

From the Point of No Return Writing Contemporary Spaces of

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Cet article place des situations d'enfermement, depuis les centres de détention pour les immigrantes jusqu'aux prisons pour femmes au centre des études de la diaspora africaine. Utilisant « Point of No Return » comme point de départ, l'auteure propose une réorientation du sujet. Elle propose que l'intérêt présent sur la mémoire du choc, de la violence et de la dispersion forcée, soit orienté vers une préoccupation plus sérieuse pour les expériences contemporaines du terrorisme et de l'immobilisation.

An' they had uh, what you call, I might call it now, uh, jail sentence, was jus' the same as we was in jail. Now I couldn' go from here across the street or I couldn' go through nobody's house 'out I have a note or something from my master. An' if I had that pass, that was what we call a pass, if I had that pass, I could go wherever he sent me. An' I'd have to be back, you know, whoever he sent me to, they'd give me another pass an' I'd bring that back so as to show how long I'd been gone ... I couldn' jus' walk away like the people does now, you know. It was what they call, we were slaves! We belonged to people. They'd sell us like they sell horses an' cows an' hogs an' all like that.

—Fountain Hughes (qtd. in Berlin, Favreau and Miller 283)

They have work range in Metro West [Detention Center], but you don't get paid. They do the trays, the laundry... At GVI [Grand Valley Institute for Women] I had maintenance. Maintenance is the worst job. These jobs are for men, contractors. We had to put screen doors on houses. Those doors are frigging heavy. We had to change the plunges on the screen door, we had to paint, we had to cut grass. One day we took the sink out of the wall. Some days you didn't even want to go to work. Holy shit, that was slave work. (Tina, interview, Toronto, 1999)

This article contributes to diaspora studies by thinking

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through the genealogy and the tensions of gender, confinement, and space embedded in diasporic conditions, analyzing what diaspora studies in Canada brings to bear on this discussion and suggesting new synergies between scholarship and struggles for social justice. The article draws attention to the ways in which the *memories* of trauma, violence, and forced scattering examined in diaspora theory can be deployed to understand *contemporary* experiences of state terror and immobilization. In so doing, I seek to rethink the relationship between location and time in the formation of what Avtar Brah labels “diaspora space” (208). At the center of this discussion, I want to consider

the unbearably slow passage of hours, days, and years that is commonly known as “doing time.” For, despite the allusion to temporality, “doing time” is also fundamentally about space. It is the confinement within the closed space of the prison and the brutal monotony of the cell that makes “doing time” a punishment. The interaction of time and space is constantly adjusted by prison authorities to administer a judicious degree of pain: 23 hour per day “lockdown” in a bare segregation cell as punishment for attempting suicide or otherwise creating a disturbance, free association and movement around the prison grounds, or even to an offsite workplace, as reward for good behaviour.

I start from Brah's observation that diasporic imagined community is constituted through a “confluence of narratives” that reconfigure multiple dispersals into one formative journey through a process of collective memory and re-memory (183). Constant retellings of forced relocation via the Middle Passage, and subsequent migrations in response to war, impoverishment and racial terrorism, place a shared memory of time gone by at the center of black collective identity. In this sense, diasporic subjectivities are fundamentally about a relationship between space and time. However, I want to suggest that this spatial-temporal interaction is not only about movement away from the traumatic past of bondage and death. Instead, I argue that contemporary diasporic conditions

to the Women's Prison Confinement into Diaspora Studies

are defined not by the routes and detours that have captured the attention of diasporic intellectuals (Gilroy 1993; Walcott), but by the unbearable immobility that surrounds these journeys. That is, that the forced and terrifying confinement exemplified by the condition of slavery becomes a formative feature of African diasporic subjectivity not only through memory and retelling, but also through ongoing experiences of capture and imprisonment. By paying attention to contemporary sites of confinement, terror, and death, I hope to mobilize the untapped potential of diaspora theory to elucidate the role of the prison in shaping black experiences of repression, resistance, and coalition-building. At the same time, by bringing the lives of criminalized women into the frame, I aim to highlight fractures within diasporic communities, which become most visible when we consider the physical and sexual violence and domination that occurs along lines of gender, sexuality and age. Although the U.S. gulag fundamentally shapes the ways in which contemporary penal regimes are represented and resisted, mirroring the U.S.-centrism of African diaspora studies, this article suggests that new insights are garnered when we center Canadian women's imprisonment within our analysis of the genealogy of racial-gender violence and confinement.

Journeys in Diaspora Theory

In the past 15 years, diaspora has been reconceptualized as a useful framework for connecting the contemporary cross-border flows of economic migrants, refugees and asylum seekers with the violent historic relocations associated with the slavery and indentured labour. Scholars have dislodged cultural nationalist and Afrocentric evocations of the African diaspora as a "black world," transplanted from Africa yet connected by essential racialized and cultural characteristics. Paul Gilroy's work (1987, 1993, 2000) has been particularly important in this regard. His concern has been to unmask "ethnic absolutism," whether evinced in white nativism, or in cultural

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insiderism by black communities, and to unearth a genealogy of creolized transnational black political thought and cultural production that offers an alternative to narrow and essentialist conceptions of blackness. Gilroy's work is groundbreaking because it replaces the notion of a single route from the African motherland to the diasporic space of the New World or Europe, with a complex crisscrossing of movements between multiple nodes in the political and cultural entity he names the Black Atlantic. At the same time, he pays close attention to the processes of remembering and retelling that are central to the construction of diasporic consciousness. The Black Atlantic therefore emerges as a

political and cultural formation constituted through the collective memory of a traumatic past as well as common struggles for emancipation and citizenship.

In exploring the Black Atlantic, Gilroy offers a number of chronotopes, metaphors that serve as foci for his analysis of the relationship between diasporic space and time. Primary among these is the ship:

I have settled on the image of ships in motion across spaces between Europe, America, Africa and the Caribbean as a central organising symbol for this enterprise.... The image of the ship—a living, micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion—is especially important for historical and theoretical reasons.... Ships immediately focus attention on the middle passage, on the various projects for redemptive return to an African homeland, on the circulation of ideas and activists.... (1993: 4).

A number of critics have questioned Gilroy's choice of the ship as the vehicle for his diasporic explorations, pointing out the gendered limitations of traveling metaphors. By focusing on the ship as the primary site for diasporic journeys, Gilroy privileges the political vision and cultural contributions of sailors, navymen, and seafarers, categories that rarely include women. Indeed black women intellectuals who crossed the Atlantic receive

only brief mention in Gilroy's study, despite his stated concern with the internal differentiation within diasporic communities. According to Jacqueline Nassy Brown, the point of "gendering diaspora space" should not be to add women in the name of gender balance, but instead to consider what an inquiry into the "staunchly male" sphere of seafaring might teach us about the "gendered politics of staying, going, and returning" (301).¹ As Brown points out, questions of mobility—who travels, who cannot, who sets sail, who stays home, who can cross borders, who is detained behind them—are deeply gendered. Brown fails to acknowledge however that these questions are also infused with the politics of class, citizenship and the social construction of criminality. Examining the ship focuses our attention on certain types of diasporic subjects in ways that are constituted through class, citizenship, social status and stigma as well as gender. Gilroy's retelling of the journeys and sojourns of black intellectuals and artists leaves not only women, but migrants and refugees, prisoners and juvenile detainees in the shadows.

As Gilroy (2000) suggests, the adoption of the ship as a central metaphor for the diasporic condition focuses our gaze on the Middle Passage as the critical moment of trauma and collective identity formation. Landing in the Americas, the African captive looking back toward her homeland saw only the unbroken line where the Atlantic Ocean meets the sky. It is this orientation toward the ocean, this rootless sense of unbelonging, that marks the diasporic subject as always alien, exiled, and lays the foundation for the claiming of mobile, fluid, and transnational identifications. However, if we revisit the Middle Passage from the point of view of the African continent, or to be more specific, from the Point of No Return, we would have a different vision of the Atlantic (Brand). For where the ocean laps what was once the Gold Coast, we see arrayed along the coastline a series of forts. With cannons facing the still-awaited European invader, the forts of Elmina and Cape Coast are not only outposts of Empire. They are also prisons, spaces of confinement where captives were once housed for weeks or months awaiting the arrival of a slaveship.² The enslaved journey was not only about the forced march to the coast, the agonizing passage across the ocean and the shackled shuffle to the slave auction.³ It was also marked by open-ended "time" served in the dungeons of the slave fort, where captives tasted their first experience of the terror of immobility.⁴ It is this immobility, the impossibility of free movement, as Fountain Hughes vividly recalls some seven decades after his emancipation, that was to

define the experience of being someone who "belonged to people."⁵ This immobility was experienced differently by men and women. While all captives were brutalized by confinement in the dungeons of the coastal forts, women captives were also systematically paraded and raped by the European administrators. And for black women in the Americas, the "cage" of slavery meant the incapacity to flee sexual violence and coerced breeding in addition to forced labour. (Jacobs 52).

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While much attention has been paid to the ways in which the horrors of slavery are summoned up by African diasporic subjects in the quest for liberation and citizenship, there is a tendency to locate the brutality of confinement in the past. Thus the "terrors and bondage that have been left behind" become a source of contemporary political and cultural solidarities (Gilroy 1993: 212). Tina's description of penal labour as "slave work" reminds us that the diasporic journey has not been one from "slavery to freedom," but that being shackled and caged is a formative aspect of contemporary African diasporic subjectivity, an experience that is reflected in black popular culture and political visions. By reconfiguring the relation-

ship between immobility, forced movement and time, our attention is drawn to the contemporary spaces of confinement that are usually invisible to diaspora theorists as well as to others in the "free world" outside of prison walls. This focus would encourage new questions. A diasporic lens could be applied to unravel the significance of the U.S. State Department's proposal to construct a detention camp at Guantanamo Naval Station in Cuba to cage refugees of the Haitian crisis alongside "enemy combatants" prior to the U.S.-backed overthrow of the Aristide government (Seper). Our attention would be drawn to the refugee camps, immigration detention centers, psychiatric wards, prisons, bootcamps, youth detention centres, and other places where people of African descent are locked down in ever growing numbers (Sudbury 2002a). Remembering the gendering of immobility, we might be tempted to seek out the women's unit, tacked on as an afterthought to the men's prison.⁶ In other words, diaspora theorists would embrace very different subjects—the refugee, the undocumented immigrant, the woman prisoner—and might have a greater sense of urgency in engaging movements against state violence in the shadow of capital.

Tina, interviewed at the Elizabeth Fry halfway house in Toronto, is not alone in viewing prison time as a form of slave labour. A number of scholars, exiles and activists, informed by personal experiences of imprisonment, have

pointed to the corollary between the prison and the slave plantation. Writing from FCI Danbury, Connecticut, Kemba Smith⁷ notes that prison is “a system of modern day slavery” that generates jobs and profits by transforming black bodies into raw materials (2). In more scholarly vein, Angela Davis traces the origins of the prison system in the U.S. South to the emergence of the convict lease system in the post-reconstruction years. Using the deliberate loophole left by the 13th Amendment, which stated

that: “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, *except as a punishment for crime*, whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States,” the Southern plantocracy swiftly instituted a series of Black Codes that could be used to criminalize African American men and women and condemn them to convict labour (Davis 1998a: 75). The rise of the prison as the primary mode of punishment in the U.S. is therefore closely interwoven with the demise of slavery. Or rather, the Peculiar Institution, with its useful dual functions of immobilizing subordinated and therefore rebellious populations and producing racialized and therefore cheap labour, simply underwent a transformation to a form which could

exist alongside the waged “free” labour demanded by the dominant Northern states. If we write the chain gang, the convicted plantation labourer and the contemporary prison back into the historical narratives that shape contemporary African diasporic identities, then our telling of the journey from slavery to freedom necessarily becomes more complicated. Far from being free to embrace a liberating cosmopolitan, mobile, and postracial subjectivity,⁸ many black men and women continue to experience confinement, immobility, and a profound lack of freedom or autonomy. More significantly, the existence of the prison, disproportionately populated by black people, and represented in popular culture as a black space, marks all black people with the “badge” of the criminal.⁹ Whether driving to church, shopping in the mall or cashing our welfare checks, we New World Africans are all confined by the prison, immobilized by the accusing cry of a little white girl: “Look, a Criminal!” (Fanon).¹⁰

It is no surprise that African Americans have been at the forefront in exploring the role of the prison, that primary site of contemporary immobility, in shaping black subjectivities. With over one million African Americans behind bars, and the number of black women in U.S. prisons rising faster than that of black men, incarceration has become both a commonplace and a crisis for African American communities (Mauer and Chesney-Lind; Wacquant). Nor is it surprising, given the profits

generated in the global marketplace by images of black men defying authority or receiving their “just deserts,” in combination with the global reach of U.S. popular culture, that how we imagine the prison is profoundly overdetermined by visions of African American men warehoused in cages. But the dominance of the U.S. experiment with mass incarceration creates a potential pitfall for those of us interested in writing the prison into diaspora theory. Discussions about the “black world”

have long been tainted with what Paul Gilroy [called “Americocentricity” (1993: 91) leading pioneering literary critic George Elliott Clarke to ask: “Must All Blackness Be American?” (Clarke 2002: 71). Having answered this question assertively in the negative, Clarke and other African Canadian critics might question the wisdom of turning our attention to yet another arena in which the U.S. dominates.¹¹ The struggle to develop black identities in Canada or Britain that are not reliant on African American music, religion, iconic figures, and political imagery has been a hard enough road without adding the prison to the long list of U.S. exports demanding reinvention. However, I want to sug-

gest that by reconsidering a site that has been so securely imagined as located within the narratives of U.S. black identity, we disrupt the centrality of the U.S. within African diasporic subjectivity. Put another way, by rethinking this particular diasporic site, we might begin to assert a more expansive continental African American political and cultural location that acknowledges the existence of the other Americans, both North and South. In this sense, Americocentricity would cease to be a synonym for U.S.-centrism, and the U.S. would be stripped of some of its imperial pretensions. At the same time, our efforts would necessarily make visible the surveillance, criminalization, and disproportionate incarceration of African Canadians, another nail in the coffin of Canadian claims to racial tolerance and harmonious cultural pluralism (Commission on Systemic Racism).

Writing about Canadian prisons in the context of U.S.-centrism in the field of prison studies also requires us to think critically about the concepts and paradigms that emerge from the over 20 years of dramatic prison expansion in the U.S. While concepts such as mass incarceration, the war on black communities and the prison-industrial complex, have been useful in generating a critique of the U.S. incarceration boom, their relevance has yet to be fully explored in the Canadian context. Two critical differences between imprisonment in the U.S. and Canada should shape our analysis of Canadian women’s

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prisons. The first is the different political economy of prisons in each location. In the U.S., mass incarceration has emerged as a solution to shifts in the national and local economies generated by globalization and free trade (Gilmore 1998; Davis 1998b). Rather than providing a safety net for the disenfranchised communities that have been made redundant by downsizing and the relocation of industry abroad, successive governments from Reagan to Bush Jr. have introduced tough-on-crime measures that have resulted in the warehousing of over two million men, women and young people (Mauer and Chesney Lind). These measures, including the war on drugs, truth in sentencing, three strikes and crackdowns on "criminal aliens" and human smugglers are racialized and gendered in ways that disproportionately affect African Americans, Latinos/as and Native Americans. At the same time, prison financing, construction, maintenance, and operation have emerged as a profitable and recession-proof industry, viewed by struggling small towns as a panacea for local economic problems. In contrast to the U.S. love affair with punishment and incarceration, the Canadian federal government has attempted to resist neo-

colonization by the U.S. mass incarceration model, using research to demonstrate that tough-on-crime measures do not positively affect crime rates or produce a greater sense of security. As a result, Canadian federal rates of imprisonment are considerably lower than U.S. rates and Canada's incarceration rate has dropped from one half to one sixth of that of the U.S. (Gardner 2002a). However, it would be premature to suggest that Canadian imprisonment is immune to U.S. trends toward penal warehousing. While the Canadian incarceration rate compares favourably to the U.S., it is higher than many Western European countries with similar social welfare systems.¹² There are also immense differences between the federal and provincial prison systems. In Ontario, for example, the provincial government has embraced U.S. style law-and-order measures, from the criminalization of "aggressive panhandling" to the establishment of bootcamps for youth (Gardner 2002b). The province has also embarked on an ambitious prison building program, including the construction of new U.S.-style superjails and contracting with a U.S. private prison corporation to run a superjail in Penetanguishene.

The second major difference between representations of U.S. prisons, and the Canadian penal system is the racialization of incarceration. Approximately 50 per cent of prisoners in the U.S. are black, one in three black young men are under some form of criminal justice supervision,

and black women are the fastest growing imprisoned population (Miller; Bush-Baskette). While over one million African Americans are behind bars, the entire prison population of Canada is 36,000 (International Centre for Prison Studies). As a relatively underpopulated country, Canada does not begin to reach the scale of racialized imprisonment represented by what Ruth Wilson Gilmore (forthcoming) calls the U.S. gulag. However, Canada's prisons are nevertheless disproportionately filled with

racialized bodies. While aboriginal people make up approximately three per cent of the total population, they make up 18 per cent of men in federal prisons and 23 per cent of women (Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies). Similarly, black women make up only two per cent of the general female population and 12 per cent of federal women prisoners (Pollack). At the provincial level, black and aboriginal people are even more disproportionately targeted for policing, surveillance and imprisonment. A 1995 study found that black women were admitted to Ontario's provincial jails at seven times the rate of white women and labeled the dramatic increase in black incarceration during the decade preceding the study "shock-

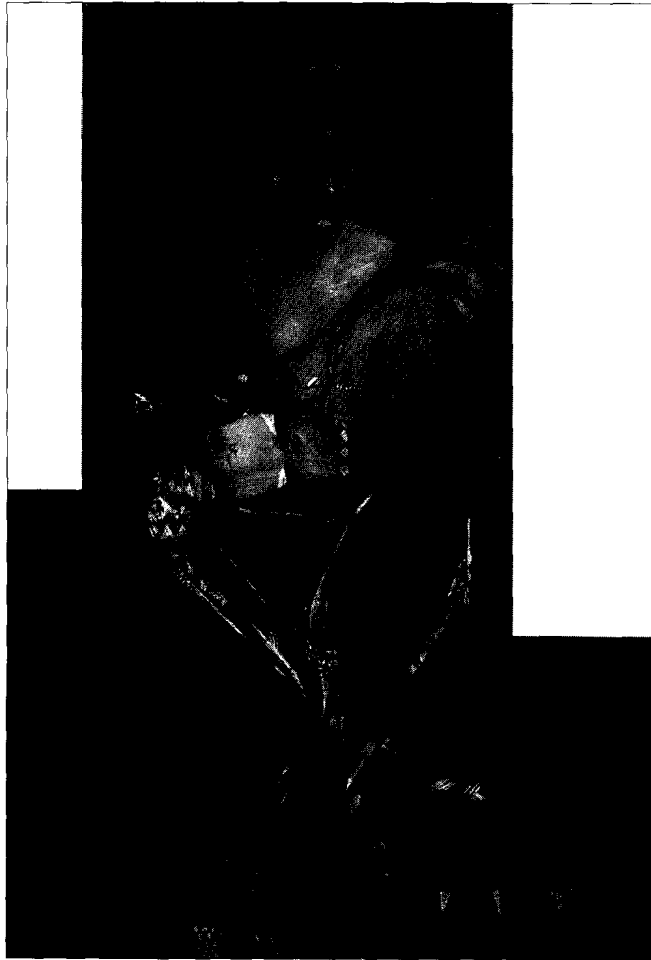
ing" (Commission on Systemic Racism). Aboriginal women make up 27 per cent of the women's provincial prison population, and in Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and the Northwest Territories, up to 56 per cent (Pollack; Canadian Criminal Justice Association). Latino/a and Native American scholars and activists have criticized U.S. prison studies for the tendency to overlook the presence of non-black racialized subjects within U.S. prisons (Ogden; Díaz-Cotto). In contrast, Canadian prison studies have long been concerned with the devastating impact of punishment regimes on aboriginal communities, but have had relatively little to say about their disproportionate impact on African Canadians and other racialized and immigrant groups. Bringing together diaspora studies and Canadian prison studies creates a space to foreground the overlooked experiences of African Canadian prisoners, and to explore cultural and political interactions between aboriginal and black communities.

In the following section, I introduce one woman's narrative in order to highlight the potential benefits in theorizing diasporic immobility through the case study of the women's prison. Rather than seeking to provide a comprehensive map of black women's experiences of imprisonment in Canada, I deploy this narrative to raise new questions about the intersections of racial and gender violence in historical and contemporary diasporic experiences of trauma, the entanglements of indigenous and

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diasporic journeys and the social justice implications of diaspora scholarship. At the end of the article, I gesture toward a methodology for theorizing diasporic sites of confinement and propose some future directions for research, analysis and activism.

For the past six years, I have been involved simultaneously in research on the connections between globalization and the growth in women's imprisonment, and activism against the violence of women's incarceration and what has been labeled the prison industrial complex. While most of my activism has been located in the U.S, primarily in California, my research has led me to prisons and half-way houses in Canada, the U.S., and Britain where I have interviewed over 50 women in addition to wardens, prison officers, senior administrators, and prison activists. Like the slave narrative, women's narratives of imprisonment can be deployed strategically against dehumanizing official and popular discourses, in this case about female offenders and evil criminals. At the same time, their testimonies of the emotional, physical, and sexual brutality inflicted by the prison is a call to action and a reminder of the immense responsibility of the activist-scholar located in the privileged space of the "free-world."



Marie-Denise Douyon, "Femme Pintade," engraving inks and oils on masonite, 32" x 48", 2003. Photo: Paul Simon

On the Run: Entanglements with Sex, Race and Nation.

I was born in '46. Segregation. But poor white trash was poor white trash and they dated black men and the black men were living the myth that they were somebody if they had a white woman.... (Mattie,¹³ interview, 2002)

When I interviewed Mattie four decades after her first experiences of criminalization and incarceration, she was still entangled with the long arms of the law, fighting an assault charge. Reflecting on the roads that brought her to what she describes as a terrifying ordeal with the criminal punishment system, Mattie started her narrative with her

birth in Cape Breton and her mother's decision to hand her over to her African Nova Scotian and Mi'kmaq grandparents:

... the reason why she took my sister and I on the train to my grandparents, my black and aboriginal grandparents was because my father and her had broken up so a lot of white women will abandon their brown children as a result of that. If they can't have the man they don't want the kid. She felt that we would interfere in whatever. She could not get any worse in her behaviour but I think she thought having brown children around would maybe prevent her finding a white man ... I came from incest from both sides of my family. When she delivered me into the hands of my grandparents the incest continued with my grandfather, I was sodomized in the basement of my grandparents' home.

Rendered expendable by racialized and gendered economies of human worth that positioned her as an intolerable burden to her white mother, Mattie was set up for sexual assault and exploitation within her grandparents' home. The abuse did not end there, however. Turning to a traditional pillar of support within the African Nova Scotian community, Mattie learned that the beloved community of the Church comes at a high price to the vulnerable within the congregation:

"Give my best to your grandmother." "Yes sir I will." "By the way I need some help in the office would you come and help me with something?" "Oh yes sir." "You wouldn't dare refuse, you don't refuse the pastor. So I went in and he said the lord talked to him and the lord told him that I was special. And that I was created to help him to continue his work and that there were certain things that I had to do in order to qualify to get that blessing that God was going to give me, it was a sacrifice. So he says this is what you do. He said get on your knees. And I

thought I would have to pray, because we're always on our knees. And so I got on my knees and I'm looking up and he pulls his penis out and he says you have to kiss my penis and ... you know the rest.

From Nova Scotia, Mattie was sent to her uncle in New England, but there the abuse continued. Finding home life unbearable, Mattie began to run away. Once on the run however, she had to find ways to find food and shelter. Early experiences of sexual abuse made sex work a rational choice:

[E]ach time I'd run I'd learn more and I'd start to connect with people like myself, other kids, other runaways. I'd learn how to steal from stores so I'd have something to eat, and I'd tap into people with a roof over their head. And then I discovered prostitution. So I was in the sex trade from almost 13. Then when I learnt that sex was a commodity I had nothing to protect, I certainly wasn't a virgin, and I thought this is not bad because at least I have a little control. I had some control and I was getting a little money and I didn't have to see these people again. Of course at that age I didn't know about bad tricks, I didn't know about people killing prostitutes, and beating them up and I didn't know about pimps. But I soon learnt.

Mattie quickly learned that survival as a black girl on the street required the accommodation of authority figures. Frequent interactions with police officers, who exchanged oral sex for the willingness to turn a blind eye to her underage runaway status, taught her some lessons about the underbelly of Canadian law-and-order. Continually moved by pimps between Toronto, Montreal, Windsor and Detroit, and in and out of juvenile detention facilities, Mattie's life spiraled until she was sentenced to an adult prison for her part in an armed robbery:

I was a deep thinker, I didn't have an education but I knew there was something terribly wrong. Also everyone was racializing me, calling me nigger and black this. At first I thought it was happening to me because of that but then I saw it was happening to white kids too. I saw politicians, chiefs of police, people in power, they were the tricks, school teachers, professors. These are the people I was told I was to grow up to be with. These were the people that were fucking with me and other kids. So I was totally violated, spiritually, mentally, physically, everything was violated. So I had no respect for society and I showed it.

Confined in her grandfather's cellar, immobilized by her respect for the Church, periodically locked in juvenile hall and eventually caged in the dungeons of the Kingston Prison for Women, Mattie's life history is characterized by movement between a series of spaces of confinement.

Rather than "seafaring" or "jogging," her movements are better conveyed by the concept of being "on the run."¹⁴ On the run across provincial and national borderlines, she is haunted by the terror of confinement, a form of dehumanization that is worse than the hunger and instability of the streets.

Mattie's narrative encourages us to identify what Mecke Nagel describes as "new diasporic sites" (1). Overlooked by diaspora theorists, the prison as diasporic site is the nexus connecting contemporary experiences of repression and resistance to collective memories of slavery and rebellion. While Nagel's analysis focuses on the U.S. and thus traces the genealogy of the prison from the southern plantation through the convict lease system, black prisoners in Canada have more diverse routes from slave plantation to prison cell. These routes include plantation slavery in the former British or French West Indies as well as the Southern U.S. states. Nevertheless, as Tina indicates, the memory of slavery is a resource that can be drawn on by black prisoners in Canada to provide an emotive and analytical framework for understanding the experience of bondage. Viewing imprisonment as part of the legacy of slavery also mobilizes histories of slave rebels, from Nanny of the Maroons to Harriet Tubman. Through multiple acts of resistance, covert as well as overt, prisoners too "refuse slave status" and demand a recognition of their humanity (Nagel 5). Mattie's response to racialization and criminalization can also be read as a form of resistance. Rather than accepting imprisonment as "just deserts" for her criminal(ized) actions, she develops a trenchant critique of the systemic racism and sexism that underpins the criminalization of black, indigenous, and marginalized young women. Her lack of respect for "society" suggests an emergent abolitionist consciousness that refutes reformist solutions to deep-rooted systems of violence and oppression. Reading the detention center for girls and the women's prison as diasporic sites encourages us to think about the intersections of gendered and racial violence in the formation of diaspora subjectivity. While the centrality of sexual violence and commodification to chattel slavery is well-charted ground, diaspora theorists have yet to incorporate contemporary forms of sexual and domestic violence against black women into analyses of black vernacular political and cultural visions. Mattie's story suggests that resistance to sexual commodification and brutality is an important yet overlooked aspect of the struggles for freedom, humanity and justice that unite African diasporic communities transnationally. Domestic abuse and institutional brutality merge in her experience to generate a continuum of intimate and state violence. This entanglement of racialized, gendered, and sexual violence characterizes the immobilization of women and men in diaspora space, the space occupied by the fort, the prison, the juvenile hall. The space that is also "the measure of our ancestors' step through the door toward the ship" (Brand 20).

Cross-cultural Intimacies in Diaspora Space

Narratives are always partial. Inevitably the storyteller must be selective about her material lest the audience tire or the pages run out. In this article, I have chosen to foreground one woman's story. It is a story that leads from Cape Breton to Nova Scotia and on to New England, through Quebec, Michigan, and ultimately to a small cell in a dismal, and now closed, prison in Kingston, Ontario. Other women have told me of different journeys. The frequent border-crossings of Jamaican women and their grown children incarcerated for carrying criminalized drugs in their suitcases or stomachs is one common story that I narrate elsewhere (Sudbury 2002b). The story of African women whose journeys in search of employment opportunities also end up in a cell, sometimes via the global sex industry, is told elsewhere (Angel-Ajani). All of these stories, and more, shape the diasporic space of the Canadian women's prison. But diaspora space is not only occupied by black captives and white jailors. Writing about England, Avtar Brah describes a space where "African-Caribbean, Irish, Asian, Jewish and other diasporas intersect among themselves as well as with the entity constructed as 'Englishness'" (209). Brah's conceptualization shifts African diaspora studies from its reliance on the black-white binary, a central trope of race-thinking in the U.S., and encourages us to consider the interactions between migrants from two continents in a third space. In the context of the criminalization of Chinese undocumented migrants and South Asian "terror suspects," Brah's work is particularly relevant to the Canadian prison. While the prison is discursively represented as a space inhabited by white guards and black "criminals," Vietnamese, Chinese, Hong Kong Chinese, Thai, Malaysian, and Pakistani prisoners exist in the interstices of the prison, not quite visible even to prison authorities who consistently deny them appropriate food, religious observances or translation. Acknowledging these liminal figures might help us to interrogate the intertwined processes of racialization and criminalization that shape the journey from the courtroom to the cell. Future research could focus on the political and cultural articulations of African and Asian diasporas in other spaces.

If we do decide to embark on an examination of the role of African and Asian diasporic interactions in shaping political and cultural formations in the Americas, we must be careful not to replicate the colonial arrogance of previous place-naming endeavours. Reminded by Brah that "diaspora space as a conceptual category is 'inhabited,' not only by those who have migrated and their descendants, but equally by those who are constructed and represented as indigenous" (209), we must pay attention to the entanglements between aboriginal and diasporic communities in Canada, the U.S. and the Caribbean. The line from the Point of No Return to the prison is compli-

cated by indigenous histories of confinement and terror, from the reserve to the boarding school. Indeed Mattie identifies as both indigenous and black, and has a white mother, thus embodying the intimate relations between three continents. Future research might focus on elaborating what Lisa Lowe, introducing the figure of the Chinese "coolie" to examinations of the African diaspora, calls "the intimacies of four continents" (1). Lowe's concept invites us to consider the outcome of forced and chosen migrations from three continents—Africa, Asia and Europe—to a fourth, the Americas.

Invoking simultaneously the spatial proximity generated by the political economy of plantation slavery and indentured labour, and the forced and elected sexual intimacies between "slaves," "coolies," natives and whites, Lowe's concept heralds much promise for those of us interested in unraveling the interconnections between intimate and state violence that shape contemporary diasporic spaces. In the context of the prison, we would need to pay attention to convergences between aboriginal and black women, both of whom are disproportionately incarcerated and frequently labeled violent or psychotic. We might also examine conflict and coalition-building between aboriginal and black women, and between black natives, "aboriginal" blacks and immigrant blacks and their descendants.¹⁵

This article has attempted to ground African diasporic studies in the material conditions generated by increasingly punitive nation-states. This plea to temper our celebration of motion and the translocal play of diasporic cultures with a long hard look at spaces of confinement can also be read more broadly as a call for a new agenda within African diaspora studies. If black cultural studies has become a "successor science" to black studies, replacing outdated essentialist equations of blood, race, and nation with a deterritorialized, cosmopolitan orientation (see Walcott 38-41), then it may be time to welcome transnational black feminist studies as a sister science that is grounded in local struggles against state violence. Paying attention to the brutality of immobilization, mapping the connections between intimate and state violence, transnational black feminism evokes a political urgency centered on specific local sites of struggle. This call for grounding should not be mistaken for a return to comfortable fictions of place, nation, and belonging. In the context of domestic abuse and the often violent impositions of nation-making projects which take the form of policing women's bodies, women should be wary of the supposed safety implied in going "home." Instead I am interested in the possibility of multiracial coalitions that oppose the immobilizing tactics of the state, recognizing that confinement is a condition that impinges violently on racialized, migrant, and aboriginal women alike. Recognizing the connections between the Point of No Return, the plantation, the prison, and the reserve is a starting point in such a political project.

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¹Brown's work is part of a broader discussion by black feminist diaspora theorists about issues of gender, racial-sexual violence, mobility and confinement (see Davies; Philip; Brand).

²I would like to thank Vivienne Saleh-Hannah for her insistence on the centrality of the coastal forts to our understanding of the genealogy of the prison.

³The dualism of motion and immobility is lodged within the Middle Passage itself, since captives were chained tightly in place as they crossed the Atlantic. Dylan Rodriguez theorizes the slaver as a "sea-borne prison" (72). This "portable and moving confinement" (73) was designed to teach captives their position in the new global ordering even as they were transported to the New World. ⁴Eighteenth-century slave-trader William Bosman's description of the mundane business of the forts asserts the centrality of the prison to the human trade: "When we have agreed with the Owners of the Slaves, they are returned to their Prison; where from that time forwards they are kept at our charge, cost us two pence a day a Slave; which serves to subsist them, like our Criminals, on Bread and Water" (qtd. in Brand 22).

⁵From the 1930s, the Federal Writers Project, under the auspices of the U.S. Federal Emergency Relief Administration, dispatched interviewers to 17 states to document the life histories of the survivors of slavery. Fountain Hughes was interviewed in 1941 when he was one-hundred-and-one years old (Berlin, Favreau and Miller). ⁶Despite plans to move federally sentenced women to the newly built, supposedly "women-centered" prisons, women with maximum security designations, a disproportionate number of them women of colour and aboriginal women, continue to be housed in male prisons, in defiance of international conventions on the treatment of prisoners (Hannah-Moffat). In Ontario's restructured provincial system, women prisoners have been moved from the separate facilities into superjails housing over 1,000 men (Haq).

⁷After a massive campaign against her 23.5-year sentence for "conspiracy" in a drug case involving an abusive partner, Kemba Smith was granted clemency by then President Clinton. She is now a passionate advocate of drug law reform.

⁸I am alluding here to Gilroy's call for black people to transcend racialized identities in favor of a "radically nonracial" "planetary humanism" (2000: 17).

⁹Exposure to the trope of black criminality does not require residence in an urban center with a dense black

population. Urban images of dangerous blacks appear to translate with ease into racial profiling by edgy rural shopkeepers, as I am reminded on frequent visits to the Kawarthas.

¹⁰The widespread racial profiling by the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) revealed by the *Toronto Star*, and the depiction of black women as welfare frauds (Mosher), are examples of the equation between blackness and criminality embedded in contemporary discourses of law and order.

¹¹While significant differences exist between Walcott and Clarke's diasporic projects, that is not the scope of this article. Instead I point to the commitment in both to writing black Canada into diasporic cultural criticism.

¹²While 116 in every 100,000 Canadians are in prison or jail, the rate per 100,000 in the U.S. is 701, France 93, Sweden 72 and Norway 64 (International Center for Prison Studies).

¹³Name and identifying information altered.

¹⁴While Paul Gilroy proposes "seafaring" as a central metaphor for the diasporic condition (1993: 12-14), Rinaldo Walcott suggests that "jogging" is a more appropriate metaphor for the Northern movement of diasporic blacks from the time of the Underground Railroad onward (31).

¹⁵George Elliott Clarke uses the term "aboriginal" to describe African Canadians who are the descendants of early settlers and calls for closer attention to the cleavages between "aboriginal" and "naturalized" (immigrant) black people (1997: xxii).

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