

**CORPOREAL IMPERIALISM: TEXTUAL ANTI-
MASTURBATION IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY**

- AND -

**NATIONAL NEGOTIATION: TOWARD FEMINIST
POSTNATIONALISM IN THEORY AND PRACTICE**

by

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ABSTRACT

Essay 1: This essay discusses textual anti-masturbation in the eighteenth century in order to introduce the concept of corporeal imperialism and argue that the history of anti-masturbation prefigures the history of bodily colonialism. Conducting a close reading of *Onania; Or, the Heinous Sin of Self-Pollution* and Samuel Tissot's *Onanism: Or, a Treatise on the Disorders Produced by Masturbation*, this essay illustrates the ways in which the authors link acceptable sexuality to acceptable expressions of citizenship.

Key Words: Corporeal imperialism; Anti-masturbation

Essay 2: Arguing that nation is the single most important concept in feminist responses to historical and neo-colonialism, this essay reviews the history of feminist nationalisms through their responses to literal and metaphoric uses of the nation. Using Ama Ata Aidoo's prose poem Our Sister Killjoy as an example of both necessary nationalism and postnationalism in literature, this essay explores postcolonial nationalism and anti-nationalism while arguing for a theoretical and practical ethic of postnationalism.

Key Words: Feminism; Postcolonialism; Postnationalism

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1:
**CORPOREAL IMPERIALISM: TEXTUAL ANTI-
MASTURBATION IN THE EIGHTEENTH
CENTURY**

Introduction

First published in London in or around 1716,¹ *Onania; Or, the Heinous Sin of Self-Pollution, and All Its Frightful Consequences, in both Sexes, Considered, with Spiritual and Physical Advice to Those who have already Injur'd themselves by this Abominable Practice* simultaneously popularized and demonized the concept of the masturbator. This text brought masturbation as a practice into the public realm as a social ill and immediately labelled it a sin, a disease, and an offence against God, the self and British society as a whole. Remaining popular through nineteen editions (the last was published in 1759), *Onania*'s anonymous author² was single-handedly responsible for the eighteenth-century concept of post-masturbatory disease, and his link between masturbation and guilt remains relevant today. *Onania* has subsequently played a vastly influential role in the cultural development of the masturbator as “the alter ego, the nasty bad brother or sister, of the modern self” (Laqueur 357-8). In addition to constructing a lasting framework for the conflation of medical, social, and religious concerns around masturbation, *Onania* also developed the social and sexual identity of the masturbator.

¹ No one has conclusively established the probable date of the first publication of the first edition. Michael Stolberg, however, argues quite convincingly in “Self-Pollution, Moral Reform, and the Venereal Trade: Notes on the Sources and Historical Context of *Onania* (1716)” that other authors have simply overlooked evidence of the text’s first publication in 1716.

² Although published anonymously, debate about *Onania*'s authorship has occurred since Tissot claimed in 1766 to have discovered the author to be one Dr. Bekkers (20). Stolberg argues that John Marten may have been a likelier author (53), and Thomas Laqueur agrees, pointing out that in 1727 an author named Mathew Rothos cited “M—n” as *Onania*'s author (31). While Stolberg and Laqueur make compelling arguments for John Marten as the original author, in this essay I will continue to refer to *Onania*'s author as anonymous both because that was how the text was published and received and because there is no unanimity about the author’s identity.

Following *Onania*, Samuel Auguste André David Tissot's 1766 text *Onanism: Or, a Treatise on the Disorders Produced by Masturbation: Or, the Dangerous Effects of Secret and Excessive Venery*³ also participated in the eighteenth-century project of examining the masturbator in a social light. Tissot's text positions itself as a medical, not moral, treatise and as such focuses primarily on the physical body in terms of the physical deficiencies both leading to and resulting from masturbation. Though in fact he frequently participates in *Onania*'s moralizing project, Tissot claims that his aim is to "write upon the disorders occasioned by masturbation, or self-pollution, and not upon the crime of masturbation" (vii). While Tissot attempts to distance himself from *Onania*, claiming that his work "has nothing in common with the English *Onania* but the subject" (x), the two texts share a framework of masturbatory disease, subjectivity, and citizenship. In addition, Tissot quotes lengthy passages from *Onania* as well as making constant references to the earlier work. As the most influential and widely read anti-masturbation texts of their time, *Onania* and *Onanism* quite handily represent the primary form of textual anti-masturbation received by eighteenth-century audiences.

Tissot and *Onania*'s author address a similar audience and assume the same readership. In addition to addressing particular groups within their readership based on their audience's sexual knowledge, as will be discussed in this essay's second section, the authors intend their work "to be read by all sorts of People of both Sexes of what Age, Degree, Profession or Condition soever, Guilty or not Guilty of the Sin declaimed against" (qtd. in Laqueur 28). In this statement taken from an advertisement for a new edition of *Onania*, the author figures masturbation quite broadly as a practice that

³ This text was published in French in 1760 as *L'Onanisme, ou Dissertation physique sur les maladies produites par la masturbation*.

transcends gender, age, and class, and therefore as an issue of concern to a similarly diverse audience. This figuration may be a function of the necessities of advertising, however, as throughout both texts it becomes clear that there are indeed gender and class-based groups who masturbation is most likely to affect and who should be concerned enough about the practice to read texts on the subject. *Onania*'s author, for example, betrays that masturbation does not in fact afflict those of all classes equally when he states that, "Idleness, and high Living, which more immediately exposes [one] to Lustful Thoughts, when Business chases them away, by employing the Mind to better Purpose" (59). Tissot further narrows down the age and class status of his audience when he advises his readers to carefully choose their children's maids and to prevent them from having contact with servants (44-5). Despite these limits, however, both texts' immense popularity indicates that readers likely took *Onania*'s early claims at face value and that the texts were read across class, profession, and age.

Although audiences were exposed to nineteen editions of *Onania* and several editions of *Onanism*, in this essay I rely on the fourth edition of *Onania*, as no known copies of the first edition exist and the second and third editions are relatively inaccessible. While study of the first edition would be ideal, most scholars working on this text have relied on the eighth and most accessible edition as it was reprinted in book form in 1986. As such, my use of the fourth edition allows me to access the text in the earliest form possible and make observations based on the text before it underwent revision in response to outside reception and criticism.

My use of early editions of both texts allows me to engage in a close reading of *Onania* and *Onanism* with a textual, rather than contextual, focus. I examine the

assumptions embedded in each text's discussions of the causes and effects of masturbation on the individual and British society as a whole. I will argue that both texts discursively and rhetorically cast the masturbator as a danger to society via his or her flagrant abuse of the self in ways that affect the social whole as a collective. By looking at the ways in which they position the masturbator as a threat to British society, I will be able to describe how the texts figure appropriate sexuality and citizenship, as well as the complicated links they establish between the two concepts. Because both texts primarily describe the aberrant sexuality of the masturbator, as opposed to the appropriate sexuality of the non-masturbator, locating their understandings of proper sexual and national conduct will require me to adopt inference as a critical practice. That is, I will uncover the authors' unspoken assumptions about appropriate citizenship by focusing on their descriptions of inappropriate citizenship. I justify my adoption of this practice by noting that the texts assume that their readers see appropriate conduct as self-evident, but that I do not share such an understanding from my historical location. As such, the authors' positions on acceptable national and sexual behaviour are inaccessible to me without employing this strategy of reading what is there for what it says about what is not there.

I argue that eighteenth-century approaches to masturbation set the historical stage for corporeal imperialism, a term I use to describe any practice at any time which inscribes national values onto the physical body. The term corporeal imperialism implies a parallel between colonized territories and the physical body. I argue that just as an imperial state can extend its authority over a colonized country via political and economic control, corporeal imperialism occurs when nation states control the physical bodies of their citizens by forcing them to literally embody national values. In this sense,

corporeal imperialism describes the process whereby bodies become functional colonies of the state, since colonization is the practice of imperialism.

The texts discussed here provide a foundation for discursive and practical anti-masturbation as a corporeal imperialist practice; the texts simultaneously figure masturbation as a danger to society via the self and situate the masturbator as 'other' to the proper social citizen. In so doing, they establish the political alterity of certain forms of sexual expression and construct a paradigm of acceptable expressions of sexuality, which they then link to acceptable expressions of citizenship, which I define as a social as well as a political form of national belonging. I argue that this link between individual sexuality and the collective nation is what functions as the groundwork for corporeal imperialism, especially in light of how the authors define acceptable citizenship as a projection into a national future. I use the term nation in Benedict Anderson's sense of referring to an imagined political and social community (1991).

Firstly, I will situate my reading of the texts in the context of current scholarship in order to comment on the critical interventions made by this essay. Secondly, I will discuss the texts' preoccupations with the availability of sexual knowledge and the naming of sexual practices as part of a larger project of creating strong borders between the identities of masturbators and non-masturbators. In this section, I will argue that the hierarchies the authors establish around sexual knowledge serve to define both aberrant and acceptable forms of sexuality and citizenship. Thirdly, I will outline both texts' perspectives on gendered masturbation, and show how *Onania* posits gender as a social construction. In this section I will also outline the role of the female citizen, and show how the female masturbator crosses the border between the public and private spheres

because her guilt is reproductive and thus social. I will also discuss how, in gendering masturbation, *Onania* ascribes a provisional form of sexual agency to women. Finally, this essay will make explicit the connection between eighteenth-century anti-masturbation and nineteenth-century corporeal imperialism, showing that by connecting sexuality and citizenship, *Onania* and *Onanism* lay the groundwork for the foundational concepts of imperialism.

Section one: Current scholarship and critical interventions

Existing scholarship on both *Onania* and *Onanism* can be divided into three main categories: work on the texts' historical significance that describes their major role in popularizing anti-masturbation sentiment in the eighteenth century; work that discusses the texts' historical and ideological context in an attempt to explain their ideological excesses; and work that emphasizes the two texts' influence on the cultural history of masturbation to the present. As such, extant work mainly addresses the contemporaneous or lasting influence of the texts, though some authors do address textual components of the two works while situating them in relation to larger bodies of similar work or related ideological concepts. Both types of work share the methodological approach of claiming to unearth either the texts or their content in the process of repositioning their importance. Especially with respect to *Onania*, current scholarship emphasizes how previous work has not adequately addressed its importance and attempts to change existing discourse on the history of masturbation by bringing the text and its importance to light. In contrast, my reading here looks at the texts' content and considers specific discourse-level aspects of the texts while linking nationality, citizenship, and sexuality. I make a critical intervention into existing scholarship by conducting a close reading of the texts not to (re)situate them historically or culturally but rather to suggest how they might be read as existing in a critical conversation with contemporary notions of nation and sexuality.

This section will discuss in turn the three main ways contemporary scholarship approaches *Onania* and *Onanism* before moving to a brief discussion of my critical framework and how it functions as a new point of entry into the texts themselves.

Much early scholarship on the anonymous *Onania* focuses on identifying that text as the originator of popular anti-masturbation sentiment in the eighteenth century. Most characteristically represented by Robert H. MacDonald's 1967 article "The Frightful Consequences of *Onanism*: Notes on the History of a Delusion," this type of work is notable for its simple identification of *Onania* as a historically significant piece of work. MacDonald argues that *Onania* was the first text to link moral and medical concerns to masturbation as well as popularize the practice as a concept. Much of his article is devoted to showing that these ideas originated with *Onania* in the eighteenth, and not the nineteenth, century as previous scholarship had assumed before 1967 (423). In establishing this text's importance, MacDonald also considers the ways in which *Onanism* relied on *Onania* for its own matrix of masturbatory disease. Succinctly representing the main point of most scholarship on *Onania* as the originary text of masturbatory disease, MacDonald claims that "it is clear that before the late XVIIth century masturbation was a sin amongst other sins, and that the widespread and popular dissemination of the idea that it caused disease can be dated to the publication of the *Onania* in about 1707" (430).

In *Solitary Sex: A Cultural History of Masturbation*, Thomas W. Laqueur echoes MacDonald's notion, citing *Onania* as the beginning of modern masturbation (51) and referring to the text as "masturbation's primal text" (25). Likewise, Michael Stolberg claims that the text "decisively shaped western perceptions of masturbation for at least

half a century” and was a “landmark in the history of sexuality in European society” (37). This type of work focuses on ensuring that *Onania*’s role in the eighteenth century is recognized.

The second main category of work on both *Onania* and *Onanism* discusses the texts’ historical and ideological context, and often does so in relation to other ideological concepts. In addition to locating the texts contextually, this work attempts to explain how masturbation came to occupy such a fiendish role in eighteenth-century discourse. The most significant discussion of historical context occurs in Stolberg’s “Self-pollution, Moral Reform, and the Venereal Trade: Notes on the Sources and Historical Context of *Onania* (1716)” where he argues that a full understanding of this hugely influential text can only come from a consideration of its sources and context. Stating that the text “was well grounded in contemporary medical theory and practice” (38), Stolberg illustrates how the author successfully shaped the nature of eighteenth and nineteenth-century thinking on masturbation not by pioneering but by newly popularizing the concept of post-masturbatory disease (38). He locates this popularization in an early eighteenth-century context of a “growing unease” among “conservatives and Puritans [in] post-Restoration England” about “what they perceived as an appalling decline of religion and morality” wherein “individual salvation,” “the welfare of the nation” and of “humanity as a whole” was at stake (46). Stolberg finds it ironic that the concept of post-masturbatory disease “may in many ways have functioned as a mere psychological justification for moral prejudice” (61).

Adding to Stolberg’s focus on the moral theories that contributed to *Onania*’s theoretical shape, H. Tristram Engelhardt locates the concept of masturbatory disease in

an ethical paradigm and notes that, “[i]nsofar as vice is taken to be a deviation from an ideal of human perfection, or ‘well-being,’ it can be translated into disease language. In shifting to disease language, one no longer speaks in moralistic terms, but one speaks in terms of a deviation from a norm which implies a degree of imperfection” (248).

Englehardt primarily uses the disease of masturbation as an example of slippage between medical and moral purposes. Similarly, Arthur N. Gilbert compares anti-masturbation as a “manufacture of madness campaign” to medieval witch hunting. In attempting to explain why “the well-known cycle of sin, confession, punishment or penance, and redemption” was carried out in a medical, rather than a religious, setting” (231) in anti-masturbation discourse, Gilbert argues that physicians took on sacerdotal roles and brought religious fervour and emotionalism to a profession within which they were powerless to actually heal their patients (222-3). In this sense, Gilbert’s work attempts to explain the texts’ content, context, and also links them to broader ideological concepts, as does Todd C. Parker’s Sexing the Text: The Rhetoric of Sexual Difference in British Literature, 1700-1750. In a chapter devoted to *Onania* and the danger of female sexuality, Parker contextualizes the text’s “anxiety about masturbatory sexuality” as a threat to “heterosexual means of social production” founded on concerns about female sexuality (47).

Though he writes on masturbation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Alan Hunt’s work on masturbation and moral panic fits into this category because it theorizes the melodramatic construction of the effects of ‘self-abuse,’ arguing that anti-masturbation is a form of social panic that took as its focus questions of self-discipline and self-control (585-90). Vernon A. Rosario’s work on vice in France makes the

comparable point that Tissot's work was part of "the secularization and medicalization of morality" (103-4). Both authors thus connect discourse-level aspects of the texts to broader on-going moral projects and in so doing exemplify this type of work on anti-masturbation which contextualizes *Onania* and *Onanism*. Similarly, Lesley Hall and Roy Porter devote their chapter on masturbation in the Enlightenment to a discussion of knowledge and anxiety. Hall and Porter focus on outside criticism faced by both authors and outline how they attempted to legitimize "launching into print on sex" (93). Additionally, the authors discuss Michel Foucault's disclaiming of the "repressive hypothesis" vis-à-vis Enlightenment anxiety about sexual language and books on sex. Discussing the texts' use of sexual language, Hall and Porter question whether the texts were "meant to be read, or at least [were] read, via an exercise in reversal: instruction manuals were handbooks in the forbidden" (104). While they do not come to a definitive conclusion on this point, Hall and Porter find that Foucault was only "half right" to disprove the repressive hypothesis, since texts such as *Onania* and *Onanism* illustrate that sex and masturbation were "domain[s] of life that [were] furtive and shameful, as was the body itself" (105). In their overall discussion of the texts in relation to other eighteenth-century texts on sex, Hall and Porter contextualize *Onania* and *Onanism* while linking these texts' content to other, broader issues.

The third category of work on *Onania* and *Onanism* consists of scholarship that traces these texts' influence through the cultural and social history of masturbation to the present. This kind of work shares similarities with work that aims to prove the texts' importance, as both bodies of knowledge identify *Onania* especially as the Ur-text of modern masturbation and emphasize its significance.

As noted above, Thomas W. Laqueur cites the publication of *Onania* as the originary moment for modern masturbation (51). He writes that, “the act—masturbation—existed in Antiquity; it had a name. But it had none of the resonance it came to have after *Onania*” (100) and as such his book is divided into chapters describing masturbation as it existed before and after *Onania*. In the eighteenth century, masturbation as defined by *Onania* “came to represent the relationship between the individual and the social world” (22), and Laqueur aims to illustrate how *Onania* forever tied that relationship to morality and more specifically instigated “the new modern regime of guilt” (183). Laqueur characterises the contemporary cultural status of masturbation as “profane,” saying that it “hovers between abjection and fulfilment.” Attributing this transient status to *Onania*’s invention of “a new disease and a new highly specific, thoroughly modern, and nearly universal engine for generating guilt, shame, and anxiety” (13), Laqueur’s text takes as its express goal to elucidate how *Onania* continues to shape masturbation’s cultural location. He concludes that,

[t]he history of that ‘trouble and agony of a wounded conscience,’ launched into the world by the most humble of literary productions—an eighty-eight page tract, by a profit-seeking quack doctor cum pornographer—is not really in the past. It is not yet really history. Serious men and women, many of the great thinkers and artists of the last three centuries, consider as deeply significant what had once been thought of as a reactively inconsequential ethical sideshow and what to some today seems like simple fun. It remains strange and disturbing that in our century the young Wittgenstein on the eastern front of the Great War was in moral agony because, amidst the death and carnage, he masturbated, just as Rousseau’s self-lacerations in more peaceful circumstances are still unsettling. (420)

Similarly, Jean Stengers and Anne Van Neck use their text to approach *Onania* and *Onanism*’s lasting impacts on the social role of masturbation in relation to sexuality. In their text Masturbation: The History of a Great Terror, the authors argue that social,

moral, and religious discourses on masturbation have and continue to constitute a form of terrorism directed at sexual health and exploration, most specifically in adolescents. The authors write that Tissot's text was primarily responsible for "the great anti-masturbatory fear" of the eighteenth century and on as it "frightened or more properly terrified generation after generation" (75). Tissot's technique of "catalog[ing] horrors" quickly became the standard which most anti-masturbation texts emulated as author after author adopted his explicit quasi-medical moralizing stance. Influencing "not only his own day but an entire epoch in Western civilization" (99), the authors show that Tissot's strategy quickly translated into a political, social, and cultural climate of terror around masturbation. Sharing the strategy of focusing on the two texts' lasting impact on the history of masturbation, Laqueur, Stengers, and Van Neck all exemplify the third type of extant scholarship on *Onania* and *Onanism*.

In contrast to this current body of knowledge, my approach to *Onania* and *Onanism* focuses on the texts' content not to situate it in a historic ideological tradition or to explain its lasting influence on the shape of modern thinking on sexuality. Rather, I perform a close reading of both texts to suggest the ways in which the external concept of corporeal imperialism operates within the eighteenth century, suggesting nineteenth-century concepts of citizenship and nationality. I then link these anticipatory concepts to the forms of sexuality at issue within the texts. As such, the critical intervention I make is primarily discursive. In addition, this work is the only current scholarship other than Parker's which expressly considers gender as a category in relation to eighteenth-century textual anti-masturbation.

Section two: Hierarchies of knowledge and subjectivity

Both Tissot and *Onania*'s anonymous author are preoccupied with discussing the accessibility of their work and the implications of that accessibility (or lack thereof) on, as *Onania* puts it, "those lascivious People of such corrupt Minds, that at no time excepted, they may be rais'd to impure Thoughts by bare Words without Coherence, and the Names of Parts, even when made use of in the Description of Calamitous Cases and Nauseous Diseases" (17). As well as expressing concern about how their discussions of masturbation will affect this group, both authors claim to be conscious of speaking to two distinct readerships: those who have "defil'd themselves by this Practice already" (2) and those who remain "unpolluted."⁴ In light of what they perceive as the separate needs of these audiences, the authors signal their awareness of facing the particular problem of, as Porter and Hall phrase it, "when to speak, when to be silent" (101). *Onania*'s author expresses a high degree of concern that some readers might use his professedly anti-masturbation texts as masturbatory fodder, thus subverting the stated purpose of the texts. At the same time, however, both authors are concerned that by failing to include enough detail they might also fail to convey the seriousness of the consequences of masturbation to those readers who may not recognize masturbation as the sin under discussion. In

⁴ As Vernon A. Rosario points out, "pollution" in an eighteenth-century medical text could denote both medical and moral corruption of the body. I am here reading *Onania*'s use of "self-pollution" as equal to Tissot's "masturbation," since *Onania*'s author defines the practice as follows: "Self-Pollution is that unnatural Practice, by which Persons of either Sex may defile their own Bodies, without the Assistance of others, while yielding to filthy Imaginations, they endeavour to imitate and procure to themselves that Sensation, which God has ordered to attend the carnal Commerce of the two Sexes for the Continuance of our Species" (1).

attempting to negotiate between these two concerns, the authors adopt a register that they quite vehemently defend as ethical and unlikely to incite masturbation or impure thoughts. As I will show, in establishing the righteousness of this position and defending it against anticipated criticism, the authors reveal how they conceive of a hierarchy of knowledge with respect to sexuality.

In addition to the concern of what and what not to reveal to the portion of their readership who have already masturbated, *Onania*'s author is also preoccupied with the problem of how to address those in his audience who have not yet succumbed to the sin of masturbation. As I will discuss, Tissot dismisses this contingent to avoid the tension inherent in dealing with non-masturbators in texts explicitly addressed to masturbators. As I will show, in delineating their respective readerships, both Tissot and *Onania*'s anonymous author lay a foundation for an explicit hierarchy of knowledge. Not only do they implicitly describe who is allowed to know, and what they are allowed to know, they also construct a hierarchy of types of knowledge when they make implicit distinctions between good and bad forms of sexual knowing. In addition, in acting as guardians of sexual knowledge, the authors also position themselves as guardians of the souls and bodies of their readers. The implicit hierarchies in their discussions of accessibility are then overlaid onto the border between the masturbator and the non-masturbator, thus creating a hierarchy of subjectivity.

This section will first discuss the authors' preoccupation with accessibility in both the context of the authors' fear of providing masturbatory material to those who have already masturbated and also with respect to their concerns, primarily in *Onania*, about causing masturbation in the innocent. In the course of this discussion, I will show how

the authors link sexual knowledge to sexual practice. Secondly, this section will discuss the implications of the authors' delineation of their audience into two groups, and I will argue that the creation of a firm border between the two groups reveals a hierarchy of subjectivity.

Before even beginning a discussion of sexual knowledge and accessibility within their texts, the authors face the need to situate their texts in relation to outside criticism. In addition to the internal debates about what to reveal that I will discuss later, both authors first address external commentary on the very existence of their work. They open their texts on the defensive, alternately rationalizing their texts and defending their reasons for writing. Tissot, for example, attempts to address both concerns by relating the difficulties he faced in revising his original text. He claims that his only reason for continuing with the difficult work was the "recompense" available to him in "diminishing in some measure" "the crimes of one's fellow creature" (vi). In addition to similarly explaining his reasons for writing on the subject, *Onania's* author uses the preface to muster support for his text, reprinting in its entirety a letter he received from an unnamed "very Learned and Pious Divine" in support of the original printing of *Onania*. Tissot likewise quotes St. Augustin and claims to be following his strategy of refusing to be "silent upon crimes of obscenity, because they could not be described without words" (vii). Despite these performances of accountability and deference, however, *Onania's* author offers what is perhaps a facetious response to his critics when he states that "[t]hose who are of Opinion, that notwithstanding the Frequency of this Sin, it never ought to be spoke of, or hinted at [...] will find themselves answer'd in Page 18, 65" (iii). In fact, page 18 does not discuss any related topic, and page 65 touches only briefly on

the subject, suggesting a taunt similar to Tissot's description of his critics as "[t]hose Zoilus's of society and literature, who do nothing themselves, and condemn all that is done by others" (viii). While these types of pre-emptively defensive comments are found exclusively in the revised prefaces, both authors' arguments for their right to write on masturbation are intertwined with their discussions of accessibility throughout the original content of their work.

The authors take different positions with respect to informing those who have not masturbated about the practice and its consequences. Tissot confidently states: "let the eyes of youth be opened, and let them learn by degrees the danger as well as the evil; this would be the surest means of preventing that decay which is complained of in human nature" (xii) and also rhetorically asks, "what young person would think of reading a book upon a medical subject, whilst he was ignorant of its name?" (ix). In contrast to this attitude of "omit[ting] nothing that might open the eyes of young people to all the horrors of that abyss which they prepare for themselves" (184), *Onania*'s author chooses to be more guarded. Although he is worried about being understood by those of the "meanest Capacities" (1), he chooses to "be less intelligible to some, and leave several things to the Consideration of my Readers, than by being too plain, to run the Hazard of raising in some corrupt Minds what I would most endeavour to stifle and destroy" (1-2). Although he claims to avoid plain language for this purpose, and to solve the problem thusly, he also interestingly excises part of the audience he had originally addressed. Noting that he is persuaded that "those who have defil'd themselves by this Practice already, or else by wicked Thoughts are tempted so to do, must understand what I mean by Self-Pollution, as I have defin'd it, without any further Interpretation," he says that it is to them that he

“chiefly recommend[s] these Pages” (2). To those “who never contracted this Guilt,” he says only that he congratulates them on their innocence and that “they shall meet here with nothing but what shall more and more incite them to Chastity” (3). From this description emerges a sense of degrees of sexual knowledge. It is difficult to accept that a reader could be genuinely “wholly ignorant of the Sin [the author] would warn them against” (3), as the act of warning, whether couched in polite language or not, does in fact conjure the sin itself. Both Tissot and *Onania*’s author realize that in order to warn their readers, they must inform them of what exactly they are being warned against. What differs between the two authors is the extent to which they make this plain in their texts; while Tissot recognizes this fact and states it explicitly, *Onania*’s author prefers to gesture toward this problem but leave it textually unresolved. For both authors, however, the desire to control the reception of their texts is collapsed onto their desire to control masturbation as these goals become one and the same.

The quandary of what to reveal and to whom is further complicated by the fact that both authors see a paradox in sexual knowledge about masturbation. Sexual knowledge is positioned as at once preventative and causal; the authors argue that knowledge of the consequences of masturbation prevent individuals from partaking in the vice, and yet it is in fact knowledge of the very existence of masturbation that instigates the practice. This tension can be seen when *Onania*’s claim that, “...a great many Offenders would never have been Guilty of it if they had been thoroughly acquainted with the Heinousness of the Crime, and the sad Consequents to the Body as well as the Soul” (iii) is juxtaposed with the text’s supposition that masturbation is most often learned by example. Several of the many readers whose letters are included in the text

claim that they learned of the practice through the actions of older friends (44-50). Likewise, when the author lists ignorance as the first cause of masturbation (as distinguished from “Uncleanness in general” [11]), he states that the “Youth of both Sexes” learn to pollute themselves “by the Example of their Intimates, through their own Wantonness, or by being idle and alone, and some by meer Accident” but that they “would have abhorr’d the Thoughts, had they understood the Nature of the Sin” (11-2). The passage assumes that masturbation could have been both prevented and cured by ignorance: were individuals to avoid learning of masturbation through wantonness, idleness, solitude or other means, they would just as likely avoid the practice as those who were aware of its consequences. As the author makes these comments in a text which openly discusses the practice, he implicitly contends that it is safe to assume the risk of simultaneously informing readers of that which they are to avoid. Nevertheless, the dual function of ignorance is such that the absence of knowledge is both vaunted as innocence and yet also decried as a state that can be ended for good. This contradictory positioning of ignorance reflects the complex value attributed to sexual knowledge: knowledge is both a tool for good and for evil.

In distinguishing good knowledge from bad, and making compromises about the kind of information they share in their texts, the authors begin to establish a hierarchy of knowledge. As discussed above, the terrifying knowledge of the horrific consequences of masturbation is ‘good’ knowledge in that this information causes individuals to avoid masturbation. ‘Bad’ knowledge is that which incites masturbation by naming the practice and thus allowing it to be imagined and therefore committed in the textual matrix where to know is to do. Interestingly, in this equation the information itself remains static and

becomes either good or bad dependent on the subject position of the individual reading the text. For example, only a reader who has never masturbated is in danger of learning of the practice through anti-masturbation material, making the status of that knowledge dependent on the receiver. Similarly, current masturbators can receive both good and bad knowledge dependent on whether or not they are repentant (and thus susceptible to learning of the evils of the practice) or incorrigible (and thus susceptible to using words and descriptors of masturbation as masturbatory fodder). One outcome of the variability of knowledge affects the authors' fears about having the stated purpose of their texts subverted: by offloading responsibility for the use of knowledge, and thus the knowledge itself, onto their readers, they ensure that the unrepentant masturbator, and not the author, is blamed for any extra-textual use of their works. More deeply, however, this figuration of knowledge as dependent on its receiver affects the authors' classification of subjects with respect to morality.

It is the classification of sexual knowledge into good and bad which leads to the establishment of hierarchies of subjectivity since the receiver is the main determinant of the morality of the knowledge he or she receives. In establishing differing contingents of readers, both authors make an interesting departure from the delineation of their readers enacted in the prefaces. There, the authors divided readers into masturbators and non-masturbators, regardless of the attitude or morality of the masturbators. Here, however, both the corrupt masturbator and the innocent non-masturbator are lumped together as potential receptors of 'bad' knowledge while the repentant masturbator is the only one who receives purely 'good' knowledge in the form of horrific tales about the consequences of masturbation. In addition to being subject-specific, these distinctions

lead into the creation of a clear border between acceptable and unacceptable forms of subjectivity.

When responding to the temptation of lust, *Onania*'s author avers that "the Enemy is within us" (23) and therefore an actual component of the masturbator, whether repentant or not. While the non-masturbator faces the constant threat of slipping into corruption since "we are conceiv'd in Sin [and] it is impossible but lustful Desires will now and then arise, especially in young People that are in Health," his or her morality is also figured as originating with the self. *Onania*'s author states that, "by the Reluctancy which all innocent Persons feel against complying with [lustful desires], it is easily to be discover'd, that they are evil" (22-23). This distinction constructs an obvious hierarchy between those whose thoughts are the enemy and those who are so innocent that their instinctive response to pleasure is in fact the definition of resisting evil. The subject's actions do not determine his or her place in the hierarchy of morality, as the subject's location is rather determined by his or her relation to masturbation and impurity in general. The various subject positions one can hold within this already specific hierarchy further complicate this schema: the non-masturbator can be either a complete innocent, and thus not even aware of the practice, or a staunch resistor and thus morally superior. The masturbator can be unaware of the consequences and thus ripe for receiving good knowledge, but can also be aware of the consequences and flagrantly unconcerned.

Despite the multiple positions available to the subject within this ethical matrix, both authors suggest that the subject can only occupy one position at any one time. The importance of the border between the masturbator and the non-masturbator also supersedes any other distinctions within those two categories, as the boundary is ethically

impermeable. Although the masturbator can cease the practice, as will be discussed in this essay's final section, this border crossing is superficial when seen in the context of the authors' comments on the differences between those who have and have not masturbated. *Onania*'s author conceives of chastity as a perishable concept, arguing that once individuals masturbate, "the Barrier that fenc'd their Chastity is broke, and the Enemy to Purity and Holiness makes daily Inroads, and ravages through every Passage of the conquer'd Soul" (24). Once broken this "fence" between good and evil is irreparable since the masturbating subject itself becomes the source of temptation, which was previously external ("His heart is a continual Spring of evil Thought [25]). Tissot likewise sees indulgence in masturbation as crossing a permanent moral line since "it is demonstrated to be an act of suicide" and a crime (viii). The individual can cross the boundary between these two distinct categories of being in only one direction and yet, as discussed above, he or she is always in danger of making that crossing due to the relative instability of the subject position of the non-masturbator. Taking into account who can receive 'good' sexual knowledge, the subject position of the knowledgeable non-masturbator is the most highly prized in this ethical formulation, despite the fact that the masturbator is not only the main preoccupation of both texts but is also their assumed audience.

On the other side of the border, the masturbator's subject status is also at issue. When encountered with a young man so afflicted by the consequences of masturbation that he "less resembled a living creature, than a corpse," Tissot comments that, "it was difficult to discover, that he had formerly made part of the human species" (25). In this valuation, not only do the moral consequences of masturbation lead to a usurpation of the

masturbator's soul by the "enemy," but the physical consequences of masturbation are such that the individual may even cease to resemble a human being. The hierarchy of subjectivity operating in such an assessment is clearly visible as the masturbator is stripped of his or her subjectivity entirely.

As discussed in this section, the authors' anxieties about accessibility lead to the creation of strict boundaries separating those who have masturbated from those who have not, and additionally creating even sharper distinctions within those categories. As I have shown, in this process the authors link sexual knowledge to sexual practice but also evaluate and rank forms of knowing according to their role in determining a subject's position vis-à-vis masturbation. Finally, this section has shown how hierarchies of knowledge readily slip into hierarchies of subjectivity, and how that slippage has the effect of ranking modes of being. As will be taken up further in this essay, the creation of a strict border between the masturbator and the non-masturbator and the valuation of ways of being on both sides of that border has enormous implications for definitions of acceptable forms of sexuality.

Section three: Guilt and gendered responsibility

Both *Onania*'s anonymous author and Tissot make distinctions between the practice of masturbation in men and women and devote portions of their texts to the unique consequences of masturbation in women. Similarly, they ascribe different status to the female masturbator, primarily due to the assumed reproductive role of all women. At the same time, however, *Onania* exhibits an interesting slippage between the male and female masturbator that reveals the author's view of a strange equality between men and women, and a sense of gender as socially constructed. In this section, I will describe both texts' positions on gendered masturbation and focus on how the texts position women in relation to guilt and responsibility. Both texts claim that masturbation in women leads to infertility, miscarriage, and/or the production of stillborn or ill infants, and argue that women masturbators are therefore directly responsible for ending or reducing the lives of others in the external world. Both texts describe masturbation in men, however, as a form of murder-suicide and construct the resultant guilt and sinfulness as an internal process. In contrast, women's guilt and responsibility originates in external roles such as reproduction and child rearing. The differences between the construction of internal guilt in male masturbators and external responsibility in women reflect the authors' respective presumptions about the nature of gender itself. In *Onania*, these presumptions surprisingly often reflect a sense of men and women as equal in the arena of sin. Interestingly, the authors' concerns about the female masturbator have to do with the places where the public and private spheres intersect; the authors see women

masturbators as deviating from their responsibility of literally reproducing society and influencing future generations, whereas the male masturbator affects himself individually and is primarily a concern for the private sphere. In addition to seeming to upset the usual attribution of women to the private sphere, this figuration of the female masturbator reveals much about the texts' understanding of gender and of the appropriately gendered citizen.

In this section, I will argue that the way the authors position women as ultimately responsible for the reproduction of society via heterosexual sex can be read in terms of what it says about women as literal and symbolic reproducers of the nation. In order to prove this supposition, I will first illustrate the overall approach to gendered masturbation taken in both *Onania* and *Onanism*. Secondly, I will show how the two texts differ in their approach to women's agency, and thirdly show how *Onania*'s author figures gender as socially constructed. Finally, I will show how the differences between the male and female masturbator with respect to responsibility and guilt define the role of the female citizen in the creation of the nation.

The authors initially reveal their respective perspectives on gender-based differences between men and women via the structure of their texts. Tissot includes a short section titled, "the effects of masturbation among women" in his text, while the title of *Onania* itself advertises that it will consider the consequences of masturbation "in both Sexes." This structural division becomes thematic throughout both works: *Onania* does indeed consider both men and women throughout the entire text while *Onanism* is chiefly concerned with masturbation in the male subject who is ungendered by default. Additionally, *Onanism*'s section on the effects of masturbation in women is very short

and contains a long tangent on the care parents must take when selecting guardians for their children of either gender. Tissot's approach speaks to men by default and he only notes this distinction in his section on women where as a preface to his discussion of effects in women he notes that all of his "foregoing observations [...] seem to relate principally to the men" (41). Although he says that his work would be "imperfect" if he did not "acquaint the fair sex, that in pursuing the same career in these infamous practices, they expose themselves to the same dangers," this comment appears as an afterthought since the body of the preceding text addresses men exclusively (41). In contrast, *Onania*'s author makes a note when he is particularly addressing young men, not women. Likewise, he states that his entire text addresses "the many of both Sexes and different Ages who defile themselves this way" (43). The difference between *Onania*'s integration of concerns relating to both men and women and Tissot's strict segregation of his discussion reveals much about the authors' distinct approach to gender.

Both authors' discussions of masturbation specifically in women are truncated, Tissot's by his inclusion of a lengthy diatribe on the selection of caregivers in his short section on women and *Onania*'s by the constraints described in the following statement:

[t]he Reason why I am not more particular in describing the many Calamities and bodily Sufferings, which this Practice may be the Occasion of in Women, I hope will be obvious to every Reader, that is capable of making Reflections. It would be impossible to rake into so much Filthiness, as I should be oblig'd to do, without offending Chastity. (21)

Presumably, the author is referring to the necessity of naming bodily parts in describing the consequences of masturbation in women beyond the following: a destruction of "the retentive Faculty," the affliction of "*Fluor albus*," the ruining of the complexion, "*Hysterick Fits*," "*Consumption*," and "*Barrenness*" (21), which are all explicitly named.

Tissot also names “hysterical fits, or shocking vapours,” “incurable jaundices,” “violent cramps in the stomach and back,” “acute pains in the nose,” “*fluor albus*,” “descents and ulcerations of the matrix,” and “*furor uterinus*” (41-2). Tissot, however, additionally reveals “extension and darting of the clitoris [...] which at once deprives [women] of decency and reason, and puts them upon a level with the most lascivious brutes, till a desperate death snatches them from pain and infamy” (42) as the consequences of masturbation in women. It is possible to surmise that *Onania*’s author may be referring to this exact consequence and the necessity of using the word ‘clitoris’ to describe it when he speaks of his desire to avoid offending chastity. Quite possibly, Tissot’s use of the term stems from his self-positioning as a medical writer using accepted medical, rather than moral, discourse to justify his text (Hall and Porter 101). If *Onania*’s author is indeed referring to the word ‘clitoris’ and other terms for female genitalia when he discusses his reluctance to further describe consequences of masturbation particular to women, it is interesting to note that he shows no such restraint in discussing effects in men, using words such as “testes,” “penis,” and “erection” (19). Linking to the discussion above concerning the author’s fear of having his stated purpose subverted by providing masturbatory material to his readers, the above quoted passage indicates that it is only descriptions of female anatomy that may incite masturbation. Likewise, women’s body parts are equated with “Filthiness” (21).

The fear of descriptions of women’s body parts leading to masturbation seen in *Onania* is echoed in *Onanism*, though in a fashion that permeates that text’s entire conception of gender in relation to masturbation. While *Onania* deals with the male and female masturbator as one, in gendering masturbation and focusing on the practice in

men, *Onanism* ascribes causality to women. He thus denies them even the subject status of the masturbator. *Onanism* devotes a large section to the “Causes of danger, peculiar to masturbation” (71) and in this section, Tissot describes the consequences of masturbation as distinct from sexual activity in general. In so doing, he repeatedly links “women and wine” (34, 35, 38), a linkage which reveals his positioning of women as vice themselves. Similarly, Tissot equates the problems stemming from masturbation to the problems stemming from sexual intercourse with women, with the caveat “that masturbation [is] more pernicious than excesses with women” (72). Tissot sets out to prove this statement, detailing the eight ways in which masturbation has worse effects than sexual intercourse. In the process, Tissot writes that *Onanism* is “a horrid supplement” to women (172) because “when an evacuation follows” sex inspired by “Nature,” “we may be pretty well assured, that the body will not be thereby sensibly weakened” (73); because of “the empire, which this odious practice gains over the senses” (74); because of “the frequency of the acts themselves,” masturbation occurring far more often than coition (76); because the “frequency of erection, though imperfect, with which they are afflicted, greatly weakens [masturbators]” (80); because masturbation can take place standing upright, which will “occasion more weakness” than an act completed lying down or “extended” (81); because “perspiration” “in coition is reciprocal, and the one inspires what the other perspires,” which does not occur in masturbation (82); because the masturbator lacks the “joy” of intercourse “which the heart is sensible of, and which should be nicely distinguished from that voluptuousness solely corporeal” (82); and because of “the shocking remorse with which it must be followed, when illness has opened the criminal’s eyes to his crimes and his dangers” (84). As the above-listed causes show, Tissot goes to

great lengths (especially visible in his discussion of the act of masturbation being possible while standing upright) to show how masturbation is worse than sex, but the explanation for this is only visible when considering the role of women in both sex and male masturbation.

While some of the dangers peculiar to masturbation may appear to apply to either men or women, the assumption upon which all are based is that women are in fact the source of the danger of masturbation itself. That is, Tissot structures masturbation as an amplification of sex itself, and women in general signify sex. This formulation is first visible in Tissot's treatment of problems stemming from sex. He relates the cases of innumerable male masturbators who were "seized with a violent fever and immoderate trembling" (37) following marriage, usually during the first week or even night after marriage (39). These cases are attributed to "excesses with women," and yet the men often are afflicted "the very same night" as they commit such "excesses" (40). In this logic, sex itself is excess, intensified by masturbation, and yet by virtue of not being affected, women themselves signify that excess. That signification is gradually revealed textually: throughout the first portion of the text, Tissot makes constant reference to those who "addict" themselves to masturbation (26, 31, 39, 43, 57) but then after discussing women, he begins to refer to those who "addict themselves to women" or "are addicted to women" (83, 88). In this sense, women become equal to masturbation as either a vice themselves (as when they are equated with wine or masturbation and discussed in terms of addiction). A final example of this equation occurs when Tissot advocates that patients practicing masturbation "should avoid the sight of women" (129). As such, women are simply an outlet unaffected by sex which in men results in "an acute fever

which terminates their days; or else [afflicts them] with such dreadful disorders, as are with the utmost difficulty cured” (40). The most important ideological result of this logical matrix is that women in Tissot’s description lack agency, sexual or otherwise.

Interestingly, *Onania* ascribes agency, sexual and otherwise, to women. In this text which speaks to male and female masturbators throughout, the female masturbator is figured as equally capable of sinning by masturbating and equally responsible for her affliction. In the process of creating this picture of the knowing female masturbator, *Onania*’s author implicitly establishes women’s sexual agency. In the first example of this establishment, *Onania*’s author explains that young women

[w]ho thus defile their Bodies by being heedless, or perhaps more fill’d with impure Desires than ordinary, actually deflower themselves, and foolishly part with that valuable Badge of their Chastity and Innocence, which when once lost, is never to be retriev’d. This may be the fatal Cause whenever they marry, of endless Jealousies and Family Quarrels, and make their Husbands suspect more than they have deserv’d, wrongfully imagining, that there is but one way by which Maids may forfeit their Virginitie. (21-2)

Todd C. Parker rightly points out that the effect of this passage is such that “the masturbating woman places herself in a male position in relation to her own body, thus giving herself an effectively doubled sexual identity. By assuming her husband’s position, she ‘deflowers’ herself and usurps the husband’s prerogative” (37). In this sense, the masturbating woman has a man’s sexual agency which she enacts on her own body. What Parker does not note in his discussion of this passage’s implications for sexual difference is that it positions premarital sex committed by women as a graver action than masturbation (“make their Husbands suspect more than they have deserv’d”). Since masturbation in men is clearly worse than pre- or extramarital sex as discussed

above, this figuration operates as *Onania*'s main differentiation of masturbation between men and women. While the author's reasons for considering premarital sex to be worse than masturbation are no doubt many, it is interesting to note that this framework ascribes women not only the potential to act as men upon their own bodies, but also means that when practiced in women, masturbation is not the highest offence available to be committed.

The second instance where *Onania* ascribes sexual agency to women occurs when the author is recommending Boccacini's advice against "Whoredom" as also effective against masturbation. He reiterates that author's injunction that "those who are that way inclin'd" should "carry about with them a well-drawn Picture, of the most perfect and faultless Beauty that ever appear'd in Flesh and Blood, pencil'd over again with rotten Teeth, blear Eyes, no Nose at all" so that "whenever Desires of the Flesh stir, they would take a sober view of it, and seriously consider what they are about to do, and the consequents?" Since this advice is directed to "Transgressors [...] of either Sex" with "Inclinations to pollute themselves," this suggestion reveals that the author believes women's sexual desires can actively originate within themselves, rather than from external sources or coercion. In so doing, the author equates women with men, in sharp contrast to Tissot who figures women only in relation to men, and then as vessels of vice. Additionally, *Onania*'s author speaks of "*Impotence*" in women in contrast to "*Infertility*" (60), suggesting that women can have non-reproductive sexual roles. When these three notions of female sexual agency seen in *Onania* are examined in light of its overall integration of women, the major differences between the two texts' respective approaches

to women and gendered masturbation can be seen as indicative of the separate matrices in which they see gender itself.

While *Onanism* defers questions of gender by focusing on men and conflating women and masturbatory vice, *Onania* interestingly figures gender as socially constructed. While the author notes that, “[w]omen, for the generality, are more Bashful and reserv’d than Men,” he comments that it would be a mistake to conclude from this observation that bashfulness is an inherent trait in women. He writes that, “to imagine, that Women are naturally more modest than Men, is a Mistake; all the Difference between them, depends upon Custom and Education” (15). While not gesturing toward the variability of gender categories as do contemporary theories of socially constructed gender, this statement dampens the authors’ later comments on women’s external responsibilities. That is, if gender differences are a result of social conditioning and education, then the circumstances where women bear social responsibility can be modified. This supposition is visible in the author’s comments concerning shame. Writing that, “[w]hen a Bastard Infant is found dead” and the mother cannot prove that “she had made Provision for it,” English law “presumes the Woman to have Murther’d the Child.” From this law, the author concludes that “Legislators must have suppos’d, that some Women may have Cruelty enough to commit the most unnatural Murder of all, and at the same time want Courage to bear Shame” (14-5). The author notes that it is possible to eradicate this “preposterous Shame” (15) via social conditioning, just as masturbation can be eradicated. This supposition opens the door to the practice of modifying not just behaviour but also social norms. Using the example of children touching their eyes or noses, the author concludes that if touching one’s face without a

handkerchief was “counted abominable,” and if all children “saw every Body comply with this custom,” the practice would be eliminated (16). Likewise, the author states that, “in a Country where one Man was not to be confin’d to one Woman, and nobody was to be Married, the issue of one Woman would not be less honourable to the Father than the Issue of another, and consequently no Man could be aw’d by that Ignominy and Reproach” (71). While the author does not extend these two examples to include social mores around masturbation, it is possible to interpolate that some of the responsibility for masturbation rests with society in general; the variable social norms responsible for determining the “Ignominy and Reproach” a man feels for fathering an illegitimate child are the same as those that are responsible for teaching children which body parts they can and cannot touch.

As I have shown, *Onania*’s configuration of gender as socially constructed leads to its implicit consideration of masturbation as socially constructed and thus value-laden and variable. It is important to keep this construction in mind when considering the text’s position of women with respect to responsibility and guilt, since the text’s configuration of the female masturbator rests on a complex formulation of internal and external guilt within the private and public spheres. In both texts, the conflation of women’s internal and external responsibilities and the guilt associated with masturbation defines the role of the female citizen and her role in the maintenance of the public sphere. In both texts, the female masturbator causes self-inflicted infertility, miscarriage, and stillborn infants. Those who do reproduce find that they have “puny, ling’ring Children [...] which they are forc’d to leave at Fourteen or Fifteen Years of Age, perhaps younger, without any probability that they shall ever come to Maturity” (*Onania* 30). *Onania*’s author holds

women to be completely responsible for any reproductive shortcomings, as is visible in his description of self-inflicted guilt as one of the consequences of infertility in female masturbators. He writes that, “if ever such Women were guilty of Self-Pollution to Excess, and are Wise enough to know the Consequences of it, with what Sorrows and Anxieties must the Remembrance of it fill them, even when their Troubles are not extended beyond Temporal Affairs? [...] What Aggravations will they not heap on their Crimes, even to their own Imaginations?” (30-1). The responsibility for failing to reproduce rests squarely on the female masturbator, and this guilt is further extended in *Onanism*, where masturbation in women is posited as anti-social.

Tissot argues that women masturbators may shun marriage and heterosexual sex, giving the example of a “a female” in whom “this practice had gained so complete a dominion over her senses, that she detested the lawful means of assuaging the lust of the flesh” (43). Since women’s guilt originates with the avoidance of sex and reproduction, the authors implicitly ascribe the female masturbator responsibility for the social aspects of reproduction. As such, the female masturbator invites guilt when she deviates from her responsibility by avoiding reproduction. This avoidance and resultant guilt are seemingly internal activities, as in *Onania*’s description of the female masturbator’s internal torment (30).

Unlike men’s guilt, however, *Onania* and *Onanism* do not structure women’s guilt and responsibility as internal processes akin to suicide. While the male who has masturbated “has in a grievous manner offended God, and wronged his Soul” (36) by committing the “Murder of ones self” (7), the female masturbator prevents reproduction, and therefore her social influence is external and therefore takes place in the public

sphere. While in *Onania* the female masturbator may have the same internal sexual agency as a man, the consequences of her actions push her into the external, social sphere. *Onania* explains that this process is only possible due to one of the main causes of masturbation: secrecy. In writing on this cause, the author states that since masturbation can be conducted in secret, “[s]ome lustful Women of Sense have made all the outward Shew of Virtue and Morality that can be required; they have had Prudence enough in the midst of strong Desires, to refuse disadvantageous Matches, and yet have abandon’d themselves to this Vice, when at the same time, they would rather have died, than betray’d a Weakness to any Man living” (12). This particular example not only shows that masturbation disturbs the boundary between the external and internal spheres, but also that in the female masturbator, these worlds do not necessarily mirror each other. The result of such a conclusion is that the female masturbator’s public role as the reproducer of society stems from her internal sexual agency. Only in women does private masturbation result in public guilt.

The texts’ overall conception of gender, visible in both their textual frameworks and their discussions of gendered masturbation, provide a picture of the female masturbator as equal to the male masturbator in licentiousness and sexual agency, and yet responsible for her actions in the public sphere. The above discussion offers an assessment of how the texts create the female masturbating subject, and where they locate her in relation to the male masturbator and the social framework. Since women’s masturbatory subjectivity is the only form of being that the texts link to both the public and private sphere, it is only by considering the relationship between the female

masturbator and the social whole that it is possible to see the ways in which the texts forge a link between acceptable sexuality and acceptable citizenship.

Section four: Citizenship and corporeal imperialism

Both *Onania* and *Onanism* establish a framework for classifying forms of sexuality in terms of appropriateness. In so doing, they implicitly establish a parallel framework for classifying appropriate forms of citizenship, which is then linked to sexuality. I argue that corporeal imperialism is the inevitable result of this linkage, and I position this concept in relation to citizenship to show how *Onania* and *Onanism*'s masturbatory paradigm anticipates nineteenth-century conflation of sexual control and imperial expansion. In order to illustrate the causal relationship between appropriate sexuality, citizenship, and corporeal imperialism, I will first outline how the texts forge a link between appropriate sexuality and citizenship. This link is primarily implicit in both texts and therefore I will rely on the preceding discussion of hierarchies of knowledge and subjectivity as well as gender to show how masturbatory sexuality becomes a danger to eighteenth-century British collectivity and therefore a national concern. Secondly, I will use the texts' respective descriptions of appropriate sexuality to determine their definitions of inappropriate citizenship. Here I will focus on textual examples of inappropriate citizenship to illustrate further how the texts see masturbatory sexuality as a threat to the social framework and thus as inappropriate. Thirdly, I will define appropriate citizenship and note how both authors see posterity as the main criteria for acceptable Britishness. Finally, I will argue that because the texts see posterity as the primary determinant of appropriate citizenship, they already gesture toward future forms of sexuality and thus inscribe a permanent link between sexuality and nationality. Since,

as noted above, this linkage is the foundation for corporeal imperialism, I will argue that by linking citizenship to sexuality and emphasizing posterity and future sexual trajectories, the discourse of anti-masturbation anticipates foundational concepts of imperialism such as sovereignty, territory, and expansion. As *Onania* and *Onanism* map these concerns onto a discourse of the body, I will thus have defined and articulated a method for reading corporeal imperialism in eighteenth-century anti-masturbation texts and beyond.

In order to explain corporeal imperialism in relation to *Onania* and *Onanism*, it is first crucial to illustrate how the two texts forge a link between appropriate sexuality and appropriate citizenship. While the link is somewhat implicit in both works, and therefore requires some inference to be unearthed and examined, it is nevertheless clear that both texts construct a hierarchy of subjectivity wherein a good person is a good social person. I will first prove how the texts construct a good person as a good social person, and then show how from there, a social person becomes a citizen.

Both texts posit that the subject, good or evil, knowing or unknowing, exists in society at all times. The masturbator removes him or herself from society, and anti-sociality is both cause and consequence of the practice's ill effects. Masturbation is a "solitary debauch" (Tissot 74) caused by being "idle and alone" (*Onania* 11); those who are attempting to cure themselves of the practice "cannot too assiduously avoid laziness and solitude" (Tissot 85). Nevertheless, the masturbator's anti-social activities still take place in the social realm. According to Tissot, "conscious to how horrible he must appear to society when discovered, [the masturbator] is incessantly tortured with the idea" (85). In this sense, all people are always social people because the masturbator

removes him or herself from proper social relations, and the masturbator is always aberrant. In addition, the correlation of morality and sociability is visible in the texts' formulations of appropriate female reproductive sexuality, which the authors structure as literal social reproduction. In women, sociability in fact means reproduction, as is illustrated by the authors' anxieties about masturbation causing women to detest "the lawful means of assuaging the lust of the flesh" (Tissot 43) and its reproductive results. Reproduction, of course, stems from marriage in both texts, and marriage is posited as the ultimate expression of existing in society. Interestingly, marriage is also the site where the texts transform a social person into a citizen.

According to *Onania*, "the most palpable End of Matrimony to be traced from Holy Writ, is to prevent the Sin of Uncleaness, that is, hinder all People, in whom Carnal Desires are stirred up, from Fornication, Self-Pollution, and other Sorts of Defilements" (73). In addition to this stated purpose of marriage, however, both texts structure the sanctioned union of a man and a woman as the primary expression of sociability both with respect to performing social responsibilities for the good of a collective and also in terms of reproducing ancestral lines and projecting citizenship into future generations. As *Onania* puts it, masturbation harms the social whole and is "detrimental to the Publik" because it "hinders Marriage and puts a full stop to Procreation" (8), which is "the manner after which God has ordain'd that our Species should be continued" and so "the Consequences are the same to the Society and our Species" (10). Marriage, therefore, is "the chief Preventative [...] to preserve us from the Guilt of Impurity, as well as for the Propagation of our Species" (58). Those who masturbate, however, "are kept from Marriage by a kind of force" (qtd. in *Onania* 61).

and when they do marry, any children they may have are “a Dishonour to Humane Race” (20). Interestingly, the express prevention of reproduction is also linked to masturbation, as when the author addresses married persons who “think Children come too Fast, [and] indulge themselves in all the Pleasures of Sense, and yet would avoid the Charges they might occasion, in order to which they do what they can to hinder Conception” (82-3) and says that this is the one part of the “married State” which has an “Affinity with the Sin of *Onan*” (82). This equation of contraception with masturbation further indicates that the sin of Onan is in fact the sin of anti-sociability. Since the “Publick” good is the same thing as the “Propagation of our Species” (58), it is possible to surmise that the authors see marriage and its attendant continuation of individual and social lines as the ultimate expression of citizenship. This assessment correlates with my earlier discussion of morality as in fact referring to sociability, proving that the good person is a good social person, who is thus a good citizen.

Just as the authors’ notion of acceptable citizenship can be deduced from their discussions of anti-sociability, it is possible to determine what the texts posit as inappropriate citizenship by examining their notions of appropriate sexuality. Creating a picture of the texts’ representation of inappropriate citizenship is a necessary step in arriving at an understanding of how they figure appropriate citizenship. As I have established the ways in which appropriate sexuality becomes appropriate citizenship, it is now possible to determine how the texts define inappropriate citizenship by focusing on how they textually represent appropriate sexuality.

As has been discussed above, the texts suggest that appropriate sexuality is that which is directed toward the social whole through marriage and procreation. That is,

appropriate sexuality takes place in society rather than in solitude, and has as its goal the creation of offspring who will likewise exist in society and not bring “Scandal to their Parents” (20). Examples of appropriate sexuality in *Onania* and *Onanism* are few, perhaps due to the authors’ preoccupation with accessibility and their assumed audience of those who have “already Injur’d themselves by this Abominable Practice” (*Onania* ii). As was discussed in this essay’s section on knowledge, however, those “who may be wholly ignorant of the Sin [the author] would warn them against” are not necessarily the carriers of appropriate sexuality, although the author does “congratulate them their Innocence” (3). Non-masturbatory subjectivity is at constant risk and is complicated by the sexual knowledge available everywhere, and innocence is equated with negative ignorance. As such, the texts do not vaunt the relatively absent non-masturbator as the carrier of appropriate sexuality. Similarly, while the repentant post-masturbator is praised, this form of sexuality and citizenship is complicated by the fact that “whatever Remedies may be applied, or Physicians made use of, no Rule or Prescription, can ever be effectual in removing the Bodily Infirmities occasion’d by Self-Pollution” (65). Neither pre- nor post-masturbatory sexuality are appropriate sexuality, and even those in the ostensibly preventative state of marriage are prone to masturbation. Tissot cautions against the prescription of marriage to all current female masturbators since it “cannot destroy the vices that kept up the disorder, and adds to the evils past those which pregnancy and lying-in bring on those women of a languid disposition” (160). Appropriate sexuality is absent from both *Onania* and *Onanism*, thus seeming to suggest that according to the authors, appropriate sexuality is no sexuality at all. The very existence of both texts, however, belies this supposition, as they treat of the inevitable

consequences of human sexuality. As such, it is productive to question why the authors are unable to define appropriate sexuality.

The authors face no problems in defining the converse concept of inappropriate citizenship, and by looking at their conceptions of inappropriate forms of national belonging it is possible to deduce more about their reluctance or inability to detail appropriate sexuality. In both texts, bad forms of citizenship are primarily those caused by masturbation and that result in the frustration of heterosexual sex and reproduction. Inappropriate citizenship is that which “*destroys conjugal Affection, perverts natural Inclination, and tends to extinguish the Hopes of Posterity*” (*Onania* 10, original italics). The processes of destruction, perversion, and extinction are many, though both authors provide ample evidence of forms of “perversion of natural inclination.” Tissot details at length a pollution that he structures as a form of masturbation: “*clitorical* [pollution], the known origin of which is to be traced so far back as the time of the second Sappho” (45). According to Tissot, “[w]omen have been known to love girls with as much fondness as ever did the most passionate of men, and conceive the most poignant jealousy, when they were addressed by the male sex upon the score of love” (47). Resulting from the “supernatural size of a part which is naturally very small,” these women “who were thus imperfect, glorying, perhaps, in this kind of resemblance, seized upon the functions of virility,” the consequences of which are not “less than that of the other sorts of masturbation: the effects are equally shocking, all these paths lead to emaciation, languor, pain, and death” (46). Similar to the perversion of sexuality evinced by the women described in *Onania* who assume the power of men and deflower themselves through masturbation (21), Tissot contends that the women he describes pervert nature by

avoiding procreative sex. Men, similarly, pervert “natural inclination” when masturbation “renders them ridiculous to Women” (qtd. in *Onania* 19). In this sense, that which masturbation destroys, perverts, and extinguishes is simply procreative, heterosexual sex. Inappropriate citizenship is therefore any form of sexual subjectivity or practice which hinders the reproduction of the nation. Inappropriate citizenship is a practice, not a state of being or an identity category, since marriage and pregnancy are not barriers to masturbatory identities.

While I have defined inappropriate citizenship, appropriate sexuality remains undefined either here or in *Onania* and *Onanism*. To outline further the absence of a definition of appropriate sexuality in both texts, I will turn to a discussion of appropriate citizenship. The main criterion for appropriate citizenship is the posterity of that citizenship. Just as masturbation “*extinguish[s] the hope of posterity*” (*Onania* 10, original italics) in the individual, it eliminates hope of future generations and thus collective posterity. By standing in the way of unfettered heterosexual reproduction by either preventing it entirely or rendering its products weak and short-lived, masturbation is a threat to not just the nation’s future success, but also its strength. Tissot claims that by eliminating masturbation, he is restoring to human nature “the strength and power of our ancestors, with which we have only an historical acquaintance” (xii), thus illustrating that he sees masturbation as having dulled or eliminated that strength. *Onania*’s author provides an example of this current state of diminished power as exemplified by the declining status of the heterosexual male:

When persons of good Estates, in the Flower of their Age, find themselves bereft of their Manhood, and conscious of their Impotence, and the cursed Cause of it, are forc’d to decline the most advantageous Matches, and without the least Hopes of Posterity, remain the Contempt of others, and a

Burden to themselves; to which, perhaps, the Mortification shall be added, that the Name and Honour of an ancient Family, extinct with themselves, must be for ever buried in Oblivion, whilst the magnificent Seats and venerable Structures of their more virtuous Ancestors are inherited or pull'd down by Strangers. (29-30)

In this configuration, masturbation is the direct cause of diminished personal and familial posterity. Since Tissot connects such posterity to the nation's future trajectory, the status of the heterosexual male is here conflated with the status of the nation, meaning that appropriate citizenship and appropriate sexuality are one and the same. As such, the texts also defer the question of appropriate citizenship, since in failing to define appropriate sexuality they likewise fail to define appropriate citizenship.

Having shown how the texts link appropriate sexuality and appropriate citizenship, though they leave these concepts undefined, it is now possible to illustrate how the texts implicitly set down a framework for corporeal imperialism. I will define corporeal imperialism and outline the nineteenth-century anti-masturbation practices that I contend result from the ideological frameworks established in these eighteenth-century texts. I use the term corporeal imperialism to refer to any practice which inscribes national values onto the physical body through forced external sexual control, such as clitoridectomy, forced sterilization, and the forcible suppression of masturbation. I contend that corporeal imperialism is a transferring onto the body of the values of the expanding imperial nation, such that the body becomes a site on which national values can be actively repeated and re-articulated. In this way, the body is interpretable as a spatial territory whose existence is a testament to the colonizing entity's power, much as the fact of a colonized country functions to affirm the colonizer's power. This concept of

the body as a potential site for articulation of values draws from Michel Foucault's conception of the body as a place for constant re-articulation of power (1980).

In the context of anti-masturbation, corporeal imperialism can be seen at work in nineteenth-century British anti-masturbation campaigns, which did in fact employ extreme practical measures such as clitoridectomy (Duffy 1963, 2003) as well as generated anxiety about masturbation through "everyday forms of discipline" (Hunt 596). Stengers and Van Neck list a variety of actions taken against masturbation in children during the nineteenth century, ranging from the very popular and low-tech practice of tying children's hands to bed rails every night (12) to infibulation ("pulling the foreskin as far as possible over the glans, piercing two holes in it and, once the scarring was healed, passing an iron ring through the holes") (89) and "cauterization of the urethra" (114). In addition to these invasive practices, a number of restrictive metal garments were used along with pointed and toothed metal "urethral rings" (77). This list only touches on the vast number of highly painful techniques Stengers and Van Neck catalogue, and Hunt and Laqueur similarly offer dozens of examples of nineteenth-century anti-masturbatory violence.⁵ Stengers and Van Neck point out, however, that within the history of suffering experienced by nineteenth-century European children, "physical pain was comparatively minor when compared to the mental suffering inflicted upon them" (115). They argue that anti-masturbation campaigns were a form of terrorism wherein young people lived with constant "shame, self-hatred, and a sense of guilt" (117). Hunt likewise points out that because "masturbation was presented as the cause of the commonplace anxieties of the whole pubescent population" (586), anti-

⁵ All three texts, along with Hall and Porter's work, contain illustrations of many of these anti-masturbatory devices.

masturbation techniques amplified young people's everyday fears to grotesque proportions. According to Hunt, these techniques were linked to the national fate via social purity movements and reflected "social imperialist anxieties about the fate of the empire" (582).

Even without providing further details of nineteenth-century anti-masturbation techniques, practices, and ideological campaigns, it is already possible to see the many ways in which such a campaign can be read as a colonization of the body and mind. By forcibly preventing masturbation through external intervention while simultaneously turning everyday anxieties into masturbatory anxieties, nineteenth-century anti-masturbatory campaigns accomplished corporeal imperialism by turning the masturbator's body into an extension of the national whole. It is clear how the eighteenth-century *Onania* and *Onanism* established a necessary framework for this nineteenth-century practice: while neither text explicitly links the nation *to* the body, they both connect sexuality to citizenship, a crucial link required for any nineteenth-century imposition of the nation *onto* the body. Corporeal imperialism is thus the inevitable extension of *Onania* and *Onanism*'s framework of sexual citizenship, since it creates the ideological space for a hierarchical conception of subjectivity based on sexuality, then links acceptability to sexual practice, and finally relates citizenship to sexuality. As such, nineteenth-century forms of corporeal imperialism are not just founded on eighteenth-century anti-masturbation texts, but actually depend on them. By linking sexuality to a form of citizenship that depends on posterity, *Onania* and *Onanism* map out the ways in which the foundational concepts of imperialism can be scripted onto the body.

Conclusion

As the primary anti-masturbation texts of the eighteenth century, *Onania* and *Onanism* are responsible not only for shaping contemporaneous concepts of masturbatory subjectivity, but also for linking sexuality and citizenship in a way that both suggests and anticipates nineteenth-century forms of corporeal imperialism. This linkage emerges from their creation of hierarchies of subjectivity with respect to sexuality, knowledge, gender, and citizenship. Interestingly, the texts make this link without ever establishing even a working definition of appropriate sexuality or citizenship. Both texts define acceptability by emphasizing the unacceptable. This process has been visible in every aspect of the texts discussed in this essay: first, when I discussed knowledge and accessibility, I showed that the authors link sexual knowledge to sexual practice by suggesting that to know is to do. They make this suggestion always with reference to current masturbators, and define all individuals (including the ignorant innocent) in relation to corruption. As I noted, the authors' preoccupation with accessibility stems from the fear that current masturbators will subvert the stated purpose of their texts. Though they succeed in offloading any responsibility for such subversion onto the masturbator, the authors always express this fear in the negative. That is, the masturbator defines the non-masturbator and corruption defines innocence as the non-masturbator is structured only in relation to his or her initiation into masturbation and its attendant sexual knowledge.

In this essay's third section, I moved from a discussion of hierarchies of masturbatory subjectivity to gendered subjectivity. In so doing, I established the authors' definition of female citizenship, and showed how the texts describe it always in relation to male citizenship. By examining the texts' different approaches to gender, the main structural and rhetorical difference between the two, it becomes apparent that *Onania's* integrative approach to gender reflects its assignation of a form of sexual agency to women, since they straddle the public and private spheres with the social consequences of their private masturbatory practices. Likewise, both texts posit that the female masturbator bears a unique role with respect to responsibility and guilt, since as a female citizen she is responsible for reproducing the literal nation. Despite outlining the forms of inappropriate female citizenship, however, neither text ever defined a concept of acceptable gendered behaviour, in yet another example of the texts' rhetorical strategy.

In linking acceptable sexuality, gendered or otherwise, to citizenship, neither author adequately defines either concept. Rather, *Onania* and *Onanism* defer this notion to focus on elaborating the forms of inappropriate sexuality and citizenship that impact the social whole. They do, however, emphasize posterity as the main criterion for citizenship, thus laying the groundwork for notions of imperial trajectory while gesturing toward concepts of lineage and familial continuity. In essence, the author's linkage between sexuality and a form of perpetual citizenship is the basis from which I argue for their suggestion of corporeal imperialism.

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2:
**NATIONAL NEGOTIATION: TOWARD FEMINIST
POSTNATIONALISM IN THEORY AND PRACTICE**

Introduction

The related concepts of nation and nationalism are theoretically central to postcolonial feminism. In theorizing the nation state and its potential role in anti-colonial practice, postcolonial feminists have defined the ideologies of postcolonial nationalism, postcolonial anti-nationalism, transnationalism, postnationalism, and necessary nationalism. While vastly divergent as theoretical approaches to colonization, these ideologies share a preoccupation with the many ways in which nation is and can be articulated within frameworks of nationalism. Each ideology exists in constant conversation with the concept of nation, and all anti-colonial strategies affirm the relevance of the nation either implicitly or explicitly. As I will show, all anti-colonial ideologies can be defined according to their embrace or repudiation of nationalism, making nation the single most important and contentious concept in contemporary postcolonial feminism.

The central question of feminist nationalism is: can anti-colonial work be accomplished without recourse to the nation as a unifying metaphor? This essay moves from outlining responses to this question to asking the following question: *how* can anti-colonial work be accomplished without recourse to the nation as a unifying metaphor? The first dilemma is at the heart of feminist negotiation with nation and also represents the main impetus for continued work on theorizing forms of feminist nationalism. The question of nation as a metaphor is particularly relevant in feminist work since both feminist theory and practice rely on identifying gender as a unifying factor, either with

respect to experience, identity, or simply as a coherent category. As such, questions of unification via identity (whether race, gender, class, or nation) are “always already” central to feminist theorizing which therefore makes the central question of anti-colonial work a decidedly feminist project. Emphasising the reasons for the historical feminist repudiation of nationalism will also show how it is specifically feminist postcolonial work that challenges the nation as metaphor. I will outline the history of feminist movement away from nation and show how feminism reveals the ways in which the nation literally and metaphorically oppresses women.

I will foreground the concept of necessary nationalism as both an attempt to bridge the differences between anti-colonial nationalism and anti-nationalism and also as the precursor to feminist postnationalism, which offers a method for conceptualizing anti-colonialism without nation. By positioning feminist work on nationalism in this intellectual trajectory, I will be able to view postnationalism as not only a theory but also as the product of a history of productive engagement with the nation.

Firstly, I will outline the terms of the debate which pitched anti-colonial nationalism against feminist anti-nationalism. It is here that I will address the history of colonial nationalism in order to show why so many forms of feminist nationalism oppose the use of the nation as a unifying metaphor. The first section will outline the oppositional elements of both anti-colonial nationalism and anti-nationalism, and will regard anti-colonial nationalism as a historically specific project.

Secondly, I will discuss Ranu Samantrai’s concept of necessary nationalism as an attempt to mitigate the colonial legacy of nationalism when using national identifications for anti-colonial purposes. In this section, I will discuss Ama Ata Aidoo’s prose poem

Our Sister Killjoy: Or, Reflections from a Black-Eyed Squint as a textual example of the very debate that generated the concept of necessary nationalism. That is, Aidoo's text plays out the same theoretical debates discussed above in literary form. As Samantrai argues, this text represents a cultural mediation between anti-colonial nationalism and anti-nationalism and I will therefore use it to show how the theoretical debates discussed in the first section manifest themselves in literature. I will also discuss necessary nationalism as it parallels Gayatri Spivak's concept of strategic essentialism and make a link between the two concepts with respect to their flaws and misapplications.

Thirdly, this essay will discuss postnationalism as the product of the negotiations outlined in the first two sections. I will position postnationalism as a resolution to the conflicts between anti-colonial nationalism and anti-nationalism and argue that postnationalism's approach to the use of nation as metaphor solves the theoretical problem out of which necessary nationalism was born. In this section, I will also discuss the creation of a postnational ethic and lay the groundwork for a theory of observing postnationalism in practice, which I will conceptualize as occurring both textually and practically, though here I will focus on how to identify and read postnationalism out of a text. As an example of the reading strategy I am attempting to create in this section, I will return to Our Sister Killjoy and provide a postnational reading of this text.

Section one: Feminist nationalism in context

All forms of feminist nationalism define themselves according to how they either incorporate or disavow the concept of nation, making the debate between anti-colonial nationalism and anti-nationalism the central division between forms of contemporary postcolonial feminism. As the most contentious component of this debate, the concept of nation and its use functions to delineate the ideological space occupied by various anti-colonial ideologies and practices. While some feminist theorists use nationalism in a postcolonial context to mine its potential for unification and anti-colonial political work, others see the concept of nation itself as both a product and a project of imperialism and therefore argue that, as Anne McClintock phrases it, “all nationalisms are gendered, all are invented, and all are dangerous” (*Imperial Leather* 352). The divergence between anti-colonial nationalism and anti-nationalism depends on each ideology’s understanding of the role of nation in the oppressive components of imperialism.

I contend that the use of nation in feminist anti-colonial work is therefore a problem to be solved. Likewise, anti-colonial nationalism is a historically specific project and it will become clear throughout the course of this essay that it has failed not only as a means of organizing against colonialism but also as an intellectual exercise. In order to prove these two statements while outlining the terms of the debate that pitched anti-colonial nationalism against feminist anti-nationalism, I will first address the history of colonial nationalism. As many feminist theorists have noted, colonial concepts of the

nation and women's place in it are the basis of gendered oppression, and I will show how feminists such as Deniz Kandiyoti and Anne McClintock have identified this oppression as occurring at both the literal and metaphoric level.

In order to outline the intellectual trajectory of nation and nationalism within postcolonial feminism, I will first discuss colonial nationalism's role in oppressing women within the nation state and review current scholarship on the gendered elements of national organization. In so doing, I will illuminate the distinguishing characteristics of the nation that anti-nationalists contend are inescapable and which form the basis for anti-nationalists' move away from any form of nationalism. Secondly, I will outline anti-colonial nationalism, showing how some theorists argue that a condemnation of nationalism fails to account for the necessities of responding to current realities of neo-colonization. Here I will show how the historical realities of de-colonization have led postcolonial nationalists to believe that nationalism is the only tool with which to respond to imperial practice. I will locate anti-colonial nationalism in its specific historical context and note the ways in which oppositional, foundational nationalism has functioned to counteract specific colonial powers during times of de-colonization. Finally, I will define and describe feminist anti-nationalism, arguing that this ideology most adequately addresses the oppressive nature of the nation itself. Here I will argue that the conflation of 'nation' and 'colonization' seen in anti-nationalism is an appropriate response to the observable and historically demonstrated functions of the nation as a political concept. I will show how feminist anti-nationalists arrive at a complete condemnation of nation by arguing that the nation itself is the source of the gender-based oppression found in imperialist states.

Colonial nationalism and the nation

In order to describe the trajectory of feminist debates on the concepts of nation, the nation state, and nationalism, it is necessary to briefly outline the characteristics of colonial nationalism against which postcolonial feminism has developed a critique. Since current and past work has discussed the nature of colonial nationalism at length,⁶ I will here focus on the gendered components of nationalism that have been subject to a specifically feminist critique. These components centre primarily around the concept of the nation itself; its duality as a literal form of social organization with symbolic implications serves to practically oppress women in systematic fashions and ascribe them symbolic roles based on essentialist notions of gender.

As anti-nationalist theorists such as Anne McClintock and Sara Suleri have pointed out, the nation itself is often gendered as feminine, and women also have a particular relationship to the nation to the extent that, as Deniz Kandiyoti phrases it, “the apparent convergence between the interests of men and the definition of national priorities [suggests] that the state itself is a direct expression of men’s interests” (Kandiyoti 376). As an extension of the nation, “the state is centrally implicated in gender relations and [...] each state embodies a definable ‘gender regime’” (378) which prescribes either a symbolic or reproductive role for women. This role is contingent upon women’s status as literal reproducers of the national population, and can be seen in operation when women are defined in terms of private sphere reproduction and also when national interests are conflated with reproduction. And according to Kandiyoti, “[w]herever women continue to serve as boundary markers between different national,

⁶ See for example Eric Hobsbawm’s Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality and Benedict Anderson’s Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism.

ethnic and religious collectivities, their emergence as full-fledged citizens will be jeopardised” (382). Women’s relationship to the nation is therefore characterized by essentialism in two crucial ways: first, when the state is gendered as feminine, women are defined only in relation to reproduction. Secondly, women’s subjectivity and political agency is denied as women are forced out of the public sphere.

In the case of discourses of anti-colonial nationalism used by nations designated as such by former colonial powers (where the nation may be figured in terms of radical independence), women’s location is also structured in symbolic terms that deny women full citizenship and agency. As well, the essentialist manifestations of colonial nationalism are reified within postcolonial and oppositional nationalism when definitions of women’s passivity are conflated with tradition. As Ketu H. Katrak notes, discourses of traditional nationalism further reinforce the oppression of women while professing to redefine women’s relationship to the nation. Since “traditions tend to get glorified in order to counteract colonialist, racist attitudes” during nationalist struggles, anti-colonialism can easily, albeit surreptitiously, duplicate the literal and metaphorical subordination of women seen in colonial forms of nationalism (Katrak 168). As Kandiyoti states, this simultaneous denial of women’s agency is accompanied by a façade of inclusion, where “women are relegated to the margins of the polity even though their centrality to the nation is constantly being reaffirmed” (377). The basis for women’s alleged centrality consists of essentialist definitions of women in relation to reproduction and the private sphere.

The concept of the nation itself is the source of that “sanctioned institutionalization of gender difference” (McClintock 352) that occurs within colonial

nationalism and is therefore replicated by anti-colonial nationalisms. According to Robert Young, this foundation has become especially problematic in the twentieth century, as “the affirmation of an indigenous cultural identity against the imposed culture of the colonizer tended to involve the reinvocation of more traditional forms drawn from the very social structures against which [feminists] were struggling” (379). It is this paradox that Spivak debates in “Can the Subaltern Speak?” when she writes that, “[b]etween patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of woman disappears...into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the ‘third-world woman’ caught between tradition and modernization” (36). These problems stem from the formulation of gender and nation seen in colonial nationalism. As Mary Layoun phrases it, this “specific gendering of nationalism” depends on “the specific metaphorization of the nation and national land in the pure and virtuous body of a woman” (121). Both Timothy Brennan and Homi K. Bhabha link this process of metaphorization to narration, claiming that because nations are a myth in the “mind’s eye” (Bhabha 1), “nations are imaginary constructs that depend for their existence on an apparatus of cultural fictions” (Brennan 48). In this sense, nations are a “discursive formation” (46) that nation-states narrate over and over to forge a symbolic image of a national community (49). When women occupy marginal positions in either the national community itself or its symbolic and narrative representations, the nation is not only an expression of a state’s interest but also truly the institutionalization of oppression.

Anti-colonial nationalism

Despite the ways in which the concept of nation functions to oppress women literally and symbolically in colonial and even oppositional nationalism, some feminist

theorists contend that postcolonial nationalism can be a viable anti-colonial strategy, especially in foundational nationalisms used in decolonization processes. These theorists argue that the inclusion of postcolonial nationalism within the condemned framework of colonial nationalism is actually a product of neo-colonial thinking which serves to further other the nationalisms of formerly colonized countries. For example, Leela Ghandi notes that within Western political discourse, nationalisms are placed into hierarchies where assertions of independence and cultural nationalism on the part of postcolonial countries are seen as “bad nationalisms” (106). According to this logic, condemnations of postcolonial nationalism can be read as a “conveniently European lapse of memory” where first world nationalisms are figured as benign and developed, in sharp contrast to “Third World” “supposedly still unfolding nationalisms” (qtd. in Lazarus 69). These writers justify postcolonial nationalism by pointing out the irony inherent in any condemnation of nationalism asserted by a former colonial power, especially in light of the material differences between former colonizers and formerly colonized nations. As Ranu Samantrai puts it, “not all nationalisms are alike. [...] Given the political and economic relations between nations that are the legacy of colonialism, loyalty to a former European colony can carry very different implications than the patriotism of former colonizers” (141).

Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Ama Ata Aidoo consider the claim that all nationalisms are always oppressive to be dualist and ahistorical. These authors likewise reject the extent to which Western definitions of nationalism construct ‘Third World’ women as a monolithic and totalizing category. Ien Ang also posits that Western feminism’s rejection of nationalism constitutes a discursive colonization where Western

feminism takes the role of a nation. Many postcolonial feminists challenge the patriarchal basis of essentialist definitions of the categories 'woman' and 'Third World woman' and by extension question the basis for connections between and among women. When the oppressive foundation of nationalist identification is recognized, nation ceases to be a productive category of analysis for Western feminism, although the substitution of gender as the basis of all women's oppression results in the reduction of actual non-Western subjects into the monolithic category of 'Third World woman.' Some postcolonial feminists problematize this consequence of a theoretical move away from nationalism in their embrace of postcolonial nationalism. This ideology hinges on the supposition that forms of nationalism used for anti-colonial ends do not "necessarily comprise the oppressive forms and practices that occur when nationalism is pursued as an end in itself" (Young 172).

When feminists adopt this critical positioning of postcolonial nationalism in the face of the widely theorized implications of the use of nation in any politics, it is done only to attend to the "urgent political necessity...of forming strategic coalitions across class, race, and national boundaries" (Mohanty, "Under" 52-3). In the process of decolonization, which Franz Fanon describes as the replacement of one "species of men" with another (29), foundational or oppositional nationalisms attempt to achieve "one of the crucial missions of nationalism[:] the creation of a 'unified community' that transcends gender, sex, 'race,' ethnic, and class divisions [and] a shared real or imagined past [which] defines the present in the trajectory toward a common future" (Moallem and Boal 251). The irony of this attempt, of course, and what anti-nationalist feminists point out, is that the process of forming this unified community can be coercive and often

depends on the same foundational and racist criteria seen in colonial forms of nationalism.

Feminist anti-nationalism

Following postcolonial nationalism both temporally and in its structuration of itself as an ideological improvement, feminist anti-nationalism argues that any form of nationalism is too polluted by imperialism and nation-statism to be of use in either postcolonial feminism or anti-colonization movements. The three main criteria on which anti-nationalism is based are well represented in McClintock's contention that, "all nationalisms are gendered, all are invented, and all are dangerous [...] in the sense that they represent relations to political power and to the technologies of violence" (Imperial Leather 352). This comment reveals the way in which anti-nationalists see the very foundations of nationalism as linked to repressive state power. Likewise, anti-nationalists focus on the "invented" nature of nationalism; as Eric Hobsbawm notes, "nationalism requires too much belief in what is patently not so" (12). In addition, feminist anti-nationalism focuses on the ways in which nationalism genders citizenship at the conceptual level of nation.

While nation is "the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time" (Anderson 12), anti-nationalists point out that as a value it is wholly invented and imagined in the sense of being indemonstrable as a concept (Anderson). Similarly, Emmanuel Yewah points out that, despite being a "recent, false notion," nation has such lasting intellectual currency that individuals both die and kill for it (45). Since nation is an invented concept, anti-nationalists problematize the ascription of such totalizing, hegemonic power to a concept that is therefore variable. As Leela Ghandi phrases it, "we

need also to recognise that if nationalism permeates the expansionist politics of empire, it is equally constitutive of imperialist ideology, of the logic which compounds the crude rhetoric of *la mission civilisatrice*" (116). In addition, anti-nationalists take issue with the nation's attempt to disguise its imaginary origins and naturalize itself as an ancient and constant institution (Brennan 44) and question the ways in which "nations are imaginary constructs that depend for their existence on an apparatus of cultural fictions" (49).

Anti-nationalist critique of the ways the nation is dangerous often focus on how the nation has the capacity to both enlarge and destroy freedom, especially in Third World contexts (Davidson 52). Though the concept of colonialism was not invented by nationalism, Brennan argues that the oppression of colonies was a by-product of an Enlightenment concept of national sovereignty, since nationalism in this context "implied uneven development" with its roots in universalizing foreign conquests (58-9). As Davidson shows, in an African context of decolonization, the naturalization of nationalism meant that freedom and anti-colonial nationalism were collapsed into one (164). The danger of such a conflation, of course, was that for African anti-colonial activists, nationalism became the only means of decolonization and as I have shown, anti-colonial nationalism often replicates the same symbolic violence as colonial nationalism.

In addition to problematizing the ways in which the nation is invented and dangerous, when dealing with the gendered nature of the nation feminist anti-nationalists simply extend their critique of women's place in the colonial nation to include women's place in the postcolonial or decolonized nation. As discussed above, feminist theorists see the nation itself, and not its application, as the main source of women's symbolic and

often literal subordination and therefore argue that any national struggle, postcolonial or not, cannot adequately function as a decolonizing project without intervening into the colonization of women within the nation. In this sense, feminist forms of anti-nationalism conflate nation and colonization, since they argue that the two concepts share a mutually constitutive relationship. This conflation is the only postcolonial feminist response to colonization capable of avoiding the endless cycle of replication visible in anti-colonial nationalism which, as Fanon has explained, seeks only to replace one “species of men” with another (29) without challenging the foundation upon which those “men” are invested with national power.

Despite its ability to adequately equate nation and colonization while responding to the nation as a gendered, invented, and dangerous concept, all forms of anti-nationalism are complicated by the fact that ““anti-colonialism is one of the main forms of nationalism”” (Breuille qtd. in Young 172). That is, anti-colonialism can create its own form of “anti-colonial hegemony” (Young 172), paralleling the ways in which anti-colonial nationalism replicates the structures of the nationalism it seeks to replace. This critique of anti-nationalism also parallels Ang’s comments about feminism itself acting as a nation and also Davidson’s observations on freedom being equated with nationalism; when anti-colonialism becomes a form of nationalism itself, anti-nationalist ideologies are completely subverted. Fortunately, anti-nationalism escapes the problems faced by anti-colonialism since it does not seek to change the character of the nation, but rather to eradicate the concept itself.

As I have shown, all forms of nationalism, feminist or otherwise, can be defined according to how they incorporate or disavow the concept of nation. By reminding anti-

colonial nationalists of the dangers inherent in the nation, feminist anti-nationalism conflates nation with colonization and thus argues that any truly anti-colonial theory or practice cannot incorporate the nation while simultaneously ending the oppression women face within that imagined political and social construct. Having shown that only feminist anti-nationalism truly excises the nation from its formulation of political community, I will now turn to a discussion of how anti-nationalism reconciles the end of nationalism with the need for unity in actual political action.

Section two: Necessary nationalism and *Our Sister Killjoy*

Though anti-nationalism appears to resolve the problem of positioning nationalism in a politics of feminist anti-colonialism, it must also provide an alternate means of forming political communities in the absence of the nation as a unifying structure and metaphor. Is it possible to undertake political movement toward decolonization without the foundational unities that stem from national identification? Necessary nationalism, an ideology which bridges the space between anti-colonial nationalism and anti-nationalism, argues that such action is indeed possible when accomplished with careful, strategic recourse to the nation as a symbolic unifier. Ranu Samantrai originally formulated the concept of necessary nationalism to address the literary workings of Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy*, but this concept also represents a major resolution of the tension between the ideologies discussed above. Paralleling Gayatri Spivak's notion of strategic essentialism, necessary nationalism argues that it is possible to use nation as an organizing tool in a "provisional, historically conscious, and pragmatic" fashion (Samantrai 142). Seeking to avoid reinforcing foundational nationalism, this concept sees nation as strategy and contends not only that non-essential, non-racialist, non-reactionary nationalisms exist, but also that they can be employed in the service of anti-colonialism. This concept represents a resolution to the debates outlined in the first section of this essay, and here I will discuss it in terms of its position between the preceding concepts of anti-colonial nationalism and anti-nationalism.

Additionally, necessary nationalism is postnationalism's intellectual predecessor, and I will foreground the ways in which Samantrai's concept anticipates postnationalism's figuration of the redundant nation.

Ama Ata Aidoo's Our Sister Killjoy relies on national allegiances to further a project of African solidarity and counter European neo-colonialism and as such could be identified as an anti-colonial nationalist text. In situating the text as necessary nationalist, however, Samantrai argues that Aidoo's nationalism is able to function apart from the political weapon of colonial nationalism because it springs from a place of oppression. Following a discussion of Our Sister Killjoy itself, I will define necessary nationalism and situate this practice as a mediation between anti-nationalism and anti-colonial nationalism. In addition, I will outline the ways in which Our Sister Killjoy functions to destabilize the terms of the debate on nation discussed above. I will define necessary nationalism vis-à-vis Our Sister Killjoy, and situate Samantrai's arrival at the concept as a process of negotiation also undertaken by other critics. Also, I will show how this political ideology functions in literature to destabilize not only political nationalism but also the established lines of the feminist theoretical debate on nationalism. I will locate this move from literature to nation in a larger context of work on the connections between nation and narrative and discuss the ways in which even necessary nationalism participates in the broader project of oppositional decolonization.

Our Sister Killjoy

First published in 1977, Aidoo's prose poem tells the story of Sissie, a young Ghanaian woman who travels "into a bad dream" (1)⁷; she receives an invitation to go to Germany on a state-sponsored exchange program and is unable to believe, as do several of her fellow Africans, that "going to Europe [is] altogether more like a dress rehearsal for a journey to paradise" (9). During her time in Europe, Sissie acts as the titular killjoy, observing the excesses of Western capitalism, the people who have "the colour of the pickled pig parts that used to come from foreign places to the markets at home" (12), and ultimately challenging the bourgeois African expatriates she meets for their refusal to return home to use their degrees and professional educations in Africa. Acutely aware that the direction of her travels reverses Western colonization of Africa, Sissie is at first baffled by the state-sponsored exchange program, wondering at "[t]he care they must have taken. The effort they seemed to have made" (8) in feeding and transporting her. Upon arriving in Europe and feasting on the seemingly endless supply of foreign food she is constantly offered, however, she quickly realizes that:

Sissie and her companions were required to be there, eating, laughing, singing, sleeping and eating. Above all eating.

So
They stuffed themselves
With a certain calmness
That passeth all understanding

They felt no need to worry over who should want them to be there eating. Why should they? Even if the world is rough, it's still fine to get paid to have an orgasm...or isn't it? Of course, later on when we have become

Diplomats

⁷ Quotations from parts of the text written in prose are here included as in-text citations while passages from parts of the work written as poetry are included as block quotes.

Visiting Professors
Local experts in sensitive areas
Or
Some such hustlers,

We would have lost even this small awareness, that in the first place, an invitation was sent... (35)

Throughout the prose poem, Sissie comes to understand that this European invitation and the masses of food that accompany it are part of a sinister Western project wherein her countrymen and women are seduced by the West, where consumer goods are not only “a million times more, but also a thousand times better” (12). Sissie sees that her national compatriots become like

A dog among the masters, the
Most masterly of the
Dogs. (42)

The African expatriates she meets are all like the “Sammy” she first encountered at the German embassy in Ghana who “laughed all the time: even when there was nothing to laugh at [...] And when he was not laughing loudly, he carried a somewhat permanent look of well-being on his face, supported by a fixed smile. Sammy had obviously been to their country before and seemed to have stayed for a long time” (9). The “Sammys” Sissie meets all across Europe are ““moderate,”” and “without a doubt, the experience [of arguing with a Sammy] is like what a lover of chess or any mind-absorbing sport must feel who goes to a partner’s for a game, but discovers he has to play against the dog of the house instead of the master himself” (6). Identifying deeply with all the Africans she meets in Europe, Sissie realizes that the fact that she is being *invited* to have her mind emptied (6) and be re-made in the almost image of a European does not change the reality that a form of neo-colonization is taking place. In creating a strategy

to counteract this neo-colonization, Sissie employs a Pan-Africanism where she not only identifies with all Africans but also feels betrayed by those from any African country who remain in Europe, since they become

Our representatives and interpreters,
The low-achieving academics
In low profile positions
[who]
Have the time of their lives
Grinning at cocktail parties and around
Conference tables (57)

About these people Sissie says, “we do not complain” and

Nor do we mind
That when they come back here
Having mortgaged the country for a
Thousand and a year
To maintain themselves on our backs
With capitalist ships and fascist planes,
They
Tell
Us
How the water from their
Shit-bowls
Is better than what the villagers
Drink...

[...]

Because
There is ecstasy
In dying from the hands of a
Brother
Who
Made
It. (58-9)

Though this harsh assessment of those she calls the “been-tos” (90) would seem to be deeply ironic, it actually reflects the national sense of betrayal Sissie feels when those she thinks should rightfully be her metaphorical brothers and sisters lie to her. She

wants to “compare notes” and be in collusion with those from all parts of Africa (80), reflecting both Pan-Africanism and oppositional nationalism. Having instigated her racist understanding of nationalism (she “was made to notice differences in human colouring” [13] for the first time in a train station on her first day in Germany), Sissie’s journey to Europe both prompts and solidifies her conception of Africa as a cohesive political entity, and thus the entire text becomes a representation of her newly formed apparently oppositional Pan-Africanism.

National negotiations

It is theoretically impossible to agree with McClintock’s assessment of the nature of all nationalisms and simultaneously sanction the form of Pan-Africanism ostensibly exemplified by Our Sister Killjoy. Critics of that text therefore participate in the broad postcolonial project of re-interrogating the utility of nationalism when reading Aidoo’s neo-nationalist prose poem. The text appears to advocate “a conservative nationalism which is based on an African racial essence, and which condemns the nation-defying identifications of immigrants and diaspora dwellers” (Samantrai 141). In order to endorse its anti-colonial project, critics such as Anuradha Dingwaney Needham, Ranu Samantrai, and Kofi Owusu are therefore forced to either redefine nationalism along anti-imperialist lines without ignoring feminist problematizations of the relationship between gender and nation or else re-conceptualize the theoretical implications of the text itself.

In order to acknowledge that Aidoo’s Our Sister Killjoy does not necessarily replicate the structures of nationalism that lead to the literal and metaphoric oppression of women, some critics have articulated the nationalist tendencies of her text in terms of its resistance to imperial nationalism. By emphasizing the differences between anti-colonial

nationalism and colonial nationalism, it is possible to create a separate definition of nationalism that resists neo-colonization. Samantrai, for example, foregrounds the political context where many African countries continue to be colonized by European capitalism, and in so doing mitigates the racialist components of Our Sister Killjoy by privileging Aidoo's comment that "colonialism has not been 'post'-ed anywhere" (qtd. in Samantrai 142). In so doing, Samantrai structures Aidoo's nationalism as counter-imperialist in a continued context of colonization, which highlights the extent to which African nationalism can be a matter of economic survival.

In arriving at nation as an ideologically justifiable category for unity, Samantrai also questions gender and class as possible rationales for solidarity. She finds that gender as a foundation for cohesion must be questioned, as the group identity of 'woman' "is permeated by the different gendering of individual women through their positions in histories of race and colonialism" and women in formerly colonized countries must address the "formation of femininity not only within an indigenous patriarchy, but also within the response of that patriarchy to the colonial encounter" (146). As such, gender is not a suitable foundation around which to organize anti-colonial projects, as gender is not a substitute for the coherent experience of nationality, specifically a racialized experience of nationality. Samantrai notes that gender and race are "two processes of identity formation [which] permeate and create each other, so that gender is raced...in the structure of femininity and in the experience of the female body" (147). Similarly interrogating class as a basis for postcolonial allegiance, Samantrai finds that class does not offer a coherent linkage or foundational unity because class politics "mirror gender

politics: both categories of identification reinforce the primacy of the struggle against neo-colonialism and complicate the subjects...who must join in that struggle” (148).

Also participating in the project of redefining nationalism, Anuradha Dingwaney Needham’s aptly titled text Using the Master’s Tools argues that oppositional writing such as Aidoo’s can be examined as resistance, despite its apparent function as a politically ineffective reversal of colonial mentalities. The “moralism and self-righteousness” (23) that would prevent a reading of Aidoo’s resistance as such leads to the critical invisibility of resistance in texts that seem to work with the structures of colonial nationalism, even when countering them. Needham rearticulates the feminist debate surrounding nationalism with respect to Our Sister Killjoy by arguing that we can “invoke *strategy* for Aidoo’s use of essentialist categories, which can and must be read in the context of her anger about and desire to wrest Africa from its downward spiral into further neo-colonial dependency” (89-90). Just as Aidoo reverses Europe’s gaze, by “emphasizing *strategy*, and thus treating essentialist attributes like African, black, and female...as in fact possessing ‘heuristic’ value, we can view Aidoo’s procedures as politically progressive” (90). In effecting this definitional reversal of what Aidoo’s text accomplishes, Needham successfully redefines nationalism: in her terms, nationalism is that which functions to destabilize the colonial project. By linking Aidoo’s nationalism to specific political goals, Needham circumvents the problems that would be initiated by viewing Our Sister Killjoy as simple reversal of colonial antagonism toward the other. Needham describes Aidoo’s nationalism as functioning to destabilize the colonizer without building up the formerly colonial subject in its place. As such, both Needham’s

analysis and Aidoo's text can be described in Mohanty's terms of responsible feminism, which deconstructs and dismantles as it builds and constructs (Under Western Eyes 51).

With her definition of postcolonial nationalism (as distinct from anti-colonial nationalism), Needham seeks to simultaneously recognize the violent nature of colonial nationalism while nevertheless valuing as productive the nationalisms of neo-colonized countries. As I have argued above, however, these two positions are difficult to maintain concurrently and Needham therefore redefines the nationalism of the oppressed as distinct from the nationalism to which McClintock refers. By emphasizing the politically productive components of Our Sister Killjoy, however, Needham opens her definition up to charges of elitism: after all, if the effects of a nationalism determine its political value, then who determines whether or not its effects are desirable and therefore valuable? Despite this question, which is left unexplored in her interpretation of Aidoo's prose poem, Needham's argument represents one alternative to a wholesale condemnation of Our Sister Killjoy in the name of feminist anti-nationalism.

In contrast to Needham's reshaping of the lines of debate, Samantrai and Owusu critically reshape Aidoo's text itself in order to view it as more than a simple reversal of colonial essentialism. Arguing that Our Sister Killjoy "provides a model for a nationalism that is not essentialist or reactionary, but rather is provisional, historically conscious, and pragmatic" (142), Samantrai finds that "far from being natural or self-evident a nationalism based on the experience of being African is necessarily coalitional" (155). As well as being coalitional, such a nationalism is necessary: that is, it is a required component of any strategic response to the realities of neo-colonization that continue to impact Aidoo's protagonist despite the Western discursive 'post-ing' of

colonization. According to Samantrai, the protagonist's return to Africa after travelling into the "bad dream" of Europe (Aidoo 1) exemplifies racial solidarity, but it is "grounded on [the protagonist's] knowledge of the history of colonialism and race relations," meaning that her solidarity is therefore "capable of embracing internal differences and even conflicts, and it is permeated with lines of identification which lead outward to cross-racial, global alliances" (142). As such, Samantrai reworks Aidoo's nationalism so that it reflects the plurality which colonial nationalism suppresses.

Samantrai's reassessment of Aidoo's nationalism contends that it is "calculated and strategic" (141) and results in a strategic denial of trans-nationalism "meant to persuade the African bourgeoisie against an anti-national class alliance" (149). Aidoo explores class and gender as potential substitutes for national allegiances, but finds that only a call to Pan-African solidarity is enough to mobilize foreign-educated African men and women to return to Africa. According to Samantrai, it is this exploration that legitimizes Aidoo's nationalism: along with gender, "Aidoo extends the possibility of an international class alliance only to delineate its inadequacy as a foundational unity," meaning that Aidoo can illustrate that "poverty may be globally similar in its effects, but it has differing local causes" (148). As such, class is felt differently according to colonial histories, and is therefore not a sufficiently unifying category for Aidoo's necessary, strategic purposes. Similarly, Aidoo's protagonist must unite with African men, meaning that radical feminist emphasis on gender does not provide a basis for cohesive political action. As such, Samantrai calls for an "intelligent, creative" nationalism that is coalitional and "embraces contradictions and is aware of its own contingent and strategic nature" (155). Since the other potential foundations for allegiances, gender and class, do

not respectively challenge the continued economic realities of neo-colonialism, the nationalism Samantrai describes is therefore necessary in the most immediate sense of the word. In this sense, not only is Aidoo's nationalism a product of negotiation, but Samantrai's understanding of it also emerges from a negotiation with the ostensibly polarizing differences between anti-colonial nationalism and anti-nationalism.

Textual necessary nationalism

It is important to note that the necessary nationalism discussed above only becomes a theoretical matrix in the work of Samantrai and other critics. That is, necessary nationalism emerges from literature, and not from the more theoretical works on nationalism discussed in this essay's first section. As such, I read the necessary nationalism in Our Sister Killjoy as nationalism in practice, but the question of necessary nationalism's origins is a complicated one. To formulate a politics of necessary nationalism, Samantrai reads the concept *out of* Aidoo's text, leading to the conclusion that the national formation exists first in literature. The emergence of nation through narrative is a problematic process, however, especially in an African postcolonial context where decolonization is linked to writing the nation in literature. Within Fanon's formulation of the stages of decolonization, the first stage is the literary "reification of European culture" by the "the colonized indigenous writer/artist" who faces "the need to prove that she/he is capable of mastering these forms. Written literature is validated over oral; Western literary forms (the novel, for example) are preferred to indigenous orality; mastery of European language becomes a goal" (Richards 21). According to Fanon and Richards, in the second stage of decolonization the writer is subject to "a romantic immersion into the precolonial stage of African identity," while finally in the third stage

developing a ““revolutionary literature [. . .] a national literature”” (Fanon qtd. in Richards 22). It is this development of Anglophone-African national literature that becomes a major component of the “escape from imperialism” (Davidson 150) represented by African literacy and language as former colonial subjects re-create the national myths by which a country knows itself. As Brennan points out, the novel mimics the structure of the nation in that it allows for an image of national community (49) and is used to create, rather than reaffirm, a people (50). Aidoo’s text can be placed in this framework, and her attempt to “undermine the concept of nation” (Yewah 49) can be read as Yewah reads it, as the destabilization of the nation:

For many women writers, who, to borrow from Homi Bhabha, ‘have always been placed on the limits of [their] nations’ narratives’ (302), contesting various boundaries has often come through their way of framing what might be considered personal, individual, local issues, everyday life stories in ways that transcend the boundaries of their imagined communities. Indeed, for all those writers and critics, the nation can no longer be interpreted as Walker Connor puts it simply as ‘a social group which shares a common ideology, common institutions and customs, and a sense of homogeneity’ (333), but must be seen in its complexity as ‘a contested referent’ (Esonwanne), a ‘shifting referent’ (Cobhan), ‘imagined communities’ (Anderson), an ‘imagined construct’ (Paredes), or, indeed, a contested construct. (49)

By complicating the nation with her notion of necessary nationalism, Aidoo creates not only a shifting and contested nationalism, but also a nationalism which contests the stability of the categories on which nation is founded. The necessary, coalitional nationalism that Aidoo advocates is based on Mohanty’s concept of the “‘imagined community’ of third world oppositional struggles. ‘Imagined’ not because it is not ‘real’ but because it suggests political alliances and collaborations across divisive boundaries, and ‘community’ because in spite of internal hierarchies within third world contexts, it nevertheless suggests a significant, deep commitment to... ‘horizontal

comradeship” (Cartographies 4). This definition of imagined community also applies to Aidoo’s understanding of Pan-African solidarity, as it anticipates linkages between individuals for political, practical purposes while acknowledging gender and class divisions. In this sense, Aidoo’s contribution to an African literature actually emerges from her literature itself, and is thus both a product and a project of the nation-based decolonization in which she engages. That is, Aidoo re-imagines the nation but does so in a manner that actively questions the oppositional framework in which that re-imagining occurs. Textual necessary nationalism, then, is that which problematizes nationalism at the very level at which it occurs.

Our Sister Killjoy’s necessary nationalism operates textually to forge a link between anti-colonial nationalism and anti-nationalism. It accomplishes this goal by justifying its use of nationalism while problematizing the concept of nation. In so doing, Aidoo provides a textual example of necessary nationalism and also participates in a larger project of decolonization through literature. In this sense, the literary manifestation of nationalism seen in Aidoo’s text has recourse to the nation both textually when it uses the concept strategically, and also extra-textually as the prose poem itself exists in an Anglophone African context. True anti-nationalists who advocate the dissolution of nation as state and metaphor would no doubt take issue with this dual engagement with the nation; while necessary nationalism resolves the central tension of feminist postcolonial debate, it is still open to charges of the essentialism that always accompanies nationalism.

Section three: Postnationalism in theory and practice

As I have shown, necessary nationalism mediates between anti-colonial nationalism and anti-nationalism by scrupulously using nation as metaphor in a strategic, non-foundational, non-racialist fashion. Whether or not feminist anti-nationalists would employ necessary nationalism remains to be seen, however, as the concept does not effect a complete divorce from the gendered trope of the nation. In this sense, necessary nationalism parallels Spivak's strategic essentialism: the visible and active negotiation entailed in Samantrai's concept is the same as Spivak's former advocacy for strategic essentialism as "a *strategic* use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest" (205). Spivak echoes this sentiment in relation to nationalism, saying:

[i]f the Third World is used as a sort of mobilizing slogan for...call it non-aligned nations or whatever, I think it's fine, but that is rather different from essentialism. If you look at the conferences, etcetera, where this language is seriously used, you will see that each one of the countries has come asserting its difference...that is a strategy that changes moment to moment, and they in fact come asserting their differences as they use the mobilized unity to do some specific thing. And that's where you see strategy at work. That has nothing to do with essences. (qtd. in Samantrai 141)

As Stephen Morton points out, however, and Spivak has acknowledged in having "given up on it" (Danius and Jonsson 35), strategic essentialism is "most effective as a context-specific strategy, but it cannot provide a long-term political solution to end oppression and exploitation" (75). Spivak points out that strategic essentialism "just simply became the union ticket for essentialism" (Danius and Jonsson 35) as the

‘strategic’ half of the term was subsumed into the ‘essentialism’ of the concept.

Following the logic and history of strategic essentialism, presumably the ‘necessary’ component of necessary nationalism will likewise be dropped in a return to unmodified nationalism. Is it possible, then, for postcolonial feminists to uphold what will inevitably become nationalism when the concept of postcolonial anti-nationalism already reveals that nationalism is inherently, in Anne McClintock’s words, gendered, invented, and dangerous? These problems direct anti-nationalists away from necessary nationalism, and it is therefore crucial to seek out forms of engagement with the political state that continue to reconfigure nationalism.

Postnationalism as both a theory and practice steps into the debate to attempt to resolve some of the problems left by necessary nationalism’s continued though cautious use of the nation in articulating a politics of anti-colonization. Postnationalism is the product of this specific history of feminist intellectual negotiation and also a recent intervention into this debate. Though this positioning of postnationalism parallels anti-nationalism’s ostensible saviour status, postnationalism radically departs from anti-nationalism by completely resituating the individual’s relationship to the nation at a practical, metaphorical, and theoretical level.

I will first discuss postnationalism’s roots in transnational feminism, showing how both theories reconceptualize the role of the nation by arguing for its transcendence or redundancy. Secondly, I will address how postnationalism escapes from the anti-nationalist problem of reifying the nation through constant disavowal. I will show that as a somewhat utopian ideology, postnationalism contends that nation and nationalism are not colonial concepts to be countered (as in anti-nationalism) or transcended (as in

transnationalism), but rather are simply redundant. Making a pragmatic link between the breakdown of national borders in the service of global capital in a neo-colonial context, postnationalism extends the same fluidity and hybridity to diasporic citizens and argues that contemporary expressions of nationality need bear no relation to real or metaphoric nations. Nevertheless, some critics argue that postnationalism ignores the way in which non-nation based identifications can become national and that postnationalism too readily serves the interests of multi- or transnational corporations.

In this section, I will also provide a postnational reading of Our Sister Killjoy as an example of how postnationalism can be read into and out of literature. By returning to Our Sister Killjoy, the text used in the second section to represent necessary nationalism, I will show how postnationalism need not be read as temporally or contextually organic to a text in order to have meaningful implications. That is, I will be providing a template for retroactively identifying postnationalism even in texts that have been read as presenting other forms of nationalism.

Postnationalism in theory

Postnationalism has its roots in theories of transnational feminism which see the nation as a concept to be transcended rather than countered. Unlike postnationalism, however, transnationalism maintains links to the categories of gender, race, and class that necessary nationalism argues are insufficient as foundations for unification. Moallem, for example, says that, “transnational feminist theories and practices [...] are based on historicity, subjectivity, and the linkage between a macro- and micropolitical and relational articulation of nation, race, gender, class, and sexuality” (341).

Transnationalism creates a framework for forming identity-based alliances, and for

privileging feminism over national boundaries. Interestingly, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, who in 1991 opposed Western feminist attempts to foster an ostensibly universal sisterhood, embraces transnational feminism in her 2003 text titled Feminism Without Borders. Here Mohanty places feminist solidarity next to decolonisation and anticapitalist critique (7), arguing that “our most expansive and inclusive visions of feminism need to be attentive to borders while learning to transcend them” (2). In its attempts to transcend national boundaries, however, transnational feminism also endeavours to sidestep the problems associated with employing nationalism for anti-colonial purposes, which become politically loaded when figured as cross-border gendered alliances. That is, transnational feminism fails in its attempts to unify based on feminism rather than gender since the “feminist project” is necessarily partial due to the “incommensurability of its insistence on the primacy of gender oppression with the political foci of movements against other forms of social subordination” (Ang 204). While this point has been made, acknowledged, and debated many times since Ang’s initial critique of Western feminism’s nationalistic characteristics, it remains relevant in the face of transnational feminism which attempts to transcend rather than grapple with national boundaries.

Unlike postnationalism, transnational feminism is built around its emphasis on the need to transcend borders and boundaries. Though transnational feminists such as Mohanty create and debate non-national foundations for alliances between individuals, they paradoxically end up affirming the centrality of nation as a representational metaphor just as they argue for its retirement. Likewise, in establishing the need to avoid nationality as an identity category, anti-nationalist feminists establish the colonial

strength of nation as primary and therefore inadvertently re-inscribe the very power they attempt to deny. This problem is not unique to transnationalism but rather endemic to all forms of feminist nationalism discussed here; in establishing nation as the central and defining concept of postcolonial politics, anti-colonial nationalism, anti-nationalism, necessary nationalism, and transnational feminism all constantly affirm the nation's power. But since nationalism is the theory of colonial practice, a true anti-colonial politics must find a way to remove nation and nationalism from this central position, lest postcolonial nationalisms become imprecated in neo-colonial theoretical structures.

Postnationalism attempts to effect the extreme temporal displacement of the nation missing from other forms of anti-colonization by 'post'-ing nation. In so doing, postnationalism excises nationalism from contemporary anti-colonial politics. As such, this ideology represents a solution to the paradox seen in other postcolonial feminist ideologies where the nation's status is constantly affirmed through denial.

Postnationalism emerges from this constant re-articulation and links a "postcolonial desire for extra- or post-national solidarities" to "'hybridity' and 'diaspora'" (Ghandi 123) while transcending nation, space, and place in "the graceful withering away of all nation-States" (109). As Ghandi notes, writers such as Franz Fanon and Edward Said have always maintained that "oppositional nationalism is—or at least ought to be—a transitional and transitory moment in the decolonising project" (122) and thus a step toward a politics of postnationalism.

Though 'oppositional nationalism' traditionally refers only to a foundational, reactionary postcolonial nationalism which operates in constant repetition of colonial nationalism, this essay has shown that the term's definition extends to include all feminist

nationalisms which lock themselves into the same cycle of repetition with the category nation. As such, I contend that the forms of postcolonial feminist nationalisms discussed here are functionally identical to anti-colonial nationalism, which “restricts the colonial encounter to a tired impasse or opposition between repression, on the one hand, and retaliation, on the other” (124). In this sense, anti-nationalism, necessary nationalism, and transnational feminisms can be positioned as transitional ideologies that lead to postnationalism, much as Said and Fanon figure oppositional nationalism.

According to Ghandi, there are three conditions that lead postcolonial theory to a “discursive turn toward postnationalism” (125). These conditions are:

First, a growing body of academic work on globalisation insists that in the face of the economic and electronic homogenisation of the globe, national boundaries are redundant or—at least—no longer sustainable in the contemporary world...[The second condition] grows out of a growing critical suspicion of what we might call ‘identitarian’ politics...Finally, [there is] the pervasive postcolonial exhaustion with the mantric iteration of the embattled past. (125-8)

According to Ghandi, national boundaries are rendered intellectually unsustainable in a global context where, for example, literal and exploitive transnational projects such as dam building in marginalized communities come to represent a form of “nation building.” Such projects cross national boundaries and in so doing become the new political forces capable of “centralization of authority and control of demographics” (Piper 162). In this sense, national boundaries become irrelevant because it is not nations who wield ‘national’ power but corporations, whose operations may transcend national borders. As Karen Piper puts it, postnationalism “is merely the ideological superstructure for the economic base of multinational corporations” (151-2). It is this condition of

contemporary postcolonial thinking which, ironically, both leads to and yet also contradicts the ethics of postnationalism.

Piper's argument that postnationalism facilitates the movement of global capital ignores the ways in which globalization is determined by "racial, class, and national formations" (Mohanty, Feminism 10) that emerge not from postnationalism but from colonialism itself. That is, "capital as it functions now depends on and exacerbates racist, patriarchal, and heterosexist relations of rule" (231) that are firmly linked to the definitions of the gendered nation-state as outlined by anti-nationalists. As well, a critique of postnationalism based on the characteristics it shares with transnational capitalism ignores the national needs of corporations with respect to production, distribution, and taxation. Postnationalism as a postcolonial ethic focuses on the *redundancy* of nationality. A distinction must be made between the claim that national borders are redundant and the separate argument that national boundaries can be *transcended* in the service of capital. The difference between the two claims is also directional: the transnational argument focuses on the flexibility of corporations while solidifying as static the national boundaries they cross. In contrast, postnationalist theory recognizes the fluidity and constructed nature of nations and therefore discards national borders in favour of notions of hybridity.

According to Ashis Nandy, a postnational ethic begins by "recognising the oppressed or marginalised selves of the First and the Second world as civilisational allies in the battle against institutionalized suffering" (348). This breakdown of the "boundaries between colonial victors and colonised victims" so characteristic of postnationalism leads to "a recognition of the continuity and interface between these old

antagonists” (Ghandi 137). In such a breakdown of identification, “the inchoate form of postnational ethics urges the recognition that oppressors are themselves the victims of their own modes of oppression” (137-8). This suspension of the stability of identification urges the dissolution of boundaries between the self and the other. The objective of such a dissolution “is to facilitate a complex system of cross-identification—of ethical hybridity—connecting former political antagonists” (138). This postnational hybridity represents a direct challenge to the “devastating rhetoric of ‘us and them’ that beleaguers issues of identity formation today” and also repudiates the “iconicity” of the “uneasy selfhood...of ‘postcolonial Woman’” (Suleri 1314, 1316).

As Said and Fanon have implicitly argued, the binaries and dualisms of oppositional nationalism lead postcolonial theory to postnationalism for a resolution of the endless cycle of national mimicry. I have shown that postcolonial nationalism, postcolonial feminist anti-nationalism, necessary nationalism, and transnational feminism similarly lead to postnationalism, in that they unwittingly constitute new forms of oppositional nationalism. When postnationalism is structured in this manner, however, it becomes privileged as a temporally and intellectually inevitable evolutionary concept. This utopian vision of postnationalism ignores the ways in which contexts such as the diaspora, the state-less nation, and the non-national coalition can ironically function as nations.

The notion of diaspora, which loses its “historical and material edge within postcolonial theory” and is “generally invoked as a theoretical device for the interrogation of ethnic identity and cultural nationalism” finds its “apotheosis in the ambivalent, transitory, culturally contaminated figure of the exile, caught in a historical

limbo between home and the world (Ghandi 131-2). James Clifford ingeniously applies this figuration of the exile, or nation-less citizen, to a European context where the “colonial adventure” can be “read as a type of migration or diaspora which relied upon a massive movement of European populations” (qtd. in Ghandi 133). This description of the movement of colonizers within colonial space as diasporic supports the notion of diaspora ironically functioning as nation. That is, the contemporary phrase “citizen of the diaspora” reveals the extent to which a postnational global system of loose political organization can in fact operate as a nation. It is no coincidence, then, that the origins of the term diaspora describe “the specific traumas of human displacement” associated with Jewish settlement outside Palestine, as a nation without a state may have the exact ideological characteristics of a recognized nation. In this sense, non-national coalitions may have recourse to national politics, even in a postnational context. For example, as discussed above, Ang describes how feminism acts like a nation when it masks assimilation as multiculturalism and inscribes “difference” as “political capital” (190) by naturalizing feminism. Allegiance to diasporic space or to feminism can therefore replace national citizenship. Postnationalism must address the seemingly contradictory postcolonial desire for nation visible in such an allegiance.

While postnationalism does not currently address the incongruous postcolonial desire for nation-based identifications, as a theory it nevertheless develops a means of conceptualizing statelessness in relation to nation. In postnational terms, it is not necessary to determine which identity category (race, gender, or class) is the ‘best’ basis for forming allegiances; rather, postnationalism suggests a method for considering

hybridity between and among these categories as an end in itself. Postnationalism attempts to erase, rather than replace, nation.

Postnationalism and *Our Sister Killjoy*

According to the necessary nationalist reading of Our Sister Killjoy presented above, the components of Aidoo's oppositional Pan-Africanism that appear to be foundational forms of nationalism can be reframed as strategic when they are placed in a context of historically transitional forms of anti-colonialism. That is, while Aidoo's necessary nationalism is a part of a larger project where Anglophone African writers rewrite the nation and include new ways of being a national citizen in their texts themselves, critics such as Samantrai and Owusu recognize that some parts of a theory of necessary nationalism emerge only via outside interpretation and contextualization. This reality of criticism also extends to a postnational reading of Our Sister Killjoy. I argue, however, that it is possible to provide a postnational reading of the text not just because of the external needs of criticism, but rather because postnationalism transcends the temporal boundaries of the nation and can therefore be retroactively applied even to texts that have been read as presenting other forms of nationalism.

I read Our Sister Killjoy according to the main defining factors of postnationalism. The text exhibits a hybridity of both form and function and deals with the diaspora as the global movement of highly nationalized individuals who curiously lack allegiance to their home states. Similarly, Our Sister Killjoy discards the many identity categories associated with gender, race, and class in its attempt to counter not only colonial history but also neo-colonization. This last presentation of postnationalism is crucial to any reading of the text, since in trying out race, gender, and class as bases for

identification it parallels the exact process undertaken by transnationalism on the theoretical way toward postnationalism.

The hybridity so characteristic of postnationalism is structurally apparent in Our Sister Killjoy. Stylistically, the work is both a poem and a novel, and its mix of prose and verse incorporates elements not typical of the prose poem as a “densely compact, pronouncedly rhythmic, and highly sonorous composition which [is] written as a continuous sequence of sentences without line breaks” (Abrams 247). Rather than incorporating the lyrical elements of poetry into prose, Aidoo’s hybrid combination of the two forms alternates between prose and verse, leaving the poetic and prose portions of the text structurally intact and yet combined. The text is visually both prose and poetry, and the narrator’s voice remains constant through both styles; the poetic passages are often continuations of a thought begun in prose, and vice versa. At the structural level, the text is a true hybrid of poetry and prose as neither style is a departure from the other as in some texts where the narrative is broken by the inclusion of poetry in another voice. By straddling the lines between poetry and prose while maintaining a clear sense of both forms, Our Sister Killjoy is not just a prose poem but a hybrid novel.

The text debates another of postnationalism’s primary concerns in its preoccupation with global mobility. It is not only set in a diasporic context, but thematizes the diasporic citizen as its main trope. In critiquing the migration of people from Africa to Europe, and the neo-colonial lack of return movement to Africa, Aidoo does not criticise mobility but rather problematizes the ways in which colonial narratives are repeated in reverse in the neo-colonial diaspora. Aidoo places Sissie on an airplane at the open and close of the text, structuring Sissie’s, and thus the text’s, migration as a

return. Sissie observes that the airplane is “another human market-place” (132), but it is not the exchange of humans she opposes. Rather, Sissie and Aidoo object to the “thousands all over the western world who were brought [there] and maintained throughout by government scholarships, and who have refused, consistently, to go back home after graduation” (126) since this process is an insidious mining of Africa’s people by the West which establishes a new form of colonial dependence via scholarships. Sissie is thus aware that the diasporic world is one in which Africa’s commodities are people rather than resources, and she condemns the ways in which old colonial patterns of exploitation and dependence are replayed in this new context. In this sense, Our Sister Killjoy is deeply concerned with the diaspora since it provides the basis for the problems with which the text grapples. By insisting on equitable global movement, the text references the continued inclusion of national values in a postnational context.

Postnationalism’s concern with transcending gender, race, and class as bases for unification is also exemplified in Our Sister Killjoy. As Samantrai outlines, Aidoo disregards all of these categories as foundations for anti-colonial actions, and it is this action that Samantrai most predominantly identifies as the necessary nationalist component of the text. This same action, however, can also be read as postnationalist: transnationalism privileges categories of race, gender, and class over nation, and a constituent part of postnationalism is the movement away from such categories. As such, I argue that the rejection of race, gender, and class that Samantrai pinpoints is also a manifestation of Our Sister Killjoy’s postnationalism.

The above elements of Our Sister Killjoy gesture at the ways in which even texts which have been interpreted as containing other forms of nationalism can have postnational components which, when read together, provide a postnational ethic.

Conclusion

Anti-colonial nationalism, anti-nationalism, necessary nationalism, and transnational feminism all privilege the nation as the defining force of feminist national negotiation, and in so doing they ironically emphasize the centrality of the very concept that they seek to either disavow, defer, or transcend. By existing in constant conversation with nation, these ideologies ensure nation's continued relevance as a political and metaphorical organizing concept. In defining all forms of feminist anti-colonialism according to their embrace or repudiation of nationalism, and showing how the use of nation functions to outline the theoretical distinctions between the above ideologies, I have also participated in the implicit and often accidental project of ensuring that the nation remains of concern to contemporary feminists. That is, when discussing anti-colonial nationalism and feminist anti-nationalism, it is perhaps unfortunately necessary to foreground the nation since these ideologies consist almost entirely of their response to nation. It is possible, however, to view this foregrounding of nation as negotiation in and of itself, especially when understanding the history of feminist nationalisms as a trajectory toward the excision of the nation.

Necessary nationalism, for example, completely destabilizes the totalizing hegemony of nation's ahistorical continuous narrative. In arguing that nation can actually be employed strategically and thus provisionally, necessary nationalism points to nation's invented nature while simultaneously anticipating the end of its usefulness as an

organizing metaphor. In this sense, necessary nationalism is a functional critique of nationalism that is observable in literature. Necessary nationalism emerges only from active negotiation, redefinition, and re-contextualization of the boundaries of colonial process, and as such represents a major challenge to the imperial formulation of the nation state and its allegiances. As I have shown, however, postnationalism's displacement of the nation effects the complete divorce from nation that anti-nationalists suggest in their critique of not only anti-colonial nationalism but also necessary nationalism. By illustrating the ways in which a focus on the nation leads eventually to a 'post'-ing of the nation, I have cast earlier forms of feminist nationalisms in an anticipatory light and thus shown that nation can in fact be escaped as a determining metaphor. Postnationalism proves that anti-colonial work can be accomplished without recourse to the nation, since it offers a politics of nationlessness. Unlike the transnational feminism from which it emerged, however, postnationalism argues that nation is not just a concept to be transcended by other identity-based solidarities, but rather that nation is already redundant in a transnational, diasporic context.

Postnationalism is thus the answer to this essay's central question of how to enact a politics of anti-colonialism without engaging the oppressive components of nation, a concept that is a product and a project of imperialism. In theory and in practice, as in Our Sister Killjoy, postnationalism suggests a utopian vision for a hybrid concept of citizenship and belonging without the state.

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