

MASTERARBEIT | MASTER'S THESIS

Titel | Title

Centering the Margins, Rewriting the Other:
Alterity Politics, Relation, and Identity in James Baldwin's Early Novels

verfasst von | submitted by

Stefan Kranawetter BEd BA

angestrebter akademischer Grad | in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Education (MEd)

Wien | Vienna, 2024

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt |
Degree programme code as it appears on the
student record sheet:

UA 199 507 520 02

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt | Degree pro-
gramme as it appears on the student record
sheet:

Masterstudium Lehramt Sek (AB) Unterrichtsfach
Englisch Unterrichtsfach Mathematik

Betreut von | Supervisor:

Dr. Marta Werbanowska

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INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, the work of James Baldwin has been met with increasing academic interest from various theoretical angles. From the resulting growth in scholarship on Baldwin's fiction and non-fiction, readings of the writer's formerly underexamined later work and new perspectives on his early fiction have emerged. Accordingly, rereading Baldwin's early works adds to this resurgent academic interest and updates perspectives on the author's early literary political project. My thesis aims to contribute an intersectional perspective on Baldwin's first two novels, *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953) and *Giovanni's Room* (1956) informed by post-colonial theory, Black and queer studies, psychoanalysis, and Baldwin's essayistic writing to illuminate the role of space in the construction of character identities in these works. This chapter outlines my thesis' contribution to the field of Baldwin studies, its research question and thesis statement, and provides an overview of its structure.

In recent years, Baldwin's literary corpus has increasingly attracted scholarly interest. Several scholars observing the field of Baldwin studies have noted a surge in engagement with the author over the past two decades which Josef Vogel and Quentin Miller have respectively called a Baldwin "renaissance" (Gibson 128; Miller 187; Vogel 155). Miller illustrates this resurgence with data on academic publication and writes that the amount of criticism on Baldwin published in the three years from 2010 to 2013 exceeded that published in the decade before (186). Undoubtedly, the *James Baldwin Review*, an academic journal dedicated to research on Baldwin established in 2015, adds to the resurgence of scholarly interest in the author and his work. Additionally, edited volumes such as *The Cambridge Companion to James Baldwin* (2015, edited by Michelle Elam) and monographs such as *James Baldwin and the Queer Imagination* (2014) by Matt Brim and *Understanding James Baldwin* (2019) by Marc Dudley are among the prominent recent contributions to Baldwin scholarship. In this context, Baldwin scholars like Douglas Field, William Maxwell, Quentin Miller, Bill Mullen, Ed Pavlic, and

Magdalena Zaborowska have contributed to a varied body of scholarship which reconsiders Baldwin's literary and theoretical writings in their political and biographical contexts. Miller points out that alongside the general increase in academic interest a turn in the reception of Baldwin emerged which rejects the narrative of the diminishing quality of his writing in later works and updates inquiries into the author's "misunderstood" artistic and political project (187). However, Earnest Gibson also identifies a scholarly "return ... to the familiar texts," Baldwin's early works which have long been read with great critical acclaim (130). Therefore, Baldwin studies is a field of accelerating academic interest which reconsiders Baldwin's later work, yet also revisits his earlier writing from new perspectives.

For my thesis, pieces of criticism which inquire into Baldwin's characters' identities through a conceptual framework of alterity and engage with spatiality, relation, and love are central. A case in point is Nigel Hatton's contribution to Zaborowska's "Rebranding James Baldwin and His Queer Others." Hatton establishes that Baldwin expands the boundaries of the subject to include marginalized identities and accept their full humanity. They see *Go Tell It on the Mountain* and *Giovanni's Room* as parts of a larger ethical project in Baldwin's writing which updates humanism through love that restores to "humanist ... thought a diverse, dialectal universalism" (214-215). Christopher Freeburg endorses this centrality of love and interpersonal relation in the construction of character identity in Baldwin's works. Aliyyah Abur-Rahman adds that sexual and racial identities in *Giovanni's Room* challenge notions of a stable subjectivity in favor of more processual conceptions of identity. Similarly, Roderick Ferguson reads *Go Tell It on the Mountain* as a critique of the exclusionary dynamics of heteronormativity dismantled by identities that are not accommodated by such restrictive ideologies. Especially for its attention to spaces and their interactions with identity, Ferguson's contribution is a central source. My thesis draws on these scholar's insights into love, relation, processuality, and

spatiality in the construction of Baldwin's character's identities and aims to expand on their findings by using these prisms in readings of race, gender, and sexuality.

While my thesis builds on the insights of the academic work surveyed above, among others, it adds an extensive inquiry into the role of spatiality and relation in the construction of character identity in Baldwin's first two novels. By rereading *Go Tell It on the Mountain* and *Giovanni's Room* with a focus on the alterity politics represented by spaces and relation, my thesis enriches the existing body of research with a perspective on the interaction between space, relation, and the intersectional constitution of racialized, gendered, and sexual character identities. The central research question which guides my readings asks how spaces and relationships are used in an alterity politics to constitute, complicate, and destabilize racialized, gendered, and sexual character identities in Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain* and *Giovanni's Room*. To address this question, I undertake close readings of passages from the primary texts and examine the entanglements of spatial organization, relation, and identity categories. In these readings, I engage critical perspectives from postcolonial, Black, and queer studies and apply Baldwin's essayistic work as a central lens to enlighten the broader significance of his literary intervention as a political project. Thereby, my thesis contributes to the ongoing conversation on Baldwin's role in literary and political discourses.

Building on existing theories and scholarship, I argue that *Go Tell It on the Mountain* and *Giovanni's Room* uncover the power structures which undergird the construction of binary identity categories of gender, sexuality, and race and display the perpetual process of reproducing and reaffirming these categories by renewing their delimitations. I demonstrate that this process of othering draws on the organization of space and produces topographies which reflect and stabilize oppressive categories. However, through their physical and imaginative mobility, Baldwin's characters transgress spatial and conceptual boundaries and relate to each other in ways which destabilize racist and heterosexist categorization. In this resistance, relation and

love become central strategies to realize human complexity beyond the limits of reductive categorizations. In my readings of spaces as sites of the negotiation of these categorizations, this thesis provides a perspective on the political literary project of Baldwin's first two novels as articulations of a revolutionary humanism rooted in relation and love.

This thesis is structured into three main chapters, the first of which lays out the theoretical foundation for the subsequent two chapters of analysis respectively dedicated to readings of *Go Tell It on the Mountain* and *Giovanni's Room*. The theoretical framework of this thesis defines central analytical terms adopted from poststructuralist and postcolonial theorists. After introducing the terms *alterity* and *alterity politics*, a review of works by Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, and Édouard Glissant assembles an analytical toolkit and establishes the relevance of these thinkers' work for an analysis of Baldwin's fiction. Finally, a review of Baldwin's seminal essays on race, gender, sexuality, and their entanglements in the context of the U.S. establishes an immediate point of contact between the reviewed theory and the primary texts under investigation. The theoretical framework is followed by the analysis of *Go Tell It on the Mountain*. Tracing the movements of the novel's central characters from the U.S. South to New York, this thesis examines the topographies of the plantation under chattel slavery, the post-emancipation South, racially segregated New York, and Harlem for their role in stabilizing power structures and the potential of characters to complicate binary spatial structures and identity categories. In the following chapter on *Giovanni's Room*, the protagonist David's grappling with the limits of heteronormativity in enclosed heteropatriarchal or queer spaces guides the analysis from the U.S. to Paris and a house in the South of France. Readings of these spaces disclose their function to materialize identity categories. However, the human potential to display a complexity which transgresses the binary identity categories remains undiminished as Baldwin's characters transgress material boundaries.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND KEY CONCEPTS

Reading Baldwin's fiction as a political literary project related to his presence as a public intellectual is facilitated by the body of his essayistic writing on racialized, gendered, and sexual oppression. Baldwin's essays tie in with writings on *alterity* and from the field of postcolonial theory. For my analysis of *Go Tell It on the Mountain* and *Giovanni's Room* and the argument that the interaction of spaces and identity markers articulates a political project, Baldwin's non-fiction together with works by other theorists offer themselves as a lens to elucidate his novels. I read Baldwin's essayistic writing as decidedly postcolonial in its outlook. Thus, I employ *alterity* and *alterity politics* as the theoretical foundation for reading Baldwin's work as embedded in the diverse landscape of postcolonial theory and link aspects of the thought of other postcolonial theorists to Baldwin's theoretical and literary contributions. This chapter reads seminal works by Fanon, Said, and Glissant together with Baldwin's essayistic writing to enrich Baldwin's postcolonial perspective on the U.S. with psychoanalytical, Marxist, and poststructuralist aspects of their works which contribute postcolonial critiques from various perspectives. Fanon's considerations of internalization and a political, collective psychoanalysis and Said's arguments on the epistemology of oppressive categories productively speak to Baldwin's writings on the underlying power structures of race, gender, and sexuality. Glissant's is a central voice to my project, providing several concepts such as *root*, *relation*, *opacity*, and *multiplicity* which illustrate (post)colonial *alterity politics* and explore escape routes from binarism. Transgressing oppressive divisions through the acknowledgment of *relation* informs my reading of Baldwin's humanism as one of relation and liberatory, even revolutionary love.

From the different contexts from which Baldwin, Fanon, Said, and Glissant write, the question of their situatedness arises when reading their work together. The various geographical contexts of writing, the U.S., France, Martinique, and Algeria require an explicit consideration of the possibilities and limits of the transferability of critiques from the *Global South* to a U.S.

American context. Yet, since all these authors extensively write on issues related to (post)colonial oppression and liberation, a productive contact can be established. Fanon's psychoanalytic inquiry into the traumata of French colonialism of Martinique in *Black Skin, White Masks* and Said's examination of Western scientific epistemologies as a tool of (post)colonial domination put forward in *Orientalism* are distinct in terms of topic and background from Baldwin's writing. While Fanon's and Said's writing is guided by questions related to European colonialism, they share the concern for the continuing effects of colonialism beyond direct rule with Baldwin. Similarly, *alterity* as conceptualized by Glissant orients itself toward postcolonial realities and can be used as an analytical tool of postcolonial entanglements. While drawing on the context of Martinique from which Glissant writes, his thinking exceeds this particular context and describes more abstractly how the idea of *alterity* interacts with (post)colonial realities. Baldwin also invokes postcolonial continuities when he illustrates the situation of Black Americans as living on "occupied territory" in "New York which the Europeans conquered" ("Occupied Territory" 735). Furthermore, he highlights the continuity of colonialism in U.S. capitalism and, therefore, its pervasiveness in U.S. American society and culture ("Nationalism" 11). Therefore, Baldwin establishes postcolonial critique as a crucial element of his thinking about the U.S. This critique can serve as a point of productive dialogue between Baldwin and other postcolonial theorists. Andrea Horváth supports this transferability by highlighting the general project of postcolonial theory to deconstruct cultural hierarchies beyond the immediate political realities of colonialism (15). While Stuart Hall warns of negligent homogenization of diverse postcolonial realities, he justifies the universalization of abstracted characteristics of postcolonial analyses to describe the lasting effects of colonial domination (224, 226). Hence, while attention to the situatedness of postcolonial critiques is indispensable, reading Baldwin in dialogue with other contributions to the field helps to uncover and criticize shared elements of asymmetrical power relations and continuities of colonial expansionism and rule. The theorists engaged in

this framework speak to one another concerning their insights into the ways violence and control define the meanings of political personhood and (non)being human and, hence, enrich a reading of Baldwin's construction of character identities.

Alterity Politics: Making and Unmaking Otherness

Writing about Baldwin as a postcolonial thinker of *alterity* places the author in a tradition of thought which critiques and rethinks Western conceptions of the relationship between the subject and entities which are defined as *others*. Thereby, postcolonial interventions, and Baldwin's political thought more specifically, are read for their engagement in an *alterity politics* which examines, critiques, and redefines the interaction of the subject and the *other*. Ian Buchanan, in defining the term *alterity* as the "otherness of the other," points out that "prior knowledge [or] experience" do not decompose this quality which is even to be found as an aspect of the self (1. 1-3). Karen Gloy further explains that *alterity*, therefore, always implies a relationship between the self and the *other* which necessarily share a sameness which makes them comparable and differences which make them distinguishable (15-16). Negotiating this distinction, however, becomes a central theoretical problem. In *Alterity Politics* (1998), Jeffrey Nealon points out that what is thought of as the *other* is necessarily negotiated in a "politics of the other" (2). Nealon elaborates that inner difference results in what can be seen as an "excess of identities" which is different from, yet contingent on the *other* (5). According to Nealon, *identity* and *alterity* are bound together by their "lack of wholeness" from which a codependency to negotiate and perpetually redefine each other arises (6). Therefore, the self and the *other* do not form a dichotomy of coherent, opposed entities but rather constitute a perpetual process of negotiation entangled with one another.

Covering over these processual, unfixed, and entangled meanings of the self and the *other* is an *alterity politics* which contains the oppressive danger of reducing the plasticity and potential of subjects to seemingly stable entities locked into dichotomies of essentialized

otherness. Nealon problematizes the Hegelian conception of the subject as a case in point for a Western “imperialist” understanding of the self and writes:

The Enlightenment subject ... turns not inward ... but rather outward to the diversity of the other(s); ... Such a subject has learned to make use of the other, and finds itself only by means of the other. The bourgeois subject, one might say, profits from its investment in the other; it gets a return for its risk. ... It is this imperialist brand of bourgeois ... subjectivity ... that is questioned in ... contemporary ethics. (32)

In Nealon’s account, the “bourgeois,” “imperialist” subject seeks out and instrumentalizes the *other* for its own interest. While the self must gain its “subjectivity” which is not fixed *a priori*, it is stabilized by seeking out and defining the *other*, thereby controlling its meaning to establish its own. The conception of the subject Nealon describes enters a relationship to the *other* which is invested in hierarchies and asymmetrical power structures. Nealon provides racism and heteropatriarchy as concrete examples which establish “the terrors of the social norm – its demands for totalization – [which] are simultaneously the tools of its undoing” by perpetually performing belonging and difference (122, 139). The processuality of maintaining these norms, despite normalization suggests their stability, is where Nealon observes the potential for their dismantling. Racist and heteropatriarchal definitions of subject positions, even if hegemonic, remain precariously unstable since they rely on perpetually being reaffirmed. Hence, postcolonial critiques which denaturalize and reconfigure racialized, gendered, and sexual otherness intervene in an *alterity politics* and destabilize the produced hierarchies of seemingly stable subject positions.

(Post-)colonial Alterity Politics: Decolonizing Inner and Outer Spaces

Given that Baldwin describes the situation of Black people in the U.S. as living “on occupied territory,” a transfer of Fanon’s and Said’s insights to the postcolonial condition of the U.S. appears to be a productive approach for reading the inner spaces of Baldwin’s characters. Fanon attacks racialized subject positions throughout his corpus of Marxist, psychoanalytic, and decolonial writings. In *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), he puts forward an extensive

analysis of the collective psychological repercussions of essentialized racial alterity in the French Antilles. Reflecting on the situatedness of his observations, Fanon writes that his “findings are valid for the French Antilles ... however ... this same behavior [assimilation to Eurocentric standards in the face of the racist devaluation of Blackness] can be found in any race subjected to colonization” (9). Fanon’s transnational political activism reflects this argument for the transferability of his antiracist thought. Teodor Kirov points out that Fanon perceived his engagement as a Martinican in the Algerian decolonial struggle as explicitly “Pan-African,” connecting emancipatory causes transnationally in his thought and activism (216). Therefore, Baldwin and Fanon provide the rationale for reading their works together in a postcolonial analysis in the U.S. context.

Fanon argues that humans depend in their “worth and reality ... on [the] other and [their] recognition by the other” who “remains the focus of [their] actions” until they have “been effectively recognized” (191). Therefore, individuals are in relationships of mutual dependence which lead to abuse and exploitation within the asymmetrical power structures of colonialism. Fanon describes the *white gaze* which objectifies and “imprisons” the colonized in racist stereotypes (90, 92). This psychological violence goes hand in hand with economic exploitation in Fanon’s analysis. He argues that devalorizing Blackness contains an “economic” aspect followed by the “internalization or rather epidermalization of this [economic] inferiority” (xi). Hence, the denial of full humanity depends on the establishment of a racialized class hierarchy in Fanon’s thought. The racist notion of Black inferiority is naturalized by its correspondence to the socio-economic precariat and, thereby, inscribed into the Black body. Fanon reasons that this *internalized* devaluation jeopardizes solidarity since “the Martinican compares himself not to the white man ... but to his own counterpart under the patronage of the white man ... [and desires to produce the] Ego [as] different from ‘the Other’” (190). Rendering Blackness the inferior *other* of Whiteness, hence, is not only internalized on the individual level but

collectively *alienates* Martinicans by making Black identification an association with inferiority. Fanon's observations on the connection of economic and psychological violence with *internalization* and *alienation* resonate with Baldwin's writings. In a 1968 speech delivered in London some of these resonances become explicit when Baldwin, commenting on the persisting effects of U.S. slavery, asserts that its economic exploitation depended on the continued inhibition of Black solidarity, from which "a kind of identity" could have been drawn ("Civil Rights" 2:40-2:45). Therefore, Baldwin recognizes the relationship between economic exploitation and political alienation, the psychological components of which Fanon explains in the *internalization* of racist dehumanization.

Like Fanon, Said in his study *Orientalism* (1978) describes the violence of colonial alterity politics. Yet, he places the production of colonial knowledge at the center of his investigation and asks how the material realities of colonialism interact with an epistemology of alterity. Said identifies and lists "features of Orientalist projection:"

[T]o formulate the Orient, to give it shape, identity, definition with full recognition of ... its 'natural' role as an appendage to Europe; ... to establish new disciplines; to divide, deploy, schematize ... everything in sight; to make out of every observable detail a generalization and out of every generalization an immutable law about the Oriental nature, temperament, mentality, custom or type. (86)

These features of the Western Orientalist project are already implicitly tied to the production of knowledge about the "Orient" which affirms its *otherness*. Said goes on to explain that this project *simultaneously* depends on "the instruments of Western knowledge and power" (86). Producing "knowledge" by defining the "Orient" and legitimizing the "generalization" of any arbitrary "observable detail" as knowledge about the "Oriental nature ... or type" is equally a tool of colonial domination in Said's thought as "power" is. Said clarifies that the acceptance of stereotypes into the status of knowledge does not merely serve as a justification of colonial subjection and warns of "ignore[ing] the extent to which colonial rule was justified *in advance* by Orientalism, rather than after the fact. [...] The absolute demarcation between the East and

the West [...] had been years, even centuries, in the making” (39, emphasis added). Therefore, the epistemology of Orientalism precedes the political realities of colonial oppression. Said encapsulates this fact when he asserts that by the “nineteenth and twentieth centuries ... Orientalism had accomplished its self-metamorphosis from a scholarly discourse to an imperial institution” (95). Orientalism establishes a link between epistemic violence and the political realities of oppression and links (post)colonial control of space to the (discursive) domination of subjugated peoples. Therefore, Said’s criticism supports a rationale which reads Baldwin’s literature as an intervention in the postcolonial politics of knowledge production through reiterating representations of the *other* and which reads space and character identity as entangled in these politics.

Rethinking the Binary with Glissant: Alterity and Identity in Relation

In *Poetics of Relation* (1990), Glissant offers a postmodern, postcolonial examination of the divisive alterity politics of colonial domination and enslavement and offers *relation* as an alternative repository for constituting identity. The context of writing is central to his project which repeatedly draws on the political and historical realities of the French Antilles in its theorizing. While Glissant’s thought arises from these realities, his fundamental critique of a colonial binary between the self and the *other* echoes Fanon’s and Said’s positions since their interventions challenge the dichotomies established between colonizer and colonized and highlight their function as instruments of oppression. With the concept of *relation*, Glissant, furthermore, provides an alternative to the construction of hierarchical dichotomies and demonstrates that identity can be constituted without reductive, generalizing definitions and devaluation. Therefore, his body of theory is central to my readings of Baldwin’s early novels not merely as critiques of racist and heteropatriarchal oppression but as interventions which demonstrate the transgression of oppressive binaries through *relation*.

Glissant's central metaphor of *root identity* serves as a starting point to transfer his theories into analytical tools for reading Baldwin. Glissant demonstrates the link between oppressive systems and identity construction and, thereby, provides a valuable lens for reading Baldwin's characters navigating constructions of binary identity positions. Drawing on the *root* in the work of the French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Glissant characterizes the "totalitarian root" as "unique, a stock taking all upon itself and killing all around it" (*Poetics* 11). Glissant elaborates that *root identity* "is sanctified by the hidden violence of ... filiation; proclaim[s] its entitlement to the possession of land, which thus becomes a territory; is preserved by being projected onto other territories, making their conquest legitimate – and through the project of a discursive knowledge" (*Poetics* 143-144). That Glissant's language evokes images of colonial expansionism is no coincidence but reflects his context of writing. Glissant explains that he sees the *root* as the underlying structure of Western imperialism and colonialism (*Poetics* 14). Abstracting the dynamics of colonialism, Glissant outlines a construction of an identity which produces itself as internally coherent through "filiation," claims and expands a "territory" justifying "conquest" and violence as necessary for its perpetuation and produces "discursive knowledge" to maintain itself. In reading Baldwin, Glissant's *root* serves as a characterization of colonizing identities which remain valid in the context of U.S. racism and heterosexism. Constructing normative positions which claim to be historically rooted in a genealogy, produce "knowledge" which justifies an expansive claim to space and displace, oppress, and "kill" their produced *others* characterize racist and heterosexist power structures. Particularly the connection between identity and territorialization established by Glissant's *root identity* provides a rationale for analyzing the appropriation of space as a signifier for the construction of character identities within asymmetrical power structures.

Glissant contrasts his concept of *root identity* with the alternative *relation identity* and demonstrates the possibility of reconfiguring the relationship to the *other* as entangled rather

than hostilely opposed. He illustrates *relation identity* by the simile of the *rhizome* which is a “root system, a network spreading either in the ground or in the air, with no predatory rootstock taking over permanently” and “maintains ... the idea of rootedness but challenges that of the totalitarian root” (*Poetics* 11). Although I will not adopt the *rhizome* explicitly in my analysis, I introduce it here to trace Glissant’s characterization of *relation identity* in contrast to *root identity*. The *rhizome* serves as a metaphor which encapsulates the idea of *relation*, central to my reading of Baldwin’s characters’ identities. Elaborating on the *rhizome*, Glissant describes that it replaces the “violence of filiation” with a “chaotic network of Relation” as its origin and “does not think of land as territories” but an arena for exchange rather than appropriation (*Poetics* 144). Glissant further relates Fanon’s expatriation from Martinique to Algeria to the *rhizome* which “[prompts] the knowledge that identity is no longer completely within the root but also in Relation” (*Poetics* 18). Glissant’s *rhizome*, *relation* and *relation identity* challenge a binary conception of alterity. Instead of constructing a stable self through inner coherence and delimitation and subjugation of the other, Glissant demonstrates that the *relations* between the self and the *other*, while never becoming definitive, constitute identity in a flexible network of being in *relation* with each other. Referring back to Fanon, Glissant demonstrates that *relation* is by no means in conflict with developing a political stance but about forming coalitions which produce identity in the space between entities rather than “within [a singular] root” (*Poetics* 18). When applied to the literary construction of characters in Baldwin’s early fiction, *relation identity* offers an alternative perspective on the constitution of identity which challenges divisive delimitations as the basis of identities. Therefore, *relation* will be used as a specialized term to encompass Glissant’s concept of two-way connections which influence all parties involved, forming a shifting web without fixed points.

Glissant addresses *alterity* as a vital aspect in his critique of *root identity*. The term *difference*, therefore, becomes central to his work and the adoption of his thought as a framework

for my analysis. The changing role of *difference* in the construction of *root identity* and *relation identity* helps to discern the reductive violence in normative positions and the flexible *multiplicity* in more open conceptions of the self and the other. Glissant highlights the importance of *alterity* for this distinction when he writes that “thought of the Other cannot escape its own dualism until the time when differences become acknowledged. ... Acknowledging differences does not compel one to be involved in the dialectics of their totality” and further elaborates that “exclusion is the rule in binary practice (either/or), whereas poetics aims for the space of difference – not exclusion but, rather, where difference is realized in going beyond” (*Poetics* 17, 82). Glissant pinpoints the transgression of dichotomies between the self and the *other* in “acknowledging difference.” He further clarifies that *relation* is built on the acknowledgment of difference (*Diskurs* 143). While *root identity* upholds excluding dichotomies, *relation identity* escapes this “dualism” through “acknowledging difference.” Glissant explains that this recognition encompasses the insight “that these differences do not constitute borders” (Diawara & Glissant 17). Therefore, *relation identity*, by interacting with the other without claiming a fixed position for either and accepting difference as productive, not divisive, realizes identities as indefinite, tentative, and able to shift with one another without being endangered by their openness.

In contrast to *root identity*, *relation identity* accommodates what Glissant terms the subject’s *multiplicity*. Glissant introduces these notions to conceptualize the complexity and unfathomable depth of the human subject. Theoretically acknowledging these qualities is vital for approaching Baldwin’s literary and political project. Baldwin reasons “if the novelist considers that [characters] are no more complex than their labels he must, of necessity, produce a catalogue, in which we will find, neatly listed, all those attributes with which the label is associated; and this can only operate to reinforce the brutal and dangerous anonymity of our culture” (“Innocence” 600). Baldwin’s insistence on acknowledging complexity beyond reductive

categories as a literary intervention in a wider context resonates with Glissant's thinking about human *multiplicity* and *opacity*. Glissant elaborates on *multiplicity* and explains that "you can change with the other while being yourself, you are not one, you are multiple, and you are yourself. You are not lost, because you are multiple" (Diawara & Glissant 7). The notion of *multiplicity* conceptualizes a relation between the self and the other in which their characteristics "are not lost" in their shifting codependence. Contact becomes enriching *relation*. However, Glissant points out that while *multiplicity* is a fundamental reality of existence, it depends on being realized intellectually and politically when "all the components of humanity [...] consent to the idea that it is possible to be one and multiple at the same time; that you can be yourself and the other; that you can be the same and the different" (Diawara & Glissant 5-6). Therefore, *multiplicity* to Glissant is an existential condition as well as a political project which calls for a more nuanced perception of subjectivity as neither singular nor consistent. Glissant argues that the subject in its *multiplicity* is never entirely graspable and describes this quality as *opacity*. In its *opacity*, *relation identity* resists the *transparency* root identity forces the self and the *other* into (*Poetics* 114). Glissant further clarifies that in *relation* one is "able to conceive of the opacity of the other for me, without reproach for my opacity for him. To feel in solidarity with him ... it is not necessary to become the other ... nor to 'make' him in my image" (*Poetics* 193). Hence, accepting *multiplicity* and *opacity* lies at the heart of being in *relation*. They maintain the subject's complexity beyond categories and beyond what is readily graspable. Therefore, applying these terms to an analysis of Baldwin's characters ties in with his ideas on literary representation and establishes a lens for understanding character identity.

Returning to Baldwin's critique of the "brutal and dangerous anonymity of [U.S.] culture" uncovers the parallel between his outlook on human complexity represented in literature and Glissant's characterization of *relation*, *multiplicity*, and *opacity*. Baldwin and Glissant share an interest in human complexity and recognize the processual interactions which shape complex

identities in *relation*. This attention to interpersonal relatedness echoes the philosophical tradition of Ubuntu which uncovers the connection between a wider body of African and diasporic knowledge and Baldwin's and Glissant's work. Reading Baldwin's work as a literary and political project relies on the awareness of its contribution to a struggle for liberation from oppression *as well as* to a tradition of knowledge which understands the subject as defined by its communion with the *other*. Accordingly, while framing Baldwin's and Glissant's anti-essentialism as postcolonial highlights the emancipatory potency of their projects, Ubuntu shows that their positions are not merely directed *against* oppression but advance longer traditions of ethico-political thought. Munyaradzi Murove explains that Ubuntu is hard to grasp conceptually or pinpoint contextually since it constitutes a tradition of ethical thought rather than a distinct theory (26). Nonetheless, scholarship on Ubuntu widely agrees that at the center of the ethical philosophy lies an understanding of the individual as embedded in communities. Mabogo More encapsulates this understanding in the formula "a person is a person through other persons" (157). Erasmus Prinsloo names "empathy," "open communication," and pride in "identity" as articulations of this emphasis on relationality (42). According to John Mbiti, this communitarianism is not merely a political or ethical stance but is rooted in the religious relationship between humans to the divine echoed in the interpersonal (136). Hence, Ubuntu explicitly connects personal identity to interpersonal relationships and, thereby, relates to Glissant's observations on identity. *Root identity* as well as *relation identity* draw on contact with the other to give meaning to the self, although the character of this relationship between the self and the other is vastly different. Similarly, Baldwin understands humans as socially embedded. This contact makes them susceptible to reducing one another to mere representations of identity categories, yet it also equips them with the potential to relate to one another in more fulfilling ways. Hence, Ubuntu provides a lens to read Baldwin's characters' identities within webs of human relationships from which they emerge.

Race, Gender, and Sexuality: Baldwin and U.S. Alterity Politics

In his essayistic writing, Baldwin engages with postcolonial oppression and liberation and scrutinizes the alterity politics of race, gender, and sexuality in the U.S. Therefore, his non-fiction provides a theoretical prism through which his novels can be read, and which renders visible the power structures which underpin the construction of identities. Furthermore, Baldwin is attentive to the interplay between markers of identity and thinks race, gender, sexuality, and class in intersections. What is of central interest to Baldwin, however, is universal humanness and how, within oppressive alterity politics, dichotomies serve to obscure this fundamental quality and upkeep hierarchies which dehumanize subjects by defining them as deviant form constructions of normativity. Baldwin contributes to the body of postcolonial theory a distinctly U.S. American perspective which links postcolonial oppression and Eurocentric concepts of exclusive humanness to various facets of defining humans and disrupts this reductive normativism through the relation of love.

In his treatment of race in the U.S., Baldwin dismantles the binary of Whiteness and Blackness as a construction which emerged from the U.S. history of violence and oppression and as a tool to maintain postcolonial power asymmetries. Baldwin writes about the constructedness of race in the U.S. that “in [the] debasement and definition of black people, [white people] debased and defined themselves. And have brought humanity to the edge of oblivion: because they think they are white” (“On Being White” 169). Baldwin makes clear that Blackness and Whiteness are mutually contingent constructions. Defining Blackness directly entails the definition of Whiteness, and both acts of “definition” constitute a “debasement.” While Baldwin is attentive to the racial power asymmetry this “definition” is entrenched in – White people “debase ... black people” and “themselves” – he points out that “humanity” per se is jeopardized by these constructions of race. In his radical anti-essentialism, Baldwin scrutinizes the rationale behind this historical dehumanization through race in the U.S. He points out that “the nigger is

a white invention ...out of terrible necessity. And every white citizen of this country will have to accept the fact that he is not innocent" ("The White Problem" 97). Leaving no doubt that Whiteness *and* Blackness are fictions constructed with a purpose, Baldwin deconstructs racial tropes as inventions which represent and uphold socio-historical dominance. Whiteness, in Baldwin's words, is a "genocidal lie" which justifies the histories of oppression and violence against Black and Native Americans by obscuring their humanness ("On Being White" 167-168). This willful suppression of the knowledge of humanity results in an American myth which distorts history under the paradigm of dehumanization. Baldwin writes that "their version of reality, which they want me to accept, is an insult to my history and a parody of theirs and an intolerable violation of myself" ("The Price" 106). Baldwin demonstrates that the hierarchy constructed by race excludes non-White people from humanity and, thereby, omits violence, oppression, and the implied ethical responsibility of human equality. In Baldwin's argument, this purposeful repression constitutes a postcolonial continuity. Baldwin writes that "White Americans [...] have attempted to behave in all matters as though what was east for Europe was east for them" (*The Fire* 80). Anticipating Said's criticism of *Orientalism*, Baldwin parallels the European colonial habitus towards the "east" to racism in the U.S. He further writes that "colonialism" served the purpose of "make[ing] money. And this is what we call the rise of capitalism, which is a pre-phrase covering an eternity of crimes" ("Nationalism" 11). In Baldwin's theorizations, race is a signifier which interacts with colonialism, the mythologies of American nationalism and capitalism. Thereby, he establishes a postcolonial, anti-capitalist framework of criticizing race as a component entangled in a multilayered system of oppression.

Given Baldwin's denaturalization of race as a signifier of power, investigating race in Baldwin's fiction asks for attention to the mechanisms which maintain racial constructions and to indicators of their instability. Baldwin emphasizes that "the terms that you have invented, which you think describe and define you, inevitably collide with the facts of life. When this

collision occurs – and, make no mistake, this is an absolutely inevitable collision – [...] life offers you the choice [...] of holding on to your definition of yourself or saying [...] yes to life” (“The White Problem” 90). Baldwin maintains that identity categories or simple definitions are incapable of expressing the complexities of human life. However, this incapability opens up a tension inherent in verbalizing identity. Baldwin notices that “we all do this all the time, of course. One labels people; [...] But in the doing of this, you have not described anything ... What I think of you says more about me than it can possibly say about you” (“The Blues” 75). From Baldwin’s critical stance towards identity categories, the question arises how the paradox of describing humans with terms which can never adequately express their identity is reflected in his fiction and how their “inevitable colli[sion]” denaturalizes categories for the characters he writes.

Baldwin integrates stabilized categories of gender and sexuality into his critique of the postcolonial constitution of the U.S. and demonstrates that they are constructions which serve the upkeep of power imbalances. He notices that although “most of us ... are ... visibly male or female, our social roles defined by our sexual equipment ... we are all androgynous ... because each of us, helplessly and forever, contains the other male in female, female in male, white in black and black in white. We are a part of each other” (“Freaks” 828). Despite hegemonic performances of gender, Baldwin rejects an essentialist binary of gender. His critique queers gender and is extended to sexual queerness. Baldwin highlights that historically “the homosexual did not exist; nor, properly speaking, did the heterosexual. We were all in a state of nature” (“Innocence” 596). Echoing his discussion of race, Baldwin denaturalizes hegemonic concepts of gender and sexuality as constructions. Intersecting with one another, all these markers of identities stabilize hierarchical power structures. Baldwin argues that “the American ideal ... of sexuality appears to be rooted in the American ideal of masculinity. This ideal has created cowboys and Indians ... butch and faggot, black and white. It is an ideal so paralytically

infantile that it is virtually forbidden – as an unpatriotic act – to the American boy to evolve in the complexity of manhood” (“Freaks” 815). The examples Baldwin gives illustrate the entanglement of heteronormativity, hegemonic masculinity, race, and nationalism in the U.S. The juxtaposition of tropes articulating subordinate and hegemonic masculinities and the salient omission of femininity outline the terrain in which the distribution of power is negotiated. Baldwin describes the hegemonic masculinity of White, heterosexual men as “paralytically infantile” and makes clear that the immaturity of the underlying reductive categorizations is not merely an individual failure but connected to the “patriotic” myths of American nationalism. Therefore, “the homosexual” becomes an abject trope against which heteronormativity can be defined. Baldwin expresses the consolidation of this trope and “doubt[s] that Americans will ever be able to face the fact that the word, homosexual, is not a noun” (*The Devil* 529). Making “the homosexual” a noun, reduced to a sexual attribute, is a mechanism Baldwin characterizes as steeped in abject fear. He argues that “freaks are called freaks and are treated as they are treated ... because they are human beings who cause to echo, deep within us, our most profound terrors and desires” (“Freaks” 828). Dehumanizing gendered and sexual queerness, according to Baldwin, creates differences to suppress the knowledge of human sameness. Therefore, the unwillingness to acknowledge the diversity humanity accommodates displaces gendered and sexual queerness into the non-human. Baldwin demonstrates gender and sexuality to be structured by an alterity politics which relies on othering to produce a normative U.S. citizenship for those in power.

Baldwin’s radical anti-essentialist critique of race, gender, and sexuality in the U.S. is related to a vision of acknowledging and respecting the depth of shared humanness. This acknowledgment is realized in a responsible relation with others, which Baldwin terms *love*. As Baldwin’s arguments about binary markers of identity demonstrate, such categorizations rely on ignorance towards others’ humanity. However, he provides a socio-political escape route

when he argues that “white power became indistinguishable from the question of sexual dominance. But the question of sexual dominance can exist only in the nightmare of that soul which has armed itself, totally, against the possibility of ... love” (*The Devil* 530). Baldwin identifies the rejection of *love* as the root of racist and heterosexist dominance. Reading this assertion together with his scrutiny of racism and heterosexism in the U.S. reveals that *love* holds the potential to overcome the blindness towards humanness and recognize human complexity which, as Baldwin argues, necessarily transgresses categorization. Baldwin characterizes *love* as a responsibility “to make [others] conscious of the things they don’t see. ... And I will not see without you, and ... you will not see without me” (“Black Scholar” 41). Baldwin reverses the popular trope of a love that makes blind and reframes it as a mutual relation through which humans make each other “see.” Therefore, *love* denotes a human relation from which knowledge about the other and the self arises. Contrasting the omission of humanness and the state of seeing and knowing through love, Baldwin argues that “people who in some sense know who they are can’t change the world always, but they can do something to ... make life a little more human ... in the sense of joy, freedom which is always private, ... respect for one another” (“The Blues” 81). To Baldwin, *love* and the recognition of humanness can realize a joyful alterity politics not based on definition and exclusion but on “freedom” and “respect.” Relating these reflections to literature, Baldwin concludes that characters should not be “present[ed] ... as they *see* themselves or *as they are*; we must be enabled to see them as they have been or as they might become; otherwise, we merely judge them as specimens and feel nothing for them as human beings” (“Theater” 26). To liberate the characters of the categories they perform and into which they might accept themselves, means to be attentive to their unrealized, rich potential. For Baldwin, to “feel for [humans] as human beings” is the central relation which allows for this realization.

In the course of this chapter, Baldwin was read in dialogue with other postcolonial theorists and concepts. His critique of the power structures which produce identities in racialized, gendered, and sexual binaries in the U.S. offers an intricate analysis of the country's postcolonial condition. The perspective on U.S. American society and his literary interventions in particular Baldwin provides is enriched by other contributions to postcolonial theory. *Alterity politics* serves as a lens to harmonize the various critiques and interventions introduced in this chapter but further allows to investigate Baldwin's negotiation of alterities in his fiction. Fanon opens up a perspective on the psychological repercussions of power structures and contributes a rationale for reading the inner spaces of Baldwin's characters as sites of the negotiation of alterity. Extending this lens on spatiality, with *Orientalism*, Said provides a rationale for reading physical spaces as representations of alterity politics which structure them and which they reproduce. Édouard Glissant's notions of "root identity" and "Relation identity" powerfully demonstrate the dialectic of space, identity, and (post)colonial power while providing a productive tool to render the processes of maintaining and challenging hegemonic identity positions visible. The philosophical tradition of Ubuntu contributes to a deep understanding of identity to be socially contingent and allows to read Glissant and Baldwin as part of a larger diasporic African tradition of thought. Enriching Baldwin's observations of violence, oppression, and liberating love in the U.S. allows for the investigation of the alterity politics articulated by the spaces in his early novels.

GO TELL IT ON THE MOUNTAIN

Baldwin published his literary debut *Go Tell It on the Mountain* in 1953. The novel's frame narrative revolves around a single weekend in the lives of the Grimes family and particularly the young protagonist John Grimes. As John does his household chores, roams Harlem and larger Manhattan, and attends a church service, the novel follows him and traces the spaces and boundaries which structure his and his community's lives. Throughout the novel, shifting focalization between John, his stepfather Gabriel, his mother Elizabeth, and his step-aunt Florence and flashbacks recounting earlier episodes of their lives allow the reader to witness the characters' inner lives and memories of other places. These embedded narratives polyphonically narrate the oppressive continuities of borders and territorialization as well as the characters' physical and inner movements within and beyond the spatial structures which map race, gender, and sexuality. Thereby, the narrative draws complex portraits of its characters' identities enmeshed into the social and spatial fabric of the U.S. South and New York. While questions revolving around identity, race, and sexuality in the novel have attracted much scholarly interest, I undertake an analysis which reads character identity through space and draws on Baldwin's non-fiction to illuminate the interacting meanings of identities and space. I argue that *Go Tell It on the Mountain* renders a sophisticated representation of U.S. American alterity politics of race, gender, and sexuality by tracing the boundaries that territorialize physical and inner spaces. The characters' complex identities negotiate and necessarily transgress the confines of such territorializations, as Baldwin suggests in his essayistic writing where he argues that "the terms ... invented [to] define [someone] inevitably collide with the facts of life" ("The White Problem" 90). Therefore, characters' complex realities destabilizing the naturalized oppressive categories of racism and heteropatriarchy. In Baldwin's literary representation of human characters, the interaction of identity and space reveals immobilizing power structures and the inescapability of characters' complexity breaching identity categories. Thereby, space is a vital

aspect in articulating a political literary project in Baldwin's early writing which represents human characters as complex beings overdetermined by the categorizations to which they are reduced in U.S. alterity politics.

“Whispered in the Cabin:” Slavery, Emancipation, and the South

The non-chronological narrative of *Go Tell It on the Mountain* follows the history of the Grimes family from a plantation and the postbellum South to New York and Harlem. The socio-historical shifts which structure the spaces the family members inhabit reveal the continuing efficacy of racism entangled with heterosexism while also displaying the characters' rejection to willingly subjugate themselves to these regimes. The historically earliest scenes in the narrative are set in the U.S. South in the late 19th century. On the evening of John Grimes' fourteenth birthday, Florence, Gabriel, and Elizabeth recount episodes from their lives in the South in several flashbacks. Through Florence's and Gabriel's memories, the novel enters the siblings' past and traces their origin back to their unnamed mother whose life is conditioned by the spatial structure of the Southern plantation under chattel slavery. In the cabin and the slaveowner's house, slavery assigns bodies to places by their status as commodities or owners. As Florence's and Gabriel's mother's children are taken away, Black motherhood and family ties are *queered* against the norm of the White nuclear family. While the cabin accommodates this imposed queerness, the big house allows the slaveowner and his family to withdraw from the site of Black oppression into a space which renders White responsibility invisible. Religion, accommodated in the Black removal to inner spaces and the cabin, disrupts the racial binary which structures the dichotomy of the plantation by imagining the fall of the big house and the system of slavery. The master-slave dynamic which, however, persists in the post-emancipation South shapes Florence's, Gabriel's, and Elizabeth's experiences and leads to their migration to the North. As the racialized economic status of slaves and slaveowners are abolished, the gendered White violence of lynching and rape queers Black gender by emasculating Black men and

denying Black people control over and integrity of their bodies. Thereby, the violation of Black bodies reiterates the White supremacist control of public spaces, the association of Blackness with imposed queerness, and the spatial marginalization of the cabin's precarious safety. However, the withdrawal to the cabin is simultaneously an act of resistance by making Black bodies unavailable to White domination. Yet, withdrawing from the racial violence of the public does not free the Black community from heterosexist dominance which Black men perpetuate by dislocating shame on raped female bodies. Therefore, the cabin and the big house form a dichotomy which defines Blackness and gender while providing removed spaces for Black resistance. Eventually, though, Florence, Gabriel, and Elizabeth refuse the limited spaces open to them in the South and migrate to the North in an act of complete withdrawal from the continuing Southern racial dynamic of slaves and slaveowners.

The commodification of Black motherhood in the plantation's economy of enslavement reveals the entanglement of the economic exploitation and the dehumanization of Black bodies. Florence's mother is expected to enter marriages as her master gives "her another [husband]" after the death of her first one, while "all [her children] had been taken from her, one by sickness and two by auction" (Baldwin *Go Tell It* 74). Black marriage and motherhood merely serve the production of commodifiable bodies on the plantation. The generation of economic value for the slaveowners provides the rationale behind the master's involvement in Florence's mother's marriage. Angela Davis confirms that Black women were stripped of their humanity and reduced to "breeders – animals ... in the eyes of the slaveholders" to make them exploitable for increasing the "monetary value" of slaveholders' possessions ("Legacy of Slavery" 4-5). While Davis highlights that the dehumanization of Black mothers preconditions the economic extraction of surplus value, this extraction, in turn, demonstrates their less-than-human status. Therefore, the economic purpose and the production of meanings of Blackness are entangled in institutionalized slavery to make monetary profit and the privilege to extract it available to

slaveholders who define their Whiteness as an exclusive signifier of humanness through and for the definition of the meanings of Blackness.

In addition to the commodification of Black bodies which entangles the dehumanization of Blackness with the radical extraction of economic value, the cabin and the plantation accommodate the imposition of queerness on the Black family. My use of the term *queer* follows Roderick Ferguson's definition of "non-heteronormativity" of racialized gendered and sexual identities as opposed to a "universalized ... heteropatriarchy" (12). Ferguson's engagement with queerness highlights that racialization and queering are intertwined in the process of producing subjects beyond capitalist, heteropatriarchal norms. The "racialized multiplication of gender and sexual perversions," Ferguson argues, is necessary in the U.S. context for "the production of non-white labor" (13). Hence, the attachment of meanings to Blackness as a precondition and effect of White exploitation provide the logic for rupturing Florence's mother's family ties. Thereby, Ferguson infers, Black identity is positioned outside "heteronormative formations" such as the "ideal of heteropatriarchal nuclearity" and, resultingly, queering Blackness becomes central to further economic exploitation (13, 17). The production of Black families as deviant from these heteropatriarchal ideals by the denial of Black motherhood breaches Black familial lineage and isolates Black individuals and can, therefore, be interpreted as a tool to historically uproot Blackness. As Baldwin phrases it, "the American ... slave[s'] ... past was taken from [them]" through the fragmentation of African and Black communities which historically prevented the emergence of "solidarity" and, thereby, "identity" ("Stranger" 124; "Civil Rights" 2:40-2:45). Cedric Robinson adds that this isolation is used to reproduce narratives of Black inferiority (74). Denying Black motherhood and producing Black families as deviant, accordingly, prevents the emergence of solidarity and communal identity of nuclear families. Since, according to Ferguson the idealized "heteropatriarchal household" is "constructed ... [to] absorb and withstand material catastrophes" it cannot be surprising that in the context of U.S.

slavery non-normative “familial forms” are racialized to facilitate the continued infliction of “material catastrophe” on them (86). Hence, under slavery, the cabin becomes the site of producing Blackness as deviant from the norms of gender and sexuality implied by the White household. Queering the cabin through the denial of motherhood and familial relation is, therefore, closely entangled with the economic exploitation of the construction of the racial binary.

In opposition to the cabin in which the entanglement of Black dehumanization, economic exploitation, and imposed queerness is located, the slaveowner’s house enables the dissociating White withdrawal from and ignorance towards Black suffering which stabilize the racial binary. Although Black suffering is produced by White exploitation, the slaveowner remains disembodied when Florence’s mother’s children are “taken from her ... by auction” (*Go Tell It* 74). Instead, his agency remains concealed behind the passive rendering of the commodification of Black characters and the rupturing of ties between them. This paradoxically omitted omnipresence of Whiteness inscribes itself into Blackness through domination. The spatial segregation of the cabin and the slaveowner’s house represents the continued effort to stabilize the racial binary in the face of this entanglement. White avoidance to face this entanglement becomes particularly apparent when Florence’s mother is “not ... allowed to call [her last child born under slavery] her own” and the child is “raised in the master’s house” (*Go Tell It* 74). The slaveowner’s claim to the child, which in turn denies Black motherhood and produces the child as White, reveals the independence of race from the body. As Aliyyah Abdur-Rahman points out, “race is ... never ... completely corporeal” but always contingent on the demonstration of asymmetrical power and “privileges” (*Against the Closet* 57). While the slaveowner’s allocation of bodies to particular spaces demonstrates this power, race is indirectly reinstated in the body through the emerging spatial dichotomy. The slaveowner’s house, then, becomes the emblem of a mythical White lineage which emerges from racial domination and the suppression of racial entanglement rather than ancestry. Baldwin insists that, in the U.S., Whiteness is

necessary “for denying the black presence” (“On Being White” 167). In other words, apart from privilege and oppression, the racial binary depends on the omission of Blackness as the constitutive other of Whiteness. The entanglement of Whiteness with Black alterity, Baldwin explains, is concealed by “mak[ing] an abstraction of the Negro” (“Stranger” 124-125). Hence, the slaveowner’s withdrawal from the space of deviant otherness he produces and the dichotomy of the cabin and the slaveowner’s house on the plantation articulate the precarious denial of racial entanglement.

While the spatial structure of the plantation seemingly stabilizes the racial binary, religion provides a vision of an alternative spatial order and, thereby, disrupts Black oppression and dehumanization. To Florence and the Black community on the plantation, faith prophesies the end of slavery and the spatial structure of the plantation. This religious narrative reclaims Black spaces as sites of communicating hope and resistance. The liberation of the slaves on the plantation prompts Florence’s mother’s reflections on the long-standing promise of redemption:

Armies had come from the North to set them free. This was in answer to the prayers of the faithful, who had never eased ... to cry out for deliverance. ... And while [Florence’s mother] lived ... she did not forget that deliverance was promised and would surely come. She had only to endure and trust in God. She knew that the big house, the house of pride where the white folks lived, would come down: it was written in the word. ... In all those days she was growing up, signs failed not ... ‘Slaves done ris,’ was whispered in the cabin and at the master’s gate. (*Go Tell It* 75-76)

Although Northern armies effect the liberation of slaves in the South, the agency of bringing about change is not attributed to them but to the “faithful” and, indirectly, God. The religious narrative allows Florence’s mother and the Black community to trust that liberation is inevitable. Therefore, it destabilizes the binary of slaveowners and slaves and the spatial structure of the “big house” and the cabin. Despite the seeming stability of this division and its spatial manifestation, the religious narrative of liberation preserves the knowledge of the unstable constructedness of the subject(ed) positions defined under chattel slavery. Religion provides a vision of an impending revolution and allows the Black community to invest their inner spaces, the cabin,

and the plantation with meanings of Black hope and resistance to racial binarism. Although the religious narrative postpones the promised liberation, the call to “endure and trust” does not jeopardize Black political conscience. Baldwin, in reflections on the Black church in Harlem, cautions against such a “white ... misreading” of Black “bitterness” and reasons that religion does not induce numbing passivity but serves as a “sinister ... fantasy revenge” (“Harlem Ghetto” 48). Therefore, the religious promise of liberation articulates a Black political consciousness of Florence’s mother and the Black community on the plantation which rejects the definition of Blackness through slavery. In their inner spaces, the cabin, and in whispers at the gate to the big house, the slaves nourish a vision of undermining the spatial order of the plantation, already transgressing their assigned space in the cabin.

Despite this vision of radical Black liberation, continuities in the racialized spatial structure persisting in the postbellum South show that the abolition of slavery does not bring about the promised redemption. When “the proud house [is] humbled” and Florence’s mother “no longer [has] a reason to tarry [on the plantation] ... [she] walk[s] through the big gate, never to see that country any more.” Yet, again, she finds herself in a “cabin and do washing for the white folks” (*Go Tell It* 77-78). In the cabin, Florence’s mother and her Black household remain susceptible to economic exploitation. While race is no longer structured through institutionalized slavery after emancipation, the prophesied exodus remains unfulfilled in the U.S. South, where Florence’s mother is merely given the freedom to live in another cabin in which economic value continues to be extracted from her. In the persistent precarious material realities of Florence’s and Gabriel’s childhood and youth, Black hope continues to be nourished by narratives of redemption. Although the children realize that “many of the stories [Florence’s] mother told ... were tales told by an old black woman in a cabin in the evening to distract her children from their cold and hunger ... the story of this day she was never to forget; it was a day for which she lived” (*Go Tell It* 76-77). Hence, the cabin retains its double function in the

postbellum South. While the Black household continues to be affected by economic exploitation and imposed queering, it simultaneously provides a space for Black withdrawal and circulating stories which articulate interventions into the seemingly stable political circumstances.

In addition to the extractivism in the cabin, the violent White appropriation of public space and Black bodies in gendered spectacles of lynching reveals the continued effort to structure space according to the racial binary in the postbellum South. Regarding the continuity of White dominance, Baldwin holds that “the North, by freeing the slaves of their masters, robbed the masters of any possibility of freeing themselves of the slaves” (“Faulkner” 213). Accordingly, White Southerners remain “masters” throughout the narrative’s sections set in the South (*Go Tell It* 82, 142). Maintaining this position compels them to reenact the past relationship with their slaves. Violent spectacles, then, stage White supremacy by seizing Black bodies and performing (dis)empowerment. Baldwin narrativizes this usurpation in “the dead body of a soldier” found “just outside of town ... his uniform shredded where he had been flogged ... his trousers, soaked with blood, were torn open, and exposed to the cold, white air of morning the thick hairs of his groin, matted together, black and rust-red, and the wound that seemed to be throbbing still” (*Go Tell It* 165). The torturous act of flogging which precedes the soldier’s murder and the concealment of White agency in the passive rendering of the atrocities reinvokes the dynamics of enslavement. Furthermore, the soldier’s physical emasculation reveals that the racial binary continues to rely on queering Blackness. Abdur-Rahman points out that the threat of Black “masculine sameness” is controlled by “transfiguring ... hypermasculinity into ... docile, emasculated, asexuality” and aligning Black masculinity with femininity through castration and imposing the “phallic lack” (*Against the Closet* 58, 67). Hence, the soldier’s lynching queers him in an attempt to suppress “masculine sameness” and affirm the racial alterity of Blackness against exclusively White hegemonic masculinity. Jeff Fallis endorses this reading their view of the “sexless lynching victim ... [as] the most extreme, literalized expression” of

the suppression of the sameness of humanity in the U.S. South (15). Therefore, the lynching narrativizes the White pursuit to control and subjugate Black masculinity and, thereby, retain the racial order of slavery.

The soldier's lynching affects the Black community beyond the victim and functions to universalize oppressive meanings of Blackness. Gabriel notices the effect of the lynching in its aftermath when "there were no black men on the streets at all, save him. ... [The soldier's body] had been carried home in silence and lay now behind locked doors ... Now, someone spat on the sidewalk at Gabriel's feet, and he walked on, his face not changing, and he heard it reprov- ingly whispered behind him that he was a good nigger, surely up to no trouble" (*Go Tell It* 165). The soldier's lynching empties the public street of Black men and makes White hegemony vis- ible in the almost exclusively White presence in public. Among other scholars, Patricia Hill Collins emphasizes that public lynching historically functioned as a *collective* affirmation of the racial order (217, 219). Gabriel indeed witnesses a spatial order in the aftermath of the lynching which bars Black access to the public space. This displacement is accompanied by the threat to Black life and the consequential collective terror. Chris Weedon highlights this inter- play writing that "bodies *and* emotions" serve as "sites of power" (42, emphasis added). Gabriel experiences this confluence of the persistent threat to his physical integrity and the control and confinement of his emotions which are reduced to numbing docility in the racist trope of the "good nigger." The public display of the soldier's dead body, the almost exclusively White presence in a public which threatens Black physical integrity, and the reduction of Black emo- tion to vengefulness or docility produce controlling images of a disempowered Black mascu- linity and establish a racialized segregation which confines Blackness and endorses White dom- inance.

Despite this spatial marginalization of Blackness, Black withdrawal also preserves dig- nity, survival, and resistance. When the soldier's body is reclaimed and mourned, the dignity of

being remembered as a human is reinstated in him. As “behind locked doors, his living kinsmen ... sat, weeping, and praying” and Gabriel “walked, held by his caution more rigid than an arrow [and] prayed ... for loving kindness,” all these Black characters “dream ... of vengeance” (*Go Tell It* 165). While they retreat to spaces “behind locked doors” or into their inner spaces and prayers, they also accommodate anguish and anger. Particularly Gabriel’s graphic fantasies subvert the images of Black victimhood. He “dreamed of the feel of a white man’s forehead against his shoe; again and again, until the head wobbled on the broken neck and his foot encountered nothing but the rushing blood” (*Go Tell It* 165). Against the White threat to Black lives, the dreams of vengeance and Gabriel’s fantasies articulate a radical Black plea for justice. His violent vision juxtaposes what Julius Fleming calls the “spectacle of injured black bodies” with a “spectacle ... of the black gaze” (182, 193). The White strategy to demonstrate dominance on the body of the lynching victim is, thereby, reversed in the Black fantasy of revenge. Simultaneously, White fantasies of Black revenge are instrumentalized to justify the continued racial violence (*Go Tell It* 176). Thereby, White aggression is reframed as counterviolence in a reversal of victim and perpetrator. Hill Collins explains that such narratives serve to disguise the underlying endeavor to reproduce White dominance (219). However, the confluence of White violence and narratives of White victimhood silences and suppresses violent articulations of Black anguish and anger. In Baldwin’s words, “silence ” is used as a “weapon” (“No Name” 458). In contrast to the White narrative of threatening Black masculinity controlled by violent disempowerment, Baldwin’s Black male characters are neither inherently violent nor disempowered but strive to preserve their dignity in resistance to the White gaze which controls the public sphere.

While lynching targets Black male bodies, White supremacy is enacted on Black women through rape. The gang rape of Florence’s neighbor Deborah updates the systemic sexual

violence of slavery in the postbellum South and displays the dependence of White supremacy on constant reaffirmation:

Their neighbor Deborah, who was sixteen, three years older than Florence, had been taken away into the fields the night before by many white men, where they did things to her to make her cry and bleed. Today, Deborah's father had gone to one of the white men's houses, and said that he would kill him and all the other white men he could find. They had beaten him and left him for dead. Now, everyone had shut their doors, praying and waiting, for it was said that the white folks would come tonight and set fire to all the houses, as they had done before. (*Go Tell It* 73-74)

In recourse to Florence's mother's rape, Deborah's rape reveals the continued sexual violence after emancipation. This reflects what Abdur-Rahman identifies as the "reinvigorat[ion] of plantation norms" in the public sexual violence against Black women (*Against the Closet* 75). Similar to the flogging of the soldier, rape in the postbellum South taps into collective traumata and images of slavery to affirm White supremacy. Deborah's father's attempt to hold a White man accountable shows that rape indirectly queers Black masculinity too. Hill Collins confirms that in a heteropatriarchal logic, systematic rape marks Black women *and* men as deviant from implied norms (223). Black men who cannot prevent White violence against Black women are, therefore, marked as deviant from the norms of patriarchal masculinity. Staging rape in the public of an open field makes these scripts of gendered racial violence knowable. The arbitrariness of the victim and the upkept anonymity of the perpetrators make the threat ubiquitous. Abdur-Rahman points out that gang rape functions as a deliberate spectacle and collective affirmation of the perpetrators' male dominance (*Against the Closet* 76). The spectacle and imposed voyeurism of public rape, however, is disrupted by the narrative distance with which Baldwin renders the scene. He refrains from exploiting Deborah's rape for what Fleming describes as "satisfy[ing] ... [the] craving for horror" (182). Instead, the anonymizing structures which undergird the White attempt to evade responsibility are rendered visible by making White agency explicit. The perpetual reiteration of White violence displays the purposeful effort involved in keeping up the heteropatriarchal, racist oppression which update the racial order of

slavery. Rendering visible the constructedness of power structures reveals their inherent shakiness and affirms the Black agency in denying oneself to the grasp of White dominance.

As Deborah's rape queers Black masculinity, the attempt to secure heteropatriarchal Black gender roles through a politics of female sexual purity makes the congregation of the Black church accomplices in the shaming of her femininity. By reading Deborah's rape as a source of her impurity, the collectively imposed queerness of Blackness is limited to her violated femininity and White violence is attributed to Deborah's impure womanhood through the complicity of Black men:

When men looked at Deborah they saw no further than her unlovely and violated body. ... That night had robbed her of the right to be considered a woman. No man would approach her in honor because she was a living reproach, to herself and to all black women and to all black men. ... Since she could not be considered a woman, she could only be looked on as a harlot, a source of delight more bestial and mysteries more shaking than any a proper woman could provide. (*Go Tell It* 79)

Deborah's rape in this scene becomes the catalyst for Black patriarchal oppression. To safeguard Black masculinity from imposed queerness, Black men queer Deborah, considering her unworthy to be recognized as a woman and, thereby, rescue a collective normative Black womanhood against which a normative Black masculinity can be defined. In other words, marking Deborah's femininity as deviant allows Black men to defend their position within a heteropatriarchal gender binary. This reading is supported by Kali Gross' reasoning, that Black "politics of respectability ... although [often] deployed ... as a form of resistance" also provide a basis for "patriarchal and heterosexist" interpretations of reality (qtd. in McBride 70-71). Deborah's deviance places her beyond *respectable* femininity and conserves the gendered binary on which patriarchal masculinity depends. Therefore, the attempt to define normative Black gendered positions beyond the control of White violence results in a sexual politics which fails to recognize and oppose sexual violence against Black women as a strategy to upkeep White supremacy. Deborah's marginalization in a matrix of gender and race is symptomatic of the decay of Black

solidarity at the intersection of race and gender and of Black male complicity in the victimization of Black women.

When Gabriel opposes Deborah's condemnation out of his religious belief in forgiveness and salvation, he fails to address the displacement of White responsibility. While religion allows for a renegotiation of the meanings of Black womanhood, Gabriel perpetuates the patriarchal logic that marks Deborah's body as the site of shame to be forgiven. Gabriel's faith, hence, affirms Deborah's body as the locus of shameful womanhood while granting him the self-aggrandizement of purifying her body from the shame instated in her:

And then, as he sat there, remembering again Elder Peters' boisterous, idle remark [about Deborah's rape], this remark shook together in him all those shadowy doubts and fears, those hesitations and tendernesses, which were his in relation to Deborah, and the sum of which he now realized was his certainty that there was in that relationship something foreordained. It came to him that, as the Lord had given him Deborah, to help him to stand, so the Lord had sent him to her, to raise her up, to release her from that dishonor which was hers in the eyes of men. (*Go Tell It* 123)

Gabriel claims to reinstate Deborah's integrity by crossing the established boundary which puts Deborah beyond womanhood and honorable desire. Thereby, he confirms the notion that as a rape victim, Deborah is stripped of her female purity. Hence, he taps into the same reversal of guilt that makes her body the locus of shame. Resultingly, Gabriel affirms his patriarchal power to purify Deborah's femininity from a shame that is made hers by heteropatriarchal dominance reiterated in sexualized violence in the first place. It becomes apparent that Gabriel is entangled in the heteropatriarchal succession of physical violence, denial of responsibility, and male complicity in the dislocation of shame. Jonathan Walton describes the "binary with whiteness, manliness, power, and freedom on one side and blackness, femininity, impotence and servitude on the other" which serves to alienate Black men from raped Black women (72-73). Even as Gabriel seems to act in solidarity with Deborah, he does not identify with her pain. Instead, he affirms his patriarchal power by reiterating the displacement of guilt and making himself the

source of her divine salvation. Therefore, Deborah's purity and womanhood remain at the mercy of men rather than becoming a source of solidarity beyond gender difference.

In the attempt to establish the cabin as a household in concurrence with heteropatriarchal norms, the project of maintaining feminine purity conflicts with the cabin's material deprivation which disproportionately affects women. While the cabin continues to mark Blackness by material precariat, patriarchal conceptions of gender make Florence's emancipation from deprivation secondary to her brother's:

With the birth of Gabriel, which occurred when [Florence] was five, her future was swallowed up. There was only one future in that house, and it was Gabriel's – to which, since Gabriel was a man-child, all else must be sacrificed. ... Florence was a girl, and would by and by be married, and have children of her own, and all the duties of a woman; and this being so, her life in the cabin was the best possible preparation for her future life. (*Go Tell It* 78)

From her earliest childhood, Florence's possibilities to articulate and perform her identity are not only limited by the deprivation of the cabin but the unequal assumption of her and her brother's future lives. At the intersection of Blackness and womanhood, Florence's future becomes inconceivable as being outside the cabin. About Black women's economic deprivation, Davis writes that by the end of WWII "Black women workers had [scarcely] really begun to escape the old grip of slavery" ("Emancipation" 85). Florence's socio-economic immobility reflected by the confines of the cabin renders her future a variation of her mother's realities under slavery. In contrast, the cabin is tellingly referred to as a house in anticipation of Gabriel's future. Hence, the dwelling becomes a paradox signifier of Florence's female immobility and Gabriel's male mobility with the designations "cabin" and "house" highlighting the gendered economic marginalization which intersects with race. While their mother privileges Gabriel to counteract the racist confinement of Black existence to the cabin, this strategy reiterates Florence's patriarchal immobilization.

Despite the intersecting force of racism and heterosexism in the attempts to displace Blackness and translate White hegemony into an exclusively White public presence, Blackness

is inscribed into the topography of the South as the constitutive other of Whiteness. Therefore, the Whiteness of the South can neither be rid of Blackness nor of the gendered and sexual categories its construction is contingent on. The lynched soldier's body only seems to inscribe itself into the Southern landscape impermanently as his "fingernails dig ... into the scuffed earth" (*Go Tell It* 165). However, the marks his body leaves modify the character of the topography. Baldwin cannot "suppress the thought that this [rust-red] earth had acquired its color from the blood that had dripped down from these trees" ("Nobody Knows" 99-100). While the knowledge of racial violence is necessary to interpret the Southern earth as a witness, Baldwin's reflection highlights that the marks of violence will not vanish through ignorance. Instead, the earth tells a truth about Southern history to those willing to listen and see. When Gabriel sees "Royal's body, sprawled heavy and unmoving forever against the earth" or longs for death to be "release[d] ... from the cruelty of his chains" and lies "for a moment silent and trembling at the base of the tree, as though he wished to be buried there," his visions directly associate Black death with the witnessing earth of the South (*Go Tell it* 105, 108, 166). The Black body, controlled by racial oppression and violence, is never obliterated but directly connected to the space they attempt to make racially pure. Just as the slaveowner's absence from the cabin cannot conceal his responsibility for Black suffering, the oppression and murder of Black characters bare the dependence of White purity on Black marginalization. Hence, the very earth of the South bears witness to the mutual dependence of Whiteness and Blackness which cannot be dissociated by the violent attempt to produce spaces reflecting racial segregation and purity.

The Southern topography demonstrates the continued affirmation of disparate racial categories which remain entangled as mutually constituting alterities. The system of slavery and the plantation's dichotomous spatial organization, which initially stabilize the binary of Blackness and Whiteness, transition into the soaring racial violence of lynching and rape in the post-emancipation South. The racial and heteropatriarchal boundaries which structure space in the

South as experienced by Florence's mother, Florence, and Gabriel, however, remain unstable and in the constant need for reaffirmation. Therefore, the spatial structure of the South stabilizes conceptual boundaries, yet spaces for Black withdrawal, visions of alternative realities, and the inescapable entanglement of Whiteness and Blackness are reflected by Southern spaces and shake the establishment of a racial binary. Therefore, space territorializes the mythical lineage of White expansive *root identity* but also allows for Black *opacity* and *multiplicity*. Although Black identities remain troubled by oppressive definitions of race, gender, and sexuality, Black withdrawal and interiority allow to preserve a dignity beyond the White definitions of race. While asymmetrical power structures keep the cabin as a racialized and gendered space intact, Black agency continues to destabilize boundaries through visions of liberation. In their passage to the North, the novel's characters eventually transgress the borders of the South. In Baldwin's words, they "refuse to be bound by ... and adjust themselves to cruel racial pressures" and enact the Black unwillingness "to wait" ("East River" 79). Instead of awaiting the earthly fulfillment of religious promises, Florence, Elizabeth, and Richard leave the South and attempt to transgress the boundaries of immobilized Blackness and womanhood by moving to New York instead (*Go Tell It* 84-86). Thereby, the racial order of the South remains intact, but the characters deny themselves to their fixation in identities constructed for the need of the White systems of slavery and oppression.

"Crush this City:" Segregation, Inner Spaces, and the North

While religious narratives promise a transcendental place of liberation and justice in contrast to the realities of the U.S. South, to Florence, Elizabeth, and Richard, the North and the Northern city locate these promises in real places. Despite their earthliness, the places to which the characters direct their hopes remain transcendental to them and, in their imagination, replace a changed South which they might or might not live to see. Migrating to the North, hence, represents the new hope for change when the religious exodus is not effected by the

abolition of slavery. Focalization on Florence reveals this hope “and deep ambition: to walk out one morning through the cabin door, never to return. ... Every day she heard that another man or woman had said farewell to this iron earth and sky, and started on the journey north” (*Go Tell It* 77). In juxtaposition to the cabin and the hostile “iron” of the landscape of the post-emancipation South which echoes the shackles of slavery, the North symbolizes potential liberation. Therefore, the passage to the North allows Florence to reclaim the agency to envision herself beyond Black female victimhood and economic oppression. As she “violently ... opened the gate and moved out into the road,” she tells her brother: ““If you ever see me again ... I won’t be wearing rags like yours”” (*Go Tell It* 87). The passage to the North means leaving the oppressive confluence of race, gender, and material deprivation of the South. Hence, by moving to New York, Florence rejects the old racist, patriarchal socio-economic order and her subjugation and attempts to realize herself in different terms and in relation to another place.

Eventually, the passage to the North realizes the self differently but also makes the transcendental North real to the characters. However, the real North the characters enter reiterates various forms of oppression anew. To Elizabeth, the realities deceive the hopes of “greater opportunities [in] the North” (*Go Tell It* 190). Instead, she finds herself being taken “out of the South, and into the city of destruction,” “in an ugly back room in Harlem ... in this great city where no one cared” (*Go Tell It* 185, 190-191). Elizabeth’s expectations of a life of possibilities in the North become a reality of familiar deprivation. Instead of providing the openness she had hoped for, New York puts Elizabeth into the isolation of anonymity and at the mercy of her relative. Therefore, the hopefully constructed otherness between the South and the North collapses in the face of Elizabeth’s experiences in Harlem. In the face of the realities of the North, she understands “that for [her boyfriend Richard’s] abundance of bitterness there was a positive fountain of grief. There was not, after all, a great difference between the world of the North and that of the South which she had fled; there was only this difference: the North promised more”

(*Go Tell It* 192). On this similarity between the North and the South, Baldwin notes elsewhere that “the brutality of the North is extreme, too, and utterly impersonal. It’s the same spirit [in the North and the South] but the technique is different” (“Black Scholar” 34). This sameness of the North and the South shatters the characters’ idealized imaginations of the North. Instead of gaining the ability to transgress the confining limits set to their identities, the passage to the North leads them to encounter all too well-known structures of race, class, and gender, this time materialized in the spatiality of Harlem. Only John, who is born and raised there, can queer the limitations represented in spatial boundaries by transgressing the isolation of Harlem, tracing the faultlines of racial segregation and destabilizing the racial binary they map on the city.

In the context of the North, Harlem manifests the upkept marginalization of Blackness through its spatial isolation and serves to reiterate the racial segregation of the plantation. Race continues to organize the space of the city. Baldwin comments on segregation that the racial binary is the precondition as well as the objective of Harlem’s ghettoization (“Fifth Avenue” 65). The character’s painful awareness of this continued efficacy of race becomes clear when in an argument between Florence and her husband Frank, he sarcastically asks: ““Where you expect us to live, honey, where we ain’t going to be with niggers? ... And what you want me to do, Florence? You want me to turn white?”” (*Go Tell It* 95). While Florence aspires to escape the material conditions of Harlem, race is constructed to bind her into these circumstances. Leaving Harlem and living outside a racialized ghetto, however, is as unthinkable, to Frank, as changing the color of their skin. His last rhetorical question reveals the immobilizing power structures which underpin Florence’s persuasion that he does not “want a coal Black woman” (*Go Tell It* 100). The devaluation of Blackness and Black femininity leads Florence to think of herself as undesirable. As Baldwin phrases it elsewhere, Blackness becomes “a stain [to] be washed away” (“East River” 80). However, Florence’s attempts to bleach her skin demonstrate the cynicism of racism. It commodifies the promise of racial mobility while affirming the color line in its failure

to keep this promise. Hence, it establishes Whiteness as worth aspiring to and deceives this aspiration. Florence's attempt to escape from the confines of color, which lock her into Harlem as she is locked into her skin uncover the mechanics behind stabilizing race in the body and allocating racialized bodies to racialized ghettos. Simultaneously, Florence's resistance demonstrates her unwillingness to submit herself to racist devaluation and the agency to counteract it.

Harlem accommodates Blackness as marginalized otherness and, furthermore, intertwines the meanings of race and class. The articulation of race through material deprivation, according to Baldwin, economically sustains the segregation of the city's Black population ("Fifth Avenue" 62). Therefore, the material conditions affirm the notion of a stable racial binary. Harlem is marked as a segregated Black neighborhood but, furthermore, it is "where the houses did not rise, piercing, as it seemed, the unchanging clouds, but huddled, flat, ignoble, close to the filthy ground, where the streets and the hallways and the rooms were dark, and where the unconquerable odor was of dust, and sweat, and urine, and homemade gin" (*Go Tell It* 32). Material deprivation proves to be relative in opposition to the affluence symbolized by the skyscrapers of Downtown Manhattan. The division of the city associates class with a moral opposition of purity and sin as Harlem's architecture cannot lift itself above the dirt and odors of the ghetto. Harlem's population cannot flee the realities of their neighborhood, rendering the city and its dwellers as immobile as the sky overclouding them. Baldwin points out that the capitalist iteration of racism distances its violent effects from those responsible, granting them ignorance of their responsibility ("Black Scholar" 35, 37). Accordingly, Harlem's referential entity, the Manhattan skyscrapers, induces the relative poverty of Harlem while remaining remote and seemingly disengaged. In a different context, David Jones indicates the underlying naturalization which renders "wealth ... racialized as being the domain of whiteness" (58). This alignment of race and class economically entangles race with profit and exploitation. Hence by othering Harlem and its population through deprivation, the prevalence of alcohol and filth,

these markers of class become readable as the effects of a process which bind the wealth and poverty of the city's segregated parts together. Sirpa Salenius, in their discussion of the representation of Harlem in Baldwin's *Another Country*, notes that the otherness of the neighborhood "reflects" New York and renders Harlem "isolated, and penetrable" (894). The capitalist logic which simultaneously hierarchizes human life according to material wealth and keeps an exploitative relationship between classes covert yet vibrant, therefore, creates Harlem as an impoverished other while constantly drawing on its population for economic and ideological profit. The poverty which articulates Blackness in Harlem, then, becomes readable as marking the devalued otherness of Blackness in its spatial as well as economic marginalization in New York.

While Harlem produces racial otherness and serves as evidence of it, the self-affirmation of segregation allows the White withdrawal from the racialized ghetto. Yet, John renders the boundaries of the territory claimed as White visible, when he strolls through Central Park and Downtown Manhattan on his birthday. In Central Park, John witnesses the markers of class, so intricately interwoven with race, changing substantially: "Outside the high wall of crossed wire, [John always found] ladies, white, in fur coats, walking their great dogs, or old, white gentlemen with canes" (*Go Tell It* 30). The image of the "wall" designed to keep John apart from New York's White population becomes paradoxically permeable to John's gaze and allows him to modify the racial relationship established by segregation. Fleming's reading of Baldwin's drama is instructive as it emphasizes the importance of making Whiteness visible to the "black gaze" in Baldwin's drama (199). Similarly, Baldwin exposes White New York to John's looks. The "ladies and gentlemen" whose Whiteness is directly associated with material affluence by their props and titles come into focus as the constitutive other inducing John's alterity. Upon tracing the borders between Harlem and Downtown Manhattan, John directly encounters the opposing other which makes itself conceivable through racialization and class differences that shape life in Harlem. Emma Cleary asserts that "the animate agency of the white gaze"

fragments the city according to race (98). Although John's gaze does not break down the wall it permeates, it juxtaposes and, thereby, renders visible what is on the other side of the boundary that produces his otherness, reversing the racialized visual logic of White withdrawal and Black looked-uponness.

Beyond the liminal space of Central Park, John's roaming in Downtown Manhattan reveals the power structures which underpin the city's racial segregation which remains intact despite his presence:

Niggers did not live on these streets where John now walked; it was forbidden; and yet he walked here, and no one raised a hand against him. But did he dare to enter this shop out of which a woman now casually walked, carrying a great round box? ... John knew he did not dare, not today, and he heard his father's laugh: '*No, nor tomorrow neither!*' ... They would never let him enter. In John's mind then, the people and the avenue underwent a change, and he feared them and knew that one day he could hate them ... He loved this street, not for the people or the shops but for the stone lions that guarded the great main building of the Public Library, a building filled with books and unimaginably vast, and which he had never yet dared to enter. He might, he knew, for he was a member of the branch in Harlem and was entitled to take books from any library in the city. (*Go Tell It* 35)

White hegemony in the organization of the city limits John's mobility in Manhattan. While the prohibition for Black people to settle in this neighborhood formalizes the White claim to territory, more incidental gatekeeping and humiliation further limit Black presence. Baldwin explains that even as Black people cross the city's racial boundaries, their "sense of honor and dignity" is constantly threatened by "the insults, the indifference, and the cruelty" of "the white man's world" ("Fifth Avenue" 59-60). John's anticipation of racial discrimination evokes an anxiety, strong enough to prevent him from acting upon his inclination to enter shops or the public library. Although there are no physical or formal boundaries, the internalized knowledge of the city's racial structure prevents him from entering shops or the library. This internalization functions as a tool of power as it perpetuates itself and prevents the Whiteness of spaces from being challenged. Furthermore, Gabriel's bitterness corroborates John's doubts about his ability to ever transgress his internalized boundaries of racial segregation. In this moment of faltering

hope, John's perspective of White people changes and gives way to fear and foreshadowed hate. Hence, John's mobility renders the boundaries he crosses visible by showing the disempowering limits to his movement and thinking which are continuously perpetuated in Downtown Manhattan.

Despite the city's durable racial order, the limits of White New York fail to propel John into subscribing to a clear-cut duality. Instead, John's physical and emotional mobility display his potential to maintain a varied, complex relationship to the city. By focalizing Manhattan through John's gaze, the narrative renders his inner spaces readable and displays how his feelings of hope, anxiety, and hatred are further complicated as the scene culminates in his love evoked by the main library. John's emotional *multiplicity* illustrates the complexity of the "portal for alternative identification" which Cleary identifies at the basis of the "produc[tion of] space" in others of Baldwin's works (96). The view of Manhattan invokes in John various contrasting and conflicting images of himself. He feels like a "giant who might crumble this city with his anger; ... a tyrant who might crush this city beneath his heels; ... a conqueror at whose feet flowers would be strewn, ... the Lord's anointed; and he would live in this shining city which his ancestors had seen with longing from far away" (*Go Tell It* 31). As John shapeshifts with his changing stance towards the city, he experiences rage, empowerment, pride, and hope. While his self-conception and his perception of the city remain entangled and undergo coordinated changes in his imagination, his emotions loosen the stability of the boundaries the city maps onto his identity. While the city's spatial organization serves John's definition through territorializations of race and class, the mobility of his body, gaze, and emotions multiplies the images he conceives of the city and himself.

Not only John's stance towards White New York but also his identification and disidentification with Harlem, its Black communities, and his family display the complexity and

openness of John's identity. The role of a community leader which is so often predicted to be John's destiny, despite his reluctance to embrace this prospect, becomes for him:

like a great brass gate, opening outward for him on a world where people did not live in the darkness of his father's house, did not pray to Jesus in the darkness of his father's church, where he would eat good food, and wear fine clothes, and go to the movies as often as he wished. In this world John, who was, his father said, ugly, who was always the smallest boy in his class, and who had no friends, became immediately beautiful, tall, and popular. (*Go Tell It* 13-14)

The trope of the gate yet again symbolizes the Black transgression of oppressive limitations. While the association of Blackness and poverty deeply encroaches into the Harlem community, John's imagination opens up spaces beyond the restrictions of race and class and the tightness of his father's condescending control. Hence, John deconstructs the entanglements of Blackness with poverty, unattractiveness, and isolation, which seem so stable in the realities of Harlem. This deconstruction has deep repercussions on John's self-conception. In imagining an alternative world, John steps out of "the darkness" of Harlem and into a world of possibility where he can transcend his immediate reality and become different without becoming somebody else in this transition. In Glissant's terms, John realizes his *multiplicity* by allowing himself to "change" and "not be lost" (Diawara & Glissant 7). John multiplies the meanings of his Blackness by loosening the association of race and class in his imagination. Despite the political dimension of his fantasy, John remains enmeshed in the social fabric of New York and Harlem. Later in the novel, John devalues the recognition he receives from Black people, "since they could not, John felt, in any case really know" (*Go Tell It* 14). Affluent Whiteness, in this passage, remains the underlying norm against which John probes his existence. John's identification and disidentification with the Blackness he experiences in Harlem and his independence and dependence on normative definitions and material realities are opposed dynamics in his interaction with the world. While he remains entangled in oppressive racial structures, the trope of the gate locates him at the threshold of change and highlights his unabated potential for understanding, signifying, and being different.

“There Began the Flood:” Complicating Identity, Inhabiting Relation

While the racial segregation of New York reveals the construction and mutual reaffirmation of race and class, the meanings of Blackness are negotiated among and complicated by the population of Harlem. As the Grimes family navigates the spaces of home, the Harlem streets, and the church, they continually encounter the boundaries defined for their Blackness in Harlem. Particularly John's attempts to open up to relation and love destabilize the racial, gendered, and sexual binaries entangled in the devaluation of Blackness and demonstrate the potential of the home and the church to become sites of liberation. In a climactic scene in the family's church, John has a spiritual experience in which love frees him from the isolation divisive regimes rationalize.

The familiar confluence of Blackness and material deprivation characterizes the Grimes' Harlem home which articulates the continued deviance of the Black household from heteropatriarchal ideals. Baldwin describes the house as a dilapidated dwelling with narrow rooms, lit by the yellow light of blind, time-worn windows, and stained, crumbling paint on the crooked walls and sagging ceilings (*Go Tell It* 14, 16-17). The house's outworn substance defies the family's attempts of maintenance so that it seems as if “[n]o labor could ever make it clean. Dirt was in the walls and the floorboards, and triumphed beneath the sink where roaches spawned; was in the fine ridges of the pots and pans, scoured daily. ... Dirt was in every corner, angle, crevice of the monstrous stove, and lived behind it in delirious communion with the corrupted wall” (*Go Tell It* 16). While the family members attempt to alter the state of their dwelling in vain, the dirt in their house becomes an animate entity which “live[s]” in their dwelling and “triumph[s]” in their constant battle against it. Just as the cabin in the South, the Harlem home fails to provide the protective seclusion of domesticity. Instead, the Grimes' dwelling is susceptible to the oppressive material and social devaluation of Harlem that shows in the raddled construction. The encroachment of poverty yet again marks the family's Blackness as deviant

from the heteropatriarchal ideal of domesticity. Ferguson reads the “dirt [as a] symbol [of] ...racial, class, gender, and sexual differences” and infers this reading from the “association between dirt and sex [updating that] between sin and sex” (103). This association of racial and class difference with gender and sexuality deviant from heteropatriarchal norms is supported by John’s brother Roy’s challenge of Gabriel’s patriarchal position, based on his precarious attempts to support the family (*Go Tell It* 18-19). It becomes obvious that poverty affirms the marginalization of Blackness but also articulates Black deviance from heteropatriarchal ideals.

Despite the susceptibility of the Grimes’ dwelling to the power structures which exert their limiting forces on the family’s daily lives, the family members’ human complexity, made visible in their loving relationships, persists in the precarious dwelling. The kitchen exposes the characters’ variability and opacity destabilizing the confines of the racialized space.

The room shifted, the light of the sun darkened, and his mother’s face changed. Her face became the face that he gave her in his dreams, the face that had been hers in a photograph he had seen once, long ago, a photograph taken before he was born. ... It was the face of a girl who knew that no evil could undo her, and who could laugh, surely, as his mother did not laugh now. Between the two faces there stretched a darkness and a mystery that John feared, and that sometimes caused him to hate her. (*Go Tell It* 17)

In this passage, the kitchen sheds light onto Elizabeth’s variability in her face’s reflection of her younger self under John’s gaze. While the change which Elizabeth undergoes becomes perceptible to John, his mother’s painful history, the separation from her father and his father Richard’s suicide, remains obscure. The unfathomable “darkness” which lies between John’s mother’s “two faces” reflects these unknown aspects of her history. Through the “darkness” of his mother’s unknown past, before she had lived through the disillusionment of the deprivation in the North, John sees the face of her younger, hopeful self in her. While the mysterious tragedies of Elizabeth’s life cause strong feelings of alienation, fear and even hate in John, his loving gaze perceives his mother beyond the person she becomes after losing the hope to find a place to realize a better life. Thereby, John’s gaze, despite the unsettling emotions this insight conjures up, transgresses the temporal and spatial limits of his mother’s life in Harlem and reinvigorates

her as she was in her youth. The repercussions of the realization of his mother's multiplicity provoke in John the "need to touch things, the table and chairs and the walls of the room, to make certain that the room existed and that he was in the room" (*Go Tell It* 17). While the gendered and queered space of the kitchen seemed to immobilize John's mother and family, under John's gaze it becomes a space which simultaneously accommodates his mother's past and present complexity. The light of the kitchen window echoes the "light" in Audre Lorde's writing, which illuminates the "dark place within" and prompts self-knowledge and growth ("Poetry" 25). While the kitchen's changing light reveals his mother's darkness to John, it indirectly points him to his potential of being different in a space suddenly shaken by uncertainty and openness. The instability of the Grimes' home, which allows the intrusion of dirt and limiting meanings of class and sexual deviance, then, becomes readable as something other than lack. In destabilizing John's perception of his mother, himself, and their dwelling, the shakiness of space produces more open meanings for their existence. While Elizabeth retains her opacity, the relation John establishes to her by acknowledging her multiplicity reveals their human depth and potential glossed over but never diminished by oppressive regimes.

Gabriel's bitterness about racial oppression and segregation contrasts his stepson's ambivalence about his limitations and possibilities. While Gabriel's stance can be interpreted as resistant towards White hegemony, his frustration postpones hope for change and leads to consolidated beliefs about Whiteness and Blackness as when he tells his son:

that all white people were wicked, and that God was going to bring them low. He said that white people were never to be trusted, and that they told nothing but lies, and that not one of them had ever loved a nigger. He, John, was a nigger, and he would find out, as soon as he got a little older, how evil white people could be. (*Go Tell It* 34)

'You see?' came now from his father. 'It was white folks, some of them white folks *you* like so much that tried to cut your brother's throat.' (*Go Tell It* 46)

Gabriel's stance towards White oppression rejects the subjection of Blackness. His "anger," as Lorde indicates, can be a productive "response to racis[m]" if "express[ed] ... for corrective

surgery, not guilt” (“Anger” 117). While Lorde’s observations illuminate the meaningfulness of Gabriel’s emotions in a resistant discourse, they also highlight their limitations. Apart from insisting on White responsibility, Gabriel stabilizes race to attach moral judgments to it. His productive critique of Whiteness loses its transformative power as White guilt becomes essentialized, only redeemable by divine intervention. While the religious narrative of redemption yet again expresses the Black resistance to the status quo, the promise for change remains adjourned indefinitely. Importantly, Gabriel locates the root of racism in the lack of White love. However, his inference that this lack is a stable fact indirectly affirms the boundaries racism constructs. Accordingly, John’s alleged affinity for “White folks [he] likes so much,” therefore, becomes a misguided transgression from Gabriel’s perspective. While Gabriel’s anger makes pain articulable, the hate it becomes through frustration paralyzes him in an acceptance of a Black/White binary under reversed moral evaluations. Mikko Tuhkanen provides an explanation for Gabriel’s deadlock as induced by the realities of Harlem which make the “ghetto hustlers ‘fast’: swift and stuck” (102). Gabriel’s response to the oppression in the Harlem ghetto fails to address this fastness and merely allows him to reverse racial devaluation while remaining trapped in his determined position. The opposition to John’s stance which accommodates the tension between love *and* hate highlights the limited transformative capacity of Gabriel’s dependence on self-aggrandizement to make his anger productive.

From John’s perspective, Gabriel signifies the persistence of the precarious circumstances which his children must reject to arrive at alternative visions of the world and of themselves. Gabriel’s life foreshadows John’s prospects to live “in the narrow way ... of the cross” that holds “only humiliation” for him and where “one day, a house like his father’s house, and a church like his father’s, and a job like his father’s [awaited him], where he would grow old and black with hunger and toil” (*Go Tell It* 32). In contrast to Elizabeth’s multiplicity which becomes visible in the changing light of the kitchen, Gabriel’s immobility and the prospect of

reiterating a life in the familiar spaces of his “father’s house and church” is unbearable “for he had made his decision. He would not be like his father or his father’s fathers. He would have another life ... [in] a world where people did not live in the *darkness* of his father’s house” (*Go Tell It* 13, emphasis added). In John’s view, the association with the church and the cross cannot lighten the burden of his stepfather’s “humiliation” or brighten the “darkness” of their home. Therefore, John refuses the Christian ethics by which Gabriel attempts to revalorize his Blackness and claim patriarchal authority over Elizabeth and his children. While John secretly “wanted to kill his father,” his brother Roy confronts Gabriel directly: “That’s my mother. You slap her again, you black bastard, and I swear to God I’ll kill you” (*Go Tell It* 49,53). The boys’ rejection of Gabriel culminates in the hyperbolical wish to kill him to free themselves of his patriarchal control and domestic violence. Thereby John and Roy queer the heteropatriarchal household and appropriate their current lives and future. Instead of allowing their filiation to propel them into following Gabriel’s immobilizing stance towards Black marginalization and patriarchal oppression, they insist on inhabiting their Blackness and masculinity outside the limits of his example.

Despite the White/Black binary Gabriel subscribes to, the Christian ethics prevent Black solidarity as they set the Grimes family’s church congregation apart from the people on the Harlem streets by hierarchizing Blackness through the same entanglement of race, class, and queerness which makes their family home susceptible to limiting meanings. Their Sunday walk to church confronts the family with the Harlem population whose sameness prompts the need to undermine relation by emphasizing the difference between faith and sin:

Every Sunday morning ... they had taken to the streets, the Grimes family on their way to church. Sinners along the avenue watched them. ... These men and women ... had spent the night in bars, or in cat houses, or on the streets, or on rooftops, or under the stairs. They had been drinking. They had gone from cursing to laughter, to anger, to lust. (*Go Tell It* 4)

The otherness between the Grimes family and the people crowding Harlem's streets is marked and solidified by the Grimes' association with the church congregation which contrasts the status of the men and women on the streets. The "sinners" are differentiated through their engagement in the Harlem nightlife, drinking, and promiscuity. Ferguson observes the juxtaposition of religious virtue and sexual promiscuity on which the Black church draws to give meaning to its sexual politics (102). The sanctification of sexuality through heterosexual marriage against the deviance of the promiscuity of Harlem's streets, allows the church congregation to realign precarious Black sexuality with heteropatriarchal norms. However, replacing the sexually and racially loaded dichotomy of rich/poor with a dichotomy of corrupted/pure embodied by sinners and saints jeopardizes Black solidarity. The regulation of Sexuality creates a division of pure and sinful Blackness. While the Black church, thereby, externalizes deviance, it becomes blind to the entanglement of racist and capitalist domination of the Harlem community and instead of fostering a relation of Black solidarity draws another divisive line of otherness.

The alignment of the Grimes family with Christian purity remains troubled by the material conditions of Harlem, despite the suggestion of heteronormativity in Gabriel and Elizabeth's marriage. The sexual politics of the church renders the "lust" of the people on Harlem's streets sinful by defining sexuality itself as the "evil that lived in the flesh" (*Go Tell It* 4, 57). However, the walls of the Grime's home cannot hide from John that his "mother and father, who went to church on Sundays, they did it too" when he involuntarily hears them "in the bedroom behind him, over the sound of rats' feet, and rat screams, and the music and cursing from the harlot's house downstairs" (*Go Tell It* 5). Gabriel's and Elizabeth's sexuality, undiminished by the regulation of Christian sexual politics and unconcealed by the precarious privacy of their dwelling, marks their home just like the dirt which creeps into the construction. Ferguson notes that the family's purity remains susceptible to the meanings of Black deviance externalized on the people on Harlem's streets (102). In the soundscape of the Grime's home, the

sounds of John's parents intermingle with those of rats and prostitutes and their customers. The spatial realities bring the Grimes into close contact with the filth and the sin they attempt to distance themselves from instead of providing secluded privacy. Despite the boundary between promiscuity and moral integrity, formalized in marriage, which invests the church congregation with moral superiority and disguises sameness with the Harlem population, their otherness remains unstable.

Just as the instability of the binary of sinners and saints becomes apparent in the narrative, the divisiveness of the patriarchal binary of gender, institutionalized in marriage, is revealed as a construction which serves the subjugation of women and children. The resulting gendered fragmentation of solidarity becomes apparent in Gabriel's advances toward Elizabeth and his claim to the role of the patriarchal savior when he tells her: "[T]he Lord's been speaking to my heart, and I believe it's His will that you and me should be man and wife. ... [M]aybe I can help keep your foot from stumbling ... again ... girl ... And I'll love you ... and I'll honor you ... And I'll love your son, your little boy ... just like he was my own" (*Go Tell It* 222-223). Before avowing his love for Elizabeth and promising to provide for her and John, Gabriel makes his moral superiority clear. Their marriage gives him the authority to keep Elizabeth from renewing her sin, embodied by her illegitimate child, John. His promise to treat John as his child is contradicted by his later assertion that there must "be a difference between [John,] the son of a weak, proud woman and some careless boy, and [Roy,] the son that God had promised him" (*Go Tell It* 131). Gabriel's patriarchal control, already implied in his proposal to Elizabeth, strips all involved characters of their troubled histories. While Gabriel's self-aggrandization ignores his abandonment of Esther and their unwed son Royal it also renders the entanglements of Elizabeth's unwed motherhood with racial oppression in Richard's suicide oblivious. Hence, Gabriel's superiority depends on stripping Elizabeth, John, and himself of the complexity of their personal histories and relations and replacing this unknowable opacity with the

transparency of a Christian sexual politics. Just as the dwellers of Harlem's streets, Elizabeth and John are reduced from humans to sinners by this transparency to provide a constitutive other for the saints and Gabriel's patriarchy.

John's sexuality reveals one more dimension of limiting alterity the heteronormative sexual politics of the Black church constructs. His queerness is exploited as a source of shameful regulation and limited to the confined privacy of his inner spaces. Queerness and heteronormativity are, therefore, entangled in an asymmetrical power structure which ensures the heteronormative hegemony. John's inner spaces and the suppression of his queerness demonstrate this power structure:

[A]nd then (while the yellow stain on the ceiling slowly transformed itself into a woman's nakedness) he remembered that it was his fourteenth birthday and that he had sinned ... In spite of the saints, his mother and his father, the warnings he had heard from his earliest beginnings, he had sinned with his hands a sin that was hard to forgive. In the school lavatory, alone, thinking of the boys, older, bigger, braver, who made bets with each other as to whose urine could arch higher, he had watched in himself a transformation of which he would never dare to speak. (*Go Tell It* 12-13)

Ironically, the boundaries of sexual purity by which the racialized meanings of Black deviance are defined, produce John's desires as shameful transgressions. Even as he adheres to sexual abstinence, his fantasies reveal that the internalized moral code of the church regulates his inner life and imagination. The regulation of John's imaginations of a woman's body and other boys by narratives of sin and shame can be read as the compulsive grasp on queerness by a heteropatriarchal ideology. Siobhan Somerville provides the rationale for such a reading and argues that "in a culture that simultaneously seeks out and erases lesbian and gay identity" the meanings of "'in' and 'out'" are shifting (93). While John's queer desires are relegated to the secrecy of his mind, the grip of the church's control and shame intrudes this interiority. Through internalization, John's inner spaces become permeable; their interiority is made susceptible to the church's heteropatriarchal alignment of sexuality and sin. Yet, the absolute ineffability of sexual desire, emerging from this rigorous control, protects the normalization of heteropatriarchal

ideals. Jones agrees that heteronormativity depends on the suppression of queerness (51). Particularly John's internalized persuasion that his sexual fantasies and masturbation are too shameful to ever be expressed demonstrates the firmness of the heteropatriarchal hegemony. The simultaneous suppression and dependence of heteropatriarchy on queerness demonstrate, yet again, how fast a contingency othering establishes. In the attempt to rid normative Black sexuality of queerness, the Black church unable to extinguish it, transforms acknowledgment of relation into an oppressive grasp of queerness to establish divisive heteropatriarchal norms.

While John's queerness becomes unsayable in the hegemony of heteropatriarchy, the narrative repeatedly allows it to filter through the confines of heteronormativity and to queer gendered and sexual categories defined by the politics of purity. While sexual desire mostly remains implied, the latency of queerness becomes a powerful undercurrent expressing John's potential multiplicity. As he "stare[s] at Elisha ... , admiring the timbre of Elisha's voice, much deeper and manlier than his own, admiring the leanness, and grace, and strength, and darkness of Elisha in his Sunday suit," John's desires are hinted at without being made explicitly sexual (*Go Tell It* 6). Reading John's attention to Elisha's body and masculinity and his "unaccustomedly bold and lighthearted [feeling at] the arrival of Elisha" as gay desire would reduce the subtlety of the narrative in these passages (*Go Tell It* 53). Bryan Washington, however, suggests a reading of *Go Tell It on the Mountain* as a novel of "repressed homosexuality," which "evades or covers over homosexuality" (81, 84). While this reading is by no means implausible, Washington reduces the indetermination of John's sexuality to a fixed position of oppression. An alternative reading that refrains from clearly defining John's complex sexuality allows for an explanation of the repeated implication of gay desire as a signifier of queer possibility rather than heteronormative oppression. Abdur-Rahman illuminates the resistant potential of Baldwin's sexual "inscrutability" in the denial of a "binaristic taxonomy of sexuality" and the protection of "privacy" ("Mystery" 209). Although Abdur-Rahman refers to Baldwin's personal

life, their observations also grant insights into Baldwin's writing. By rendering John's sexuality through allusions, his presumed queerness remains a translucent undercurrent in the narrative. This undercurrent reinstates the transgressive potential of the *rhizome* into queerness which allows John to relate to aspects of his desire and himself despite the boundaries heteropatriarchy sets by its isolating grasp.

During a religious service, John's struggle against the immobilizing heteropatriarchy of his father and the Christian politics of purity climaxes in the realization of his capacity for love. The relation love establishes projects a passage out of the limiting racial and heterosexist boundaries Harlem manifests and simultaneously liberates and "anchors" John in a transformative state of being other. In the church, the lingering "odor of dust and sweat" and the "voices ... cursing and crying in the streets" which filter through its "closed ... door" are reminiscent of the realities of the Grime's home and the Harlem streets (*Go Tell It* 51). Despite its permeability to the troubles of Harlem, the church becomes the site of John's transformative spiritual experience:

Then there began to flood John's soul the waters of despair. *Love is as strong as death, as deep as the grave* ... rage that had no language, weeping with no voice ... spoke now, to John's startled soul, ... of the strongest chains, the most cruel lash ... And John looked back, seeing no deliverance. ... And he struggled to flee ... into the land of the living, so high, so far away ... finding no hand, no voice, finding no door. (*Go Tell It* 236-237)

On the church floor, John experiences an existential isolation in which his "soul" appears to drown. Echoing Gabriel's anger, the unspoken "rage" contains the painful histories of Black oppression, slavery being conjured up in images of "chains" and "lashes." Robert Birdwell argues that the cathartic solitude John experiences allows him to escape the reiteration of his father's life and the dictates of the church and to recognize the "opportunity for redemption ... [and] alternative self-affirmation" (31). While John longs for "deliverance" and for finding an escape from the isolation of anger, in the face of his inability to escape historical racial traumata, these longings are intertwined with the longing for community and relation among the "living"

where a “hand” or “voice” might reach out for him. Accordingly, John does not experience his liberation in a state of detached isolation. Instead, John overcomes the seemingly inescapable deprivation of support and communication when he has a divine vision and subsequently finds himself in the community of the congregation. Importantly, John’s relation to this community changes through his experience of “the love of God” which “anchored his drifting soul” (*Go Tell It* 241). The experience of this divine love transforms the church into a place of liberating relation rather than definitive exclusion. Therefore, the potential to replace delimitations with relation through love steers John towards what Douglas Field identifies in Baldwin’s thought as the metaphysical stability of home (4). This stability, established by love overpowering divisive definitions, renews, as Freeburg argues, John’s enmeshed relation to himself, his faith, and his community (189). Thereby, love allows John to enter into a liberating relation with himself and others in which painful histories cease to overdetermine him. It transforms John and provides him with the agency to find among others, despite the infringements of racism and heteropatriarchy, a place to be.

Although Baldwin’s characters continue to struggle against the oppressive regimes of racism and heterosexism, their continuous refusal to passively inhabit racialized, gendered, and sexual identity categories displays the unstable constructedness of these categories. As Florence, Gabriel, their mother, and Elizabeth all challenge the grip of the reality of the cabin in the U.S. South and eventually migrate to the North, both, the violent grip of racism, capitalism, and heterosexism which marginalizes them and their undiminished agency to counteract these oppressive structures becomes apparent. In New York, John’s movements in Downtown Manhattan, his shifting perception which exposes his and his mother’s complexity, and his wandering mind which lets him envision himself and his realities in alternative ways make the boundaries of racialized, gendered, and sexual spaces fuzzy. In his family’s church congregation, which perpetuates the fragmentation of the Harlem community through its Christian politics of

respectability, John eventually experiences the divine love which empowers him to enter into a relation with himself and the community despite the abjection of queerness and Blackness induced by internalized regimes of heterosexism and racism. Hatton points out the centrality of love to Baldwin's literary project and writes that "by the end of his fictional journey" he "had shown his definition of a human being to mean any individual ... wherever they might fall on the continuums of race, gender, sexuality, and possibility" (214-215). The "humanist political thought" Hatton sees represented in Baldwin's body of fiction and centrally articulated through love, is already foreshadowed by the climactic end of his first novel *Go Tell It on the Mountain*. The love through which John finds relation and destabilizes the normative divisions of binary race, gender, and sexuality represents an early articulation of the literary political project Hatton sees fully realized in Baldwin's later work. In *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, despite the reductive categorizations of oppressive regimes, relation and love make the full humanity of characters expressible.

GIOVANNI'S ROOM

Baldwin's second novel, *Giovanni's Room*, was published in 1956. With the frame narrative set in the South of France, the novel recounts the protagonist David's shifting and at times conflicting recollections and projections of his youth in the U.S., his time in France, and the impending execution of his ex-lover Giovanni. In David's remembrance, his relationship with his father, a sexual experience during his youth, the relationship with his fiancée Hella, and the affair with Giovanni are revisited. Thereby, David reconstructs his voyage from the U.S. to Paris and the South of France and the material and inner spaces in which he performs his troubled identity. My reading of *Giovanni's Room* focuses on the interaction between character identity and space and, thereby, adds to scholarly engagement with aspects of spatiality in the novel in contributions by Zaborowska, among others. Particularly, I address how Baldwin problematizes heteronormativity and destabilizes the underlying binaries of gender and sexuality inflected by other categories of oppression. Thereby, I read *Giovanni's Room* as an early fictional articulation of Baldwin's later, more overt attack on heteropatriarchal binaries put forward in his seminal essay "Freaks and the American Ideal of Manhood" (1985). I argue that character identities in *Giovanni's Room* are mapped onto physical spaces in an attempt to stabilize binary constructions of identity which, nevertheless, remain precariously dependent on perpetual reaffirmation in the face of transgressive human complexity. Therefore, the organization of space is in direct conversation with the asymmetrical power relations of heteropatriarchy which structure it. Baldwin exposes these oppressive mechanics of territorialization and the cracks in the construction of hegemonic masculinity. The narrative, then, shows the political possibility of liberating love through which characters transcend the boundaries of binary, heteropatriarchal identities seemingly stabilized in their spatial manifestations.

“The Merciful Distance:” Masculinity, Queer Possibility, and Leaving Home

The earliest episodes of his life David recounts are memories of his youth spent with his father and aunt Ellen in a house in San Francisco and later in New York. After David's mother's death, the ideal of the White, middle-class heteropatriarchal household is troubled by David's nightmarish fantasies of his mother and the faltering façade of idealized motherhood and womanhood constructed by the stories of David's father and Ellen about her. Attempting to maintain his patriarchal position, David's father engages in casual sexual encounters and emphasizes the masculine sameness between him and his son. However, his masculine identity remains precariously dependent on reaffirmation and the strategies he employs highlight the underlying violence of purposefully exploiting sexuality and reducing human complexity to a patriarchal gendered binary, thereby, jeopardizing interpersonal relation. In contrast to the troubled heteronormativity of David's father's household, the seclusion of the flat of David's friend Joey allows the boys to withdraw from heteropatriarchal norms and enter into a space of queer possibility. The sexual encounter which occurs between the friends in Joey's bedroom breaches the boundaries of heteronormative gendered and sexual identities and transgresses the racially inflected difference between David's Whiteness and Joey's embodied darkness. The heteronormative panic which David experiences upon leaving Joey's flat and his later reflections on his reasons for leaving the U.S. uncover the internalization of heteronormativity and its entanglement with Americanness.

David's deceased mother functions as one of the focal points for the distortion of the ideal heteropatriarchal household seemingly represented by David's White, affluent childhood home. David's nightmarish fantasies of her dead body reverse the patriarchal ideal of the nurturing mother and display David's vulnerability to intrusion within spaces of alleged paternal security. Despite David's assertion that he “scarcely remembered [his mother] at all,” his inner spaces are routinely intruded by uncanny fantasies of her dead body which erode the privacy

and security of his bedroom in his father's house. As he lies in his bed, David's lack of memory does not secure him from nightmares of his mother in her grave, where she is "blind with worms, her hair as dry as metal and brittle as a twig, straining to press me against her body ... so putrescent, so sickening soft that it opened ... as to swallow me alive" (Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room* 9). The horror of David's fantasies articulates an alienation from his mother which inverts idealized notions of motherhood. Barbara Creed offers a perspective on such reversal in the image of the "mother's ... body" as "an open wound" which signifies genealogical relation through birth as well as the natural opposite of death (47-48). To David, the body of his mother becomes uncanny and abject by articulating the link of his birth and death through her decease. Instead of personifying the ideal of the mother who biologically and symbolically gives and sustains life, his mother's dead body signifies David's impermanence by burying him inside her and threatening to take his life by her death. Hence, the house of David's childhood lacks the motherly nourishment and fatherly protection of the idealized patriarchal household. Instead, David experiences the existential angst of death in the uncanny fantasies of his mother whose body's present absence becomes the rupture in the ideal of the heteropatriarchal household. This rupture expands into the material space of David's bedroom which materializes his fear of death by turning into a grave and fails to provide the stability and security of the idealized heteropatriarchal household.

In addition to David's existential angst displaying the unfulfilled promise of shelter and security, the portrait of David's mother in the living room reflects the breaching of heteropatriarchal ideals. Just as David's mother's absence and the uncanny presence of her and David's mortality vex the ideal of the heteropatriarchal household, David's perception and anxiety of her complexity displays the tension between her and her idealization as a mother and woman:

My mother's photograph ... seemed to rule the room ... in which I never felt at home ... [B]eneath [her] tense fragility was a strength as various as it was unyielding and ... dangerous because it was so entirely unexpected. My father rarely spoke of her and when he did he covered, by some mysterious means, his face; he spoke of her only as

my mother and ... as ... he might have been speaking of his own. Ellen spoke of my mother often, saying what a remarkable woman she had been, but she made me uncomfortable. I felt that I had no right to be the son of such a mother. (*Giovanni's Room* 10-11)

David, to his surprise, sees in the portrait of his mother, which “rules the room” an “unexpected strength.” Anne McClintock points out that such an acknowledgment of seemingly contradictory notions of gendered fragility and strength could be productive for an emancipation from binary gender conceptions (644). In contrast to David’s ability to perceive the complex multiplicity of his mother’s femininity, even in the face of his terrifying visions of her, the narratives his father and aunt tell about her reduce her to idealized images of motherhood and womanhood. His mother’s strength, then, becomes unexpected and threatening to David, as the stable ground of his patriarchal childhood home depends on the roles his father and aunt mold his mother into. Hence, her complexity destabilizes a concept of home which reduced her to the representation of an ideal. However, this representation reduces the depth and complexity of David’s father’s and aunt’s relationship to her. She becomes a mother that could also have been his own or an aggrandized ideal of femininity which shames David. Hence, the portrait of David’s mother becomes a catalyst for exposing the threat of patriarchal clichés to her and David’s complexity. Simultaneously, the anxiety David experiences in the awareness of her complexity reveals the normalization of the reduction which routinely makes his relation to her an unsettling yet liberating experience and shakes the conception of the patriarchal house which does not feel like home.

The precarious home devoid of the mother figure stages David’s father’s struggle to demonstrate his heteropatriarchal masculinity. The perpetual need to reaffirm his position creates a contradiction between the ideal of masculine autonomy and the dependence of David’s father on commodifying sexual encounters which disparage his sexual relationships to mere goods exploited for the stabilization of his troubled identity. In an argument, Ellen challenges this exploitation of sexuality for a reductive patriarchal notion of masculinity:

‘You’ve been with that girl, Beatrice,’ said Ellen. ‘That’s where you always are and that’s where all your money goes and all your manhood and self-respect, too ... And don’t fool yourself ... [that David] doesn’t know about your women.’ ... ‘[A]ll I want for David is that he grow up to be a man. And when I say a man, Ellen, I don’t mean a Sunday school teacher.’ ‘A man,’ said Ellen, shortly, ‘is not the same thing as a bull.’ (*Giovanni’s Room* 13-14)

Despite David’s father’s seeming embodiment of the White, middle-class ideal of masculinity, this dominant position is contingent on perpetual enactment. Devon Carbado notes that hegemonic masculinity depends on preserving the “heterosexual presumption” to ensure privileges such as access to socially unsanctioned sexual encounters (196, 199). David’s father’s male privilege ensures the social acceptability of his sexual encounters which allows him to access scripts of performing masculinity *and* heterosexuality. Hence, when Ellen criticizes David’s father’s encounters with “Beatrice” and “[his] women,” she denaturalizes his privilege and the scripts of its perpetuation. Furthermore, her critique uncovers the dependence of his transactions which affirm his position for a monetary price on his class status. Thereby, David’s father’s hegemonic masculinity is revealed to be a shaky construction which produces but also depends on various privileges. His performative enactment is also shown to commodify any sexual relationships, giving them a purpose and monetary value, while rendering more human sexual relationships unattainable and jeopardizing his respectful relation to himself and his son. David’s father’s idea of aspiring to a masculinity unlike a “Sunday school teacher[’s]” is telling. He readily accepts compulsive heterosexuality as a means to affirm hegemonic masculinity, dehumanizing himself by reducing his sexuality to an instrument of power. Baldwin locates this dehumanization of the “prison of that [powerful] masculinity” in the isolation created by the “exploitation of externals” (“Prison” 161-162). In criticizing David’s father’s compulsively heterosexual masculinity as animalistic, Ellen dismantles this dehumanization and self-inflicted loss of relation effected by the reduction of human sexual relationships to a means to the end of enacting heteronormative gender roles the heteropatriarchal household cannot stabilize.

In his heteropatriarchal enactment, David's father repeatedly stresses his and David's sameness of masculinity. By his rejection of this oppressive sameness, David unwillingly troubles the ideal of hegemonic masculinity passed on in the patrilinear household and reveals his potential and desire to realize his masculinity beyond the imitation of his father:

I did not want to know – not, anyway, from his mouth – that his flesh was as unregenerate as my own. The knowledge did not make me feel more like his son – or buddy – it only made me feel like an interloper, and a frightened one at that. ... I did not want to think that my life would be like his ... He wanted no distance between us, he wanted me to look on him as a man like myself. But I wanted the merciful distance of a father and son, which would have permitted me to love him. (*Giovanni's Room* 15)

To David, his father's emphasis on their shared masculinity jeopardizes his autonomy and difference. The knowledge of his father's sexual encounters coerces him into witnessing a sameness which fails to establish a relation between father and son but instead provokes David's rejection. David yearns, not for leading a life "like his [father's]" but for a difference between his father and himself to root his love in. Lorde explains that embracing difference is a precondition for love between humans in "self-defin[ed]" positions ("Man Child" 64). This observation allows to unpack the emotional detachment David experiences in his father's heteropatriarchal household. Determining the meanings of David's masculinity through sameness, David's father robs his son of this self-definition and, with it, of a love steeped in difference. However, this lack of love and relation becomes the central moment of David's resistance to his alleged sameness to his father. Carbado notices how rarely men "expos[e] the contingency and false necessity of manhood" and attempt to "locate, or even imagine, ... the man whose personal identity has not been over-determined by his gender" (192). In rejecting his father's heteropatriarchal masculinity as a template for his gender and sexual identity, David refutes the "false necessity" Carbado outlines. Although the difference in his masculinity remains shapeless, David's yearning for relation ruptures the patrilinear transfer of hegemonic masculinity symbolized by his father's house. Hence, David's interiority accommodates a resistant agency to think

his own masculinity beyond his father's and to breach the confines of hegemonic masculinity symbolized by the heteropatriarchal family home.

Upon David's family's relocation to New York, his friend Joey's home allows him to withdraw from his heteropatriarchal home and cross sexual boundaries and implied dichotomies of class and race. While David and Joey follow the scripts of heteromascularity in public as they catcall at girls at the beach, David's insecurities are apparent when he anticipates "shame and terror" in case "any of the girls ... had shown any signs of responding" (*Giovanni's Room* 6). David's emotions reveal the disparity between his inner spaces and the identity he displays publicly. The private space of Joey's home allows for queer possibilities to arise from this crack in David's heteronormative performance as a romantic scene unfolds between the boys. Abdur-Rahman points to the "racializing effects of queerness" in the narrative which draws characters through "factors of ... racial identity" which are not "quite reducible to race" ("Menaced Boy" 480). This subtle association, yet not equation, of queerness with race accentuates the difference of David living in a "better neighborhood" and Joey's "curly hair" and "brown" body (*Giovanni's Room* 5, 7-8). However, the racial inflection of their queer relationship does not bar David from the emotions and sensations he experiences in the seclusion of Joey's shower and bedroom which stand in stark contrast to his anxiety in the public performance of his heteromascularity. Reflecting on the events, David admits that "I know that I felt something ... which I had not felt before, which mysteriously, and yet aimlessly, included [Joey]" and continues to tell the addressee that "when I touched [Joey] something happened in him and in me which made this touch different from any touch either of us had ever known ... We gave each other joy that night" (*Giovanni's Room* 6-7). Despite the retention of the "mysterious," inexpressible opacity of David's feelings and sensations, the transgressive affective and physical relation with Joey profoundly stirs him. Baldwin highlights that writing characters as "humans" in his literary project is to "shatter" isolating "labels" of otherness ("Innocence" 600). In transgressing the

boundaries of class, race, and heteromascularity, the relation between David and Joey breaches the normative labels which rationalize their isolation and allows them to experience queer “joy.” Therefore, the seclusion of Joey’s home liberates the boys from their socially prescribed isolation and opens up queer possibilities of emotional and sexual relation.

The hegemony of heteropatriarchy becomes apparent when the light of the morning symbolically opens up the seclusion of Joey’s home and David’s incipient heteronormative panic leads to his regress to the performance of a heterosexual identity. Linked to a normative conception of Americanness, this heteromasculine identity marginalizes Joey as its constitutive other on various levels. The distance David creates between Joey and himself after their queer encounter shows how deeply troubled the notion of his heteromascularity is by the episode. As he reappropriates hegemonic masculinity by reinvigorating the boundaries which separate him from Joey, his attempts to stabilize his position reveal its fragility:

Joey’s body was ... the most beautiful creation I have ever seen till then ... I was suddenly afraid ... It was borne in on me: *But Joey is a boy*. ... That body suddenly seemed the black opening of a cavern in which I would be tortured till madness came, in which I would lose my manhood. ... I, who had seen [Joey] that summer nearly every day till then, no longer went to see him....When I finally did see him, more or less by accident, near the end of the summer, I made up a long and totally untrue story about a girl I was going with and when school began again I picked up with a rougher, older crowd and was very nasty to Joey. And the sadder this made him, the nastier I became. (*Giovanni’s Room* 8-9)

With the realization of the sameness of David’s and Joey’s male bodies, the relation and “joy” Joey’s body holds for David during the night gives way to David’s heteronormative panic which makes Joey’s male, racialized body the locus of a queer, Black threat to David’s masculinity. Just as David’s mother’s death turns his bedroom and her body into a grave for David, the “black ... cavern” Joey’s body morphs into, in extension of David’s masculinity and sanity, threatens David’s very self. In both cases, the deviance from heteropatriarchal norms of either White, middle-class motherhood or White heteromascularity challenge David’s identity within such a normative framework and arouse David’s heteronormative panic. With this shift in

perception, David regresses to a hegemonic definition of his masculinity inflected with meanings of class and race. In the context of the U.S., Baldwin unpacks these intersections of power structures which make the ideal of heteromascularity “paralytically infantile” since they bind masculinity into asymmetrical dichotomies which keep “the American boy [from] evol[ing] into the complexity of manhood” (“Freaks” 815). David reinstates the dichotomies Baldwin refers to by creating a spatial distance to Joey. Thereby, he is kept apart from his own queerness projected on Joey’s body. When the physical distance collapses, the mere presence of Joey’s body necessitates David’s enactment of his heteromascularity dominance through a fictional relationship and bullying Joey. These scenes illustrate Baldwin’s argument that queerness becomes abject and suppressed because it “echo[es] ... our most profound terrors and desires” (“Freaks” 828). Neither David’s suppression of his desire nor bullying Joey dissipate his angst. Instead, his queerness continues to powerfully shake his heteromascularity masquerade.

David’s later reflections on his sexual encounter with Joey uncover the interconnections of his troubled masculinity and his Americanness. Looking back at this episode, David explains his later expatriation in the emotional turmoil he undergoes in the face of queer possibilities opening up and being displaced. He speculates that “I began, perhaps, to be lonely that summer and began ... the flight which has brought me to [France]” (*Giovanni’s Room* 9). The establishment and loss of his queer relation with Joey leaves David in a state of sustained heteromascularity angst which he relates to his expatriation from the U.S. In contrast to his father, who willingly accepts his heteropatriarchal isolation as a condition of his masculinity, David is driven out of the country by this experience. This expatriation implicitly sheds light on the connection of hegemonic masculinity and national identity. Abdur-Rahman points out that the patriarchal nuclear family, by normalizing gendered and sexual identities and producing Black “family formations” as deviant creates the White, heteromascularity norm of citizens who collectively make up “the nation” (*Against the Closet* 97). Ferguson adds class difference to these

mechanisms of normalization and exclusion (17-18). These recent contributions echo Baldwin's earlier critique of the connection between Americanness and the binaries of gender, sexuality, race, and class which makes overcoming these simplistic categories "an unpatriotic act" ("Freaks" 815). While to David the knowledge of these normalizing mechanisms of citizenship remains implicit, leaving the country, which maps the nation onto space, appears as a route of escape from his heteromasculine angst and tension between queerness and Americanness. David's father's assumption that a relationship with a woman must motivate his expatriation is telling, yet "[h]e could not risk this question because he could not have endured an answer in the negative [which] would have revealed what strangers we had become" (*Giovanni's Room* 81). As the passage reveals, any motivation for David's expatriation other than a hetero-romantic pursuit becomes unthinkable to David's father. Therefore, the national boundaries of the U.S. gain meaning in the organization of identity as the transgression of these boundaries becomes justifiable only for the affirmation of heteromascularity. Hence, while David's passage creates a figurative distance to the U.S. where heteropatriarchy denies him his queer possibilities, reaffirming his heterosexuality becomes the only thinkable validation for his father to keep his notion of Americanness and their shared masculinity intact.

"We Will not be Difficult to Find:" Closeting Queer Visibility

Upon leaving the U.S., David encounters the queer community in Paris which initially seems to be accepted into public visibility much more than in the U.S. However, the Parisian sexual topography proves to regulate and closet queer visibility, affirming the heteropatriarchal structures which sustain David's performance of heteronormative identity. While he reproduces the conception of queer deviance inflected with signifiers of race and femininity, he enters a sexual relationship with the bartender Giovanni. In the dissonance of his conception of masculinity and his queer relationship with Giovanni, the masquerade of his heteronormative performance becomes apparent. David's experience of the Parisian queer community, regulated and

closeted despite its public visibility, confronts him with another form of heteropatriarchal control. In the face of this experience, David eventually yearns for the clear boundaries created by the complete withdrawal of queerness into secluded spaces in the sexual topography of the U.S.

Upon David's transatlantic passage, variations of familiar gendered and sexual topographies upkeep the notions of 'normalcy' and 'otherness' which compartmentalize identities in the U.S. and France. As David navigates the Parisian queer community, he witnesses these variations of prisons built in the interest of heteropatriarchy:

Most of the people I knew in Paris were, as Parisians sometimes put it, of *le milieu* ... We would end up drinking in Jacques' favorite bar, a noisy, crowded, ill-fit sort of tunnel, of dubious - or perhaps not dubious at all, of rather too emphatic - reputation. Every once in a while it was raided by the police, apparently with the connivance of Guillaume (*Giovanni's Room* 20, 23).

Although Guillaume's bar locates the Parisian queer community in a space more publicly visible than the seclusion of Joey's home or David's interiority to which David's queerness was restricted in the U.S., queerness is still territorialized to regulate its visibility. The term "*le milieu*" is telling as it outlines the queer community as an entity, distinguishable from an implied norm while omitting the threat of its non-conformity. Guillaume's bar, then, functions as a closet not by rendering queerness invisible but by accommodating queerness as an open, yet unspeakable secret. This configuration resonates with the "transparent closet" Marlon Ross describes to capture the regulation of queer visibility by "mark[ing] the living body" with what remains "invisible in the ... anatomy" (164). Policing and raiding Guillaume's bar criminalizes the place of uncertainly "dubious" or "too emphatic" reputation and the bodies the space holds in association with their queerness. Instead of shutting the bar down, its toleration ensures the existence of a site to enact the criminalization of queerness and the denial of its right to exist. Hence, the queer community is seized discursively through strategically knowing and unknowing the place of its constitution. Eve Sedgwick explains such dynamics as displaying the "epistemological privilege of unknowing" (5). This privilege allows the Parisian public to strategically

exploit (the omission of) the knowledge of queerness. Hence, as Monica Pearl argues, the closet does not represent spaces of safe captivity but regulates “exposure” and “visibility” (75-76). The sexual topography of the city materializes this privilege and ensures queerness “not [to] be difficult to find” (*Giovanni’s Room* 115). Therefore, the Parisian queer community can be foreclosed or seized by the public consciousness as well as the grip of the police and is closeted by knowledge and denial.

In navigating the Parisian queer community, David does not seek to establish relation but attempts to set himself apart from the community through a paternalistic tolerance which echoes the general exploitation of queerness for heteropatriarchal normalcy. Marking queerness as deviant for his own normative position, David reiterates the same sexual dichotomy which robbed him of the possibility of queer relation in the U.S. This reiteration translates into his project of “proving, to them and to myself, that I was not of their company. I did this by being in their company a great deal and manifesting toward all of them a tolerance which placed me, I believed, above suspicion” (*Giovanni’s Room* 20). David seeks out the queer community not to forge solidarity or relation but to solidify his heteronormative masculinity through a paternalistic tolerance which is merely a variation of the earlier externalization of his queerness onto Joey. David’s exploitative contact with the queer community echoes Glissant’s *root identity* which appropriates space through subordination of the other (*Poetics* 11). David extends the enactment of hegemonic masculinity into the queered space of Guillaume’s bar, to reaffirm the normalizing binary between hetero- and homosexuality. Nicholas Radel notes that despite his flight to Paris, David does not escape the American “fantasy of ... purity” (205). While this is certainly true, David’s affirming the otherness of queerness, furthermore, shows his complicity in reproducing the heteronormativity which controlled his masculinity and queerness in the U.S.

Apart from reproducing heteronormative isolation, David taps into the same intersections of sexuality, gender, and race which affirm the displacement of queerness in the U.S.

David's condescending characterizations locate the people he encounters in the bar in "a peacock garden" or "barnyard" and Giovanni on "an auction block" from which Jacques may buy him as the only thinkable scenario for his sexual pursuit to be successful (*Giovanni's Room* 23-25). In his description, David turns the guests in Guillaume's bar into animals and Jacques' romantic pursuit for Giovanni into the sale of a slave symbolized by the auction block. David draws on images of African American dehumanization and commodification to fortify the otherness of queerness. Trudier Harris argues that in *Giovanni's Room*, the absence of Blackness becomes a meaningful signifier of David's Whiteness (24). This observation makes David's discursive linking of queerness and Blackness readable as a simultaneous enactment of his heteromascularity and Whiteness. Just as David's performance of heterosexuality depends on the implication or presence of otherness, his Whiteness depends on evoking contrastive Blackness where it is absent. Due to the entanglement of normative sexuality and race, however, Blackness is inscribed into queer bodies to manifest the otherness David constructs his normalcy against. Baldwin dissects the illusion of an American identity which is in fact "almost completely undefined" yet gains contouring through racialization. ("The Discovery" 3-4). David's struggle to upkeep his racially inflected heteronormative position illustrates the fragility of his American identity Baldwin outlines. He depends on the presence of racialized and sexualized others who are commodified and dehumanized to affirm the hierarchy on which his identity is built.

Guillaume's bar and David's inner spaces stage the conflict between David's performance of his heterosexuality and his attraction to Giovanni. This attraction transgresses the racialized, gendered, and sexual boundaries through which he attempts to dissociate his identity from Blackness, femininity, and queerness. The looming relation to Giovanni threatens the stability of this dissociation and, hence, opens David's identity up to alternative realizations:

I wanted to get out of this bar, out into the air, perhaps to find Hella, my suddenly so sorely menaced girl. ... I felt that I had better get drunk. ... I was only sorry that Jacques had been a witness. He made me ashamed. I hated him because he had now seen all that he had waited, often scarcely hoping, so many months to see. ... It did not even matter

if I never spoke to Giovanni again; for they had become visible ... they stormed all over me, my awakening, my insistent possibilities. (*Giovanni's Room* 36-37)

David's inner turmoil, caused by his attraction to Giovanni, displays his fear of the collapse of his heteronormative masquerade. Accordingly, queer attraction is not a threat in itself but in its visibility to Jacques which undermines David's heterosexual performance. This threatened credibility urges David to leave the queer space of the bar for his fiancée Hella who is a site for his heteropatriarchal enactment or to get drunk and unknow the shameful seeping through of his queer desire. David's condescendence towards the queer community is rooted in his fear of his queerness. Baldwin points out that "the object of one's hatred is never ... outside but seated in one's lap" ("Freaks" 824). Accordingly, David's hate of Jacques becomes most aggressive when Jacques witnesses what David is not willing to admit and causes the illusion of his heterosexuality to falter. As Jacques threatens David's heterosexual masquerade, he becomes the object of David's displaced panic turned into hate. Irrespective of the reiterations of David's heteronormative identity, he realizes that the surfacing of his queer attraction changes something permanent in himself. As his queerness dismantles his privilege of unknowing, his sexual identity is complicated and shows to be more complex than the boundaries of heteronormativity can accommodate. Therefore, the binarism between heteropatriarchal masculinity and queerness per se is destabilized which demonstrates the inadequacy of the heteronormative constructs to represent David's experience.

On the stage of Paris, David's precarious performance of his heterosexuality is shown to depend on the objectification of women and to be continually threatened by the undercurrent of queerness which destabilizes its constructedness. Outside the queer "milieu," Paris evokes memories of David's heteronormative performance "walk[ing a particular] street, sometimes, with Hella, towards the river, often, without her, towards the girls of Montparnasse" (*Giovanni's Room* 38). While Hella allegorizes David's ability to achieve heteropatriarchal normalcy, her absence renders this position precarious. Devoid of the woman who proves his hegemonic

masculinity, David turns to the anonymous “girls of Montparnasse” whose only relevant characteristic to him is their femininity. The parallelism David establishes between the romantic walk with his fiancée and his solitary walks to other women reveals his indifference towards both. Harry Thomas points to the inherent violent dimension of performing the “purity” of hegemonic masculinity (613). Just as David’s performance involves the dehumanization and commodification of Blackness and queerness, it involves the objectification of women and reducing them to props. While the streets of Paris seem to provide a solid stage for David’s heterosexual performance, their ground is deeply shaken when David notices a man in the streets and the undercurrent of queerness surfaces:

... the boulevard, the light, the sound of [Giovanni’s] laughter turned into a scene from a nightmare. I kept looking at the trees, the light falling through the leaves. I felt sorrow and shame and panic and great bitterness. ... The beast which Giovanni had awakened in me would never go to sleep again; but one day I would not be with Giovanni anymore. And would I then, like all the others, find myself turning and following all kinds of boys down God knows what dark avenues, into what dark places? (*Giovanni’s Room* 74)

The cracks in David’s heterosexual façade shake the scenery of Paris and reveal the prominence of heteronormativity in David’s sense of reality and self. Giovanni’s witnessing and amusement of David’s queer interest turn the street “into a scene from a nightmare.” Despite his queer relationship with Giovanni and the romantic image the scene evokes, two lovers walking and laughing on a boulevard sheltered by trees, the visibility of David’s queerness unsettles him enough to distort the scene into a nightmare and evokes images of “dark avenues [and] places” echoing the “black ... cavern” of Joey’s body. Hence, David’s movements through Paris display the performativity and resulting instability of his heterosexual identity, which depends on perpetually making heterosexuality visible and queerness invisible. This dependence leads to the exploitation of women in their objectification and the precarity of his performance in the face of the undercurrent of queerness.

David’s involvement in the dichotomies which initially cause him to leave the U.S. for Europe becomes apparent in his wish to return. In Europe, David reiterates the homophobia

which produced his queerness as a threatening other in the U.S. and externalizes his fear onto Paris. Despite Giovanni's and David's shared foreignness in Paris, David aligns Giovanni with the city: "He belonged to this strange city, which did not belong to me. I began to see that, while what was happening to me was not so strange as it would have comforted me to believe, yet it was strange beyond belief" (*Giovanni's Room* 54). David establishes the difference of their respective (non-)belonging to Paris and, thereby, implies a distance between himself and Giovanni, the relation to whom perpetually threatens his heterosexual enactment. The inefficacy of this differentiation becomes apparent immediately when David realizes that his attempts to externalize his queerness alienate him from it without purifying him. Returning to the U.S. holds the promise of this complete suppression. David is overcome "abruptly, intolerably, with a longing to go home ... across the ocean, to things and people [he] knew and understood" (*Giovanni's Room* 54). In the context of David's Parisian exposure to the queer community and the queerness of his relation to Giovanni, the familiarity and fathomability of U.S. culture lies in the stronger invisibility of this troubling queerness. Returning, therefore, means reentering the spaces of the U.S. and his father's house which symbolize the binary constructions of class, race, gender, and sexual identity which displace David's queerness into seclusion. While this seclusion provides safety for David's queer relation with Joey, its meaning is reversed when he sees it from Paris. The American seclusion of queerness simultaneously provides a heteronormative amnesia. The spatial segregation and unknowing of queerness in the U.S. makes categories clear and people easy to "kn[o]w and underst[a]nd." Hence, while experiencing the oppressive limitations of hegemonic masculinity himself, David is willing to sacrifice his human complexity for the seeming clarity of compartmentalized identities mapped onto segregated spaces.

“This Filthy Little Room:” Queer Submergence and Heteronormative Self-Denial

As David’s and Giovanni’s romance evolves, Giovanni’s room becomes a central space for the staging of queer withdrawal and David’s heteronormative grappling with his sexual identity. While the seclusion of Giovanni’s room initially provides the safety for David to experience their queer relation as liberatory, it grows increasingly abject under David’s gaze. The room becomes a screen onto which David projects his heteropatriarchal panic and manifests the prison of David’s adherence to heteronormative ideas. The devaluation of David’s and Giovanni’s love in this prison eventually drives David out of the room. His return to his fiancée Hella marks a transition back into embracing his persistent heteropatriarchal imprisonment. However, the heterosexual relationships he finds outside Giovanni’s room are degraded to mere performances of a normative identity. Therefore, heteropatriarchy remains an isolating prison even as David leaves Giovanni’s room making him unable to forge true human relations.

Giovanni’s room is an ambivalent place which opens up the queer possibility of David’s and Giovanni’s intimacy in its seclusion without sheltering David from his internalized ideals of hegemonic masculinity:

[Giovanni’s] room was in the back, on the ground floor of the last building on this street. ... [A] short, dark corridor ... led to his room. The room was small, I only made out the outlines of clutter and disorder, there was the smell of the alcohol he burned in his stove. He locked the door behind us, and then for a moment, in the gloom, we simply stared at each other— with dismay, with relief, and breathing hard I was trembling. I thought, if I do not open the door at once and get out of here, I am lost. But I knew I could not open the door, I knew it was too late; soon it was too late to do anything but moan. (*Giovanni’s Room* 56)

The passage to Giovanni’s room creates a palpable distance between the visibility of the Paris public and the remoteness of the dark room. The locking of the door, on the one hand, perfects David’s and Giovanni’s seclusion in the room and, on the other hand, ignites a claustrophobia in David which inverts the room’s withdrawn privacy into a trap. In the “small” room which locks out the city while simultaneously locking in David and Giovanni, the air is thick with the smell of burnt alcohol and the same twilight which shelters the men half-reveals the “clutter

and disorder.” Therefore, the room, apart from providing the men with the privacy of its seclusion and allowing David to transgress his compulsive heteronormative performance, simultaneously becomes an inescapable, claustrophobic, and dirty confinement in which David feels the need to “open the door” or be “lost,” antithetical to his inability to do so. Zaborowska discusses the function of metaphorical imprisonment which shows the complicity of David in his self-paralyzing ideal of masculinity (“Black Queer Domesticity” 78). Elsewhere, Zaborowska contrasts David’s denial of desire with Giovanni’s acceptance of his sexuality which respectively make the room a “closet” or a “space of desire, liberation, and redemption” (*My House* 12). Zaborowska’s analysis is insightful in locating the source of David’s growing discomfort in his heteronormative denial rather than his queerness. He does not succumb to queer imprisonment, but his heteronormative apathy turns the space of queer possibility into a prison. Ferguson provides a productive perspective on this passage when arguing that the “sexual chaos,” “rootlessness,” and “moral disruptions” symbolized by dirt do not merely serve as a means to produce queer otherness but also function to create otherness of class, race, and gender (9-10). Therefore, David’s fear of queer otherness is attached to the signifier of dirt and articulates the various dimensions of otherness his masculinity depends on.

While queer desire and joy cannot subvert David’s internalized homophobia entirely, they reveal the liberating potential of Giovanni’s and David’s queer relation and expose David’s internalized homophobia as the source of his heteronormative anxiety and shame:

[L]ife in that room seemed to be occurring beneath the sea. Time flowed past indifferently above us; hours and days had no meaning. In the beginning, our life together held a joy and amazement which was newborn every day. Beneath the joy, of course, was anguish and beneath the amazement was fear. (*Giovanni’s Room* 67)

Each day [Giovanni] invited me to witness how he had changed, how love had changed him, how he worked and sang and cherished me. I was in a terrible confusion. Sometimes I thought, but this is your life. Stop fighting it. Stop fighting. Or I thought, but I am happy. And he loves me. I am safe. ... I lay in the dark and listened to his breathing and dreamed of the 'Touch of hands, of Giovanni's hands, or anybody's hands, hands which would have the power to crush me and make me whole again. (*Giovanni’s Room* 79)

Despite David's heteronormative panic of losing himself in the queer intimacy with Giovanni, Giovanni's room provides a space for the lovers to submerge "beneath the sea" where the meaning of their relationship becomes more independent from the time and place in which it is produced as deviant. Facing the perceived loss of a position naturalized by heteronormativity, holds the potential, according to Baldwin, to escape the misguided question of normalcy and nature and grants access to the real "problem" which is the question of being "in the best sense of that kaleidoscopic word – a man" ("Prison" 232). Instead of losing themselves, David and Giovanni enter the metaphorical ocean of Giovanni's room and the liberating seclusion of its fluidity which spatially and temporally opens up a reality beyond stable boundaries. Their unobstructed relation "changes [Giovanni]" and, unlike the imprisoning confines of heteronormativity, brings them "joy," "amazement," "happiness," and the feeling of safety. Ferguson, in another context, illustrates the resistance immanent in Black and queer joy which display a humanity beyond racist and heterosexist reductions of the subject to a mere example of deviance (1). Although David cannot subscribe to this rejection fully, the relation of love shows glimpses of a fulfilling queer existence. However, despite the fulfillment of their "life together," David remains torn by his internalized heteronormativity. In contrast to Giovanni who feels transformed by his love, David remains in want of "hands with the power to ... make him whole again." Hence, David's internalization of heteronormativity keeps him from experiencing his queer love as transformative, even as Giovanni's room provides experiences of queer joy and fulfillment.

David's function as the first-person narrator discloses the changes in his perception of Giovanni's room following his struggles with accepting his queer attraction to Giovanni. As the narrative progresses, Giovanni's room undergoes a metamorphosis and becomes increasingly abject:

Life in that room seemed to be occurring underwater, as I say, and it is certain that I underwent a sea change there. To begin with, the room was not large enough for two. It ... had two windows, against which the courtyard malevolently pressed, encroaching day by day, as though it had confused itself with a jungle ... To ensure privacy, Giovanni

had obscured the window panes with a heavy, white cleaning polish. ... sometimes strange shapes loomed against it. At such moments, Giovanni, ... would stiffen like a hunting dog and remain perfectly silent until whatever seemed to threaten our safety had moved away ... One of the walls was a dirty, streaked white where [Giovanni] had torn off the wallpaper. The wall facing it was destined never to be uncovered, and on this wall a lady in a hoop skirt and a man in knee breeches perpetually walked together, hemmed in by roses. The wallpaper lay on the floor, in great sheets and scrolls, in dust. On the floor also lay our dirty laundry, along with Giovanni's tools and the paint brushes and the bottles of oil and turpentine. (*Giovanni's Room* 76)

Several descriptions of Giovanni's room throughout the novel which echo and diverge from each other call into question the reliability of David's narration, an inconsistency paralleled by the "sea change" he undergoes in the room as he claims in an introspective remark. However, the narrative focus immediately shifts back to the room, which is transformed, in David's renewed description, from a "small" room into one which is too small "for two." The paradoxically mobile and invisible "courtyard [which] malevolently presse[s and] encroach[es]" upon them cannot be warded off by Giovanni's precarious attempt to maintain their seclusion. Nor can the "obscured windows" hinder "strange shapes" to "threaten [their] safety." Cynthia Barounis points out the racial inflection of this threatening "jungle" alive with enigmatic beings shut out by white paint on the windows (411). In addition to these images of eroding seclusion, the dirt in the room, now clearly discernible, adds to the inflection of the room with the otherness of class, race, and sexuality. Giovanni's attempts to enhance the room merely make this dirt permanent. Removing wallpaper only uncovers another dirty wall and clutters "the floor" where debris mingles with the "laundry," dirt produced by the men's bodies. Simultaneously, David apathetically witnesses the precarity of their seclusion, the accumulation of dirt, and Giovanni's incapability to rid the room of its marks of otherness. Despite Giovanni's work, the room remains impure and becomes abject under David's gaze.

In the face of David's heteropatriarchal anxiety and shame, the metamorphosis of Giovanni's room and its filth climaxes in the images of the prison and the grave. In a confrontation

between David and Giovanni, these images capture the displacement of David's heteronormative angst onto the room:

‘You do, sometimes, remind me of the kind of man who is tempted to put himself in prison in order to avoid being hit by a car.’ ‘That,’ I said sharply ‘would seem to apply much more to you than to me.’ ‘What do you mean?’ he asked. ‘I’m talking about that room, that hideous room. Why have you buried yourself there so long?’ (*Giovanni's Room* 104)

The diminishing sheltering function Giovanni's room fulfills when David enters it first is completely eradicated in David's perception when this argument with Giovanni takes place. Giovanni's room which allowed David to access his potential of queer joy initially, after becoming increasingly uncanny turns into a prison and grave in which Giovanni “buries himself,” echoing the traumatic scene of David's burial in his mother. Therefore, David once again experiences the inversion of a homely place into a grave which threatens to turn life into perpetual death. While his burial in his mother symbolized the distortion of the heteropatriarchal “home,” Giovanni's room equally fails to provide a queer home to David. Field argues that the notion of home in the corpus of Baldwin's work remains “metaphysical, rather than geographical” and is found in character's “interiority” through the self-knowledge of their origin (4). Hence, David's failure to be at home is rooted in himself and his adherence to a heteropatriarchal narrative of his identity which prevents his acknowledgment of his queerness. Zaborowska notices this denial and reasons that instead of a home, David's Americanness becomes a “prison” through “its prescriptions for manhood” (*My House* 13). However, in both instances, heteropatriarchal ideals induce lack and distortion in David's homes. David's internalized beliefs invert Giovanni's room's queer liberatory potential and make its seclusion an imprisonment and eventually a grave.

A later scene explicitly articulates David's fear of his queer emasculation which threatens the purity of his hegemonic masculinity. By transferring patterns of heteropatriarchal

partnerships onto his queer relation with Giovanni, David produces the sameness of their masculinity as a threat to his, ending in images of his emasculation and death in the room:

‘What kind of life can we have in ... this filthy little room. ... You want to go out and be the big laborer and bring home the money, and you want me to stay here and wash the dishes and cook the food and clean this miserable closet of a room and kiss you when you come in through that door and lie with you at night and be your little girl. ... You say I want to kill you. What do you think you've been doing to me?’ (*Giovanni's Room* 126)

The “filthy room” has lost all its promise of a liberated life of queer relation to David. Instead, he calls into doubt whether this life, breaching the boundaries of heteropatriarchal norms, is a life at all. In contrast, he evokes the gendered norms of the heteropatriarchal household and, thereby, evokes a norm he fears losing. While Giovanni represents the ideal of White, middle-class autonomy, the fantasy of the binary gendered household leaves David in the role of the subordinate housewife, infantilized to a “little girl.” While this narrative does not represent the reality of Giovanni’s precarious job in Guillaume’s bar and David’s apathy towards his financial situation and the state of the room, it exposes the dichotomies David’s thinking is caught up in. His bleak fantasy of emasculation articulates a misogynist and homophobic fear of resemblance which makes the boundaries of gender and sexuality so central to David’s masculinity. David dramatically compares the loss of clear distinction to Giovanni killing him. This parallel evokes what Ernesto Martínez terms “figurative suicide” and sees as a reoccurring theme in Baldwin’s fiction which challenges characters “to risk their sense of self” (783). However, David is unwilling to challenge the conceptions of his masculinity. Instead, Giovanni who allegedly emasculates and kills him serves as a screen onto which David projects his heteropatriarchal fear of a threatening queerness.

In David’s figurative reversal of entering the queer room by returning to the straight public, his intimacy shows to be corrupted by his angst to know himself outside the boundaries of hegemonic masculinity which results in his incapacity to take responsibility for the

relationships he enters. Giovanni reveals David's rejection of self-examination and his resulting detachment in an argument when David leaves the room upon Hella's return:

I ... held him in my arms, staring above his head at the wall, at the man and woman on the wall who walked together among roses. ... Something had broken in me to make me so cold and so perfectly still and far away. ... 'You are not leaving me for her,' he said. 'You are leaving me for some other reason. You lie so much, you have come to believe all your own lies. ... You never have loved anyone, I am sure you never will! You love your purity, you love your mirror ... You want to be clean. You think you came here covered with soap and you think you will go out covered with soap.' (*Giovanni's Room* 124-125)

As David holds Giovanni under the inanimate gaze of the heterosexual couple on the walls of the room, his own apathy strikes him as a form of damage. His unmoved coldness is reflected by the deadness of the couple on the wall and contrasted by Giovanni's deep agony and fear of loss steeped in his relation of love with David. This constellation links David's emotional detachment to the pursuit of the generic ideal of heterosexual romantic love symbolized by the lifeless couple. Although David perceives how "cold, ... still, and far away" this detachment makes him feel, Giovanni dismantles this detachment as a result of the lies about himself David has "come to believe." This denial of self-knowledge, Giovanni concludes, is related to David's adherence to his "purity" and renders him unable to love. Baldwin asserts that it is an "act of love" to make somebody "conscious of the things [they] don't see" ("Black Scholar" 41). Giovanni's dissection of David's detachment, in the light of Baldwin's insight, becomes readable as an act of loving relation. In contrast to David's inner, emotional detachment, mirrored by the image of the couple and his physical withdrawal, Giovanni attempts to force him into a relation with himself. Yet, David's rejection to examine himself and his relationships bars the escape route from heteropatriarchy his relation to Giovanni represents and forces him back into the precarious security of his hegemonic masculinity outside Giovanni's room and relation.

In David's retreat from Giovanni's room to his relationship with Hella and an affair with an acquaintance, the tragedy of his adherence to a heteropatriarchal self-image Giovanni

prophesied becomes apparent. Distancing himself from Giovanni's room and seeking out spaces of heterosexual performance cannot stabilize the ideal of masculinity he strives for:

I had meant to order an aperitif but now, in some grotesque spirit of celebration, ordered a Scotch and soda. And over this drink, which had never seemed more American than it did at that moment, I stared at absurd Paris ... Now [Hella] would be coming back and my life with Giovanni would be finished ... My real fear was buried and was driving me to Montparnasse. I wanted to find a girl, any girl at all. ... The person who appeared, and whom I did not know very well, was a girl named Sue. ... The moment she appeared I began, mentally, to take off all her clothes. (*Giovanni's Room* 84-85)

[T]he thought of a child belonging to Sue and me, of being trapped that way – in the very act, so to speak, of trying to escape – almost precipitated a laughing jag. (*Giovanni's Room* 89)

David's figurative return from queerness back to heteropatriarchal normalcy, signified by leaving Giovanni's room is inflected with meanings of nationality symbolized by his ordering of a "drink which never seemed more American" rather than a French "aperitif." Over the drink and the sight of "absurd Paris," David ponders the end of his queer relationship and the return of his fiancée. In the scene, queerness and "absurd Paris" are juxtaposed with heterosexuality and the U.S. through David's physical movement, his favoritism, and alienation. However, the grotesqueness of his "spirit of celebration" at affirming his Americanness associated with heteronormativity immediately uncovers the cracks in his idealization of both. Zaborowska parallels David's alienation from the U.S., his father's house, and the masculinity they signify to his suppressed fear of being unable to fulfill the role of the patriarch (*My House* 13). As the scene evolves, David's "real fear" inaccessible yet efficacious on him, pressures him to demonstrate his heterosexuality, once again with "any girl" in Montparnasse. Upon meeting Sue, he immediately sexualizes and reduces her to the arbitrary gendered other in his performance. However, David's compulsive performance of his heterosexuality triggers fantasies of Sue's pregnancy. To David, Sue's body's significance is reversed from accommodating his heteropatriarchal liberation from queerness to becoming the site of a new imprisonment in fatherhood. As Erin Harrington points out, tropes of the threatening female body such as the "vagina dentata"

reverse the ability to give birth and make it something destructive (53). Just as David's anxiety about entering a relation responsibly made Giovanni's room a prison, his fear of fatherhood demonstrates his inability to relate sexually at all which results from the heteropatriarchal devaluation of sexual relation to the mere reaffirmation of his privileged position.

“To Crack that Mirror and be Free:” Self-Knowledge and Liberating Relation

At the end of the narrative arch, David finds himself alone in a house in the South of France. Initially moving there together with his fiancée Hella, he leaves the house for a series of affairs. Eventually, his abandonment of Giovanni is reversed when Hella leaves David and returns to the U.S. David's solitude in the house exposes him to the reflective surfaces of windows and mirrors which initiate his introspection. As the narrative of the novel evolves from these reflections, the self-knowledge of his heteropatriarchal isolation and detachment become accessible to him. In the course of his reflections, David begins to see his responsibility for Giovanni and Hella which destroys his illusion of innocence. As it becomes apparent that responsibility is the key to David's maturity and to human relation, the solitude of the house reveals love as an escape route from David's heteronormative prison.

The house in the South of France into which David and Hella move once reunited, does not realize the ideal of the heteropatriarchal home but becomes the site for David's painful realization of his heteropatriarchal self-denial. Unable to fulfill his self-imposed compulsion of heterosexual desire, Hella's body becomes abject to David. “I sometimes watched Hella's naked body move and wished that it were harder and firmer, I was fantastically intimidated by her breasts, and when I entered her, I began to feel that I would never get out alive ... When my fingers began, involuntarily, to loosen their hold on Hella, I realized that I was dangling from a high place” (*Giovanni's Room* 140). Echoing David's angst of Sue's pregnant body, Hella who epitomizes the promise of heteronormative validation to David reveals the threat that lies in David's hegemonic masculinity's dependence on constant reaffirmation. David's fear of “never

get[ting] out alive” and his diminishing desire threaten his heterosexual performance. As Hella’s vagina becomes threatening to David, the heteronormative prison is finally exposed to not only turn the body of David’s mother and Joey, and Giovanni’s room into “graves” and “caverns” but equally morph Hella’s female body into a deadly confinement. Just as the masculinity of David’s father, Joey, and Giovanni limited David’s masculinity to an imitation or inversion of this sameness, his mother’s, Sue’s, and Hella’s femininity make visible the otherness to which the heteropatriarchal binary logic allocates David. Harrington explains that “the primacy of the masculine” draws on the “invisibility” of the “feminine ... negative alter ego” (35). Hence, Hella’s embodiment of the constitutive other exposes the limiting construction of his heteromascularity dependent on desire. Therefore, Hella does not numb David’s heteropatriarchal angst but reveals his precarious heteronormative position under the constant threat of transgression.

Once David’s fear of breaking his heteropatriarchal role is realized in his abandonment of Hella and his sexual encounters with a group of sailors, his emotional detachment and physical withdrawal from Hella once again demonstrate his irresponsibility towards those he enters relationships with. His abandonment of Hella reversely iterates that of Giovanni and complicates David’s inner conflict of queer desire and heteropatriarchal angst. Hence, his rejection of self-examination continues to jeopardize his intimate relationships, indifferent to their queerness or heterosexuality:

In the mirror, suddenly, I saw Hella's face. I thought for a moment that I had gone mad, and I turned. ... We walked for a long time in the stone-cold streets, in silence. ... 'Well,' said Hella, I'm going home. I wish I'd never left it.' ... 'I was lying to myself. ... I only meant to say,' I shouted, 'that whatever I've done to hurt you, I didn't mean to do!' 'Don't shout,' said Hella. 'I'll soon be gone. Then you can shout it to those hills out there, shout it to the peasants, how guilty you are, how you love to be guilty!' (*Giovanni's Room* 143-145).

Even when Hella confronts David, the presence of his fiancée appears surreal to him. He dismisses her image in the mirror as a sign of his own madness rather than responding to her

presence. The strategy of suppressing Hella's very existence falters when David faces her directly and is followed by their "silence" in the "stone-cold streets." The space resonates with David's continued detachment from and refusal to respond to Hella. His hardness and coldness become impenetrable to both as he betrays Hella and himself with his lies and drives Hella back towards a home she does not find in her relationship with David. In the scene, David unmask himself with the claim to innocence justified by his self-induced lack of self-knowledge. Attempting to reject his responsibility, David reveals the agency which lies in his self-deception and the actively preserved ignorance of his hegemonic masculinity. In the conflict, David's attempts to assert his innocence flounder in the face of Hella's victimization through his suppressed self-knowledge and responsibility.

Under David's forced introspection in the seclusion of the remote house, the origins of his ideal constructions of hegemonic masculinity become explicit and denaturalized. The enactment of the heteropatriarchal household is eventually dismantled entirely when Hella leaves David. In the vacuum left by his heteropatriarchal self-image, a window exposes David to his reflections and forces his image on him:

I watch my reflection in the darkening gleam of the window pane. My reflection is tall, perhaps rather like an arrow, my blond hair gleams. My face is like a face you have seen many times. My ancestors conquered a continent, pushing across death-laden plains, until they came to an ocean which faced away from Europe into a darker past. (*Giovanni's Room* 3)

I understand now that the contempt I felt for [Jacques] involved my self-contempt. (*Giovanni's Room* 21)

David's Whiteness which is, for most of the novel, entirely obscured or normalized against the otherness of Joey's and Giovanni's racialized inflection, becomes visible in the reflection in the window. As his Whiteness appears against the inanimate otherness of the dark, the mechanics behind its otherness are commented on. David's face is one that the narratee has "seen many times" and that the reiteration of its normalcy renders invisible. Otherness is, thereby, revealed as the precondition for the existence of Whiteness which in turn loses its normalcy when this

relation is uncovered as the basis for its construction. Abdur-Rahman endorses this reading and notes that David's acknowledgment "of European imperialism and domination" and their role in his identity "begins Baldwin's work ... of undoing whiteness" ("Metaphor" 168). The normalizing reiteration of Whiteness is shown to be contingent on a genealogy which links race in the U.S. to the colonization of North America and genocide of its aboriginal inhabitants. Brad Congdon similarly interprets David's reflections as revealing "exemplary masculinity" naturalized by its historical reiteration (65-66). This generic masculinity realizes identity through the same mechanism of normalization and othering which becomes apparent in David's homophobia towards Jacques. Essentially, David's homophobic rejection of Jacques is a reaction to the threat of their potential sameness. David's ideals of Whiteness and heteropatriarchal masculinity are, therefore, uncovered as means to construct otherness from difference to dismiss the possibility of sameness.

To David, becoming aware of the constructedness of racial and sexual otherness makes self-knowledge accessible, which he barred himself from by aligning his identity with White hegemonic masculinity. His reflections denaturalize constructed dichotomies and make the aspects of his self which transgress the ideal of White, middle-class, heteromascularity palpable:

[T]he germ of the dilemma that resolved itself ... into flight [o]f course ... is somewhere before me, locked in that reflection I am watching in the window as the night comes down outside. It is trapped in the room with me, always has been, and always will be, and it is yet more foreign to me than those foreign hills outside. (*Giovanni's Room* 9)

Watching his reflection in the window, David realizes that his reason for leaving Joey and the U.S. reveals something about himself which is "locked in" but looms in his reflection against the darkness. Hence, the interplay of darkness and light makes the constructedness of David's normative position visible and points to the purpose of this construction to conceal a reality about himself in it and render him a normalized complement of a constitutive other. The reflection unearths the foreignness, thereby, instated in himself which is seemingly so much closer to him "yet more foreign to me than those foreign hills outside." Baldwin highlights the

entanglement of Whiteness and Blackness in the construction of a racial binary and demonstrates the function of race to conceal humanity behind hierarchizing power structures (“On Being White” 170). David’s alienation from himself reveals this contingency of his Whiteness on Blackness which functions like the metaphorical darkness in the window which makes the subject visible to itself in a reduced reflection. Hence, the window symbolically reveals the constructedness and mutual contingency of dichotomous positions and criticizes their ineptitude to accommodate humanness. The various binary positions David claims for his identity in the course of the narrative are, therefore, dismantled as unstable constructions which depend on their constitutive others and conceal the multiplicity of his humanness which necessarily transgresses the underlying binaries.

David’s introspections are accompanied by fantasies of Giovanni’s imprisonment and looming death. These fantasies parallel David’s and Giovanni’s situations and show that heteronormativity turns Giovanni’s room and the house in the South of France into confinements and, tragically, leads to Giovanni’s literal imprisonment. David’s detachment from himself contrasts the closeness to Giovanni which is evoked by their synchronized movement yet breaks down in the face of their factual distance created by David’s rejection of Giovanni in favor of his isolating hegemonic masculinity:

I walk up and down this house ... I think of prison. ... to be in prison is simply not to live. ... I wonder about the size of Giovanni’s cell ... if he is perhaps ... walking up and down. I wonder if he knows that the approaching morning is the last morning of his life ... I try to see him, his back to me, standing at the window of his cell. From where he is perhaps he can only see the opposite wing of the prison ... And then something shakes me ... like a dead thing in the desert ... I am hoping that Giovanni is sheltered in someone’s arms tonight. I wish that someone were here with me. (*Giovanni’s Room* 100-101)

David’s movements which, trace the narrowness of the house, evoke the image of imprisonment associated with death and echo Giovanni’s reality. Beyond the physical distance separating them from each other, Giovanni tracing the narrowness of his cell and looking out of a window becomes present in David’s imagination. Beyond the imprisonment into his death-like

heteropatriarchal isolation, David creates a closeness to Giovanni. The crucial difference, of course, is that Giovanni faces his real death in his involuntary imprisonment. David's heteronormative identity connects their fates since it propelled both out of their relation and into their respective states of isolation and threatening death. This isolation, which already separated them when still in Giovanni's room, is manifested in their physical distance. That the narrowness of the house and the prison cell echo the smallness of Giovanni's room displays David's and Giovanni's separation through heteronormative boundaries irrespective of their physical closeness as the root for the confinement of these places. Hence, Giovanni's present absence catalyzes David's perception of the tension between Giovanni's absence and his own desire for intimacy. While David's metaphorical death persists the difference to Giovanni's death it omits, it renders David's self-imposed isolation a tragedy and "shakes [him]" with the realization of his desire for relation.

The realization of David's and Giovanni's deaths' profoundly distinct realities, destabilizes the parallelism David imagines between himself and Giovanni. His ability to admit his love for Giovanni in the face of his death cannot redeem him from the responsibility of imposing anguish worse than death on Giovanni:

Anguish is about to overtake me in this house, as naked and silver as that great knife which Giovanni will be facing very soon. My executioners are here with me, walking up and down with me ... They are everywhere I turn. Walls, windows, mirrors, water, the night outside—they are everywhere. ... It would help if I were able to feel guilty. But the end of innocence is also the end of guilt. No matter how it seems now, I must confess: I loved him. I do not think that I will ever love anyone like that again. And this might be a great relief if I did not also know that, when the knife has fallen, Giovanni ... will feel relief. (*Giovanni's Room* 99)

The knife with which David imagines Giovanni to be executed links the men in their distress. The reflective and delimiting surfaces of the house, windows and the darkness, the mirrors, walls, and even water which force David to face his masquerade and feel his self-imposed isolation become his "executioners." However, Giovanni's death jeopardizes this parallelism. David knows that Giovanni's knife will eventually fall and free him from the isolation he imposed

on him. Admitting his love for Giovanni cannot reinstate David's innocence or his guilt nor relieve him from the knowledge that Giovanni "will feel relief" upon his death. Baldwin asserts that guilt justifies the status quo, just as innocence makes humans blind to their responsibility ("The Blues" 76, "Identity" 96). Hence, the self-knowledge of David's love for Giovanni and of the effects of his heteropatriarchal angst on him diminish his ignorant innocence and apologetic guilt and leave David with the responsibility for their relation and isolation.

Although David struggles to make his responsibility for Giovanni productive, the novel closes with David articulating his desire for the maturity and responsibility of self-knowledge as escape routes from his imprisoning ideal of masculinity with its delusive strive for purity and innocence. While David's discomfort at the realization of his responsibility persists, the necessity to acknowledge this responsibility for realizing his humanity more maturely and fully looms over his introspections:

The body in the mirror forces me to turn and face it. And I look at my body, which is under sentence of death. It is lean, hard, and cold, the incarnation of a mystery. And I do not know what moves in this body, what this body is searching. It is trapped in my mirror as it is trapped in time and it hurries toward revelation. *When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.* I long to make this prophecy come true. I long to crack that mirror and be free. (*Giovanni's Room* 149)

Being forced to look at his reflection, David once again experiences the estrangement from his body destined to die. Its hardness and coldness, which contrast Hella's lack of these characteristics and mark its masculinity, are linked directly to the mystery he perceives in it. The mystery David's body is to himself aligns with his lack of knowledge of its desires and with his turning away from the male bodies of Joey and Giovanni. This knowledge is locked in the mirror which reflects a cold, hard image of his masculinity. Yet, the trap of the mirror externalizes the image of himself and dissociates it from his physical body as the site of direct self-perception. While his reflections make this removal visible, cracking the mirror becomes an ambiguous signifier which could encompass gaining freedom from the self-knowledge of the constructedness of his

position or the freedom from the cold withdrawal from himself. The intertextual reference to the first book of Corinthians, however, points to the vision David hopes to realize. Moving from infantility to maturity evokes, once again, Baldwin's idea of American masculinity as a dominant position dependent on binarism, oppression, and infantile ignorance ("Freaks" 815). To leave this position imprisoning humans in binary categories, then, implies realizing the self in more complex ways than these categories suggest and accepting others as more than tokens of particular types. The referenced passage from scripture read in its context establishes a link between maturity, "charity" and becoming whole (1 Corinthians 13.10, 12-13). In his famous exegetical writings, Thomas Aquinas explains that "charity" is a form of love which extends the love for God to other humans in the acknowledgment of their divine element and contrasts "cupiditas," a "desire to acquire something from" others (67). Hence, David's desire to follow this prophecy is a desire to affirm human complexity and unconditional spiritual value in relation to one another. To relate to others in "charity" clearly represents a shift away from processes of racial othering and sexual exploitation on which hegemonic masculinity depends and towards the recognition of others' full humanity.

While Baldwin does not write David as a character freed from his self-maintained prison of hegemonic masculinity, by the end of the novel, the fallacies underpinning his isolation and detachment dawn on him. The relation of charitable love he intends to realize implies his abandonment of hegemonic masculinity inflected with race and class and opens up the perspective of acknowledging the multiplicity of humanity which transcends reductive binarism. This love becomes the key to think David's identity beyond the hierarchization, isolation, and detachment of power structure which depend on constant the reaffirmation of separating boundaries. Instead, a relation which acknowledges shared humanity in the face of simultaneous sameness and difference becomes fathomable. Baldwin understands this inner work of love as a deeply political act: "I think the revolution begins first of all in the most private chamber of somebody's heart,

in your consciousness ... And I will not see without you, and vice versa, you will not see without me. ... The only way you can get through it is to accept that two-way street which I call love ("Black Scholar" 41-42). David's struggle for self and relation within the confines of hegemonic masculinity represents the struggle for political change Baldwin outlines. The outlook of love points to an escape route from David's deluded isolation and detachment and articulates a political vision which realizes a "revolution" in inner spaces by accepting to see what is revealed in relation.

CONCLUSION

To conclude my thesis, this chapter revisits key insights from the analysis and gives a brief overview of the central arguments made. Thereafter, the chapter returns to the research question which guides the close readings undertaken in the analysis and answers it by critically updating the thesis statement. Reflecting on the arguments made in the analysis, the conclusion continues to outline the contribution of this thesis to the field of Baldwin studies and criticism and provides an outlook for further investigation concerning the key issues of my thesis.

The close readings of Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain* and *Giovanni's Room* undertaken in this thesis center around space, relation, and the construction of character identity. In the examination of the cabin and the slaveowner's house on the plantation, and the public space in the U.S. South, I have demonstrated that racist binaries manifested in dualist spatial structures remain unstable and dependent on violent reaffirmations. The allocation of bodies into spatial dichotomies and the performance of White dominance create the impression of a stable divide yet reflect the need for a constant redrawing of divisive racial boundaries. The organization of space, furthermore, reflects the intersecting forces of racism and heterosexism which continue to territorialize marginalized character identities in the post-emancipation South and segregated New York City. Despite these oppressive spatial divisions which reflect identity categories, Baldwin's characters resist their degradation to gendered, sexualized, or racialized tropes. They carve out spaces to engage in liberating discourses, withdraw from the White gaze into Black spaces, and hold on to their physical and imaginative mobility. Transgressing the boundaries between the U.S. South and North, of segregated New York, and within Harlem in their physical and inner movement, divisive lines of racial segregation and queer exclusion are destabilized. While Baldwin's characters perpetually struggle for self-defined positions in the face of violent categorization, they remain enmeshed in spaces and relations structured by the oppressive regimes of racism and heterosexism. However, interpersonal relation, as between

John and Elizabeth, and the relation of love John experiences in the narrative climax on the church floor articulate a vision of humanness recognized in its fullness, uninfringed by reductive categorization.

The analysis of *Giovanni's Room* uncovers compulsive heteropatriarchy in its entanglement with race, class, and nationalism as the foundation of the protagonist David's inescapable isolation. In the household of his father, heteropatriarchal identity positions remain precarious and jeopardize the complexity of humanness and interpersonal relation in favor of ideals of gender and sexuality enshrined by the White, middle-class nuclear family. The room of David's friend Joey displays the potential of queer liberation which falters against David's internalization of these limiting ideals. When David relocates to Paris, he finds similarly oppressive heteronormative regimes despite the visibility of the Parisian queer community in the public sphere. The community is closeted through the regulation of the knowledge and visibility. David's condescending engagement with the community and the suppression of his queerness mirrors the public heterosexist tolerance and policing of queer spaces. With the unfolding romance between David and Giovanni, Giovanni's room provides a space of queer withdrawal, intimacy, and relation. Yet again, the liberating potential of love and relation diminishes against David's self-imposed isolation from Giovanni. David's internalized heteronormativity, however, does not only distance him from Giovanni but also jeopardizes his heterosexual relationships. The house in the South of France, in which David is eventually confronted with this isolation, elicits David's self-knowledge which foreshadows the potential of forging honest human relation through the love David perpetually deprives himself of in the pursuit of heteronormative ideals.

The research question which guides my readings of *Go Tell It on the Mountain* and *Giovanni's Room* asks how spaces and relationships are used in an alterity politics to constitute, complicate, and destabilize racialized, gendered & sexual character identities in the two novels. In my readings, I demonstrate that both novels use topographies to uncover the binary alterity

politics of Euro-American notions of race, gender, and sexuality through which they are structured. In this uncovering, the unfixed, processual dimension of binary categories which remain dependent on constant reaffirmation becomes apparent. In their attempts to realize their identities beyond the reductive dictates of binary categories, Baldwin's characters display a humanity more complex than the notions of race, gender, and sexuality they continue to be troubled by. However, through their physical and imaginative mobility, Baldwin's characters transgress spatial and conceptual boundaries and relate to each other in ways which destabilize racist and heterosexist categorization. In this form of resistance, relation and love become central strategies to realize human complexity beyond the limits of reductive categorizations. In his literary representation of their struggles, Baldwin does not only problematize the immobilizing regimes of racism and heterosexism which keep characters in particular places. Instead, the transgression of delimited spaces and entering into love and relation to other characters and themselves become lines of flight to Baldwin's characters. In their physical, imaginative, and emotional movements, characters withdraw from oppression, imagine alternative realizations of their positions in the world, and connect beyond divisive boundaries. Thereby, relation and love become revolutionary in uncompromisingly acknowledging the full humanity of characters and in the flouting of power structures which confine characters in isolating categories. Baldwin's literary political project, therefore, articulates a vision of a humanism rooted in revolutionary love.

My thesis contributes an extensive examination of the articulation of a political-literary project through space, relation, and identity construction in Baldwin's first two novels to the field of Baldwin studies and criticism. Thereby it highlights the political dimension of Baldwin's early literary works. It uncovers how the early novels anticipate love and relation as fundamental liberating forces, which Baldwin in a later interview with *The Black Scholar* described as *revolutionary*. Thereby, it complicates scholarly discourse of Baldwin's assumed early "liberal integrationist" position which Miller outlines (194). In the examination of space and

relation, Baldwin's radicalism is demonstrated to already be a central aspect in his early work. Given the limited scope of this thesis, aspects of social marginalization beyond race, gender, and sexuality were addressed only incidentally. Further investigations of the intersections of identity categories Baldwin attends to could add to the complex picture of his characters' identities. Furthermore, the rationale for a comparison of the political projects Baldwin articulates in his early and later works in this thesis draws solely on readings of the early novels and other scholars' observations of the field of Baldwin studies. Comparative studies which read Baldwin's earlier and later works together are needed to draw a more intricate picture of Baldwin's evolving radicalism suggested by my reading of his humanism of revolutionary love.

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APPENDIX

Abstract

This thesis addresses the problem of the relationship between alterity politics and the construction of character identity in James Baldwin's first two novels *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953) and *Giovanni's Room* (1956). The inquiry is guided by the question of how Baldwin employs spaces and relationships in an alterity politics to constitute, complicate, and destabilize racialized, gendered, and sexual character identities in these novels. Informed by the works of several postcolonial theorists and Baldwin's essayistic works, Baldwin's representations of the U.S. and Europe are read as postcolonial spaces. To understand Baldwin's literary intervention in the construction of identity in this context, the novels are read closely for spaces and their interaction with interpersonal relations and the identities they allow to or prevent from being articulated. In these readings, I argue that spaces perform a vital role in the two novels in realizing identities which perpetuate asymmetrical power structures. However, the dependence of power structures on being reiterated in spatial structures also displays the constant potential of characters to transgress the boundaries of spaces which map these oppressive identities and, thereby, destabilize the construction of binary identity positions through racist and heterosexist power structures. Hence, I argue that the complex characters in Baldwin's first two novels articulate a political literary project of revolutionary humanism which anticipates the radical politics long attributed exclusively to Baldwin's later works.

Zusammenfassung

Diese Arbeit befasst sich mit der Beziehung zwischen Alteritätspolitik und der Konstruktion der Identität fiktionaler Charaktere in James Baldwins ersten beiden Romanen *Von dieser Welt* (1953) und *Giovannis Zimmer* (1956). Die Untersuchung wird von der Frage geleitet, wie Baldwin Räume und Beziehungen in einer Alteritätspolitik nutzt, um in diesen Romanen rassistische, geschlechtsspezifische und sexuelle Charakteridentitäten zu konstituieren, zu komplizieren und zu destabilisieren. Basierend auf mehreren Werken der postkolonialen Theorie und Baldwins essayistischen Werken werden Baldwins Darstellungen der USA und Europas als postkoloniale Räume gelesen. Um Baldwins literarische Intervention in die Konstruktion von Identität in diesem Zusammenhang zu beleuchten, werden Textpassagen auf die Interaktion von Räumen, zwischenmenschlichen Beziehungen und Identitäten, die sie ermöglichen oder verhindern, hin gelesen. In den vorgelegten Close Readings wird gezeigt, dass Räume in den beiden Romanen eine zentrale Rolle bei der Verwirklichung von Identitäten spielen, die asymmetrische Machtstrukturen manifestieren. Die gleichzeitige Abhängigkeit von Machtstrukturen von ihrer andauernden Bestätigung in räumlichen Strukturen zeigt jedoch auch das ständige Potenzial von Charakteren, die Grenzen von Räumen zu übertreten, die die entsprechenden unterdrückenden Identitätskategorien abbilden, und dadurch die Konstruktion binärer Identitätspositionen durch rassistische und heterosexistische Machtstrukturen zu destabilisieren. Entsprechend argumentiere ich, dass die komplexen Charaktere in Baldwins ersten beiden Romanen ein politisch-literarisches Projekt eines revolutionären Humanismus artikulieren, das die radikalen Politiken antizipiert, die lange ausschließlich Baldwins späteren Werken zugeschrieben wurden.