

Book Review: *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* by Saidiya Hartman

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In *Wayward Lives*, Saidiya Hartman writes poetically about how we might do justice in our work by honoring the lives of those we craft narratives about. As the project of this class is unthinking the archive, I focus this response on how Hartman both acknowledges the limits of the traditional archive and uses it ethically and capaciously to rewrite histories of Black life. Hartman starts her book with a crucial *note on method* where she writes: *I have pressed at the limits of the case file and the document, speculated about what might have been, imagined the things whispered in dark bedrooms, and amplified moments of withholding, escape and possibility, moments when the vision and dreams of the wayward seemed possible” (xv)*. Here, Hartman acknowledges like other scholars whose work we have engaged up to this point including Trouillot, Stoler, Taylor, and Schneider that there have been varying degrees of contortion, gaps, and erasure from the traditional archive not just of forms of terror but also the beauty and vitality of Black lives (5). Her project follows in the long tradition of black feminist scholarship and praxis of undisciplined mining of alternate/counter accounts of sociality, love, desire, revolution, autonomy and freedom.

As Julie Sze (2020) has poetically written *broken places and people of color go hand in hand (57)* and so it not accidental that the ghettos of Philadelphia and New York would be spaces where Hartman could look for the black life scripted as ‘waste’. In these broken places, as Hartman lays out, black (and women of color) are already constructed as deviant, pathological,

and criminal and their efforts to work against this script, when viewed through colonial epistemic lens serves to 'prove' deviance, pathology, and criminality. It is precisely because black women knew how this would be proof- and did it anyway, that Hartman suggests positions them as resisters if not agentive. A key question then is how might we reestablish agency by looking at how the very frameworks meant to dispossess have been used subversively by the black folk in these Ghettos. What might we learn from paying closer attention to the 'doing it anyway'?

By reading what Hartman terms Waywardness, that is the riotous nature of how black folk lived and rejected systems of white hetero-patriarchy under racist colonial regimes, the evidence of the quest for love, desire, and freedom becomes starker. While racial terror, spectacular and slow violence was undoubtedly part of the Post-Reconstruction experience of women in the North, Hartman argues that black women fashioned lives that allowed them to imagine worlds outside the conditions to which they were expected to resign. As she writes: *[they] knew first-hand that the offense most punished by the state was trying to live free. To wander through the streets of Harlem, to want better than what [they] had, and to be propelled by [their] whims and desires was to be ungovernable. [Their] way of living was nothing short of anarchy (230).*

Hartman's framework of waywardness hits at the heart of how I imagine my own project as being toward an impulse of redress that does not rest within a colonial epistemological frame of reference. This framework is central because of how I see it as being in conversation with the notion of 'thrivance' (following from Andrew Jolievette 2019 usage) which is key to how I examine issues of sexual violence and queerness in the Caribbean context. In this sense, I am reading Caribbean literary production to *untether waywardness, refusal, mutual aid and free love from their identification as deviance, criminality, and pathology...to affirm...intimacy*

outside the institution of marriage and queer and outlaw passions and to illuminate the radical imagination and everyday anarchy of ordinary [queer folk] which has not only been overlooked but is nearly unimaginable (x).

This text has helped me to think through what I was encountering as a problem in my research- a general scarcity of queer Caribbean text on the one hand and on the other, text which - on other reviewers' accounts, might further the pathologization of queer bodies. But given the colonial context within which this literature was produced, I began to think with Hartman about what it would mean to read the existence of the literature itself as part of the framework of thrivance. What might be revealed through the genealogy of queer Caribbean literature and examinations of how queerness has been rendered incoherent with national identity formation within the Caribbean and more specifically in Jamaica? The theoretical and methodological interventions that Hartman advances recognize the significance of a reading practice that allows for piecing, re-membering, and weaving of fragments to put forward a theory of queer world-making in Jamaica immediately following independence. As part of my dissertation work, I read Caribbean literature production to excavate liveness that is about redress for the way queer bodies have been rendered dead and disposable but my work with Caribbean literature has also been about challenging points of erasure in disciplinary spaces and writing the Caribbean back from the margins.