



The Dark Skin I Live In: Decolonizing Racial Capitalism's Aesthetic Hierarchies in the Diaspora

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Abstract: Dark skin on Black women's bodies has become a Black Atlantic diasporic (post) colonial artefact circulating discursively within the skin value hierarchy of racial capitalism. This article uses a Black decolonial feminist approach to analyse racial capitalism's "second skin" discourses of dark skin as contemptible object established prior to and during enslavement and colonialism. Drawing out its contemporary manifestations in the narratives of/about Black women celebrities, the analysis shows that libidinal economies of dark skin continue to impact women's lives. Indeed, the impact of "second skin" discourses can produce alienation from oneself if one begins from shadism and/or whiteness. However, this article argues that women with dark skin dis-alienate from "second skin" (Cheng 2011) discourses to construct the skins they live in as objects of love through naming and critiquing diasporic discourses which reproduce their skins as valueless. Through the routes of social media, their critiques of "second skin" discourses produce and maintain alter/native constructions of dark skin value, a radical Black aesthetic consciousness, a new "livity" (Chevannes 1994) within diaspora which unsettles dark skin's negation.

Key words: racial capitalism, decolonizing, diaspora, dark skin, libidinal economy, "second skin"

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Introduction

According to Cedric Robinson (1983) Western racism existed in Europe before capitalism and the encounter with Africa and the “New World”. Racism and capitalism produced a modern world system of “racial capitalism” which was dependent on slavery, imperialism, violence, genocide and epistemicide (Robinson 1983). It was in the West that “the Negro” (Robinson 1983), “the Indian” (Wilderson 2010) and the Human as white (Wynter 2003) were constructed and racial boundaries policed through extensive psychic, intellectual, affective, aesthetic, and legal means. Part of this policing was the erasure of the Black Mediterranean and the African contribution to European civilization so as to reproduce Europe as “racially pure” (Robinson 1983), whilst aesthetically and affectively dark African descent skin was constructed as repulsive and contemptible (Tate 2015). This article seeks to extend Robinson’s ideas by including aesthetics based on whiteness and shadism and their concomitant affects within racial capitalism.

The discussion shows that the construction of dark African descent skin as antithetical to whiteness already existed in the Middle Ages and that the West’s “Negro” extended to aesthetic discourses on and affective attachments to whiteness and shadism as they came up against dark African descent skin. Shadism intimately attaches skin colour to the trauma of racial capitalism as it spreads out across the roots and routes of the Black Atlantic like other cultural objects and artefacts (Gilroy 1993). However, shadism’s denial emerges in the Global Northwest which believes itself to be “post-race” (Goldberg 2015) with “post-race” aesthetics being constructed through the inclusion and consumption of the bodies of Black women with dark skin within global skin markets. Concomitantly, Lupita Nyong’o, Alek Wek, Michelle Obama and Nyakim Gatwech can be named the most beautiful women of the year, become the global faces of beauty products that sell trans-racially and be feted as super models, while Jamaicans Zahra Redwood, Miss Jamaica Universe 2007 and Miss Jamaica Universe 2017, Davina Bennett can be praised for their

natural hair and darker skin. Indeed, Bennett was one of the last three in the Miss Universe 2017 competition; her hair style is said to have “broken the internet.” Fans started the hashtag #MissJamaicaShouldHaveWon and she is now being sought after for modelling contracts. These examples of aesthetic inclusion recast dark skin as a valuable mobile diasporic object. Indeed, one could begin to believe that “Black is beautiful” as a site of aesthetic political contestation, and its accompanying anti-racist aesthetics (Taylor 2016), are no longer necessary in the Global Northwest because of some Black women’s inclusion in “beauty”. However, continuing anti-Black racism, shadism and misogynoir (Bailey 2010) make anti-racist aesthetics still relevant. This is so because shadism as part of racial capitalism’s construction and consumption of “the Negro” maintains colonial aesthetic hierarchies, keeping a colonial politics of skin values and devaluations in circulation in the diaspora irrespective of the inclusion of some women with dark skin.

As a hyper-visible signifier of Black African descent racial difference in the Global North/South West, skin is still the bedrock of anti-Black woman racism – “misogynoir” (Bailey 2010). Misogynoir has embedded within it affects, aesthetics and politics continually circulating through racial capitalism, as discourses of physical and moral ugliness attach to dark skin. These discourses of dark skin as ugly lay over the surface of Black women’s bodies as a “second skin” (Cheng, 2011) and condition the politics of hyper-visibility which surround dark skinned African-descent women.

From a Black decolonial feminist lens, this analysis uses skin narratives from/about Michelle Obama, Lupita Nyong’o, Nyakim Gatwech and Davina Bennet’s November 2017 Instagram post reported in the Jamaica Observer, to outline the emergence of other skin values beyond the politics dictated by colonial aesthetics. The discussion thinks through the complaints within these women’s skin narratives as resistance to the colonial aesthetics kept alive within contemporary racial capitalism. Robinson’s (1983) analysis of Black revolt in the Western hemisphere categorizes these as either based on maroonage and

reproducing African social life in the case of early revolts, or latterly, as being focused on the transformation of social relations. Women living their skin lives through resistance and focusing on the transformation of aesthetic social relations negate the impact of “second skin” discourses even whilst these extend across interpersonal, political, social, and cultural life. Their refusal to problematize their dark skin whilst it still continues to be problematized in the diaspora is enabled by what Aimé Césaire (2000) calls “dis-alienation” from these discourses. Dis-alienation as resistance is a turning away from “second skin” discourses of dark skin’s negation as valueless, which in turn produces a new “livity” (Chevannes 1994). Within the virtual politics of the media’s life their resistances become mobile, diasporic objects leading to dark skin validation, and towards different modes of becoming which do not start from colonial aesthetic discourses of whiteness or shadism.

Skin and its discontents: From colonial discourses on Black women’s difference to shadism

In the Black Atlantic diaspora Black women’s bodies are always already marked as ugly, especially if dark skinned. This is a North Atlantic universal (Truillot 1995) which travelled around the routes of racial capitalism-settler colonialism, empire and enslavement - and still resonates in the diaspora today. In the Global Northwest the construction of dark African-descent skin as antithetical to whiteness and ugly already existed in the Middle Ages which supports Robinson’s (1983) claim that race thinking began within Europe itself. Religious scholar, Peter Abelard (1119-1142), wrote to Hèlöise about the *Song of Songs* and the Queen of Sheba being desired by and sexually intimate with King Solomon, “it so happens that the skin of black women, less agreeable to the gaze, is softer to touch and the pleasures one derives from their love are more delicious and delightful” (Sharpley-Whiting 1999, 1). Black women’s skin, although softer, was already constructed as ugly in the Middle Ages, whilst paradoxically, they were seen as offering intense sexual pleasure. Skin and hyper-sexuality already marked Sheba and, therefore, all Black women as

racialized “others”, desirable but contemptible. Constructing the gendered and “raced” boundaries of European national identities and white supremacy continued with early European travel writers who represented African women as monstrous bodies, “desirable and repulsive, available and untouchable, productive and reproductive, beautiful and Black” (Morgan in Hall 2000, 39). These discourses emerged centuries before the European colonies in North and Latin America and the Caribbean were established (Gilman 1992).

Skin shades and dark African-descent skin have had resonance within the Black Atlantic world for centuries. For example, in *El Archivo de Indias* in Seville it is possible to see requests for licences to travel to Latin America from Spanish families which list household members, both free and enslaved, in terms of the constructed caste-shade categories generated from “race mixing” and blood quantum, for example, *mulata/o*, *zambo*, *morisco*. In the Mexican *Las Castas* classification *mulata/o* had white and Black parents, *morisco* had *mulata/o* and white parents and *zambo* had Indigenous and Black parents. Needless to say each blood quantum category had different discursive constructions attributed to skin and through that to people, which enabled Spanish whiteness to have boundaries setting it apart from those who were “mixed race”, Black or Indigenous. According to Hilary Beckles (1999), during enslavement in the Caribbean the Black woman was ideologically constructed as essentially “non-feminine” in so far as primacy was placed upon her alleged muscular capabilities, physical strength, aggressive carriage, and sturdiness (10). Pro-slavery writers presented her as devoid of the feminine tenderness and graciousness in which the white woman was tightly wrapped.

The history of *the* Black woman's body in the European-North/Latin American imagination is imbricated within racial capitalism, its racialization regimes and technologies of governance based on skin shade further developed during Western Hemispheric colonialism and enslavement. These regimes and technologies still remain active today both in metropolises and former/present colonies. Indeed, for Hortense Spillers (1987) *the* Black woman's body has

provided and continues to provide an essential other for the construction of white US American/European women's bodies. The dark skinned Black woman continues to be a marginalized corporeality in white and light skinned US-UK/European-Latin American-Caribbean cultural consciousness and representation.

We can say that there is a repetition of images of dark skin as ugly in the UK-US (Collins 1991; hooks 2000; Wilder 2010), Latin America (Pinho 2010) and the Caribbean (Tate 2009) deriving from shared North Atlantic universals (Truillot 1995) of what dark skin on women's bodies constitutes. For example, ugliness, backwardness, African-ness, masculinization and poverty. The gaze from white and lighter iconic skins continues to reproduce dark skin as multiply displaced and undesirable, though paradoxically a source of endless fascination (Fanon 1986; Yancy 2008; Wilder 2010).

Drawing on the earlier work of Charles Parrish, Jeffrienne Wilder (2010) asserts that there has been no change in colourist ideology among African Americans. The attitudes and names associated with light skin tones tended to be negative whilst those related to dark skin tones were derogatory, but medium skin tones were viewed most positively. For Wilder (2010), colourism in the USA seemed not to operate in the traditional binary logic of racialized skin politics but was within a three-tier system with brown at the top of the hierarchy. This preference for brownness and orientation away from dark skin also maps onto Jamaica's "browning" (Mohammed 2000; Tate 2009), Brazil's "mulata" (Caldwell 2007; Pinho 2010), Cuba's "mulata" (Arrizon 2006) and the Dominican Republic's denial of African descent but embrace of indigeneity and Spanish descent brownness (Candelario 2000).

In the Global North/South West, dark skin colour continues to speak racialized otherness and ugliness in post-settler, post-plantation and post-colonial societies. Indeed, it is through skin shade that we still intuit who can be human even in those societies which appear to be racially homogeneous (Pierre 2013; Tate 2016; Wynter 2003, 2001). As Kobena Mercer (1994) reminded us, skin is not just

organic but highly politicized as a hyper-visible signifier of racial difference. Our racialized and gendered identifications emerge in the flow *between* skin shades as meaning-filled and affective body surfacings. Skin shade continues to be the building block of national politics, aesthetic hierarchies, transracial intimacies/dislocations and structural inequality within the USA, Europe, Latin America, the Caribbean and the African continent (Pierre 2013; 2008; Fokuo 2009; Hope 2009; Brown-Glaude 2007; Tate 2016). It is from within the historical and contemporary aesthetic matrix of racial capitalism that we see discourses of dark skin on women's bodies as ugly, backward, masculine, desirable, repulsive, and contemptible, spreading out as a "second skin" (Cheng 2011) to impact Black women through misogynoir.

Affective and aesthetic economies as second skins: Misogynoir, Michelle Obama, Lupita Nyong'o, Nyakim Gatwech and Davina Bennett

Marie Solis (2016) notes that Professor Moya Bailey coined the term "misogynoir" in 2010 to describe Black African-descent women's experiences of the intersections of sexism and racism. This is experienced as absence within presence, hyper-visibility plagued by invisibility, as well as hatred but inclusion with provisos (Solis, 2016). Misogynoir is intimately attached to dark skin on a Black woman's body as shadism's discursive "second skin" with its centuries of construction as signifier of racial otherness, inferiority, atavism and primitivism (Cheng 2011). We can see this discursive "second skin" in the media debate on Michelle Obama's "right to (bear) bare arms" in her first term as First Lady of the United States (FLOTUS) (Tate 2012). The furore over her "rippling biceps" illustrated that in the USA FLOTUS's respectable femininity is still judged from the gaze of dissection (Fanon 1986; Yancy 2008) emanating from whiteness. It was unnecessary to say "Hey! Look! FLOTUS is Black and dark skinned". This is because through drawing attention to her "rippling biceps" her masculinization (Beckles 1999) was also compounded by her dark skin. This discursive "second skin" forged within the racial capitalism of "New World" plantation economies, impacted Michelle Obama in the twenty-first century because she was *not* the

FLOTUS “somatic norm” (Puwar 2004; Tate 2012). As a dark skinned Black woman she co-existed uneasily with the white somatic norm as we can see in the “ape in heels” comment when she was compared unfavourably with Melania Trump and its aftermath in 2016 (Simpson 2016).

Through this comparison between Obama and Trump, we see the same naked racism as the attention to her arms because she is known only through a “second skin” which places her as (un)knowable threat to the white body politic socially, politically, culturally, aesthetically, and psychically. This “second skin” is always already known within the Global North and South West racial epidermal schema in which irrespective of gender, class, age, ability or sexuality, black bodies are “sprawled out, distorted, recoloured animalistic, bad, mean, ugly, cannibalistic, lascivious but, most importantly, feared” (Fanon 1986, 113). Over-determined by “this second skin”, Obama had to performatively enact a “known” bodily hexis as FLOTUS through “civility” as in colonial times. This civility was measured through how her body spoke, looked, behaved, and was adorned. She had to use glamour and professionalism to undermine the threat posed by *her* dark skin to the body politic imagined as white and male. We can see this assumed threat in the focus on her arms, muscles covered by her dark skin themselves covered by the “second skin”, where we can perceive fear, contempt and white ontological insecurity even as “the force of the racist episteme is imprinted on the body” (Puwar 2004, 41). As Charles Mills (1997) argues, the white body continues to be the somatic norm even if it is no longer juridically or constitutionally supported because the racial contract demarcates and reserves space for its white first-class citizens. Thus, reactions to Obama show the connectedness between anti-dark skin aesthetics and negative affect within racial capitalism. Dark skin is also affective outside of the White House space as we see next in a *Teen Vogue* article on Nyakim Gatwech.

South Sudanese model Nyakim Gatwech, called ‘Queen of the Dark’, has taken the world by storm simply because she celebrates and loves her darker skin (Sahu 2017). Nyakim went viral after posting a story of her interaction with an Uber driver on Instagram. When the Uber driver asked if she would bleach her skin for \$10,000,

Nyakim laughed it off. 'I would never do that. I consider my skin to be a blessing'", she told him (Roberts 2017)

To "take the world by storm" because you celebrate and love the dark skin you live in, means that dark skin continues to be seen as problematic by "the world" and dark skin on African-descent women's bodies is something that still attracts negative affect. We see this in the article which makes us assume that she should *hate* rather than *love* her dark skin as well as *not* celebrate it. Thus, self-hate and its binary self-love need to be looked at briefly here. According to Peter Hadreas (2016), personal love is looking together in the same direction and personal love wears down inequalities. If we take the back of the cab as a microcosm of the world in which she lives, Gatwech cannot look in the same direction as the taxi driver because to do that would be to reproduce herself as unequal and as ugly. To do that would be to reiterate that very hatred of dark skin which generalizes and constructs her through "an exclusive or" (Hadreas 2106, 2). The generalization is the assumption that she must hate her skin enough to want to change it, and the exclusive or is that she is both a fare and contemptible. The world she inhabits in the back of the cab is one in which a "limiting case of hatred emerges when groups of people are believed to be monolithically *necessarily* worthy of harm and blame" (Hadreas 2016, 2). That is a world dominated by white supremacy and shadism which together produce the iconic norms of whiteness and lightness as skin ideals and reproduce dark skin as ugly. Gatwech turns away from this world towards love of dark skin, towards self-love without reliance on the other to come into being. In contradistinction to the world of darker skin hatred she sees her skin as a blessing and would not bleach it even if offered a considerable sum of money.

She negates the ruling episteme within racial capitalism where whiteness/lightness is prized and brownness is desired, even whilst she undertakes global aesthetic labour as a model within it. She has "caused a storm" because she transgresses a racial aesthetic contract in the Global North/South West which has been centuries in the making and which is so pervasive that it has almost

managed to disappear into thin air because its negativity is a taken-for-granted aspect of social life. It is something that we are all inculcated to expect within a Global North/South West aesthetic "libidinal economy" which, for Frank Wilderson,

functions variously across scales and is as 'objective' as political economy. It is linked not only to forms of attraction, affection, and alliance, but also to aggression, destruction and the violence of lethal consumption... it is the whole structure of psychic and emotional life... something more than but inclusive of or traversed by ... a 'structure of feeling'; it is a dispensation of energies, concerns, points of attention, anxieties, pleasures, appetites, revulsions, phobias capable of great mobility and tenacious fixation (7).

The avid consumption, contempt-hate and love of dark African descent women's skin show the ease of slippage produced by Hadreas's concept of "exclusive or" in terms of racialized skin dynamized by phobia (Hadreas 2016). Within this libidinal economy dark skin on a woman's body as a "second skin" places her at the bottom of the aesthetic hierarchy because of the limited value attached to that skin tone. It is worth repeating that this "second skin" is produced in political and social conditions not of its inhabitant's choosing. Therefore the libidinal economy of dark skin is important to think through because of how tenaciously fixated we all are on skin through *philia* or *phobia*. As the object of *philia* or *phobia*, dark skin structures affective and psychic life, political economy and societal structuration.

Dark skin's libidinal economy is textured by racial capitalism's whiteness and shadism. Here dark skin is reproduced continuously as negative and is subject to aggression, phobia, as well as violent consumption, as we see in the cases of both Obama and Gatwech. However, such an economy can also be positive, in terms of attraction, alliance and affection as we see with Gatwech's comments. Dark skin's libidinal economy can also be the source of exceptional

inclusion into an industry which prizes and fixates on “unusual skins” as we have also seen through the modelling careers of Alek Wek and Grace Jones (Tate 2009; 2015). The psychic life of dark skin phobia means that Gatwech should see her skin as a burden not a blessing, something to be vilified, not prized or praised, something to be erased from representation, not reproduced by her or others in Instagram and YouTube posts. This psychic life of dark skin phobia is also reproduced through Black communal and individual shadism as we see next in the example of Gilbert Arenas’s comments about Lupita Nyong’o:

Gilbert Arenas has found himself under fire for his comments about dark-skinned women on Instagram in which he claimed that very few dark-skinned women are beautiful. The athlete even slammed actress Lupita Nyong’o as not “cute”. In response to an Instagram post from *ProBlk* that read “Dear Black Girl: You don’t have to be mixed to be beautiful”, Arenas went on a rant: “How black are we talking??? Not to be funny can u name a beautiful black woman on the outside... not brown skin...like tyrese black.... when you say African features black then u have (#1 lupita nyong’o) and she’s cute when the lights are off... so the black beautiful women u try to boost up is [sic] technically light skinned or brown skinned”. After intense backlash Arenas still refused to apologize for his comment on Nyong’o. (The Grio 2017)

Arenas separates Black from brown skin when he talks about beauty because for him African Blackness such as Nyong’o’s is “not cute”. In fact, he sees her as cute only when “the lights are off”. Although he later apologized to Black women, the tone of his apology is deeply offensive and misogynist, so will not be repeated here. This brutal assault on dark skinned women brings to mind the words of Peter Abelard with which we began to historicize connections between dark African-descent skin on a woman’s body and ugliness constructed in racial capitalism. This should be a point of concern for members of the Black community in the diaspora and on the continent who think and act in shadist terms.

What can be done in the African phobic world we inhabit where misogynoir dictates that Black women with dark skin continue to occupy the space of ugliness? What Gatwech and Obama have shown above is resistance to this “second skin”, which takes the form of a turning away from it as a determinant of who they are and can become. They absolutely reject its boundaries and limits. In this re-orientation (Ahmed 2006), this turning away from dark skin phobia, we see the resistance of dis-alienation (Césaire 2000). This is essential to re-constructing dark African-descent skin at one step removed from what it once was perceived to be within “second skin” discourses and white/shadist imaginaries. Dis-alienation is focused on constructing Black women turning away from their inscription by Abelard in the Middle Ages and from Beckles's (1999) historical account of Black enslaved woman and the aesthetic politics which surrounded them on Caribbean plantations. Resistance through dis-alienation begins the work of decolonizing “second skin” discourses, affective life and aesthetic politics. This is necessary to do if we are to continue to assert dark skin's aesthetic value away from contemporary racial capitalism's market in skins, or even within those markets when they have been stripped of their tendency towards “violent consumption” (Wilderson 2010). Decolonizing “second skin” discourses by resistance through dis-alienation enables the creation of a new libidinal economy of dark skin based on philic attachments. The turning away from the libidinal economy of dark skin as negative which Gatwech and Obama have modelled above and will do again below is also shown by Nyong'o and Davina Bennett.

Creating a new libidinal economy of dark skin: Resisting dark skin othering through dis-alienation

For Aimé Césaire (2000), the being and becoming of the colonized is circumscribed by white supremacy such that the colonized cannot fully occupy the category human. In order to become human and leave being a colonized thing behind, the colonized woman has to dis-alienate from the scene of her racial subjugation, from the white supremacist constructed impossibility of her

being and becoming human. This is at root the work of dis-alienation. It is about resistance to the “second skin” constructed during a long history of European production of Black women as other which had its zenith in settler colonialism and enslavement. Such resistance through dis-alienation severs links to racial and gendered subjugation by re-constructing self and society based on the gaze of a Black decolonial feminist critique (Tate 2017). What are the outlines of such a critique?

In her response to white feminism from what I interpret as a Black decolonial feminist perspective, Jamaican scholar Sylvia Wynter OJ (1982; 2001) repeatedly avers that her focus is on “genres of Man” rather than just gender. This is because focusing only on gender leaves man intact which will not enable women’s emancipation. Thus, placing gender at the centre of a Black decolonial feminist theory will not lead to Black women’s liberation. Rather, critiques must be built on the coloniality of power, race, gender, and other intersections to enable feminism to liberate Black women (Tate 2018). What if women do not necessarily recognize what they do, see and believe is Black decolonial feminist critique? Can we still say that their resistance through dis-alienation is Black decolonial feminist critique? The Dominican Republic-born, Black decolonial feminist Yuderkys Espinosa Miñoso (2007), helps us in thinking through this, when she asserts that we can say that art [also read here knowledge and other forms of cultural production and practice] by women which is inventive, sagacious, radical and committed to women’s existence, is feminist, irrespective of whether or not feminist consciousness led to its production. Espinosa Miñoso’s (2007) view is that if it is not anti-racist, feminism is racist and we must make visible patriarchy, colonization, and the Western gaze within existing feminist discourses. Indeed, we must question both the existing conditions of subalternity and the mechanisms of privilege within modern heteropatriarchy from an anti-racist, decolonial, and anti-capitalist position (Espinosa Miñoso 2007). It is only by doing this questioning that we can critique racial capitalism’s negation of dark African-descent skin on women’s bodies and illustrate that women live their dark skin lives through dis-alienation forged by radical Black aesthetic consciousness.

In an interview with Oprah Winfrey (2016), as she was about to stop being FLOTUS, Michelle Obama spoke at length about how to deal with negativity. She said that she has a defence mechanism whereby she does not hold onto the “bad stuff” including being called an “angry Black woman”. Her thought at the time that this occurred was, “Dang, you don’t even know me. Where did that come from? Then you sort of think this isn’t about me but about the person or people who write it”. Obama’s claim that this is not about her but about the people who write it, think it and speak it, already orientates us to a new position on “the angry Black woman” trope. That is, it is *not of her*. That anger is being ascribed to her because of “the second skin” which threatens to encase her. From this “second skin” she can only be known as white-generated stereotype rather than herself as an individual – “me”. She goes on to say in that interview that colour and wealth are not things that define us as people but rather it is how we live our lives that matter. “So I thought, ok, I will just live my life out loud and let people judge for themselves” (Winfrey 2016). Living one’s “life out loud” is already a position which turns her away from stereotypes on the dark skinned Black woman. She lived her life as the first African American FLOTUS in a way that she chose, not as dictated by the media. In doing that, she also allowed “the American people” to judge the quality of their FLOTUS for themselves rather than being media dupes. Through her own act of freedom, she also freed “the American people” to interrogate the racist stereotypes of Black women so deeply held that they continue to inflect dark skinned Black women’s lives, even hers. At base, she engaged in a re-construction of what Black women can be and become outside of the confines of the stereotypes. Reconstructing the human as raced, gendered, abled, sexualized, and classed becomings which can be imagined otherwise and performatively enacted (Butler 1997; Tate 2005; 2009) and brought into being, is the work of dis-alienation. In this dis-alienation (Césaire 2000) from the stereotype of the angry Black woman she engages in a “liveable life” (Butler 2004) free from the grief caused by shame inducing anti-Black woman racism, misogynoir. In other words, she re-creates the libidinal economy of dark skin through resisting racist phobia and violent cannibalization of her body parts and psyche in the media: that is, if we see cannibalization as “domination, fear, absorption, revulsion and dehumanization” (Owens and

Beistle 2006, 207-208). In her resistance to this domination based on negative racialized affect, Obama refuses to be the sum of her body parts, so that the media could not project onto her their own taboos on Black women's pathological psyche and aberrant flesh.

When model Nyakim Gatwech was in middle school she cried herself to sleep thinking she wasn't beautiful enough. Now the 24-year old Sudanese model has become an icon of beauty and an inspiration to young women everywhere. Her secret? Self-love. "It takes time to love who you are. Be confident in whatever the situation is", Nyakim said in an interview with *Teen Vogue*. "If you love yourself other people will see. It will shine through you and then they have the choice to accept you or walk away... When I put a picture up I'm telling people that no matter what you say, I love who I am. I love my skin tone. I'm telling people that I am beautiful even though I look different from the majority of the people in this world I live in" (Roberts 2017).

Gatwech's resistance through dis-alienation emerges through self-cannibalization which challenges racist perceptions of low self-esteem and ugliness attached to Black women with dark skin. She does not wait to come into being through the other of the West (Glissant 2006) which would be a position of self-negation. Her pictures are a demonstration of self-love, resistance in the face of the violent consumption of shadist and white supremacist hate. Through self-love she remakes the world in which she lives which removes her resistance from being perceived as purely narcissistic or vain, to being anti-racist image making beginning from the self as possessor of radical Black aesthetic consciousness. If we notice her words above, she also begins from a position in which she locates the source for her action through the use of complaint, "I am telling people that no matter what you say, I love who I am". The *who* is as important as the self-love here as they both humanize her through her own gaze in the face of the dehumanization meted out to Black women with dark skin. For Anne Anling Cheng (2001) complaints emerging from grievance are central to anti-racist political action. Here, Gatwech's negation through racial capitalism's

“second skin” ugliness is the source of grief. She has chosen to let go of grief, to extricate herself from the suffering caused by anti-dark skin hate and to construct resistance through the dis-alienation forged by each self-love image she posts of herself. We can read each image as a grievance, a complaint which, as a Black decolonial feminist political action, turns away from the Black beauty melancholia (Cheng 2001; Tate 2005) which reaches out from racial capitalism’s “second skin”. Lupita Nyong’o also shows us such Black decolonial feminist turning away from dark skin negation next.

Lupita Nyong’o is again getting candid about her looks and is glad she’s helping to redefine the standards of beauty... she was dubbed People’s most beautiful woman in 2014 and then appointed as L’Oréal’s brand “ambassador” ... she’s “happy to help change the narrative that previously proscribed dark skin as unacceptable” ... Oprah Winfrey, Whoopi Goldberg and Alek Wek ... paved the way for her ... she got over believing that light skin was more desirable with the help of her loving supportive family...” I think beauty is an expression of love ... to rely on the way you look is empty... You’re a pretty face and then what? Your value is in yourself. The other stuff will come and go...There’s room in this world for beauty to be diverse (Saad 2014).

Nyong’o’s beauty as “an expression of love” re-orientates us to how we can value ourselves by turning away from those norms based on just “a pretty face” and “dark skin as unacceptable”. To not ascribe to the normative beauty values of the “pretty face” and lightness is to put oneself outside of racial capitalism’s “second skin” beauty hierarchies. However, it is not just oneself that is implicated in breaking away from the violent consumption and domination of the libidinal economy of the “second skin”, but also families and communities must conduct such politics from bell hooks’s (2001) margins. From these margins we can begin to enact a Black decolonial feminist politics in which as Nyong’o puts it “your value is in yourself”. *Your value is in yourself*, also re-orientates us to a form of world making in which we must recognize that “the body is not merely matter but a continual “‘materializing’ of possibilities” (Butler 1997, 404). As we do our

bodies, we can do them differently from our contemporaries and predecessors through repetitive signifying (Butler 1997). Subversion of discourses becomes possible within repetitive signifying whilst change occurs through failure in the repeat of “second skin” discourses of *the* dark skinned Black woman. Thus, Nyong’o emerges as herself, as different from the expected script of “second skin” ugliness because

Just as a script may be enacted in various ways, and just as the play requires both text and interpretation, so the gendered [and raced] body acts its part in a culturally restricted corporeal space and enacts interpretations within the confines of already existing directives (Butler 1997, 410).

Dark skin dictates a lack of aesthetic value when whiteness/lightness are the norms. However, Nyong’o asserts that lack produces something other within spaces of resistance to the “second skin” within the self, family, and community. Such resistance through dis-alienation from the “second skin” norm creates a position from which beauty can be diverse.

We see this same repetitive signifying of lack and failure in the repetition of “second skin” discourses of *the* dark skinned Black woman and resistance through dis-alienation in the case of Miss Jamaica Universe 2017, Clarendon’s own Davina Bennett. Within Jamaica’s aesthetic hierarchy “browning” (Mohammed 2000) and straight/straightened hair reigns supreme, as we see in Miss Jamaica World 2017, Solange Sinclair. Against all the aesthetic odds Bennett, who is a dark skinned wearer of an Afro, was crowned Queen to represent Jamaica on the international beauty stage that is Miss Universe. Even though we know that the Miss Universe pageant, as opposed to Miss World, allows more racially diverse “looks” in its competitors, Bennett was significant because her skin colour and hairstyle in combination spoke her African diasporic descent. Indeed, the *Jamaica Observer* states that after the Miss Universe competition in November 2017, “Bennett became an internet sensation thanks to her rich chocolate coloured skin and trademark afro” (Author (*Jamaica Observer* 2017)). “Thanks to” *not* “in spite of” alludes to a new era in beauty

politics in Jamaica. As “face” of the Jamaican nation (Barnes 1994) her skin and hair spoke the resurgence of a decolonizing Blackness in Jamaica worn on the body which evokes the texture of Marcus Garvey’s resistance to brown and white skin colonial power and privilege. This argument draws on Deborah A. Thomas’s (2004) Jamaican “modern Blackness” by thinking about how decoloniality works at the level of everyday often micro-practices, such as dis-alienation, a turning away from dominant beauty norms. Bennett herself posted on Instagram after placing third in the Miss Universe pageant 2017.

I did not win but I got what I was seeking. I won the hearts of many, I got to highlight deaf awareness, I stand as the first afro queen to have made it thus far, I represented my little island and I received all the love one could possibly wish for... THANK YOU!!! I came, I conquered, and if you know me, then you know that's just another story and you will be seeing a lot more from me (*Jamaica Observer* 2017).

She came, she conquered hearts and was loved but she also had to face critique in her own country of Jamaica for not straightening or tying her hair back for the competition. This is significant because hair politics is linked to skin politics in Jamaica and her outward show of Afro-centrism draws attention to her dark skin which for some in the diaspora continues to be problematic within the realm of beauty. Angela Y. Davis (1994) asserts that the retro-Afro is shorn of the politics of Black liberation, self-love and anti-racist aesthetics within which the hair style originally emerged. However, Bennett calls herself “the first afro-queen to have got this far”, which makes us see her Afro in a different light. Far from being a hairstyle “shorn of the politics of Black liberation” we see Barrett asserting its Black anti-racist aesthetics significance and thus positioning herself as occupying a radical Black aesthetic consciousness. The facts that Bennett won in Jamaica, “broke the internet”, and had her success picked up by fashion and lifestyle glossies such as *Elle*, *Essence* and *Allure*, which praised her for going against tradition and entering an international pageant with an Afro, are important. This is so, first because they show her resistance to racial capitalism’s “second skin” through dis-alienation from dark skin phobia. Second,

because they show that dis-alienation and Black anti-racist aesthetics continue to decolonize a Global North/South West society and culture still fixated on whiteness and browning beauty norms. Bennett's skin in combination with her hair show her Jamaican twenty-first century Black-centric decolonizing resistance to such norms through her dis-alienation in insisting on going against the beauty grain by being "the first afro queen".

Conclusion

Looking at these women's resistance through dis-alienation by the lens afforded by Black decolonial feminist critique we can see that Obama, Gatwech, Nyong'o and Bennett have developed ways of living and becoming outside of racial capitalism's "second skin" discourses. They engage in developing ways of living and becoming which start from the Black dark-skinned woman self. Beginning from the self as a site of Black decolonial feminist critique and practice means that they engage in what Jamaican Rastafarians call "livity" (Chevannes 1994). Livity is a Black Jamaican-originated philosophy which extends from aesthetics to a whole way of life centred on Black dark skinned becoming rather than seeing dark skin as a deficit, something which is in need of correction. Obama, Gatwech, Nyong'o and Bennett create a world which they make to pause and look at its own dark skin phobia as a traumatically intimate location produced by the skin values of global racial capitalism (Robinson 1983).

In doing this, they go beyond the negatively affective and violent consumption of the libidinal economy of the "second skin". They turn away from the "second skin's" reproduction of dark skin's ugliness and dark skin as a source of shame. Livity as a Black decolonial feminist practice of dis-alienation ruptures the body politics of "second skin" aesthetic regimes. This takes on board Césaire's (2000), Glissant's (2006), Fanon's (1986) and Wynter's (2003) insistence that as Black African-descent women in the diaspora we can only decentre the European civilization project by moving beyond *being* solely in opposition to whiteness in

order to *become* ourselves. Racial capitalism constructed Black African-descent dark skin ugliness and white or light-skinned beauty. We need to move beyond being in opposition to whiteness/lightness if we are invested in intersectional anti-racist liberation focused on the process of *becoming* ourselves. We see this being put into practice by Obama's, Gatwech's, Nyong'o's and Bennett's starting from themselves, from love of themselves, as they remake their worlds in their own image and through their own gaze. This is not the gaze of dissection wrought by the "second skin" but one focused on showing who "I am", in contradiction to the taken for granted position of dark skin's lack of aesthetic value in the diaspora. From the lens of Black decolonial feminist critique, these women highlight the continuing libidinal economy of dark skin subalternity, contempt, hate and violent consumption as well as the mechanisms of white/light skin privilege within contemporary heteropatriarchy and counter this with a radical Black aesthetic consciousness of dark skin as valuable, as loved.

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