UC Santa Barbara

Journal of Transnational American Studies

Title

“Transcendental Cosmopolitanism”: Orlando Patterson and the Novel Jamaican 1960s

Permalink

https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9cg5249p

Journal

Journal of Transnational American Studies, 5(1)

Author

Francis, Donette

Publication Date

2013

DOI

10.5070/T851019714

Copyright Information

Copyright 2013 by the author(s). All rights reserved unless otherwise indicated. Contact the author(s) for any necessary permissions. Learn more at https://escholarship.org/terms

Peer reviewed

eScholarship.org Powered by the California Digital Library
University of California

SPECIAL FORUM

"Transcendental Cosmopolitanism"[1]: Orlando Patterson and the *Novel Jamaican* 1960s

DONETTE FRANCIS

> I saw the Caribbean in exilic terms. I played down the continuities. I saw exile as a creative possibility. I saw the Caribbean as a uniquely cosmopolitan experience in the sense that people of African ancestry were plunged into modernity and could draw from both Europe and Africa, but transcend both. It was a sort of *transcendental cosmopolitanism*, which is different from European cosmopolitanism. I saw possibilities with the break from history.
>
> ——Orlando Patterson, in an interview with the author (emphasis mine)

In most scholarly efforts to understand the thought of Orlando Patterson, his 1982 sociological study *Slavery and Social Death* has featured as the principal text to make sense of the author's intellectual contributions. But more noteworthy than this limiting recourse to a single text in interpreting Patterson's expansive body of writing is that the very concept of "social death" has taken on an *afterlife* of its own. Defined by Patterson as "the permanent violent domination of natally-alienated and generally dishonored persons," "social death" resonates across multiple fields, and has received a good deal of traction by contemporary theorists who use it to describe the condition not of enslaved people but of nominally freed ones.[2] Building upon Saidiya

Hartman's refinement that there is no meaningful temporal break between slavery and emancipation but that slavery lives on, scholars have drawn on Patterson's scholarship on slavery to address present-day black subjecthood.[3] Two camps have emerged out of these very North American focused discussions: the afro-pessimists and the afro-optimists. The former espouses the resulting impossibility of black subjecthood in the US whereas the latter centers black possibility *within* and *against* structural conditions of impossibility. Critiquing the field, but identifiable as an afro-optimist, historian Vincent Brown argues that these contemporary deployments of social death have fossilized the *predicament* of enslavement into the *condition* of the slave because enough time is *not* spent on the context of the enslaved and the various strategies they used to alter their predicament. Brown concludes "If scholars were to emphasize the efforts of the enslaved more than the condition of slavery, we might at least tell *richer stories* about how the endeavors of the weakest and most abject have at times reshaped the world" (emphasis mine).[4]

Too often the framework of social death solely reads those actions within a US national context. How might a geographical rerouting of this paradigm outside of the US and into an anti-colonial national setting—such as Patterson's own "transcendental cosmopolitan" framing of the Caribbean from which his scholarship emerges—recast our engagement with social death? In a 2000 interview, Orlando Patterson offers the above reflection and characterization of his intellectual project of the 1960s. "Transcendental cosmopolitanism," which captures a sense of violent rupture from original homeland, living within and through structural domination even while emphasizing the creative possibilities of such an exilic condition, has shaped the long arc of Patterson's scholarship from the 1960s to the present. In this paper, I reposition the originator of "social death" in his Caribbean milieu, to consider, as David Scott might put it, Patterson's "context for debate and dispute" *before* his institutional migration to Harvard.[5] I want to suggest that part of why "social death" as a conceptual category has become fossilized is precisely because North American scholars have neglected other works in Patterson's oeuvre, particularly the Caribbean scholarship that precedes *Slavery and Social Death* and the "richer stories" he attempts to tell in his largely unstudied Caribbean novels of the 1960s. Patterson's early writings include the sociological monograph on Jamaican slave society, published in 1967 as *The Sociology of Slavery: Jamaica, 1655-1838*, and the three Caribbean novels he published between 1965 and 1972, in which he attempts to work through and popularize his sociological studies: *Children of Sisyphus* (1965), *An Absence of Ruins* (1967) and *Die the Long Day* (1972).[6] The conceptual trajectory of these novels begins with his exploration of the plight of the urban subaltern in *Sisyphus*; continues with a consideration of the crisis of the intellectual returnee from London who seeks a meaningful role in a post-Independent Jamaica in *Absence*; and culminates with an examination of the predicament of the enslaved in the neoslave narrative[7] *Die the Long Day.* It is important to underscore that these early writings come out of particular time and place—the newly emergent independent Caribbean

nation states, Patterson's own activist engagement with nationalist and regionalist struggles of the 1960s, and his involvement in formative debates about what characterizes a West Indian aesthetic. Within this context, H. Orlando Patterson, the sociologist, novelist and literary critic, emerges as a contrarian figure—an intellectual on the Left who challenges the radical left when their ideas seem unviable or if such ideas espouse an untenable "bourgeois romanticism."[8] His refusal to write either a black-nationalist or multi-racial creole-nationalist romance in the height of the nation-building momentum consequently has meant that his novels have been "silenced," as Michel-Rolph Trouillot would frame it, in the making of a Caribbean literary canon.[9] Yet, the antiromantic sensibilities of Patterson's early novels predate much late postcolonial Caribbean writing—especially novels and autobiographies by women writers.[10] Moreover, in his long historical role as a contrarian thinker he has sought to push the public debate beyond the settled shibboleths accepted in intellectual discourse in whatever national context he finds himself.

A child of the Independence generation, Horace Orlando Patterson is profoundly shaped by its ethos. He earned his first degree in Social Science at the University of the West Indies, Mona in 1962—the very year Jamaica gained independence. In 1963, Patterson accepted a Commonwealth Scholarship to study at the London School of Economics, where he completed his doctoral thesis on Jamaican slave society. This work later became the 1967 monograph, *The Sociology of Slavery*, dedicated to C. L. R. James. As a doctoral student in London, he wrote his first novel *The Children of Sisyphus* (at 23 years old), and shared a copy of the manuscript with C. L. R. James. Rather than getting direct feedback from James, a month later he received a letter from a publisher expressing interest in the manuscript—indicating the role James played in facilitating Patterson's short-lived career as a novelist. The novel was published in 1965, on the eve of Patterson's return to Jamaica to teach Sociology at the University of the West Indies. The Walter Rodney October 1968 crisis, which led to the University Professor being expelled and prohibited from returning to the island, crystallized the draconian tactics of the governing Jamaican Labor Party, and changed Patterson's own desire to stay in the newly sovereign island nation. He, nonetheless, started his final published novel in Jamaica, and completed it in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1971. Unable to give up on the Jamaican nation-building project, when Michael Manley and the People's National Party came to power in 1972 he serves as "Special Advisor for Social Policy and Development" to Manley's government from 1972-1979. During those years, Patterson split his work year between Cambridge and Jamaica, spending seven months teaching Sociology at Harvard and five months developing social programs to ameliorate the conditions of the lower-income areas of Kingston, Spanish Town and Montego Bay.

One way to characterize the break between the Caribbean-centered years versus the move to North America is that in the former, Patterson did historical work (slavery and its afterlife) about a particular place (Jamaica), and in the latter, he did

comparative conceptual work (slavery) about many different places (the Islamic kingdoms, China, Korea, Greece, Rome and Africa, among others). Importantly, this comparative Harvard-era writing pushes against any exceptional reading of Jamaican society to offer a global understanding of the meaning of slavery. Knowledge of his earlier full-length study of Jamaican slavery might temper the critics who argue that in *Slavery and Social Death* Patterson is most concerned with writing socio-historically from the perspective of the dominating rather than the dominated.[11] It might show instead that Patterson had moved beyond the period's imperative to write social histories "from below" to generate a global definition about the operating logic of slavery as an institution. The dialectic between the local and the global is necessary in situating Patterson's characterization of the tenor and texture of slavery as "social death." Yet, even as "social death" has been taken up by the North American academy as conceptual shorthand, it elides much of the comparative nuance present in the 1982 text itself, as well as the generative work that led up to Patterson's arrival at this descriptor. Conceptually, "social death" captures hierarchies of difference and manipulation of power within the confines of slavery. The enslaved are conscripted by the institutional domination of slavery, but it does not curb their attempts to remake their quotidian lives even if the end result is failure within a greater systemic frame. The emphasis of the scholars who take up social death as a conceptual rubric in their own works, however, has underscored how actions end in ultimate failure, rather than equally addressing how, in Patterson's formulation, attempts are made to negotiate the system *in and through* failures since failure itself produces the critique. This generative possibility of failure—as a challenging opening rather than a foreclosed ending—is one way to think about Patterson's definition of transcendental cosmopolitanism and the similar conceptual work it performs with social death. In fact, it places Patterson within an established Caribbean intellectual tradition that considers the Caribbean itself as a site of *sui generis* (C. L. R. James), "modernity otherwise" (Michel-Rolph Trouillot) and "transcendental cosmopolitan" (Patterson), which accounts for the generative possibilities of failure and violent disruption within a new world context.[12]

Notably, the final chapter of *Slavery and Social Death* focuses on the eunuch as the ultimate slave. This chapter illustrates that even the most sexually abjected body, in the figure of the castrated male slave, is able to wield power over his master around the fraught erotics of sex. Patterson notes that these rulers "seem to prefer—even to need—slaves who have been castrated." And, "their reliance becomes so total that they often end up being dominated by these deformed persons who are universally despised."[13] This figure of the eunuch prompts the recognition that not only do hierarchies of difference exist within the category of the enslaved, but also that even the most abject can wield power, meaningfully, through the idiom of sex. It is this emphasis on the hierarchies of difference and the idiom of sex within an understanding of "social death" that I attend to in a close reading of Patterson's 1972 neoslave narrative *Die the Long Day*.

The Intimacy of Social Death: *Die the Long Day*

One of the noteworthy contributions of *Die the Long Day* is its multi-perspective portrayal of eighteenth-century Jamaican slavery that offers glimpses into the interior lives of differently ranked white men in the plantation infrastructure (masters, preachers and bookkeepers), a burgeoning community of free people of color, as well as male and female slaves. His comprehensive attention to the institution of slavery led Patterson to characterize the Jamaica of this period as "a monstrous distortion of human society,"[14] not just for the slaves but for whites and free people of color as well. Patterson demonstrates how distinctions in ethnicity, class, caste, color, time of arrival on the island and individual dispositions generate meaning in the quotidian life world of the plantation. An awareness of such details in the novel's narrative arc reveals that, in Patterson's early writings, what scholars today have described as irrevocable bipolar imperatives—pessimism versus optimism—were actually not irreconcilable (though they still sat together uncomfortably), as he pays keen attention to the *difference* differences make. Even more poignant than the distinctions of difference is the very *intimate* nature of Patterson's sociohistorical writings. The possibility and/or impossibility of black intimacy, and more specifically black female intimacy, grounds *Die the Long Day*. That is to say, *sex in the condition of slavery* remains a central preoccupation in Patterson's work, and therefore needs to be understood in tandem with any theorizing of social death.

In her influential 1997 study, Saidiya Hartman asks: "What happens if we assume that the female subject serves as a general case for explicating social death, property relations, and the pained and punitive construction of blackness? . . . What possibilities of resignification would then be possible?"[15] I want to suggest that Patterson tackles this question as early as 1972 in *Die the Long Day*. A moral crisis around sex frames the novel. As an enslaved mother, Quasheeba seeks to strategically attach her daughter to a white plantation owner by making her the local mistress of his house, in order to elevate her status and enjoyment of economic and emotional privilege within the slave community. The drama unfolds when Quasheeba discovers that this owner has syphilis; she therefore wants to retract her daughter's obligation to that master. How to maneuver this very intimate set of social relations is Quasheeba's predicament within the novel. Initially, it was Quasheeba's will to tactically negotiate a consensual liaison between her daughter and the master for the benefits to be accrued, but she dies attempting to protect her daughter from being coerced into this sexual arrangement. This inability to retract consent goes to the heart of Patterson's description of social death because, as Saidiya Hartman points out, "consent is meaningless if refusal is not an option."[16] Quasheeba's dilemma therefore underscores the "intimacies of empire," which, as Ann Stoler reminds us, necessarily meant that sexual relationships between colonizer and colonized could not be framed around the notions of bourgeois intimacy reserved for white subjects

in the private sphere, but that it included practices—ranging from rape to "consensual relationship"—that reflected such separations between colonizers and colonized.[17] Significantly, Patterson's story turns on the fact that refusal is not an option for Quasheeba's daughter. In so telling, Patterson highlights how such "consensual relationships" under slavery enact practices of social death, demonstrating that while one might manipulate conditions to become visible (as the master's mistress), it becomes difficult to become unseen once caught up in this power matrix. Whatever maneuvers Quasheeba and her daughter make within the system adhere to the fundamental grammar of what Lisa Lowe calls the "microphysics of colonial rule," a condition that manages sexuality, affect and the very meaning of what constitutes marriage and family and who can participate in such institutions.[18]

Though less explored, such microphysics of the colonial role of intimacy have been central to Patterson's conceptualization of "natal alienation."[19] In addition to the discussion of intimacy in *Die the Long Day* (1972), and the later example of the eunuch in *Slavery and Social Death* (1982), Patterson's very first study of Jamaican slave society (1967) makes this interest readily apparent: "This was a society in which clergymen were the most finished debauchees in the land; in which the institution of marriage was officially condemned among both masters and slaves; in which the family was unthinkable to the vast majority of the population and promiscuity the norm" (9). Because Jamaica was represented here as a very "libertine colony," historian and poet Edward Kamau Brathwaite critiqued Patterson within a year of the book's publication for this portrayal of a disintegrated society of "masters richly absent or presently debauched, slaves prostituted and trauma ridden."[20] During the height of creating nationalist historiography, Brathwaite, for example, was more interested in demonstrating that in spite of power differentials these were functioning creole societies. Moreover, my allusion to Doris Garraway's 2005 study and characterization of sixteenth-century Haitian society—a libertine colony—as one where practices of domination are fundamentally organized around sexuality and desire, suggests that while Patterson might have been early, he certainly is not alone in thinking through a debased intimacy as a core logic of slavery.[21] In fact, such a praxis has become characteristic of postcolonial feminist scholarship. Critical discussions of social death, however, have focused more on a generic existential or ontological crisis, and only recently have scholars begun to consider Patterson's novels in relation to social death.

In the recent March 2013 *Small Axe* interview with Orlando Patterson, "The Paradox of Freedom," David Scott asserts that "it is nearly impossible to understand the idea of slavery as a form of natal alienation that gives rise to the systemic condition of social death—the theme of *Slavery and Social Death*—without a sense of Patterson's attunement to the historical ontology of Quasheeba's predicament" (Scott 98). Her predicament, Scott suggests, helps us to see "freedom's paradoxical origins in slavery" (98). It is striking that Scott not only goes to Patterson's last

published novel, *Die the Long Day*, to explain the breadth of Patterson's work—but also that he goes to its principal female character, Quasheeba. Foundational to Scott is Quasheeba's confrontation with a limit that forces her to act. Especially because she is a creole slave born into slavery, for Scott, it is particularly poignant that Quasheeba reaches her existential crossroads, the limit "where the burden of injustice has become simply unbearable" and thereby is compelled to act in the service of universal ideals. In Scott's reading of Patterson "*the answer to these questions . . . is not to be found in quotidian material determinations or indeed in ideological ones—however important these are as shaping conditions*. . . . As a mother Quasheeba acts 'to shield her daughter from the sexual predation of a slave master'" (emphasis mine, 98). Scott is right to suggest that this figure of the creole slave—embodied in the character of Quasheeba—"retains a generative and hauntological presence" in all of Patterson's later work (98). But I want to turn Scott's reading inside out to underscore that the shaping quotidian material condition of "sexual predation" constitutes the existential ground zero that compels action. Intimacy in the form of sexual violence is what leads the human subject to act, to feel, and ultimately to make meaning in the world. This is the pivotal ground that marks Quasheeba's exercise of the right of refusal as a quest for freedom. Throughout the novel, sex remains the activity that allows Quasheeba to barter access to greater degrees of "freedom," yet it also paradoxically highlights her unfreedom. Hence, understanding the minutiae of intimacy or the "microphysics of colonial rule" is central to any reading of the novel and its elucidation of social death. Moreover, *Die the Long Day* explicitly compels readers to confront the minutiae of intimacy—reading it as not *incidental*, but rather *indispensible* to the conditions that produce the social death of the slave subject. Because Patterson searches less for acts of agency and looks instead for idioms of intimate power, this scholarly approach places him in critical conversation with scholars such as Ann Stoler, Lisa Lowe, Doris Garraway, Christina Sharpe, Nadine Ehlers, Sara Clarke Kaplan, and myself, who seek to unpack the inner logic of colonial intimacy. To some, this alignment with contemporary feminist thinkers might seem like strange bedfellows indeed.

Die the Long Day explores how the enslaved negotiated eighteenth-century Jamaican slave society, with an emphasis on three features: sexual agency, mourning and the meaning of freedom. Sexual agency is the province of women in this neoslave narrative. Patterson repeatedly depicts women manipulating their sexuality to gain rewards for themselves and their children: For their daughters, it often means negotiating roles as masters' mistresses. For their sons, without such agency, it means becoming apprenticed to skilled tradesman, thereby securing a profession with the potential for earned income to purchase their freedom. In 1972, Patterson certainly creates a "strong, defiant slave woman" in Quasheeba's character—*and*, as he reminds us, 15 years before Morrison's Pulitzer prize-winning 1987 neoslave narrative *Beloved.*[22] Yet *Die the Long Day's* early emphasis on women's sexual agency initially obscures the inherent fact of racialized sexual violence under slavery.

Readers are uncomfortably presented with spectacular scenes of Quasheeba manipulating sex to garner money, or to show appreciation for heroic acts of healing or protection. But even more telling than Quasheeba's seemingly casual recourse to her sexed body is that the structure of the story demands a confrontation with the very limits of an enslaved woman's sexual agency.

Even while Quasheeba uses sexuality to secure favors *because* it is still possible within the structural confines of a system of property and coercion, she has neither the natal rights to her body or that of her daughter's. Again, she cannot truly exercise the right of refusal. I quote at length the exchange when Quasheeba confronts the master, which is itself italicized in the text:

> *Q: Ah come for me daughter, Busha. Ah not leaving without 'er. She is all me 'ave.*
>
> *B: Your daughter. Your daughter. You don't own her. You don't own anything, you insolent black bitch.*
>
> *Q: She is me own flesh and blood. She fall from me own belly. You can't deny that. You can't take that from me. She is mine an' you not going to kill 'er with your nasty disease.*
>
> *B: You little bitch. You own nothing. You don't even own your own body. You were just the bitch we used to breed her. And I am going to put you in your place if it's the last thing I do.* (15)

Claiming the very corporeality of her body, Quasheeba invokes ownership through the act of physically conceiving and birthing her daughter. But the master asserts his apriori property rights as owner of Quasheeba's body, thereby nullifying any claim she can make to self-possession. When Quasheeba cannot exercise the right to say "no," the natal alienation of both her and her daughter becomes painfully apparent. Quasheeba chooses to fight to the death, and subsequently meets a violent demise in her attempt at resistance. Upon her death, the master wants to string her body up in the town square as a symbolic visual marker to discipline fellow slaves. Such an indexical scene, for scholar Hortense Spillers, is one of "ungendering," where "unprotected female flesh" is subjected to "*externalized* acts of torture and prostration we imagine as a particular province of *male* brutality" (68).[23] Yet with the narrative details Patterson provides, this moment is simultaneously gender neutral and yet very gender specific. It is neutral in that any enslaved body could be subjected to such a violation. But it is also gender specific in that, in this case, it is because Quasheeba dares to highlight the sexually diseased nature of the white male

body that she needs to be severely censored. And that censorship necessitates humiliating her sexed (maternal) body—even after death.

That this master seeks to exercise his property right to deny her what slaves highly value—a proper burial—presents Quasheeba's daughter Polly with a conundrum. What does she value more: preserving her individual life—which is literally her mother's death wish—or adherance to the slave community's value of honoring dead bodies with a proper burial? In the end, she chooses to honor her mother's body in death with the meaningful burial rites that follow. The sadistic barter here is that she must willingly have sex with the syphilitic master in order for him to release her mother's body for burial. Polly's final acquiescence to the violent embodied sexual limits of slavery remains off the page and unnarrated.[24] Readers are reminded, nonetheless, that her choice under conscription is governed by the fact that refusal is not an option.

From scenes of hypervisible sexual seductions, the novel detours to quieter meditations on the community's burial and mourning rituals. Africanus, an enslaved African and the community elder, articulates the community's belief system: "But to us who live, death is the most important thing we have. Is the only thing Neager [*sic*] can look toward. Death is the return to the homeland. We must give [Quasheeba] a chance to go back to Guinea and the freedom she deserve" (183). Death rituals, Patterson shows in this 1972 novel, represent one of the ways the community staves off complete natal alienation. Such a conception of the afterlife and of commemoration practices positions death as *generative* failure. The community recovers death as an imagining that speaks back to the hegemony of the social order through their ritual burial practices. Death is a failure that approximates freedom because it carries within it a decentered subjectivity that is about community affiliation, challenging the singular individual free subject of social death. With its comprehensive attention to the social life of death, we might read Patterson's novel as prescient in that it predates Vincent Brown's focused study on the importance of "mortuary practices" as stabilizing acts in an otherwise volatile social world of slavery.[25]

In addition to dealing with death and communal afterlife, Patterson also turns attention to the burning question of freedom. With Quasheeba's "almost-white cousin" Benjamin, Patterson portrays hierarchies along the color line within the slave society. As a skilled mulatto tradesman, Benjamin uses the proceeds from his work as a furniture maker to procure his freedom. Not only has Benjamin saved enough money to purchase his freedom, he has convinced his master to sell him. On what is to be his final night of enslavement, Benjamin goes into town to share his good fortune with the two most important people in his life—his white Anglican minister, and his childhood friend, Jason, a free man of color. Rather than the joy of freedom, he experiences the fact of racism. The scene of Benjamin's disappointment is vividly narrated: he excitingly heads into town, and as he approaches the door to his minister's house, he recognizes that he has never been in contact with the minister

outside the context of the church, let alone approaching his private residence. Yet, Benjamin figures that his auspicious news warrants a break in decorum. When he knocks on the door, his minister's blonde daughter answers and is quite taken aback and even fearful at the sight of a black man at her door. This fear of the proximity of the black male body to the white female body heightens at the mere suggestion of black male freedom. When the minister comes to the door to see what has so shaken his daughter, he is confronted with Benjamin. Irritated by Benjamin's audacity, he manages nonetheless to congratulate him on his impending freedom, but he also immediately tells Benjamin that his talents would be better used as a deacon in the Black Baptist church uplifting slaves, rather than returning to the Anglican church that preaches salvation yet does not advocate freedom. Buying into freedom's promise, Benjamin had previously been caught up with the language and ideal of freedom. Because Benjamin used his membership in the Anglican Church as a status marker, the minister's subtle rejection crushes his sense of self. It reconfirms his place among whites even those with missionary zeal, and demonstrates that even though he bought into the values of this religious discourse, he would remain a perpetual racial other.

Through Benjamin's fastidious quest for freedom, the novel positions the free man of color as perhaps more tragically powerless and placeless than the enslaved man within the extant social order. Recovering from the first disappointing response, Benjamin goes to share the news with his friend Jason, with whom he has assumed color and aspirational identification. Through Jason's dramatic monologue, which addresses the inability of free black labor to compete in the marketplace as well as a default sexual debauchery, Benjamin is confronted with the question, what kind of subject can an ex-slave be? I quote at length:

> Oh, poor Ben. Poor Ben. I hate to do this, but let me tell you the truth. Look around at the free colored people in the island. . . . What have we made of our freedom? What can we make of it? Even those few like myself who were well educated, what can we make of ourselves? Can we make money? The law places a limit on how much property we can own. But that was quite unnecessary since few of us could dream of ever reaching that twelve-thousand-pound limit. There is nothing for us to do, for the country has no need for us. The only useful people in this place are the slaves and, of course, their masters. You are a parasite here if you belong to neither group. Look at our women. What are they all but whores? What else can they be? Can you blame them for having nothing but contempt for us? Can we offer them anything? Can we protect them? They have the one asset this country needs other than what it

> takes to make sugar. Can you blame them for using it? I don't blame my woman for not wanting to marry me. I don't blame her for occasionally doing what duty demands of her. How can I blame her for whoring when I was conceived in whoredom. (208)

On this night, which was to be his last night of enslavement, Benjamin confronts freedom's limits and witnesses instead a very libertine afterlife. He now understands that the institution of slavery produces the enslaved subject as well as corollary forms of subjection for free people of color. Highlighting the paradox of freedom, Benjamin appreciates that his skills and color buys him more *within* the economy of slavery than within the economy of freedom. It is a recognition that, as Hartman reminds us, "the language of freedom does not rescue the slave from his former condition but rather is the site of the re-elaboration of that condition."[26] Dismayed by this brief glimpse of slavery's afterlife, Benjamin chooses to retain his rank and status within slave society.

Yet, it is with the generative possibilities of failure with which the novel closes. Patterson gives the last word to Africanus and Quasheeba's common-law husband Cicero, as the community elder tries to bring Cicero back from a deep sense of natal alienation in response to Quasheeba's death:

> **A:** Don't talk like that son, Our body may be enslaved, but is the freedom of the spirit that count. Massah can't put that in chains unless you let him. . . . What about our children? What you think they will think o we if we just give up in despair the way you talking now?"
>
> **C:** Our children? Our children? Ah hope ah never have any cause they only going to look back pon us in shame. They going to say we as no better than the beast of burden. An them would be right.
>
> **A:** No not our children. They'll be proud of us. They'll look on us as heroes. . . . It take courage, it take a great people to preserve body and mind through all this. Our children will see it this way, and they'll be proud." (253)

Just as the community makes meaning in Quasheeba's death, with this final dialogue Patterson invites readers at the time of its 1972 publication—in Jamaica's moment of independence—to make meaning of slavery's afterlife. Even as Jamaica is at pains to establish a new nation, articulated in its national motto, "out of many one people," Patterson suggests that slavery has to be the heart of this construction. Slavery and the subsequent anticolonial struggle that lead to independence cannot be glossed

over into a romantic notion of creolization, which erases or plays down the violent struggles and contestations over power. Instead the very "transcendental cosmopolitan" ground that gives rise to Caribbean modernity is a world of violent rupture and plundering, a world in which failure reveals its generative underbelly.

In *Die the Long Day*, Patterson attends to the very social ways that enslaved communities made meaning within the confines of slavery. Quasheeba's death is not to be simply read as an act of liberation, but rather evinces her struggle to the death—one that defines the master/slave dialectic, and which characterizes her attempt to assert black womanhood, *and* more specifically black motherhood. How the enslaved negotiate sexuality, bury their dead, and grapple with freedom's promise are the *novel* insights Patterson provides about slavery. It is a story at once pessimistic—if we follow the major characters, Quasheeba and Benjamin—but if we consider the community, and what they make of Quasheeba's life *after death*, it is judiciously optimistic. Attending to how the form of the novel enables Patterson, *in the 1960s,* to explore how distinctions of difference and idioms of intimacy are negotiated within the *social death of slavery,* calls for a more general recasting of Patterson's later ideas, which account for the complexities and productive paradoxes embedded in the very term "social death." A careful tracing of the context and content of the term's emergence affords a more nuanced understanding of the long arc of Patterson's scholarship, which practices the methodological and conceptual premises of a transcendental cosmopolitanism—exilic creativity in the midst of structural domination and violence.

Notes

[1] The phrase is Orlando Patterson's and was given in the context of my 2000 interview with him at his office in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The interview focused on the theme of my dissertation "Cosmopolitan Patriots: West Indian Intellectuals Between Home and Metropole" as my way of describing the simultaneous nationalist and internationalist vision of their intellectual project during the 1960s. See Donette Francis, "Cosmopolitan Patriots: West Indian Intellectuals Between Home and Metropole" (Ph.D. thesis, New York University, 2001), 84.

[2] Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).

[3] Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008), 6. See also Hartman's *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Frank B. Wilderson, *Red, White and Black: Cinema and the Structures of U.S.*

Antagonisms (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009); Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003). For a fuller discussion of black optimism and afro-pessimism, see Jared Sexton, "The Social Life of Social Death: On Afro-Pessimism and Black Optimism," *In*Tensions 5 (2011) 1-47. See also Nadine Ehlers, *Racial Imperatives: Discipline, Performativity, and Struggles Against Subjection* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 9-12. I would argue that Patterson's "social death" and Hartman's "scenes of subjection" share a similar sensibility, which tries to capture and theorize the horror of slavery without the need to offer celebratory conclusions.

[4] Vincent Brown, "Social Death and Political Life in the Study of Slavery" *American Historical Review* 114, no. 5 (December 2009): 1231-1249.

[5] David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

[6] Patterson, *An Absence of Ruins* (London: Hutchinson, 1967); idem., *Children of Sisyphus*. (London: Hutchinson, 1964). idem., *Die the Long Day* (New York: William Morrow & Co. 1971).

[7] I use the term "neoslave narrative" here to simply connote fictive representation of slavery. I am aware of the various discussions to tease out the layers of distinction from Bernard Bell who coins the term "neoslave narratives" to Ashraf Rushdy's hyphenated "neo-slave narratives" and Arlene Keizer's "contemporary narratives of slavery." Keizer's term that attempts to cover the geographical range of such narratives is perhaps most akin to my usage here. Bernard Bell, *The Afro-American Novel and its Tradition* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1987); Ashraf Rushdy, *Neo-Slave Narratives: Studies in the Social Logic of a Literary Form* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Arlene Keizer, *Black Subjects: Identity Formation in the Contemporary Narrative of Slavery* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2004).

[8] This is how Patterson characterizes the national mottos of the Independent Caribbean that construct a racial harmonious society such as Jamaica's "Out of Many, One People." See my unpublished dissertation, "Cosmopolitan Patriots."

[9] Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Baltimore:: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

[10] Donette Francis, *Fictions of Feminine Citizenship: Sexuality and the Nation in Contemporary Caribbean Literature* (New York: Palgrave 2010).

[11] V. P. Franklin, Review of *Slavery and Social Death* by Orlando Patterson, *Journal of Negro History* 68, no. 2 (Spring 1983): 212-216.

[12] C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989 [1938]); Michel-Rolph Trouillot, "The Otherwise Modern: Caribbean Lessons from the Savage Slot," in *Critically*

Modern: Alternatives, Alterities, Anthropologies, ed. Bruce M. Knauft (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002).

[13] Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 315.

[14] Orlando Patterson, *The Sociology of Slavery* (London: McGibbon and Kee, 1967).

[15] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 100.

[16] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 111.

[17] Ann Laura Stoler, "Intimidations of Empire: Predicaments of the Tactile and Unseen," in *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History*, ed. Ann Laura Stoler (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 23-70.

[18] Lisa Lowe, "Intimacies of Four Continents," in *Haunted by Empire*, 191-212.

[19] For an excellent reading that reconceptualizes social death by centering the black enslaved woman, see Sara Clarke Kaplan, "Our Founding (M)other: Erotic Love and Social Death in Sally Hemings and The President's Daughter," *Callaloo* 32, no. 3 (2009): 773-791.

[20] Edward Brathwaite, "Jamaican Slave Society, A Review," *Race and Class* 9 (July 1968): 331-342.

[21] Doris Garraway, *The Libertine Colony: Creolization in the Early French Caribbean* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

[22] It is not just that he wrote *Die the Long Day* before *Beloved;* rather, it is the parallels between a slave mother who kills her children to spare them a life of enslavement (*Beloved*) and a slave mother who is killed in attempt to save her only child from a ghastly sexual violence and disease. See Kwame Dawes, "Calabash: Orlando Patterson," *Huffington Post*, March 3, 2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/kwame-dawes/calabash-orlando-patterso_b_1565505.html, accessed June 22, 2013.

[23] Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (Summer 1987): 64-81.

[24] The recovered journal of the 18th century Jamaican overseer, Thomas Thistlewood, reminds us of the ubiquity of such scenarios on the plantation. See Douglass Hall, *In Miserable Slavery: Thomas Thistlewood in Jamaica, 1750-1786* (London: Macmillan, 1989).

[25] Vincent Brown, *The Reaper's Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008).

[26] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 4.