

DISLOCATED SUBJECTS:  
TRANSNATIONAL FORCED PROSTITUTION, AFRICAN FEMALE BODIES AND  
CORPOREAL RESISTANCE

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction: Feminist Praxis, Corporeal Progress.....	1
Chapter 1: The Geography of Form - Bodies, Space and Capitalist Desire in Amma Darko's <i>Beyond the Horizon</i> .....	9
Chapter 2: Reinscribing Power – Corporeal Acts and Body Inscription in Chris Abani's, <i>Becoming Abigail</i> .....	26
Conclusion: What Can the Body Do for Transnational Feminism? – From the Individual to the Collective.....	48
Bibliography.....	56

## Introduction: Feminist Praxis, Corporeal Progress

When I was working (in Nigeria), a friend told me that she had a friend, a woman, who arranged visas to Europe for girls who wanted to study ... I went to my parents one day and we chatted about the matter. I am their first daughter and they wanted me to study ... When I knew what was going on, you know, what could I do? I knew what they wanted me for in just a few hours after I arrived here and I was trapped. How could I escape, with no money, no car, no airplane ticket? ... I didn't even speak the language! Oh! It was impossible! ... I still write my family, I have since I have been here. At first I told them that my life is fine here, I was working and studying. I did not like to lie to them. I wrote one day and I told them everything, I told them the truth ... I have not received a letter, not even a common letter from them.

-Charlotte, a prisoner in Rebbibia prison in Italy  
interviewed by anthropologist Asale Angel-Anjani,  
"Trafficking, African Women, and Transnational  
Practices" in *Diasporic Africa*

The coercion, sexual abuse, cultural alienation and familial rejection that mark Charlotte's real-life experiences as a forced prostitute manifest central concerns in my analysis of two contemporary African novels, Chris Abani's, *Becoming Abigail* and Amma Darko's, *Beyond the Horizon*, published in 2006 and 1995 respectively. In their novels, Darko and Abani imagine the lives of young women lured from Africa and forced into prostitution in Europe. My goal for this project is twofold. First, I explore how features of postcolonial culture and contemporary globalization produce the transnational business of forced prostitution in these novels; and second, I examine how forced prostitution across national and cultural borders shapes the Diasporic African female experience in Abani's and Darko's texts. How, I ask, do global shifts from postcolonial African to European physical and cultural space affect the formation of the Diasporic African female subject? How does forced sexual labor and physical violence shape this

process? What forms of resistance are possible for Diasporic African women forced into prostitution?

In their anthology, *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*, Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty explore these questions by probing how social forces “discipline” the female body. Specifically, they offer analysis on different ways in which female bodies are or can be disciplined and how these forms of discipline may complicate one another. I look at how female bodies are disciplined “within discourses of profit maximization, as global workers and sexual laborers” and within “discourses of ordinary nuclear family, as wives and mothers” and daughters in Abani’s and Darko’s novels (xxiii). Engaging Amina Mama’s argument in “Sheroes and Villains: Conceptualizing Colonial and Contemporary Violence Against Women in Africa,” that the inheritance of patriarchy from the colonial to the postcolonial state in many African countries perpetuates the colonization of African women, I look at how colonial legacies reinforce physical and psychological subjugation of females in both Abani’s and Darko’s novels. I draw on Alexander and Mohanty’s conception of often-conflicting processes of “disciplining and mobilizing” female bodies, “particularly Third World” bodies “in order to consolidate patriarchal and colonizing processes,” as a way of examining how and why women in the two novels are forced into prostitution by male family members (xxiii).

I expand Mama’s argument beyond the realm of the African state by analyzing how the novels link two European countries, England and Germany, and two African countries, Nigeria and Ghana, in continuing colonial relationships through contemporary global economic configurations. Working from Anthony Giddens’ definition of

globalization as “the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities,” I posit that such linking of “distant localities” through economic relationships propagates hetero-patriarchal structures across geographic and national borders in the novels (181). Exploring how forced prostitution emerges at the conjunction of colonial histories, globalization and hetero-patriarchy constitutes a central aim of my project.

Anthropologist, Asale Angel-Anjani has studied the forced prostitution of Nigerian women in Italy and ties this form of slavery on a global level to “economic degradation ... rapid urbanization and migration” (300). And in “Feminism, Postcolonialism and the Contradictory Orders of Modernity,” Ato Quayson asserts that contemporary conditions for women “are greatly aggravated in the Third World, where women’s existences are strung between traditionalism and modernity,” (585) demonstrating an example of “the tension between cultural homogenization and heterogenization” that Arjun Appadurai views as “the central problem of today’s global interactions” (30). My project puts these theorists in conversation as I analyze how intersections among globalization, colonialism and traditional cultural practices contribute to the proliferation of forced prostitution and violence in Abani and Darko’s texts. By doing so, I examine the relationships among these superstructural forces and the violence that the protagonists of the two novels endure.

Abani and Darko employ particular narrative techniques to emphasize these relationships. I explore how Abani plays with shifting temporality, positing that this fractured mode highlights how historical relics of colonialism persist through the disciplining of the female body. By moving back and forth from the past to the present, Abani portrays how continuing patriarchal structures compromise the agency and safety

of African women across chronological time. Likewise, he shifts the spatial structure of the novel between London and a Nigerian village, drawing attention to the ways in which global capitalism propels the disciplining of women across national boundaries. Darko, on the other hand, offers a more linear structure, allowing readers to follow her protagonist's path from a rural village, to the Ghanaian capitol and finally to the European metropolis. This structure presents conflicting cultural and economic expectations in these different locations and allows readers to trace the path of capital reaped from female bodies. By opening up space beyond the circumscribed borders of towns, cities and countries through movement of the female body, both authors represent ways in which globalization shapes female subjectivities. This narrative technique also provides a visual representation for the transnational flow of capital, from Europe to Africa, procured from female bodies. Through their particularized spatial and temporal structures, both authors elucidate the intersecting historical, cultural and economic processes that interplay across space and time, setting the context for the forced prostitution of African women.

In addition to the structural elements that govern *Becoming Abigail* and *Beyond the Horizon*, these texts present nuanced depictions of female bodies. Both Abani and Darko investigate the intersecting physical and psychological impacts of violence and forced prostitution on African women in the Diaspora. They spare no details in describing the searing pain of broken bones and wounded skin, as well as the violation, humiliation and shame of their protagonists. Many third world and postcolonial critics look at violence, particularly sexual violence, enacted on female bodies. In particular, Akosua Adomako Ampofo examines how ambiguous interpretations of law facilitate the

use of rape and domestic violence to discipline Ghanaian women in her article, “Controlling and Punishing Women: Violence Against Ghanaian Women.” Amina Mama takes a different approach in “Sheroes and Villains,” connecting present-day violence against African women to the continent’s colonized past. Very few critics, however, examine what happens to the material body after periods of violence.

I engage this critical gap by exploring how females use their bodies to fight against their abusers and deploy their corporeality to reconstitute subjectivity in the aftermath of violence in the novels. What might it mean that the abused body also serves as the primary tool of resistance? I employ the thinking of contemporary body theorists, Elizabeth Grosz and Elaine Scarry and draw on Freud’s early psychoanalytic work to analyze how both Darko and Abani navigate this question. Though female bodies are in many ways manipulated, abused and trafficked across borders to new spaces in *Becoming Abigail* and *Beyond the Horizon*, both authors also uniquely conceive ways for their female protagonists to utilize their corporeality to resist violent treatment and attain psychic agency. Abani and Darko circumscribe the body as an alternative spatial domain with its own borders through which females act and re-constitute their perceived identities. Specifically, I look at how alternative uses of the female body, like physical violence, engaging in voluntary sexual acts and self-mutilation may function as forms of resistance against sexual objectification and psychological colonization in both Darko’s and Abani’s novels. The female body in the texts, I argue, becomes a medium for resisting physical, psychological and economic totalization and producing agency in the individual female subject.

My interest in looking at female bodies in these texts stems, in part, from literary critic MaryEllen Higgins's close reading of *Beyond the Horizon*. Higgins focuses on diverging ideologies for female movements presented in the novel and their relative successes and failures. She attributes the failures of transnational female connection in Darko's text to racism, national prejudice and the symptomatic isolation of abused women. While her analysis certainly confronts potential shortcomings of contemporary feminist praxis, I offer an alternative reading of female agency through the use of bodies in the text. My interest in looking at bodies functions as a response to Higgins's diagnosis that transcontinental female movements fail in the novel. Darko's and Abani's depictions of corporeal acts, I argue, present alternative ways for African female subjects to mediate the abusive experiences of forced prostitution when female community connection is not possible.

Conversely, literary critic Maria Frias considers how African forced prostitutes in Europe reclaim their bodies and financial independence through the lens of Darko's novel in her article "Women on Top: Prostitution and Pornography in Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon*." In the process, she argues that Darko re-writes the traditional African prostitution narrative. Whereas many, typically male, African writers depict prostitutes as "fallen" women, Darko re-presents (voluntary) prostitution as a subversive way that African women in the Diaspora may refigure themselves as active subjects, attaining financial independence and escaping abusive relationships (Frias 8). I align my readings of both novels with Frias', suggesting that corporeal acts, sexual, violent or otherwise, offer forced prostitutes and other subjugated women means of attaining agency.

Agency, according to M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Mohanty's transnational feminist frame, occurs when "Women do not imagine themselves as *victims* or *dependents* of governing structures but as agents of their own lives" (xxviii). In their view, agency stems from "the conscious and ongoing reproduction of the terms of one's existence while taking responsibility for this process" (xxviii). In my analysis, I utilize Alexander and Mohanty's conception of agency as an active re-shaping of a subject's position by the individual, but I also draw on Elizabeth Grosz's re-thinking of female subjectivity as stemming from the body rather than rooting consciousness solely in the mind (*Volatile Bodies* vii). Grosz asserts, "All the effects of depth and interiority can be explained in terms of the inscriptions and transformations of the subject's corporeal surface" (vii). Bodies, she insists, "have the explanatory power of minds" (vii). One of the major stakes of Grosz's argument lies in its implicit attention to "sexual difference" (vii). Focusing on the body allows feminists to examine "sexual difference," as both physical and cultural constructions, "in a way that the mind does not" (vii). Utilizing Alexander and Mohanty's conception of agency, and working from the idea that a combination of unique individual qualities and outside social and historical forces shape subjects, I examine how corporeal acts challenge the female subject position within the contemporary global economy, colonial histories and familial structures in the two novels.

I commence my analysis with a reading of *Beyond the Horizon* that specifically delves into the tensions between traditional and modern cultural formations, and interrogates how this tension leads to the violation and isolation of Mara, the novel's protagonist. In the closing statement of the novel, Mara comments that "material things"

are all she can offer her children (Darko 140). She laments, “As for myself, there’s nothing dignified and decent of me left to give them,” illustrating some of the psychic and social implications of being disciplined in both the corporeal discourses of motherhood and sexual labor (140). My study of Darko’s novel focuses on how corporeal resistance may afford forced prostitutes, like Mara, economic autonomy and liberation from abusive men, but also acknowledges that the choice to remain in prostitution may alienate these women from families rooted in more traditional cultural mores. In the following chapter on *Becoming Abigail*, I hone in on the historical genealogy of patriarchy and its transnational proliferation under contemporary global conditions. I explore the acutely physical and enduring psychological repercussions of these patriarchal conditions on Abigail, the protagonist of Abani’s novel. The agency, or “becoming” that Abigail garners from the active use of her body, I argue, has more to do with her psychic reformation than economic autonomy as in Darko’s novel (Abani 34).

In concluding, I consider how these individual forms of corporeal resistance may indicate new ways of thinking about transnational feminist practices. How, I ask, can one think about bodily resistance on a collective level? How does thinking about the body as a site of resistance and agency contribute to broader discourses in Transnational Feminism? And, what can feminists draw from this model that may help impact more subjugated women worldwide? This project poses no definitive answers to these questions, but rather tries to shift thinking about the female body from a potential site of vulnerability to a site of power.

Chapter 1: The Geography of Form - Bodies, Space and Capitalist Desire in Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon*

As I toured the red-light zone in Amsterdam one evening with a friend, we heard a heated argument between a man and a woman, in *Twi*, from a side alley. Soon an attractively-dressed young man, probably in his late twenties, and a slim, pretty woman some years younger stepped into the light. The man was threatening to give the girl 'the beating of her life' if she didn't go in there (the window) and 'work.' She was sobbing, imploring him not to force her. My friend and I walked away, and when we passed by later only the young man was out in the street – obviously watching to see how many clients she had. Whether she came of her own free will or at her boyfriends 'invitation,' what was clear was that he had forced her into prostitution and was controlling her and her earnings.

-Akosua Adomako Ampofo, "Controlling and Punishing Women: Violence against Ghanaian Women"

The scene that Ampofo observes in Amsterdam is far from anomalous in many western European metropolises. In her novel, *Beyond the Horizon*, Amma Darko depicts a marriage between a Ghanaian village girl, Mara, and her "been to," or urbanized, husband. Darko's marital portrait delves into the intersecting and conflicting cultural, economic and global conditions that lead to Mara's eventual journey to Germany as a forced prostitute. Her literary rendering of African forced prostitutes in Europe not only portrays this horrific phenomenon, it also serves as a call to re-think forms of feminism that reach beyond national borders and account for what cultural critics Caren Kaplan and Inderpal Grewal term "transnational flows" (qtd. in Angel-Anjani 293).

By posing female bodies as spaces sovereign in relation to the geographic locations within the novel, Darko suggests that the female body may become, what theorist, Elizabeth Grosz terms "a site of *resistance*" (*Inscriptions and Body Maps* 238). Grosz views the body as a privileged space. While it may be acted upon in violent and

dehumanizing ways, the body is also “capable of being self-marked, self-represented” (238). Through different uses of the body, such as engaging in *voluntary* labor and prostitution, individual females in the novel resist being passively subsumed by the patriarchal marketplace and instead re-assert themselves as active subjects. Looking at the body as a potential site of resistance, I argue, provides a way of re-thinking feminist praxis for women cut off from their cultures and often isolated, physically and/or psychologically, from collective forms of resistance.

Darko illuminates how the female body becomes the site of both abuse and resistance by outlining the narrative trajectory of female bodies through space. Global theorist Anthony Giddens describes how “capitalism has been such a fundamental globalizing influence precisely because it is an economic rather than a political order” (184). Because capitalism works among, rather than within, national political structures, “it has been able to penetrate far-flung areas of the world” (184). In her novel, Darko traces Mara’s movements in global space. In doing so, Darko portrays Mara as both humanized subject and commodity within the capitalist system contributing to “local and international discourses about the abuse of women in the transnational sex trade” (Higgins 312). Darko constructs Mara’s body as a marker for the transnational flow of capital from Europe to Africa. Structurally, the novel serves as a geographic blueprint, or map, for the movement of capital and information to and from different physical locations through the movement of female bodies; however, through the particularity of Mara’s experience, Darko also outlines ways in which females may use their bodies to resist exploitation.

Opening up space beyond delineated national borders, via national and transnational movement of the female body in the novel, ultimately illuminates ways in which globalization shapes female subjectivity.

Under contemporary global structures, like those that lead to the trafficking and the prostitution of women, feminists must examine conditions for women across cultures and geographic spaces instead of looking solely at fixed locations or societies. For instance, Susan Stanford Friedman insists that feminism be theorized with the understanding that “the global is always already present in the local; the local always already present in the global” (111). Friedman argues that contemporary globalization erases traditional cultural, political and economic boundaries between nations (111). Both the content and narrative structure of Darko’s novel locates her text within this transnational frame, demonstrating how global intercultural and spatial factors fuel the forced prostitution of African women in Europe.

By shifting her narrative from rural to urban and third world to first world space, Darko examines how “transnational flows” of capital and myths of capitalist progress travel across circumscribed national and regional borders and contribute to the global business of forced prostitution in the novel. In conjunction with spatial shifts, Darko makes use of temporal structure to depict how these intersecting global flows yield the exploitation of female bodies. Darko plots a largely chronological narrative, demonstrating that temporal history must be mapped against spatial location. This chronological frame highlights how differing cultural norms across communities compound the pressures placed on females and contribute to the violence enacted on their bodies in Darko’s text. As the narrative trajectory moves sequentially forward, Darko

elucidates discrete cultural practices in three distinct spaces, the Ghanaian village and city, and the European metropole. At the same time, tracing literal movement of women's bodies among these spaces illuminates how exploitation of female bodies links these different areas in the global economic market. Shaping her chronological structure into a relatively condensed timeframe allows readers to see how the tension between localized cultural norms and the global marketplace trap women in positions of physical and emotional servitude as they move from space to space in the novel.

This narrative structure corresponds with the way Anthony Giddens suggests we look at "social life" (181). Rather than examine societies as sovereign entities, like many transnational feminists he encourages looking at "social life" as "ordered across time and space" (181). Examining interactions between time and space, Giddens purports, "directs our attention to the complex relations between *local involvements* ... and interaction across *distance*" (181). Darko's transnational narrative reveals how looking across space elucidates certain global synchronicities; yet spatial analysis also highlights asynchronous interpretations of such cultural forms creating different imagined worlds across geographic locations. In the novel, the imagined worldviews in a rural Ghanaian village, Ghana's capital city and a European metropolis intersect, but do not wholly align. It is from the tension between universalized capitalist signs and differing local interpretations of these capitalist structures that the business of forced prostitution develops in the novel. Tracked through the corporeal experiences of the female protagonist, Mara, Darko's narrative suggests that such capitalist structures bolster global hetero-patriarchal interests and utilize cultural difference to exploit gender and sexual expectations for females, particularly African women in the diaspora.

The novel commences with a vignette from the chronological endpoint of the novel when Mara works as a prostitute in Munich. Beginning with an examination of Mara's left pinky finger, the protagonist describes how her mother used to play games with her little finger when she was an "innocent naïve child," in the Ghanaian village of Naka, but now "it's bent" from a violent experience with a John (Darko 2). Mara's little finger tells the narrative trajectory of her body and the movement of capital acquired from it. Though she "loath(es)" how "the bone's have been displaced" and how "it looks weird," Mara does *not* loathe "the money that came with it" (2). Though abused and distorted, it is from the localized site of her body that Mara reaps capital from the global market. The female body in this scenario functions as an alternative to Friedman's assumption that globalization blurs the boundaries between the global and the local (Friedman 111). Darko erects Mara's body as a new spatial location through which she can benefit as an active subject in the capitalist marketplace. Though she participates in the activities of the local community and the global market(s), Mara's body cannot be circumscribed as either space. The female body becomes the sovereign space of the individual female subject, a space that she controls and utilizes for her own purposes.

However, Mara only achieves this relationship between body and sovereign capital at the end of the novel. Following this passage, the narrative shifts back in time and moves from Munich to Naka, and thereafter, unfolds chronologically. In Naka and in her subsequent relocation to the city of Accra, Mara neither has control of her body nor capital. Her spatial shift from the rural city to the urban capital results from an economic exchange between her father and her abusive husband, Akobi. Akobi gains ownership of Mara by paying her father with "two white cows, four healthy goats, four lengths of

cloth, beads, gold jewellery and two bottles of London Dry Gin” and Akobi moves her “as his wife from my little African village, Naka, to him in the city” (3). Thus, initially Mara’s body is bought and sold in an exchange between two men stripping her of any control over her body, the monetary exchange and her geographic residence. Darko aligns the economic relations of marriage with those of forced prostitution in which a male client and (generally) male pimp exchange money for use of a female body, and thus controls the movement of that body in space. However, Darko emphasizes that it is neither the institution of marriage nor local tradition that puts women in danger, but rather the ways in which ubiquitous capitalist desire influences these domains. Mara notes:

Naturally, not all husbands made wrecks of their wives ... but father ... had a different formula for choosing or accepting husbands for his daughters, which took more into consideration the number of cows coming as the bride price than the character of the man (4).

By privileging economic advancement over her potential husband’s integrity, Mara’s father puts her in danger of abuse and exploitation. In this initial section of the novel, Darko links the proliferation of capitalist desire in rural Ghana with Mara’s loss of agency over her body and her physical residence. Additionally, this purely material marriage transaction in a traditional Ghanaian village illuminates how the forces of capitalism link different geographic spaces under a global system of economic desire.

Darko’s representation of Mara and Akobi’s marriage reveals how these same capitalist desires circulate in urban space. Mara’s marriage demonstrates how the exchange of female bodies increases interaction between rural and urban spaces in a way that strengthens patriarchal structures and limits the control females have over their lives.

Akobi's motivation for marrying Mara turns out to be purely economic. When he leaves Naka for Accra he discovers that "life in the city ... was not the glamorous days and nights he had seen in his dreams. Reality hit him ... and he realized that the furthest he could go with his level of education was a messenger clerk" (5). After being rejected by several "high class" women in the city, Akobi returns to Naka for a wife whose labor will aid his process of uplift. These two distinct geographic spaces in the novel, the Ghanaian village and city, function interdependently through economic transactions. Like Giddens, Arjun Appadurai outlines how capitalism serves as a globalizing force because cultures become "products of intercultural transactions" (Appadurai in Friedman 113). As a result, he proposes, capitalism obliterates the notion of "purely domestic space" (113). Mara's body, and the capital procured from its exchange, marks an economic link between rural and urban space that blurs the line between the two locations. Her body serves as a conduit for interspatial transactions among men that at once accelerates their social and economic uplift and attenuates her agency. While Mara's father enjoys greater prominence in Naka and settles his debts and Akobi acquires a source of labor in his new wife, she, however, is "bought ... off very handsomely" and made the "wife ... and property" of Akobi (Darko 7).

In the grammatical structure of this section, Darko highlights how these men rob Mara of agency altogether, demonstrating how patriarchal structures objectify women and divest them of agency as a means of propagating male interests. Darko couches this section in economic language in which the "property" of Mara's body may be "bought" and possessed. Within this trope the men take on the roles of buyer and seller, while Darko figures Mara as the commodity good exchanged. As narrator, Mara tells readers

that “Akobi’s father bought *me*” and that Akobi “left for the city ... with *me* as his wife” (7). In both clauses, the men occupy the active subject positions that act upon the indirect object, Mara. Darko’s economic motif reflects how the exchange of female bodies links discrete locations, in this case Naka and Accra, in an increasingly globalized marketplace. Likewise, the syntactical structure accentuates the complete lack of agency that patriarchal structures afford women. The passive exchange of Mara’s body in this section exemplifies a major tenet of most feminist discourses. Whether rooted in African contexts, focused on transnationalism or located in the so-called First World, and whether they call themselves, feminists, Womanists or Stiwanists, most “feminist” scholars agree “that a woman’s body is her inherent property, not to be owned, used, and dumped by men” (Ogundipe-Leslie 547). Calling attention to how Mara’s body functions as “property” through a particularly economic exchange between men, connects patriarchal practices to the marketplace and underscores the need for feminist intervention in contemporary capitalist structures.

Additionally, the movement of female bodies through space in the novel draws attention to the necessity of intervening in such capitalist structures through a transnational lens. Though the movement of female bodies through capitalism links Naka and Accra, differences in cultural expectations make fluid movement of bodies between the two spaces difficult. The increasing hybridity of contemporary culture does not erase important distinctions among different cultural spaces. As the first young man with a school certificate in Naka, Akobi enjoys superior status in his rural home; but this status does not translate to the city where his education proves limited. Nonetheless, his community in Naka expects him to live up to their traditional standards. In “Disjuncture

and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy,” Appadurai describes how globalization creates both cultural homogeneity, which takes the form of capitalist desire in Darko’s text, and cultural heterogeneity. The disparity between Akobi’s status in Naka and Accra highlights persisting heterogeneous characteristics among different cultures. A tension exists between traditional familial expectations and the reality of the global capitalist system. Darko highlights the disparity between rural myth and urban reality by tracking Mara and Akobi’s movements between the two spaces. Though in Naka Akobi earns accolades, the villagers fail to realize that he cannot achieve financial success in urban space. Darko utilizes Akobi’s situation to demonstrate how many African men must straddle the expectations and realities of both rural and urban space, of both traditional and rapidly modernizing culture.

To compensate for his financial and social failures in Accra, Akobi disciplines Mara into a bastardized and abusive version of a nuclear marriage in which he physically, emotionally and economically exploits her. Akobi projects his failures on to Mara’s body by treating her as his possession, his source of labor and his cathartic punching bag that “receives his beatings, his kicks, his slaps, scolds and humiliations” (Darko 44). Mara’s body bears the brunt of Akobi’s struggle to reconcile traditional expectations and the realities of contemporary urban space. The violence Akobi exacts on Mara’s body demonstrates a tension that often exists between women and men in societies where global economic realities and traditional cultural expectations are irreconcilable. Appadurai suggests that “women ... bear the brunt of this sort of friction, for ... they are often subject to the abuse and violence of men who are themselves torn about the relation between heritage and opportunity in shifting spatial and political formations” (42-3). It is

this very tension that leads some men to force women into prostitution, as Akobi does to Mara. Darko's representation of a marriage in which a husband forces his wife into the sexual marketplace problematizes this means of attaining capital and constructing a mirage of success for families back home.

In the introduction to their book, *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*, M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Mohanty explain how the global structures of capitalism may create the kinds of false expectations that Darko constructs as catalysts for Akobi's abuse of Mara's body in the novel. For Alexander and Mohanty, the idea of individual liberalism, or capitalist uplift, inherently ties to the notion of democracy and citizenship. They see democratic rhetoric as promoting "freedom of choice and access," to mask the inherent project of maintaining capitalist status quo (xxxix). They cite the promotion of private-land ownership as a means of progress and development for the individual and the U.S. government's simultaneous institution of land-allocation policies that severed Native Americans from their land as an example of this masked capitalist project. The message this sends in America is that white citizens of a certain economic class have access to this kind of individual progress because they maintain capitalist structures, but such opportunities are institutionally foreclosed for many, like Akobi. Akobi's limited education, though it "stood out in the village crowd," hinders his ability to advance into lucrative and socially desirable occupations in Accra (Darko 5); and his skin color, which makes him just "another primitive African face come to pollute the oh-so-pure German air" and lack of citizenship further compound his struggle for capital in Munich (60). Alexander and Mohanty call this the "myth" of individual liberalism because it assumes an already privileged economic and political

position. They argue that democracy has been subsumed by capitalism. In order to redeem democratic values for feminism, it must be divorced from capitalism. Thus, they base their vision of feminism around socialist principles of political and economic equality.

Like Alexander and Mohanty, Darko also questions “the myth” of capitalist progress in her novel, but does not entirely renounce capitalism. In Accra, Mara attains a brief period of sovereignty over her finances by starting her own business. Appalled by Akobi’s abuse and financial neglect of Mara, local matriarch and businesswoman Mama Kiosk tells her,

Tradition demands that the wife respect, obey and worship her husband but it demands, in return, care, good care of the wife. Your husband neglects you and yet demands respect and complete worship from you. That is not normal ... Men buy for themselves, Mara. There’s no law that says they shouldn’t. But they buy for their wives too, Mara. And there’s a law that says they must (Darko 14).

Through Mama Kiosk, Darko indicts an individualist approach to capitalism, but does not blame the capitalist system for the exploitation of women like Alexander and Mohanty do. Instead, she marries socialist principles of collectivity and equality with individual business ventures. Mama Kiosk shares her knowledge with Mara by helping her set up her own business selling goods so she can maintain her daily needs. Darko portrays such female business ventures positively as they afford women control over their financial security and their bodies. When Mara becomes pregnant, she “wasn’t taking money from him for our daily meals” any longer and manages to buy herself “a pair of car-tyre slippers” (24). By utilizing her body for such voluntary labor, Mara finds agency within her marriage. Earning independent capital becomes a way for her to resist Akobi’s

deprivation and work towards self-reliance. African feminist, Laretta Ngcobo, argues that African women must find ways to construct “self-definition and self-determination,” as “women have been driven to this position where they may only live through men” through the tradition of family structures and inheritance (540). Through Mama Kiosk’s ethical stances and model for business ventures, Darko imagines one way in which women may find “self-definition and self-determination” based on female accomplishments, rather than their relationships with men.

Significantly, through Mama Kiosk, Darko exposes flaws in traditional marriage practices, but does not wholly renounce the system either. In the space of the African city, Darko suggests a way of reconciling traditional cultural expectations with the global capitalist market. For Darko, it seems, the African city presents unique opportunities for women. Accra weds traditional culture with the contemporary global marketplace, presenting possibilities for female advancement within a particularly Ghanaian context. It is in this space that Mara can both maintain her traditional duties as a wife and begin earning capital by doing small chores for her neighbors and ultimately setting up her own business. As Mama Kiosk tells Mara, “no one does nothing for free in the city” (24). Darko poses the African city, in its synthesis of African cultural practices and modern global advancement, as a model space for African women to join in capitalist ventures. By engaging in private business in this space, Mara may not circumvent her husband’s physical abuse, but she does utilize her body, in the form of physical labor, to gain control over her finances *and* contribute to her family. The agency Mara gains through capitalist means suggests that feminism need not reject capitalism as Alexander and Mohanty assert, but rather utilize its structures for the collective advancement of women.

Consequently, Darko differentiates between the application of economic structures to meet basic needs and a thoroughly individualist approach to capitalism. By shifting the text from Naka to Accra, and then from Accra to East Berlin, she demonstrates how these myths of individual liberal achievement prove dangerous for the African female subject. In doing so, she affirms the privileged space of the African city as a locus of feminism for African women. To attain the “television, radio, fridge, carpet, even car!” that Akobi desires, he sells Mara’s things and buys a ticket to Europe,” stripping her of economic sovereignty (34). Akobi’s dream of going to Europe where he believes “there is so plenty factory and construction work waiting to be done there” exemplifies what Appadurai describes as the disjuncture between different imagined worlds. According to Appadurai, “The further away ... audiences are from the direct experiences of metropolitan life, the more likely they are to construct imagined worlds which are chimerical, aesthetic, even fantastic objects” (33). The chronological structure of the novel highlights the synchronicity of such different imagined realities across the three different geographic spaces in the novel. In both Naka and Accra, Europe is continually figured as the land of dreams and freedom and democratic opportunity. Mara recalls that as a child, “we used to imagine Europe not to be just near Heaven but in Heaven itself” (Darko 34). This “chimerical” image of Europe persists in Ghana even as Mara experiences the neo-colonial structures of capitalism in Germany. As black Africans and non-citizens, neither Akobi nor Mara has access to the kind of capitalist development in Europe imagined by their native communities. Widespread racism and political limitations lead Akobi to

exploit Mara's labor and eventually force her into prostitution rather than give up his dream of attaining "plenty things."

Forced prostitution emerges in *Beyond the Horizon* at this tension between the myth of global capitalism and its harsh realities. Appadurai explicitly cites pressures placed on "young men," who "come to be torn between the macho politics of self-assertion in contexts where they are frequently denied real agency" (43). One of the effects of this, he asserts, is that women are forced to enter the labor force in new ways on the one hand, and continue the maintenance of familial heritage on the other" (43). Similarly, in "Feminism, Postcolonialism and the Contradictory Orders of Modernity," Ato Quayson argues that the traditional notion of family and kinship relations in many African contexts was complicated by the introduction of Christian marriages under colonialism. While many contemporary couples adopt Christian-style nuclear marriages, particularly those in urban areas, "it is rare that the nuclear family arrangement is not entangled in other realities that constantly challenge and undermine it" (588). Quayson argues that women consistently carry the burden of the difficult complications. Akobi's denial of agency in western space affects his abilities to live up to traditional familial expectations at home. Members of his community in Naka assume that his travels to Europe will yield economic success. Women, according to Quayson and Appadurai, "bear the brunt of this sort of friction, for they ... are often subject to the abuse and violence of men who are themselves torn about the relation between heritage and opportunity in shifting spatial and political formations" (Quayson 42-3). In addition to "abuse and violence," Darko represents women as subjects of economic exploitation. They are forced into positions of labor to allow men to "save face," with their families and communities at home. Like the

other African prostitutes she meets, Mara sets off for Germany “full of hope,” but both her body and the money earned from its use end up in the hands of men or back in the villages with its corporeal labor source disguised (Darko 89).

Nevertheless, Darko carves out a way for females to resist total corporeal and economic exploitation in European space. In addition to marking global flows of capital, the female body in Darko’s novel also serves as an alternative space through which women reorganize violating physical experiences and economic exploitation. As Linda McDowell notes, “Bodies exist *in* places; at the same time they *are* places” (McDowell qtd. in Longhurst 337). By highlighting the ways in which bodies are not just “*in* places,” but “*are*” sovereign “places” connected to individual subjects, Darko demonstrates how forced prostitutes in the novel find agency through their bodies. Constructing the body as an alternative site of power also challenges the dominating structures of capitalist globalization.

At the end of *Beyond the Horizon*, Mara flees her husband, but decides to remain a prostitute in Germany as she “decided to stop thinking about ever going home” since she “just don’t belong there any longer” (Darko 139). While she turns away from her native geographic space out of fear of her family’s rejection and her own emotional alienation, Mara turns to her body as an alternative space through which to attain some semblance of control. While this is by no means an entirely liberating decision, by making this *choice*, Mara gains some sense of sovereignty over her body and achieves financial independence. In her analysis of the novel, literary critic, Maria Frias suggests that “despite the painful, frustrating, and humiliating experience of prostitution and drug addiction written on her body” Mara keeps “reclaiming and reconstructing” her “own

private space ... freedom and financial independence” (8). Instead of succumbing to constant abuse, the body becomes the vehicle through which Mara attains physical and financial independence from her abusive husband.

Through use of her body Mara achieves some degree of physical and financial autonomy; however, corporeal resistance also helps shape her subjectivity. Frias posits,

African women who are trapped into European prostitution pay a very high price for their one-way ticket to *glorious* Europe, but in return they often obtain an agency that somehow allows them to master their own bodies and minds, while appropriating control of their own financial gains (8).

While Frias theorizes, “somehow” African women forced into prostitution “master their bodies and minds,” I argue that use of “bodies” as a means of resistance allows Mara to “master” her mind (8). Body theorist, Elizabeth Grosz, claims that power marks the body in material ways that produce consciousness. Following her theory, the act of utilizing one’s body as a form of resistance against violence and exploitation functions as an assertion of power that in turn affects consciousness, or subjectivity, producing agency in the individual. This form of resistance can be very powerful for individuals, like Mara, whose consciences have been marked by externally abusive experiences. She ultimately realizes that instead of allowing Akobi to control the money she earns prostituting, she can “take control of” her “own life” (Darko 118). Mara extricates herself from her husband’s manipulation by using her body to gain financial independence and ultimately realizes that “the body being used and misused belonged to me” (118). Though Mara’s options are limited, her recognition that she can use the sovereign space of her body to “take control of” her life facilitates a psychic agency that induces her to “turn” her situation “to my advantage” (119).

Darko also subverts traditional tropes of prostitution in African literature by figuring it as a means of attaining economic independence through use of the body. Though the shame of her profession distances Mara from her family, she is able to “buy a small cement house ... for my two kids” with the money she procures from prostituting (Darko 140). Additionally, by situating Mara as narrator Darko gives “silenced” and “stigmatized” African women a voice through which they can “speak out loud” (Frias 9). She makes readers aware that prostitution “doesn’t render” the female subject “emotionless” (Darko 1). Trauma theorist Elaine Scarry contends, “Even the most small and benign of bodily acts becomes a form of agency” (Scarry 48). By posing Mara’s body as a site of choice and endowing her with a voice, Darko gives African “women who are traumatically silenced and sexually exploited in the brothels of the Western world” a means through which to find agency (Frias 8).

Locating feminist theory in the body proves imperative for forced prostitutes who do not have access to the kinds of feminist collectives advocated by Caplan and Grewal. In their studies of feminist geography, Lise Nelson and Joni Seager see the body as “the touchstone of feminist theory” because of its unique position as a “space” that “does not have a single location or scale” (2). Thus, the body can serve as a form of power-resistance “that disrupts naturalized dichotomies and embraces a multiplicity of material and symbolic sites” (2). Darko demonstrates how the female body challenges power systems that attempt to dominate this same material space. Thus, the abused body, I propose, also becomes a primary tool of resistance.

Chapter 2: Reinscribing Power – Corporeal Acts and Body Inscription in Chris Abani’s,  
*Becoming Abigail*

While torture contains language, specific human words and sounds, it is itself a language, an objectification, an acting out. Real pain, agonizing pain, is inflicted on a person; but torture, which contains specific acts of inflicting pain, is also itself a demonstration and magnification of the felt-experience of pain ... The physical pain is so incontestably real that it seems to confer its quality of ‘incontestable reality’ on that power that has brought it into being. It is, of course, precisely because the reality of that power is so highly contestable, the regime so unstable, that torture is being used. What assists the conversion of pain into the fiction of absolute power is an obsessive, self-conscious display of agency.

-Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, p. 27

In her explication of the metaphysical experiences of torture, Elaine Scarry suggests that such corporeal acts of torture differ from other encounters with physical pain because of their inherently performative nature. Physical torture functions as a device that attenuates the agency of the tortured and augments the power of the torturer. Torture, Scarry asserts, inheres its own kind of language in its “acting out” (27). Thus, the act of torture narrates shifts in human power from tortured to torturer.

In his coming-of-age novella, *Becoming Abigail*, Chris Abani utilizes the logic of torture as both the “felt-experience of pain” and a “display of agency” and turns this logic on its head. Abani’s protagonist, Abigail, a young girl lured from her native Nigeria to London by her cousin and consequently raped, tortured and forced into prostitution grapples with her abusive experiences and alien surroundings through her corporeality. She resists physical and psychological domination by utilizing her body for self-defense, engaging in voluntary sexual acts and physically marking her own body. Abigail organizes and re-frames her abusive experiences and exhibits her agency as an active

subject, an individual who controls her body and mind. In his construction of Abigail, Abani creates a character that both bears torture and resists it, locating both experiences in the physicality of her body. By doing so, Abani exposes ways in which patriarchal, or male-centered, structures utilize female bodies as sites to discipline and control, and alternatively, demonstrates how women may challenge such hegemonic structures.

By framing Abigail's individual experiences of exploitation and torture with subtle references to colonialism, I suggest that Abani engages with postcolonial and third world feminists who expose how colonialism and its relics perpetuate the abuse of female bodies. Likewise, I propose that the corporeal resistance deployed by females in the novel provides new ways of thinking about the forms that transnational feminism may take. Abani's representation of abuse corroborates arguments of critics, like Anne McClintock, who suggest that aspects of colonialism persist in the present "postcolonial" period.

In her essay, "Sheroes and Villains: Conceptualizing Colonial and Contemporary Violence Against Women in Africa," Amina Mama traces the institutionalization of sexual violence against African women from European colonial rule to the contemporary moment. Though she frames the African and European continents in fairly monolithic ways, her genealogical analysis of imperialism provides a helpful lens through which to interrogate the sexual abuse in *Becoming Abigail*. Mama argues, "European chauvinistic constructions of femininity and a marginalizing ideology of domesticity decreased the legal and social status of African women in many spheres of life" in many colonial African nations (61). Numerous postcolonial African countries, she asserts, retained the patriarchal structures of colonialism, providing "the authority of articulating the nation's

culture and politics” to men (56). Broadly, Mama attributes much violence against women in Africa to patriarchal attitudes and behaviors passed down through imperial rule to present-day African nations. Mama cites Frantz Fanon’s link “between the conquest of land and peoples and the violation of women” as central to the perpetuation of sexual abuse (51). Fanon argues that “the colonized woman becomes associated in the mind of the European man with fantasies of rape and despoliation” (Fanon in Mama 51). According to Mama, when nationalist groups in many African nations attained independence and sovereignty over the land, the tie between conquest and the female body persisted.

However, the transnational structure of Abani’s text, a form that traverses geographic and national borders, highlights how abuse of women escalates as the narrative crosses national boundaries from Nigeria to England, complicating Mama’s distillation. Though the British no longer directly occupy and rule Nigeria, the persisting economic dominance of England fuels the trafficking of women from Nigeria and their forced prostitution in London. The transnational structure of *Becoming Abigail* exposes persisting exploitation of Nigerians by the British, and links the two countries in perpetuating patriarchal structures. Thus, globalization, a phenomenon Anthony Giddens’ defines as, “the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities,” encompasses enduring colonial relationships between economically uneven countries like England and Nigeria (181).

Abani narrates the persistence of this masked colonial relationship through the structure of *Becoming Abigail*. While he relays a narrative of forced prostitution and sexual abuse in the present moment, Abani utilizes a back and forth narrative structure to

discuss the long cultural history of sexual abuse and violence enacted on the African female body. We get hints of the colonial legacy and its persistence on Nigerian *and* British male behavior and, in turn, on African women in the present day.

In *Becoming Abigail*, Abani implies that the patriarchal legacy of colonialism continues through the abuse of women's bodies. At the beginning of the novel, Abigail laments, "none of the men who had taken her in her short lifetime had seen her," citing men's failure to notice "that her light complexion was a throwback from that time a Portuguese sailor had mistaken her great-grandmother's cries" as a prime example (Abani 26). By alluding to her great-grandmother's rape by a European man alongside Abigail's revelation about her sexual abuse, Abani traces a historical lineage of sexual exploitation in Nigeria. Not only is Abigail's skin marked by the colonial past, the recurrence of abusive sexual behaviors, of men "who had taken" women, from one generation to the next highlights the repeated colonization of female bodies in the novel.

Abani marks the colonization of female bodies through his treatment of temporality and geographic space in the novel. His initial chapter, "Lay It As It Plays," takes place in the present, and subsequent chapters entitled "Now" and "Then" shift back and forth between past and present, finally converging at the end of the text. Like in Darko's novel, Abani's text crosses national borders, situating the "Now" chapters in the London metropolis and the "Then" chapters in a Nigerian village. This transnational and non-linear form of narration highlights the persistence of colonial structures in the contemporary globalized world. The ways in which he crafts the spatial and temporal structures of the text draws attention to continued abuse of female bodies from the colonial to the "postcolonial" periods, and their increased vulnerability in a transnational,

globalized market economy. While the British no longer occupy Nigerian land, Abani utilizes his temporal and spatial structure to reflect a lasting colonial relationship between the two spaces and the effects of this relationship on female bodies.

These narrative techniques particularly emphasize the colonial structures that lead to Abigail's move from Nigeria to London and the subsequent sexual abuse that she experiences at the hands of her cousin, Peter. In a "Then" chapter, Abigail recounts an experience her father had traveling with her mother in London. When they tried to secure a room at a boarding house, there was a sign that read "No Blacks. No Irish. No Dogs" (Abani 56). The landlady "took in the grinning black faces on her stoop and with a short scream fell into a faint" (56). In what was supposed to be a vacation, Mr. and Mrs. Tansi, Abigail's parents, literally come face-to-face with racial barriers that impede their access to and acceptance in British space. A few chapters later, when Peter comes to their home in the Nigerian village to discuss bringing Abigail to London, Abigail relays her father's view that,

Peter was apparently a successful businessman in London and was very generous to the villagers when he came home, paying for a hospital bill here, new glasses there, some child's school fees over there, and so forth. Her father really liked him and had often told her about Peter and his trips when she got back from boarding school on breaks.

'He always takes one young relative back to London as well,' he used to explain. 'Imagine how lucky those children are!' (62).

Like in Darko's text, the incongruity between the reality that Abigail's father experienced in London and the myth of achievement propelled by Peter, speaks to the danger of the dream of capitalist progress and persisting colonial structures. In the narrative reality of the novel, Peter's "successful" business entails trafficking and prostituting women and children from Nigeria in London; the money that he gives back to his community, he

reaps from their bodies. Though left more implicit in Abani's text, in Peter we see another character that does not have access to the opportunities promised by capitalism in western European space. Abani alludes to the kinds of racial impediments Peter may face in London by introducing Mr. Tansi's incident in London alongside Peter's visit in the text. Though the fifty year period between Peter's and Mr. Tansi's experiences in London certainly account for shifts in racial politics, Abani's non-linear structure allows readers to draw comparisons between the two men's stories, displaying them as companion tales about the reality of the Nigerian Diaspora in London.

That Peter's success rests on the sexual marketability of black bodies in London, calls attention to the legacy of colonialism and the ways in which globalization negotiates a new kind of colonial relationship between Nigeria and London. Abani crafts a transnational narrative that highlights the incongruity of these two spaces for African subjects. Like Mara in Darko's text, Abigail enters European space with diminished economic, political and racial power. Lacking any proper legal identification since "Peter had used a fake passport and a forged visa to bring her into the country," it was as if Abigail "was a ghost" in London (110). She can only identify as a sexualized body in this space, rather than as a citizen with a legal name.

Abigail's increased sexualization and lack of enfranchisement in London extends Amina Mama's argument to expose enduring patriarchy in British, as well as Nigerian, space. That a market for Abigail's body exists in London speaks to continuing colonial attitudes about black female bodies. Mama argues that in the height of the imperial nineteenth century, "black women attracted sexual fascination" and "had come to feature in the white male psyche as a metaphor for Africa, the dark and unknown continent

waiting to be penetrated, conquered, and despoiled” (49). Though Mama does not explicitly examine contemporary European gender violence, she suggests “that the history of gender violence in Europe raises questions about European masculinity and about the gender ideologies that lay behind the emergence of today’s European states” (48-9). Abani’s text blurs this distinction between African and European gender violence. That Abigail’s body provides an economic link between Nigeria and England alludes to ways in which globalization reinforces gendered structures of colonialism through gender violence across national borders.

The link between these two spaces is further complicated, however, by the politics of citizenship in England. Abigail’s illegal status in London literally renders her a “ghost,” or an invisible subject whose body is evacuated of a legal name and national citizenship, and instead, treated as an empty repository for male sexual pleasure. Her situation indicates a kind of legal and political violence exacted on women who are coerced across borders and forced into prostitution. Though globalization links England and Nigeria in the economic market, the products for sale, these trafficked women, do not carry their citizenship and legal rights from one country to the other. As Asale-Anjani notes, without legal identification or citizenship forced prostitutes are often elided with other “displaced persons” and denied legal rights (296). In her work with forced prostitutes from Africa in Italian prisons, Asale-Anjani encountered a woman who reported her traffickers and pimps, but “the police ... did not believe her and did not investigate the case” (302). Abigail, on the other hand, does ultimately receive legal aid, but only because she escapes Peter’s violence and “ran out” in “the streets ... with bloody mouth and hands ... until a passing police car picked her up” (Abani 99). For those

forced prostitutes who may not escape or gain police protection, there are few resources for legal protection. Without legal documentation their existence and, thus their exploitation, may remain invisible. These women are not only violated sexually and psychologically, they are also stripped of their political agency.

However, even under the protection of the law forced prostitutes are not necessarily protected from further violation. Through the characterization of Abigail's relationship with her social worker, Derek, Abani further emphasizes the links among black female sexuality, colonialism and globalization. Derek, Abigail's legal advocate, takes on a paternalistic role after the police find her traumatized from Peter's abuse. His paternal role quickly turns to that of a sexual partner who, at first, provides her with "safety" and "warmth" (Abani 51). This safety, however, quickly turns to "the familiar look of men wanting her to be something they wanted" (53). While Abani represents Peter as the most overtly abusive male in the text, he is only able to adopt the role of pimp because figures like Derek exist. Abigail, a fourteen-year-old, black African girl fulfills this older white, British male's erotic desires. Derek embodies the ideal client in the transnational business of forced prostitution. Abani paints Derek's desire, and thus the germs of this contemporary business, in colonial language. When Molly, Derek's wife, discovers the couple copulating in her kitchen, she does not discover two people, but rather a "kingdom" (115). Following this incident, Abigail asks, "How many kingdoms had been lost for sugar? Or taken. The English knew all about that. About the slavery of desire" (115). Portraying the relationship between Abigail and Derek as an imperial metaphor draws the reader's attention to the colonial history between England and Nigeria, and thus links this contemporary sexual relationship to this troubling past.

Abani frames Abigail's body as the metaphoric "sugar" that Derek so "desire(s)" conjuring a "kingdom ... lost" or "taken." Derek's sexualization of Abigail's body symbolizes the history of England's parasitic role in Nigeria, or the "kingdom," and the ways in which this colonial history endures through European male treatment of the African female body.

Through other male characters, Abani demonstrates how patriarchal structures reinforce and capitalize on the colonization of women's bodies. Peter, and to some extent Mr. Tansi, participate in the exploitation of these bodies for their own benefit. Much like the middlemen of the Atlantic Slave Trade, Peter lures women and children from Nigeria in order to capitalize on a wealthy western market. He reinforces this cycle by giving money back to his unknowing community in Nigeria, the members of which laud his generosity and accomplishments.

Abani's treatment of Mr. Tansi also indicts the broader patriarchal structures institutionalized in the Nigerian community for perpetuating this cycle of enslavement and abuse. When Peter pleads with Abigail to come back to London with him, Mr. Tansi tells Abigail, "'your life will be better ... London will give you a higher standard of education and living'" (Abani 66). However, Mr. Tansi's aforementioned anecdote about his experiences in London contradicts his statement to Abigail. His first-hand experience with racial discrimination illuminates possible barriers to Abigail's success in the European metropolis. Again, by placing these two narratives close together in the text, Abani utilizes his non-linear narrative technique to highlight the contradictions between Mr. Tansi's own experiences and his recommendations for Abigail. While he leaves Mr. Tansi's motivations somewhat hazy, Abani insinuates that he is knowingly complicit in

arranging Abigail's fate. Though on the surface Abigail "felt his sacrifice knowing that he was fighting his heart the urge to beg her to stay," she also sees "the faintest shadow in his eyes, one that revealed rather than occluded. She shivered and crossed herself, arms and legs locked" (66-7). That the revelation Abigail sees in her father's eyes leads her to protect her body implies her father's knowledge of Peter's true intentions.

Abani's treatment of Mr. Tansi uncovers the depth of patriarchal structures in Nigerian society. He presents Mr. Tansi as at once a sympathetic character stricken by grief over the loss of his wife and a manipulative patriarch. While ostensibly concerned about Abigail's education and opportunities, his actions prove otherwise. When Mr. Tansi falls into a depression, Abigail transfers from a superior boarding school to a local school because "he needed her to take care of everything for him" (62). Likewise, when Peter visits, Mr. Tansi expects Abigail to make lunch for them and "the two men ... looked surprised when she joined them. They had expected her to eat later, or simply take her food to her room, while they discussed important things" (66). Her father's expectations uphold a male-centered family structure that rests on the labor of Abigail's body and sacrifices her educational opportunities, despite Mr. Tansi's rhetoric. Though not directly involved with Abigail's sexual exploitation, Abani presents Mr. Tansi as a patriarchal figure on a continuum with Peter. By demonstrating how male-centric social structures function at different levels, whether subtly in the familial domain or violently in the business of forced prostitution, Abani's depiction of male characters examines the ways in which Abigail becomes "caught in the sheath of men's plans" (75).

Peter, the most overtly violent male in the novel, exacts the kind of physical and sexual brutality on Abigail that, in Scarry's terms, results in "unmaking," or depletes the

tortured of will and power, and confers them on the torturer (45). After Abigail manages to ward off a “client,” Peter “slipped a harness with a ball into her mouth and over her head ... dragged her in front of the empty doghouse” and “handcuffed her to the chain lying in front of it” (Abani 89). Once she realizes that she cannot escape, Peter “spat at her,” and then “pulling his penis out, he peed all over her,” exclaiming ““That’s my dirty dog ... Dirty dog’” (89). Peter tortures Abigail for weeks, coming outside only to “feed and water” and “mount” her (92 & 95). Peter’s marking of Abigail’s body and the dehumanizing language used to describe his actions alludes to both the tropes of colonialism and slavery in which humans become property of either a political state or individual owners. In trying to turn her into a “dirty dog,” Peter employs a form of torture that, according to Scarry, “has political consequences” (19). Through physical and psychological torture, she asserts, torturers “deconstruct” the tortured and re-make them in their own image (20). In overtly political contexts, the re-made subject becomes an advocate of the state. By treating Abigail like a plant or animal that one only “feed(s) and water(s),” Peter attempts to “deconstruct” Abigail’s humanity and re-make her as a subservient sexual object. In turn, he would gain physical and psychological power over her, and utilize her body to garner personal capital. Thus, gaining power over Abigail would augment Peter’s economic power in the global marketplace. Torturing Abigail, and his other charges, through these dehumanizing means, is Peter’s way of climbing the rungs of economic power.

Abani depicts the potential outcome of such torture in Mary, Peter’s wife. After experiencing Peter’s repeated rapes and beatings, and witnessing the infanticide of her child, Mary “was too far gone into whatever trance she was in” to resist abuse or aid

Abigail (Abani 89). Through such brutalizing physical and psychological violations, Peter tries to similarly colonize Abigail's body and use it for his own economic gain. Certainly Peter's behavior is the most horrifying of the men in the novel, but they are all complicit in Abigail's torture. The sketches of Mr. Tansi, the exploitative father and Derek, the patriarchal law and client figure make Peter's role as pimp possible and necessary. Thus, this climactic event in the novel demonstrates how the perpetuation of male-centered social constructs may discipline female bodies into the most extreme forms of gendered violence.

In her relationships with these men, Abigail experiences manipulation, rape, physical abuse and exploitation. Though not all torturers in the traditional sense, each of these men, Peter, Mr. Tansi and Derek, colonize Abigail's body, whether for her labor or for their own sexual pleasure. In one way or another, these men gain power over Abigail through the manipulation of her body; taken together, their actions form a kind of transnational network of patriarchy that contributes to the escalation of Abigail's abuse. According to Scarry's logic, such manipulation of Abigail's body extends beyond the corporeal domain to articulate power, or control over Abigail's actions and psychological state. The use of Abigail's body, thus, narrates shifts in power from the abused to the abusers, from Abigail to the men in her life.

However, Abigail's various corporeal acts, I argue, challenge Scarry's logic, and thus, challenge the transnational patriarchal structures that facilitate her abuse. In *Volatile Bodies*, Elizabeth Grosz re-frames Scarry's earlier thinking on the body. Grosz views "bodies to always extend the frameworks which attempt to contain them, to seep beyond their domains of control" (xi). For her, "bodies are not inert," but rather "function

interactively and productively. They act and react” (xi). The ways in which Abigail deploys her body in the text reflects the kind of productive and generative power that Grosz theorizes. Abani implies that by utilizing her corporeality to fight against her abusers and carve out her own subjectivity, Abigail attains some semblance of agency. Though Grosz looks to the body as a potentially empowering site for feminist praxis, she does not specifically tie her analysis to third world or transnational feminism. In looking at the ways in which a forced prostitute who crosses national and cultural borders from the first to the third world deploys her body, I extend Grosz’s analysis to think about how the body may engage new ways of thinking through third world and transnational feminist praxis. How might feminists in these fields utilize the notion of corporeal resistance to combat persisting male-centric structures that subjugate women? Exploring the ways in which Abigail utilizes her body to challenge her aggressors and reframe her subjectivity provides insight into how corporeal resistance can extend to new theories of transnational feminism that look to the body as a potential site of power and agency.

On the most literal level, Abigail asserts her physicality as a form of self-defense against Peter’s and his client’s violence. In her initial violent encounter, she reacts to the client’s sexual advances by flying “at him, gouging a deep furrow under his eye” until “he shouted and kicked wildly” (Abani 86). When Peter finally manages to pin her down, “she closed her eyes and brought her knee up and all the fight went out of him” (88). After Peter chains Abigail outside and continually rapes and beats her for “acting up” with his client, she conjures her energy to scream and “with her teeth tore off Peter’s penis” (97). Through Peter’s and his client’s physical violence and sexual abuse, Abani reveals some of the most horrendous and humiliating ways in which “women have been

objectified and alienated as social subjects ... through the denigration and containment of the female body,” but he also unsteadies this objectification by showing how females may use this same body to fight back (Grosz xiv). Whenever one of her abusers attacks her, she reverses the power dynamic by “gouging,” kneeling, screaming and tearing. She ultimately ends this cycle of abuse by physically immasculating Peter. By posing Peter’s castration as the final violent act between the two characters, Abani not only leaves his female character in the physically dominant position, he also re-orders the historical colonization of the female body. In this case, the female, not the male, achieves physical dominance. In using these violent and action-oriented verbs, Abani depicts Abigail as a being, both material and intellectual, who has the ability change the character of her own body and another’s. His description of her physical acts upholds Grosz’s assertion that bodies function “interactively,” and ultimately that “the body’s psychical interior is established ... through ... inscription of bodily processes” (xi and 27). Through this intensely physical battle and triumph for material power, Abigail ultimately finds amusement in “the ridiculous impotence of the phallus” (Abani 25). Though far from Abigail’s only negative experience with men, what she accomplishes with her body demonstrates a way in which subjugated females may re-frame their psychological relationship to patriarchy.

Grosz also argues that misogynist views have, historically, tried to justify “women’s secondary social positions by containing them within bodies that are represented ... as frail” and defined by “sexuality” (13). Sexual abuse and its deployment in the business of forced prostitution capitalize on these social constructions, weakening and wholly sexualizing the female body. The enactment of this kind of

torture, Scarry would argue, in turn weakens the female mind and endows the abuser with power. It is this dynamic that Abani reverses in the drama between Peter and Abigail. Abigail may endure physical and sexual abuse, but by continually using her body to resist her abusers she achieves power, in the form of physical and psychological independence and, thus, enacts her agency as a subject.

Such psychological independence is central to what M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Mohanty call *decolonization*, an idea which they espouse as central to the establishment of transnational “feminist democracy” (xxxvi). For them, *decolonization* is a process that begins with individual female subjects and extends to the collective. The beginning stage they describe as a “transformation(s) of consciousness and reconceptualization of identity” at the individual level (xxxvi). In utilizing her body to resist her abusers and reframe her psychological relationship to patriarchy, Abigail initiates the beginning stage of Alexander and Mohanty’s *decolonization* process. This intersection of corporeal resistance and Alexander and Mohanty’s notion of *decolonization* suggests a meaningful way in which the body may be re-thought as a source of power, rather than a site of victimization in transnational feminist thinking.

However, the violent resistance that helps facilitate Abigail’s *decolonization* may not always be wise or possible for women who are sexually manipulated and/or enslaved. Through Abigail’s other corporeal acts, Abani offers alternative ways in which a female may utilize her physicality to make sense of her experiences and attain agency. Though often violent, sexual encounters play a central role in Abigail’s process of “becoming” in the novel (Abani 34). In the majority of sexual acts, Abani describes Abigail passively, as someone “who had been taken and taken and taken,” but, in her initial encounters with

Derek, he reverses her agency (117). Her sexual relations with Derek are “the one time she took for herself, the one time she had choice in the matter” (117). Certainly the aforementioned problems with Derek’s motivations and desires complicate the agency in their relationship. Nonetheless, that Abani frames her sexual experiences with Derek as a point in which Abigail shifts from a passive and coerced subject to an active and willing one suggests that voluntary sexual acts may serve a resistant function for female subjects whose bodies have been colonized in other ways.

In shifting Abigail’s agency, Abani re-positions sex; he demonstrates how a bodily act may shift from the objectifying experience of rape to become something empowering and pleasurable. He frames Abigail and Derek’s initial sexual encounter as the first time “Abigail was giving. For the first time, she wasn’t taken” (52). It is in this moment that Abigail “felt herself becoming, even in this moment of taking” (52). Abani draws a direct correlation between the physical activity of sex, or “taking,” and the experience of “becoming,” or coming into one’s subjectivity. By gerunding these two nouns as concurrent physical and psychological processes, he maps a clear connection between bodily action and psychological transformation. This suggests a non-violent form of corporeal resistance that also leads to *decolonization*. Reconceptualizing identity on a “psychic” level, Alexander and Mohanty suggest, serves the necessary function of “thinking oneself out of” a “space of extreme repression” (xxxviii). For forced prostitutes who experience such “extreme repression,” psychological transformations initiated by voluntary sexual engagement can shift their self-perceptions from those of repressed victims to active agents.

Grosz makes connections between sexual excitation and subject formation, tracing their theoretical linkage back to Freud's work in *The Ego and the Id*. In this work,

Freud shows the ego emerging from out of the id through a gradual process of differentiation initiated by the organism's confrontation with reality ... The ego is only gradually distinguished from id through the impact of perceptual stimuli on the surface of the organism ... the ego is something like a 'psychical callous' formed through the use of the body, and particularly its surface, as a screen or sieve for selecting and sorting the sensory information provided by perception. But although perception is crucial in the establishment of the psychical agencies, Freud implies that the body itself, or at least certain privileged bodily zones and organs, particularly those with heightened reception of sensory inputs, is even more significant (Grosz 36-7).

Freud asserts that when a body experiences "touch it yields ... sensations ... which may be equivalent to an internal perception" (Freud 19). Sexual, or erotogenic zones, Grosz suggests, are "privileged" sites of synthesis for corporeal sensation and ego formation. As the ego, for Freud, serves as the rational and realistic part of the psyche or "what may be called reason and common sense," it is through this mental apparatus that a subject begins to make sense of identity and form a unique subjectivity (19). Thus, according to Grosz, heightened physical perceptions that arise during sexual activity serve as defining psychic experiences that are organized through the ego.

I read Abani through Freud's and Grosz's theoretical frames to map the agency that may be achieved through voluntary sexual activity. He describes Abigail's process of subject formation as a heightened awareness of self achieved through the sexual excitation of the body. When first initiating sexual intercourse with Derek, "Abigail, this Abigail, only this Abigail, always this Abigail, felt herself becoming, even in this

moment of taking” (Abani 52). Abigail explains that this encounter “wasn’t the familiarity she expected,” from her previously violent sexual experiences; instead, when her “breasts, her nipples hard, pressed into his softer chest ... she felt passion enveloping her” (51). It is through the progression from arousal to sexual contact to emotional “passion” that Abigail is able to define a distinct, unique and self-perceived vision of her identity. As Abigail achieves a vision of “*this* Abigail,” Abani suggests that voluntary sex offers one way abused and colonized women may assert their agency in self-identity (51, emphasis mine).

While violent resistance and erotic sexuality serve as means of resisting domination and producing agency in acute situations, Abani depicts Abigail’s process of body inscription as another means of “*decolonization*,” or way to make sense of and attain psychic agency for the experiences throughout her life (Alexander and Mohanty xxxvi). Throughout the novel, Abigail purposefully burns her skin in clear patterns that “traced out ... the stories that filled the world around this Abigail” (Abani 44). By burning her own skin, Abigail performs a kind of writing on her body. While this certainly constitutes a form of self-torture, I argue that burning allows her to organize her experiences, come into her subjectivity and attain control over her body. Abigail’s process of burning her body “wasn’t immolation. Not combustion,” but rather an exorcism. Cauterization. Permanence;” self-burning serves as Abigail’s catalyst for “becoming” or finding agency (Abani 34). Through Abigail, Abani mimics Scarry’s reading of torture. However, he displaces the traditional torturer v. tortured dichotomy by placing Abigail in the role of both tortured and torturer. In doing so, the body becomes both the site of abuse and resistance. While self torture is certainly a

problematic act in many ways, it allows the abused subject to achieve control of her body. Across different fields of feminist thought most feminists, like Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie, argue that “a woman’s body is her inherent property” (547). Viewed in this way, body inscription can serve as a powerful means of reclaiming ownership of the body for forced prostitutes and other sexually and physically violated women.

Body inscription also functions as a kind of living text that is written on the body. In an interview with Daisy Hernandez for *Colorlines* magazine Chris Abani answers questions about his own experiences with political torture. For Abani, writing serves as a powerful way of reclaiming personal sovereignty after such dehumanizing experiences. He explains, “Sometimes writing is the only mark of your humanity left. Sometimes the refusal to give in is the best resistance. Sometimes it is the only way to stay sane. Sometimes it is the only thing that makes sense” (Abani in Hernandez 3). Describing Abigail’s process of bodily inscription as writing or the creation of a map on the skin implies that the body also functions as a text to be written and re-written. With the understanding that maps provide ways of defining and making sense of space, Abigail’s body serves as a dynamic map on which and through which she defines the important occurrences in her life.

Following her first sexual encounter with Derek, Abigail,

burned two points onto each of her breasts, one on each. Each one. One on one. Then one in the middle, the hard of her sternum pressing back against the needle. One on her stomach. On each thigh. Each knee. Several round each ankle until they were wearing a garland ... And each bubble of hope wept salty water running cool and delicious in its sting. And in the tears running down her face she tasted herself for the first time ... She held his fingers against her. Against her dots.

‘This one,’ she said, touching the ones on each breast, first one, then the other. ‘This one is you, this, me. In the middle is

Greenwich. Here,' and she was down on her stomach, 'is my hunger, my need, mine, not my mother's. And here, and here and here, here, here, here, here, me, me, me ... Words. And words. And words. But me? These dots, Me, Abigail' (Abani 52-3).

Burning her skin allows Abigail to organize her life experiences and incorporate them into her physical being. Abani uses almost oxymoronic language in this passage, noting the "hope" of her singed body and her "delicious" tears as they collide with her raw skin, juxtaposing pain and optimism. Collapsing torture and writing into one act, reflects both Abigail's corporeal abuse and her resistance. This shift in control from an external abuser to Abigail highlights the potential for re-appropriation and reformation of violated bodies by the individual.

Just as Abigail re-shapes her experiences by burning her body, Grosz works from the belief that power marks the body in material ways that produce consciousness. She proposes that "the subject is named by being tagged or branded on its surface" which creates "a particular kind of depth-body or interiority" (239). Abigail's assignation of literal meaning to each dot on her body reflects her hyper-insistence on this kind of logic. Branding her skin with literal words is not only a way to represent her identity, but more importantly to construct and re-construct it. For Freud, "the genesis of the ego is dependent on the construction of a psychical map of the body's libidinal intensities" (Freud in Grosz 33). He claims, "the ego is not so much a self-contained entity or thing as a kind of bodily tracing, a cartography ... of the body" (33). Abani actualizes Freud's theory on Abigail's body, crafting a "bodily tracing" of marks come words on its surface. Though she depicts real people and events, inscribing her body also allows Abigail to re-frame her experiences in ways that fit "my hunger, my need, mine" (53). She is able to reconstruct her history in a living fiction that empowers her psychologically. What this

suggests is that the act of writing text on one's own body functions as an assertion of power, or (re)colonization of one's consciousness. This, in turn, produces subjectivity and allows one to claim agency over his or her future. While Abigail's experiences with sexual abuse and forced prostitution mark her, by re-writing her body Abigail reforms her self-perception. This ability to acknowledge and analyze various experiences constitutes an important step in what Alexander and Mohanty term, "feminist democracy," which they base on "anti-colonial" and anti-capitalist principles. Paula Moya proposes, "The key to claiming epistemic authority for people who have been oppressed stems from an acknowledgement that they have experiences" (Moya qtd. in Alexander & Mohanty xl). It is the "*interpretation* of that experience within a *collective* that marks the moment of transformation," Moya asserts (vi). Though Abani's protagonist does not have access to a collective context for resistance, the ways in which she uses body inscription to *interpret* her experiences transform her psyche and sense of agency. In the absence of feminist collectives, corporeal resistance presents a way that isolated women, like forced prostitutes, may initiate their own transformations.

The act of bodily inscription in the novel also forces readers to resist reading Abigail's ultimate suicide as the complete erasure of her agency. Before jumping in the Thames, Abigail brands her skin with the acronym, "DSHND," meaning "death shall have no dominion" (Abani 40). These words she takes from a line of lyrical poetry, not coincidentally, also the dominant aesthetic mode of Abani's novella. While these words may only subsist on the surface of Abigail's skin temporarily, "death" has "no dominion" on the pages of Abani's text. By constructing his fiction, Abani immortalizes his protagonist's corporeal text, a reconstruction of a forced prostitute's collective

experiences of both abuse and resistance. Abigail, the individual subject, may choose death over life; however, her forms of bodily resistance imagined in Abani's text signal a re-thinking of the body as a site of power and resistance for other subjugated women.

## Conclusion: What Can the Body Do for Transnational Feminism? – From the Individual to the Collectives

In his critique of several contemporary Nigerian novels, Chielozone Eze employs Wolfgang Welsch's definition of transnationalism as, "a consequence of the inner differentiation and complexity of modern cultures ... which also interpenetrate or emerge from one another" (Welsch qtd. in Eze 1). Key to Welsch's definition, Eze concludes, is "the idea of motion, understood in this context as the movement of subjects from one place to another ... the entanglement with new realities and the validation of new hybridized worldviews" (Eze 1). Both Chris Abani and Amma Darko depict experiences of human trafficking and forced prostitution that fully embody Welsch's and Eze's interpretations of transnationalism. In both content and form these authors articulate the interrelatedness and complexity of contemporary cultures. Movement of the female body "from one place to another" in the novels indicates the historical, cultural and economic intersections and differentiations among various cultures, and also alludes to potentially dangerous consequences for these female subjects. Likewise, by imagining how forced prostitutes continually reconstitute their agency in "new realities," Abani and Darko craft subjects that, out of necessity, fully *embody* the contemporary transnational experience.

Although she does not contest Amma Darko's depictions of transnational experience in *Beyond the Horizon*, literary critic MaryEllen Higgins does diagnose Darko's novel as a failed vision of transnational feminist *collectivity*. In advocating the function of transnational feminist collectives, Higgins argues that "global women's genuine partnerships can mobilize against ... the oppression of women whose rights to healthy lives and a voice in their own affairs are devastated as a result of the destructive

power of allegedly more ‘developed’ nations” (Higgins 310). For women trafficked or coerced across borders and consequently sexually abused and prostituted, these kinds of transnational partnerships among women offer a collective voice for the silenced female subject. But where Higgins sees *Beyond the Horizon* as contributing “to local and international discourses about the abuse of women in the transnational sex trade,” she concludes that “Darko explores the possibilities for,” but ultimately exposes the failures of “transnational, transcultural sisterhood” for the forced prostitute in her novel (311-12).

Higgins performs her analysis, however, by looking only at the female character-to-character relationships within the novel; thus, she bases the failure of transnational collectivity on the teleology of the plot. In contrast, I suggest that both Darko and Abani plant seeds for other possible forms of collectivity and coalition by exposing how individual females may utilize their bodies to resist abuse, victimization and psychic control. While their novels focus specifically on the agency of individual female subjects, I’d like to conclude by exploring how particularized bodily acts may contribute to potential collective strength and agency. How, I ask, might my discussion of individual corporeal resistance contribute to broader discourses on transnational feminism?

While I employ several intersecting strains of feminist theory in my project, namely Postcolonial, Third World, African and Transnational feminism, I think it is important to continue investigating the latter for new forms of engagement. After looking at how Abani and Darko depict individual female subjects utilizing their bodies as they move from the so-called Third to First world, I must also ask: What do such depictions of corporeal resistance do to Third world feminist *praxis* when the subject

moves from Third to First world space? Elizabeth Grosz looks at bodies as integral to the production of consciousness and agency, and thus roots her vision of feminist praxis in the female body. However, she does not specifically tie her work to Third world subjects, human trafficking or forced prostitution. Other critics, like M. Jacqui Alexander, Chandra Mohanty, Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan have explored this question, but not within the context of human trafficking or forced prostitution. Their transnational models, however, offer several different ways of thinking about how to link the idea of individual corporeal resistance to transnational collectivity.

For instance, Alexander and Mohanty see the concept of *decolonization* as central to their frame of transnational feminism. They define this term as involving “both engagement with the everyday issues ... and engagement with collectivities which are premised on ideas of autonomy and self-determination, in other words democratic practice” (xxxvii). Their vision of such “democratic practice” or what they also call “feminist democracy,” “has to be premised on the decolonization of the self and on notions of citizenship defined not just within the boundaries of the nation state but across national and regional borders” (xli). *Decolonization* then, occurs on both the individual and the collective levels. Alexander and Mohanty envision the process of *decolonization* beginning with the individual as “transformation(s) of consciousness and reconceptualization of identity” (xxxvi). Thus, transnational feminist praxis must begin with the self on a psychic level. One way of performing *decolonization*, and eventually “imagining community differently,” Alexander and Mohanty suggest, “is thinking oneself out of this space of extreme repression” (xxxviii).

As I argue earlier, corporeal resistance presents one model for facilitating shifts in individual consciousness, or “decolonizing” subjugated females, like forced prostitutes, who, as Abani and Darko imagine, are literally forced into such “space(s) of extreme repression.” Contemporary theorization of the body insists that we examine corporeality in order to probe the mind. As Robyn Longhurst asserts in her article, “Situating Bodies,” the division “*between* mind and body, must be disrupted. Minds cannot float freely in space and time – they are always embodied. Bodies cannot exist without minds” (339). Elizabeth Grosz takes this argument a step further. While she also recognizes the mind as an inherent element of corporeality, she asserts that actions of the body are what initiate transformations of the mind, rather than the other way around. Looking at how forced prostitutes utilize their bodies to resist perpetrators and re-construct their subjectivities presents one way of imagining Alexander and Mohanty’s *decolonization* process. But how might this individually oriented model of feminist praxis move to a more collective or coalition-based approach that transcends borders? Perhaps a more fitting question to ask is: What can feminists draw from Abani and Darko’s depictions of corporeal resistance that may help impact more subjugated women worldwide?

In discussing “subjugated women worldwide,” it is important to recognize that “all diasporas are not alike; we must learn how to demarcate them, how to understand their specific agendas and politics” (Grewal & Kaplan 16). In *Scattered Hegemonies*, Grewal and Kaplan place particular importance on locations, both locations of origin and Diaspora, and their attendant differences in culture, class, gender, sex, economic and racial politics for the varying Diasporas that exist worldwide. I recognize that subjects of a Nigerian Diaspora in London or a Ghanaian Diaspora in Germany may have different

experiences of oppression than other Diasporas in the world. Both Abani and Darko demonstrate that even within these specific Diasporic communities, gender politics produce divergent, and sometimes conflicting, male and female encounters with hegemony. What interests me are the different ways in which authors depict experiences of sexual violation and resistance among women of various Diasporic communities. I hope examining these depictions prompt new ways of thinking about transnational feminism.

Though sexually violated women certainly differ vastly for all of the above-cited reasons and more, they are also all linked through the body. They all have access to their corporeality as a potential site of resistance. By no means do I suggest prescribing universal ways of deploying the body, but rather pose it as a possible site of resistance that may link subjugated women around the world. The ways in which individual female subjects utilize their bodies will vary depending on cultural, political, historical and economic contexts; furthermore, individual personality, age, familial structure, location, etc. all contribute to infinitely diverse circumstances. It is the model of using the body as a form of resistance, rather than a potential site of victimization, that may contribute to new ways of thinking through feminist collectivity.

In her article on two prison testimonios, “Probing ‘Morality’ and State Violence” Kavita Panjabi examines how similar models of feminist praxis may be applied across different cultures and spaces. Panjabi looks at prison testimonios produced by two female political prisoners in West Bengal, India and Argentina. In *Hammaman* and, *The Little School*, Jaya Mitra and Alicia Portnoy recount their time in political prisons in their respective countries. Both women experienced forms of physical and psychological

torture meant to enact pain and ultimately achieve compliance with oppressive political regimes. Though living in different cultures and countries on opposite ends of the world, Panjabi finds important similarities between Mitra's and Portnoy's experiences in the prisons and their means of resistance. Panjabi notes, "Both writers, in discussing the political thrust of their testimonios, assert the need to stress not victimization but resistance and strategies of survival" (155). Like Abigail in Abani's text and Mara in Darko's, these women find ways to re-constitute their victim status through forms of resistance. Likewise, the women "in *The Little School* and *Hannaman* ... develop strategies of resistance out of precisely those values that are manipulated to torture them" (164). Just as Abani and Darko demonstrate how the abused body may also become a primary site of resistance for forced prostitutes, Mitra and Panjabi utilize their torturers strategies against them. The women turn their torturers weapons against them to fight back and re-frame their own consciences.

Where Panjabi's analysis departs from mine is that resistance in both of her texts leads directly to an "ethics of collective survival that forms the basis of ... community," whereas the protagonists in my texts experience physical and psychological isolation (165). Because these political prisoners are not isolated from others, this form of female collective resistance becomes possible in ways that isolated forced prostitutes are not necessarily afforded. However, similar experiences with torture among these political prisoners and the forced prostitutes in Abani and Darko's novels and a common logic of resistance links corporeal resistance to broader transnational forms of feminist empowerment and demonstrates how this form of resistance can be taken to the collective level. Likewise, Panjabi joins Mitra's and Portnoy's similar models of resistance, not by

their literal alliances across borders, but rather by citing common means of feminist struggle in different areas of the world. Calling these two texts to the attention of the transnational feminist movement helps to build an archive of feminist resistance against physical and psychological torture across spaces and borders. Abani and Darko, I argue, also add to such an archive by demonstrating how forced prostitutes in different cultures and areas of the world may utilize their bodies as sites of resistance.

Grewal and Kaplan's frame for transnational feminism supports this claim and suggests other ways of imagining transnational coalitions through a model of corporeal resistance. They give tangible examples of how transnational coalition building can link feminists worldwide around common goals without impressing any particular ideology or framework. I share their interest in linking "diverse feminisms without requiring either equivalence or a master theory" (19). How, they ask, can we "make these links without replicating cultural and economic hegemony?" (19). Grewal and Kaplan explore this question using the example of religious fundamentalism. They demonstrate how fundamentalism, regardless of religious particularity and national location, functions as a mechanism to control women. Grewal and Kaplan emphasize that "each fundamentalism uses and disciplines women in different ways," and thus, "we need to learn more about the different ways in which a state becomes fundamentalist and how women fare in those locations" (24). Instead of building large transnational collectives to combat fundamentalism, they advocate creating location and culture specific organizations to combat specific forms of fundamentalism and advocate for women's rights. A common theme of resistance to fundamentalism will link these disparate organizations in transnational coalitions to combat fundamentalism worldwide. This model unites

women under a common general cause, but roots feminism in the specificity of local issues.

I argue that both Abani and Darko participate in this kind of coalition building centered on the goal of advocating agency and empowerment for sexually and psychologically violated women. Both authors depict their protagonists in vastly different ways which take into account the national, regional, age, cultural, situational, etc. specificities of their respective characters; they also link them through the common experience of forced prostitution and corporeal resistance. The ways in which Abigail and Mara deploy their corporeality, however, differs greatly. Nonetheless, by locating models of resistance in corporeality, the body becomes a privileged cite of agency for women in varying situations. Imagining how a forced prostitute might deploy her body to combat subjugation and find agency contributes to broader archives of transnational feminist praxis. Such innovative thinking about the body, resistance and agency presents possibilities for re-imagining feminist praxis by uniting violated and isolated subjects under shared means of resistance. Doing so not only challenges Higgins's claim that transnational feminism fails in *Beyond the Horizon*, it also presents new ways for "global women's genuine partnerships" to imagine the body as a vehicle for providing women "rights to healthy lives and a voice in their own affairs" (Higgins 310).

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