

Gilroy and James: Embracing Queer Perspectives of Race

by

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## Chapter 1:

### Introduction to Non-Western Fantasy and the Radical Critique of Defamiliarization

Speculative genres have only just begun to be acknowledged and appreciated in both lay and professional spheres as pieces that do important speculative work, like granting readers an outside perspective that allows them to critique their current culture and society. Science fiction has fairly recently been acknowledged for its speculative work, and for its importance in speaking of and to marginalized peoples, i.e. the Afrofuturism movement. Fantasy works, however, are seldom seen as anything beyond escapism, and the genre as a whole (not unjustifiably) has been seen as a white man's playground, incapable of critical work and/or non-optimal for discussing or expressing the experiences of marginalized people.

The perception that fantasy is not literary, or that it is incapable of doing critical work, is a failure of literary criticism and reception rather than of the genre itself. S. C. Fredericks, frequent scholar and a defender of science fiction and fantasy, examines the history of criticism levelled against fantasy and failures of literary criticism in appreciating it in his essay, "Problems of Fantasy". He examines critic Colin Manlove's arguments against J. R. R. Tolkien's works:

Somehow, the Fantasy fiction gets lost in the concern for these "other writings" and Manlove seems blind to "literariness" . . .his worst pitfall of quarreling constantly with the "philosophy" he attributes to the author . . . Thus his 'reading of Tolkien's *Rings* is best characterized as debunking, not criticism." (34-5)

This is one pole of the spectrum of disrespect towards fantasy literature, and it is critical that is levelled towards Tolkien's works, which have otherwise been absorbed into the "literary" genre. Manlove demonstrates a common behavior, which is to assume that fantasy is little more than allegory and that allegory is, by its very nature, unliterary and uninteresting. This results in

Manlove “debunking” the argumentative essays he thinks he sees in Tolkien’s work. He does not, in other words, consider the literary merit and significance of Tolkien in context with literature as a whole; he treats Tolkien’s novels as ideas dressed up in a plot.

Western readers, writers, and theorists commonly mistakenly assume that fantasy is not concerned with the immediate present reality. This especially true for non-Western genre fiction writers, whose works are often orientalized and not given the same critical attention as Western works. Rather than calling these works fantasy alone, they deem them works of “magical realism.” Frederick considers the flaws of later critic Jane Mobley:

Mobley illustrates one recurrent failure in Fantasy-criticism: too much of the theoretical discussion has centered on myths and fairy tales and supernatural phenomenon even when these are not crucial to the actual narrative in question . . . In order to equate Fantasy with “magic fiction,” the concept of “magic” loses its original associations with religious [and cultural] phenomena like witchcraft, rituals, and sacraments and is made to obtain a new Cassirean meaning of *any* alternative “causality” system and is too general to be of value as a descriptive definition. (36)

When works classified as magical realism are not appreciated fully, it is often for the above reasons: either there is a myopic focus on the entire work as fairy tales and myths, or the work’s concepts of magic and supernatural elements are broken off from their cultural and religious associations. It is no coincidence that non-Western works are sorted into a sub-genre that erases the indigenous significance and associations. As magical realism, fantastical elements may be considered “merely” different, artifacts of a non-Western or indigenous imagination, or hold a metaphor or symbolic meaning not immediately relevant to the current world. This allows critics

to integrate the desirable parts of the works, like the literary merit, while evading the critical work these fantasy works do.

Often, but not always, labelling non-Western fantasy works as magical realism is done to distance the work that the generic conventions of non-Western works do. However, non-Western fantasy is just as substantive a critical genre, potentially even more so, due to creating space in which the constructed world operates fundamentally alien to that of potentially everyone who reads it; they also navigate said space in such a way that allows them to embody their experiences of terror and marginalization, while simultaneously critiquing the system and structures that allow for it. When works are classified as magical realism for the purpose of distancing them, it inhibits the ability of non-Western writers to convey ideas or critiques in the reception of the West (and areas of the non-West who also suffer this ideology). Criticism of this kind revives the language and misreadings of Orientalism, imagining that the other/the Orient and its artifacts are essentially different and more primitive and exotic. This misreading by Western critics also negatively affects non-Western writers, forcing them to assimilate and conform to Western forms in order to get recognized as serious writers. Even if they can work within Western limits, there is something essential lost in not appreciating non-Western forms as equally sophisticated in their social and political critiques as our own forms.

Science fiction has managed to remain significantly more respected than fantasy. Frederick focuses on the idea of credibility: “critics wish to reserve some special dimension of ‘credibility’ for SF, as distinct from the ‘incredibility of Fantasy . . . to understand worlds of SF as extensions of our own, provided that the author explores the cognitive possibilities of ideas” (41). This is one of the dividing lines for anti-Fantasy critics: they argue that science fiction is

interested in intellectual disciplines and “relevant topics” while fantasy is quite the opposite, allegedly not drawn from any intellectual disciplines or inspiration at all.

But this view of science fiction, and genre as a whole, is heavily blinkered, and more unconventional considerations of science fiction and fantasy reveal its depth. Frederic Jameson, in his essay, “Progress versus Utopia; Or, Can We Imagine the Future?” particularly targets this idea of science fiction as a cognitive exploration of ideas:

The apparent realism, or representationality, of SF has concealed another, far more complex temporal structure: not to give us ‘images’ of the future . . . [which] will naturally predecease their ‘materialization’ but rather to defamiliarize and restructure our experience of our own *present* . . . necessary [...] to ‘experience,’ for some first and real time, this ‘present’ . . . in some time-released and utterly unexpected posthumous actuality. (151)

For Jameson, science fiction, and likely fantasy, are often taken only as representations, projections, “images” of potential futures, and primarily by way of consciously working our way there. But the way science fiction works is much more complicated, especially in time. It does not give precedence to our present, and instead creates a future to which our present is the past. In doing so, science fiction is capable of making readers actually experience our present for what it really is. Our present is made to be objectified by the world created in a work, making its subject multifaceted, and defamiliarizing and disorienting readers so that they may perceive, critique, and “experience” the present or aspects of it in a world and work of science fiction. Science fiction and all speculative fiction (any fiction that deliberately does this work) defamiliarizes readers from both the familiar *and* unfamiliar, making unclear the relation, appearance, and location of the familiar to the Other.

All genres frequently defamiliarize readers from their own culture and era so that they can view the familiar as the unfamiliar, as the Other. Fantasy, however, can go much further, as it does not require any “strategies of indirection” of our present, the strategies of setting distance or identifying things unfamiliar. Rather, it presents a world that often differs in many ways but does not necessarily guide the reader in any way. Frederick argues that works of fantasy “take as *their point of departure* the deliberate violation of norms and facts we regard as essential to our conventional conception of ‘reality,’ in order to create an imagine counter-structure or counter-norm” (37). In other words, fantasy often deliberately builds its worlds so that reality has little bearing or use, even for misdirection or defamiliarization. Our present may not ever be the past or future of the created world; it might not even be relevant to the created world; and there might be no nodes with which an author may familiarize or defamiliarize the reader. In other words, fantasy presents a world that works on entirely different rules, may be unfamiliar to the reader’s world, does not connect the dots between the reader’s world and the work’s imagined world, and it is in that liminal space where the speculative action occurs. By doing so, fantasy works can critique the world and society we live in in many of the same ways as science fiction, but on deeper or polyvalent levels.

Fantasy is particularly well suited to thinking about community: why and how they are formed and sustained; what ends, ideological or otherwise, they serve (or critique); how they accommodate or refuse the Other; and how else new social organizations could be imagined. Frederick imagines two central axes within fantasy. The first is “the impossible.” This starts with the “antifact” and means that “the final fictive product—the Fantasy narrative—may be understood by the reader as an intelligible ‘world’ to be taken on its own terms” (37). This characteristic is advantageous to the fantasy genre (including magical realism), as it grants

fantasy the ability to create innumerable intersections between people, groups, communities, nations, and states. In a work of fantasy, these groups—which may or may not be, represent, or resemble real-world counterparts, all to significant results—can meet, interact, become various communities, often in ways that are not possible, or highly implausible or difficult or dangerous, in the real world.

Fantasy also has an advantage in that as its non- or anti-reality is read and comprehended by the reader, as the reader revises their “hypothesis” about the world, the reader is compelled to consider the constructed world’s characteristics and questions as the reader’s own. The other axis Frederick imagines is “the conceivable”: “in turn, this ‘impossible’ universe somehow converges creatively on readers’ understanding of the real world . . . Fantasy must be regarded as dealing with human realities and as having a reality-oriented function despite the self-conceived irreality of its hypothesis and conceptions.” A work of fantasy can present a reality and its organizations, and related questions or hypotheses, that can be inherently illogical or contradictory, and the reader will still follow the critical work as it stands against their own world. Much of this is possible because fantasy does not owe any familiarity to the reader or the reader’s world, nor to any aspects of the reader’s world. Organizations of people may or may not exist in a given fantastical world; these communities can exist and interact in ways that can’t happen in reality or even don’t make sense; and many different novel concepts can be made unclear within a particular work. And with these aspects missing or non-equivalent, these imaginary groups can come to represent any combination of counterparts in the readers’ world, embody any number of experiences, and make plausible ideas thought impossible or implausible in our world. The constructed world can be what it is, can exist, despite everything that tells the reader it cannot.



## Chapter 2: Gilroy and James, Ideology and Community

There have been many projects and much theoretical work focused on community, citizenship, and nationhood for marginalized peoples, especially black peoples, across the globe. Many black writers and critical theorists speak to similar experiences within the countries they are currently residents of. They are members of groups defined by an origin and continued history of marginalization and exploitation. This group identity, and organization into an exploitative system, also reduces their individual identities to marginalization and exploitation. While these groups may have persevered and have some level of increased agency compared to the past, they are still far from being considered citizens of their countries instead of merely bodies. And despite any and all progress they may make, towards equality in terms of agency, or forming a nation or community among marginalized groups, it is hindered by the same exploitative system and its institutions.

This structural roadblock to forming a community is of particular interest to Paul Gilroy in his various works on the subject. He finds that forming a new hybridized community and identity is the key to resisting marginalization, and that structures and ideology of the modern era are to blame for that not occurring. Community and identities have been replaced with arbitrary and/or ideological categories. The concepts of ethnicity and race are done to separate the dominant from the marginalized, to mark their experiences and mutually unintelligible, and to maintain the marginalized as units of racialized capitalism. Further, communities and identities associated with the modern and post-modern era are arbitrary and ideological constructs. Marginalized people are not full citizens, as compared to the dominant class, but by creating an ideology of country, citizenship, and belonging, marginalized people often seek to attain full citizenship instead of identifying and resisting the forces that keep them marginalized. This, in

turn, also supplants any genuine communities and identities based on culture and race, which would also reveal marginalization and common experiences of marginalization among various marginalized groups. In other words, marginalized groups do not identify the ruling class and their ideology as the source of their marginalization, and do not seek to join with other marginalized groups to resist marginalization. This perpetual cycle allows the ruling class to reign, and to do so invisibly. Only by breaking from those ideological categories and forming a community of marginalized people can any resistance to the dominant class be made.

There is an inherent myopia in Gilroy's project, however, in identifying who is actually marginalized. While he acknowledges marginalized groups and the position in society the dominant class, he does not acknowledge that different groups face qualitatively different kinds of marginalization, and that those of multiple marginalized groups face additional marginalization and often lack even the minimal level of agency or privilege single marginalized groups have developed over time. Several critical theorists, Cathy Cohen a centerpiece among them, identify ignoring the margins, those most marginalized by society, as being a source of failure in various social movements. To work towards progress, it is not enough to acknowledge marginalization in general, as doing so results in a blindness to the actual structure of oppressive ideology, and groups actually risk reifying the dominant ideology in various ways within their own community.

Marlon James, a queer author from Jamaica, discusses the same issues in many different and seemingly antithetical ways to Gilroy. Whereas Gilroy tends to utopianize community, both inherently and in his idealized hybridized community, and finds it to be a source of progress and protection, James identifies community as inherently dangerous. Throughout his works, marginalization and violence are not found in a one-to-one, top-down relationship from the

ruling class to the marginalized. Rather, marginalization is much more directionless, existing both in the ways Gilroy identifies, *and* reified by marginalized groups themselves. James's work embodies the goals set by Cohen and other critical and queer theorists, namely, to start with and keep focus on those at the periphery, those most marginalized by society—not just by the ruling class, but by other marginalized groups as well. James seeks to advance the conversation, not invalidate it. The solution, to both the central problem of being marginalized within society, and to the problems Gilroy's work exemplifies, is found within queer experience and queer community. If race and ethnicity allow for organized exploitation, and if groups are prone to falling to ideology, save for a hybridized and amorphous category, then the answer lies in queering work, to queer ideas of race and community. The new kind of community and category that Gilroy imagines as being the key and reward in fighting marginalization, in being hybridized and resisting ideology, would naturally be a queer community. A queer community does not demand a minimum membership, and in fact is unique among all other marginalized out-groups in that it does not have a common ideological identity (like ethnicity or religion). By its very nature, resists the ideological categories of the post-modern era, and by identifying and joining with the queer movement and community, other people(s) can achieve both an awareness of their status and a platform for changing it.

### **Gilroy on Hybridity and Resistance**

Paul Gilroy, author of *The Black Atlantic* (1986), examined notions and conditions of black identity and community; what prevents these intersections in our world, and much else besides. In works of fantasy, black people and other marginalized groups who share a common experience of being terrorized and exploited by could interact in imagined spaces, forming communities within them. But, as Gilroy shows, in the modern era, within the actual history of

the West, these groups are often inhibited from identifying with each other due to the structures and ideology of the ruling class.

Gilroy cites “cultural insiderism” as a major roadblock preventing both physical and cognitive connection and identification:

The essential trademark of cultural insiderism which also supplies the key to its popularity is an absolute sense of ethnic difference. This is maximised so that it distinguishes people from one another and at the same time acquires an incontestable priority over all other dimensions of their social and historical experience, cultures, and identities. Characteristically, these claims are associated with the idea of national belonging or the aspiration to nationality and other more local but equivalent forms of cultural kinship (3).

This encompasses one of the central themes of Gilroy’s book: that categories largely exist to serve ideological ends, and that one of these ends is to essentialize ethnic differences over all other kinds of difference, and subsequently, ethnic ‘belonging’ and groups over all other kinds of belonging or communities..” Gilroy refers to the creation and maintenance of categories and identification with them as a “clutch of rhetorical strategies,” and they often bolster other aspects of institutions. Some categories are often completely arbitrary, like the concept of a nation-state, which demands people’s “allegiance” yet does not grant all citizens equal citizenship. Other categories, like race and ethnicity, also function to divide people, specifically to create “immutable, ethnic differences as an absolute break in the histories and experiences of ‘black’ and ‘white’ people” (2).

This is all done to minimize community within and between marginalized groups as much as possible. Nation-states and nationalism inhibit communities of different countries from

communicating and relating to each other, in terms of a shared experience of exploitation. At another level, concepts of nationality and race and ethnicity seek to supplant actual community and traditional forms of cultural kinship. In doing so, the ruling class pacifies resistance to the exploitative systems, both in terms of political voice and political action, and sustains marginalization and their own power. Therefore, in Gilroy's conception of the world, the ruling class and ideology are the root cause for marginalization. They do this in large part by harming community and communal identification, one of the few social agencies left to a diasporic people, and the primary tool necessary for resisting exploitation and for making progress in general. The construction of rigid national and ethnic difference and arbitrary communities, and the ideological policing and enforcing of them, prevents the marginalized from joining, in solidarity or otherwise, and creating transnational, multi-ethnic coalitions or communities, or any organization that does not benefit the ruling class.

This clash between being or identifying as both American or European and black (a category created by the dominant classes in America and Europe in order to exploit them and limit their citizenship), results in and/or requires double consciousness. Gilroy gives an extensive definition:

Double consciousness was initially used to convey the special difficulties arising from black internalisation of an American identity . . . [It] emerges from the unhappy symbiosis of three modes of thinking, being and seeing. The first is racially particularistic, the second nationalistic in that it derives from the nation state in which the ex-slaves but not-yet citizens find themselves, rather than from their aspiration towards a nation state of their own. The third is diasporic or hemispheric, sometimes global and occasionally universalist. (125-126)

The marginalized are, without question, not full citizens, being denied rights or exploited, explicitly or otherwise. However, they are still partial citizens in a sense. As is the case with many exiled and diasporic peoples, black Americans experience the land and state in which they find themselves as oppressive, but it is still their home—either one they made, or one they cannot leave. Along the nationalistic axis, some black people may still have an “aspiration to nationality” (3), in that they actually strive to be full citizens, for full equality and agency within the nation-state they find themselves rather than making or finding a new one.

Beyond the fundamental definition of double consciousness, the actual experience(s) and feelings associated with it vary among writers. At one end of the spectrum lies Du Bois’s sense of double consciousness, potentially the most pessimistic and/or cynical. In *The Souls of Black Folk*, he writes, “One ever feels his twoness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals in one dark body whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (qtd. In Gilroy 126). In contrast to other writers, like Zora Neale Hurston, Du Bois characterizes black music and slave song as “sorrow songs” (91), and he even describes his “happy” experiences as a schoolteacher (which he initially positioned as counterevidence to Booker T. Washington’s denial of relationships between freedom and education) as, ultimately, “nuanced accounts of the continuing slave-like toil” (129). Many writers discussing double consciousness discuss the measure of sight it brings, and most find it to be a keener and potentially productive form of insight. Du Bois, decidedly, does not, and demonstrates a sense of the sight just as destructive as double consciousness as a whole. On the sight and awareness associated with double consciousness, Du Bois describes as “[yielding] no true self-consciousness... This sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of other, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (134).

Du Bois heavily felt a lack of identity, of a personhood (insofar as it was respected by others) and felt that both double consciousness and the particular sight it brings only heightened the effects of marginalization.

Despite Du Bois's portrayal of double-consciousness as a destructive force, a kind of antimatter to identity, Gilroy argues that Du Bois also used double consciousness to "animate a dream of global co-operation among peoples of color," citing Du Bois's pan-Africanism, his sense of unity with other people of color, and the contrast he drew with his mother's indigenous ancestors who, despite being close in both culture, race, and proximity, did not have a strong or stable connection. Gilroy also emphasizes Du Bois's interest in Bismarck as a political leader, culture hero, and more, quoting from *Dusk of Dawn*: "Bismarck was my hero. He made a nation out of a mass of bickering peoples... This foreshadowed in my mind the kind of thing that American Negroes must do, marching forward with strength and determination under trained leadership" (35). Du Bois saw in Bismarck a man who brought groups, which were seemingly irreconcilable and mutually exclusive to each other, into a single, coherent community. And his success in doing so also led to a harmony among them, and a greater sense of universalism, and a strong sense of belonging on a global level. This is what Du Bois hoped to develop out of his view pan-Africanist views, possible because of a unique sense of unity afforded by his double consciousness. However, his double consciousness, combined with his actual experiences (filtered through double consciousness), led him to disillusionment. Gilroy characterizes this as a premature end for Du Bois's imagination and had Du Bois been exposed to a different frame of thinking, of community-building, like Gilroy's own, then Du Bois would still pursue his goal of a super-community. Therefore, according to Gilroy, Du Bois's goal of super-community is both possible, and realistic.

This optimism becomes central to Gilroy's sense of double consciousness and the forming of new black nations, communities, and identities. Gilroy idealizes community in general and many specific communities as well, going so far as to imagine the community formed by the meeting and interactions of disparate groups and strangers as a kind of utopia. He locates a source or generator of identity and community not just in shared experiences of marginalization, but in the beginning of the slave trade itself, on ships and in the middle passage, within "the half-remembered micro-politics of the slave trade and its relationship to industrialization and modernization. As it were, getting on board promises a means to reconceptualize the orthodox relationship between modernity and what passes for its prehistory" (17). From the middle passage, one can find not only a new basis with which to form a community on, and the respective plural and identities that comes along with a compound community, but a way to rethink history, modernity, the relationships between them, and the seeming inevitability of post-modernity.

Having already described marginalization as a tool of the ruling class, one that exists to prevent progress within the marginalized community, it follows that the counter to the contemporary structures and systems of exploitation lies in resisting the dividing categories and their ideology. As Gilroy writes, "Against [identifying as singularly "black"] stands another, more difficult option...hybridity. From the viewpoint of ethnic absolutism, this would be a litany of pollution and impurity" (2). Just as exploitation and marginalization are sustained by the separation and compartmentalization of people into categories, the natural counter would be to resist identification with not just the provided categories, but with the nature of identification itself. Gilroy imagines that a truly radical move would be to resist these categories, as refusing to identify with these categories can allow marginalized groups to resist being reduced to them. The



means and the outcome involve coming together, interacting, becoming, and building a hybrid community, identities, and creating or locating a space which is welcoming to the groups, as a nation.

### **James and Community as Exploitation**

Marlon James, the Jamaican-born novelist and author of *The Book of Night Women* (2009), *A Brief History of Seven Killings* (2014), and *Black Leopard, Red Wolf* (2019), explores concepts and experiences of black identity, community, and belonging within his fiction. Yet both his methods and arguments run counter to, or move beyond, Gilroy's scope. Gilroy imagines exploitation and by a ruling class is the root cause of marginalization, and ideology needs and serves exploitation, creating arbitrary communities that can be manipulated and exploited while supplanting "real" community. Marginalization creates ideology, which drives communal life, especially in an exploitative system. James believes that community itself is the driver, of both ideology and marginalization. Communities exploit and/or Other not for some ideological end but for the sake and perpetuation of themselves. When identifying ideology and marginalization, it does not lie with a singular ruling class, but exists in all organizations of people, all society even. Marginalization does not require a ruling class or exploitative economic system; it requires a community, or communities, and sometimes the communication/interaction of these communities. Much of what Gilroy envisions with hope, to be the instruments against oppression, James identifies them as multi-dimensional phenomena both capable of that function, and responsible for perpetuating and creating marginalization.

*Black Leopard, Red Wolf* is the arguably the most relevant text to discuss community and nation despite, or, perhaps, because of, the fact that it seems totally incomparable to the world we inhabit and the one that Gilroy analyze. The setting of the novel resembles, to Western readers at

least, a pre-modern West African territory. The world and society seem wholly untouched by industrialization, colonization, or globalization, and there is not an overpowering influence nor a looming threat of invasion by a Western force, or the presence of the West at all. Capital, as a driving force, seems entirely absent, and, along with it, any class system recognizable as Western and capitalist, modern or postmodern.

The most glaring decision is the design to defamiliarize readers with the novel's world, both as it appears, and to the reader's beliefs and assumptions about pre-modern West African territories and cultures. It is meant to be unclear as to whether the book is the past to our world, a world in which our world is their past, or one which exists perpendicular to our own. To this end, the novel is not European in origin or motivation, but demonstrates a fluency and critique of European and modern traditions. The world and reality of the novel, for example, draw heavily from West African and Polynesian folklore and mythology, which are primarily unfamiliar to the West. However, the novel and its world are not strictly or easily categorizable as either Western or non-Western, similar to the reader and the familiar, or different from it. Stylistically, the novel uses contemporary prose, as well as script format, unbracketed dialogue, etc. Narratively, the novel follows several timelines, such as Tracker in adolescence, Tracker in the "central" storyline involving his quest, and the frame narrative with Tracker being interrogated and recounting the events of the novel to the reader. While the novel and its constructed world seem completely counter to our own, stylistically it participates in the norms of conventional fantasy/realism--the syntax is normal, the diction is contemporary, etc.—and forms familiar and central to Western culture. The novel, in its form and its constructed world, exists in a hybrid zone, between our own and something not: either unfamiliar, or more fantastical. It exists in a space which post-modernity could be surpassed and developed into; it may even resemble the

difficult-to-comprehend space of the middle voyage, itself a liminal space. The novel then exists as an example that Gilroy's imagined space can exist and allows some comprehension of this world.

Generically, and most critically, the novel mixes forms of African, Eastern Asian (specifically, *Rashomon*-style), and Western tropes. The novel does not resemble magical realism or Western fantasy singularly. Supernatural elements are distinguished from the natural or realistic at times, and are indistinguishable from the real, the normal, and the natural at others. For example, Tracker, the protagonist, has a supernatural sense of smell, allowing him to sense and track anything. The plausibility of this phenomenon in relation to reality within the world is not questioned, and most do not consider the significance of the existence of an ability. However, Tracker being able to find and travel into and out of the land of the dead (or one of) is not described as particularly unheard of, nor is Bunshi, a goddess who strangely does not seem very godly. Yet, both bring questions of reality, like the nature and permanence of death (and, in response, life and living), as well as questions about divinity, if gods are real, and whether they should be treated as superior or lesser. The status of Tracker and his ability, as well as all other supernatural existences and their non-supernatural or societal status, remain liminal, whether they are real or not, actually supernatural or just appear as such, etc. The categories of natural and supernatural take on a transient and mystifying form similar to Gilroy's notions of what the Black Atlantic would be, and in identifying, or even being identified by others, as these categories, makes the subject resistant to incorporation and exploitation within a system.

Further, because *Black Leopard, Red Wolf* embodies several traditions that would fall under the fantasy umbrella, it is able to do several different kinds of genre work. Novel concepts can be introduced in a world for a speculative function, to investigate how a world would react;

i.e., the victims of the impundulu become unstoppable zombies filled with lightning, and the world reacts by first denying it, then denying the supernatural nature, then seeking to end the problem as quickly as possible. Tracker's superhuman smell is mostly reduced in other people's minds to its potential use or exploitability. At other times, the novel or fantastical assist in the defamiliarization and construction of a world not contingent on the rules of ours: the forests are filled with living trees, which are occasionally spiteful, occasionally carnivorous. Then, at other times, fantastical or non-realistic elements are introduced to serve as primarily symbols or allegory, much like folklore and pre-modern literature: the various shape-shifting species/races are occasionally the least-trustworthy, or portrayed as such, such as Leopard acting inconsistently in his romantic relations with Tracker; the hyena pack are imagined as shrewd and wicked tricksters, and at times this is reversed, reflecting how people are naturally untrustworthy, as Kava, the third lover in Tracker's adolescence, was the one to attempt to manipulate others, and Nyka was the male lover who betrayed Tracker over to the hyena pack. By having various elements alien to readers and the familiar world exist simultaneously, yet be considered and reacted to differently, the fantastical elements cannot be placed in a single category at once. In other words, nearly everything in the world, even things not apparently novel, fantastical, or speculative, become polyvalent and demand respective analysis.

Similarly, the people are not organized according to the patterns of modernity and post-modernity. City-states exist, but they do not have the same ideological weight as post-modern nation-states. The closest are the two Kingdoms, the Northern and Southern Kingdoms, which also do not resemble kingdoms as far as the West imagines them. One is ruled by a council of elders, more important than the king. Subsequently, people's identities are not based on or limited to "citizenship" to a nation-state government, nor are there self-contained racial or ethnic

categories (beyond, that is, the tribes some people live in, and some super-, sub-, or non-humans, like the race of Ogo, or giants, and some supernatural creatures, like were-beasts).

The absence, and even eschewing, of the structures recognizable and seemingly inseparable from marginalization and exploitation allows the novel to act as an antithesis to Gilroy's work, and as a work of social analysis of its own, in several ways. First, because structures allowing for and/or necessitating marginalization and exploitation are notably absent (the categories of the nation-state that Gilroy analyzes so closely), and because marginalization still occurs throughout the novel, we can see that, contra Gilroy, James finds marginalization to not be inextricably bound to capitalist, Western, ruling class, or other forces. Nor does marginalization in the novel demonstrate a one-to-one relationship with marginalization in the real world, in causes or catalysts. Without market forces, forces of capital, or a ruling class to maintain ideology and privileged classes to follow it, Gilroy's conceptualization of the world suggests that marginalization and related ideology are negligible or would become negligible. As James shows in many ways in many instances, there are many "reasons" marginalization comes about and continues, and many relationships between marginalization and power, and marginalized groups and their oppressors.

However, effects as potent as cultural insiderism still occur among various tribes. Take, for instance, the Ku and the Gangatom, whose members demonstrate an identity with each other and not the opposing tribe. Additionally, there is no overt exploitation or marginalization of this group by more powerful groups. Yet, these groups marginalize others, without a capitalist- or ideology-based motivation. The Ku practice the tradition of abandoning (or immediately killing) twins and other irregular births, recognizable as a West African tradition. This loosely serves a religious ideology, but it does not clearly benefit other people or allow for exploitation. Another

West African tradition is the circumcision of both male and female children, and ostracization of those not ordained in the rites. This, however, does loosely serve the ideological purpose to keep the elders, those who hold the rites, in power and respected, as well as to curb resistance and abandonment by members, lest they be refused the rites and be deemed both or neither male nor female, and looked down upon because of it.

Because ideology that is located more closely to actual needs of a community--like one that chiefly relates to securing of food, shelter, and safety both social and physical--is responsible for some behaviors and not others, all without modern nation-states or capitalism, we can see that James finds communities themselves to be the cause of marginalization and violence, with no external or superior pressures. Additionally, interaction with strangers, or between distinct groups, is often a source of anxiety. When Tracker meets someone, they often try to exploit him, either for his sense of smell or for something else. At other times they mean to cause him harm, as Nyka plans to betray him from the start. (In fact, that was why they encountered each other at all.) In this regard, communities facilitate exploitation, violence, and terror, as individual members would not be able to marginalize another individual on their own, and/or without a system of privilege in place. Additionally, for communities to continue to exist, and maintain peoples' identities, they may even require violence and terror: the Ku needed to commit violence on and towards the Gangatom, and they needed it be committed on them in turn, in order to justify and convince others of the necessity of the community existing. To that end, much as Gilroy finds categories of the modern era to be arbitrary and primarily ideology, James finds communities to be not necessarily significant or novel, and potentially even essentially violent.

Along this line of reasoning, one may find any identity or community to be unnecessary and not essential; even without the ruling class and capitalism, people are separated (and actively

separate themselves) and develop insiderism and exceptionalism without being handed a directive. When this happens, there is not necessarily an independent identity, and so a community may develop or provide an identity supplanting any individual differences a person may have, which leads to participation in marginalizing activities.

James also locates double consciousness differently. Where Du Bois finds it to be a destructive force counteractive to identity, and where Gilroy finds double consciousness to be a kind of fulcrum that allows for development of a new *kind* of identity and community, James finds truth in both, and opens these seeming warring notions up to greater complexity. Very obviously, double consciousness is shown to be destructive and harmful in the novel, as not belonging creates emotional and psychological danger and damage, as well as opening one up to exploitation and reduction. Tracker, void of family, a clan, a residence, or allegiance to a city-state, is essentially reduced to his use by others: his exploitability, his labor, and his non-human function, i.e., tracking. Additionally, in not being a member of a group, he is targeted: the hyena pack targets him, and Nyka successfully takes advantage of him because he has no community or sense of safety that comes with a community, leading him to look to Nyka for protection.

However, double consciousness is also productive, even for Tracker, as he is constantly aware of how others view him, how they attempt to reduce him or make him a subject of some ideology. In addition to his untouchable status and patchwork origins, he demonstrates that he cannot be interpolated as a subject; it is not even clear what to target. Additionally, in naming himself Tracker, by the name of his labor and exploitation (and crime by the common people), he calls out the systems/structures of exploitation, and brings them into a public space. James, in other words, is at least partially in agreement with Gilroy: he also believes that awareness and discussion or expression of experiences and against exploitation does actively work as resistance.

Pointing out how James differs from Gilroy is not meant to suggest that Gilroy's work is empty of value. Thinking about community and ideology is not a zero-sum game. Nor do I mean to argue that James offers advice to Gilroy, in a different a solution or a different form of thinking. Rather, the trajectory of the novel advances the conversation, increasing its depth through dialectic. Put simply, James shows a different relationship between ideology and community, and he imagines different ways that double consciousness can be experienced.

Outside of all that, though, the novel brings the conversation to bear on areas that have historically been overlooked, both by society and by social movements. This includes non-Western cultures and nations, and the assumptions that they are inferior to or a past version of the current West, as well as the margins of the margins, those of multiple, intersecting identities, and the most vulnerable and least privileged, even among marginalized groups.



### Chapter 3: Critical Race Theory, Sexuality, and Gender

#### Gilroy's Blind Spots

The history of critical race theory and its theorists has often neglected or not given proper attention to heteronormativity, patriarchy, toxic masculinity, and other forces and ideologies that may not seem to affect the main population or the general issues of black community and nation. This position—namely, that ideologies of gender and sexuality are inconsequential to issues of race—is incredibly flawed for two deeply interconnected reasons: first, those in the margins, the marginalized among the marginalized, cannot be ignored or left at the margins if progress is to be made for any community; and second, in many cases, forces that marginalize the marginalized like queer folk, affect the broader community as well, even if invisibly.

Cathy Cohen, author of “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens,” critiques social movements, and even queer movements, for similar failures to address the underlying bedrock ideology. She argues that radical movements require a left framework of politics that “brings into focus the systematic relationship among forms of domination, where the creation and maintenance of exploited, subservient, marginalized classes is a necessary part of...the economic configuration” (442). This political claim seems to align with Gilroy’s critiques of power, citing the maintenance of arbitrary groups to sustain racialized capitalism. What is missing in Gilroy’s work is the plurality of classes that are exploited.

As Cohen argues, many of these movements and theorists fall short of their goal in addressing domination, particularly because of they ignore those at the margins and those with intersections/intersecting identities: “While left theorists tend to provide a more structural analysis of exploitation, many...have also been homophobic and heterosexist in their approach to or avoidance of the topics of sexuality and heteronormativity” (Cohen 443). In pursuit of

building a nation, or in critiquing what threatens their people, these left theorists succumb to the same or similar ideologies that lie further within people's unconscious and reifies racialized exploitation. Gilroy, as a continuation (and, in some ways, a culmination) of the conversation with a historicist focus, also suffers from this. He downplays, justifies, or validates the ideology and prejudice of other writers, insofar as he ignores issues of intersectionality and how they relate to marginalization and underlying ideology. Martin Delaney, a proto-nationalist of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, felt that securing a part of Africa for black people of the west "would go far towards impressing them [the indigenous people] with some of the habits of civilized life" (qtd. in Gilroy 25). Delaney often conceptualized a black nation as a "fatherland" and never a motherland, and Gilroy notes that he was "probably the first black thinker to make the argument that the integrity of the race is primarily of its male heads of household and secondarily the integrity of the families over which they preside." Gilroy considers Delaney's work, which he even calls that of the "supreme patriarch," as seeking a "variety of power for the black man in the white world." He quotes Delaney's claim that "our females must be qualified, because they are to be the mothers of our children," and he identifies that Delaney is arguing that "women were to be educated but only for motherhood." While Gilroy addresses it, it is only to distinguish it from his work. Yet, he does not invalidate it, nor does he elaborate on how his project works differently or does not rely upon the same discriminatory underpinnings

Later, when citing Ralph Ellison's analysis of the connection of violence to black culturally-specific nurturing practices, Gilroy argues that "it is cited here neither to excuse Wright's sexist attitude to women nor to legitimate the abusive patterns of nurturing to which black families—like families in general—regularly give rise" (175). And that is all he has to say about an endemic problem of marginalization within the black community *by* the black

community. In short, Gilroy and others do not acknowledge the recurring marginalization of women within black communities, and heteronormativity and heterosexism so ubiquitous in black nation-building yet so overlooked.

Gilroy, like others before him, focuses primarily on connections and the joining of communities—coming together into a new community, or a new kind of community. This is part of what makes his view flawed. Cohen argues that “strategies built upon the possibility of incorporation and assimilation are exposed as simply expanding and making accessible the status quo for more privileged members of marginalized groups, while the most vulnerable in our communities continue to be stigmatized and oppressed” (443). The method and/or technique of incorporation and assimilation both fails to address and resist domination and dominating forces and reifies the status quo and marginalization in different forms or different areas. Following the trajectory Gilroy envisions, communities would come together, form a new kind of community, and either be able to resist forms of marginalization, or be afforded some protection to it. This also means that the *privileged* of the communities get to join, and to join the new nation, and the marginalized among the marginalized get left behind, or are marginalized again.

Gilroy also argues that the act of identifying and affiliating with this new species of community-nation, one that runs counter to structures of exploitation, therefore acts as the “counterculture to modernity” itself. This is wrong on several notions: changing form and identity does not magically solve underlying problems; and in changing form, the bedrock ideology is often made central to the new social organization anyway. M. Jacqui Alexander, a queer theorist native to Trinidad and Tobago, tackles this issue in her essay, “Not Just (Any)Body Can Be A Citizen: The Politics of Law, Sexuality and Postcoloniality in Trinidad and Tobago and the Bahamas.” She charts the trajectory of power from the colonial era to the

postcolonial condition these states now find themselves in: “Colonial rule simultaneously involved racializing and sexualizing the population...Elizabethan statutes of rape operated to legitimize violent colonial masculinity...yet criminalized black masculinity for rape” (11-12). This further delineates the ideology that racializes and lessens marginalized groups, identifying the problems of black sexuality—problems that have yet to be addressed.

These dehumanizing beliefs became entrenched in the psyches of indigenous people: “Respectability emerged in alliance with sexuality and helped to shape middle-class beliefs about the body, sexual (mis)conduct, normality and abnormality, about virility and manly bearing” (12). In this far more pragmatic lens, Alexander shows how indigenous attitudes were destroyed, or became otherwise unrecoverable. Despite being aware or developing awareness and agency, the ideology that subjugates people is their own ideology. Continuing chronologically, the elites of the middle class, the ruling class during and immediately after the pulling out of colonial powers from their states, established the nationalist parties and the later state apparatus. And they did so while also cementing their own power by rooting it in the same notions of “respectability” (13). The nationalist parties that then came to power, and the nation-state that came into being, also now held these ideologies and used them.

Returning to the central theme of her paper, these post-modern, postcolonial states solidify and validate their ruling ideology and power in a post-modern way: through policies, legislation, and separation of citizens from criminals, people from bodies. Alexander focuses on the laws passed in the 1980’s in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, the “Sexual Offences Act.” This law, and similar laws passed in many postcolonial states, performs several psycho-social functions. Overall, they seek to “fix conjugal heterosexuality”: to make the normative, specifically the heteronormative, align both morally and legally with the country, and to expel

the aspects of it which harm the ability for heteronormativity to hold the position of superiority (9). Such laws and such ideologies seek to “collapse identities onto sexual bodies.” This both immediately “serves to reinforce a fiction about promiscuity: that sex is all of what we do and consequently the slippage [from heteronormativity] is all of who we are.” This reduction of non-heteronormative sex and those having non-normative sex, with the already-formed prejudice as lesbian and gay sex as “perverted” and “unnatural,” also are required to the formation of the heterosexual as “natural” and non-perverted. Along this line, heterosexual sex “assumes the power of natural law only in relation to sex which is defined in negation to it (what natural sexual intercourse is not)” (10).

In the same motion, the laws “systematically conflate violent *heterosexual* domination, such as rape and incest, with same-sex relations, thereby establishing a continuum of criminality among same *sex* rape, domestic violence, adultery, fornication, and dishonesty.” This is all pertinent to the conversation of a black nation: in order to assert the “right” for the postcolonial nation-state to exist and to be respected by others, including Western powers (especially its former colonizers), postcolonial black states have reified and/or worked into the same exploitative notions of respectability. With black nation-building often relying on heteronormativity—men being the holders and face of the nation; women being subservient to men of various stages—we see the perpetuation of heterosexist violence and the marginalization and terrorizing of non-heteronormative sex and those who practice it. Therefore, these movements and ideologies ultimately fail in addressing the ideology that exploits the black nation and leads the black nation to exploit others.

**Between the Middle Voyage and the Black Atlantic: What is Missing**

All this is not to say that Gilroy's project is also flawed and produces or will produce another system of marginalization. Gilroy's movement has the necessary skeleton to accomplish his goals: his movement away from the categories created by ideology and which sustain it, the unification or connection of marginalized communities, the location of the new nation-community in a transient space, and a space notable for its exploitation of people and creation of exploitative groups by the classes and forces responsible. Gilroy's work simply does not go far enough, nor does it begin with the right people. The mistake of overlooking bedrock ideology and the margins of society, and the solution to this problem, are both clarified in exploration of what is essentially queer.

The groups overlooked and/or forgotten by various social movements—the contemporary queer movement (especially in the West) included—are those at the margins who are members of multiple marginalized groups, resulting in them having several communal and individual identities as well as a more sources of marginalization. Cohen identifies those at the margins as having multiple and intersecting identities, and therefore suffering compounded marginalization as members of several targeted groups. Much like James, Cohen finds among the marginalized of the marginalized a polyvalent/ambivalent double consciousness and second sight. She acknowledges that “queers who...assume a material independence [may] disregard historically or culturally recognized categories and communities or...move fluidly among them without every establishing permanent relationships or identities within them” (450). This aligns with Gilroy's sense of double consciousness, in which those people forced out of spaces and lands and left to a liminal space can maneuver outside or independent of the current categories designed to keep them there. In her efforts to advance the social movement, Cohen reframes the requirements of creating, joining, and maintaining a community it is not, or not primarily, the marginalization

that allows for a sense of common experience or community, but queer politics and queer ‘identities.’

Being queer or having a queer identity is not an entirely productive construct, either. Although she firmly plants her discussion of the queer movement and identities within contemporary queer politics and its own successes and failures, Cohen’s construction strongly resembles Du Bois’s sense of the destructive nature of double consciousness. Specifically, like Du Bois, she finds that double consciousness reveals the constrained and threatened condition of marginalized communities and the people within them:

I and many other lesbian and gay people of color, as well as poor and working class...do not have such material independence. Because of my multiple identities, which locate me and other ‘queer’ people of color at the margins...my material advancement, my physical protection and my emotional well-being are constantly threatened. (450)

In direct contrast to Gilroy’s perspective of opportunity—that double consciousness and the particular feeling of being an outsider is productive towards creating a new community—her sense of what being queer is actually like for many people is, akin to Du Bois, framed in the negative, and through the second sight as being the gaze of the dominant. Cohen writes that these multiple identities locate her and other people at the margins, which means that these ‘identities’ are not the utopian building blocks that Gilroy envisions but another kind of objectification and dehumanization—being reduced to a not-yet-citizen by the dominant class. The critical difference is that queer people, because they belong to multiple marginalized groups, are located at the margins of the marginalized groups as well. Due to a lack of material independence and mobility, queer people have less ability to disregard the arbitrary categories which characterize post-modernity or move fluidly, facing threats to their physical and emotional well-being, as well

as their ‘advancement’ within the system. In other words, marginalized identities, when they are multiplied, compound the effects of marginalization.

The post-modern categories—the arbitrary categories conflated with identity and serving only ideological purposes—are also a different force within a queer double consciousness. According to Gilroy, these categories are responsible for separating people(s) and preventing solidarity while supplanting indigenous or cultural communities with arbitrary, exploitative ones. However, Cohen finds these same categories, especially race and ethnicity, as being “stable,” “named,” and “structured by shared resistance to oppression.” In contrast to Gilroy’s sense of these categories as constituting part of the problem of marginalization and standing in the way of progress, Cohen sees benefits to these categories existing, at least in the interim. The fact that the categories still exist is less important than the fact that the categorized *people* still exist, and that they actively work to resist oppression and reclaim their identities and communities. This, in turn, demonstrates that people can continue to survive and that progress can be made; Cohen finds “relative degrees of safety and security” in the communities that have formed out of and in resistance to the categories that reduced them to exploitable units of capitalism. that exist under or with the same name as the categories used to reduce them to units of capitalism. This feeling of sense and safety brought by these communities allows for any kind of community to form among marginalized groups, and this makes the *response* to these arbitrary categories an unspoken first base for Gilroy’s trajectory.

These named and stable communities are still less accessible to (queer) people of fluid, outer-systematic, or non-classifiable identities or communities. They have less inclusion and belonging within these marginalized groups, which limits their sense of safety and security, both



physically and psychosocially, and withholds from them any semblance of agency afforded to the marginalized group.

This, however, only accounts for the oppression by the ruling class, and not by marginalized groups and people in general. The linear relationship that Gilroy sketches, of the ruling class oppressing the marginalized by instrumentally organizing society's institutions, is myopic and fails to account for the conditions of 'merely' intersecting identities (i.e. black, female, working class, feminists) and/or any queer peoples. In a one-to-one relationship, would not all members of exploited groups be marginalized equally, regardless of the number of groups they belong to? That is not the reality, however, as those of multiple and intersecting identities face marginalization from several directions, including the ruling class, but also other marginalized communities, and privileged members of their own marginalized groups. The communities formed out of and/or in resistance to the marginalization and categories do provides an initial sense of safety, but without addressing the bedrock, normative ideology, these communities become a particular vector for oppression. Considering that the problem—the inhibited awareness and discussion of the systems of oppression—seems to exist in separating communities into groups and the solution seems to exist in forging unity, would that not also require the dissolution of or evolution beyond most categories, including race, sex, gender, sexual orientation, and so on? Then the space and kind of community and identity Gilroy seeks *must* be queer in nature—denying, existing outside, or moving fluidly among many of these categories. And if so, then Gilroy's processes of race must be [queered].

#### Chapter 4: How did we get “Queer?”

Queer movements have developed, and fallen short, as a solution to other social movements not targeting the normative ideology that is the source of marginalization while reifying ideology and ideological boundaries. For example, feminist movements may position the male part of society as opposing females and equality, rather than the ideology which elevates men over women. Cohen refers back to Michael Warner and his volume *Fear of a Queer Planet* in order to discuss why the quintessential movement is a/the queer movement: “‘queer’ represents...an aggressive impulse of generalization; it rejects a minoritizing logic of toleration or simple political interest-representation in favor of a more thorough resistance of regimes of the normal” (16). “Queer” as an umbrella concept encapsulates the new phenomenon Gilroy wants to create (even if he doesn’t use this term himself), one that rejects the minoritizing and anti-solidarity categories while widening categories or providing a basis to which many communities and identities can belong. Queer gives a name to Gilroy’s unnamable phenomenon: if the Black Atlantic and the Middle Voyage are the liminal spaces, then “queer” refers to the people within them.

Queer also rejects the “minoritizing logic of toleration [and] simple political interest-representation.” This is aimed at ‘go slow’ movements, like Booker T. Washington-style methods of making sacrifices and participating in the system to gain some measure of agency. It also draws attention to the weaknesses of civil rights strategies and frameworks, under which successes are trivial at best and harmful at worst. Cohen cites Urvashi Vaid about the limits of civil rights strategies:

Civil rights strategies do not change the social order in dramatic ways; they change only the privileges of the group asserting those rights. Civil rights strategies do not challenge

the moral and antisexual underpinnings of homophobia [and racism] because [they do not] originate in our lack of full civil equality. (qtd in Cohen 442-3)

Unlike Gilroy's method of identifying with a counter-culture to modernity itself, pursuing civil rights strategies to gain equality risks only further entrenching the apparent legitimacy of nation-state governments and the ideology of citizenship by locating the source and cause of the inequality in an (impermanent) error in legislation and law, rather than within the exploitative motivation behind marginalization itself. In particular, the normative ideologies remain hidden or overlooked by social movements because these movements fail to recognize the interrelated oppression of marginalized groups towards the ruling class, and the interrelated power struggles between and within marginalized groups.

If Cohen and Warner discuss queerness and the trajectory of the queer movement in political and theoretical terms of the present, Marlon James, in all of his fiction but especially in *Black Leopard, Red Wolf*, shows the stakes of such issues in literary form. James's worlds are queer in nature as they locate marginalization as existing in various patterns and/or without any patterns. Despite there being no uniform and often mutually-intelligible normative ideologies and categories within the world of *Black Leopard, Red Wolf*, marginalization still occurs, and does so among, within, and because of communities, rather than as solely exploitative forces of the ruling class. This, much like many of the other absences and omissions of institutions in James's worlds, is done to position the normative nature of the world as both its subject and its converse. Warner argues that "the insistence on 'queer'—a term defined against 'normal' and generated precisely in the context of terror—has the effect of pointing out a wide field of normalization, rather than simple intolerance, as the site of violence" (16). This is precisely what James does with his works (and what Gilroy fails to do with his). The world of *Black Leopard, Red Wolf* is

seemingly missing an exploitative capitalist system so that it can position itself against both capitalist and anti-capitalist ideologies: society and people are still evolving without the invisible hand of the free market, yet people are still shut out from groups and groups from each other. What James critiques is not modernity, or capitalism, or the nation-state; what he critiques is the process of normalization itself.

In this position, the novel can also more readily address the issues of normalization and terror, again taking them as both its subject and its converse. Even without patriarchal heteronormativity present everywhere, binaries divide groups (male and female or normative to non-normative), and, despite the fact that what categories do exist are transient at best, these differences still are used as instruments of terror: Tracker is targeted because of his third-gender/GNC and homo-romantic preferences, and he is terrorized both verbally and physically by various individuals and communities. At one level, this is done to position the reader, interpellated by heteronormative ideology, against the normative ideology that exists as the bedrock of normative society independently from particular structures of any era. At another level, it also introduces the reader to opposition to this ideology, both passive and active, and a livable alternative to this ideology, i.e. ways of identifying and living outside of and/or in disregard to the normative categories. In other words, the reader is both presented with an alternative to marginalizing structures and participation in a conversation about it, ideally carrying on the amorphous qualities of the novel and its queerness and queering their own worldviews.

### **Queering Race**

Queerness, then, acts as both a nexus and intersection for disparate experiences in marginalized groups, both within groups and between them. While many social movements and

critical theories suffer due to overlooking or not accommodating those of the margins, James takes a “both-and” approach, ameliorating the various projects by forming a queer coalition movement. In contrast to identity politics and Western left frameworks, queer theory does not rely on and in fact moves beyond the enumeration of multiple identities or groups a single individual may belong to. *Black Leopard, Red Wolf*'s tactical world- and society-building allows it to act as this particular synthesis, focalizing around a handful of queer experiences as lenses: 1) groups and communities that do not exist at the margins, regardless of whether they are marginalized groups themselves, are dependent upon othering those less privileged, and rely upon committing marginalization and terror; 2) genuine communities are chosen families, and are often out-groups formed by those exiled from a dominant class; and 3) queer experiences, identities, community, are unique from other marginalized groups in that they are intrinsically distinct from traditional categories, yet are formed because of, and out of, terror and violence.

In M. Jacqui Alexander's work on postcolonialism and Edward Said's *Orientalism*, we can see how the ruling class will often attempt to validate its claims of the right to rule by designating population to be marginalized. The dominant class (or the more dominant between a small handful of groups) will define and reduce the “other” so that they may, in turn define, themselves. Outside of “pre-modern” orientalist motives, like exoticism, vilification, etc., this is often heavily related to colonial-based patriarchal and heteronormative ideologies, as the various Caribbean countries ‘cleanse’ conjugal heterosexuality and expunge conflated violent heterosexuality and all non-normative sex(uality) in one swift legislative move.

In *Black Leopard, Red Wolf*, dominant groups, and the privileged among the marginalized, are also essentially terroristic and violent in nature. This violence by the privileged (or relatively privileged) against the marginalized can be done for exploitation, or for ideology's

sake: community requires the designating and distinguishing—by further marginalization, violence, and terror—of the margins to justify its own existence. Because it not only requires the Other to define itself, but the violence and terror to sustain the Other, community itself is also characterized by the violence and terror it inflicts on others.

Tracker's biological family, his 'initial' community, is constituted primarily by violence. His father committed several kinds of abuse towards Tracker and Tracker's sister. (James 6-9). Tracker killed his father as he was beating and about to kill Tracker's mother, yet, contrary to Tracker's expectations about separating from family, Tracker was expelled from the family and tribe clan as a fugitive and was not even given a birthright or rations of any kind. While living with his uncle among the Ku tribe, he is visited by the ghost of his real father, and his uncle reveals that the father who raised him was really his grandfather, and his sister is really his mother, and lies that the Gangatom killed his father and a brother he never met (29-30). Upon being pressed by both Leopard and the Sangoma to think critically and not blindly accept people's claims, Tracker realizes that his uncle and grandfather betrayed his father to the Gangatom and fled to the city with their ill-gotten gains (89-90). All of these are responsible for making Tracker's family the way it was. In other words, Tracker's domestic life, and Tracker himself, are products of violence and domestic violence, running counter to, or perhaps revealing the inherent falsehoods of, the ideology surrounding duty within family.

The Ku tribe, Tracker's extended relations and the first community he comes into after fleeing his home, hide their overt violence under ideology. Leaders of the tribe perpetuate hostility with the Gangatom, refreshing the external danger as well as the violence they are expected to inflict. Their rites, called the Zareba, which initially seem to concern companionship and coming-of-age (23-24), are revealed to be a combination of physical violence

(circumcision/genital mutilation) and domestic or psychological violence in the form of gender roles. Not participating in these rites also facilitates marginalization of a designated non-normative population, those of a third or mixed gender, who experience terror and exclusion. Tracker is told by Kava, his first companion and queer companion, that one group, the “Luala Luala,” the people above the Gangatom, have man who live with man like a wife, and woman who live with like a husband...who live as they choose, and in all these things there is no strangeness” (35). Despite claiming that “there is no strangeness,” Kava is both distinguishing non-heteronormative relationships and behaviors as being non-normative and therefore noteworthy, highlighting normative ideology by using heteronormative terms as the basis (“man live with man *like wife*”), and also reveals that there is an understood strangeness of it in having to tell Tracker that this behavior isn’t strange. Additionally, the third gender and non-heteronormative individuals are associated with the enemy, the Gangatom, and with extravagance, as living “above” the Gangatom, seemingly citing them as a source of the Ku-Gangatom violence. In one movement, the Ku cleanses the normative, expelling violent and extravagant heterosexuality along with all homosexuality, which is conflated with violence and violent sexuality, and identifying them all with their other enemies, the Gangatom. As an inverse of the target of their separation/othering, and embodying the separation/othering they commit, the Ku are reduced to violent fearmongers, and their community has no authenticity or necessity beyond this.

Normative communities that serve ideology and perpetuate violence are still particularly steadfast sources of fear within queer experiences. When Tracker first lives among the Ku, they treat him as extended family, and it seems that he is welcome in this foster family, being taught by the elders, initially being invited to undergo the rites, etc. Among this extended family and

kin, Tracker also begins his experiences of queer adolescence, especially his first queer experiences with his first and queer lover, Kava.

Over time, Tracker begins to feel distanced and separated from the Ku, Kava becomes the main instrument by which Tracker experiences his first loss and betrayal. While living with the Ku, Kava introduces him to the practice of killing or abandoning infants born under atypical circumstances, and also introduces him to Leopard, Sangoma, and the mingi children, those whom Kava and others managed to save and raise (39). In seeing their violence firsthand, especially after hearing about the violence committed on his immediate family, and after staying with the mingi, Tracker loses a sense of kinship with the Ku. He seeks to find belonging with Kava, but Kava pursues a more intimate relationship with the shapeshifter, Leopard, lying about until Tracker eventually spies them having sex one night (61). Kava returns to the Ku tribe every so often, having material wealth and his own house there, but Tracker does not belong there, so he stays with the mingi, developing a closer relationship with Leopard. Kava, in his rage at Tracker for seemingly not being passive about sex and love, attempts to make Tracker feel alone, “[Leopard] will never love you,” and attempts to kill Tracker before being stopped by Leopard. (72). Even after this breaking off and betrayal of the intimacy he and Tracker shared, Kava later forsakes the mingi and Sangoma, having chosen to follow the ideology of the Ku, leading the latter to the mingi hideout and in their mass murder of them (87). Kava’s betrayal and abandoning the queer community acts as a kind of recession of his queer lover into the dominant class, or the reabsorption by the dominant class. Kava is closeted, to use a Western-term, and hides who he is, his queer self, denying any intimacy and pursuing only immediate pleasure. Kava is also able to pass as a heterosexual, a privilege that many queer people, especially those



of targeted races and lower economic class (and other intersecting marginalized identities), which Tracker does not have.

### **Queer Communities and Chosen Families**

Within *Black Leopard, Red Wolf*, however, there are genuine, non-arbitrary communities that do not exist for exploitation or require marginalization of the Other to exist: these are queer communities. These, or any, queer communities not-so-coincidentally resemble Gilroy's imaginings of a hybrid nation, both in formation and in their characteristics. They are often outgroups, formed by exiled members of the dominant group, who form a new community and, crucially, a new *kind* of community for immediately pragmatic reasons—safety, defense, resources—and for communal purposes, like belonging and identity.

Tracker finds his first, true, and importantly chosen family with the Mingi. Exposed or introduced to the world itself, meaning the wilds, and the actions of the Ku (infanticide), the Mingi possess no inherent or essential ideology. They have no use or need for it, as they both are constituted by a common experience of marginalization and threat of violence and lack the agency to marginalize others.

As chosen family, the mingi community also serves as a queer community, and many of the mingi children are queer from birth. This is not sexual in nature, and not based on behavior as identity (as it is in the West); rather it means the mingi demonstrate queerness in their existing physically and psychologically outside of normative boundaries and categories. The mingi children were all abandoned by the (more) dominant group, the Ku, as well as by their biological families. In being taken in by the Sangoma and other mingi, their identities became constituted not only by common experience of marginalization, but in being exiled and exiles from other communities and identities. In other words, they share a void where identity would be. But this

also serves to create some of the substance of a new kind of group and communal identity. In being queer from birth, the mingi all chose their family, and chose a queer family. It was not a choice because they had many options, but in response to Tracker's stubbornness in accepting the mingi, the Sangoma says, "Children cannot help how they are born, they had no choice in it. Choosing to be a fool, though..." (56). The mingi then maintain the choice, and Tracker had yet to make the choice, joining and being part of a family and a queer family, but the choice must be consciously made. It is not enough to be queer and have queer experiences. One must choose a community, to belong to one, to treat others as one's kin, to let their chosen family constitute their communal identity and individual identity. The mingi did not choose to be queer from birth; although they may have made the choice had they been given the option, the Sangoma states that the choice was made before they were even born. Being born into a community did not guarantee full belonging, but the mingi's actively choosing to be members of this community and accepting of other members, did.

The Sangoma and mingi also serve as an allegory for queer communities and acceptance. Regardless of whether Tracker joins or stays with them, he will always be a lost child, as he will always have his sense of smell and feel an urge to pursue the source. However, his belonging to a queer community is not automatic or immediate. Tracker does not act as a member of the community and does not treat others within the community as equals. Tracker remarks, "for seven days I stayed away from the woman and she stayed away from me. But children will be children and will not be anything other" (50). The Sangoma, having seen the dangers and knowing the threat, likewise do not treat Tracker as though he belongs, nor does the most aware child, Giraffe Boy. But the children seem to notice in Tracker the same experience of terror that they have experienced. They treat him as an insider, even while they remain wary of his liminal

and outsider status and the potential threat he represents. Tracker finds himself a caretaker to the children immediately, and not long after entertaining them, he is able to perceive and enter the top floor of the hut the Sangoma lives in (54)—something Kava never learns, despite knowing that something exists there. Membership, and growing into a member, a kind of citizen, in a queer community, both grants and requires knowledge and understanding of queer community and individuals. Once Tracker has acquired some knowledge of experiences with the queer community of the mingi, he comes into a consciousness of them and himself as a queer people.

The mingi community, existing within the text as queer community, also serves to oppose normativity and normalizing ideology. The mingi children, as victims of child abandonment, never had the chance to even meet their biological family. The queer family they have lived in and always known is not, however, positioned as a “surrogate,” nor as an alternative to the “normal” biological family. When Tracker first stays with Kava, the latter tells him, “These elders [say] that a man is nothing but his blood. Elders are stupid and their beliefs are old...I envy you...to know family only after they are gone is better than to watch them go” (35). Kava identifies the ideology around family and asserts that biological family is simply another arbitrary category. He also positions the lack or loss of a biological family, like that of mingi, as not being opposite to a normal family but as being opposite to the violence that accompanies family, created by it and for it. Kava here directly refers to Tracker not having seen the murder of his brother and father, not knowing that Tracker himself had killed his grandfather, which led to him actually knowing his real family after the fact. There is little in the way of “natural” family that is not tied in violence. By contrast, the mingi and queer family is a genuine family, inviting no violence and coming together due to the violence of others.

When considering Tracker as a lost child and as another mingi, we can see just how intrinsic violence is to normative society. His biological family was constituted by violence: the physical and emotional abuse his grandfather committed on him; the abuse (including sexual abuse) his grandfather committed on his mother; and the violence of his uncle's murdering his father. Indeed, this particular act of violence is the primary cause for the location and organization of Tracker's abusive upbringing. Tracker arguably never had the opportunity to belong to his biological family, as his father was killed before he was born, and he was raised separately from his tribe and kinsmen. As we and he both learn, his entire upbringing was a lie. (His "father" was his grandfather, his "sister" was his mother.) Tracker was/is a queer birth, the product of fratricide and incest. With all of this in perspective, we might read Tracker as queer/mingi from birth, having been expelled (prior to being born) from dominant communities, both prior to his birth and through his adolescence. He simply took longer to find his chosen family than the mingi, requiring another exclusion from another community—the last normative one which linked him to normative and dominant society/community/identity.

Joining and being part of a queer community and queer family also queers one's relationships, and their role and presence within this community. The Sangoma acts as a kind of queer parent, serving as both mother and father of the heteronormative expectations, being both emotional caretaker and physical protector and punisher. Additionally, she functions as a kind of queer role model and teacher. She outlines normative ideology and prejudice, and, in response to Tracker's suspicion, she says, "If I were a witch, I would have come to you as a comely boy since that is the way inside you, false? If I were a witch, I would summon a tokoloshe, fool him that you are a girl and have him rape you while invisible each night" (56). She teaches him to identify the prejudice that normative society has towards him as mixed gender, the beliefs about

witches and the inherent violence normative society attempts to displace onto threats. She also passes down other knowledge and traditions and cultures that could be considered “culturally queer” in origin, like ways of magical protection such as the “nkisi nkondi” (57); she also identifies her own queer experience, namely her “ithwasa” and forced period of purity for her to learn “to close [her] eye and find things hidden, medicine to undo witchcraft” (68). Finally, she later passes on such medicine and even witchcraft, as Tracker and those he meets remark on the tricks of witchcraft he learned, his skill in using his supernatural sense of smell, his wolf eye, and the protection charm, all given to him by the Sangoma.

Tracker becomes a queer figure, and within the queer family, a kind of role and familial relationship with the other members of the community. He becomes a kind of big brother, playing with Ball Boy, being taught by Giraffe Boy, and being a constant source of safety for Smoke Girl (57-59). After the attack by the Ku, which results in the death of the Sangoma and the destruction of their home, he becomes the closest thing to a queer parent/caretaker and a centerpiece for the mingi survivors. Central to queer experiences of parenting, he is forced to do what is necessary out of necessity. Just as the Sangoma forced him to track down a boy who stole an item necessary for the mingi’s protection (73), Tracker is forced to surrender the mingi to the Gangatom. When Smoke Girl refuses to stay and keeps following Tracker, he is forced to break their bond, insulting her, and throwing stones (92). When he returns to visit the mingi, keeping his distance as the Gangatom still view him as an enemy Ku), Smoke Girl never visits him (103). Not only is queer experience and queer community centered around terror, but queer parenting is characterized by fear for one’s children, especially queer children, as well as the seemingly inevitable loss of them.

### **Queer Double Consciousness**

For James, queer double consciousness embodies both Du Bois and Gilroy's senses of racial double consciousness, at a more extreme level. Much like how Du Bois felt his identity, including his liminal and hybrid identity, were framed by the gaze of the dominant class, Tracker's non-normative (and queer) characteristics are made identities and reinforced by others. Tracker does not particularly self-identify as third gender or homoromantic/non-normative, but he is made constantly aware of his being so because others see him as such. This framing by the gaze of the dominant separates (and others) him from the dominant, starting with the Ku distinguishing those of mixed gender from the normative who have gone through the rites and follow traditional gender roles. This is also used by others to reduce Tracker to his targeted aspects and to his labor, in order to exploit him more easily or to make him less of a threat. We can see this in Tracker's clients throughout the book. Nsaka De Vampi and her boss, the slaver, tell Tracker, "Maybe the woman is still part of the man. No man has cut you. No wonder you so flighty" when he resists their plans; later, they say, "If I was looking for noble men with the heart to help a child, I would never have called you" (165). Other times, his queerness and outsider status are also vulnerabilities used by other groups to inflict terror and violence. We see this with Nyka and the hyena pack females (176-186). The former uses his romantic preference for other men and his desire for companionship and kinship to gain his trust in order to later betray him; the female alpha hyenas use physical and psychological violence on Tracker directly, making him feel more vulnerable, and using sexual violence through their pack.

Because the terror that targets one's identities is both present everywhere and intrinsic to normative society, queer identities, both individual and communal, risk becoming constituted by trauma, like gaze-formed identity but worse. Tracker must avoid introspection about his own feelings overall, and especially about the hyenas and their attack, thinking after the attack, "I was

tired of it all, man and beast threatening to kill me, sucking my want to live, but never killing me” (187). And after the hyenas let him go, Tracker distrusts the man who helps him: “Maybe the man was kind, maybe he planned to sell me into slavery.” Tracker’s relationships from this point on are characterized by an expectation of violence and betrayal, more than ever before.

Tracker is unreadable, undiscernible, as he has no clear origin, community, or identity. As a result, he is often a threat to ideology: his resistance to interpolation presents an annoyance or blockage, unsettling truths and contradicting or even invalidating ideology and beliefs. This is also why individuals and groups attempt to assign him an identity or reduce him to one. Some aim to neutralize or pacify the ideological threat that is his queer identity (the kingdom’s council and opposite kingdom’s interrogators); others find that his identity can be used to exploit him, can become an instrument to their own ends, as the Sangoma reminds him: “do not forget why I sent for you,” (73). However, in both these instances, the reduction fails. Tracker already actively and outwardly identifies himself as his labor, being “Tracker.” This prevents more dominant persons or groups from reducing him, and while the end result seems to be the same (Tracker is reduced to labor), Tracker weakens their ideology/dominance in a very similar way to the use of “queer” as identity. Tracker, in using the act of reduction to labor as a name and identity, identifies the normalizing/systemic ideology and locates the marginalization within the public sphere, making it explicit the acts of marginalization committed by the dominant and the privileged among the marginalized and obfuscated by ideology. However, in naming and identifying oneself as this action, it prevents the dominant class marginalizing him in that way, and by extension, removes the sense of power the dominant typically holds, as they are forced to rely on other methods of marginalization, often more obviously ideology. This inhibits their power over him and many other marginalized people, and because their power combined with

their marginalization is core to their identity, it begins to weaken and queer the dominant class itself. Further, by using it as a name and identity, much like 'queer,' identifies the normalizing/systemic ideology and locates the marginalization within the public sphere. In other words, people all around him are responsible for perpetuating normalizing ideology furthering other acts or marginalization, and by using an act of marginalization as his name, he identifies those responsible as being *everyone* not marginalized in the same way.

All these factors critical to queer experience—being unlocatable; being able to exist outside and/or move fluidly among normative categories; having the second sight to see ideology—are crucial for Gilroy's imagined nation. When the Sangoma is killed, Tracker and Leopard are forced to disperse the mingi among the families within the Gangatom and surrounding tribes willing to care for the children. They also sever their own connection to them. Despite being pulled from their original common community and space, and put into different normative communities and lands/spaces, they all remain queer/mingi children, and maintain this identity, community, and common connection, establishing and sustaining a feeling of unity and oneness. This feeling which Du Bois, Gilroy, and Cohen all discuss as being necessary in the formation or movement towards a community counters normative and oppressive society. Unlike racial and other historically-identified groups with commonality, queer community can form, and already has formed, among people with no common origin or history of marginalization. Queer people are a diasporic people unlike any other group, having the necessary bond with nothing else being equal—not even being oppressed by the ruling class in the same ways. And it is particularly this amorphous common experience and identity that forms in spite of all the ideology put against it that is the key to making a community that exists to counter that ideology.



## Chapter 5: Conclusion: Fantasy and a Queer Future

The greatest trick capitalism ever pulled was convincing people it did not exist. Capitalism is undeniably both a central instrument *for* oppression and exploitation, and a system that *requires* exploitation in order to maintain itself. Certain categories held to be based in objective and essential truths (especially in the West), such as race and ethnicity, are units of exploitative capitalism; indeed, these often arbitrary and ideological categories are designed to separate marginalized groups from dominant groups and from other marginalized groups, thus making communication and resistance nigh impossible. At the same time, capitalism distracts marginalized groups from identifying the ruling class and its dominant ideology as the necessary target, thus leading them to continue living in ways that allow for exploitation. Differences in race or ethnicity are made to seem like irreconcilable differences in race or ethnicity (and relevant experiences) when they are largely socially and ideologically constructed; ideas of countries as nation-states, dispensing citizenship and deserving the loyalty of people deemed citizens, are also made to seem real and essential, when they are tools for exploitation. All of this is done to keep people from becoming aware of the methods of oppression and to keep the dominant class dominant and the marginalized groups marginalized.

Marginalization, however, is much more complicated than even the above account, especially as various groups have gained some degree of agency, along with different levels of interpellation into dominant ideologies, over time (and over capitalist evolution). The ruling class does oppress the exploitable groups through ideology, but ideology is more than just the arbitrary categories that group and separate various marginalized peoples. Specific ideologies work because of the bedrock, normative ideologies, those which establish binaries and push people of multiple marginalized groups—nearly interchangeable with queer—to the margins. This cannot

be done by dominant institutions alone; rather, this process is reified and perpetuated by marginalized communities themselves. In fact, arguably any community not made for pragmatic reasons—a community of queer folk joining together for safety against active terror and violence by the dominant class—and/or due to being an outsider of every other group, i.e. queer people, requires violence and marginalization to sustain its own existence and right to exist, mirroring the ruling class's right to rule.

Because queer people are the most marginalized, the most targeted by both institutions and normative ideology (i.e., heteronormativity), it is necessary, for the progress of any social movement, to focus on them and maintain focus on them. In doing so, we can maintain our awareness of marginalizing processes, to see the effects on the most targeted, and to not let ideology slip from our attention when we consider only single groups. Developing communities, identities, and ways of life that are distinct from and offer resistance to those created by the dominant ideology, would naturally and necessarily be queer. In fact, they would queer our communities and identities as they are known to us. Our identities were clear because of binaries: black vs white, male vs female, heterosexual vs homosexual. These binaries hold no meaning and must be treated as such. To truly develop and progress beyond the system we find ourselves in, which we are familiar with, we must live and identify in ways unfamiliar to us, unlike our past. These new identities and communities may be unfamiliar because we did not identify with them before, but they may also not resemble anything we have known. And that is precisely why queer is the way forward: any future that we want to not resemble our present requires identities that do not resemble anything we have known. Our queer identities and communities will be the truest identities and communities, even if we cannot comprehend them yet. And that quality, of

being unknowable yet felt, unformed yet always changing, is precisely why it is the necessary and optimal way forward.

Fantasy is particularly well equipped to explore processes of marginalization/oppression and the many processes for living outside of or in resistance to it. Fantasy, in its many, amorphous forms, resembles the chimeric queer community that is both the key and goal, as well as the liminal/transitional stage/state between that goal and where we are now. It is difficult to imagine what a world like that would look like: how can we work towards something that we have never known, and that is antithetical to anything that we currently know? It is in this space, of the unknown and anxiety, where fantasy thrives. Fantasy both naturally finds itself there, and deliberately situated in this liminal space in readers' minds. Fantasy provides ways of conceptualizing, visualizing, and interacting with these various otherwise-incomprehensible concepts and social organizations, that, by definition of the central line of argument, do not yet exist. Fantasy also helps to establish an awareness, defamiliarizing readers from the familiar and known, bringing outright attention to normative ideology while readers are in a position to see it and criticize it. Fantasy, a liminal and amorphous genre, is the instrument to guide us through the transitional stage into a new way of living and thinking. And that new life, and the line of thinking that accompanies it, will be essentially queer and fantastical.

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