans—or any other “Black” community fighting racism and seeking socioeconomic and political equality in the African Diaspora. In attempting to interpellate Ramses within this definition, we must produce Blackness as a fixed identity that transcends time and space; through this, Ramses no longer belongs to his own spacetime but retroactively becomes a denigrated “Negro” who must combat his oppression. A paradox or—as Massey terms it, “a dichotomous result”—now confronts us: was Ramses II a Black freedom fighter or a ruler of extraordinary and largely unquestioned power, one of the greatest and most oppressive in the history of Egyptian pharaohs?

It is the qualitative definition of Black progress that creates this dichotomy, a paradox that then “empties out” all meaning in qualitative collapse. The attempt to interpellate Ramses II through a Black progress narrative exposes the continuing attempt and subsequent failure of the progress

narrative to interpellate Ramses. He is Black because he is a Black African, but he is not Black, because neither “Black” nor “African” operated as identities in Ramses’s spacetime. Ramses II’s life speaks to the greatness of African empires, but his unapologetic use of massive slave labor should “expel” him from Black progressive membership, the same way in which some discourses attempt to expel Blacks whose actions deliberately harmed other Blacks.

While we should perhaps not lose sleep over the “odd individual” whose terrible behaviors bar him, her, or them from full or perhaps even partial mention in a Black progress narrative, there are other Black individuals who are barred from mention who have not acted against the principle of striving for collective progress. This dichotomy also threatens to create interpellative problems for Blacks who, unlike the Egyptian pharaoh, move across the Atlantic at the same time as millions of Black Africans are being sailed to and sold into the Americas, but not in the same directions, veering away from our progress narrative.

Black slaves transported outside of the Americas to Europe, India, and elsewhere do not retain a collective identity. They are sold individually and disappear into households, perhaps factories, fields, or country roads and city streets, intersecting with populations at large. From the point of view of Black linear progress narratives, progress has not been achieved because the collective has evanesced (and is therefore unable to achieve its goal of overcoming racism), or read another way, their histories have become irrelevant to the collective historical theme of overcoming racism. Qualitatively speaking, it appears difficult if not impossible to interpellate Blackness using a Black Atlantic linear progress narrative in a significant and lasting way. In “The World Is All of One Piece: The African Diaspora and Transportation to Australia,” which is included in Ruth Simms Hamilton’s book *Routes of Passage*, Cassandra Pybus reprises a version of Sidney Mintz’s question about the qualitative limits of Black Atlantic studies:

A transnational historical consciousness and a capacity to encompass experience in disparate time and space are great strengths of African diaspora studies. In so far as there is a weakness, it is that the Atlantic world remains the locus of discussion. While some attention has begun to drift toward the Indian Ocean, less scholarship has been directed toward the distant Pacific. . . . In the diaspora at the detailed penal transportation records we can find

information about the African end of the eighteenth century that is very hard to come by elsewhere and that points in directions in which historians may not otherwise look.<sup>11</sup>

Pybus understands that her topic is framed by African Diaspora studies yet constrained by its “Atlantic focus”; she then observes that despite this swirl of scholarly activity in the Atlantic, there is a “drift” and “direction” toward the Indian Ocean and the “distant Pacific.” This passage draws a connecting line moving horizontally (well, south by southeast) from the moment of the American Revolution in the Middle Passage timeline to other moments in those kingdoms and empires that border the Indian Ocean and, more specifically, to the moment of the British penal colony of Australia.

By moving us horizontally into the Pacific, Pybus traces the journey of those (primarily) U.S. Blacks who allied with the defeated British and accompanied them on their return to England. Once there, the promised support from the Crown never materialized, and many of these former soldiers, spies, and support staff found themselves on the London streets. These (primarily) men would have been in competition with an already burgeoning class of the dispossessed filling the streets of London and other industrial centers. As Robert Hughes argues in his monumental history of the settling of white Australia, *The Fatal Shore*, land grabs by the aristocracy and the replacement of cottage industries with large industrialized factories deprived farmers, laborers, and urban workers of their former careers as well as prospects for new ones (many machines, such as looms, required fewer adult workers). Theft, especially with the poor now rubbing shoulders with the wealthy in crowded urban centers, skyrocketed, and Parliament responded with deeply punitive measures; to steal a bit of ribbon or bread could send you to prison or heavy labor or, most fearful of all, condemn you to “transport” (to a British penal colony). With the American colonies no longer available for convicts, Britain turned to its recently neglected “discovery” of Australia as a convenient replacement, and so white and Black Britons, along with a few U.S. and Caribbean Blacks, found themselves transported as part of the First Fleet settlers.

Pybus’s second horizontal reading comes, counterintuitively, mostly through records created by hierarchies such as court, maritime, colonial, and penal records, due to the paucity of “horizontal” archives (correspondence between peers, diaries, etc.). Pybus, not unlike Hughes in *The Fatal*

*Shore*, constructs a *horizontal* narrative of these Black convicts and settlers through (unavoidably) mostly *vertical* archival sources: state, judicial, colonial, and penal records that read these human beings as mere numbers filling ships, accepting punishment, and perhaps enriching the Crown through forced labor. To an even greater extent than Hughes, Pybus works to retrieve the very multivalent human experiences behind these records of discipline and punishment, to see the interactions denoted, denounced, and pronounced through their eyes, so to speak, looking out horizontally rather than down from the (at least figurative) heights of the judge's bench and foreman's lash.

Yet despite these two horizontal readings, qualitative collapse looms here because Pybus has framed this history as a horizontal connection to what is ultimately a vertical framework that finds meaning in the struggle against racism. Pybus's *Black Founders* offers us a notable exception to our assumptions about Blackness, but in her work, as in other histories she mentions, Blackness evanesces as the convicts and settlers perhaps married, procreated, and most certainly died without moving a coherent Black Atlantic collective forward in its quest for equality in a majority white society. Or, rather more complicatedly, in *Black Founders* Blackness evanesces into either the white Australian population or the Australian Aboriginal population, in the latter case an indigenous Blackness. Most likely reflecting on this, Pybus herself does not think that this discovery of Australia's "Black founders" radically changes the history of the African Diaspora or Australia: "My point is not that this cohort of convicts is especially significant to the history of Australia—though it certainly challenges the conventional reading of the colonial experience—but to examine what it can tell us about the wider world."<sup>12</sup>

If we add Epiphenomenal time to our Black Atlantic frame, however, we can avoid the qualitative collapse that (re)produces these histories as interesting in their own right but marginal to our understanding of Black Atlantic history. Interpellated through Epiphenomenal time, the Blackness in *Black Founders* first changes a person's relationship to Blackness and indigeneity. Rather than simply "losing" indigenous status once captured and then sold, Blackness intersects twice more with indigeneity, and on two continents: North America and Australia. In both cases, indigenous peoples sometimes helped Black slaves escape, the latter often marrying into specific American Indian nations. Middle Passage U.S. Blackness now shares a spacetime through indigeneity and raises questions about

Central and South American intersections (such as the Garifunas of Nicaragua).<sup>13</sup> One might also see a third, more controversial intersection, between U.S. Blacks who “returned” to establish the free state of Liberia and the indigenous populations who found themselves oppressed in the resulting socioeconomic and political hierarchy. The qualitative value of Pybus’s Blackness now meaningfully intersects with the Americas but is not swallowed by it, because the frame is horizontally comparative rather than vertically subordinating.

The intersection of Blackness with indigeneity in the Americas, Australia, and Africa also subverts the notion of a “purely” diasporic Blackness, even within the progress narrative itself, because the latter honors indigeneity as the “origin” to which the collective must eventually return. In this moment of interpellation, origin/home is achieved not necessarily through return but through intersections with other “first nations” in the Atlantic and Pacific. Even further, we can see how Blackness, in intersecting with indigeneity when (formally) seeking “return,” as in Liberia, might produce not egalitarian unity but instead oppressive hierarchy.

*Black Founders* also provides us with perhaps unheard of dimensions of Blackness that, once recognized, might usefully connect to other possible spacetimes that share this dimension. As noted before, the “Atlantic Blacks” who arrived with the First Fleet and on subsequent convict ships experienced a range of lives or careers that cannot be summed up through one collective trajectory, especially that of the progress narrative. Pybus shows that in our present moment of reading, Blackness becomes ambiguous in its meaning in these early colonies. On the one hand, racial designations are clearly marked in the official records, but unlike in the Americas, socioeconomic and political castes are not created to wholly segregate them. There are many marriages one would designate as “interracial,” but even if one could access some understanding of how “interracial marriage” would translate in this spacetime, marriage is rarely an ideal that denotes the cessation of difficulties over differences. As more than one wag has pointed out, the dominance of heterosexual marriage certainly does not reflect an egalitarian harmony of relations between the sexes. The marriages in question are thus racialized outside of social racializations, meaning that to be Black in these colonies does not automatically designate a subaltern status below that of whites. In cases where Black convicts were executed or subjected to physical punishment (whipping was the most common), we might see racially motivated causes, but

in the brutal tide of regular executions and torturous punishment, it is difficult to extrapolate consistently a narrative in which this Blackness can be separated from the brutal imperial and capitalist caste system that ruled all British subjects, including the white working poor.

Blacks intermixing with the white working poor populations in England and Australia intersect with similar interactions during the earlier spacetime of indentured servitude in the United States and the later one of late nineteenth-century Irish immigration to northeastern urban centers of the United States. If we step back from Pybus's initial frame, which connects the history of the Black Atlantic in Australia horizontally, and instead honor the horizontality of her interpellations of Black individuals and their intersections (through marriage, penal life, executions, manumission, etc.), one can read this history as a series of moments that intersect not only with Black Atlantic histories in the Americas but also with histories in Europe, Africa, and perhaps India. It should be noted that, while we are discovering intersections of collectives, we do so wholly within idealist frameworks that can be further interpellated only through individuals who make up those collectives; beneficially, however, the collective identities that intersect with these individuals produce yet more collectives in more spacetimes—more dimensions of Blackness across the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian Oceans.

While the era of the Middle Passage produces many and varied kinds of Blackness through the intersection of linear and Epiphenomenal time, the conflated eras of World War II and the postwar era offer yet more. I understand World War II and the postwar period as a conflation of eras because it is impossible to pinpoint where one ends and the other begins; however, when we are operating with Epiphenomenal time, this ambiguity is productive rather than restrictive. Indeed, breadth, depth, ambiguity, ambivalence, and dominance are the strengths contributed by these overlapping eras: breadth because World War II involved almost the majority of Black Africans and Black Diasporans across the globe, whereas slavery—which forms the cornerstone of the Middle Passage epistemology—did not; depth because the various narratives, such as that of Black African men attempting to resist forcible conscription by French and British colonial forces, or that of African American men and women who fought for the right to be drafted, require explanation and further research; ambiguity because we find Blackness where we do not expect it and struggle to interpret it, such as Black German individuals who

served in Hitler's army and Black Brazilian troops tasked with defending Italy; ambivalence because it is a war and its equally destructive aftermath ironically connects the African Diaspora many times over with ease and diversity; and finally, dominance because World War II and the postwar era constructed an interpellative frame that has been used by so many across the globe, a frame that highlights the contemporary and global importance of Blackness far more frequently than themes of the Middle Passage ever do. While the rise of the BRIC nations (Brazil, Russia, India, and China), the Arab Spring, and other sociopolitical and economic events seem to signal the framing of a new era, journalists, pundits, and politicians alike still interpret many of these events as effects of the World War II/postwar era.

Even the most rigid histories cannot sustain a completely linear Second World War narrative. For example, the invasion of Poland in 1939 must be explained by the rise of Nazism, which perhaps requires a notation about the Versailles Treaty. Likewise, the bombing of Pearl Harbor is necessary to explain the entrance of the United States into the war as a direct combatant. The Second World War, therefore, has at least two beginnings and, even by conservative estimates, at least two endings: the surrender of the Nazis in Berlin and the signed surrender by the Japanese on the USS *Missouri* in Tokyo Bay.

This gives us a war with at least two timelines to which there correspond two themes, two notions of progress, and many ways in which occupied nations must be understood: as collaborators, as wholly oppressed, as underground resisters, and so on. This nonlinear set of peoples, places, and events forces anyone seeking interpellations through World War II to accept all the exceptions to its linear progress narrative—that is, it forces researchers to incorporate great nuance into their interpellations (in asking when the Second World War ended, for example, we have to amend the question to reflect all the surrenders and dates that dominant discourses on World War II cite in response because, whether there were multiple wars or one great war may be a matter of definition, but there is no question that there were multiple narratives that intersected). This means that qualitative collapse will occur less frequently in interpellations made through a wholly linear progress narrative on the war (because dominant discourses do not offer, really, any wholly linear narratives of it), but when it does, the effect is almost always “deafening,” as if it were drowning out alternative interpellations.<sup>14</sup>

Blackness can manifest through this multidimensionality, in most cases quite easily. In contrast to the difficulty involved in explaining how Blacks from the Atlantic found themselves in Australia, the global reach of the Second World War makes it easy to explain how Blackness has spread almost everywhere. When using both Epiphenomenal and linear spacetimes to interpellate Blackness in these eras, no long, creative narratives are needed to explain the presence of West Africans under British rule, East Africans under Italian Fascist rule, or the fight for equality both at home and abroad that was the self-appointed task of many an African American man or woman in uniform; moreover, using both spacetimes enables Black European studies to explain without much difficulty how Blacks of African descent came to fight under Hitler. We can arrive at these explanations by starting with the individual, rather than the collective, as a point of interpellation. We can then link such an individual to his, her, or their variously realized collective identities (understanding that we should never claim that an individual is fully realized, as we can work within distinct spacetimes only as they are imagined in the now, not in both the present and the past).

Unfortunately, many of these dimensions as interpellated through the postwar epistemology are easily achieved through vertical structures: we need only locate (in ascending order) a military battalion, a regiment, or a division that would contain Black soldiers and its encampments and headquarters. Vertical readings alone can often interpellate an agential and diverse Blackness: Black soldiers and field nurses with agency, Black civilians with choices, and a whole roster of intersections with a broad variety of peers (soldiers and civilians) across vast geographies. At first glance, performing vertical interpellations through linear narratives appears to bear the same fruit as a horizontal reading: Blackness with agency and diversity.

This might explain why so many Black collective progress narratives of World War II use this multidimensionality to produce hierarchical, or vertical, interpellations for the collective. The “Windrush narrative” of Black Britain, for example, readily narrates the contributions of Black British Caribbeans in the Second World War, yet uses a progress narrative to interpellate this Blackness. Like the histories of African American men who fought for the United States during World War I, the “Windrush” narrative underscores the painful hypocrisy of serving the British Crown only to be treated as an undesirable emigrant in the postwar era.<sup>15</sup> Drawing on oral histories of service in the war and archival records from the British War Office, *Windrush: The Irresistible Rise of Multi-Racial Britain* (1999)

interpellates Black Britishness as agential and diverse, a proud component of the history of World War II but of official British histories of the war more particularly.<sup>16</sup>

To be sure, even when operating within World War II/postwar frameworks, we encounter obstacles. Hierarchies of power are not (unfortunately) wholly erased, and they can be complicated by the complexities of global alliances and rivalries (no matter how easily they are manifested in the postwar epistemology). The postwar epistemology's emphasis on the "now," in the absence of a geographical center (a component of even the most traditional narratives of the Second World War/postwar era),<sup>17</sup> allows, say, Samoan warriors aiding the Allies to be interpellated through collective identities that certainly include hierarchal structures (e.g., the military command structure) but also relationships whereby power must constantly be negotiated (e.g., in relationships between soldiers or between soldiers and civilians). The "now" complicates power, meaning that while an Epiphenomenal interpellation enables agency, it will also reflect those vertical hierarchies that inevitably accompany so many moments of interpellation in every individual life across the globe.<sup>18</sup>

Dominant discourses on World War II reflect these hierarchies and suffer from both spatial and temporal "narrowness."<sup>19</sup> Spatial narrowness is a consequence of the way in which the spacetime of "the world" is denoted. The Second World War was a global war that claimed tens of millions of civilian lives both directly and thousands of miles from the frontline battlefields, in locations including South America, South Asia, Australia, and of course sub-Saharan Africa. Yet narrative manifestations of this war rarely stray beyond pitting Germany and Japan against Britain and the United States (with Italy switching sides again). This bifurcates a considerably more unwieldy geography into what has become known as the European and Pacific theaters.<sup>20</sup> There is also a temporal constriction: those who seek to study the Second World War beginning with 1939 will not understand why both the Allies and the Axis powers became anxious over their colonial holdings, why Russia-cum-the-Soviet Union and Italy switched sides, or, for that matter, why this supposedly grand and perhaps "ultimate" moral conflict between the forces of democracy and the forces of fascism appears to have benefitted Germany and Japan far more than those who suffered under their yoke.

These spatiotemporal constrictions and their painfully ironic postwar ramifications are not lost on Black African scholars and leaders seeking

to interpellate their nations through the postwar era through their roles in World War II. In Birgit Morgenrath and Karl Rössel's anthology of oral histories, *Unsere Opfer Zählen Nicht: Die Dritte Welt im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (*Our Victims Do Not Count: The Third World in the Second World War*), the scholar and activist Kum'a Ndumbe III notes in the foreword,

The history of the Second World War has proven, like every history, to be that of the victors, but also that of the wealthy and propertied. In spite of their military defeats Germany and Japan are still counted among the victors in the writing of this story: Even though the historiography produced by both countries has had to submit to critical scrutiny and corrections, they are still accorded an equal ranking on the scale of humanity. However, those who were forgotten after the War—as if they had never even existed during the war—who, with their children, must (re)learn this history without ever finding their own deeds in the historical narrative, they belong in fact to the defeated. Defeated and without a voice, this is how hundreds of millions of people and their descendants still live even today in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Pacific region.<sup>21</sup>

What *Unsere Opfer* underscores, above all else, is that the Second World War looks very different when interpellated from the viewpoint of the formerly or still colonized, and it is this set of ever-shifting minority viewpoints (the diversity of which will be discussed later in the chapter) that the postwar epistemology incorporates as the template for the collective identities of the African Diaspora.<sup>22</sup> *Unsere Opfer* does not distinguish between the colonial rulers who were part of the (supposedly prodemocratic) Allies and those who were part of the Axis. From the postcolonial viewpoint, they were all colonizers. Yet in interpellating in the “now” and assembling peer groups for its oral histories of collective identities (laborers, prisoners, soldiers), this collection of horizontal or peer histories interpellates the “Third World in World War II”<sup>23</sup> in a way that belies traditional frames of a battle between good (Allies) and evil (Axis):

Great Britain was the largest colonial power when the Second World War began, presiding over an empire that encompassed a quarter of the earth as well as a quarter of the world's population,

and stretched from Jamaica and Latin America over East Africa and India almost to Southeast Asia and the [Central Pacific]. Taken altogether, the French colonies in the Caribbean, North and West Africa, Vietnam, Melanesia and Polynesia were twenty times larger than France itself and had more than one hundred million inhabitants. With Libya, Eritrea and Somaliland, the fascist government of Italy also ruled over a conglomerate of colonies four times larger than its own country, and the colonial Netherland-Indies, for example Indonesia, was owned by greater Western Europe.

Germany had to abandon its colonies after the First World War, so their reconquest became one of the war aims of the National Socialist regime. For the Allies the colonies were indispensable. They provided the essential raw materials for war at bargain rates, had millions of soldiers to be placed into the armed forces as well as millions more men and women to be put to work, often through forced labor.<sup>24</sup>

Despite *Unsere Opfer's* exciting range of discourses—in addition to Black African combatants from Mali, Ethiopia, Senegal, Cameroon, and Burkina Faso and Black Diasporan combatants from Brazil and Surinam, it incorporates the voices of nonwhite official combatants, guerillas, and civilians pressed into service or who volunteered, such as Australian Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islanders, Black and indigenous Brazilians, Palestinians, Egyptians, Filipinos, Vietnamese, Chinese, Thai, Burmese, East Timorese, Maori, Solomon Islanders, and more—the largest group it does not capture is enormously sobering: hundreds of millions of Black African women.

This omission, we should be quick to acknowledge, is not unique to *Unsere Opfer*: while most qualitative collapses are avoided through the ambiguity of these conflated eras, the ease with which vertical interpellations offer pathways forward for Blackness means horizontal interpellations occur far less often. The majority of books, articles, films, and television programs devoted to Blacks in World War II focus on African American men, with African American women a distant second, but still outnumbering Black African men, Black Anglophone Caribbeans / Black Britons, Black Europeans, and Black Central and South Americans and Hispanophone/Lusophone Caribbeans, in that order. Black African women are almost wholly absent.

As elaborated in chapter 2, the impossibility of firmly establishing a linear and direct causality from its origins to the occurrence of a complex event (which can prompt the feeling of being caught in M $\ddot{u}$ nchhausen's Trilemma) can make it difficult to establish one single cause of this absence, but hierarchies abound in both Black and white histories that intersect with the Black and African Diaspora. Such causes may include the relative wealth of the United States and the ability of a few hundred African American scholars to access its publishing houses but also the way in which Black U.S. participation in World War II neatly dovetails with the U.S. progress narrative that seeks to highlight its antiracist practices against those of fascist Germany, Italy, and Japan. In other words, the ease with which predominantly heteropatriarchal white and Black male narratives can provide a broad overview of antiracist progress that supposedly benefits all subaltern collectives has been taken to mean that women (and queers, and other Black collectives) need not be explicitly named, much less narrated.

At the same time, there is also socioeconomic clout that many African Americanists can access and deploy to continue the research and dissemination of African American progress narratives, and World War II offers a wealth of exemplary heroes, from the Black GIs dealing with racist white officers to the activism of A. Philip Randolph in seeking the desegregation of the armed forces. Through this valence—the U.S. Black struggle to progressively integrate into the armed forces and thus the nation-state more effectively—the narratives of Black women who served in the armed forces nicely combines patriotism with “race pride,” and Black women can be interpellated as part of this grander narrative of World War II as “America’s Battle for World Democracy” without the heterosexist and homophobic logics that prevent those hierarchical, vertical militaries and nation-states from ever being examined or questioned. In this frame, we see how African American men and women can interpellate their own histories through the themes established by the U.S. nation-state regarding its goals in fighting this war.

Yet not all Black minorities under domination by one of the Allies can interpellate themselves through patriotic nation-state narratives. While white national narratives that can accommodate Black progress during World War II allow for wholly or almost wholly vertical interpellations of this Blackness, the same is not true, of course, for those combatant nations that seek to minimize or hide their colonial histories, especially in narratives of national defense. In the case of France, the central role of

its conscripted colonial forces challenges its own narrative of liberation at the hands of white Americans and the Free French forces. As Myron Eschenberg notes in his work “‘Morts Pour La France’: The African Soldier in France during the Second World War,” “until recently many Frenchmen have preferred to avoid the painful story of France’s defeat and later re-entry into the war as a minor player.”<sup>25</sup> Eschenberg estimates that “Africans in 1940 constituted almost 9 percent of the French army in France, whereas for the entire First World War they may have approximated only 3 percent,” but after the fall of Paris, the number increased dramatically: “At a conservative estimate, then, the French recruited in excess of 200,000 Black Africans during the Second World War.”<sup>26</sup> Indeed, that so many prominent Black men of the Francophone Diaspora served in World War II—Léopold Senghor, Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, and Léon Damas—attests to the extensive reach of the French military and later the Free French Army.<sup>27</sup>

In order to prevent the enormous qualitative collapse that is threatened by applying a vertical, linear progress narrative to the World War II/postwar era, in which Blackness is reduced to male combatants and Black women from Allied nations who served in the military, one must shift quite firmly to the horizontal, beginning with one’s interpellative frame. Not unlike the historian who understands state historical documents as partial and subjective histories that lean heavily on vertical interpellations, applying a horizontal approach to research means reorienting the research question. The next part of this chapter explains this process first through a theorization by Evan Mwangi for Black African texts, then in reference to its application in the production of a history of Black Anglophone Caribbean women during World War II, before showing how it might be applied to retrieving and interpellating Black African women in the World War II/postwar and postcolonial eras.

Like this book and Massey’s *For Space*, Evan Mwangi’s *Africa Writes Back to Self: Metafiction, Gender and Sexuality* also circumvents vertical structures by arguing that we should understand African literary traditions as (horizontal) conversations between members of that tradition rather than as responses to Western interpellations through the postcolonial frame (which reflect a hierarchical, and thus vertical, status):

Since the mid-1980s, African novels have become markedly self-reflexive in the way they rewrite one another and draw attention to their own fictionality. They mark stylistic and thematic departures

that deliberately undermine the nationalist and realist impulse that governed earlier writing. The novels further depart from the tradition of “writing back” to the European colonial center by focusing their gaze on local forms of oppression that are seen to parallel classical colonialism. . . . Examined here are contemporary African novels that demonstrate perceptible shifts in focus from issues of external colonialism to a more self-reflexive treatment of gender and sexual relations.<sup>28</sup>

By conflating self-reflexivity and fictionality, Mwangi’s analysis in effect allows readers to overhear a conversation that does not posit Massey’s unloved three-dimensional reality or fix the meaning to particular space-times. This emphasis on fiction points to many possibilities. Because these possibilities are self-reflexive, produced by the individual text in conversation or intersecting with other “interlocutory” texts, one can understand this as a model of Epiphenomenal time: “In the novels I examine here, resistance to the West may be seen to reside more potently in the texts’ disregard or demotion of the West as the categorical and ineluctable point of reference in the representation and self-fashioning of the Global South; the texts resist the West by erasing it from local discourses on postcolonial cultures, aesthetics, and politics of identity.”<sup>29</sup> Similar to Massey’s call for a horizontal application of space that would enable interpellation and analysis to posit a multiplicity of dimensions, Mwangi understands horizontal resistance to verticality through the specific and explicit use of space as place, or an individual’s locale. He adds that “individual texts are more preoccupied in writing back to themselves and other local texts to address emerging realities and to express the growing diversity of identities in Africa.”<sup>30</sup> These moments *resist* vertical structures of interpellation in their “internal heteroglossia,” suggesting that they cannot be read as answers that presciently respond to the questions we formulate about their status as “womanist” or “postcolonial” or “queer”—Western terms that frame the text as an informant rather than as an interlocutor.

In asking how any Black African novel published in the 1980s reads itself through the “postcolonial moment” with no regard for its actual content, the reader has already begun a distorted process of interpellation, even if the intent behind the question is to achieve a sympathetic understanding. Mwangi spells out the politics of this vertical interpellation in the negotiation between African author, text, and Western literary scholar:

Given the predominant notion that African literature is about “writing back” to the European canon, my proposal that African arts are primarily writing back to themselves might give the impression that this book is a subversion or parody of . . . *The Empire Writes Back*. . . . It is not. Rather, I am extending the idea in Ashcroft and colleagues’ authoritative and seminal analysis in a direction they have indicated, especially in their discussion of how we can rethink postcolonial studies to pay more attention to local texts and contexts. I am particularly attracted to their prognosis toward the end of their book to the effect that the future of postcolonial studies resides in the consideration of local conditions and the influence of global moments on particular instances and spaces.<sup>31</sup>

As Mwangi reveals, the implied horizontal exchange of “writing back” belies its implicit verticality in postcolonial studies as we understand them today. Scholars of the postcolonial tradition might understand themselves as sympathetic readers of these African texts of “internal heteroglossia,” because they are intent on making horizontal, or peer, interpellations as allies, but this passage shows how verticality remains in these moments. It is present through the question itself, which presumes that the African text interpellates itself as a subaltern expression in a postcolonial history rather than as an African text engaging likeminded interlocutors in the interpellation of its “now” through many possible distinct space-times. Returning briefly to our question about Ramses II (“Was he Black or not?”), we can see the hierarchical, or vertical, logic that girds our question: in one valence, we subordinate Ramses’s spacetime to ours by assuming our category of Blackness is transcendental—figuratively above any of the identity categories he might have used (and the latter are likely quite lofty!).

Western readers are not the only ones to pose vertical questions to contemporary Black African discourses; the desire on the part of Black Atlantic scholars to retrieve a marginalized history through what they *know* to be vertical sources and restrictions can also lead them to pose a question that appears to be “horizontal” but is in fact irretrievably vertical. We find this phenomenon in a work by Ben Bousquet and Colin Douglass, *West Indian Women at War: British Racism in World War II*, in which they take up such a historical task as a corrective to the paucity of extant histories on their chosen topic. Yet as the title itself indicates, the text does not

understand itself as wholly “free” of the vertical as Mwangi stresses that horizontality should be. The introduction makes more explicit the central role of hierarchical state structures and colonial regimes in the interpellation of Black Anglophone Caribbean women through World War II:

To fully appreciate the position of West Indian servicewomen, we have to look at a range of wider questions, which touch on fundamental issues of war policy and colonialism. These wider questions address the role of women in the war, the position of Black people in Britain and the Caribbean, the political climate in the Caribbean, the different faces of wartime racism and the relationship between Britain and America. These are all major issues, which are integral to this book. It is only once we get a clearer picture of these issues that we can ask the all important question: why did they join?<sup>32</sup>

This passage appears to stress multidimensional interpellations, but the categories chosen are overwhelmingly vertical ones: collective identities located in military and state hierarchies. Unlike *Black Founders*, which uses state documents to explore individual lives, *West Indian Woman at War* at first attempts a collective interpellation, which, combined with these hierarchical identities, precipitates a qualitative collapse, and the paradox produces these women as subalterns, either objects or duped supporters of the British military-industrial complex. As chapter headings such as “From Plantocracy to Third Reich,” “A Woman’s Place,” and “Forgotten Heroines” attest, Bousquet and Douglas choose to read these women as objects whose heroic struggle is a testament both to their courage and to the obstacles that lie ahead for the Black Atlantic collective as a whole.

In the interviews that follow, we catch a glimpse into these women’s lives, but primarily we read their reactions to being negatively interpellated by these various hierarchical and deeply bigoted powers—politicians, military brass, and so forth. We do not learn how Black Caribbean women relate to West Indian men, to Black African women, to white working-class women, or to many of the other collective identities with which they would have come into contact and that no doubt would have produced rather rich insights and interpellations. As Mwangi warns, this is what happens even when we attempt a sympathetic reading with the intention of recognizing and blunting the impact of vertical interpellation.

Yet when interpellating Black African women's identities out of World War II, attempting to draw a "Pybusian" horizontal line to connect Black African women to a Black African or Black Diasporic progress narrative will not work. Pybus can point to a "new" spacetime (Australia during the era of the Middle Passage), but Black African women are still in Africa and thus folded into and erased by the linearity of Black African progress narratives that divide the history of Africa into "precolonial," "colonial," and "postcolonial" eras. Because these eras are wholly hierarchical, denoting only which race of men controlled the widest swathes of Africa, the Black African women of the World War II era cannot interpellate themselves through this epistemology's linear spacetime. Because the conscription of African men by the colonial powers radically altered the agricultural, commercial, and industrial landscapes of the colonies, the histories of Black African women would be quite prominent in the histories of Africa during World War II.

As Mwangi emphasizes, it is the *question* that must be changed and reoriented, no longer driven by the expectation that the text is the informant or even the interlocutor. Because no one has yet written a text that answers the question, "What were Black African women doing during World War II?" we must assume that the texts that contain our "answer" are not in conversation with us. In this moment of "now," we are unlikely to find a text that will answer that, because the "internal heteroglossia" of these texts will not interpellate Black women as an absence. Even further, they may not even interpellate Black African women as Black African women but rather through some other collective that actually foregrounds their agency—that is, the collective that defines what they were *doing* during these years. Finally, as I promised in the introduction, I can now explain why the use of "World War II" is also hierarchical, because it presumes that Black African women experienced these years primarily through the Second World War and thus would be located somewhere in its far-flung and relatively vast if mostly underfunded archives.

In struggling with this question-that-must-change over the past few years, I simply could not imagine what sorts of collectives and what sorts of texts possibly could produce this Blackness—one in which Black African women between 1936 and 1945 could interpellate their own Blackness.<sup>33</sup> My research assistant at that time, Bernard Forjwuor, also hit a wall. A few weeks later Bernard came to me with a solution, one that can be best explained by reference to Epiphenomenal time. He told me

that Black West African women have historically been known as producers and sellers of food for the family, village, or community.<sup>34</sup> These roles, he reasoned, would expand further under the colonial and wartime eras with the evacuation of able-bodied men into the army or prisons, work gangs, or through their own agency—either by joining resistance movements or by training for and securing positions within local or colonial administrations that promised some form of socioeconomic agency. Thus these women would be denoted as agricultural and urban workers (not Black African women) in economic reports from 1939 to 1945 (but not necessarily labeled as “agents in World War II”).<sup>35</sup>

As might (albeit unhelpfully) be anticipated, the “answer” to my question lay in texts that did not interpellate Black West African women as an absence and did not interpellate them as Black women but instead interpellated them as a *presence* as agricultural laborers, merchants, and urban workers. Because such an interpellation remains vertical, although we begin to learn who these women really were, we do so in a frame that still reads them quite narrowly and often inhumanely. Admittedly, we glimpse their existence, but only through a colonial lens—meaning the interpellative frame requires yet more revision.

The majority of the records that answer this question on the history of Black African women during World War II verge on the illegible for a poor humanities scholar: data tables and acronyms abound, with rarely an (intelligible) word in sight. There were no qualitative narratives, of course, under our original search terms, but by focusing on what these women *did* during the war, Bernard was able to provide me with a handful of articles that allowed us to see where Black African women intersected through the postwar epistemology with Pan-African or postcolonial progress narratives.

Within a horizontal framework, we can answer our question about Black African women’s agency from 1939 to 1945 by using a term provided by political scientist and sociologist Janet M. Bujra: *entrepreneur*. Bujra studied an early part of the era of Kenyan women’s entrepreneurship as they moved from rural areas to the urban center of (in this case) Nairobi, interpellating this collective through other largely unanticipated collectives, all of which are agential. In “Women ‘Entrepreneurs’ of Early Nairobi,”<sup>36</sup> Bujra begins what she terms her “social” history by carefully subverting the analytical categories that are typically dispensed by a vertical, heteropatriarchal interpellation of East African women. Bujra must

first explain that the occupations held by these women were indeed *occupations* and not states of moral decay:

It is not easy to find models for an objective sociological analysis of prostitution. Much of the literature on the subject, if not merely descriptive, is charged with a moralistic tone or with psychological insinuations—it sees prostitution as a “social problem,” as “deviant behavior,” or as an indication of psychological immaturity. From my point of view there are two basic inadequacies in such formulations. The first is that they fail to locate prostitution as a social phenomenon with social implications. Only rarely do they shift focus from the prostitute herself to her social context. The second problem is that they assume a cultural universalism in relation to prostitution. Most of these analyses stem from the study of prostitution in Europe or America. When transposed to other contexts they are often misleading since prostitution assumes a different social character and is differently regarded in different social contexts.

Bujra provides us with a reorienting frame here, noting that the category of analysis, prostitution, is far from an objective category in the West, much less one that carries universal significance. In other words, an “internal heteroglossia” is needed. Bujra also underscores the need to focus on the individual in her environment or, as I would term it here, the need to interpellate individuals through Epiphenomenal time. Bujra also uses a linear progress narrative, but it is not the precolonial-colonial-postcolonial timeline we would expect. Instead, she tracks the progress of individual women from dependency to self-sufficiency as they move from rural areas to Nairobi:

The underlying assumption here, as in most other writings on the subject, is that prostitution “degrades” and that those who practise it are its “victims.” My interpretation will be somewhat different. Whilst accepting that the women I describe were, in a sense, “forced” into prostitution by economic necessity, I shall argue that they turned the situation into one of economic advantage. Far from being degraded by the transformation of sexual relations into a sale of services, they held their own in “respectable society” with men.

From being passive sexual objects, they became actors in a social drama of their own making. And in a very real sense prostitution allowed them an independence and freedom from exploitation that would not have been possible had they chosen any of the other socioeconomic roles open to them—as wives, or as workers in the formal economy of Kenya.<sup>37</sup>

Bujra highlights both agency and intersections using an Epiphenomenal spacetime that manifests not qualitative collapse but a multidimensional Blackness that intersects with a number of collectives outside of “female prostitutes.” She achieves this analysis, as advocated by Evan Mwangi, by rejecting vertical time frames that cohere with our questions and instead seeking internal heteroglossia. By interpellating these women as “entrepreneurs of Nairobi” rather than as “Black African women during World War II,” she successfully resists the hierarchical structures that *African Writes Back to Self* criticizes, choosing instead a category that describes how these women would understand one another rather than how the reader might first interpellate them. If we were to use only a (sympathetic) vertical interpellative frame, we would see its dichotomous result: these women are either prostitutes made good or good women gone bad.

*Entrepreneur* is a gender-neutral term that foregrounds agency and diversity (whereby the individuality of one’s chosen role in commerce matters more than the specific business or industry chosen). By understanding prostitution as entrepreneurship, Bujra changes these women from objects moved by other forces into agents who choose their own paths and transformations through interactions with the people and socioeconomic and political forces of Nairobi (most especially with one another).

In this way, the manifestation of Black African women’s collective agential identities as reactive to white European colonization (and its effect on Black African men, which in turn affected the women) aligns Bujra’s article with works such as Stephanie Urdang’s “Fighting Two Colonialisms,” Susan Abbott’s “Full-Time Farmers and Week-End Wives,” and Barbara Bush’s sections on Black African women in the colonial era in *Imperialism, Race and Resistance*.<sup>38</sup> Bujra’s interpellation goes yet further than these other texts, however, because she stresses (like Pybus) the individuality of each woman, foregrounding how she intersects with alternative collective identities rather than interpellating her through a Black female African collective alone. By intervening through their agency, as a group of

entrepreneurs (rather than pitiable prostitutes) these women both affirm and diverge from each other's accounts, producing more dimensions of Blackness, both in the contemporary choices of the interlocutors and in their related recollections of oral histories about earlier generations.

Because these women are not interpellated as resistant to a particular racist or misogynist movement, their histories need not be subsumed by vertical spacetimes that trace subalterns through their resistance to dominant powers and therefore are always defined through those dominant powers and as subaltern to boot. If we took Bujra's spacetime of Nairobiian entrepreneurship and reached out to find other women entrepreneurs across African nations, we might produce a Black African women's epistemology that provides whole new dimensions of Blackness that, while perhaps never thought of before, nonetheless intersect across the globe as we discover yet more collectives through which Blackness interpellates itself in multiple spacetimes.

The collective identities that manifest are not predictable, to say the least. In the case of Nairobi during the colonial era, startlingly, it was through prostitution, beer brewing,<sup>39</sup> and the conversion to Islam that these women found agency and moments through which they could manifest the full range of collective identities to which they individually belonged. According to "Women 'Entrepreneurs' of Nairobi," this is due to the *spacetime* Islam occupied in Nairobi:

In East Africa Islam had largely been an urban religion. In Nairobi it offered a complete social system owing nothing to rural modes of life and taking no account of ethnic differences. This urban religion provided a framework within which people could interrelate on a new basis, it provided an authority structure, it ordered life crises, it offered literacy and formal education, and it even structured the passing of time with communal celebrations of one form or another. To convert to Islam involved at one and the same time the rejection of a person's tribal origins and his or her acceptance into a new set of urban relationships. Since women had often cut themselves off more critically from their rural origins than had most men (due to the circumstances in which they left home and to the occupation they had adopted in town) they had more need of an urban substitute for rural securities than had men. Indeed, some women spoke as if coming to live in town was synonymous

with conversion. “Why,” said one, “*everyone* who came to Nairobi changed and became a Swahili Muslim.”

Bujra underscores that Islam in Nairobi, although it represented an “authority structure,” also recognized the multidimensionality of Blackness in the city and found ways to attract members by providing institutions and practices that intersected with their own cherished moments of performance that they used to interpellate themselves as members of local collectives, such as communal celebration or simply the need for sustained communal interaction: “The Islamic community was conceived of in the idiom of kinship. Once having become a Muslim, all other Muslims became one’s ‘relatives’ or *jamaa*. This word may have many shades of meaning, but it is usually used to mean kindred, plus perhaps neighbours and friends—fellow members of a cohesive community . . . [that] replaced that of their tribe and relatives at home. One woman, when asked why she became a Muslim, replied simply: ‘I wanted *jamaa*. They will bury me.’”<sup>40</sup> What Bujra finds, in effect, is women cast out and marginalized under one vertical interpellation and finding another means of collective identity that is also largely horizontal, multidimensional, and rooted in the individual intersection with collective identities. Islam enhances these dimensions rather than demanding a qualitative collapse back to traditional heteropatriarchal roles: it does not require them to marry or bear children in order to retain their role in the community. Perhaps most valuably, Bujra’s interpellation reveals how a shift in spatiotemporal coordinates (here from rural to urban) can make an interpellation possible through an epistemology we imagine to be structured as vertical (Islam, which grants men agency as closer to God and gives women protected status) but that, in the “now,” makes a horizontal interpellation through peer relationships possible as well.

Bujra’s determination to “change the question” produces a formidable network of horizontal interpellations that intersect with a variety of Black identities, but the multidimensionality of her work and its intersection with a broad variety of disciplines too often produces qualitative collapse in the world of poststructuralist theory in the humanities and the social sciences that Massey analyzes. I could not find Bujra through my own rather large vertical search parameters of Blackness and World War II, and my research as a theorist into alternative models for spacetime brought me no closer. Without Bernard Forjwuor, I wonder what this chapter would look like.

These are the “axes of asymmetry” that attend the postwar epistemology. The qualitative parameters that accompany all research are always swinging, shifting, and suddenly collapsing when in their last iteration they might have been richly multidimensional, reminding us that *all* collective identities are contingent on the specific spacetimes through which we interpellate them. To be even harsher (perhaps just to myself), staying “true” to an Epiphenomenal interpellation of Blackness (alongside the vertical) means we must face our own moments of hypocrisy, wherein even those of us who champion gender and sexual equity in our research parameters sometimes provide a foothold for certain hierarchies to function. I would argue that this occurs through our desire to retrieve the histories of a specific collective (such as Black women across the Diaspora), but moving across distinct spacetimes erroneously categorizes these identities as transcendent. The result of our error is asymmetry: while some Black women can be found, others—tens of millions—go missing, because not all Black women are the same across all spacetimes. This is why the postwar epistemology begins with the individual, then moves horizontally, developing peer groups within this spacetime. Importantly, “peer” in the postwar epistemology is defined as sharing the same qualitative and quantitative parameters. If one mistakes collective identities as not constructed but essentialist (i.e., they transcend space and time), one ends up either measuring Beethoven’s skull and facial features to prove he wasn’t “Black” or facing puzzling disappearances that cannot be retrieved through the same spatiotemporal parameters one initially deployed.

There is a final verticality that needs to be reconciled to finish this book, and that is the relationship among the humanities, the methodological domain of *Physics of Blackness*, and discourses on spacetime written by physicists and science journalists. By turning to lay discourses in physics to seek out nonlinear models of spacetime, this book is always, in some ways, *reacting* to these physics discourses rather than acting on its own. A larger, more troubling symbolism emerges in which physics, that stereotypical exemplar of white Western male achievement, must intervene in and inform a wayward theorization of Blackness by Blacks and Black Africans across the Diaspora. In short, this is a vertical interpellation that threatens to produce a horrific qualitative collapse.

One can also, however, change *this* question, as one audience member did for me after a talk I gave on the book at Mills College in November 2011. “Where did Newton get his idea of linearity?” she asked, and I had to

admit that the question had never occurred to me because I had unconsciously located physics as the origin of these theorizations. Put another way, I had read Newton only vertically through a linear progress narrative in which he was a physicist rather than an individual who intersected with many other collectives. In this specific case, I had never thought of Newton as anything other than a scientist even though it would have made sense to ask what, as an intellectual at that time, his *religious* beliefs were. In other words, did he communicate with a peer group of fellow religious practitioners or did he individually interpellate himself through personally selected readings?

The answer invokes, for the final time, the impossibility of establishing a direct, linear causality in that there are many possible causes that point to other causes for Newton's idea of linearity. We know for sure that Newton did not hold with all Anglican beliefs, but the degree to which he did and did not cohere is debatable. In "Isaac Newton, Heretic: The Strategies of a Nicodemite,"<sup>41</sup> religious studies professor Stephen Snobelen observes that, while we know for sure that Newton was both deeply religious and "what the orthodox would have deemed extremely radical," "scholars are still unraveling his personal beliefs."<sup>42</sup>

By stressing a horizontal approach in which Newton's work cannot be read as harboring an answer to our question about his beliefs, Snobelen instead informs us that we can understand Newton's orthodoxy as specifically anti-Trinitarian<sup>43</sup> but that we also must interpellate Newton's discourses on religion as most likely seeking to obscure rather than render clear the question of his religious beliefs. This ambiguity, interpellated through Epiphenomenal time, provides a wealth of possibilities, all of which indicate that Newton's specific religious identities are numerous because so many could intersect with his scientific work. Snobelen suggests that Newton was heavily influenced by the work of Socinus (a mid-sixteenth- to early seventeenth-century Italian theologian) and might therefore intersect with the anti-Trinitarianism of Socinian beliefs, but we cannot be sure.<sup>44</sup>

*Physics of Blackness* is less interested in Newton, however, than in the circulation of ideas about space and time, or spacetime, and within this moment we can locate one of the earliest influential discourses on linear time in Western civilization. This much earlier manifestation of anti-Trinitarianism, known as Arianism, holds that the Son of God was preceded by and thus created by God, an assertion of divine vertical

interpellation if ever there was one. Preceding Socinus, a.k.a. Sozzini, by several centuries, in its heyday of influence in the third and fourth centuries CE, Arianism attracted two Byzantine emperors as followers before fading from influence in Christianity.

Arius, the founder of Arianism, was a Black African theologian, taking us outside of Europe before there was a Europe to a Black African who would not have identified with the term *Black*. In this “now” of the conclusion, pausing at Newton’s intersecting with Socinus and Arius on our progress narrative of spacetime concepts, *Physics of Blackness* underscores what it hopes to bring to the interpellation of Blackness: that the latter is simply too complex and broad, too catholic and global, to be confined by any parameters, including those set by itself.

In 2011, Sharon Bertsch McGrayne introduced lay audiences to Bayes’s Theorem in her book *The Theory That Would Not Die*. Rather than seek to uncover and deploy fixed absolutes in our exploration of the universe, Bayes’s Theorem, a mathematical equation, argues that we must routinely “update” our epistemologies if we hope to achieve consistently accurate results. In Bertsch McGrayne’s narrative, human ego and other forms of self-interest have marginalized the impact of Bayes’s equation across the sciences and social sciences. In her introduction to *The Theory That Would Not Die*, Bertsch McGrayne argues that despite the successful application of Bayes’s Theorem (which was actually further developed by a French researcher, Pierre Simon LaPlace, returning us to the impossibility of origins) to many “real world” problems—not unlike physics—the theorem was rendered *verboten* by “researchers and academics.” She notes, “In a celebrated example of science gone awry, geologists accumulated the evidence for Continental Drift in 1912 and then spent 50 years arguing that continents cannot move.”<sup>45</sup>

Arius argued that the Son of God was subordinate to “his Father” because Jesus follows God chronologically, asserting a vertical hierarchy whereby that which precedes is superior to that which follows. This is the implicit if not explicit value applied to origins in the linear progress narrative, why all events that follow on a linear timeline (as an effect of the original cause) must subordinate themselves to the meaning of the origin. Yet the concept of progress complicates this understanding of origin: if the “story” of the time is to move away from the origin toward a better state of affairs (e.g., from enslavement to freedom), then the origin operates against itself; it urges us to end its dominant resonance in our

lives. The origin of the Middle Passage epistemology effectively asks us to achieve total freedom and thus obliterate the need for more struggle—to reach a spacetime coordinate where and when no more progress is needed because all is perfect.

Bayes's Theorem, with its emphasis on updating as an essential component of progress, effectively adds a layer of Epiphenomenal time to the progress narrative. One can update only in the "now," of course, meaning that it makes sense to update one's understanding of the origin in a moment of reflection in order to accurately deploy that origin. This means that the "origin" is lifted from its place at the beginning of our timeline and remanifested in the present moment. Visually, it is as if, while we stand on a timeline, we reach back and pick up the glowing orb that symbolizes our collective's origin. Then, standing in place and holding that orb, we reflect on multiple pasts, multiple presents (either of our contemporaries or of other things we may have been doing in that moment under different circumstances), and multiple futures, with each reflection radiating out from that orb so that we appear to be at the intersection of all those radiating lines of light.

That is as far as the purple prose will go before it reaches the limits of imagination: after all, those radiating timelines all express possibilities imagined in the moment, not a broad choice of actions we can take. Yet in the act of interpreting our lives and (re)determining our actions—as well as those of others—this ability to imagine is crucial, guiding both the linear progress narrative and Epiphenomenal time. When it comes to scholarly, mass media, and quotidian analysis and interpretation of identities like Blackness, Thomas Bayes and Arius, Sir Isaac Newton and Ama Ata Aidoo, when brought into conversation, emphasize that Blackness must continually update itself in the moment at the level of the individual in order to accurately reflect and honor its trajectory "forward." The physics of Blackness is this mechanism in a nutshell, radiating outward from the individual and achieving meaning through the continual updating of intersecting interpellations in the "now."