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# Revolutionary Love: Ferguson Uprising, A Love Story

Zoe Krause  
zkrause@wellesley.edu

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Revolutionary Love:  
Ferguson Uprising, A Love Story

Zoe Krause

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the  
Prerequisite for Honors  
in Political Science

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For the folks in Saint Louis taking the streets without permits and trying to build something better, all my love.

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## Preface

Who is invited to speak about a movement and who must die for it? – Alok Vaid-Menon<sup>1</sup>

If it weren't for love we wouldn't have to protest anyway. – Tara Williamson<sup>2</sup>

Writing a thesis on organizing in Ferguson is not without deep conflicts, and I remain ambivalent about my position and conclusions in undertaking this project. The movement against police brutality specifically and white supremacy broadly continues to exist both in St. Louis and around the country. The work of the movement continues to be a crucial project of building new kinds of communities and demanding a different world. I am undertaking this task from a position of insider/outsider – I was born and raised in St. Louis, less than twenty minutes from Ferguson. Many of my family members and I have been deeply involved in the protest community, a diverse group of people who continually show up for actions, discussions, and related social events. I am connected and committed to organizing efforts in St. Louis. Yet, I've written this thesis from the other side of the country, at Wellesley. I am white in a Black-led, Black-centered movement, which means that no matter my level of involvement or feeling of connection, this movement is not and should not be mine to speak for or lead. Although I believe that archiving movements, in their successes and failures provides both crucial histories and insights into strategies of resistance, I am writing this with skepticism about the politics and purpose of archiving these words and actions in an academic language, and in the space of academia. Any conclusions drawn here are preliminary and subject to continual revision internal to the movement. I include this preface to foreground my own ambivalence, limitations and ethical concerns in approaching this thesis and by way of explaining my interpretive approach, grounded in taking seriously the work of organizers on the ground.

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<sup>1</sup> TEDx Talks. "We are nothing (and that is beautiful): Alok Vaid-Menon at TEDxMiddlebury." YouTube video, 17:59min. Posted December 17, 2013. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wxzb-zYthAOA>

<sup>2</sup> Tara Williamson. "Come my Way." YouTube video, 2:49min. Posted January 7, 2013. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=miovjvVq5FI>

Amy Hunter, a St. Louis YWCA educator and a member of the Ferguson protest community, argues that the vision for eliminating racism should be falling in love, cultivating networks of fictive kinship and concern wherein “we run to each other to solve [racism]...Love is what we’re striving for all the time.”<sup>3</sup> Hunter uses fictive kinship to describe the social rather than biological or legal bonds of relation, or as she says, “although we are not related, we are claiming each other as if we were in the same bloodline.”<sup>4</sup> I am undertaking this work in that same spirit – of running towards other people, towards what is unknown and unknowable and most importantly, towards a love, which I believe, could change us. Many of the people I write about, and the people I have written with in spirit as well as those who have read and informed this thesis, are members of my own kin network, both fictive and biological, a chosen family,<sup>5</sup> people for whom I would and have risked my safety, comfort and freedom. Folks like Victoria Lee, a fellow Wellesley student with whom I have both protested and conversed with in ways that profoundly impacted my thoughts on love and resistance; Charles Wade, for whom I spent hours lugging supplies, and in a church kitchen, making hundreds of waffles; the wonderful rabble-rousers of the Artivists collective,<sup>6</sup> for whose brilliant art builds and daring actions I have gladly lost sleep and risked arrest; and the organizers of Millennial Activists United, Brittany Ferrell, who I would follow in any protest and Alexis Templeton, whose chants never fail to push me past the barricades. None of the conclusions I make are mine alone, they are the product of

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<sup>3</sup> Omar O’Hara. “Amy Hunter | TED | Lucky Zip Codes.” YouTube video, 25:36min, Posted March 19, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g36ijwr3wc8>

<sup>4</sup> Amy Hunter. “To Heal Our Communities, We Must Treat Each Other as Family.” *YWCA Blog*. August 15, 2014 <http://www.ywcablog.com/2014/08/15/to-heal-our-communities-we-must-treat-each-other-as-family/#sthash.z0v5yj9d.dpbs>

<sup>5</sup> Christin Scarlett Milloy. “’Tis the Season for Family, If You’ve Got One,” *Slate: Outward*. November 24, 2014 [http://www.slate.com/blogs/outward/2014/11/26/queer\\_for\\_the\\_holidays\\_when\\_birth\\_families\\_reject\\_us\\_we\\_create\\_our\\_own.html](http://www.slate.com/blogs/outward/2014/11/26/queer_for_the_holidays_when_birth_families_reject_us_we_create_our_own.html); Hannah Giorgis. “Chose Family in Unsafe Spaces: How Loving One Another is Resistance,” *Black Girl Dangerous*, January 17, 2014 <http://www.blackgirldangerous.org/2014/01/chosen-family-unsafe-spaces-loving-one-another-resistance/>

<sup>6</sup> For more on the Artivists, see their most recent project: De Nichols. “Growing Griot – Artivists STL.” YouTube video, 4:37min, Posted December 7, 2015 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OeO\\_qol634c](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OeO_qol634c)

my conversations in person and on social media, my participation, my contextual engagement with the ongoing movement in St. Louis.

The first protest I ever went to, at ten years old at the March for Women's Lives, I fell in love immediately, with everyone around me in the street, with being allowed to use my voice like that, big and broad and defiant. I felt miraculously, intricately connected to the people around me. As Wanda Nanibush argues of indigenous women's involvement in the Idle No More movement in Canada, "it's a rare feeling to go to a political action and want to hug every stranger around you, to feel vulnerability at the center of life and a desire to protect it."<sup>7</sup> While that feeling does not occur at every political demonstration or in every public moment of togetherness, I have felt this feeling many times over. That is part of the feeling I name as love: a feeling that acknowledges our nonsovereignty and interrelatedness, disrupting our conceptions of self in an individualistic, competitive society that values mastery over community. The love I felt then grew outward across many years and a deep commitment to both reproductive justice and direct action organizing. I did many, many things that terrified me in the light of this original love (started trying to learn how to organize, confronted incredibly condescending state lawmakers, and talked to strangers on the street). That was only the beginning of how love has moved me in protest and political action.

On a cold, sunny day in Boston, hours into a march against police brutality that zigged and zagged with logic unknown to me, I put my body in position to push a police line. My body never felt so fragile and inconsequential, even as I knew that the bodies of Black and non-Black people of color around me faced far greater risk in opposing the police. I kept pushing back, the crush and noise of those around me unrelenting. Certainly, I stayed because the people on either

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<sup>7</sup> Wanda Nanibush. "Idle No More: Strong Hearts of Indigenous Women's Leadership," in *The Winter We Danced: Voices from the Past, the Future, and the Idle No More Movement* ed. The Kino-nda-niimi Collective. (Winnipeg: ARP Books, 2014)

side of me were people I love dearly both within and outside of protest (including Victoria), but also because that love extended to the people linked on either side of them, and the next link and so on. There is no clearer moment of need for one another than pushing against something so unmoving, when it is so compellingly evident that individualism doesn't hold up in the face of collective struggle. I know no clearer sort of love than one that acknowledges our frailty in the face of violence while making room for fierce resistance.

A year and a day after Mike Brown's murder, Elle, a woman I'd never met, stood next to me on the steps of the federal building in St. Louis and covered my face with blessed oil. Later, when the decision came whether or not climb over the barricades separating us from the Federal Marshals, she checked to make sure I was ready to commit to going over, and it was love and my feeling of closeness and care for those around me that made me climb over the fence. Love for Mike Brown, for the people who have created communities in his name and in the name of resisting the violence done to both him and his memory, moved me toward the waiting zip tie cuffs. In the hours we waited for release, we talked and laughed and sang and traded all sorts of stories and advice. When we got out, one of the women asked to take a photo together, and when she shared it on Facebook, she captioned it "a taste of beloved community," referencing a tradition of Black political thought tied to Martin Luther King, Jr.<sup>8</sup> And perhaps it wasn't all that, perhaps that's an overly optimistic conception, after all, deep conflicts exist in many social movement spaces about strategic arrests, who participates, why and how. The woman who shared the photo is not a native St. Louisan and arrests of 'outsiders' often inspires criticism both

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<sup>8</sup> For original post see: Rahiel Tesfamariam's Facebook Page. Posted August 12, 2015. <https://www.facebook.com/rahielt/photos/pb.167292350133252.-2207520000.1461182142./398167550379063/?type=3&theater>



inside and outside activist communities<sup>9</sup> because of the social use of arrests as proof that you were there for historic moments of resistance, regardless of how much you actually contributed. But love did move me, and maybe some of those around me, to wind up locked up in the first place, and there were certainly moments in the holding cell in which I felt deep love and connection with those around me.

I write this not from the normative belief that people *should* feel love in, about, or towards certain political goals. Such a claim would dangerously approach the sort of calls made for protestors across the ages to remain calm, quiet and without righteous anger or urgent demands, to “love” passively in a system built on domination and death. Instead, I write to support the work done on the ground, to permanently locate its importance in this moment as in past moments of Black activism, for myself and hopefully some others. I write to discover the contours of a different possibility for love that, in its unruly excess, could perhaps allow us to build new worlds together.

Emotion more generally is a fraught and uneasy territory. Feeling in groups, between bodies located in vastly different social positions, is difficult, even impossible to definitively name or understand. As Sara Ahmed points out,

I have experienced numerous social occasions where I assumed other people were feeling what I was feeling, and that the feeling was, as it were, ‘in the room,’ only to find out that others had felt quite differently. I would describe such spaces as ‘intense.’ Shared feelings are at stake, and seem to surround us, like a thickness in the air, or an atmosphere. But these feelings not only *heighten tension*, they are also *in tension*. Emotions in their very intensity involve miscommunication, such that even when we feel we have the same feeling, we don’t necessarily have the same relationship to the feeling.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> For criticism of outside agitators, see: Josh Levs. “Some ‘agitators’ arrested in Ferguson come from across U.S.” *CNN*, August 19, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/08/19/us/missouri-ferguson-agitators/>

<sup>10</sup> Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. (New York: Routledge, 2004), 10, emphasis original.

I understand the difficulty of writing about emotional intensities. Even in moments where we are certain the person next to us feels the same thing, there are very few ways to be truly sure. Even if conversation verifies something named by the same word, feelings are such complex and fleeting things and there is no way to verify the similarity of the internal referent of a word like “love.” I recognize that in many of the moments and ways that protests and protestors in Ferguson articulate and perform love are not meant for me and do not include me. The way Black people experience love for Blackness, or the way I experience love for queerness as a queer person are fundamentally positional experiences. I can perhaps achieve empathy or intellectual understanding, but I will never experience that love in the same way as others will.

Because of these difficulties, I am trying, here, to write in many ways (personally, academically) about my own participation, as I have done above. I refuse to pretend at studied emotional indifference about this subject: I am deeply committed to the people and work in which I am engaging. Further, I will offer some potential indications of shared feelings of love, but I am primarily interested in how the *language* of love performs certain functions on the streets of Ferguson and how Ferguson activists are actively developing and discussing contentious concepts and theories about love and politics. In what follows, I attempt to draw narratives of love’s use and functions in protests in Ferguson and surrounding locations in St. Louis. As Darnell Moore writes,

Love is antithetical to the desire to regulate bodies and the knowledges they produce. Theorizing love, therefore, is a practice that must perform the intervention that love signifies; it resists, if not razes, the limitations and boundaries that tend to willfully separate bodies of knowledge and peoples. That is, approaches to critically investigating love must be interdisciplinary and without boundaries.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Darnell Moore, “What Freedom *Feels* Like: On Love, Empathy, and Pleasure in the Age of Neoliberalism.” Lecture at the Kennedy School. (Audre Lorde Human Rights Lecture Series, 2012), 8

I intend to take seriously the way people are talking about and working through love in anti-police brutality movements. I believe that these voices and stories are important, that regardless of policy outcomes or election results, resistance always changes both the world and our understanding of it. I attempt to develop here an accounting of love in the spirit of Moore's undertaking, which involves multiple vectors of understanding and remains conditional, uncertain, and perhaps at least partially incoherent.

## Introduction - Love Lost and Found: Skeptics, critics and multiculturalists on love

On August 9, 2014 in Ferguson, Missouri, police officer Darren Wilson murdered<sup>12</sup> Michael Brown, a teenager walking back to his grandmother's house from a convenience store. His body lay uncovered in the street for four and a half hours. That night, St. Louis County police brought dogs to a vigil, teeth-bared for a picture that would achieve national fame.<sup>13</sup> The days and weeks that followed saw civil unrest, extreme police violence, and near-continuous media coverage of the small suburb of St. Louis County.<sup>14</sup> As the days wore on without indictments or official sanctions, thousands of people came together to mourn Brown's death and to fight back against repressive police responses in St. Louis and in cities like New York and Baltimore.

While many protests against police brutality received coverage mainly documenting rage and anger,<sup>15</sup> activists in Ferguson frequently articulate a complex idea of love as a part of

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<sup>12</sup> I am aware that there is a legal connotation to the word murder, and that some may even consider my use of this word to be incorrect in this case. However, Brown's death was legally ruled a homicide (see: NBC News, "Justice Department's Autopsy of Michael Brown Is Released," December 9, 2014, <http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/michael-brown-shooting/justice-departments-autopsy-michael-brown-released-n264361>) and many witness statements report events indicative of murder (see: Shaun King, "The Complete Guide to Every Public Eyewitness Interview in the Shooting Death of Michael Brown," *Daily Kos*, October 31, 2014 <http://www.dailykos.com/story/2014/10/31/1340611/-The-complete-guide-to-every-public-eyewitness-interview-in-the-shooting-death-of-Mike-Brown>). Moreover, I am not writing on the law, but on protest politics, and I chose here to use the word murder because it is the word my fellow protestors would use and in being true to that shared language, I defer to our common vernacular. Calling Michael Brown's death a murder insists on, at the very least, linguistic accountability in the face of injustice.

<sup>13</sup> See: Mark Follman, "Michael Brown's Mom Laid Flowers Where He Was Shot—and Police Crushed Them: New details emerge about callous tactics that fueled anger in Ferguson," *The Atlantic*, August 27, 2014, <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2014/08/ferguson-st-louis-police-tactics-dogs-michael-brown>

<sup>14</sup> Sometimes, I will talk about "St. Louis" when I am talking about protests that happened related to the death of Michael Brown and other victims of police brutality in the region. Ferguson is a municipality located inside St. Louis County, St. Louis City is a politically separate but geographically contiguous entity. People who live in Ferguson, other areas of St. Louis County and in St. Louis City generally simply write and refer to the area as "St. Louis," when using their address.

<sup>15</sup> See: Todd C. Frankel, "All the rage around Ferguson: pop-up protests," *The Washington Post*, November 29, 2014. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/storyline/wp/2014/11/29/all-the-rage-around-ferguson-pop-up-protests/>; Hasani Gittens, "Ferguson Protests Sweep U.S., Oakland, L.A., Atlanta, Boston, NYC," *NBC News*, November 26, 2014 <http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/michael-brown-shooting/ferguson-protests-sweep-u-s->

political life and the struggle for liberation both in the streets and online. As Guardian reporter Steven Thrasher noted in March 2015, “the terms ‘ancestors,’ ‘family’ and ‘love’ came up throughout [the] protest as often as the terms ‘police’ and ‘racism.’”<sup>16</sup> DeRay Mckesson, an activist elevated to the level of Twitter celebrity through his coverage of the protests frequently says, in reference to his commitment to the movement, “love is the why.”<sup>17</sup> The organization Millennial Activists United (MAU), founded by Black queer feminists, brought Assata Shakur’s quote to the streets: “It is our duty to fight for our freedom. It is our duty to win. We must love and support each other.”<sup>18</sup> The call and response of this quote constitutes a hallmark of the group’s actions, often beginning and ending each demonstration.<sup>19</sup> In the streets, protestors across the country often repeat, “we must love and support each other” against the backdrop of riot gear and threats of tear gas.<sup>20</sup> Members of MAU and other organizations, both in action and online, have often grappled with the weight of the particularities of growing a loving world and movement.<sup>21</sup> Religious leaders and secular activists often argue that the movement was born out of love and will win through “deep abiding love.”<sup>22</sup> Over and over again, members of the protest community in St. Louis have articulated and performed love in public.

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oakland-l-atlanta-boston-nyc-n256291; Joe Tacopino “Night of rage in Ferguson,” *New York Post*, November 24, 2014 <http://nypost.com/2014/11/24/ferguson-decision/>

<sup>16</sup> Steven Thrasher, “What’s Next for Black Lives Matter in Ferguson after city’s police shooting,” *Guardian*, March 13, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/mar/13/black-lives-matter-ferguson-police-shooting>

<sup>17</sup> DeRay Mckesson (deray). Twitter Post. June 29, 2015, 6:59 PM. <https://twitter.com/deray/status/55339874055729153>

<sup>18</sup> For original quote, see: Assata Shakur, “Letter to My People” in *Assata: An Autobiography*. (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2001).

<sup>19</sup> For documentation of the use of the quote in Ferguson/St. Louis, which I will discuss in chapter four see: Wilson, Heather “It Is Our Duty to Fight for Our Freedom....” Vimeo video, 1:25min, Posted October 10, 2014. <https://vimeo.com/108625673>

<sup>20</sup> For original quote, see: Assata Shakur, “Letter to My People” in *Assata: An Autobiography*. (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2001). For use in Ferguson, see: “It Is Our Duty to Fight for Our Freedom....” last modified October 10, 2014, <https://vimeo.com/108625673>.

<sup>21</sup> For example: Alexis Templeton (audreoverlorde). Twitter Post. December 29, 2014, 12:35 PM. “I think love & support aspect of the Assata quote is the hardest part to understand and ensure, even more than the losing of the chains.” <https://twitter.com/audreoverlorde/status/549634792646656>

<sup>22</sup> See: Renita Marie Lamkin. “Love Always Wins.” *The Huffington Post*. September 3, 2014 [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/pastor-renita-marie-mdiv/love-always-wins\\_b\\_5757066](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/pastor-renita-marie-mdiv/love-always-wins_b_5757066); For Rev. Sekou quote, see

These articulations, however frequent, rarely receive much attention or analysis in news reports or analyses of the movement. What could love have to do with politics, after all, in a mainstream political culture that conceives of love as a private affair? Love nearly always sounds sentimental or commercial in our culture: the stuff of Hallmark cards, not of politics and certainly not of revolution. In American political culture, discourses of love construct it as an individual feeling that occurs most frequently within the heterosexual family. On rare occasions, love momentarily intrudes in public life, but largely without any attachment to transformative demands. For instance, after the Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriage, mainstream gay and lesbian organizations popularized the message, “Love Wins!” What gay love won was inclusion in marriage, an institution that regulates subjects through state-granted legal recognition of private and capitalist relations. While this strategy uses the rhetoric of love, it uses love to articulate a demand for entrance into a domestic institution that reinforces the notion that love is private and apolitical. As private and capitalist, American cultural understandings of love reinforce dominant modes of subjectivity and relationality. The prevailing discourse of love in the United States defines us as individual subjects who leave emotions and caring attachments in the private realm (the heterosexual home, now open to some queer people), to clash and complete regarding our own self-interests in the public realm (commerce and politics).<sup>23</sup>

Moreover, this turn to love may seem surprising given the history of dismissals of love in political theory and American democracy. For many liberal scholars concerned with reason, love

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the website of his non-violent direct action training organization, “Deep Abiding Love,” at: [www.deepabidinglove.com](http://www.deepabidinglove.com)

<sup>23</sup> See: Dean Spade and Craig Willse, “Marriage Will Never Set Us Free.” *Organizing Upgrade*, September 6, 2013; Chrys Ingraham, “Heterosexuality: It’s Just Not Natural!” *Handbook of Lesbian and Gay Studies*. (London: Sage Publications, 2002); Jaye Cee Whitehead, *The Nuptial Deal: Same-Sex Marriage and Neo-Liberal Governance*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

represents the paramount illiberal emotion – irrational and exercised with abandon.<sup>24</sup> Even for leftist scholars concerned with pluralism, love often represents a homogenizing force, used primarily by nationalist leaders to bind people to “the nation” and incite fear and violence against “enemies” and “strangers.”<sup>25</sup> For some feminists, the social scripts of heterosexual love and marriage overdetermine “love,” and as such love represents one piece of the continued oppression of women, directing us towards certain privatizing relationships dependent on undervalued feminized labors of care and reproduction.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, recent scholarship shows the way the global commodification of care and affective labor – childcare and other domestic labors – distributes labor unevenly in ways which reproduce global economic, racial and gender inequality, displacing undervalued feminized labors onto marginalized women around the world.<sup>27</sup>

To think through the possibilities of love in Ferguson, I will examine liberal, leftist and activist understandings of love. First, looking to the work of Martha Nussbaum, I will examine both the dismissals of love in liberal theory and the efforts to incorporate a multicultural love into liberal theories. Next, I will trouble those theories with left theorists concerned about the possible effects of love on pluralism (Hannah Arendt) and affective white nationalism (Sara Ahmed). Finally, I will turn to the contested nature of love in activist and political communities

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<sup>24</sup> Martha Craven Nussbaum. “A Problem in the History of Liberalism” in *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice*. (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2013).

<sup>25</sup> Martha Craven Nussbaum. “A Problem in the History of Liberalism” and Sara Ahmed, “Organization of Hate” in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. (New York: Routledge, 2004)

<sup>26</sup> See: Lauren Berlant, “Remembering Love, Forgetting Everything Else” *The female complaint: The unfinished business of sentimentality in American culture*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); Eva Illouz *Why love hurts: a sociological explanation*. (Cambridge: Polity, 2012); “Gendered Interests in Sexual Love,” and essays by Leyna Lowe, Alyssa Schneebaum in *Love: a question for feminism in the twenty-first century*. ed. Anna G. Jónasdóttir, and Ann Ferguson. (New York: Routledge, 2013).

<sup>27</sup> See: Joya Misra, Jonathan Woodring, and Sabine N. Merz. “The globalization of care work: Neoliberal economic restructuring and migration policy.” *Globalizations* 3, no. 3 (2006): 317-332; Amanda Moras, “The Role of Maternalism in Contemporary Paid Domestic Work.” *Sociology Mind* 3, no. 03 (2013): 248.

in and around Ferguson, examining the ways that liberal multicultural love and white nationalist love figure into the politics of revolutionary love in which I remain interested.

### **Liberals find love**

The fear and suspicion of love in liberal theory stems from a more general concern with emotion's role in politics; particularly the threats emotion poses to sovereign rationality and autonomy.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, love in Ferguson shares a contested and at times uneasy place with other weighty emotions like rage, fear, and grief. Protestors who express emotions—grieve in public, rage in public, love in public—find themselves accused of being irrational, uncivilized, beyond the pale of liberal political society.<sup>29</sup> Discursively, emotions occupy a subjugated place in a hierarchy of human faculties, with reason occupying the place of privilege. For many, “to be emotional is to have one’s judgment affected: it is to be reactive rather than active, dependent rather than autonomous.”<sup>30</sup> As many feminist scholars observe, emotions occupy a gendered and racialized place as a dispositional attribute: women (especially women of color) express emotions and are governed by them, men (especially white men) operate on the basis of reason.<sup>31</sup> Emotions like grief and love in particular occupy a cultural space of belittled emotions, which demonstrate weakness and dependency in a liberal society that values rationality, sovereignty, and agency.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Nussbaum, “A Problem in the History of Liberalism” in *Political Emotions*

<sup>29</sup> See, for example: Steve Pfister. “The Protests in Ferguson Were Uncivilized, Un-American.” *The Post Newspapers*. December 6, 2014. [http://www.thepostnewspapers.com/strongsville/opinion/the-protests-in-ferguson-were-uncivilized-un-american/article\\_60970cb5-566e-5def-9113-7862febbc537.html](http://www.thepostnewspapers.com/strongsville/opinion/the-protests-in-ferguson-were-uncivilized-un-american/article_60970cb5-566e-5def-9113-7862febbc537.html); Mychal Massie, “Ungodly, Uncivilized Behavior In Ferguson, MO.” *The Daily Rant*. August 19, 2014. <http://mychal-massie.com/premium/ungodly-uncivilized-behavior-in-ferguson-mo/>; or the comments section on any article about Ferguson protests.

<sup>30</sup> Ahmed, *Cultural Politics*, 3

<sup>31</sup> See: Misra, Woodring, and Merz, “The globalization of care work.”; Arlie Russell Hochschild. “Emotion work, feeling rules, and social structure.” *American journal of sociology* (1979): 551-575.

<sup>32</sup> bell hooks, *All about love: New visions*. (New York: William Morrow, 2000).



Yet, some liberal theorists critique liberalism's over-emphasis on reason and individualism, including those who rely on understandings of civic friendship and public feeling. For philosopher Martha Nussbaum, liberalism includes an unexamined history of emotions, especially patriotic love. Public emotion, especially love, promises an under-used tool for shaping the political goals and ideals in democratic liberal societies. Nussbaum, writing in the tradition of liberal multiculturalism, which calls for tolerance and inclusion for different 'others,' relies on sympathetic attachments to the democratic nation-state and the desire to cultivate of liberal values of "equality, inclusion [and] distribution."<sup>33</sup> In *Public Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice*, Nussbaum argues for the cultivation of what she calls a "humane and aspirational patriotism,"<sup>34</sup> which develops love between citizens, the nation and the nation's ideals. This love of the nation understands the nation as a moving historical target, a set of shared principles and desired achievements that belong in part to the individual.<sup>35</sup> This shared personal stake in the nation provides liberal ideals with stability over time even as they remain aspirational rather than actually achieved.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, for Nussbaum, love in politics creates stability or permanence of liberal ideals (equality, inclusion, and distribution) even while history paints a bleak picture of the failure of the United States to achieve these principles fully. Respect alone, upon which many theories of liberal multiculturalism rely, is simply not hardy enough to sustain democratic ideals.<sup>37</sup> Love, on the other hand, provides a passionate prop upon which to stabilize our attachment to these idealistic liberal aspirations.

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<sup>33</sup> Nussbaum, *Political Emotions*, 124

<sup>34</sup> Nussbaum, *Political Emotions*, 21; Nussbaum largely takes patriotism as an understood political entity and does not define her idea of "love" further than I describe here.

<sup>35</sup> Nussbaum, *Political Emotions*, 207-208

<sup>36</sup> Nussbaum, *Political Emotions*, 6-7

<sup>37</sup> Nussbaum, *Political Emotions*, 124-126

This is the political love of my upbringing – a suburban, middle-left, George McGovern-esque<sup>38</sup> understanding of patriotic love, oft-articulated by civics teachers and a younger version of my mother. Like my mother, who has been radicalized by Ferguson-related organizing, I have distanced myself from this understanding of political love over years of protest. In writing about protests that grow from centuries-long government abuse and murder of Black people, I find Nussbaum’s desire for “aspirational patriotism” weak-kneed at best and a simultaneously dangerous and impossible ask at worst. She attributes the large-scale distrust of civic emotion in part to “the legacy of post-Vietnam cynicism and alienation,” especially by “racial minorities,” in the face of unchangingly unjust politics.<sup>39</sup> And yet, she still urges those same people to reinvest love in a nation which she promises could live up to ideals we have never seen in full practice. Moreover, Nussbaum’s notion of political emotions and aspirational patriotism relies heavily on existing liberal and multicultural principles (inclusion in the system, equality of rights), which leaves unchallenged the legitimacy of these principles in creating a desirable politics and also ignores the structural processes of capitalism, white supremacy and neoliberalism at work in creating and perpetuating inequality and injustice.

### **Leftists look for love**

The politics of public visibility and intentional disruption of “business as usual”<sup>40</sup> at work in Ferguson protests partly recalls the political theory of Hannah Arendt, whose commitment to disrupting institutions and creating public spaces through action make her work influential in radical politics. However, the public emotional expression of Ferguson protestors bring into

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<sup>38</sup> I am recalling this quote: “The highest patriotism is not a blind acceptance of official policy, but a love of one’s country deep enough to call her to a higher standard.” George McGovern; See: Chua-Eoan, Howard, “The American Quixote: The Death of George McGovern (1922-2012) *Time*, October 21, 2012, <http://nation.time.com/2012/10/21/the-american-quixote-the-death-of-george-mcgovern-1922-2012/>

<sup>39</sup> Nussbaum, *Political Emotions*, 396

<sup>40</sup> See: Al Jazeera and the Associated Press "After Ferguson, Protests across Country Disrupt Business as Usual." After Ferguson, Protests across Country Disrupt Business as Usual. November 29, 2014. <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2014/11/29/16-arrested-as-demonstrationsreturntoferguson.html>.

relief Arendt's critique of love. Arendt believed that pluralism, in which political actors draw on their singularities, allows for creative action and newness in the world, making it an important part of disrupting institutions bent on homogenizing society.<sup>41</sup> She saw love as private and likely dangerous to public spaces of pluralism, remarking, "generally speaking, the role of the 'heart' in politics seems to me altogether questionable."<sup>42</sup> Likewise, in a letter to James Baldwin, responding to his argument that love is a great power for change, Arendt asserts, "in politics, love is a stranger." She continues, saying "Hatred and love belong together, and they are both destructive; you can afford them only in private."<sup>43</sup> Arendt's concern for love's destructiveness stems from her intense devotion to plural space: like hatred, love eliminates plurality by blurring the boundaries between singular people. In fact, Arendt's concern mirrors a common cultural narrative of losing one's self in love, which certainly indicates an uneasy dividing line between the lover and the loved one.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The human condition*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), pg. 7-8

<sup>42</sup> Hannah Arendt, "The Eichmann Controversy, a letter to Gershom Scholem." In *The Jewish Writings*. Compiled by Jerome Kohn and Ron H. Feldman. New York: Schocken Books, 2007. pg. 467

<sup>43</sup> Hannah Arendt, "The Meaning of Love in Politics." Letter to James Baldwin. 21 Nov. 1962. Web. <<http://www.hannaharendt.net/index.php/han/article/view/95/156>>.

<sup>44</sup> Arendt participates in the trajectory of derision related to emotions in public action and of questions relating to what she calls necessity (Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 71). Necessity, all of the things required for human survival biologically, does not and cannot enter into the public political realm. Necessity and politics are incompatible because Arendt believes that necessity, which we all experience as human beings, erases differences and causes us to act in a unified way (Reinhardt, *The Art of Being Free*, 154). As Anne Norton puts it, in Arendt's world "one enters politics by leaving the body, in utterance of thoughts and the will in labor" (Norton in *Feminist Interpretations of Arendt*, 257). In this way, Arendt depoliticizes many of the mass movements of the last century (most of the civil rights movement, feminist movements excepting suffrage, certainly AIDS activism, and most likely Black Lives Matter protests). While she supported particular goals of legal equity articulated by the mainstream civil rights movement, Arendt notably opposed the integration of public school systems, calling these social, rather than political concerns (Norton in *Feminist Interpretations of Arendt*). In fact, I am deeply ambivalent about including Arendt in a project that consists largely of Black political thought. Although Arendt insisted publicly many times that her sympathies were with oppressed people first, including Black people, she treated both Africans and African Americans as marked by existing in the realm of necessity and the social, therefore below the space of politics and the public (Norton in *Feminist Interpretations of Arendt*, 251). In fact, much of her writing that directly addresses race, is incredibly condescending and insulting, remarking on Black activists as both violent and without understanding of political strategy, making the achievements and possibilities of the political realm wholly the domain of white actors (Norton in *Feminist Interpretations of Arendt*, 251). Emotion, while never clearly defined by Arendt, seems to lay solidly outside of the public realm: belonging to people she denigrates as confused or failed political actors.

Sara Ahmed shares Arendt's concerns about the relationship between love and hate, although as a prominent theorist of affect, Ahmed complicates Arendt's work by looking to the circulation of love among political actors. Understanding the reliance of Ferguson protestors on public emotion as a disruptive force necessitates a turn to the language of affect theory, which analyzes states of feeling and their production and use to organize people and movements. As I elaborate in the next chapter, the interplay between the embodied aspects of emotion and the way they move between people and create outcomes provides a crucial method of understanding the work of emotion in social movements. Speaking of how white supremacist groups affectively organize themselves, Ahmed writes, "because we love [white people], we hate [everyone that threatens the white nation], and this hate is what brings us together."<sup>45</sup> This love provides strict boundaries and an instance on sameness, violently enforcing these ideological borders in order to ensure the object of love (white people and the white nation) remain unchanged and untouched. Certainly, this kind of "love" has been visible in St. Louis with white supremacists holding rallies and threatening violence against Ferguson protestors.<sup>46</sup>

Ahmed's attention to white nationalist's own language of love brings the potential consequences of political love into sharp relief. She questions whether or not the so-called 'expansion' of love called for by Nussbaum, really serves leftist goals or only produces different conditions of exclusion. In both racist and multicultural love, Ahmed sees love as conditional –

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See: Mark Reinhardt, *The art of being free: Taking liberties with Tocqueville, Marx, and Arendt*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Anne Norton, "Heart of Darkness" in *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt* ed. Bonnie Honig (University Park: Penn State Press, 2010); Hannah Arendt, *The human condition*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013); Hannah Arendt, "Reflections on little rock." *Dissent* 6, no. 1 (1959): 45-56).

<sup>45</sup> Ahmed, *Cultural Politics*, 43

<sup>46</sup> Walter Moskop, "White Supremacists Hold Downtown Rally; Counter-protesters Gather." *The St. Louis Post Dispatch*. April 25, 2015. [http://www.stltoday.com/news/local/metro/white-supremacists-hold-downtown-rally-counter-protesters-gather/article\\_710ca1d6-3017-5bc5-bd16-ffb2b613bf9a.html](http://www.stltoday.com/news/local/metro/white-supremacists-hold-downtown-rally-counter-protesters-gather/article_710ca1d6-3017-5bc5-bd16-ffb2b613bf9a.html); Alice. Speri, "KKK Missouri Chapter Threatens Ferguson Protesters with 'Lethal Force' | VICE News." VICE News RSS. November 13, 2014. <https://news.vice.com/article/kkk-missouri-chapter-threatens-ferguson-protesters-with-lethal-force>.

citizen-subjects must meet certain conditions for the nation to love them.<sup>47</sup> In the case of racist love, those conditions are whiteness and alignment with white nationalism. In multiculturalism, the condition is assimilation to the nation in both style and ideals. For Ahmed, the problem with this multicultural love is two-fold. First, it obscures the fact that the nation, imagined now as an inclusive ideal, still uses this ideal to reproduce a certain kind of subject, namely an individual committed to tolerance and multiculturalism.<sup>48</sup> Secondly, the multicultural love still disadvantages the non-white subject by first insisting that minority communities give up intragroup solidarity in favor of “loving difference” including those who wield the power of white supremacy.<sup>49</sup> Then, upon any disturbance, or civil unrest, multicultural discourse blames “their failure to love...for the failure of multiculturalism to deliver the national ideal.”<sup>50</sup> In this way, the blame for the failures of multiculturalism falls on the shoulders of those who already face marginalization, which aides white people in denying culpability for the consequences of white supremacy. No unconditional love from the nation exists: either you must be white, or you must remain complacent and tolerant, which means either way, white supremacy remains unaddressed. For Ahmed, the primary concern about any calls to love in politics is the way in which love relies on conditions. According to Ahmed, “there is no good love that, in speaking its name, can change the world into the referent for that name.”<sup>51</sup> While Ahmed admits that love is a powerful part of what makes individual human lives worth living, she does not believe in the possibility of expanding and generalizing that love to the nation or its citizens to such a degree that it could change politics for the better.

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<sup>47</sup> Ahmed, *Cultural Politics*, 137

<sup>48</sup> Ahmed, *Cultural Politics*, 138

<sup>49</sup> Ahmed, *Cultural Politics*, 138

<sup>50</sup> Ahmed, *Cultural Politics*, 139

<sup>51</sup> Ahmed, *Cultural Politics*, 141

While Ahmed's concerns establish a classic conceptualization of love's danger, the blurring of lines between the self and the other, it inspires in me more potential of to disrupt atomistic neoliberal world than it inspires fear. However, I do share Ahmed's concern that love's attachments and conditions make love a particularly "sticky" subject, one with perhaps as many dangers as promises because of its use by white supremacists, mainstream reformists, and corporations. These attachments threaten the erosion of any potential love might have in transformative politics. And yet, Ahmed's concept of love remains fairly limited in its failure to address the note on which she ends, saying, "perhaps love might come to matter as a way of describing the very affect of solidarity with others in work that is done to create a new world."<sup>52</sup> I do not think love needs to grow into this role; I think love has already existed, deeply between people striving to create a different world, in times both present and past.

### **Competing visions of love in Ferguson**

Conversations about and uses of love remain part of an ongoing and contested theme in Ferguson protests and related politics precisely because love can perform the affect of solidarity between those struggling for justice *and* the affective organization of white nationalist communities. While I will turn in later chapters to the use of love by Black queer feminist organizations on the ground, here, I want to illuminate multicultural and white nationalist uses of love in Ferguson and St. Louis politics since the murder of Michael Brown. By exploring both these uses of love, I am interested in discovering in which communities and under what conditions revolutionary love can create the affective space and engagement with politics which might allow for internal and external transformation.

In the immediate aftermath of Ferguson's initial protests, the former mayor of Ferguson founded a combination civic-engagement and fundraising group. Calling itself "I Love

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<sup>52</sup> Ahmed, *Cultural Politics*, 141

Ferguson” the group is well-known for its “I [heart] Ferguson” yard signs with black lettering and a prominent red heart. They use a business and unity-oriented understanding of love, articulating their vision as follows, “to raise funds for our businesses that have been hurt by recent looting in the aftermath of the recent Ferguson tragedy. We love Ferguson... We believe that we can learn from what has happened and become a better, stronger and more unified community.”<sup>53</sup> While the focus on businesses does not neatly fit into Nussbaum’s understanding, they too organize love of place around certain liberal or multicultural values (here, “unity”: community togetherness or inclusion). Moreover, the language of a “wonderful community,” which merely experienced a vaguely defined “tragic event” from which it can return “better [and] stronger” elides the specificity of white supremacy and racialized violence and profiteering.<sup>54</sup> Instead, I Love Ferguson positions Mike Brown’s murder and surrounding protests (including coded language about violence – “looting” *hurts* businesses) as the discrete incidents of disharmony, rather than a pattern of disrespect for Black life spanning centuries. As founder Brian Fletcher says, “the protestors are putting all the civil rights issues of the US on the backs of Ferguson residents.”<sup>55</sup> The love of I Love Ferguson orients members towards the goal of unified community that prioritizes the city budget and revenue as a measure of success, which in turn negates the importance of protestors’ concerns and the responsibility of the municipality in the systemic devaluation of Black life. The generic multicultural love that I Love Ferguson peddles exemplifies a middle-left love, prioritizing the feelings of white people and the success of businesses, leaving no room for protest or disruption. Wielded against those protesting deep

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<sup>53</sup> See the organizations website: [www.iloveferguson.com](http://www.iloveferguson.com)

<sup>54</sup> On how Ferguson and other municipalities like it in St. Louis have long been segregated communities where police departments over-ticket Black community members for revenue, see: Radley Balko, "How Municipalities in St. Louis County, Mo., Profit from Poverty." *Washington Post*. September 3, 2014. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-watch/wp/2014/09/03/how-st-louis-county-missouri-profits-from-poverty/>.

<sup>55</sup> Chris McGreal, "I Love Ferguson' Campaign at Odds with Abiding Anger of Protesters." *The Guardian*. October 18, 2014. <http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2014/oct/18/i-love-ferguson-campaign-anger-protesters>.

systemic injustices, I Love Ferguson engages in precisely the kind of tone-policing and conditionality that Ahmed argues against.

Farther right, Donald Trump engages the language of love in politics. On March 11, 2015, just four days short of Missouri's primary, Trump held a political rally in the city of St. Louis, drawing a large crowd and an organized protest. In fact, of all the Trump rallies that have resulted in arrests or citations for protest, most arrests and citations happened on in St. Louis (thirty one people were handcuffed, processed and cited for charges like general peace disturbance and obstructing an officer).<sup>56</sup> Looking at the diverse uses of love in this single political moment demonstrates the widely varied ways in which political actors might articulate love. Let me begin with the most dangerous – closing in toward a love of the white nation and a charismatic leader. Hearing shouts of “We love you Donald!” Trump responded to the crowd, saying, “I love you too! This doesn't get talked about in the press—the love that's in these rooms. I mean, it's love! You know, they talk about protest or something; they don't talk about what's really happening in these rooms and these stadiums—they don't talk about the love.”<sup>57</sup>

Here, Trump articulates what he sees as the unrepresented side of his rallies, which have largely been covered as monuments to hatred, to an angry and unforgiving political moment—and that uncovered affect is love. Of course, the love that is initially expressed – “we love you Donald!” – is love for Trump himself, a love for a charismatic leader, a political phenomenon often closely tied to a narrow ethnic nationalism in which the individual becomes a symbol for the nation. Indeed, when Trump mirrors back his love for those in the audience, he also identifies “the love that's in these rooms” a broader, seriously bounded patriotic love. As they tried to

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<sup>56</sup> Dana Liebelson and Julia Craven. “Here's How Often People Are Hurt and Arrested At Donald Trump Events,” *Huffington Post*. March 22, 2016. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/donald-trump-rallies-arrests-and-violence\\_us\\_56f17b5ce4b09bf44a9ea5f1](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/donald-trump-rallies-arrests-and-violence_us_56f17b5ce4b09bf44a9ea5f1)

<sup>57</sup> Danny Wicentowski, “How St. Louis Stopped Donald Trump.” 14 March 2016 *Riverfront Times*. <<http://www.riverfronttimes.com/newsblog/2016/03/14/how-st-louis-stopped-donald-trump>>



drown out protests from Ferguson activists, Trump supporters chanted “USA! USA! USA!” affectively attaching themselves to the exclusive nation via Trump. Love, here, circulates between Trump’s supporters and is directed at Trump as a symbol or stand-in for the nation. This is the love of Ahmed’s fears: one that requires strict boundaries violently enforced. Trump built support among the white working class,<sup>58</sup> using expressly exclusionary terms, namely through fear mongering about non-white terrorists and immigrants.<sup>59</sup> The love-hate affect of Trump supporters names an attachment to the white nation and the trappings of whiteness (entitlement, bootstrap ideology, economic success) and projects that love onto Trump.

At the same Trump rally, a loosely organized group of Ferguson protestors, allies, and accomplices lay in wait for Trump’s appearance on stage. Shortly after he began to speak, two teams of protestors deployed banners from the balcony, distracting police and security guards while larger teams on the ground established protective circles, putting their bodies between college-aged Black activists and Trump supporters while chanting “dump Trump” and “stop the hate.” As police moved in to pull away protestors linked together, many went limp and officers struggled to remove them from between tight rows of theater seats, they chanted “it is our duty to fight for our freedom. It is our duty to win. We must love and support each other. We have nothing to lose but our chains.”<sup>60</sup> Love, again enters public space. This raises the crucial

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<sup>58</sup> Phillip Bump, “Why white voters won’t be enough to put Donald Trump in the White House.” *The Washington Post*. March 21, 2016. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/03/21/why-white-voters-wont-be-enough-to-put-donald-trump-in-the-white-house/>; Gest, Justin. “Strange bedfellows: Donald Trump and the white working class,” *Reuters*. August 24, 2015 <http://blogs.reuters.com/great-debate/2015/08/23/strange-bedfellows-donald-trump-and-the-white-working-class/>

<sup>59</sup> Dana Millbank, “Donald Trump is a bigot and a racist,” Opinion: *Washington Post*. December 1, 2015 [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/donald-trump-is-a-bigot-and-a-racist/2015/12/01/a2a47b96-9872-11e5-8917-653b65c809eb\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/donald-trump-is-a-bigot-and-a-racist/2015/12/01/a2a47b96-9872-11e5-8917-653b65c809eb_story.html); Amanda. Holpuch, “Trump re-ups controversial Muslim ban and Mexico ban in first campaign ad.” *The Guardian*. January 4, 2016 <http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/jan/04/donald-trump-great-again-first-campaign-ad-isis-mexico-wall-muslim-ban>

<sup>60</sup> Description based on report and videos from Wicentowski, “How St. Louis Stopped Donald Trump.”

question: is there something more to this vision and performance of love than the ideological opposite of Trump's articulation of love?

### **Toward revolutionary love**

Love in politics can serve radically different ends – in the same day, even in the same moment, it may serve the interests of Donald Trump and the interests of queer, anti-capitalist feminists of color working to overthrow white supremacy. In the potentially contradictory nature of love in politics, as in many things, the devil is in the details. As Ahmed would say, emotions are sticky subjects, they pick things up, attach to things differently as they move through space and time. What I mean to suggest in the bulk of this work is that, while love can serve dangerous and white nationalist ends, the possibility that it could, too, serve the ends and organize the desires and actions of those struggling for justice merits investigation. That maybe in moving away from an Arendtian model that considers love hate's prettier cousin we might uncover other possibilities. That while differentiating and carefully analyzing the differences between Trump's love and the love of the movement for Black lives remains crucial, perhaps the power of the love politics of protestors in Ferguson allows new imaginations of both community and politics.

The unrest in Ferguson and in New York after the death of Eric Garner<sup>61</sup> and in Baltimore after the death of Freddie Gray<sup>62</sup> sparked a national movement resisting police brutality and structural racism, which many call the "Black Lives Matter Movement."<sup>63</sup> Protests

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<sup>61</sup> Oliver Laughland, Kayla Epstein, and Jessica Glenza, "Eric Garner Protests Continue in Cities across America through Second Night." *The Guardian*, December 5, 2014. <http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2014/dec/05/eric-garner-case-new-york-protests-continue-through-second-night>.

<sup>62</sup> Gabriella Demezuk, "Baltimore Sings the Blues," *ABC News*, March 30, 2016 <http://abcnews.go.com/US/photos/remembering-freddie-gray-37895739>

<sup>63</sup> I believe an important distinction exists between the phrase, the official organization, and what the phrase broadly used has come to connote. First, the phrase "Black lives matter" is chanted by those protesting police brutality functions as both a demand and an affirmation: an affirmation of Black people and a demand to those systems which threaten their lives (See: *Fargesn Media Project*. "Episode 3: Haggadah" <http://www.fargesn.com/web-series-1/2015/8/5/fargesn-media-project-episode-3-haggadah>). Second, there is the formal organization Black Lives Matter, formed in 2013 in response to the extrajudicial murder of Trayvon Martin and subsequent lack of criminal

and demonstrations continue, and my project does not aim to make claims about the impact or success of the broader movement. Whatever story I can present of the movement is without an end, because as Mckesson often says, “the movement lives.”<sup>64</sup> Instead, I am concerned first with what I have seen of the inner life of the movement, especially the shimmering emotional current that runs throughout the mobile spaces of protest and what love, in particular, means for the vision and interworking of the movement. Moreover, I will not aim to replicate the framing of countless stories describing the “true story” of the Ferguson protests. I offer an ambivalent consideration of love’s theoretical weight and history and its purchase, promise and pitfalls in recent organizing in Ferguson. The protests that continue in St. Louis include a multitude of narratives, goals and tactics, and I will address merely a handful of these, as I discuss in chapters three and four.

In what follows, I will first turn to theory, looking for the history of love in radical politics that Nussbaum, Arendt and Ahmed do not address. Bringing a deep history of love in radical Black political thought into conversation with more recent turns to love in feminist, queer and affect theory, I will examine the use and impact of love in protests in and around Ferguson. I turn to theory to understand a line of thought that predates protests in Fergusons. Moreover, based on the conversations and online dialogue of Ferguson activists, I know that many of the theorists I will cite are part of the cultural and intellectual lexicon of those on the ground in

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liability for George Zimmerman (See: [blacklivesmatter.com/herstory](http://blacklivesmatter.com/herstory)). The organization, founded by Alicia Garza, Opal Tometi and Patrisse Cullors, was not founded in Ferguson, and the people who began and continue to protest in Ferguson do not necessarily have any formal relationship to the organization. This point is important precisely because the phrase “the Black Lives Matter Movement” used by both the media and the public to refer to a large and diverse set of protests on issues of white supremacy and police brutality can produce associations not everyone desires – between a myriad of demands, tactics and individuals. When I am referring to protests and people in Ferguson, specifically, I will say so (i.e., “the movement in Ferguson,” or “activists in Ferguson.”) When I am referring to the words themselves, I will use “Black lives matter.” When I am referring to protests that have spanned the country and even the globe, I will refer to it as the movement for Black lives, which many have recently moved to using (see: [movementforblacklives.org](http://movementforblacklives.org)). Finally, if I mean the doings of the organization, I will cite the words of its founders and call the organization Black Lives Matter.

<sup>64</sup> See: DeRay Mckesson (deray). Twitter Post. March 30, 2016, 6:04 AM. “the movement lives.” <https://twitter.com/deray/status/715132496942342144>

Ferguson.<sup>65</sup> Using these diverse theoretical traditions, with attention to the similarities and tensions between them, I define love as an affective power with the possibility to interrupt or unmake existing structures and to build different visions and possibilities.

In chapter two, I explore the political ideology of the women who founded the organization Black Lives Matter, considering the way that they discuss love in their numerous interviews and press releases. Although I find limitations in turning to their work because of the disconnect between their organization and Ferguson-proper, their importance to the current media narrative of the movement for Black lives and their frequent articulation of love represent one node of what William Connolly calls resonance, in this case a resonant notion of love in anti-police brutality organizing. I examine the way they use love to resist nihilism and imagine the work of building a different world without racial domination.

In the third chapter, I attend to the rhetoric of love at play in movement conversations happening on Twitter from various activists and observers in St. Louis. Turning to Twitter, I am interested in the use of the mediated-public space as a reflective space for many young activists involved in Ferguson protests, and the way tweets become part of a community building conversation, inflecting and changing the use love in organizing. This love, I argue has certain key components, namely constituting the movement, continuing the movement through certain practices (care labor and solidarity) and struggling in the face of both internal and external pressures. In my fourth chapter, I turn to participant-observation in anti-police brutality organizing in St. Louis to examine how love functions in moments of uncertainty and risk, to link participants across space and time and to operate in defiance of the white supremacist state.

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<sup>65</sup> See: Alexis Templeton, "The Non-Binary Negro," *Medium*, January 14, 2016 <https://medium.com/@theyzus/the-non-binary-negro-a48cf91f624e#.v0umo0gnd> - a personal exploration of gender identity that begins with a quote from Audre Lorde; DeRay Mckesson. (@deray) Twitter Post. November 12, 2014. "Martin was onto something. And Malcolm got it in the end. Love stands WITH my rage & anger. Love does not replace my rage/anger. #Ferguson" <https://twitter.com/deray/status/532523460636196866>

In these two chapters, I investigate the specificity of love in organizing in Ferguson: what does a practice of love concerned both with self-preservation and communal liberation look like under the threat of police violence?

Finally, I will conclude with remarks on the distribution of love and care labors in radical organizing practice and concurrent implications of love as a long-term organizing project. How are labors of love and care distributed based on gender, class, race, ability, sexuality in movements for liberation? How do we seek equity in those arrangements? Is care part of a radical re-visioning or is it gendered beyond rescue?

## Chapter 1 - The Mightiest Word: Revolutionary love in radical Black, feminist, queer and affective theory

What if the mightiest word is love? – Elizabeth Alexander

Theorists of radical and transformative politics have long articulated love as a powerful part of forming a politics of liberation. As liberation theologian and pedagogical theorist Paulo Freire argues in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, “no matter where the oppressed are found, the act of love is commitment to their cause—the cause of liberation.”<sup>66</sup> Radical Black thinkers including Martin Luther King, Jr. and James Baldwin use the language of love to expose the wrongs of the present order, imagine a new future and mobilize activists for liberation. This sort of love is far from the sentimental or privatized notions of love found in mass media and popular culture: it is engaged in continual acts of resistance, directly targeting white supremacy and struggling for a new world. In other words, in a world defined by hierarchy and competition under white supremacist capitalism and liberal understandings of subjectivity, which atomize individuals and undermine cooperative interplay, love provides an opportunity to create a different kind of relationship to others, which includes a willingness to change and be changed by others.

In this chapter, I draw on that tradition, and on the contributions of feminist, queer and affect theorists including Audre Lorde, Jennifer Nash and Lauren Berlant, who unpack the role of bodies and emotions in public life. These theorists allow me to define love as an affective power: as a collective force derived from shared and circulated emotion that can disrupt existing forms of subjectivity and relationality and produce new ones. I argue that in the most transformative theorization of love’s place in politics, love disrupts the forms of subjectivity that oppressive socio-political power structures (including white supremacy and capitalism) create

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<sup>66</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. (New York: Continuum, 2000), 89

and depend upon. Specifically, it disrupts individualist and profit based notions of subjectivity and relationships. Instead, this sort of love, which I will call revolutionary love, in the colloquial of Ferguson protestors,<sup>67</sup> invests subjects in creating a new world based on profoundly different principles and interactions. These include fully realized liberation and non-sovereign subjectivity and relationality that allow subjects to do both the inner and outer transformative work of building a world without racial domination.

Speaking of love in politics evokes the prophetic spirit of Martin Luther King, Jr., who described himself as an “extremist for love.”<sup>68</sup> Certainly the conception of love in politics does not begin or end with him. King, for example, drew on Ghandi’s concept of “satyagraha” which King interprets as follows, “*satya* is truth which equals love, and *graha* is force; *satyagraha* thus means truth-force or love-force.”<sup>69</sup> And, as I elaborate below, he relied on previous Greek and Christian conceptions of love as a God-force universalized to all humanity.<sup>70</sup> However, King’s theory and theology of love as a force of God stands out as the most widely recognized call to love in the history of U.S. social movement politics. King calls for love in the context of a dominant social order marked by lovelessness. In one of his most radical speeches, “Beyond

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<sup>67</sup> See: Kayla Reed (KayRay) Vine Post. “Revolutionary family. Revolutionary love. #ferguson” December 27, 2014 <https://vine.co/v/OHDh03EIZPz>; Alexis Templeton (@audreoverlorde). Twitter Post. “REVOLUTIONARY LOVE, LOVE, LOVE” October 15, 2014 1:07 PM <https://twitter.com/audreoverlorde/status/522448694642102272>

<sup>68</sup> In “Letter for Birmingham Jail,” King discusses the accusation of extremism from his critics, citing Biblical figures and historic heroes as extremists for their principles and beliefs (justice, equality, the gospel) and says, “Jesus Christ was an extremist for love, truth, and goodness, and thereby rose above his environment. Perhaps the South, the nation, and the world are in dire need of creative extremists.” Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from Birmingham Jail.” *The Atlantic Monthly* August 1, 1963, 78-88.

<sup>69</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., “Pilgrimage to Nonviolence” in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr.* comp. James Melvin Washington (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), 39. See also: Mahatma Ghandi. *Non-violent Resistance: (Satyagraha)*. (New York: Schocken Books, 1969).

<sup>70</sup> King relies primarily on Greek, Christian and Ghandian concepts of love as it exists in politics. Greek conceptualizations (division of love into the categories: eros, philia, agape) from Plato and Aristotle put forth a concept of love’s position in social and political life (see: Bennett Helm, “Love,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* ed. Edward N. Zalta, Fall 2013 Edition, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2013/entries/love/>). King draws on these in connection to Christian understandings of agape as God’s love for man and man’s love for God, expanded and universalized past an individual subject. In *A Testament of Hope*, editor James Melvin Washington points out that King relied heavily on theologians Anders Nygren and Paul Tillich, who both explored agape as related to Christian social ethics.

Vietnam,” King addresses the “giant triplets of racism, extreme materialism and militarism” and sees a society on the verge of “spiritual death.”<sup>71</sup> Racism, materialism and militarism are directly connected. Materialism functions at a fundamental level by turning people into things, naming a culture engaged in dehumanization. Racism marks the exploitation of Black people and the state-supported conception of Black people as subhuman and not deserving of rights or acknowledgement. Materialism combines with racism to enable militarism, which permits and encourages violence both at home and abroad. Coming to love thus requires tremendous effort: considering the world “has become oppressively impersonal, many of us have come to feel we are little more than numbers.”<sup>72</sup> The combined systems discussed above create a cultural environment in which individuals are unable to see themselves or others as persons, a fundamentally unloving model of relationality. Recognizing the compounding systems of dehumanization that atomize people and eliminate space for collective feeling, King exposes a world without connection, without community, where individual people cannot value themselves or others truly.

In response, King calls for rising “to the level of love, of its great beauty and power, [in which] you seek only to defeat evil systems.”<sup>73</sup> Here, King describes love as a form of power that enables actors struggling for justice to confront materialism and racism and seek their destruction. By emphasizing love’s beauty, he also situates love at the center of “long and bitter, but beautiful, struggle for a new world.”<sup>74</sup> This sort of love, which exists internally between those involved in direct action and also externally in the commitment to direct action as a method for confronting injustice and “evil systems.” For King, the power of love contains the possibility

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<sup>71</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., “Beyond Vietnam,” *King Encyclopedia: Stanford University*, April 4, 1967, 10

<sup>72</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., “The Strength to Love,” in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr.* comp. James Melvin Washington (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), 500.

<sup>73</sup> Martin Luther King Jr., “Loving Your Enemies,” in *King Encyclopedia*, November 17, 1957, 3

<sup>74</sup> King, “Beyond Vietnam,” in *King Encyclopedia*, 9



to redeem the nation both by interrupting the trio of dehumanizing systems that control American culture and struggling to build a new, beautiful world.

In the gap between the actual world and the possible world, actors seeking justice struggle for a new world through the loving power of nonviolent civil disobedience. For King, the most important kind of love for civil disobedience is agape, which he conceptualizes as “understanding, redeeming good will for all men. It is an overflowing love which is purely spontaneous, unmotivated, groundless and creative.”<sup>75</sup> Agape operates as a regulating vision for King, which critically applies to “all men,” making it an expansive and public idea of loving, which includes both those struggled with and those struggled against. In its “overflowing” nature, this sort of love does not require any particular inspiring act, it is “God working in the minds of men.”<sup>76</sup> Here, King uses the Greek conception of a universal love, attaching it to a Christian understanding of reciprocal love between God and humanity, which then generalizes a universal love of humanity springing from the connection of man to the divine. He moves away from the more individualized conceptions of love in the Greek sense – eros (romantic love) and philia (friendship) – that he contends relate to self-interest.<sup>77</sup> The capacity to experience agape reflects the universal divine element of humanity; to encounter the world universally with love requires believing in the worthiness of all of humanity, believing, for example, in the possibility for even the most vicious proponents of segregation to change. Agape thus pulls love from its discursive position in the private sphere of romantic and familial love to a public sphere that allows the crucial struggle for justice.

Building on a universal understanding and love of humanity, agape resists a world founded on not feeling and not connecting. Confronting the reality of racism, materialism and

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<sup>75</sup> King, “An Experiment in Love,” in *A Testament of Hope*, 19

<sup>76</sup> King, “The Power of Nonviolence,” in *A Testament of Hope*, 13

<sup>77</sup> King, “The Power of Nonviolence,” in *A Testament of Hope*, 13

militarism, King urges his audience to “have sense enough and morality enough to cut off the chain of hate and the chain of evil in the universe and you do that by love.”<sup>78</sup> Here, love interrupts hate and evil, and breaks it, which implies a certain destructive capacity, an ability to interrupt a long-line of dominating systems and bring them down. King believes this sort of love “overcomes the world,”<sup>79</sup> that is, the critical power of love can incapacitate evil systems and creates the possibility for moving beyond the world that exists. Indeed, “love is somehow the key that unlocks the door which leads to ultimate reality.”<sup>80</sup> The use of love as the “key” is important because it means that love singularly contains the capability to open the way to a new future.

Crucially, the power of love is also what creates that future. *Agape* requires a commitment beyond the feeling of expansive goodwill because it “is love in action. *Agape* is seeking to preserve and create community. It is insistence on community even when one seeks to break it.”<sup>81</sup> Love has collective, communal goals, which *create* community against the threat of racism and materialism. This means love’s creative power sustains an alternative to individualistic ways of being by centering the goal of community struggling for justice above all others. King’s love originates with the self, but it does not stop there. As George Shulman argues in *American Prophecy*, “agape reaches across such lines to engage the other; love names a struggle with inherited identities that reconfigures the very meaning of public and private. Love means, not safety, but risking the self and challenging the other.”<sup>82</sup> In its very essence, *agape* requires an other-regarding capacity and demands the use of the self in the service of this cause, despite risk of harm. Shulman continues, that the process of engaging the oppressor allows

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<sup>78</sup> King, “Loving Your Enemies,” in *King Encyclopedia*, 4

<sup>79</sup> King, “The Strength to Love,” in *A Testament of Hope*, 513

<sup>80</sup> King, “Beyond Vietnam,” in *King Encyclopedia*, 8

<sup>81</sup> King, “An Experiment in Love,” in *A Testament of Hope*, 20

<sup>82</sup> George M. Shulman. *American Prophecy: Race and Redemption in American Political Culture*. (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota, 2008), 111

transformation because, “if domination denies connection, love addresses this denial of (our) reality by waking in our oppressors their own capacity for connection.”<sup>83</sup> Love’s connective force offers the same chance to the oppressor: to reconnect to others as human, which requires relinquishing domination over them. King’s commitment to building community in love thus creates new, other-regarding ways of seeing and new connections grounded in universal humanity rather than domination. It is perhaps for this reason that King declares, “Love is the only creative, redemptive, transforming power in the universe.”<sup>84</sup> Allowing love to transform the ways political actors see the world (without racial hierarchy) redeems those previously complacent in white supremacy and creates new political possibilities.

Loving expansively is a requirement of transformation because “the very root of love is the power of redemption.”<sup>85</sup> Redemption is a dual force regarding both the oppressed and the oppressor. As George Shulman notes, “suffering [at the hands of the oppressor] is made creative by ‘love’ conceived as acting, healing, becoming. Redemption then is an act, not a substance to possess or a final destination.”<sup>86</sup> Love redeems suffering by making it an active force in the process of changing the world. Love creates the potential for those most mired in a system of unloving to consider the possibility of love, humanity and redemption. Centering love in the struggle against evil systems does not merely inoculate against insidious despair; it requires commitment to move forward, to transform both the individual and the nation.

King’s most compelling arguments on love are the most overlooked: his radical claim that evil systems can be brought down with love and a new and different world built in its place. As feminist scholar bell hooks argues in the tradition of King, “love is available to us because it

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<sup>83</sup> Shulman, *American Prophecy*, 111

<sup>84</sup> King, “Loving Your Enemies,” in *King Encyclopedia*, 7

<sup>85</sup> King, “Loving Your Enemies,” in *King Encyclopedia*, 4

<sup>86</sup> Shulman, *American Prophecy*, 109

is a non-market value. We can create love wherever we are,” which means that love remains a powerful and renewable tool in the struggle against domination.<sup>87</sup> However, King’s grounding of this love in a universal Christian God may limit the reach of his particular political love as Christian theology has its own regulating institutions and histories at which many activists of different faiths, and those who identify as queer, bristle. While not necessarily his intent, the universalism of his language risks interpretation as vague platitudes without attention to the real conditions of oppression. Mainstream political figures left and right have de-radicalized King’s politics and appropriated his legacy toward maintaining a white supremacist status quo and simultaneously denying culpability in its maintenance. Examining the national political memory of King in the context of the monument built in his on the National Mall, Kevin Bruyneel argues that King’s radical politics are “muted by the universalizing, biblical language and the absence of a clear claim regarding who or what is being fought” in the quotes selected for the monument.<sup>88</sup> The universal notion of love itself allows King’s love to be easily distorted, erasing the material differences between racialized, sexualized and gendered subjects in the contemporary age.

King’s theories of love are often used to paint him as a compromiser and “as an advocate of post-

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<sup>87</sup> For quote see: bell hooks. *Salvation: Black People and Love*. (New York: William Morrow, 2001), 70  
bell hooks has written extensively on the importance of love, drawing largely on King, Baldwin and a variety of psychoanalytic and self-help literature. I have forgone much of hooks’ writing as it deals specifically with feminist interventions in individual romantic relationships, which, while important, are beyond the scope of my project. On love in politics, hooks argues that love is a central part of working against oppression and that without it, even the most revolutionary activists will be tempted to return to ways of thinking and acting that are based in domination (see: bell hooks. "Love as a Practice of Freedom." in *Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations*. (New York: Routledge, 1994), 1). Much of hooks' love ethic is built on a commitment very similar to King's: a commitment to living and participating in a certain sort of political action, one which allows the actor to move beyond the self to a deep concern for others, which then allows the collectivity of activists to build a social movement which is anti-domination on multiple fronts, and which encounters differences in an orientation of understanding and building together. Differently, her articulation of love is grounded in the work of intersectional feminism (much like Audre Lorde, to whom I turn shortly), and includes much on the importance and political purchase of interpersonal romantic love, both sexual and platonic. For more, see: bell hooks. *All about Love*. (London: Harper Collins, 1999); bell hooks. *Salvation: Black People and Love*. (New York: William Morrow, 2001); bell hooks. *Communion: The Female Search for Love*. (New York: W. Morrow, 2002); and bell hooks. "Loving Blackness as Political Resistance." In *Killing Rage: Ending Racism*. (New York: Henry & Holt, 1995). 146-152.

<sup>88</sup> Kevin Bruyneel, “The King’s Body: The Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial and the Politics of Collective Memory.” In *History and Memory*, 26.1 (Spring/Summer 2014), 83

racial views.”<sup>89</sup> Love, its teeth pulled out, becomes the driving force toward something inevitable. Protestors in St. Louis, have responded to these politics of curtailing King’s vision, including interrupting a march on Martin Luther King, Jr. day with a banner reading, “Revolution is not a Parade,” and another in which King’s face is made of pictures of the protestors.<sup>90</sup> While King argued the moral arc of the universe bends towards justice *with the work of human actors*, white moderates often quote King<sup>91</sup> to argue for calm that respects order, to urge patience in the face of suffering, and to demand Black people love white Americans despite their participation in white supremacist violence.

While James Baldwin does not shy away from a theological connection, he moves towards a love that originates from the paradox of Black life in America; that is, living in and belonging to a nation that violently disavows Black people as persons and citizens. For Baldwin, love is a bodily, emotional experience, a defining and yet fragile part of an imperfect, deeply human existence. Baldwin, similar to King, acknowledges that his readers live in an era that rejects and devalues feeling, in which people have become divided and individual. In modern society, he believes, “the person is desperately trying *not* to find out what he *really* feels. Therefore, the truth cannot be told, even about one’s attitudes: we live by lies.”<sup>92</sup> Not only are people prevented from accessing true feeling they are implicated in the decision not to feel. Here, “the relevant truth is that the country was settled by a desperate, divided and rapacious horde of people who were determined to forget their pasts and determined to make money.”<sup>93</sup> The truth

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<sup>89</sup> Bruyneel, “The King’s Body,” in *History and Memory* 84

<sup>90</sup> See: Lilly Workneh, “#ReclaimMLK: Activists Nationwide Follow In MLK’s Footsteps to Protest Racial Injustice,” *HuffPost Black Voices*. January 19, 2015. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/01/19/reclaim-mlk-day-protests\\_n\\_6503012.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/01/19/reclaim-mlk-day-protests_n_6503012.html)

<sup>91</sup> Chauncey DeVega. "Dear White America: Please Stop Talking About Martin Luther King Jr. and the Baltimore 'Riots'" *Daily Kos*. April 25, 2015.

<sup>92</sup> James Baldwin, “Nothing Personal,” in *Collected Essays*. (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1998), 698, emphasis original.

<sup>93</sup> Baldwin, “Nothing personal,” in *Collected Essays*, 693-4

Baldwin invests in reveals the origins of America in settler colonialism, white supremacy and capitalism, which the national myths of American exceptionalism and commitment to liberty deny. These lies are explicitly linked to racism: for white people the central lie is that whiteness constitutes a true or natural identity rather than a moral choice based in domination.<sup>94</sup> White people ignore this truth to cast ourselves as innocent ahistorical actors, and this imagined innocence allows the continued perpetuation of white supremacy.<sup>95</sup> For Black people, the crucial lie is in not accepting the foundational paradox: “that the Negro has been formed by this nation...that the American Negro can have no future anywhere, on any continent, as long as he is unwilling to accept his past.”<sup>96</sup> Rather than wrestling fully with this “terrible” paradox, Baldwin observes, it is easier to numb the pain of racial disavowal and fall into fatalism. In both cases, to see the truth and to tell it widely, and to feel truly in the face of those truths, is itself a potentially transformative act. As bell hooks would say, “to choose love is to go against the prevailing values of the culture.”<sup>97</sup>

Though love is difficult to choose, it functions for Baldwin as one of the great constants of the human condition. “Birth, struggle and death are constant,” writes Baldwin, “And so is love, though we may not always think so.”<sup>98</sup> Love, even though Baldwin acknowledges it may be difficult to see at first, exists as something solid and constant in the universe. By placing love into the same category as birth, struggle and death, he intimates no easy constant in love, and certainly not a consistent one, but a contested space, a changing and definitive human

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<sup>94</sup> Baldwin, James. “On Being White ... and Other Lies” *Essence*. April 1984.

[http://www.csworkshop.org/pdfs/CARC/Family\\_Herstories/2\\_On\\_Being\\_White.PDF](http://www.csworkshop.org/pdfs/CARC/Family_Herstories/2_On_Being_White.PDF)

<sup>95</sup> Baldwin, “The White Man’s Guilt,” and “My Dungeon Shook,” in *Collected Essays*

<sup>96</sup> Baldwin, “Down at the Cross,” in *Collected Essays*, 333

<sup>97</sup> hooks, “Love as a Practice of Freedom,” in *Outlaw Culture*, 3

<sup>98</sup> Baldwin, “Down at the Cross,” in *Collected Essays*, 339

experience. Perhaps struggle and love, intertwined between birth and death, must each fully engage the other to be transformative.

For Baldwin, love is both survival and salvation for Black people living under white supremacy, though neither is easy or comfortable. In “Letter to My Nephew,” he recalls the child’s birth,

here you were: to be loved. To be loved, baby, hard, at once, and forever, to strengthen you against the loveless world. Remember that: I know how black it looks today, for you. It looked bad that day, too, yes, we were trembling. We have not stopped trembling yet, but if we had not loved each other, none of us would have survived.<sup>99</sup>

Love is the first and final purpose of the person, a birthright of sorts: to be loved and to love as a protective balm that allows survival despite the lovelessness that abounds everywhere else. Love strengthens a person against the ‘loveless world’ – a world of white supremacy. The ‘we’ of this sentence is the very community of Black Americans, so love has allowed not just the individual survival of Black children, but also the collective survival of Black community. Yet Baldwin continues to ‘tremble,’ a physical expression of insecurity and vulnerability. This love does not simplify the subject or community: love does not insulate or decontextualize the individual (take him out of the context of white supremacy) or provide endless comfort in community. Love is, as the world is, imperfect. Love is also not the sort of power that allows any hope in the certainty of a changed world. Indeed, the world looks bad in the present, and it looked bad in the past, and Baldwin offers no vision here of the future. Love, then, comes from a place of humanity, not the perfection of the divine.

Love originates in the paradox of Black life in America and its relationship to white society. For Baldwin, the relationship

is not simply the relationship of oppressed to oppressor, of master to slave, nor is it motivated purely by hatred; it is also, literally and morally, a *blood* relationship, perhaps

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<sup>99</sup> Baldwin, “My Dungeon Shook,” in *Collected Essays*, 293

the most profound reality of the American experience, and we cannot begin to unlock it until we accept how very much it contains the force and anguish and terror of love. Negroes are Americans and their destiny is the country's destiny.<sup>100</sup>

Black people in America are inextricably bound up with the nation. By articulating a “*blood* relationship” Baldwin articulates both the violent relationship of the nation to Black bodies (blood flowing through white supremacy, systems of exploitation, slavery and rape) and the importance of Black people to the ongoing creation of the nation that should be (blood is also a life force). The key to understanding this paradox is love. Love, which has kept Black folks alive, also contains terror and anguish when the creation of the desired nation seems so uncertain, even impossible. Absent divine origins, love can only spring from the body situated in its historical context, which is the blood relationship of Black people to the nation. By describing it as such, Baldwin paints love as a sensual experience: one that contains other complex emotions and springs from this bodily fact. Using the language of the sensual, bodily and experiential, Baldwin connects love to a complex set of emotions, grounded in the real and uncomfortable condition of living itself.

Love enters the public sphere as a practice of truth telling and confrontation with the foundational lies of American democracy. Speaking to his nephew about political action confronting white supremacy, Baldwin argues, “if the word *integration* means anything, this is what it means: that we, with love, shall force our brothers to see themselves as they are, to cease fleeing from reality and begin to change it.”<sup>101</sup> Love becomes the emotional state within which Black people struggling for justice confront the reality of white supremacy. Here, he uses love in the definition of integration, centering this kind of love in the public sphere and in confrontation with people with profoundly different experiences, with the “other.” In writing to his nephew,

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<sup>100</sup> Baldwin, “Many Thousands Gone,” in *Collected Essays*, 32, emphasis original

<sup>101</sup> Baldwin, “My Dungeon Shook,” in *Collected Essays*, 294



Baldwin writes as a Black man to a Black audience. He positions white people as the other, and love as the primary mode of encountering that otherness in order to make change, through loving force. Baldwin troubles the conception of brotherly love by simultaneously using the language of engaging the “brother” “with love” and arguing that love means *forcing* the brother to see that which he wants to flee, challenging him to change. In love, white people are also forced to deal with the brutal history of white supremacy and the reality of its continued power. Yet for Baldwin, the tragic realization remains: Black people must love even the oppressor.

In the essay, “The Creative Process,” Baldwin outlines the role of the artist in society, arguing, “the war of an artist with his society is a lover’s war, and he does, at his best, what lovers do, which is to reveal the beloved to himself, and with that revelation, make freedom real.”<sup>102</sup> Here, again, love includes confrontation and telling the truth. Using the sexual and sensual language of the lover/beloved, Baldwin again implies the position of love in embodied relationships and experiences. In the loving process of making the truth clear to the object of desire (“the beloved” is, in this case, the nation itself), freedom begins to come into being in the spiritual and emotional world. Using the language of desire, and assigning the nation the place of the desired/beloved, performs the rhetorical strategy of positioning the nation as wed to ideals of freedom that are not yet achieved, but possible. Crucially, it is love that will allow us to see and comprehend the truth, “it is the miracle of love, love strong enough to drive or guide us into the great estate of maturity, or, to put it another way, into the apprehension and acceptance of one’s own identity.”<sup>103</sup> Not only does love make the truth known, it guides one to accept the truth of racial construction, that white supremacy and Black ‘inferiority’ are as fundamental to American

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<sup>102</sup> Baldwin, “The Creative Process,” in *Collected Essays*, 672

<sup>103</sup> Baldwin, “Nothing Personal,” in *Collected Essays*, 701

democracy as the mythic ideals of freedom and opportunity. By destroying the lie of innocent whiteness, Black and white people position themselves to move toward a different democracy.

Baldwin's language of sensuality surrounding love implies a sort of love that comes from the body, entrenched in the conflicted and messy nature of desire: desire for the nation, desire for change, desire for truth. He believes that, despite the weight of history "one is responsible to life: it is the small beacon in that terrifying darkness from which we come and to which we shall return."<sup>104</sup> We are responsible to life because it is all that exists, the only constant fact we have any dominion over, containing both love and struggle. The primary mode of encountering life is "to be sensual, [which] I think is to respect and rejoice in the force of life, of life itself, and to be present in all that one does, from the effort of loving to the breaking of bread."<sup>105</sup> For Baldwin, one is responsible to the sensual and experiential world, and the struggle of life is the struggle of love. To be accountable to the condition of living requires emotional presence, not begrudgingly, but passionately, despite how much easier it would be to live by lies. Baldwin believes "it is only this passionate achievement [of love] which can outlast death."<sup>106</sup> That this achievement, being fully present and involved in the sensual world, "can outlast death," implies the sort overcoming of the world that exists for King as well. Engaging in life with love exists beyond the mortal span of an individual, rejecting a finite and discrete notion of emotion's impact and creating a long continuity of possibility.

Unlike King, who establishes a clear and consistent link between love, civil disobedience and the coming of a changed world, Baldwin troubles the teleology of love and remains deeply ambivalent about the potential for a new world. Love contains no guarantees, but it does contain anguish, force and terror. Love allows survival, but the mess of love and life continues, requiring

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<sup>104</sup> Baldwin, "Down at the Cross," in *Collected Essays*, 339

<sup>105</sup> Baldwin, "Down at the Cross," in *Collected Essays*, 311

<sup>106</sup> Baldwin, "Nothing Personal," in *Collected Essays*, 701

love of the unachieved nation and a commitment to living passionately in the brutal and uncertain world that exists. Shulman argues that Baldwin's love "names the transforming engagement that moves an individual or collective subject not from ignorance to knowledge but from innocence to acknowledgement and so from sterile repetition into the unknown."<sup>107</sup> Not unlike King, Baldwin's love is transformative, but the transformation is not redemption with a clear ending, rather, it bursts into the unknown potential of a world that acknowledges the legacy of slavery and structural white supremacy, disowning foundational lies and myths. The movement from "sterile repetition into the unknown" is the critical quality of Baldwin's conceptualization of love, because

Baldwin queers prophecy by abandoning the purity entailed in the logic of fidelity to God, principle, or people. He practices a prophecy whose authority is earned by 'accepting' impurity, and this prophecy is political precisely by troubling pure identity and the domination it entails.<sup>108</sup>

Baldwin's prophecy, defined by its insistence on testifying to the "disavowed and unsayable,"<sup>109</sup> draws on the long history of prophetic language in American politics which derives authority from "bearing witness and warning."<sup>110</sup> The ambivalence and muddled nature of Baldwin's love leads to a sort of political love that engages in fierce battles to define and move beyond the paradoxes of upending white supremacy but he is rarely convinced in any eventual happy ending. Baldwin's queering of the concept of prophecy stems from the messiness inherent in his sensual, world-changing notion of love. Reflecting on the lovelessness of the nation, Baldwin says, "the best that can be said is that some of us are struggling."<sup>111</sup> The most optimistic

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<sup>107</sup> Shulman, *American Prophecy*, 95

<sup>108</sup> Shulman, *American Prophecy*, 163

<sup>109</sup> Shulman, *American Prophecy*, 132

<sup>110</sup> Shulman, *American Prophecy*, 30

<sup>111</sup> Baldwin, "Nothing Personal," in *Collected Essays*, 700

framework he offers relies on struggle: that some people try to feel love, to make love real, to grow and mature in full understanding of the reality around them, to achieve the desired nation.

Baldwin's work begins to craft a conception of love that includes the sensual, an embodied response to the unfeeling oppression of ruling systems. The move to understanding the place of the body and emotionality critically engages with dimensions of individual life and social experience previously ignored. Much of political discourse, both historically and contemporarily, ignores emotions and bodily realities, generally disparaging and excluding these understandings because of the cultural conception of these ways of knowing as less worthy of theoretical exploration in rational and linear understandings of the world. Theorizing the realm of bodies and emotions is compelling precisely because these dimensions are real and under-theorized modes of participating in and experiencing the world. Since the height of Baldwin's fame as an author and cultural critic, feminist, queer, and affect theorists have contributed greatly to conversations about oppression, the body, and the circulation of emotions in public space. In these theorists' conceptualization, love develops in relationship to the body and to the ways that emotions circulate among people. These conceptualizations challenge the lack of feeling in public spaces and introduce new ways of theorizing love as public and political.

Audre Lorde, a Black lesbian feminist theorist and poet, critiques the scarcity of feeling in public life and situates feeling as the basis for liberation. For Lorde, white supremacy, capitalism and sexism cause the devaluation of feeling:

“Within living structures defined by profit, by linear power, by institutional dehumanization, our feelings were not meant to survive. Kept around as unavoidable adjuncts or pleasant pastimes, feelings were expected to kneel to thought as women were expected to kneel to men.”<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Audre Lorde, "Poetry is not a Luxury." in *Sister Outsider*. (New York: Ten Speed, 1984), 39

In Lorde's analysis, systems based on profit and hierarchy attempt to eliminate emotions and the knowledge they contain. Feelings share their subordinated position with women: both have been asked to "kneel," make themselves lower and smaller, before the dominant source of power and knowledge (men and thought respectively). Precisely because of their dismissed and feminized status, feelings are crucial to Lorde's project of liberation. "The white fathers told us: I think, therefore I am," she writes, "the Black mother within each of us – the poet – whispers in our dreams: I feel so I can be free."<sup>113</sup> In a patriarchal and white supremacist society, Lorde situates feeling within the power of the racialized and gendered body of the Black mother. The subordinated and feminized status of feelings makes them critical to Lorde's project because she believes, "there are no new ideas still waiting in the wings to save us as women, as human," meaning we must only uncover "old and forgotten" knowledges.<sup>114</sup> The vocation of the poet, one that claims the creative power of feeling and makes explicit previously unuttered knowledge is the hint of her vision of how to achieve freedom. To have the capacity to feel, despite the odds, means that Black women have the deep-seated capacity to be free and to live according to their own desires and emotions.

In "Uses of the Erotic," Lorde names the power of feeling as the erotic itself, "a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling."<sup>115</sup> The erotic names the unrecognized power that resides in women or in the part of each of us constructed as feminine (although not necessarily naturally) and when recognized through feeling, can help "examine the ways in which our world can be truly different."<sup>116</sup> The resource of the erotic has power that allows the imagination of a

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<sup>113</sup> Lorde, "Poetry is not a Luxury," in *Sister Outsider*, 38

<sup>114</sup> Lorde, "Poetry is not a Luxury," in *Sister Outsider*, 38

<sup>115</sup> Lorde, Audre, "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power." in *Sister Outsider*. (New York: Ten Speed, 1984). 53

<sup>116</sup> Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic" in *Sister Outsider*, 55

“truly different” world than what existed before. Lorde’s use of “truly different” indicates that the use of feeling, the full and unregulated expression of erotic power, would necessarily lead to a complex overhaul of ways of living in accordance with profit and linear power. She continues in the same passage, “the very word *erotic* comes from the Greek word *eros*, the personification of love in all its aspects – born of Chaos, and personifying creative power and harmony.”<sup>117</sup> For King, *eros* designates an incomplete sort of love: private and self-interested in contrast to the publicity and universality of the divine agape. For Lorde, *eros* is key because it situates power in the body of women. The erotic then is love itself, both the chaotic and the creative, and the erotic declares the power that moves out of the bodily and personal transform the world. Lorde emphasizes the “creative power and harmony” of the erotic – the creation of collectivities and bonds, the harmony existing between people expressing feeling and desire. Through the bonds of the erotic, women can uproot the patriarchal and racialized command of the “white fathers.” Erotic love is this gateway to freedom; freedom reflects a new way of being, one in which different modes of living in the world (erotic, feminized knowledge and relationships) contradict and replace domination and oppression.

Chela Sandoval, a scholar of third world and postcolonial feminism and oppositional consciousness furthers this understanding of love as an entry to a new world in *Methodology of the Oppressed*. Sandoval develops an articulation of the way that love opens the space for a different world. Sandoval argues for love “as a set of practices and procedures that can transit all citizen-subjects regardless of social class toward a differential mode of consciousness.”<sup>118</sup> The experience and practice of love makes it capable of circulating between many actors, potentially moving across arbitrary social distinctions (social class and race and gender). Understood as

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<sup>117</sup> Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic" in *Sister Outsider*, 55

<sup>118</sup> Chela Sandoval, "Love as a Hermeneutics of Social Change, a Decolonizing *Movida*." in *Methodology of the Oppressed*. (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota, 2000), 139

practice, love becomes a pathway, a passage or “entry to a form of being that breaks the citizen-subject free from the ties that bind being.”<sup>119</sup> In Sandoval’s interpretation, love is destructive of existing forms of subjectivity, breaking down the norms and attachments created by capitalism, racism, and sexism (attachments to domination, to individualism, to dominant perceptions of meaning). Instead, love allows the individual to see the world differently, and therefore to break from previously dominating ideologies. Love elides dualities of thought (between masculine and feminine, thinking and feeling, for example), instead permitting hidden and subjugated meanings to become known.<sup>120</sup> In doing so, love dissolves the boundaries of the subject, throwing into question individuality and sovereign control over the body and mind.<sup>121</sup> Love signifies the way to become different, a puncture of the world that exists to create the possibility of something else, of thinking and feeling and living differently, although Sandoval leaves the dimensions of that possibility uncertain. Love’s affective puncture, the ability to trouble the boundaries between the lovers, creates opening for difference.

Drawing on Lorde’s work, contemporary feminist scholars Darnell Moore and Monica Casper of *The Feminist Wire*, write “love is the resounding ‘yes’ that beckons us toward connection, communion, and companionship.”<sup>122</sup> Love answers the fear of feeling that accompanies dehumanization and emphasizes building new community. In the building of community, a very literal new world is built in the wreckage of the old, one that values communion and companionship over de-eroticized thought and institutional dehumanization. In his speech, “What Freedom *Feels* Like,” Moore argues for a an understanding of “freedom’s interiority and our own,” where instead of asking what freedom ‘looks like,’ feelings are central

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<sup>119</sup> Sandoval, "Love as a Hermeneutics" in *Methodology of the Oppressed*, 140

<sup>120</sup> Sandoval, “Love as a Hermeneutics,” in *Methodology of the Oppressed*, 143-145

<sup>121</sup> Sandoval, “Love as a Hermeneutics,” in *Methodology of the Oppressed*, 150

<sup>122</sup> Darnell Moore & Monica Casper, “Love in the time of racism.” in *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology*, No.5. doi: 10.7264/N3QZ288S, 3

to what freedom would be like in practice. Feelings are the means of achieving freedom in order to “refuse the commodification of our work and our bodies.”<sup>123</sup> Moore’s argument is that freedom has an interiority composed of bodies and emotions: since processes of commodification and dehumanization do work on bodies, those seeking liberation must invent new practices at the level of bodies to dislodge their subjectivity from dominant regimes of unfeeling and move toward community. Specifically, Moore relies on Sandoval’s concept of love as “the lens through which we might read new and more just futures (...) through which we discern the path that we must take as we move toward the end of transformation.”<sup>124</sup> Love functions as a challenge to those ways of being which would make us “workers in the domain of justice and not human beings with hearts, minds, and souls worthy of embrace, conversation and respect.”<sup>125</sup> He understands that even in struggling for justice collectively, atomization is at work, and must be combated. He cites the specific case of collective mobilization for change after the murder of Sakia LaTona Gunn, a young queer woman in Newark, New Jersey. He argues, “had a people not come together, had they resisted the ‘yes’ deep within themselves to connect with the other, the momentum necessary to enact justice would not have been formed.”<sup>126</sup> Moore reads protestors and community activists as producing the necessary affect to create change, by being moved to social movement in the affective space of grief and by acknowledging each other as humans more fully. His specifics largely refer to legal-framework changes, probably because they are measurable outcomes, but he also suggests a more radical shift happens by creating a community founded on mutually understood and recognized humanity.

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<sup>123</sup> Darnell Moore “What Freedom *Feels* Like: On Love, Empathy, and Pleasure in the Age of Neoliberalism.” Lecture at the Kennedy School. (Audre Lorde Human Rights Lecture Series, 2012), 10

<sup>124</sup> Moore, “What Freedom *Feels* Like” Lecture at the Kennedy School, 5-6

<sup>125</sup> Moore, “What Freedom *Feels* Like” Lecture at the Kennedy School, 2

<sup>126</sup> Moore, “What Freedom *Feels* Like,” Lecture at the Kennedy School, 6



Analyzing the contributions of Black feminists, namely Alice Walker, Audre Lorde and June Jordan, Jennifer Nash reads affect theory into Black feminist thought by constructing what she calls “love-politics.” For Nash, affect theory adds a new language for understanding the sort of “public feelings” discussed in Black feminist literature. She uses “*affective politics* to describe how bodies are organized around intensities, longings, temporalities, repulsions, curiosities, fatigues, optimism, and how these affects produce political movements (or sometimes inertias).”<sup>127</sup> In other words, affect reflects and creates systems of feeling that instruct subjects to respond and move in certain ways and towards certain goals. Recall that for Ahmed, the affective politics of love organizes white bodies toward achieving purity and maintaining dominance. Nash sees an entirely different end of affective love in Black feminist politics. Nash argues, “black feminist love-politics stakes out a radical conception of the public sphere.”<sup>128</sup> In the love-politics of Black feminists, the public sphere becomes a place where, “selves laboring to love—to orient themselves toward difference, toward transcending the self—join in a form of relationality.”<sup>129</sup> Radical orientation towards difference, the labor of love and the desire to transcend the boundaries of an individual self are critical parts of this project to build relationality. In this new relationality, love-politics adherents,

dream of a yet unwritten future; they imagine a world ordered by love, by radical embrace of difference... [which] requires certain kinds of very hard work, pushing beyond our investments in selfhood and sameness, and reaching towards collectivities and possibilities [and perform this work as] a critical response to the violence of the ordinary and the persistence of inequality.<sup>130</sup>

Feminist love-politics disrupts common dichotomies of the private sphere versus the public sphere: first, by bringing a struggle of “selves laboring to love” into politics, and second, by

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<sup>127</sup> Jennifer C. Nash "Practicing Love: Black Feminism, Love-Politics, and Post-Intersectionality." in *Meridians* 11.2 (Indiana University Press, 2011). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2979/meridians.11.2.1>, 3

<sup>128</sup> Nash, "Practicing Love," in *Meridians*, 13

<sup>129</sup> Nash, "Practicing Love," in *Meridians*, 15

<sup>130</sup> Nash, "Practicing Love," in *Meridians*, 18

making the work of love and community a work of public importance. By upending their own attachments to neoliberalism and white supremacy internally, love-politics practitioners bring a different imagination of what might be politically possible through embracing difference. Establishing the hard work of moving beyond the self as an immediate and long-term solution to “ordinary” and “persistent” violence and inequality, Black feminist love-politics challenges prevailing notions of individual sovereignty. The public instead becomes “rooted in affiliation and a shared set of feelings.”<sup>131</sup> Additionally, the importance placed on building and sustaining loving community across radical difference moves away from demands of the nation-state and towards the politics of what is possible in community. This reorients the demands of the group inward—while avoiding the trap of homogeneity Ahmed fears—and frustrates the legible narrative of requesting inclusion in liberal state frameworks.<sup>132</sup>

Black feminist love-politics creates a radically new public sphere, which, rather than relying on hierarchical terms and exchange relationships, is created by the relationality of selves laboring to love and oriented towards what is possible through intentional loving community. This collective labor relies on vision, on futurity or potentiality, an open ended idea of what the world could be, because it theorizes a new sort of world made possible in the act of loving. Actors undertake public and collective work on the self in the belief that a new world will be created in the process. For this reason, Nash argues, “black feminist love-politics is staunchly utopian; rather than the presentism of visibility politics like intersectionality, which calls for legibility in ‘the here and now.’”<sup>133</sup> As Nash articulates, Black feminists invest in love-politics to resist systems of violence in the present as well as to demand a politics of the possible or the utopian, which shifts part of the work to a visionary, imaginative plane. But in the embrace of

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<sup>131</sup> Nash, “Practicing Love,” in *Meridians*, 14

<sup>132</sup> Nash, “Practicing Love,” in *Meridians*, 15

<sup>133</sup> Nash, “Practicing Love,” in *Meridians*, 17

futurity, an attachment to the world that could exist, Black feminist love-politics makes clear that the demand of a dream world is only made possible through the “hard work” and struggle of love.

Affect theory provides new ways of thinking about love as an emotion that circulates publically and organizes bodies and subjectivities. Baldwin, Lorde, and other Black feminist writers move theories of love toward the realm of the body and the experience of feeling. I argue that introducing Black radical thought to affect theory enhances our understanding of love’s power in politics. I turn to affect for similar reasons as Deborah Gould, who argues in *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP’s Fight Against AIDS*, “the movement in ‘social movements’ gestures toward the realm of affect; bodily intensities, emotions, feelings and passions; and toward uprising.”<sup>134</sup> Affect usefully names the way that emotions move between and through people in public collectives, how feeling jumps between bodies in space to create certain non-discrete instances of public emotions that might disrupt existing forms of subjectivity and relationality and help produce new ones while also more literally engaging in the work of collective politics. I see and feel affect at work in the organization of protests in Ferguson and elsewhere, and seek a language in affect theory to explain the way love constructs and instructs the subjective and relational world of movement organizing in Ferguson and St. Louis. Emotions and personal commitments are key parts of the constellation of factors motivating people to participate in politics,<sup>135</sup> and in this case, protest. The moments of shared feeling (rage, grief, and yes, love) that compel some to speak or to hop over the barricades, and others to move away comprise key moments which advance or stall the broad and specific goals of organizing. At the

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<sup>134</sup> Deborah Gould. *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP’s Fight Against AIDS*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 3, emphasis original

<sup>135</sup> For a much more thorough treatment on the subject of emotion, personal commitments, and political motivation across unequal landscapes of political power, see: Hahrie Han, *Moved To Action: Motivation, Participation and Inequality in American Politics*, (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2009).

same time, I am troubled by the fact that many theorists of love as affect largely ignore their debts to the Black radical tradition. This often results in a conception of political love that does not deal fully with how the specific dimensions of lovelessness and the continuing racial trauma of white supremacy impact the way love functions politically and affectively. Troubling affect theory with Black radical thought allows a deeper understanding of what might be possible in love, including the terror and anguish to which Baldwin refers.

In *Multitude* and *Commonwealth*, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri present a theory of affective love that contains the possibility of forming a new world. In the modern world, they observe, “love is almost exclusively limited to the bourgeois couple and the claustrophobic confines of the nuclear family. Love has become a strictly private affair.”<sup>136</sup> Hardt articulates five categories of corrupted or degraded love that reduce its power as a potentially political concept: love of the same, love as union destroying difference, the oppressed as the object of love (charity), the segregation of eros and agape (denial of desire and the sensual), and love as passion without power (sentimental or apolitical love).<sup>137</sup> Drawing on what they refer to broadly as Judeo-Christian traditions, with some (often unacknowledged) input of feminists of color,<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri. *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*. (New York: The Penguin Press, 2004), 351

<sup>137</sup> Michael Hardt (2007) “About Love,” presentation for the European Graduate School. Online. Available: <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/michael-hardt/videos/about-love>

<sup>138</sup> In his lectures on love (made two years prior to the publication of *Commonwealth*), Hardt references a set of writings “which might be classified under ‘feminists of color think love’” and names Cherríe Moraga, Chela Sandoval, Rosemarie Hennessy (“even if she isn’t a feminist of color”) and bell hooks as well as queer theorists (he names Lauren Berlant and Eve Sedgwick). He also briefly quotes hooks on love in community, but fully explores the ideas of none of these theorists (which are complex and vastly divergent). *Commonwealth* does include citations for work by Donna Haraway, Kimberlé Crenshaw and Angela Davis but references none of the Black feminists Nash identifies as explicitly interested in love as an affective sort of politics (Alice Walker, June Jordan, Audre Lorde). Although he was discussing the work of Moraga, Sandoval and hooks before the publication of *Commonwealth*, explicit references to these theorists are also not present in the book. *Multitude* cites Audre Lorde, but not her work on love and none of the other feminists of color referenced by Hardt in his lectures. In both *Multitude* and *Commonwealth*, most references to feminism and feminist thought are sparse and hollow, often occurring in a list of movements or schools of thought without engaging in more than an overarching similarity. For example, “Feminist struggles, anti-racist struggles, and struggles of indigenous populations too are biopolitical in the sense that they involve legal, cultural, political, and economic issues, indeed all facets of life” (*Multitude*, 282).

Hardt and Negri propose that love “has a great heritage worth struggling over” that has never been fully realized, but remains possible.<sup>139</sup> Attempting to disrupt the degradation and corruption of love, to ‘recover’ love as a political concept, Hardt and Negri engage a tradition of love as an expansive sort of relationality that finds its base in the love of the difference. From Judeo-Christian thought broadly understood, they adopt the conceptualization of love as a metaphysical truth or basis of the universe, and additionally theorize the affective power of love in the formation of the multitude.

For Hardt and Negri, love functions as a collective space of self-transformation through affect in which the masses of common people can learn self-governance without attachments to neoliberal capitalism.<sup>140</sup> Love materially produces collectivities, organizing people in society: “love composes singularities, like themes in a musical score, not in unity but in a network of social relations.”<sup>141</sup> In other words, the affective condition of love permits an interconnected set of relationships that work together, not by becoming the same, rather by relating through difference, to create a unique social world (like the score with many various instruments and parts occurring simultaneously and harmoniously in the musical metaphor). Love as an affective power organizes bodies around difference, allowing shared but relational goals to take root and habituating communities toward self-rule over time.

Hardt and Negri received criticism from feminist writers for denying or obscuring the politics of the private and intimate spheres. Eleanor Wilkinson argued that the “hierarchies of love” they put forward “may be preventing people from imagining new ways of loving and living, and that these distinctions are exactly what needs to be challenged in order to truly

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<sup>139</sup> Hardt, “About Love”

<sup>140</sup> Hardt, “About Love”

<sup>141</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri. *Commonwealth*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 184

rediscover the political function of love.”<sup>142</sup> By articulating sharp categories of the ‘right’ political love, which excludes or moves past the privatized conception of love, some worry that Hardt and Negri demonstrate a lack of understanding of how “private” love is itself political, which limits the scope of their project of love in politics. Theorists like Chela Sandoval and Lauren Berlant are interested in the ways that romantic love also function as a space of political possibility, especially if its position as ‘naturally’ private were interrupted, a possibility Hardt and Negri seem to exclude. Their concept of love also lacks engagement with the realities of gender and race in the modern age – in the multitudinous construction of love in political life, Hardt and Negri neglect to deal with the way “differences of identity *do* still matter,”<sup>143</sup> that bodies organized around affect are still bodies with positional relationships to race, gender, and class. Moreover, when Hardt and Negri argue for a “generous and more unrestrained conception of love”<sup>144</sup> in order to recover the power of love in politics, Nash points out that they largely ignore the long history of love theory in Black radical politics, feminist theory and queer thought, demonstrated by their lack of exploration or full citation of these texts.<sup>145</sup> Hardt and Negri use love as a metaphysical and affective force that can bridge the world that exists and their utopian vision of a world that could be. However, their lack of full attention to the ways in which this articulation is indebted to feminists of color produces a grandiose love unsatisfying in its lack of specificity and attention to present material conditions.

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<sup>142</sup> Eleanor Wilkinson, “Love in the multitude? A feminist critique of Hardt and Negri’s understanding of love as a political concept.” In *Love: A Question for Feminism in the Twenty-First Century*. Ed. Anna G Jónasdóttir and Ann Ferguson (Routledge Advances in Feminist Studies and Intersectionality, 2014), 241

<sup>143</sup> Wilkinson, “Love in the multitude?” in *Love*, 244

<sup>144</sup> Hardt & Negri. *Multitude*, 351

<sup>145</sup> Nash, “Practicing Love,” in *Meridians*, 4-5

Affect theorist Lauren Berlant has also dealt glancingly with the political implications of love.<sup>146</sup> Much of Berlant's work addressing a public conception of love has been in conversation with Hardt. She pulls from Hardt the generous reading that he is "trying to imagine a social and affectual world organized by processes of being-with and not profiting from."<sup>147</sup> Berlant's specific articulation of love in politics troubles the division of creative or generative love from destructive love in Hardt and Negri's work. For Berlant, "in the vernacular of love it is impossible to tell the difference between destructive and world-building impulses. We see that revolutionary impulses are destructive too, but the spin it puts on that points to productive destruction."<sup>148</sup> While for Hardt and Negri, for example, love functions to bridge the old world and the new, Berlant is as invested in the place of love in unmaking the present world as she is in the place of love in the building of a new world. She eschews the way of talking about love as a pure and metaphysical force directing a definite change, which Hardt and Negri veer dangerously close to in assigning love such a foundational but relatively unexamined position.<sup>149</sup> She sees

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<sup>146</sup> In fact, much of Berlant's writing on love is about how heteropatriarchy structures our desires/hopes/dreams of the "good life," which will be achieved through marriage and the simplification of the female subject. She calls this sort of love "the love plot," indicating that part of its affective power is the narrative drive to a particular end. "The modern love plot requires," Berlant writes, "that, if you are a woman, you must at least *entertain* believing in love's capacity both to rescue you from your life and to give you a new one, a fantasy that romantic love's narratives constantly invest with beauty and utopian power" ("Remembering Love, Forgetting Everything Else," 171). The "love plot," governs individuals by organizing the messiness of desire and sexuality into an appropriate form, marriage which unifies two distinct subjects ("Love A Queer Feeling," 443). Love's purpose, then, is "to place the *couple* at the heart of social being, to designate its two-as-one as the core of normative personhood" ("Remembering Love," 171). This work is an important rumination on the dangers of love as an organizing affect, but she neglects to reference what, if any connections she sees in her more recent work on the potential politics of love. She has maintained throughout that queer theory should take the subject of love more seriously, precisely because love names a kind of "expanding interiority" that, if embraced in all its incoherence, could hold potential yet unknown ("Love, A Queer Feeling," 443). See: Lauren Berlant, "Remembering Love, Forgetting Everything Else: Now, Voyager." *The Female Complaint*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008). 169-206. and Lauren Berlant. "Love (A Queer Feeling)," *Psychoanalysis and Homosexuality*, ed. Tim Dean and Christopher Lane (Chicago, 2000), 432-451.

<sup>147</sup> Lauren Berlant, "A Properly Political Concept of Love: Three Approaches in Ten Pages." In *Cultural Anthropology* 26.4 (2011), 684

<sup>148</sup> Berlant, "A Properly Political Concept of Love," in *Cultural Anthropology*, 690

<sup>149</sup> I say relatively unexamined because love constitutes a power of fundamental importance to the construction of the multitude, which is, after all, the drive of Hardt and Negri's work in both *Commonwealth* and *Multitude* and yet,

both a destructive and a creative power in love that are not easily separated but which must happen simultaneously, because of the messy and ambivalent affective power that love contains.

Love means non-sovereignty for Berlant because from the standpoint of love, interests become multiple rather than singular, and individuals acknowledge their full interest in others, and in the ways that the outcomes of other people's lives affect them. Within the affect of love, "we desire to have patience for what isn't working, affective binding that allows us to iron things out, or to be elastic, or to try a new incoherence."<sup>150</sup> Love is an affective power, characterized by an elastic binding and that binding creates the emotional space to desire to organize oneself in incoherent situations. Love allows the non-sovereign individual to move forward into an uncertain future, to acknowledge and allow for solutions or situations that are incoherent. In incoherent situations that lack the affective binding possible in love, sovereign subjects most often attempt to simplify the incoherent by relying on dominant modes of thinking in response to the discomfort of challenges to selfhood. But in love patient and elastic attachment to others is primary, allowing patience and space for change even in the discomfort of non-sovereignty. While Ahmed worries that love will simplify the fearful incoherences and collisions of difference through violence (through attaching oneself to certain ideals and white subjects),<sup>151</sup> Berlant posits love as an affect within which one is able to accept the reality of incoherence without struggling to create a certain and stable coherence. For Berlant,

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the examination, explanation and definition of love occupy very few pages in each book (34 pages of 383 in *Commonwealth* and 16 pages of 372 in *Multitude*).

<sup>150</sup> Berlant, "A Properly Political Concept of Love," in *Cultural Anthropology*, 685-6

<sup>151</sup> Ahmed says, "Love here sticks the nation together: it allows cohesion through the very naming of 'political community' as a shared object of love. Love becomes crucial to the promise of cohesion within multiculturalism; it becomes the 'shared characteristic' required to keep the nation together" ("In the Name of Love, 7). She also posits, "The definition of values that will allow America to prevail in the face of terror—values that have been named as freedom, love, and compassion—involves the defense of particular institutional and social forms against the dangers posed by others" ("Affective Economies," 134). For Ahmed, love provides a positive and connective simplification of the insecurity and fear affectively palpable after the construction of the specter of terrorism.



A properly transformational political concept [of love] would provide the courage to take the leap into a project of better relationality that would give us *patience with the 'without guarantees' part of love's various temporalities*; a properly transformational political project would *open spaces for really dealing with the discomfort of the radical contingency that genuine democracy - like any attachment - would demand*; a properly transformational political concept would *release courage and creativity* about how to make resources for living available to all objects in their [particularity].<sup>152</sup>

The trick of bringing love into politics, for Berlant, is not eliminating its destructive capacities, but leveraging them towards the radical potential of love: to provide space for messy and entangled relationality. In this space, subjects struggling to survive under domination move beyond survival to creating a new world where all subjects can flourish. Berlant's dealing with incoherence suggests two things: first, that the necessary attachment is to difference rather than to defined ends. Second, uncertain ends require the adoption of different temporalities, not the linear, profit-driven ones that Lorde critiques, but the possibility of a contingent future devoid of previous sureties, as Sandoval would suggest. In transformational political love, a mess will be made of individuality and sovereignty and that mess will not necessarily be resolved.

The sort of world love might create remains an uncertain potentiality in Berlant's work. In love, we are attached to each other without making sense or logical coherence of that attachment and we (potentially) engage in the creation of unsystematized communities, which will never quite be realized, and are "so fragile and ephemeral."<sup>153</sup> In "Sex in Public," Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner examine the building of queer culture and argue that "making a queer world has required the development of kinds of intimacy that bear no necessary relation to domestic space, to kinship, to the couple form, to property, or to the nation (...) [These intimacies] are typical both of the inventiveness of queer world making and of the queer world's

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<sup>152</sup> Berlant, "A Properly Political Concept of Love," in *Cultural Anthropology*, 690, emphasis mine.

<sup>153</sup> Lauren Berlant & Michael Warner. "Sex in Public," in *Critical Inquiry* 24.2 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 561

fragility.”<sup>154</sup> The world of queered love, similarly to the queer world, could jettison attachments to coherent categories (the couple, private property, the nation-state) that maintain dominance and oppression. The release from certain schemas of understanding is a powerful framework for imagining new futures is precisely that breaking of attachments that makes the queer(ed) world precarious and potentially dangerous. The new world this messy love creates is not stable, it involves constant re-creation, and the only continuity is (perhaps) in the affect of love, wherein non-sovereign subjects are attached to the flourishing of those around them. The strength of Berlant’s focus on love is in the potential of opening different futures toward which we might dream, however, the danger of her claim is also clear: many people already live in precarious and dangerous worlds and the celebration of discontinuity and upheaval risks missing the pain and hardship which keeps many people from flourishing. Love sets subjects free to pursue a collective good, but it does not guarantee, in the arc of history, a bend toward any particular outcome.

Berlant sees constant recreation and instability as a fundamental and promising potential for love in social life. Love is,

one of the few places where people actually admit they want to become different. And so it’s like change without trauma, but it’s not change without instability. It’s change without guarantees, without knowing what the other side is, because it’s entering into relationality. The thing I like about love as a concept for the possibility of the social is that love always means non-sovereignty.<sup>155</sup>

Love gives the affective space in which to become different, to feel with other people and to be affected by the feelings of others. Berlant’s emphasis on change without trauma is central to her understanding of the sort of opening love provides: one of affective continuity, in which

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<sup>154</sup> Berlant & Warner, “Sex in Public,” in *Critical Inquiry*, 558

<sup>155</sup> Heather Davis and Paige Sarlin, “No One Is Sovereign in Love: A Conversation Between Lauren Berlant and Michael Hardt.” Interview. *No More Potlucks*. [nomorepotlucks.org/site/no-one-is-sovereign-in-love-a-conversation-between-lauren-berlant-and-michael-hardt/](http://nomorepotlucks.org/site/no-one-is-sovereign-in-love-a-conversation-between-lauren-berlant-and-michael-hardt/), 2

mutuality becomes primary, and where we admit we want to be different sorts of people neglecting attachment to individual interests and instead forming attachments to each other *because of our differences*. In the best of relationality, people become, as bell hooks might put it, more fully themselves, but also more fully committed to being themselves in a way that supports the other(s).<sup>156</sup>

But the assertion that love does not include trauma flies in the face of much of Black political thought on love. In fact, the psychological and physical wounding of the Black subject under white supremacy critically informs Black thought on love. For King, love brings community together to heal and be redeemed in the face of trauma. Love and trauma are inextricably linked for Baldwin as well, when he characterizes “the force and anguish and terror of love” in a world built on white supremacist lies and deep historical violences.<sup>157</sup> In Toni Morrison’s novel *Beloved*, the trauma and power of love are dramatized by the murderous love of Sethe, a mother who kills her child rather than see her returned to slavery. According to Shulman, love in the novel becomes one of the “central constituents of freedom [for Black people]: control of one’s labor in its many senses; being able to love and protect what one loves; political voice and representation.”<sup>158</sup> In a world without freedom, Sethe does not have control over her children’s lives. In her powerlessness, she “exercises the frightful power love can justify” by murdering her child as an act of protection—an act which is traumatic both for herself and her community—causing lasting psychological wounds which become actualized in a life-threatening haunting.<sup>159</sup> In this light, Berlant’s assertion of love as change without trauma lacks a historical and psychological understanding of the pervasive effects of racialized lovelessness.

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<sup>156</sup> bell hooks. *All about Love: New Visions*. (London: Harper Collins, 1999), 185

<sup>157</sup> Baldwin, “Many Thousands Gone,” in *Collected Essays*, 32

<sup>158</sup> Shulman, *American Prophecy*, 204

<sup>159</sup> Shulman, *American Prophecy*, 206

While she acknowledges love does not have guarantees, Berlant dismisses the trauma of love, which perhaps remains one of the productive non-dualities of love: that it is traumatic *and* healing, destructive *and* creative. The inheritance of King, Baldwin, and Black feminists in talking about love is a crucial understanding of the fragility and precarity of the condition of Black people in a white supremacist system, and more than that the extreme precarity of bodies organized in protest against state violence. By referencing these politics without explicitly dealing with this connection, affect theorists like Hardt, Negri and Berlant risk enshrining a pure and simplifying affective power of love, one that ignores the material and psychic realities of historical white supremacy and violence.

In her poem for the first inauguration of President Barack Obama, “Praise Song for the Day,” Elizabeth Alexander asked, “what if the mightiest word is love?” This is precisely the question that theorists have been asking about the possibilities of love in the struggle for a different world, the question that animates my project. Does love hold the possibility for challenging domination and oppression? Does it contain the potential for a new world? In an interview with Christa Tippett, Alexander argued for an expansive definition of love beyond romantic or familial love, saying, “really there is so much more to the word. The word is sober. The word is grave. The word is not just about something light and happy and pleasurable. The word calls up deep, deep responsibility.”<sup>160</sup> Responsibility to build the just new world through the interruption of evil with love, responsibility to make the truth known, to feel truly in spite of the world that says otherwise, responsibility to love itself, as the process of making the new world, in collaboration with others. In the moment of the inauguration of America’s first Black president, Alexander evoked love as the hope so many progressive Americans had in that period: that the state of politics could be different, the world would change, a new world made real. The

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<sup>160</sup> Elizabeth Alexander (2013). Interview: *On Being*. “Words That Shimmer.”

weight of historical and quotidian traumas remain acute, and the years since Obama's inauguration have been no less filled with racialized violence than those prior. And yet, standing in a busy intersection, demanding recognition, again and again, activists in Ferguson repeat: "we must love and support each other," "love is the why," "this movement was born in love."<sup>161</sup> For these activists, love remains the space in which we can access a different possibility of being in relation to each other. In the precarious position protesting in the street occupied by armored tanks, the air full of tear gas, police batons poised at the ready, our reliance on and responsibility to each other is viscerally clear and the drama of injustice is strikingly displayed. On New Year's Eve of 2014, in the direct aftermath of police pepper-spraying us and throwing us to the ground in front of the St. Louis City Police Headquarters, a group of about fifty protestors administered first aid to each other, shared extra gloves, hand warmers and food without concern for favors returned. We strategized together and, after some disagreement, decided we would still try to stay for our initial goal: four and a half hours, to dramatize the time Mike Brown's body remained in the street. That day was excruciatingly cold, but together we sang and danced in the aftermath of violence. People who knew, remembered or felt the impact of Mike Brown, Kajeme Powell, Kimberly King and Vonderrit Myers, all victims of police violence, spoke of them. Gathered there, it was articulated more than once that we were there in and for love, that we came together because we loved both the dead and each other. Coming together in this way, in the thick of affective moments and the fierce urgency of the precarity of protest, necessitates new forms of relating to one another and love figures as the most powerful of those possibilities. Love could yet tear down a culture of domination open the door to a new way: a way of relationality to encounter histories of violence and acknowledge their reality and weight. In the

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<sup>161</sup> The final quote comes from Kayla Reed, an organizer for the Organization for Black Struggle in St. Louis. She said this during a protest the evening (approximately 9:23 PM) of November 24, 2015. My mother was present at that protest and texted me about Kayla's comments.

most radical political theorization of love, love is the revolution and in loving, we engage in a continuous struggle for a new world. Although this creation would necessarily create uncertainty in our lives, it would center non-sovereign relationality and radical responsibility to others.

## Chapter 2 - Forming a “Love Group” Narratives from the organization Black Lives Matter

Love truly drives it all. Black love can be our ideology...black love has to be the ethos of our movement. – Alicia Garza<sup>162</sup>

The rhetoric of Black Lives Matter exists not only in relation to the ongoing current protests but also in a longer historical understanding of previous movements concerned with Black life and love. Taking seriously the use of love by Tometi, Garza and Cullors requires contextualizing their understanding in thinkers and organizers past. As Julius Bailey and David Leonard argue in “Black Lives Matter: Post Nihilistic Freedom Dreams,” the movement for Black lives exists relationship to a historical tradition of love, brought into and built upon in the present moment. They say,

we see these movements [against police brutality] as building on the work of King, Malcolm, Lorde and others who sought to elucidate and highlight the love that is already there central to community and family. Black love is central to this movement, especially in a movement of hypervisibility of Black death.<sup>163</sup>

The way Tometi, Garza and Cullors conceptualize love and its place in the movement, shares much with previous uses of love by Black liberation theorists and activists, as well as building and pushing at the margins of previous uses of love. As I explored in the previous chapter, an articulation of love as an affective power which includes the possibility of changing the world runs through certain strands of Black, feminist, and queer political thought. The women associated with Black Lives Matter build on the work of theorists like King and Lorde, and articulate love in the face of the police brutality and systemic racism in order to understand and

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<sup>162</sup> Grace Elletson and Justin Henry. "Black Lives Matter: Ithaca Debuts after Rally at Local School | The Ithacan." The Ithacan. February 10, 2016. <http://theithacan.org/news/black-lives-matter-ithaca-debuts-after-rally-at-local-school/>.

<sup>163</sup> Julius Bailey and David J. Leonard. "Black Lives Matter Post Nihilistic Freedom Dreams." *Journal of Contemporary Rhetoric* 5, no. 3/4 (2015): 67-77. *Journal of Contemporary Rhetoric Dreams*.  
*Journal of Contemporary Rhetoric* 5, no. 3/4 (2015): 67-77.  
[http://contemporaryrhetoric.com/articles/Bailey\\_Leonard\\_11\\_3.pdf](http://contemporaryrhetoric.com/articles/Bailey_Leonard_11_3.pdf), pg. 71

support a growing social-political movement for Black life. Recognizing the long tradition of love especially in Black political thought adds a crucial dimension of complexity to the theories of love and change that Garza, Tometi and Cullors put forward.

In what follows, I will explore the ways that the founders of the organization Black Lives Matter, like others in the tradition I described, use the rhetoric of love to resist white supremacy and transform the world. Specifically, they invoke love to resist nihilism, by confronting the realities of a loveless – namely, white supremacist and capitalist – world. Moreover, Black Lives Matter explains the foundations of their work and their imaginations for a different world as *visions* of love: love organizes desires toward the creation of community in love and the goals of transforming both the self and the world are understood in relation to love. The understanding of love that Black Lives Matter invokes is affective and embodied and deeply connects to the way the group desires to create change, namely through the transformative power and vision of love. Black Lives Matter relies on a vision of love in action that creates elastic lines in order to provide for the possibility of transformation in the face of uncertainty.

### **Black Lives Matter and Ferguson**

Three women – Patrisse Cullors, Opal Tometi, and Alicia Garza – founded the organization Black Lives Matter (BLM), which describes itself as a “chapter-based national organization working for validity of Black life” in 2013 after the death of Trayvon Martin and the acquittal of his murderer, George Zimmerman.<sup>164</sup> These women, especially Alicia Garza and Patrisse Cullors, have been very vocal about the role of love in their understanding of their organization, their now-famous rallying cry and the movement for Black lives more broadly. While some members of the organization have been to Ferguson, the organization was started before Ferguson protests, and the primary reason for the frequent media comparison or

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<sup>164</sup> See the organizational website of Black Lives Matter: <http://blacklivesmatter.com/about/>



conflation is the shared statement (#BlackLivesMatter), although the group also shares many broad goals with protestors fighting police brutality in many places. The question of tension between BLM and Ferguson activists and those affiliated with the movement for Black lives is beginning to surface in media coverage. In a recent New Yorker piece, Jelani Cobb said the movement for Black lives, “eschews hierarchy and centralized leadership, and its members have not infrequently been at odds with older civil-rights leaders and with the Obama Administration—as well as with one another.”<sup>165</sup> In fact, BLM is the target of a lot of frustration for many in Ferguson, primarily because the organization and its founders are often cited as “the founders of Black Lives Matter.” While it is true that Cullors, Tometi and Garza founded an organization called Black Lives Matter and perhaps originated the phrase itself, many argue that “Ferguson is the cradle of the movement, and no chapter of the organization exists there or anywhere in the greater St. Louis area.”<sup>166</sup> To confuse or conflate the organization with the broader movement provides an incomplete picture.

I turn to these tensions between BLM and organizers in Ferguson not out of an interest in presenting a movement wracked with internal fractures, as I believe that dissent facilitates movement growth and improvement. Rather, these tensions illuminate resonances as well as crucial limitations of using BLM content to understand the protest movement in Ferguson. For many activists in Ferguson, the fame of Garza and Cullors appears exploitative, as they capitalize on the work in the streets by St. Louisans largely unknown to them. Without the uprisings and organizing in Ferguson, New York and Baltimore, “Black Lives Matter” lacks intelligibility in political conversations. Indeed, the hashtag #blacklivesmatter experienced very little exposure before August of 2014, as one recent report found, “it was used in only 48 public tweets in June

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<sup>165</sup> Jelani Cobb, “Where Is Black Lives Matter Headed?” The New Yorker. March 14, 2016. <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/03/14/where-is-black-lives-matter-headed>.

<sup>166</sup> Cobb, “Where is Black Lives Matter Headed?”

2014 and 398 tweets in July 2014. But by August 2014 that number had skyrocketed to 52,288.”<sup>167</sup> However, because of the widespread use of the phrase, and the compelling story Garza, Cullors, and Tometi weave of its founding in the aftermath of Trayvon Martin’s murder, many news outlets interview the founders of the organization about how they see the movement more broadly.

I include their words and understandings of love partly because they have a wide mainstream media reach (including interviews in the likes of *Cosmopolitan*, PBS, and the *Associated Press*).<sup>168</sup> Engaging with the interviews and stories about BLM as well as the organization’s press releases provides a deeper understanding of the broader discourse of love as it relates to the movement for Black lives. Because of their frequent coverage and access to certain feminist media outlets, Tometi, Garza and Cullors have space and time to develop complex understandings of the organization’s ideology and the place of love in their work in interviews. Moreover, a resonant pull of love exists through a dispersed group of activists connecting over social media, who frequently articulate a shifting and sustaining vision of love. Resonance accounts for the way that similar dispositions, ideologies and rhetoric affectively amplify each other.<sup>169</sup> BLM functions as a key vector of this resonant discourse on love and resistance in the movement for Black lives with both crucial insights and very real limitations.

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<sup>167</sup> Deen Freelon, Charlton D. McIlwain, and Meredith D. Clark. "Beyond the Hashtags: #Ferguson, #Blacklivesmatter, and the Online Struggle for Offline Justice." Center for Media and Social Impact, American University. February 2016. [http://www.cmsimpact.org/sites/default/files/beyond\\_the\\_hashtags\\_2016.pdf](http://www.cmsimpact.org/sites/default/files/beyond_the_hashtags_2016.pdf), pg.75

<sup>168</sup> Judith Ohikuare, "Meet the Women Who Created #BlackLivesMatter." *Cosmopolitan*. October 17, 2015. <http://www.cosmopolitan.com/entertainment/a47842/the-women-behind-blacklivesmatter/>; Alicia Garza and Rashad Robinson. "Covenant Week: Reclaiming Our Democracy." Interview by Tavis Smiley. PBS: WGBH. January 12, 2016. <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/tavissmiley/interviews/covenant-week-reclaiming-our-democracy-alicia-garza-rashad-robinson/>; Jesse J. Holland, "AP Interview: Black Lives Matter Skipping 2016 Endorsement." *The Big Story*. September 19, 2015. <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/954d522f3299444ea5054e4bf451385e/ap-interview-black-lives-matter-skipping-2016-endorsement>.

<sup>169</sup> W. E. Connolly, "The Evangelical-Capitalist Resonance Machine." *Political Theory* 33, no. 6 (2005): 869-86. The concept of resonance and its importance in discussions of love and the movement for Black lives is developed more fully in chapter three.

## Why love?

Like many movements before, Black Lives Matter turns to love in a moment of public awareness about the consistent devaluation and destruction of Black people. Speaking about the formation of the group in response to continual violence against Black people and to the specific internet echo-chamber of despair in her own circles after the George Zimmerman acquittal, Garza says,

I'm not satisfied with the "I told you so" [that Zimmerman would not be convicted] and I'm not satisfied with the nihilistic "it'll never happen" kind of thing. I was basically popping off on Facebook saying, "Yes, I'm going to be surprised that this man was not held accountable for the murder of a child." I was basically sending love notes to black people and saying, "We're enough. We are enough, and we don't deserve to die, and we don't deserve to be shot down in the streets like dogs because somebody else is fucking scared of us. And our presence is important, and we matter. Our lives matter, black lives matter."<sup>170</sup>

For Garza here, the response to overwhelming cynicism and nihilism is a response of love – love responds to the unloving conditions that typically inspire emotional detachedness and pessimism about the state of the world. Garza does not say that she lacks understanding of where these feelings come from rather, she refuses to engage with a feeling of bottomless despair that does not hold the possibility of something different. She proposes the "love note" as an alternate response, as something that names the dehumanization and denaturalizes it ("we don't deserve to die"). Love, particularly, responds to brutality and an impending or looming nihilism with deep engagement and an imagination for a different world. The desire to combat fatalism or nihilism echoes through the work of previous theorists of love in Black politics. Baldwin's love especially

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<sup>170</sup> Alicia Garza, "A Love Note to Our Folks." Interview by L. A. Kauffman. N +1. January 20, 2015. <https://nplusonemag.com/online-only/online-only/a-love-note-to-our-folks/>.

requires dealing in the weight of the world rather than pushing it away in favor of numbing engagements, of saying “yes to life” in the face of impossibility.<sup>171</sup>

The oft-repeated speech act of “black lives matter,” both in online spaces and in protests and direct actions, constitutes acts of public mourning that bear witness to the death of those killed by the police, those unloved by the nation, in order to simultaneously affirm their lives and to maintain the possibility of a different life for Black people in the United States. Tometi echoes this sentiment saying, “we wanted to affirm to our people that we love one another, and that no matter how many times we hear about the extrajudicial killing of a community member, we would mourn, and affirm the value of their life.”<sup>172</sup> Love, connected to public mourning, endures repeatedly: “no matter how many times we hear...we would mourn.” Such vigilant witness places the victims of racist violence in a position of presence. As Judith Butler theorizes, the treatment of victims like Tamir Rice and Mike Brown, the abandonment of their bodies in the street, demonstrates the consideration of their persons as “disposable and fundamentally ungrievable” and, “when lives are considered ungrievable, to grieve them openly is protest.”<sup>173</sup> Mourning resists the dehumanization that minimizes Black death by making visible the intentionally disappeared and forgotten (victims of police brutality). In this insistence on presence, mourning creates an act of public love that reconstitutes community with new members and values: namely, the fundamental value of Black life and the possibility of a different world.

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<sup>171</sup> James Baldwin, "Nothing Personal," *Contributions in Black Studies*: (1983) Vol. 6, Article 5. Available at: <http://scholarworks.umass.edu/cibs/vol6/iss1/5>, pg. 60

<sup>172</sup> Jamilah King, “#blacklivesmatter How three friends turned a spontaneous Facebook post into a global phenomenon,” *The California Sunday Magazine*, March 1, 2015 <https://stories.californiasunday.com/2015-03-01/black-lives-matter/>

<sup>173</sup> Judith Butler and George Yancey, “What’s Wrong with All Lives Matter?” *The New York Times*, January 12, 2015, <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/01/12/whats-wrong-with-all-lives-matter/>

## **“This is a love group”**

Garza and Cullors specifically identify the Black Lives Matter network as a “love group.”<sup>174</sup> For BLM, the phrase “love group” grounds the organization in two related things: first, love for Black community, including victims of police brutality, holds the movement together; second, love is the vision for the organization, presenting a theory of change for the movement that can organize the desires of participants. Love itself is the material of the movement, in its internal connections and external orientations toward better futures. For Garza and Cullors, the origin of the phrase and the organization is as a “deep love for our people.” Garza describes this love beginning in specific terms and then moving toward general or expansive terms – she identifies a “real deep love for those mamas who are just trying to make it work, who’ve got the bucket under the leaky roof but are figuring it out” and also a love for “our folks” or “our people.”<sup>175</sup> The love of individual Black people (especially women, queer, trans and disabled folks)<sup>176</sup> struggling to get by in a white supremacist, capitalist, heteropatriarchal system grows to a broadly defined people – the people who populate the movement and those for and with whom the movement professes to fight. These loosely bounded collectivities, held together by love, make up the movement.

In the case of BLM, the specific turn to the extreme margins of social power and the emphasis on changing the valuation of lives in those margins offers a sharp distinction between a nationalist or multicultural emphasis on love in politics. Garza works to rhetorically develop the organization’s support of those most impacted by regimes of white supremacy, heteropatriarchy and capitalist power. In fact, Garza takes care not to reproduce a narrowing love, what she calls

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<sup>174</sup> Press Release, Black Lives Matter: “FOX Pundits Further Tensions and Put Black Lives at Risk,” September 2, 2015 <https://www.facebook.com/BlackLivesMatter/posts/489975451173705>

<sup>175</sup> Garza and Kauffman, “A Love Note to Our Folks”

<sup>176</sup> Alicia Garza, “A Herstory of the #BlackLivesMatter Movement,” *The Feminist Wire*, October 7, 2014, <http://www.thefeministwire.com/2014/10/blacklivesmatter-2/>

“the narrow nationalism that can be prevalent within some Black communities, which merely call on Black people to love Black, live Black and buy Black, keeping straight cis Black men in the front of the movement” while marginalizing others.<sup>177</sup> Here, Garza argues that it is not enough to argue for love within a hegemonically defined Black community, which centers the demands of those with relative power over women, queer and disabled people. She recognizes the ways in which love itself could be used to create boundaries of those acceptable in their tactics, lives or demands in the way that Ahmed fears. Instead, she organizes the language in such a way to center, “those that have been marginalized within Black liberation movements,”<sup>178</sup> to cultivate a love which gravitates towards the specificity of the margins. Consistently articulating the importance and demands of Black queer and trans folks, for example, underlies a certain ethos of the movement that indicates an ongoing process of moving towards those least heard. In this way, BLM draws on the history of intersectional feminist theory to understand and interrogate the intersecting marginalization of Black women and Black queer people.<sup>179</sup>

The stakes are higher than a liberal demand for inclusion, revaluing lives at the margins actively disrupts and changes the “center.” Black Lives Matter disrupts love’s centralizing pull towards “all lives matter,” which ignores the realities of structural power and oppression. The group or collectivity of BLM forms through love by looking to the margins to disrupt the bounded conditional nature of patriotic or nationalist love. This love, Garza says is “a deep profound love, not just for each other, but for humanity.”<sup>180</sup> Tometi once declared, “on

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<sup>177</sup> Garza, “A Herstory.”

<sup>178</sup> Garza, “A Herstory.”

<sup>179</sup> See: Kimberle Crenshaw, "Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color." *Stanford law review* (1991): 1241-1299; Brown, Michael. "Gender and sexuality I: Intersectional anxieties." *Progress in Human Geography* 36, no. 4 (2012): 541-550.

<sup>180</sup> John Riley, “#BlackLivesMatter: Alicia Garza on privilege, justice and founding a movement,” *Metro Weekly*, February 18, 2016, <http://www.metroweekly.com/2016/02/black-lives-matter-cofounder-alicia-garza/>

reflection, all our lives lack in value – love drives us all.”<sup>181</sup> The practice of prioritizing the struggles and concerns of the most marginalized under oppressive regimes works on the theory of change that liberation for the most marginalized will necessarily improve the conditions of those who occupy spaces above them in hierarchies of relative power.<sup>182</sup> Tometi echoes King’s belief that “injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere,”<sup>183</sup> that the systemic devaluation of Black life devalues all of life. Love, particularly, “drives us” to uncover and rework this lack of value through a struggle for those least valued; love drives us toward valuing human life.

Garza’s rhetoric in this instance, proposes a broad commitment for “humanity,” which I believe she means both in the sense of many human people, but also the concept of “humanity,” which emphasizes the full humanity of Black people. When Cullors says, “Black Lives Matter is a rehumanizing project,” the practice of recognizing the humanity and value of Black people, she invokes a practice, working on the level of the imaginary to make space for a more full picture of Black life and Black humanity by shifting the reference point from Black suffering and death to Black flourishing and humanity. Bringing the lives of poor, queer, and trans Black folks to the center of the movement undermines the values of white supremacy and capitalism which insist on the lack of value in these people’s lives. By addressing the margins with an elastic love and focusing on revaluing lives in the margins of oppressive power structure, BLM disrupts the centering pull of conditional love, and transforms the movement’s understanding of the center.

Black Lives Matter also organizes itself as a “love group” in terms of the vision of the organization: both in positing concrete demands and BLM’s ideals *as love* and articulating a

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<sup>181</sup> Daniel Aloï, “Black Lives Matter organizers discuss 21st-century activism,” *Cornell Chronicle*, February 4, 2016, <http://www.news.cornell.edu/stories/2016/02/black-lives-matter-organizers-discuss-21st-century-activism>

<sup>182</sup> See, for example: “Social justice does not trickle down . . . we should center the experiences of the most vulnerable first—that’s how we should determine our agenda.” Dean Spade in “Trans Politics in a Neo-Liberal Landscape,” lecture at Barnard College, January 6, 2009. Available at: <https://vimeo.com/4596216>

<sup>183</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from Birmingham Jail.” *The Atlantic Monthly* August 1, 1963, 78-88.

broad, abstract imaginary of a world constituted *in love*. This move recalls Black feminist affective love politics in which visionary practices based in love, and the possibilities of a different world, focus on both personal transformative work, (like overcoming internalized prejudice) and lofty directions, (like overturning white supremacy).<sup>184</sup> Demanding things like an end to police and vigilante violence and economic policies of redistribution and re-building, they end by saying “these are demands of love.”<sup>185</sup> These statements build a vision of love which demands more than survival: it names the systems orchestrating violence as inhuman and unjust, but also changeable, and with alternatives. Indeed, a press release the organization says it “seek[s] a world in which ALL Black lives matter, and racial hierarchy no longer organizes our lives or yours. This is a vision of love.”<sup>186</sup> Addressing both the symptoms (economic misdistribution, police violence) and the causes (a world organized by racial hierarchy), BLM engages in both the everyday battles and the visionary practices of building a different social world. By naming specific demands, they open the alternative that the world could be different by cultivating a vision of love.

### **Transformative work**

Important to any movement, whether explicitly or implicitly is a theory of change: how will the movement’s tactics affect the change they desire? Recall Tometi’s claim that love “drives us,” organizing desires, affectively prompting protest and community organizing. Cullors speaks to one element of BLM’s theory of change through what she calls spiritually transformative work. Dismissing the post-racial narrative of racism as a shallow problem based

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<sup>184</sup> See: Jennifer C. Nash "Practicing Love: Black Feminism, Love-Politics, and Post-Intersectionality." in *Meridians* 11.2 (Indiana University Press, 2011). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2979/meridians.11.2.1>

<sup>185</sup> Press Release, BLM: “FOX Pundits Further Tensions.”

<sup>186</sup> Press Release, BLM: “FOX Pundits Further Tensions.”



only in explicitly white supremacist beliefs, easily trumped by logical facts, Cullors asserts that ridding ourselves of racism,

takes a sort of exorcism. I deeply believe that. And you see it in people's transformation in this work. In the last year and a half, from the black community in and of itself, as we say "black lives matter," you see the light that comes inside of people to other communities that are like, "I'm going to stand on the side of black lives." You can see people literally transforming. And that's a different type of work. And for me, that is a spiritual work. It's a healing work.<sup>187</sup>

Cullors articulates the work of the organization and the movement as something beyond gains easily qualified to include the internal work which happens along with the concrete work of protesting or demanding. Cullors' actor must commit to the simultaneous change internally (exorcising racism) and commitment to change in community (standing on the side of Black lives). Using the word "exorcism," Cullors' turns to a certain body politics, and the metaphor of standing recalls the physical and bodily presence and solidarity of ongoing direct organizing around police brutality. This love happens in the presence and togetherness of bodies.

As Berlant argues, love includes the embrace of the possibility to change, the desire to exist differently within ourselves, after all, love is "one of the few places where people actually admit they want to become different."<sup>188</sup> Cullors continues "we are social creatures. Human to human, if you take a moment to be with somebody, to understand the pains they're going through, you get to transform yourself."<sup>189</sup> This language of the importance of other-regarding orientations resonates with a lot of understandings of love as a fundamentally other-regarding emotional state. Like Jennifer Nash, Cullors articulates a public in which loving activists orient themselves toward the 'other's' emotional state forming a relational bond that transforms the

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<sup>187</sup> "The Resilient World," On Being.

<sup>188</sup> Heather Davis and Paige Sarlin, "No One Is Sovereign in Love: A Conversation Between Lauren Berlant and Michael Hardt." Interview. *No More Potlucks*. [nomorepotlucks.org/site/no-one-is-sovereign-in-love-a-conversation-between-lauren-berlant-and-michael-hardt/](http://nomorepotlucks.org/site/no-one-is-sovereign-in-love-a-conversation-between-lauren-berlant-and-michael-hardt/), 2

<sup>189</sup> "The Resilient World," On Being.

self.<sup>190</sup> This understanding of transformation in loving struggle also rings true in the work I see many people in St. Louis do in love: by bringing people together in protest community, many must challenge previous assumptions and do internal and external work to continue to move toward and engage with the margins of the community. As organizing in Ferguson approaches a second year, many involved in protest participate both in direct action and in trainings on things like trans issues or (for white folks involved) white privilege. These sorts of trainings push folks in the movement to change the way they understand themselves and the organizing community. For my parents, who participated in both, the trainings challenged them to examine their internal assumptions about those in their protest community and their roles in the movement, both of which changed the way they interact with their communities, both in and out of protest. My mother challenged her suburban white book group to work honestly through a book on white privilege, and my father continues to learn to use correct pronouns for trans and gender nonconforming protest friends. These small behavioral changes, while not enough to end white supremacy or heteropatriarchy, do add up over time and through social circles. Through standing together in difference, BLM enacts a politics of intersectional protest in which the self is changed in relationship to regard for the other.

Love fills part of the explanatory gap of how radical social change happens for Cullors: love is a connecting thread that creates the conditions in which we are inspired to work towards transformation. In both quotes, Cullors considers the deeply human drive to interact in community with others as a drive that allows for intense solidarities and therefore transformative work. This shares a conceptual affinity with Berlant's love as an affective space that allows us to change. While Berlant relies on love as an affective power that drives work toward both different selves and a different world built on human flourishing Cullors builds on and challenges

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<sup>190</sup> Nash, "Practicing Love" in *Meridians*, 3

Berlant's theory by providing a more concrete vision of what that love looks like in practice. Black Lives Matter returns historical context and specificity to the forefront, confronting the lovelessness of white supremacy and creating a vision for a new world built through protest and deep community involvement grounded in love.

Black Lives Matter's specificity surfaces in their discussion of concrete actions. Early in Ferguson protests, the group, along with Darnell Moore, another frequent writer on the subject of love, organized a "Freedom Ride to Ferguson," which brought hundreds of outsiders to Ferguson over Labor Day weekend, with the desire to help cultivate local leadership and capacity.<sup>191</sup> Garza's references to love in relationship to the Freedom Ride to Ferguson and other on-the-ground organizing efforts, including a BART shutdown in San Francisco, complicate Berlant's emphasis on risk and uncertainty in her theory of love. Garza emphasizes the lived consequences of risk and uncertainty in Black bodies and communities. Speaking of the trip to Ferguson, Garza describes the palpable force of the desire to survive:

I think what it felt like for me in St. Louis was that when your back is against a wall and you don't think there's any other way to get out, you're going to fight like hell to save your own life. And so inasmuch as people are throwing tear gas canisters back at the National Guard, it's really a fight for survival. Once the National Guard departed for the first time, I think what was left was this real sense of determination and fearlessness. The feeling was profound: it felt like "Get free or die trying," you know?<sup>192</sup>

This sense of fear and fearlessness, of the very real possibility of death at the hands of the police, the precariousness of organizing Black bodies against a white supremacist state, is profoundly present in the affective dimension of transformative work that Black Lives Matter describes. Love as Berlant describes allows people to hold together in these moments of profound uncertainty, but her ideas of uncertainty and risk are vague and romantic—recall her insistence that love creates a space without trauma in which the work of transformation can take place. For

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<sup>191</sup> Garza and Kauffman, "Love Note to Our Folks."

<sup>192</sup> Garza and Kauffman, "Love Note to Our Folks."

Black Lives Matter the quality of the risk is markedly different and includes a specific existential threat, a palpable feeling that lives could be lost, a history of death at the hands of a white supremacist state. Love allows for continuance in the face of anxieties, uncertainties and threats, but it also draws a certain line in the sand, marks a certain territory as beyond discussion – that Black life matters, that the aims of the movement are freedom, that those involved willingly undertake certain risks in protest. According to Cullors, “when we show up on the freeway, when we chain ourselves together, that’s an act of love. That act of resistance is an act of love...”<sup>193</sup> In other words the willingness to risk body for community connects the movement to a deep cultural understanding of love as something which allows us to risk everything for the protection of another (maternal love is especially drawn in this light, perhaps too much so).

Resistance is an act of love in the way it both draws certain protective lines and also creates unsystematized lines<sup>194</sup> of connection between those struggling together. In the space of trauma that brings both fear of the existential threat and love of the community and as the vision to the front, love does include conditions. Organizing against the police practically demands drawing or dramatizing a certain line against those who would deny the value of Black life. Constituting the community in relationship to this line in the case of Black Lives Matter requires looking to the margins of community: to organizing with Black queer and trans folks against intersecting nodes of state violence. Love as an affective state then animates Black Lives Matter’s move to the margins, for the purpose of lifting up and revaluing those most impacted by white supremacy and capitalism. Love allows continuance despite and beyond the consequences of impending violence, and allows a continuing presence of those at the margins while uncertainty looms large; love allows resistance and resistance *is* a kind of love.

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<sup>193</sup> “The Resilient World,” *On Being*.

<sup>194</sup> See: Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner. “Sex in Public,” in *Critical Inquiry* 24.2 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 561

Black Lives Matter embraces this kind of love as a necessary element of social change – love allows the manifestation of rage and the presence of dissenting bodies. In an interview for the radio show *On Being*, host Krista Tippett asked Patrisse Cullors about arguments made against the movement for Black lives which centers on the concern, “the rage is out front, and when people compare the Civil Rights Movement of fifty years ago with Black Lives Matter, they say, ‘Where is the love?’” Tippett brings into sharp focus the way that contemporary discourse on the movement for Black lives regulates love to an invisible or secondary position. The way that Tippett expresses this, comparing the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s to current activism by asking the question, “where is the love,” not only expresses a deep ignorance about the movement for Black lives (although not necessarily on Tippett’s part, as she appears to be trying to frame the question from a third party), it also exposes the common bastardization of King’s articulations of love. What this hypothetical questioner really wants to know is, “why aren’t you behaving as the nostalgic and white-washed version of King I remember? Why don’t you struggle the way I think is appropriate? Why won’t you prioritize my feelings?”

Elaborating her belief that “resistance is an act of love,” Cullors answered that the movements actions come “from a place of rage, but also from a place of deep love for black people.”<sup>195</sup> Cullors’ response refuses an opposition between love and rage, acknowledging the presence of both in the origins of the movement and action. As Bailey and Leonard write, “those who are most vocal within this space [social media] do not vacillate between anger and tenderness so much as they express each simultaneously.”<sup>196</sup> Cullors then turns to acts of physicality: acts of being present and vulnerable with other people in protest constitute acts of love. The situations she describes include legal and physical risk and, no matter how thoroughly

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<sup>195</sup> “The Resilient World,” *On Being*

<sup>196</sup> Bailey and Leonard, “Post Nihilistic Freedom Dreams,” 68

planned, definite elements of uncertainty regarding how they will be received and handled by outside parties: walking onto a freeway presents a fairly obvious risk of injury, chaining people together, while a great physical representation of solidarity and connection, also almost always inspires legal consequences and often physical violence. The first involves an act of maintaining presence and inhabiting space in the face of police and a likely unfriendly, potentially dangerous viewing public; the second returns to the importance of the bodies in protest themselves, establishing the connectedness of bodies in resistance and both are acts of love. Love, then, is partially constituted or confirmed in actions and those actions involve vulnerable bodies in daring relation to each other. In these moments, rage is not easily separated from love. The particular goals and protest actions, in the face of risk, uncertainty, and understandable rage seek to draw elastic protective lines that orient activists toward the margins and engage with those most traumatized by structures of power.

## **Conclusion**

For the founders of the organization Black Lives Matter, who coined the phrase itself, love responds to a nihilistic tendency with regard for others. Love figures as a foundation that calls us to build a different imagination of the world, and forms the way we think about possibilities. Love informs how we come to build a new world, and allows us to build toward that potential even in the face of violence, suffering, and uncertainty. In our loving connection with others, we can transform ourselves.

While Garza, Cullors and Tometi express the realistic deep frustrations, and even despairs of many involved in long-term activist work, while they certainly acknowledge the profound violence of white supremacy, in their discussions of love they remain overwhelmingly optimistic and sometimes decidedly vague. When Garza talks about the feeling of fear and

fearlessness in the streets of Ferguson, she does not elaborate whether love has any role in responding to or building those feelings. Although she also talks about the difficulty of organizing as outsiders, and declares that the organization tried to forgo “disaster tourism” and engage deeply with those working in Ferguson, more recent disagreements suggest their effort was less than entirely successful. In talking about the BART shutdown, which relied heavily on chaining bodies of Black people together, and the intentional leadership of Black people and Black women specifically, Garza says that the action was designed with the goal of “affirming our humanity.”<sup>197</sup> Certainly, this too is an act of resistance, an act of love. Garza, too, hints that when the BART shutdown was declared a “space for black folks” that many organizers were unsupportive of that decision.<sup>198</sup> As I will deal with in chapters three and four, in the daily realities of organizing, people hurt and harm one another, certainly in situations like this, solidarities are tested and broken. The specificity of these questions is not answered here and love is not given a place as a difficult, sometimes near-impossible thing.

In light of ongoing tension between protestors in Ferguson and the organization Black Lives Matter, how do activists honor and credit each other in ongoing struggles, as a practice of love? As many suggest, the organization BLM gained popularity on the work and sacrifices of everyday people resisting in St. Louis. Indeed, I argue that the language of love, particularly, has purchase in this movement because of the way it is used in the streets of Ferguson (mostly by Black queer women), in movements where the politics of love are complex, contested and ever shifting. As promising as this call to love is, it is further complicated and strengthened by the reality of communities in activist struggle in Ferguson, by the spaces where people try to actualize the love so frequently called upon in activist rhetoric.

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<sup>197</sup> Garza and Kauffman, “Love Note to Our Folks.”

<sup>198</sup> Garza and Kauffman, “Love Note to Our Folks.”

### Chapter 3 - "Love is the Why" Love and resonance on Ferguson activists' Twitter community

Thinking back on all that we have overcome I can't help but become emotional. We've been through so much together, we've fought for change together, and we've risked our lives and our freedom together. The work has only begun but love will win. – LaShell Eikerenkoetter<sup>199</sup>

On August 9, 2014 when Mike Brown's murder rocked both his family and close neighbors, those who saw his body lying in the street, unattended by medical professionals, the reach of the news remained uncertain. As protestor and organizer Johnetta Elzie recalls, the general feeling in the street was, "it's just another dead black boy, no one's gonna care." Echoing the sentiments of many other protestors active on social media, Elzie continues, "all I had was my Twitter, and my Facebook and my Tumblr and Instagram and I just felt and I really believed that someone somewhere would care about what I was saying."<sup>200</sup> Elzie, who now has roughly 103,000 followers, turned out to be right, and her tweets, along with those of DeRay Mckesson (who has over 323,000 followers) reached countless people as #Ferguson became a nationally known city and the stand in for an ongoing conversation about race and policing. The Twitter presence of folks like Elzie and Mckesson, along with countless other protestors, journalists, livestreamers and politicians brought the tragic death of Brown into the national consciousness.

In the aftermath of the Arab Spring, union protests in Wisconsin, Occupy Wall Street, and President Obama's innovative campaign strategy, analyzing the impact of social media tools on "real world" organizing has become increasingly popular.<sup>201</sup> In the case of the movement for

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<sup>199</sup> LaShell Eikerenkoetter, "The Work Has Only Begun But Love Will Win..." *NewsOne*. August 09, 2015. <http://newsone.com/3165923/lashell-eikerenkoetter-ferguson-reflections-one-year-later/>.

<sup>200</sup> The New York Times. "They Helped Make Twitter Matter in Ferguson Protests." *The New York Times*. August 10, 2015. <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/11/us/twitter-black-lives-matter-ferguson-protests.html>.

<sup>201</sup> See, for example: Manuel Castells, *Networks of outrage and hope: Social movements in the Internet age*. (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2015); Paolo Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the streets: Social media and contemporary activism*. (London: Pluto Press, 2012); Sasha Costanza-Chock, "Mic check! Media cultures and the Occupy movement." *Social Movement Studies* 11, no. 3-4 (2012): 375-385; Gilad Lotan, Erhardt Graeff, Mike Ananny, Devin Gaffney, and Ian Pearce. "The Arab Spring: the revolutions were tweeted: Information flows during the 2011 Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions." *International journal of communication* 5 (2011): 31; Claire Miller, "How



Black lives, the growth of the movement and the use of social media are intimately related; as the authors of the recent report “Beyond the Hashtags” point out, “there is no meaningful way to measure the magnitude of the internet’s impact on the movement (whatever that might mean) or test how outcomes would have been different without it.”<sup>202</sup> However, it is safe to say that the movement broadly defined relies heavily on the use of social media. Freelon, McIlwain and Clark find in the report that activists affiliated with the movement for Black lives use Twitter to report on stories of police brutality and misconduct and simultaneously critique the avowed neutrality of the mainstream media (talking about how or whether the media covers something). Overall, Twitter users largely focused on sharing news and narratives rather than using the platform to explicitly organize actions (as in asking people to attend, disclosing organizing details).<sup>203</sup> The particular dimensions of police brutality, with the terrible commonality of individual victims, allows activists to establish and spread “digital memorials” to victims of police killings, which also provides an affective space (of public outrage, as the report suggests, but also grief, love, pain and much more), which creates the possibility for affective and practical solidarity.<sup>204</sup> In fact, the use of Twitter as a platform to archive, report and reflect on on-the-ground activism makes it particularly useful in uncovering the way the movement in and around Ferguson thinks about emotional themes and organizing.

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Obama’s Internet Campaign Changed Politics.” *The New York Times* (2008); Aaron S. Veenstra, Narayanan Iyer, Mohammad Delwar Hossain, and Jiwoo Park. “Time, place, technology: Twitter as an information source in the Wisconsin labor protests.” *Computers in Human Behavior* 31 (2014): 65-72. Rosa, Amaro La. “Social Media and Social Movements Around the World. Social Media in *Politics*: 35-47

<sup>202</sup> Deen Freelon, Charlton D. McIlwain, and Meredith D. Clark. “Beyond the Hashtags: #Ferguson, #Blacklivesmatter, and the Online Struggle for Offline Justice.” Center for Media and Social Impact, American University. February 2016. [http://www.cmsimpact.org/sites/default/files/beyond\\_the\\_hashtags\\_2016.pdf](http://www.cmsimpact.org/sites/default/files/beyond_the_hashtags_2016.pdf), pg.75

<sup>203</sup> Freelon, McIlwain and Clark, pg. 78; While the authors of this report conclude this is likely reflective of the interests of users of platforms like Twitter, I would argue that permeability of social media platforms to police, white supremacists and media have quickly made it clear to most organizers that Twitter is not the safest space from which to organize, especially when you are organizing against the police-state. Very few organizers post real action details (especially for risky and arrestable actions) on any social media before the action begins.

<sup>204</sup>Freelon, McIlwain and Clark, 82-83

First, I will outline relevant research on social media to better understand the way that Twitter functions in social movements and organizing.<sup>205</sup> Then, I will discuss the way in which Twitter archives the circulation of emotion. Then, I turn specifically to the use of love by protestors and organizers in and around Ferguson to describe and analyze the resonating discourses of love on Twitter. These articulations of love center on the way that protestors understand the constitution of the movement, think about the particular work of the movement (including care work and solidarity) and the ways that the discourse of love comes up against the difficulties and harm that may come up in organizing.

### **Twitter, Activism and Ethics**

In choosing to write about Twitter in Ferguson, I am deeply invested in addressing the ethical dimensions of whose material I use, how and why. Twitter's popularity as a topic of discussion expands beyond the uneasy boundaries of social activism. Media outlets and researchers frequently dissect what many call "Black Twitter."<sup>206</sup> Researcher Meredith Clark defines Black Twitter "as a temporally linked group of connectors that share culture, language and interest in specific issues and talking about specific topics with a [diasporic] black frame of reference."<sup>207</sup> Unlike previously semi-private Black collective spaces (like churches or Black colleges), Twitter is a "'mediated public' – environments where people can gather publicly

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<sup>205</sup> Although I will not discuss here whether the microblogging platform of Twitter motivates political engagement in 140 characters or less, or the social nature of Twitter networks, but the following pieces are instructive: Chang Sup Park, "Does Twitter Motivate Involvement in Politics? Tweeting, Opinion, Leadership and Political Engagement." *Computers in Human Behavior* (2013): 1641-648; Center for the Study of Social Impact, "Social Media Plays a Greater Role in Cause Engagement for African Americans and Hispanics," *Georgetown University* (2011) [http://static.scs.georgetown.edu/upload/kb\\_file/csic/OPR\\_SM\\_GT\\_Ethnicity\\_FS\\_Final.pdf](http://static.scs.georgetown.edu/upload/kb_file/csic/OPR_SM_GT_Ethnicity_FS_Final.pdf); Yosh Halberstam and Brian Knight. *Homophily, group size, and the diffusion of political information in social networks: Evidence from twitter*. No. w20681. National Bureau of Economic Research, 2014.

<sup>206</sup> See: S. Florini, "Tweets, Tweeps, and Signifyin': Communication and Cultural Performance on "Black Twitter"" *Television & New Media* (2013): 223--37; Sanjay Sharma, "Black Twitter? Racial Hashtags, Networks and Contagion." *New Formations* (2013): 46--64; Aaron Smith, "African Americans and Technology." The Brookings Institute (2014).

<sup>207</sup> Donovan X. Ramsey, "The Truth About Black Twitter." *The Atlantic*. April 10, 2015. <http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2015/04/the-truth-about-black-twitter/390120/>.

through mediating technology.”<sup>208</sup> This mediation means that Twitter defies previous understandings of public/private distinctions – on the one hand, many people’s tweets are functionally public as they do not have privacy settings keeping people out, meaning potentially anyone can access the tweets of even the most ordinary user. However, danah boyd argues that most people on social media sites operate under the assumption of “security through obscurity” where they assume that as long as no one cares about them, no one will come knocking.”<sup>209</sup>

Unlike clearly public documents, such as online interviews either print or video, articles, or press releases that are designed and distributed to broad public audiences, Twitter’s spread means that many of its users, regardless of their privacy settings, may reasonably expect their tweets will not gain popularity. Indeed, the intentions and expectations in using Twitter may vary from the intentions of participating in making a clearly delineated public document. As Jeff Guo of the Washington Post points out, “members of the black community did not hop on social networks to be gawked at or to gain attention...they use the internet for the same reason everyone else does: to be connected.”<sup>210</sup> As Mckesson argues similarly, “Twitter became a platform for us [Black people] to talk to each other in ways that weren’t mediated by dominant culture.”<sup>211</sup> Twitter functions as a space of conversation and community,<sup>212</sup> and the tweets of many Ferguson protestors can be reasonably understood to be intended for the consumption of other protestors and those in solidarity worldwide, not necessarily for mainstream media consumption.

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<sup>208</sup> danah boyd, “Social Network Sites: Public, Private, or What?” *Knowledge Tree*, May 13, 2007, <http://www.danah.org/papers/KnowledgeTree.pdf>

<sup>209</sup> boyd, “Public, Private or What?” 4

<sup>210</sup> Jeff Guo, “What People Don’t Get about ‘Black Twitter’” *Washington Post*, October 22, 2015. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2015/10/22/why-it-can-be-offensive-to-use-the-term-black-twitter/>.

<sup>211</sup> New York Times, “They Helped Make Twitter Matter.”

<sup>212</sup> See communications research on Twitter as an imagined community: A. Gruzd, B. Wellman, and Y. Takhteyev. “Imagining Twitter as an Imagined Community.” *American Behavioral Scientist* (2011): 1294-1318.

However, the possibility for self-told stories on Twitter also facilitates a culture of media voyeurism in which digital media establishments like BuzzFeed, Jezebel and Gawker as well as academics and mainstream media engage in the practice of “Twitter mining” or curating tweets on common themes (like tweets using the same hashtag, or a particular user sharing an engaging story long-form via many tweets) and publish them, generally with sparse additional commentary.<sup>213</sup> This practice recently received wide criticism as the practice benefits and creates profit for large media corporations based on the intellectual and emotional labor of mostly people of color, especially women.<sup>214</sup> While folks like Mckesson and Elzie now manage highly visible Twitter accounts and could be understood as full-fledged public figures, their Twitter presence initially related to the protest was based solely on the desire to see the story of Brown’s murder and the protests told.<sup>215</sup> Many Ferguson protestors received unwanted public attention over the course of the last two years, with personal accounts suddenly becoming wildly popular and inspiring comment, criticism, threats and general invasion of privacy from strangers. More than that, lots of Ferguson activists and Tweeters achieved notoriety only accidentally, and felt violated by news coverage of their personal lives.<sup>216</sup> As Zeynep Tufekci argues, while many journalists continue to operate under the guise of Twitter’s publicness, “social media is a conversation, not a press release” and the nature of social media platforms necessitate

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<sup>213</sup> Anne Theriault, "The Dubious Ethics Of Twitter Mining." *The Establishment*. 2015. <http://www.theestablishment.co/2015/11/04/the-dubious-ethics-of-twitter-mining/>.

<sup>214</sup> Theriault “Dubious Ethics;” Dorothy Kim and Eunsong Kim. "The #TwitterEthics Manifesto." Model View Culture. April 7, 2014. <https://modelviewculture.com/pieces/the-twitterethics-manifesto>.

<sup>215</sup> New York Times, “They Helped Make Twitter Matter.”

<sup>216</sup> For example, activists Brittany Ferrell and Alexis Templeton got married after meeting at Ferguson protests and forming an organization together. When they tweeted about their marriage for friends and family, it was picked up as a story in countless media outlets, very few asking for any input or permission from Ferrell or Templeton. As Templeton says, “We had NO idea any media was going to show up. I felt violated for weeks after that news story hit the Internet. I couldn’t believe it. But it’s conflicting because there are folks who found bravery, happiness and love within themselves from that story.” Quoted in: Erica Cardwell, "Where My Girls At: Meet Two of Ferguson's Black Queer Activists." Bitch Media. April 27, 2015. <https://bitchmedia.org/post/where-my-girls-at-meet-fergusons-black-queer-activists>. \*This article has not been recently updated and misgenders Templeton who identifies as nonbinary and uses they/them pronouns.

engagement rather than passive “perusing” and publication.<sup>217</sup> On the whole, I agree with Tufekci’s argument in the case of individual users of Twitter: most people, particularly young people use their social media accounts to engage conversationally with their friends and followers, rather than to declare fixed stances to the broader public. Of course, certain Twitter accounts serve a more public function, including those of celebrities, companies and organizations. Even then, levels of notoriety are relative and up for debate. Primarily, as I discuss later, I will be engaging with individual users of Twitter, with express permission.

### **Twitter & Resonance**

As Sara Ahmed discusses in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, texts, including digital texts (like those of white nationalists previously discussed) perform certain emotions that can be interpreted and analyzed.<sup>218</sup> As Adi Kuntsman discusses in *Digital Cultures and the Politics of Emotion*, the internet’s various integrations can be considered “objects of feeling [which] sheds light not just on the emotion intensity of online interactions, but also on digital media technologies more broadly, showing how they can be objects, mediators, and repositories of affect,” that the digital can present “archives of feeling.”<sup>219</sup> Adding to this understanding, Zizi Papacharissi argues that Twitter’s specific dimensions (especially hashtags) “supports both individually felt affect and collectivity. Moreover, tweets frequently link to other types of content... which [demonstrates] the virality of affect as it spreads through and beyond the Twitterverse.”<sup>220</sup> In other words, the space of social media makes evident the complex

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<sup>217</sup> Zeynep Tufekci, "Social Media Is a Conversation, Not a Press Release - Technology and Society." Medium. January 13, 2014. <https://medium.com/technology-and-society/social-media-is-a-conversation-not-a-press-release-4d811b45840d#ioqoxuk2r>.

<sup>218</sup> Ahmed, *Cultural Politics*

<sup>219</sup> Adi Kuntsman, “Introduction” in *Digital Cultures and the Politics of Emotion: Feelings, Affect and Technological Change*. ed. Karatzogianni, Athina, and Adi Kuntsman. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan: 2012), pg. 6

<sup>220</sup> Zizi Papacharissi, *Affective Publics: Sentiment, Technology, and Politics*. (Oxford Studies in Digital Politics: 2014), 27

interconnected and viral nature of affect; the spread of tweets, links and content provides a digital frame of affective virality. And virality is not just social phenomenon without consequences, as Athina Karazogianni argues that in the case of the WikiLeaks controversy, “affective flows can snowball into a revolutionary shift in reality.”<sup>221</sup> In the case of the movement for Black lives, affective flows may be complex, interrelated and difficult to define, but many agree that the conversation (affective and analytical, digital and physical, and in-between all these categories) and activism addressing police brutality has certainly brought a change in public consciousness and legal and institutional policy in some places.<sup>222</sup>

However, affect as a concept, and my application of it, do not lend themselves to linear cause-effect notions of impact. William Connolly uses the concept of the “resonance machine” to explore the way that affects, dispositions and ideology circulate and amplify each other in digital and physical spaces informing and magnifying existing emotion, affect, and ideology in political actors.<sup>223</sup> Kuntsman similarly discusses the way the repetitive and circular movement of affect on- and offline creates “reverberation” a concept that “makes us attentive to the simultaneous presence of speed and stillness in online sites; to distortions and resonance, intensification and dissolution in the process of moving through various digital terrains.”<sup>224</sup> Drawing on the concepts of resonance and reverberation in digital space, I am interested in the ways in which similar themes and affects become clear in movement conversations without clear distinction for any “beginning” or origin of the feeling or specific refrain. Resonance and reverberation account for the ways that affect moves between and *affects* people—moving, changing, and intensifying

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<sup>221</sup> Athina Karazogianni, "WikiLeaks Affects: Ideology, Conflict and the Revolutionary Virtual." In *Digital Cultures and the Politics of Emotion*. ed. Karatzogianni, Athina, and Adi Kuntsman. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan: 2012), 52

<sup>222</sup> See: Clare Foran, "A Year of Black Lives Matter." *The Atlantic*. December 31, 2015. <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/12/black-lives-matter/421839/>.

<sup>223</sup> W. E. Connolly, "The Evangelical-Capitalist Resonance Machine." *Political Theory* 33, no. 6 (2005): 869-86.

<sup>224</sup> Kuntsman in *Digital Cultures and the Politics of Emotion*, 1-2

some concepts and feelings which regularly surface and silencing or shuttering discussion on others—without clearly tracing outcomes. I am writing about Twitter partially because the affective resonance of love both in on-the-ground organizing in Ferguson and in social media conversations in diverse situations and understandings moved me and others I know, although tracing these impacts remains difficult if not impossible.

From the early days of protests, Twitter provided crucial functionality as a platform where belabored activists in Ferguson, facing police dogs, tear gas, and rubber bullets, could connect to those invested in solidarity, those demonstrating elsewhere, and media outlets in attempts to stave off erasure, silencing or acceptance of the police narrative. As the movement evolved and changed, receiving mass media and academic attention, activists and community members have continued to turn to Twitter as an outlet to tell their own stories against the compulsion of many to write complete histories or present documentaries on the movement while it continues to work and change. I am not positing that love was the dominant affect in either those early days, or that it is now, rather that it always existed in complex and contested forms. Love, coupled and interacting with other emotions ((out)rage, grief, pain among them)<sup>225</sup> plays an important role in conversations about the movement on Twitter. While the resonance of love in and around Ferguson is broader than Twitter, the resonance on Twitter reflects the most transformative and revolutionary type of love discussed in relationship to the movement for Black lives. Analyzing Twitter content may seem disembodied, or similarly rhetorical or strategic, as I argued about Black Lives Matter. However, in turning to the tweets of particular activists, especially to those who simultaneously come together bodily in protest and reflected or reported those experiences online, the implications of bodies in the precarious space of protest

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<sup>225</sup> DeRay Mckesson (@deray) Twitter Post. August 31, 2014 10:53 PM. “And love doesn’t deny the anger, hurt or pain. But allows space to build and grow and act. Love is power. #Ferguson #BlackLivesMatter” (8/31/2014 10:53 PM) <https://twitter.com/deray/status/506107419869843458>

remains, precisely because the voices to which I turn momentarily are activists in both online and offline spaces. In Ferguson, Twitter plays the role of archive, but it is a self-critical archive that reflects and complicates understandings of what happens offline.

### **Love in #Ferguson**

In turning to Twitter, I looked for tweets which used love to perform some sort of descriptive or analytic role in organizing work. I understand Twitter as a self-critical archive which allows protestors to create lasting memories, both for themselves and in solidarity with others, and to critically engage with a changing concept of love. These tweets help me put together a picture of revolutionary love in Ferguson, specifically related to the themes how the protestors understand and describe the constitution of the movement, care work, solidarity with other movements for justice, and internal strife in relationship to love.

My initial searches, based on a wide-swath of tweets originating near St. Louis mentioning both the word “love” and hashtags related to protests (like #mikebrown, #Ferguson, and #blacklivesmatter) and occurring since Mike Brown’s murder turned up thousands of tweets.<sup>226</sup> I focus on particular users<sup>227</sup> who I follow on Twitter and see talk about love related to

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<sup>226</sup> These searches were based on the “Advanced Search” function of Twitter, which can be found here: [twitter.com/search-advanced](https://twitter.com/search-advanced). The exact list of hashtags is as follows: #Ferguson #BlackLivesMatter #BLM #policebrutality #handsupdontshoot #mikebrown #michaelbrown #STLPD #FergusonPD #handsup. These reflect the hashtags I see most often used by protestors in and around St. Louis. I limited my search to those in the St. Louis area because of my interest in the way that love on Twitter plays out particularly in and around Ferguson. The date range reflected the time when active protests began (August 9, 2014 to present). Initial searches revealed that love is a concept with a lot of background noise – the vast majority of tweets were unhelpful in this context as they either included sarcastic uses of the word love by those against the protests (ie, “gotta love this,”), or positive instances of “I love this,” which, while somewhat heartening, and potentially could be classified as a show of solidarity, is not very interesting in this project.

<sup>227</sup> These users included: DeRay Mckesson (@deray) current mayoral candidate in Baltimore, MD; Kayla Reed (@RE\_invent\_ED) an organizer for the Organization for Black Struggle hired because of her involvement with protests; Alexis Templeton (@audreoverlorde), co-founder of organizing group Millennial Activists United; Brittany Ferrell (@bdoulaoblogata), co-founder of Millennial Activists United; Millennial Activists United twitter account (@MillennialAU), Johnette Elize (@nettaaaaaaa) who works with Mckesson on Campaign Zero; Operation Help or Hush founders Charles Wade (@akacharleswade) and (@heyasha); Brittany Packnett (@misspackyett), also a member of Campaign Zero and the education director of Teach for America in St. Louis; in this chapter I will primarily use tweets from Alexis Templeton, Charles Wade, and DeRay Mckesson. In choosing specific tweets from certain users, I do not mean to suggest that these users are more important than other voices coming from Ferguson,



the movement because I want to link social media organizing to the work happening offline. I also used similar search terms, excluding those particular to St. Louis, to search smaller samples of tweets on love from activists in Chicago and Toronto, as both cities currently have anti-police brutality movements receiving attention in Twitter's activist circles. From an initial sample of thousands of tweets, I transcribed and organized over one hundred tweets by person and theme, noting the conspicuous overlaps in message. I chose those tweets that reflect the general themes of the ways protestors are talking about love on social media.

There are many who discuss love in and around Ferguson not discussed here. For instance, I have not quoted any members of the clergy here, although religious leaders have been a source of organizing capacity and resources to the protest, and are also thinking and speaking about love.<sup>228</sup> I will discuss some of these organizers in the following chapter about offline organizing. Twitter, because of its nature as a free online platform, provides space for many

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and by quoting them here I do not mean to suggest these are the only ways to think about love, or the only ways people are thinking about love in Ferguson.

<sup>228</sup> For the changing role of the church, see: Emma Green, "Black Activism, Unchurched." *The Atlantic*. March 22, 2016 <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/03/black-activism-baltimore-black-church/474822/>; For more on clergy activism, see: Traci Blackmon echoing Langston Hughes "I, Too, Sing America," argues, "I, Too, Love Ferguson," against the quieting instinct of the I Love Ferguson campaign, insisting instead on the sort of reckoning protest brings, because of her love (Traci D. Blackmon, "The Rev. Traci D. Blackmon: I, Too, Love Ferguson." *Stltoday.com*. October 1, 2014. [http://www.stltoday.com/news/local/the-rev-traci-d-blackmon-i-too-love-ferguson/article\\_eabe440e-c9da-51ea-9c9c-8c11d415fd5c.html](http://www.stltoday.com/news/local/the-rev-traci-d-blackmon-i-too-love-ferguson/article_eabe440e-c9da-51ea-9c9c-8c11d415fd5c.html)). Reverend Osagyefo Sekou, harkening back to both Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and the Bible, frequently uses the language of love as an escape from white supremacist capitalist imperialism and as method of resistance in the world as it exists (Sarah van Gelder, "Rev. Sekou on Today's Civil Rights Leaders: 'I Take My Orders From 23-Year-Old Queer Women,'" *Yes! Magazine* July 22, 2015 [http://www.yesmagazine.org/peace-justice/black-lives-matter-s-favorite-minister-reverend-sekou-young-queer;Osagyefo Uhuru Sekou. "The Clergy's Place Is with the Protesters in Ferguson." The Clergy's Place Is with the Protesters in Ferguson. November 23, 2014. <http://america.aljazeera.com/opinions/2014/11/ferguson-protestmovementreligious.html>\); Rev. Starsky Wilson \(Danny Wicentowski, "Rev. Starsky Wilson and the Fight to Make the Ferguson Commission Matter." \*Riverfront Times\*. April 15, 2015. <http://www.riverfronttimes.com/newsblog/2015/04/15/rev-starsky-wilson-and-the-fight-to-make-the-ferguson-commission-matter>\), Pastor Renita Lamkin \(Yasmine Hafiz, "Ferguson Police Reportedly Shot Pastor Renita Lamkin With Rubber Bullet During Protest \(PHOTOS\)." \*The Huffington Post\*. August 14, 2014. \[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/08/14/ferguson-pastor-shot-police-rubber-bullet\\\_n\\\_5678973.html\]\(http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/08/14/ferguson-pastor-shot-police-rubber-bullet\_n\_5678973.html\)\), Rabbi Susan Talve \(Susan Talve, "A St. Louis Rabbi On the Ground in Ferguson \(Interview\)." \*Moment\*. August 22, 2014. <http://www.momentmag.com/st-louis-rabbi-ground-ferguson/>\) and many of the theologians associated with Eden Theological Seminary in St. Louis, including Leah Gunning Francis \(Leah Gunning Francis, "Seven Questions with Leah Gunning Francis, Author of 'Ferguson & Faith'" \*Forum for Theological Exploration\*. August 19, 2015. <http://fteleaders.org/blog/seven-questions-with-leah-gunning-francis-author-of-ferguson-faith>\)](http://www.yesmagazine.org/peace-justice/black-lives-matter-s-favorite-minister-reverend-sekou-young-queer;Osagyefo%20Uhuru%20Sekou.%20%22The%20Clergy's%20Place%20Is%20with%20the%20Protesters%20in%20Ferguson.%22%20The%20Clergy's%20Place%20Is%20with%20the%20Protesters%20in%20Ferguson.%20November%2023,%202014.%20http://america.aljazeera.com/opinions/2014/11/ferguson-protestmovementreligious.html)

young people and allows me to draw out the voices from Ferguson that might normally go unheard – younger people with less access to mainstream media. In my experience, while some clergy do use Twitter, they often use it differently than younger activists outside the church. As Tufekci argues, most people (in my experience especially young people) use social media as a space for conversation rather than a press release, and this conversational use of Twitter is more useful to understanding the self-critical conversations on love in the movement.

Following the initial guidelines presented in the “Twitter Ethics Manifesto,” I strive to exceed the minimum (“credit, citation, attribution”)<sup>229</sup> ethical standards of using original content from Twitter in research by contacting individual Twitter users to ask permission to use their tweets and explaining the context in which I am using them (including offering to detail which tweets will be used and how I am discussing them). I asked each person whose tweets I would like to quote if I could use their tweets in this context and received permission from all individual users of Twitter.<sup>230</sup> I am using tweets because I value the input of those working on the ground, and indeed because this thesis and whatever cursory conclusions I can draw are deeply influenced, both consciously and unconsciously by the people I follow on Twitter.

The way that a certain understanding of love circulates between Twitter users involved in Ferguson protests, provides another node of analytical possibility for examining love’s resonance in relationship to movement for Black lives organizing. In the subsequent sections, I argue that the resonant conception of love within movement for Black lives in Ferguson includes roughly four interrelated concepts. First, similarly to the work in Black Lives Matter, the movement defines itself and its actions in relationship to love: of community, of principles, and of Black

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<sup>229</sup> In Kim and Kim, “#TwitterEthics Manifesto” from Sonmin Bong (@SonminBong), Sharmani Fowler (@sharmanifowler), and Electric Bird (@jazzycrayon)

<sup>230</sup> I have received blanket permission to use their tweets in my thesis from DeRay Mckesson, Alexis Templeton, Kayla Reed, Charles Wade and Chuck Modi, and permission to use the specific tweets included here from Keith Rose, Marissa Southards, Deivid Rojas and Ryan Singh.

people or Blackness. Second, organizers and activists relate love specifically to the labors of building a movement in shared spaces and in broad-flung solidarities. Third, both of these practices build community through Twitter in dislocated space and times. Finally, disagreements and harm within the community challenge these articulations of love and these struggles over love change and deepen the way activists understand and articulate love.

*The revolution is love*

The resonance of love as a creating and sustaining ethic of the movement has spanned its existence from the earliest days in Ferguson to more recent protests in St. Louis and around the world. One of the resonant themes of love on Twitter since the beginning of Ferguson protests is the definition of community in love: which includes the formation of community, the purpose and aims of community, and a specific communal intervention against white supremacy and the possibilities of violence. These strains of thought share many similarities or resonances with the thinking and discussion Black Lives Matter does about love. Alexis Templeton, a co-founder of the queer feminist organization Millennial Activists United (MAU), tweeted in the early August, “we have grown over the past 7 days. We are holding our people accountable. We are taking our own stand. That’s love! #Ferguson”<sup>231</sup> Just a week into the protests Templeton defines the actions of the movement as love: holding people accountable (presumably for actions-in-protest that put themselves or the community at risk) and making “our own stand.” In these terms, Templeton demonstrates the way that the tough and dangerous actions of the early movement, the earliest attempts to create community (“we have grown”) are constitutive of love. A little less than a year later, live-streamer and commentator Chuck Modi tweeted, during a late-night jail support rally at the St. Louis County Justice Center (holding cells), “STLC Justice Center 4am:

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<sup>231</sup> Alexis Templeton (@audreoverlorde). Twitter Post. August 16, 2014 1:41 AM. <https://twitter.com/audreoverlorde/status/500532860047351808>

You cannot separate #Ferguson spirit of resistance from its radical love for one another” with an accompanying picture of folks gathered waiting with snacks, drinks and games for protestors arrested at an MAU action to be released.<sup>232</sup> Modi expresses a sentiment not dissimilar from Templeton a year prior—the centrality of love in work of building community, work that includes building accountability and also supporting members of the community in confrontation with the police state, here, by performing jail support. Both understandings of love include actions – holding people accountable, supporting those involved – and are central to the movement. The movement *is* “radical love for one another.”

Love also functions as a motivating affect for many organizers. DeRay Mckesson argues both that “love is the why”<sup>233</sup> of protest and that “there is family in protest. There is love in protest.”<sup>234</sup> Love simultaneously inspires and motivates organizing, and circulates in organizing communities. Protest originates from love and creates a community in which love exists between actors. Moreover, the community of protest, described as family, relies on a non-romantic frame of cultural reference regarding love, a frame that, although not without its strife, includes the possibility for disagreement, but ultimately remains a commitment to others members of the community in love. As Organization for Black Struggle organizer Kayla Reed says, “We do this because we love each other.”<sup>235</sup> Love for individuals or ideals motivates organizing efforts, motivates the fight. Love for those involved in protest motivates continued protest. Not unlike the articulations of love by Black Lives Matter, this love includes a specific love for Black

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<sup>232</sup> Chuck Modi (@POPSspotSports) Twitter Post. August, 11, 2015 5:00 AM  
<https://twitter.com/ChuckModi1/status/631027320472645635>

<sup>233</sup> DeRay Mckesson (@deray). Twitter Post. June 29, 2015, 6:59 PM.  
<https://twitter.com/deray/status/55339874055729153>

<sup>234</sup> DeRay Mckesson (@deray). Twitter Post. March 21, 2015 6:40 PM  
<https://twitter.com/deray/status/579427405024116736>

<sup>235</sup> Kayla Reed (@RE\_invent\_ED) Twitter Post. February 18, 2015. 6:29 PM. “We do this because we love each other. Now we can let the bullshit in or we can remember that love is what will get us free.”  
[https://twitter.com/RE\\_invent\\_ED/status/568567989731069953](https://twitter.com/RE_invent_ED/status/568567989731069953)

people and Blackness, but in a way that allows for an opening outward rather than a closing. Mckesson tweets frequently, “I love my blackness. And yours.”<sup>236</sup> First, Mckesson grounds love of his own experience and understanding of Blackness – a specific experience – in the foreground, but the end of this statement “and yours” opens the statement outwards, for multiple expressions and understandings of Black community, culture and identity. Of course, this love includes conditions, namely Blackness, but in his intentional refusal to limit the notion of Blackness his conditions are much more elastic than those that Ahmed critiques. And, although in a more complicated and specific way than Berlant, they emphasize the uncompromising centrality of loving Blackness in the movement.

Love also provides a communal way to respond to the difficulties faced by protestors. Templeton, presumably gearing up for a day (or more likely, night) of protest tweeted, “If nobody told you today, I love you. And I mean that shit.”<sup>237</sup> This tweet performs love as an act of resistance in a time of precarity. In the specific climate of protest, especially in early September when they sent this tweet, when protestors faced extremely harsh and regular police violence, it seemed anyone could be harmed or die at any moment and many people were willing, even expecting, to die (many still are), for the movement. Of course, in a more general climate of a state built on doing violence to Black bodies, precarity and the possibility of violence always exists for Black people. In this instance, Templeton articulates to love for a generalized audience, their Twitter followers, although they presumably understand those followers to be mostly Black. This love, variants of which were expressed by others as well, rests on the understanding of the possibility of loss, and insists on love in the face of that possibility. It also, in a roundabout way,

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<sup>236</sup> DeRay Mckesson (@deray). Twitter Post. April 11, 2016 9:27 PM  
<https://twitter.com/deray/status/719713577448316929>; Same content: November 13, 2015, 5:32 PM.  
<https://twitter.com/deray/status/665311257151557633>

<sup>237</sup> Alexis Templeton (@audreoverlorde) Twitter Post. September 16, 2014 12:38 PM.  
<https://twitter.com/audreoverlorde/status.511932238494060544>

provides a similar statement to Reed's – a declaration of purpose. Sent in the hours leading up to protest, Templeton's tweet can also be read as a promise to fight for the people they love. As Templeton tweeted in December of 2014, "To see people in a time of tragedy love strangers SO hard, it's special."<sup>238</sup> Five months in, Templeton still notes the power of strangers coming together, affectively binding community in love under conditions of threat and police violence. Unlike Berlant's space of love, trauma proceeds the space of love and remains even as people come together in love.

### *Love & solidarity*

Almost precisely as Sara Ahmed proposes at the close of *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, love shines as an affect in anti-police brutality organizing with which to name "the very affect of solidarity with others in work that is done to create a different world."<sup>239</sup> Both within the Ferguson protest community and more broadly in anti-police brutality organizing, and movements for justice worldwide, protestors use the language of love to articulate solidarity. Within the movement, love often notes the solidarity of community members with the ongoing struggle of Ferguson protestors. For example, after the police-murder of Mansur Ball-Bey in the city of St. Louis,<sup>240</sup> Reed tweeted, "I get to the memorial and the Myers are there in solidarity. That's love."<sup>241</sup> The Myers, the parents of police brutality victim Vonderrit Myers,<sup>242</sup> are well-respected members of the protest community at-large, but they, and other immediate family

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<sup>238</sup> Alexis Templeton (@audreoverlorde) Twitter Post. December 17, 2014 11:49 PM.

<https://twitter.com/audreoverlorde/status/545455786667696128>

<sup>239</sup> Ahmed, *Cultural Politics*, 141

<sup>240</sup> Lawrence Bryant, "Mansur Ball-Bey: Autopsy Reportedly Shows Man Killed by St. Louis Police Was Shot in Back." *CBSNews*. August 20, 2015. <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/mansur-ball-bey-report-autopsy-shows-man-killed-st-louis-police-shot-in-back/>.

<sup>241</sup> Kayla Reed (@RE\_invent\_ED). Twitter Post. August 21, 2015 7:48PM

[https://twitter.com/RE\\_invent\\_ED/status/634889942431240192](https://twitter.com/RE_invent_ED/status/634889942431240192)

<sup>242</sup> Christine Byers, "No Charges against St. Louis Officer Who Killed VonDerrit Myers." *Stltoday.com*. May 18, 2015. [http://www.stltoday.com/news/local/crime-and-courts/no-charges-against-st-louis-officer-who-killed-vonderrit-myers/article\\_5641ecfd-4b37-54c1-b717-1a7d84500892.html](http://www.stltoday.com/news/local/crime-and-courts/no-charges-against-st-louis-officer-who-killed-vonderrit-myers/article_5641ecfd-4b37-54c1-b717-1a7d84500892.html).

members of police brutality victims, are not always (in St Louis particularly) organizers and generally protest communities do not expect their constant involvement. Noting here the exceptional, but appreciated presence of the Myers family, Reed names their expression of bodily presence and solidarity with the families of other victims of police brutality as love. In Chicago, via organizer Deivid Rojas' Twitter protestors call "we love you" to arrestees, sending solidarity across the police line to those arrested.<sup>243</sup> This love demonstrates solidarity internal to the protesting community, one that recognizes and attempts to support the risky choices and immediate consequences of direct action. This space allowed by love, in the moment of precarity, allows protestors to take risks that may previously seem impossible. Moreover, both by using love in the space of protest and by archiving it through Twitter, love performs solidarity, presencing those who have been removed or might be forgotten. In both cases, love names a form of solidarity within the protest community. Across space, including across the bars of jails, love names an affect with which protestors communicate support for other like-minded individuals undertaking struggles for justice.

There's also a common practice amongst protestors to use love to name gestures of solidarity with others protesting police brutality, government corruption or systemic racism internationally. Many have noted the use of Twitter to express international solidarity, especially between demonstrators in Palestine tweeting Ferguson protestors strategies for treating tear gas exposure and Ferguson protestors responding by flying the Palestinian flag.<sup>244</sup> Legal observer and protest accomplice Keith Rose tweeted in late September a picture of signs he made to

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<sup>243</sup> Deivid Rojas (@DeividSRojas). Twitter Post. October 24, 2015 6:45 PM. "'We love you' Message from badass Chicago Black youth to arrestees #StopTheCops #FundBlackFutures @BYP\_100"  
<https://twitter.com/DeividSRojas/status/658051688377548800>

<sup>244</sup> Bassem Masri, "The Fascinating Story of How the Ferguson-Palestine Solidarity Movement Came Together." *Alternet*. February 18, 2015. <http://www.alternet.org/activism/frontline-ferguson-protester-and-palestinian-american-bassem-masri-how-ferguson2palestine>.

express solidarity with the 2014 Hong Kong protests, “Printing signs in Chinese for #Ferguson protestors to send love to #HongKong tonight!”<sup>245</sup> Here, Ferguson protestors call gestures of solidarity love, something sent to those facing similar, yet different, state repression in protests elsewhere, moving the margins that protestors see internationally. And this strategy isn’t just used by activists in Ferguson, but by activists affiliated with anti-police brutality movements in other contexts as well. Toronto-based activist Ryan Singh tweeted to Black Lives Matter affiliate demonstrators occupying the Toronto Police Service’s Headquarters, “Solidarity to #BLMTOtentcity and @BLM\_TO. Police brutality must be ended & structural racism destroyed. Love to you all. #blacklivesmatter”<sup>246</sup> Singh articulates support and solidarity for the protests demands, and also uses or sends love to those continuing to demonstrate, using love as a way to name solidarity between those struggling for justice.

### *Love & care work*

Love plays a role in the movement not only in theatrical spaces of protest, but in more mundane moments as well. Communities, whatever they are structured around, also rely on emotional and caring labors to keep members alive and well. Many in the movement name these moments of care and support as love. Much of this relates to the use of the Assata Shakur quote, “It is our duty to fight for our freedom. It is our duty to win. *We must love and support each other.* We have nothing to lose but our chains,” used in the streets by many activists and organizers. The definitions and dimensions of “love and support” in the movement are a part of the contested definition of love on and off Twitter. As Templeton argues “the love and support aspect of the Assata quote is the hardest part to understand & ensure, even more than the losing

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<sup>245</sup> Keith Rose (@KWRose). Twitter Post. September 28, 2014 5:07 PM  
<https://twitter.com/KWRose/status/516348539870666754>

<sup>246</sup> Ryan Singh (@ryansinghTO) Twiter Post. March 22, 2016 8:36 AM  
<https://twitter.com/ryansinghTO/status/712271821807218688>



of the chains. Just because it's SO HARD to love & support 'each other.' Because 'each other' embodies a culture of oppressed whose love & support varies."<sup>247</sup> Recognizing that the dimensions of love and support are varied and difficult to accomplish under conditions of oppression, they recall the way hooks talks about love, as something we have often learned to do in potentially dangerous ways, something at which we must practice and become better.<sup>248</sup> Moreover, they articulate the work involved in understanding and undertaking love in the face of unloving conditions. As I will elaborate in the conclusion, the long history of gendered expectations impact care work impacts both who does care work in the movement and how it is received.

Many on Twitter also named and described certain actions and practices as love, fleshing out a resonant movement conception of love work. These moments often report certain embodied practices of care and then describe them as love. This indicates that the language of love circulates through the movement as a way of describing and explaining its practices. As Marissa Southards, a white ally in the Ferguson protests expressed, "I cannot sit idle while our community suffers. A kind word, a note of support, a hug – these things are important to keep focused. Black lives matter. These voices matter. I support them with love."<sup>249</sup> Southards notes different labors of care – words, physical gestures (a hug, a note) – as the parts that make up a loving support for activists. In the early days of the protest, Mckesson tweeted "Hot food center. This is love. This is community #ferguson"<sup>250</sup> with an accompanying picture of a man serving food to protestors from a tent outside. Mckesson names a necessary labor of self-preservation

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<sup>247</sup> Alexis Templeton (@audreoverlorde). Twitter Posts. December 29, 2014 12:35 PM (<https://twitter.com/audreoverlorde/status/549634734792646656>) & 12:36 PM (<https://twitter.com/audreoverlorde/status/549635071339405312>)

<sup>248</sup> See: hooks, *All About Love*

<sup>249</sup> Marissa Southards, quoted in Faces of the Movement (facesofthemvmt), Tumblr Post. March 24, 2015, <http://facesofthemvmt.tumblr.com/post/114577551351/i-cannot-sit-idle-while-our-community-suffers-a>

<sup>250</sup> DeRay Mckesson (@deray). Twitter Post. August 21, 2014 9:22 PM <https://twitter.com/deray/status/502641875699126274>

(eating) as one of love. Communal eating is a part of community formation, and naming this practice as love demonstrates the attention within the movement to the building of a loving community through labors of care. Similarly, Charles Wade, the co-founder of the direct service organization Operation Help Or Hush (OHOH), formed in the wake of initial protests to provide support to protestors and activists uses love to describe certain labors. He often similarly tweets descriptive sentences punctuated with “that’s love,” naming particular efforts of care as love. For example, “#Ferguson resident who works at the store came over and used his employee discount to help us today. That’s love!”<sup>251</sup> or “One of the great things that came out of last night: an offer to do all of non-profit paperwork with us. That’s love.”<sup>252</sup> These two labors are distinct, but both involve the primary offer of time – going out of one’s way to make the tasks the organization is trying to accomplish for the movement easier, by providing skills or monetary perks. While much of the work of OHOH could easily be named as care labor (feeding people, providing medical supplies, caring for children) these are less easily marked as care labor, and yet are still named as part of love. By including these things as acts of love, Wade includes work as part of love, and engagement with undesirable tasks underscoring the effort and care that are involved in love. Love, as a practice moves toward specific and mundane daily activities of caring – unlike a romantic picture of love, love here is hard, build relationally over a long time.

### *The difficulty of love*

The difficulty and minutia of care work and community creation results in a complex and internally fraught understanding of love. Creating and sustaining a loving community of imperfect human beings means there will inevitably be discomfort, harm, falling outs, and

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<sup>251</sup> Charles Wade (@akacharleswade). Twitter Post. September 23, 2014 2:21 PM  
<https://twitter.com/akacharleswade/status/514494770950176768>

<sup>252</sup> Charles Wade (@akacharleswade). Twitter Post. September 1, 2014 9:28 AM  
<https://twitter.com/akacharleswade/status/506448584208687104>

difficulties – as the movement understands love, love, too is work and not an inevitability. As DeRay says, “I have learned not to be seduced by the notions of inevitability – whether it’s progress, hope, love, or friendship. It all requires work.”<sup>253</sup> The suspicion of teleology underlies the insistence on the work required to create and sustain the work of the movement. The movement has had intense periods of conflict and disagreement, people within the movement have caused harm, either intentionally or accidentally to each other in ways that are difficult to heal and redress. This includes both broad patterns and specific moments of sexism and homophobia, moments of violence or abuse between protestors, as happens, sadly, in almost all communities, or disagreements between organizers about direction, goals or particular actions. These moments are difficult to catalogue, as many within the movement are concerned with the way protests receive coverage and therefore are unlikely to document certain disagreements. Moreover, as protestors against police brutality and mass incarceration, Ferguson activist communities are extremely skeptical to involve police in addressing potentially illegal actions, as they well should be considering police responses. I raise this set of conversations about the difficulty of love not as a criticism of the movement or the movement community; of course these struggles are not unique to this movement or moment. Rather, examining the ways even those who profess a great and continuing interest in the power of love find fault or shortcoming in its execution deepens and complicates the picture of love I am providing. Moreover, it demonstrates the resonance of love as an affective naming in Ferguson even in moments that test its strength. As much as the visions of love are coming from them, for queer people and women in the movement, there have been intense moments of conflict and silence about misogyny, homophobia, and transphobia in the movement. Developing the concept of collective love

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<sup>253</sup> DeRay Mckesson (@deray) Twitter Post. June 19, 2015 8:01 PM.  
<https://twitter.com/deray/status/612062582518730752>

including practices of accountability stays true to the values of the movement and moves away from carceral and punishment frames of understanding transgressions in community. In other words, love which includes accountability accounts for those harmed without relying on state-based solutions of arrest or adjudication.

For some, a general and overarching love trumps all other conflicts. As Mckesson tweets to a Black audience specifically, “We won’t always agree. But I will always believe in your right to breathe. I may love you from a distance, but it’s love. #Ferguson”<sup>254</sup> Here, a general love for Black people and Blackness becomes broad and non-specific and allows for both disagreement and a less personal involvement than previous iterations of care and support labor. This love does not paint as pretty a picture as some of the others, but deals more fully with the reality of human relationships, which often include disagreement and even sometimes-necessary disjuncture. Templeton devotes a lot of time and space on Twitter to thinking about the difficulties of love, especially since they, along with their wife, organizer and MAU-co-founder Brittany Ferrell, have been on the receiving end of a lot of homophobic vitriol and constant misgendering.<sup>255</sup> They say, “All I know is I hate people. All I know is I want to get free. All I know is all the people I hate, I love enough to get free.”<sup>256</sup> Here, Templeton expresses a (perhaps somewhat intentionally hyperbolic) hatred for people in the movement and beyond. Mckesson similarly insists on a general love and a particular dislike at the same time. These tweets underscore the way many in the movement have not, as hooks or Darnell Moore might put it, loved well but reproduced the exclusions and violences of hegemonic power structures (white supremacy,

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<sup>254</sup> DeRay Mckesson (@deray) Twitter Post. October 30, 2014 6:48 PM. “Black. We won’t always agree. But I will always believe in your right to breathe. I may love you from a distance, but it’s love. #Ferguson” <https://twitter.com/deray/status/527970314840707072>

<sup>255</sup> See: Cardwell, “Where My Girls At.”

<sup>256</sup> Alexis Templeton (@audreoverlorde) Twitter Post. December 15, 2014 9:12 PM <https://twitter.com/audreoverlorde/status/544691601889452033>

capitalism, heteropatriarchy).<sup>257</sup> Many who operate under the revolutionary call of love and simultaneously do harm and violence to other members of the community, both physically and emotionally.<sup>258</sup> The movement responds to this reality with the commitment of many in the movement to link love and accountability. As Templeton expressed, replying to Mckesson, “In fact, to hold you accountable means I love you.”<sup>259</sup> Accountability, understood by the movement as public reckoning and an imperative for behavioral change, becomes a necessary part of building a loving community, accountability reflects a different sort of love: a love which admits the possibility of its own failure in a complicated, ever-changing practice.

In its contradictory tone of, “I hate you but I love you,” accountability allows for community that acknowledges harm and seeks to redress it or, perhaps, to remove those who refuse to make amends or change their ways. It rejects a narrative that would have women and LGBTQ people hold their tongues in the face of misogyny, homophobia, and transphobia in the name of love for a larger movement. In the movement, many comment on the perceived pressure to remain silent on certain internal disagreements in favor of presenting a united front.<sup>260</sup> In light of this pressure, protestors demand the removal of silence from the conception of love. Mckesson

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<sup>257</sup> Darnell Moore, “You Are Not My Leader If You Don’t Love Me,” *Huffington Post*. February 17, 2016 [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/darnell-l-moore/you-arent-leader-if-you-dont-love\\_b\\_9229394.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/darnell-l-moore/you-arent-leader-if-you-dont-love_b_9229394.html)

<sup>258</sup> See, Alexis Templeton (@audreoverlorde): Twitter Post. October 23, 2015 10:45 AM. “I just hate so many of my ppl feel like they’re outcasted & unloved in a movement \*supposedly\* about inclusion, affirmation & black love.” <https://twitter.com/audreoverlorde/status/657583705519624192>; Twitter Post. November 30, 2015 11:51 PM. “i’m not here to show fake unity & fake love with folks who make my stomach turn, who physically make me sick. i’m just here to get u free.” <https://twitter.com/audreoverlorde/status/671567223358550017>; Twitter Post. April 25, 2015 2:12 PM. “Folks claim to be fighting for Black liberation in one breath, then turn to the person next to them & call me a “dike bitch” in the next. [crying emoji]” <https://twitter.com/audreoverlorde/status/592043485345132544>; and DeRay Mckesson (@deray). Twitter Post. January 29, 2016 2:39 PM “I’ve found that it is often the folks who yell about “revolutionary love” the most that have been the most toxic.” <https://twitter.com/deray/status/693141442735251456>

<sup>259</sup> See, Alexis Templeton (@audreoverlorde) and DeRay Mckesson (@deray). Twitter Post. February 6, 2015. 9:49 AM. “In fact, to hold you accountable means I love you RT @deray: Accountability is not synonymous with attack.” <https://twitter.com/audreoverlorde/status/563726179027275776>

<sup>260</sup> For one example of this pressure and historic and legal lack of attention intersectionality in both mainstream Black and feminist movements, see Kimberle Crenshaw on Anita Hill’s accusations of sexual harassment during Clarence Thomas’ confirmation hearings: Kimberle Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color.” *Stanford Law Review* (1991): 1241-1299.

says, “Love is never a request for silence.”<sup>261</sup> This love holds itself accountable to the voices at its own margins, insisting on the questioning of the actions and practices of those at the center. Related to accountability, the refusal to allow love to become a silencing force, the insistence on speaking truth within love, *in the name of love*, powerfully troubles the understanding of many of love’s detractors who worry about love’s homogenizing tendencies.

I believe this provides a Black feminist queering of the concept of love, troubling its theoretical borders, allowing for a love that includes and excludes at the same time, binds even as it pushes away. Establishing both care work and accountability as principle actions within love reflects a sort of work that continuously reworks and reshapes the community as protestors build it. The complexity of love, and the insistence on a love that acknowledges its own failure in activist cultures, is crucial to a movement that rejects the closing in and silencing possibilities of love that Ahmed fears. Acknowledging the possibility, or even expecting love will occasionally fail, the movement sees these moments of failure as productive points of engagement to rework the way the community practices love. While uncritical patriotic love relies on a unidirectional accountability – the citizens accountable to the nation – multicultural love relies on multidirectional accountability of community members to each other in so far as each meets conditions of national belonging. This self-critical love at work in Ferguson insists on a multidirectional accountability of all members of community to each other in their differences, which are *given priority to speak loudly from the margins*. It allows a continuation of a broad and elastically bounded love (I will perform acts of love – resistance – even for those I dislike or distrust), while maintaining the importance of accountability (I will not perform these acts without critique, there will be a reckoning). The self-critical and reflective love of the movement

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<sup>261</sup> DeRay Mckesson (@deray) Twitter Post. May 4, 2015 9:52 AM.  
<https://twitter.com/deray/status/595239539670659072>

consistently troubles the margins of both the movement community and the very concept of love. By building on its own failures in a way that does not assume any certain end, but a continuous process of fleshing out what practices, attachments and ideals constitute love, the movement articulates love as an imperfect reflective practice, rather than a firmly affectively bounded community.

## **Conclusion**

Looking to Twitter allows me to examine the emotional artifacts, the digital archives of meaning and affect of the movement in Ferguson, and proves that from the earliest days to the most recent protests, love is a powerfully complex resonant concept for activists and protestors in St. Louis and beyond. The articulation of love by protestors in Ferguson shares affinities with Black Lives Matter's understanding of the resistance movement as founded in and envisioning love. Ferguson activists build on this by naming acts of solidarity as love, building the affective resonance of the movement across space and pushing the margins of the movement beyond the United States, as in the cases of solidarity with protests in Hong Kong and ongoing Palestinian resistance movements. Activists in Ferguson also trouble the conceptual boundaries love farther through their self-reflective understanding of love's difficulty: the boring and laborious aspects of care work and accountability, as well as the acknowledgement and embrace of failure.

This love does not stand alone in crisp conceptual perfection, it includes space for dissent, disagreement, and other emotions often considered at odds with love (rage and grief). It pushes against previous understandings of love and the sorts of consuming national loves which would have those most marginalized subjugate their voices to a broader movement narrative. Moreover, in the acceptance and embrace of love's moments of failure, the movement troubles existing narratives of love, instead insisting on love as a constantly moving target, imperfectly

achieved and always open to testing and transforming its own boundaries. In using these examples, I mean to show that the movement's definition of love and support is broad and diverse, that many things, including traditionally understood care labors as well as other investments of time, energy or resources are understood as a part of creating and sustaining a loving movement. Ferguson activists struggle to achieve love, understood as a resonant constellation of practices and ideals, in the context of continuous uncertainty and physical precarity. Across the dislocated spaces of protest, Twitter's mediating technology allows protestors to store and critique their own actions – Twitter as a reflective archive of affective moments and understandings of love in Ferguson includes a rich understanding and critique of love's purpose in organizing and building community. In order to understand the flesh and blood consequences of the developing idea of love in Ferguson, we must look to the movements in which Ferguson activists perform love in public, the moments that create the archive that exists on Twitter. In the next chapter, I will develop an understanding of love's role in action in the offline space of Ferguson, the spaces that animate and complicate love's salience as an emotion circulated between bodies in public.



## Chapter 4 - We Must Love and Support Each Other

### The performance of love in protest

We need to reflect on our history as it happens or we will forget... [let it be said] that we struggled with how to be angry and loving at the same time. – Sarah Barasch-Hagans, faith-based activist and founder of the Fargesn Media Project<sup>262</sup>

After turning to Twitter in the previous chapter, I want to turn in this final chapter to the embodied space and affective pull of offline protests. These spaces of protest build and shape the communities involved, especially in their affective dimension. The ever-changing performance and articulation of love in Ferguson's protest politics marks love itself as a site of ongoing contestation in the movement. I am interested in the complex and contested ways that the movement attempts to theorize and embody politics of love: what does it mean to come together politically in love? In other words, what role does love play in the public spaces and actions that Ferguson protestors create and perform? What does it mean to orient oneself towards bullets and riot gear while arguing for love, feeling love, believing in the capacity and power of love that does not close in but open outward towards others?

Seeking to answer these questions, I turn to ongoing demonstrations, their reception and coverage to understand the way they challenge the politics of love that exists in conversation or ideology, as I discussed in chapters two and three. I introduce protest in physical space because conversations about love in organizing, both on Twitter and by Black Lives Matter, are reflected and refracted in the daily practice of a movement. In this chapter I draw from my own notes collected over protests I attended in the last two years, organized by various groups and in various places in and around Ferguson and St. Louis. I turn to my particular experiences as an intimate juncture at which I am able to observe the actions of others and investigate my experience of affect. I am hopeful that from my own vantage point I can provide a certain picture

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<sup>262</sup> Sarah Barasch-Hagans, "Fargesn Media Project" (lecture, Burroughs High School, St. Louis, MO, January 14, 2016).

of both what happened and how I engaged the affect of individual moments of protest. Of course, my experiences are limited. Recall as Ahmed says that, “emotions in their very intensity involve miscommunication, such that even when we feel we have the same feeling, we don’t have the same relationship to the feeling.”<sup>263</sup> Not only do our experiences of particular feelings necessarily informed by individual experiences, they are informed by social structures of power: race, class, gender, ability and sexuality among them. I am writing about love in protest *because* I am not the only person talking about love. I write from my own experiences because those are the only experiences of feeling love in protest of which I can be certain even though my experiences are necessarily limited.

Building on the historic uses of embodied action in the tradition of civil disobedience, (a tactic used in many instances in Ferguson and St. Louis), academics and artists in the field of performance studies have noted the way in which contemporary protestors the world over “put in practice a variety of communicative styles and mobilizing techniques that include strategic uses of non-linguistic, embodied actions as statement” which are, often through the archives of social media, circulated and reproduced as simultaneously symbolic and embodied political acts.<sup>264</sup> In looking briefly to performance studies, I am interested in examining the ways love *performs* or *demonstrates* certain things in protest, creates certain affective moments and embodied responses. In turning to performance, I am not suggesting that these actions do not have purchase as actions alone, or that they are all intentionally invested in aesthetics and symbolism, although that is a dimension of many protests. Rather, I am arguing for a performance analysis, for what protests say as well as what they do. In what follows, I will first provide a brief picture of several

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<sup>263</sup> Ahmed, *Cultural Politics*, 10

<sup>264</sup> Marcela A. Fuentes, “Performance, Politics and Protest” in *What is Performance Studies?* ed. Diana Taylor and Marcos Steuernagel. (Durham: Duke UP, 2015). <http://scalar.usc.edu/nehvectors/wips/performance-politics-and-protest>

moments at which organizers use love. Then, I will develop a more in-depth example drawing on the particular work of Millennial Activists United, analyzing the founding of the organization, the use of Assata Shakur's quote in their organizing, and particular actions I have attended. Using participant observations from protests in and around Ferguson, I will argue that love links together protestors in contested community. Moreover, I argue these affective links also work to link protestors in an oppositional orientation toward the state, while simultaneously defiantly envisioning a different possible world.

### **Love in Ferguson Organizing**

Many organizers in and around Ferguson use love for diverse purposes and to varying degrees of success. These uses of love in public moments of protest form a community and motivate actions with uncertain outcomes. Here, I briefly describe three actions that reflect protestors' use of love in Ferguson and then evaluate these actions to elaborate the use of love to link protestors to each other and to a cause across time and space by ritually preparing for risk taking, and creating the elastic boundaries of the movement in the face of uncertainty or disputes.

#### *Participant observation, demonstrations in Ferguson and St. Louis*

On October 8, 2014, immediately before a large-scale gathering in St. Louis called Ferguson October, an off-duty cop acting as a security guard in St. Louis City murdered Vonderrit Myers, a young man walking home from a convenience store. For many involved in protests since Mike Brown's death, the undeniable parallels between the two deaths reopened recent wounds, and the resulting protests burned emotionally bright, while the police response to the protests mirrored earlier violence. Early in the morning of October 13, 2014, after marching miles through the night, hundreds of activists myself included, gathered in the outdoor amphitheater of St. Louis University (SLU) in a meeting that would become a five-day

occupation of the college.<sup>265</sup> Speakers comically alluded to the holiday that had officially begun: Columbus Day, the perfect day to start an occupation. The crowd seemed tired, but generally seemed jovial, the rush of successful infiltration palpable. Then someone announced that Vonderrit Myers, Sr. would speak about his son, and a hush fell. Myers thanked us for gathering in his son's name and through thick emotion he said, "you are showing me that my son was loved. That he is still being loved right now."<sup>266</sup> In the minutes that followed, the previously rowdy crowd fell completely silent – many people cried, others held up fists, few left despite the fact that the march began roughly five hours earlier. In that moment, I felt connected to the people around me, people that I had never met, connected to a community of love bridging an impossible gap, both between the living and the dead and in the seeming impossibility of community existing under conditions of systemic violence against Black lives.

In a civil disobedience training immediately before "Moral Monday" on the day after the anniversary of Michael Brown's death, Reverend Osagyefo Sekou, leading the training repeated several times "we do this work out of what?" to which the crowd responded "deep abiding love!" Later, when some of us crossed the police barricades, separating a small crowd of around fifty people from a larger crowd of closer to a hundred, police arrested us individually, as those waiting to be arrested and those outside of the barricades shouted, "we love you!" to each person led away.

In January of 2016, at the close of a rally in solidarity with the family of Tamir Rice, organizer Alisha Sonnier with Tribe X,<sup>267</sup> ended the contentious talk back after a march to the

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<sup>265</sup> Fred P. Pestello, "'Occupy SLU' anniversary reminds us all that 'love, compassion, concern, respect for others' define SLU" *University News*, October 2, 2015 <http://www.unewsonline.com/2015/10/02/occupy-slu-anniversary-reminds-us-all-that-love-compassion-concern-respect-for-others-define-slu/>

<sup>266</sup> Personal notes, Oct. 13, 2014 2:53 AM

<sup>267</sup> See the organization's Facebook page: [www.facebook.com/TribeX.STL/timeline](http://www.facebook.com/TribeX.STL/timeline)

federal building, saying, “We need to love each other first. There are people on the side of freedom and people on the side of oppression. That’s it.”

### *Love’s Functions in Ferguson Organizing*

In the beginning moment of Occupy SLU, after hours of marching, those of us in the crowd shared something, something which took place at the birth of something not entirely unlike Arendt’s understanding of action: the occupation of a public space, which would enliven campus activism at SLU and eventually result in changes in the university’s budget priorities and institutional commitments.<sup>268</sup> In coming together, we created a different kind of space than usually held within the walls of a private university, a space also created out of a different affective moment of love than Trump’s narrow ethnic nationalism. We created a particular *performance* of love in politics through making present the disappeared bodies of those killed by police. Myers’ call to love cannot be coherently analyzed from the traditions of patriotism or multicultural tolerance against which Ahmed argues, nor can it be understood as an utterance without an accompanying embodied creation or response. Myers named the appearance of the collective, the occupation as a performance of love, a love that Myers’ makes clear exists for his son from beyond an early and unjust grave. Ferguson activists recall those lost to police brutality, not as one-dimensional heroes, but as humans. This move rejects the need for a perfect hero with a spotless past to organize resistance around and embraces the “rehumanizing” project that BLM engages in, it ruptures the insistence of systems of white supremacy that only the perfect victims deserved humane treatment from police.<sup>269</sup>

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<sup>268</sup> Danny Wicentowski, “Here’s the Agreement that Ended the Occupation of Saint Louis University,” *RiverFront Times*, October 21, 2014 <http://www.riverfronttimes.com/newsblog/2014/10/21/heres-the-agreement-that-ended-the-occupation-of-saint-louis-university>

<sup>269</sup> For more on this see Mia McKenzie. “Thing To Stop Being Distracted by When a Black Person Gets Murdered By Police,” *Black Girl Dangerous*, August 12, 2014 <http://www.blackgirldangerous.org/2014/08/things-stop-distracted-black-person-gets-murdered-police/>; ReasonTV. “Ferguson Protestors React to Michael Brown Robbery

The Moral Monday training was marked by the pre-action period of uncertainty, over how the action would play out and how the police would respond, especially considering developing specific plans to push the police to respond with arrests. The ritual of repetition performed by Reverend Sekou linked protestors together in a shared ideology of deep abiding love, linking the protesting community in behind the scenes space of organizing before undertaking the public action. Deep abiding love, which Sekou draws from a religious history of militant non-violent direct action, “says you’re willing to risk your life for what you believe in” it is a faith act which allows us to stay together in the face of impending violence.<sup>270</sup> Reverend Sekou asserts his role as a follower of the young, queer Black women who lead the movement, and argues that the fundamental shift at the heart of organizing in Ferguson is that “this generation has made a commitment to love its way out.”<sup>271</sup> Using this deep abiding love as a tool for continuance in organizing in the space of precarity towards a different possibility, Sekou desires a “breaking open [of] the meaning of what the church is.”<sup>272</sup> In a moment where I felt uncertain about whether or not to participate in the arrestable action, the call to love, the way that I felt attached to this shared community and shared ideals bounded by love, moved me beyond my feeling of uncertainty to participate in the action fully. In the moment of the arrests, the call to love from those external to the arrestable action (those standing behind the barrier), similarly to the practice ritual, created affective attachment across space, which moved me to continue on

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Footage,” Filmed August 2014. YouTube video, 2:48min. Posted August 15, 2014.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2AJIXYWW\\_Dw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2AJIXYWW_Dw)

<sup>270</sup> Kerry Picket, “Organizers Train Newly Minted Protestors In St. Louis,” *Breitbart News*, November 17, 2014 <http://www.breitbart.com/big-government/2014/11/17/organizers-train-newly-minted-protesters-in-st-louis/>; This source is unexpected, but I have heard Sekou say all of these things, so I believe it’s an accurate representation of his remarks during non-violent direct action trainings.

<sup>271</sup> Sarah van Gelder, “Rev. Sekou on Today’s Civil Rights Leaders: ‘I Take My Orders From 23-Year-Old Queer Women,’” *Yes! Magazine* July 22, 2015 <http://www.yesmagazine.org/peace-justice/black-lives-matter-s-favorite-minister-reverend-sekou-young-queer>

<sup>272</sup> SCUPE Chicago, “Rev. Osagyefo Sekou – From the Front Lines in Ferguson [Full Speech]” Vimeo video, 34:29min, Posted February 2, 2015 <https://vimeo.com/118527184>

an uncertain and initially frightening path. I have mixed feelings about arrests as a protest strategy because arrests carry different risks and consequences across race, class, gender and sexuality that are often collapsed in rhetoric of the importance of civil disobedience. Ultimately, however, this gesture of love prompted me to stay the course – my sense of community and linking with others undertaking a similar risk.<sup>273</sup>

In the case of Sonnier’s quote at the rally for Tamir Rice, articulated at the end of a much contested action, love created the boundary of the protest community. Yet this boundary, “people on the side of freedom,” is fluid and elastic at the same time as it is an affective attempt to bind the community in the face of disputes. Here, protestors use love to establish and contest the boundaries of their own communities. As I argued in chapter three, the space of protest community involves negotiating and contesting both protective and unsystematized lines of connection. In this moment Sonnier draws a protective line of those “on the side of freedom” in order to negotiate the contested internal unsystematized lines (“we need to love each other”). In this case, I felt less moved than other instances, as the conversations happening (about protest strategy, leaders in a leaderless movement) are also deeply important to me. In other words, despite this use of love at the end of the event, I left conflicted, not quieted. Indeed, among my mother’s protest family,<sup>274</sup> the discussion of the event and its shortcomings, continued for weeks

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<sup>273</sup> I say similar because the risk is certainly not the same for me as a white woman as it is for other members of this community: for people of color, especially Black people and queer people of color, arrest, both in the possible treatment of law enforcement in the act of imprisonment *and* the continuing possibility of having an arrest record hold different meanings and consequences. Moreover, arrest risks bodily safety, especially for queer and trans people of color, and bodies respond to risk differently (meaning, as a person with a relatively healthy and able body, I am more able to risk my body than those who do not occupy my positions of privilege). Often, I find the rhetoric of civil disobedience alienating for this reason: getting arrested is necessarily not a universal good for either individuals or for a movement. Using arrest records as a measure of legitimacy or radicalness, as a form of movement credentialism, creates an environment in which outsiders come to St. Louis and Ferguson to say they got arrested for “Black Lives Matter,” without really committing to the long-term, slow moving, not photo-friendly work that liberation requires.

<sup>274</sup> Many people in the movement talk about “protest family,” which may or may not include biological family, but is generally understood to refer to the specific group of people with which you stick together in protests and actions. These families are certainly formed by the necessity of safety in numbers, but they often develop into deep, critical

afterward. Yet, Sonnier still performs a strategy of binding a community together against the possibility of falling apart, and still in those debates about the merits of specific actions, activists continued to return to movement spaces.

### **Millennial Activists United**

Love's use in protest is particularly strong in the organization Millennial Activists United. The group, formed by a set of young, Black, queer activists, most of them women, including originally Alexis Templeton, Brittany Ferrell, Ashley Yates, Zakiya Jemmontt, and Larry Fellows III met through their involvement in organizing protests and Twitter.<sup>275</sup> While the membership of the group has changed over time, Templeton and Ferrell have continued to play a central role in organizing. The tactics of the group have changed during the course of the protests; as Ferrell says, "we were out in Ferguson everyday with resistance, marching and chanting. In between doing those things, we fed protestors that were out...we turned into either raging protestors or medics. Equipped with masks, Maalox and apple cider remedies and other things to treat gas exposure."<sup>276</sup> The flexibility of the organization, and the way it changes over time, reflects a broad commitment to the cause and a willingness to play to the changing needs of the community.

One of the hallmarks of Millennial Activists United's organizing practices is the use of Assata Shakur's quote "it is our duty to fight for our freedom. It is our duty to win. We must love

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and humorous communities with which people protest and also enjoy themselves: having dinner parties and attending concerts.

<sup>275</sup> Kristin Braswell, "#FergusonFridays: Not all of the Black freedom fighters are men: An Interview with Black Women on the Front line in Ferguson," *The Feminist Wire*, October 3, 2014 <http://www.thefeministwire.com/2014/10/fergusonfridays-black-freedom-fighters-men-interview-black-women-front-line-ferguson/>; Millennial Activists United (millennialau). Tumblr Post. "Millennial Activists United (& community leaders) calls for chief Thomas Jackson to resign," October 4, 2014

<http://millennialau.tumblr.com/post/99352057781/millennial-activists-united-community-leaders>

<sup>276</sup> Braswell, "#FergusonFridays"



and support each other. We have nothing to lose but our chains.”<sup>277</sup> Shakur, a Black Panther Party and the Black Liberation Army activist, has lived in Cuba under a grant of political asylum since her escape from prison on charges of murdering a police officer many believe to be fabricated. She wrote this particular sentence at the end of letter, “Letter to My People,” which Shakur penned from prison after her initial arrest. In the letter, Shakur proclaims her love for Black people and argues against the state narrative used against her. She also writes “every revolution in history has been accomplished by actions, although words are necessary.”<sup>278</sup> In coupling her words with their actions, MAU takes Shakur up on her demand, joining words of love and struggle to actions that include highway shutdowns and demonstrations during brunch at fancy restaurants and at the airport during the holiday rush.

The use of Shakur’s quote causes much consternation on the right,<sup>279</sup> and the obvious discomfort this causes certainly accounts for part of the turn to Shakur’s words. Moreover, Shakur’s uncompromising stance and recalling her legacy as a political exile encompassed in this quote resonate in a time of profound precarity because of police response to protest. Shakur’s words remain in common use during protests, including by those outside of MAU,<sup>280</sup> as many activists, including Templeton and Ferrell face serious criminal charges. Perhaps this ongoing moment of state persecution accounts for part of the continuing relevance of her work, as her

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<sup>277</sup> Assata Shakur, *Assata: an autobiography*. (London: Zed Books, 1987). 52

<sup>278</sup> Shakur, *an autobiography*, 52

<sup>279</sup> For example: Katie Pavlich, “Exposing The Black Lives Matter Movement for What It Is: Promotion of Cop Killing,” *Townhall*, September 2, 2015 <http://beta.townhall.com/tipsheet/katiepavlich/2015/09/02/exposing-black-lives-matter-for-what-it-is-promotion-of-cop-jilling-n2046941>; Lee Stanahan, “BlackLivesMatter Pays Homage to Marxist Cop Killer At Every Event It Holds,” *Breitbart News*, July 23, 2015 <http://www.breitbart.com/big-government/2015/07/23/blacklivesmatter-pays-homage-to-marxist-cop-killer-at-every-event-it-holds/>; Paul Joseph Watson, “Inspiration Behind ‘Black Lives Matter’ Is On The FBI’s ‘Most Wanted Terrorists’ List,” *InfoWars*, August 28, 2015 <http://www.infowars.com/inspiration-behind-black-lives-matter-is-on-the-fbis-most-wanted-terrorists-list/>

<sup>280</sup> See also the organization Assata’s Daughters: [www.assatasdaughters.org](http://www.assatasdaughters.org)

story verifies the possibility that the state can, has and does engage in the persecution of radical actors.<sup>281</sup>

In looking to the uses of this quote in protest, and specifically to the organizing of MAU, the identity of the organization as a Black queer feminist collective is crucial. In fact, much of left-leaning news coverage surrounding the movement for Black lives includes an emphasis on the leadership of Black queer, transgender and gender non-conforming folks.<sup>282</sup> Working from the texts of folks like Shakur and Audre Lorde,<sup>283</sup> MAU organizes actions and mission in a way that prioritize Black queer folks, especially women and queer people of color, in leadership and solidarity. In this context, the question remains: why turn so decidedly to Assata Shakur, a popularly overlooked figure, and a still-alive practitioner of resistance in the streets of Ferguson?

Using the words of a woman, rather than more popularly quoted men, continually brings to the surface the deep history of Black women's involvement in organizing. Shakur begins with, "it is our duty to fight for our freedom. It is our duty to win." This reflects an uncompromising sense of "duty," bounded by how, in this case it is "our freedom" at stake, meaning that the necessary duty is tied to the position of Black people. "We must love and support each other"

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<sup>281</sup> Rebecca Rivas. "MAU leaders charged for assault, property damage to driver who drove through protestors," *The St. Louis American*, August 11, 2015 [http://www.stlamerican.com/news/local\\_news/article\\_f0bf1612-407d-11e5-a472-87a0c007baf8.html](http://www.stlamerican.com/news/local_news/article_f0bf1612-407d-11e5-a472-87a0c007baf8.html)

<sup>282</sup> See: Derrick Clifton, "Queer women are shaping Chicago's Black Lives Matter movement," *Chicago Reader*, April 7, 2016 <http://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/queer-black-women-shaping-black-lives-matter/Content?oid=21692933>; Marcia Chatelain and Kaavya Asoka, "Women and Black Lives Matter: An Interview with Marcia Chatelain," *Dissent Magazine*, Summer 2015 <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/women-black-lives-matter-interview-marcia-chatelain>; Qasima Wideman, "Y'all White Queers Better Quiet Down in North Carolina," *The Advocate*, April 6, 2016 <http://www.advocate.com/commentary/2016/4/06/yall-white-queers-better-quiet-down-north-carolina>; Darian Aaron, "Queer, trans identities centered in Black Lives Matter Atlanta chapter," *The Georgia Voice*, December 18, 2015 <http://thegaVOICE.com/queer-trans-identities-centered-in-black-lives-matter-atlanta-chapter/>; Michelangelo Signorile, "DeRay Mckesson, Baltimore Mayoral Candidate, On His Sexuality And Black Lives Matter," *Huffington Post*, March 1, 2016, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/deray-mckesson-gay-black-lives-matter\\_us\\_56fd3599e4b0daf53aeee353](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/deray-mckesson-gay-black-lives-matter_us_56fd3599e4b0daf53aeee353); Walidah Imarisha, "Learn About Black Lives Matter Movement," *Coast Weekend*, March 9, 2016 <http://www.coastweekend.com/cw/coastal-life/20160309/learn-about-black-lives-matter-movement>

<sup>283</sup> See: Templeton, "The Non-Binary Negro," *Medium*

insists on a commitment beyond the duty to fight by bringing in language of community and support through love in struggle. The sentiment “we will win/we’ve already won” is often articulated by religious activists and proponents of civil disobedience.<sup>284</sup> Here, the fact that we will win, although secularized, insists “we have nothing to lose but our chains.” The fact that there is little to lose (for some, there’s obviously a realism to this quote and a metaphor for others) is in itself a liberating statement. Protest will only be liberating, Shakur insists, if it is connected to the duty to “love and support each other”: that is, to the necessity of community and collective struggle toward an eventual creation of a different world. The simultaneity of the tone, both in the militancy of duty and fight, the community formation of “love and support,” and the inevitability of “nothing to lose,” means that the quote in protest performs complicated and interrelated ways of performing both resistance and love.

Building a queer Black feminist understanding of what love could be and do - shouted against a line of cops with shields at the ready, the long form chant performs the most crucial functions of love in the streets of St. Louis: linking the community of protest and defying the state in moments of precarity. These categories are certainly not distinct ones, and by separating them here, my aim is to develop working models of certain functions love plays rather than restricting love in protest to these discrete categories. Of course, collective feelings are often not as collective as we may believe them to be, and it is important to note that Shakur herself intended these words for a certain audience and impact – in other words, she was not writing to inspire an audience of white queer women at multiracial protests, but rather, she wrote her letter to Black people specifically. In fact, white queer activists have a lot to lose other than chains, like the power and privileges of whiteness. In looking at these speech acts as rituals engaged for

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<sup>284</sup> See, Osagyefo Sekou in St. Marys SCA Edu. “Rev. Sekou & The Holy Ghost, ‘The Revolution Has Come’” Filmed January 2016. YouTube video, 4:01min. Posted January 22, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q0HeRudnMB8>

particular aims I desire to investigate the possibilities of what these performances suggest. I argue that in MAU's very use of Assata Shakur's words there is a stark defiance: an insistence on using the words of one of the FBI's most wanted, a woman still alive and still evading authorities portrays a strategic disregard for representatives of the white supremacist state. Millennial Activists United's use of this quote makes starkly apparent the use of love in Ferguson protests not just to link protestors together, but to link protestors together *in opposition and defiance*. First, I will provide three descriptive recollections of moments of protest, and then I will analyze these moments as they perform the work of linking and defying.

### **MAU's demonstrations**

*Video, St. Louis City, October 10, 2014*<sup>285</sup>

A long line of protestors stand, arms linked, directly across from a line of fully armed riot cops with shields up. The video shows Templeton ending one set of chants and announcing that the crowd has said the chant sixty-two times in honor of Mike Brown (it had been sixty-two days since he was killed), they say "thank you for letting us say that to you [the cops]." Then, from the other end of the line, someone asks if the organizers could make the chant clearer for everyone to follow. Templeton responds by raising their voice and walking up and down the line, between the cops and the protestors, continuing the chant.

*Participant observation, The airport action (12.26.2014)*

A demonstration held at Lambert St. Louis International Airport during the holiday rush of 2014. The action consisted largely of chanting and physical performances of protest (dying in, blocking security lines), much to the dismay of airport security. It was a risky move for the

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<sup>285</sup> Heather Wilson, "It Is Our Duty to Fight for Our Freedom..." Vimeo video, 1:25min, Posted October 10, 2014. <https://vimeo.com/108625673>; This instance is the only example at which I was not present, both because it more clearly illuminates the oppositional quality of MAU's use of love than any I have in my notes from my experiences in protest, moreover, I recall seeing this video shortly after I returned from Ferguson October and felt the emotional pull even from the other side of the country.

young organization, as airports are federal jurisdiction and none involved had experience organizing airport disruptions, making it difficult to predict how the action would play out. None of us were arrested, and the demonstration received a lot of attention on Twitter.<sup>286</sup> In the execution of the action, there was a lot of internal conflict, and much anxiety about potential legal complications or security responses. However, as happened at many protests in that period, when asked who was in charge of the protest, multiple protestors responded either “no one” or “Mike Brown.” Officers followed up by asking, “so there’s no one in charge that I can ask to have you leave?” And when the response was again, “no” the group was never formally asked to leave and we were therefore able to protest much longer than anticipated. The protest successfully interrupted the normal flow of business at the airport and inspired some tears and strong emotional responses (mostly anger) among travelers. On its completion, we debriefed the action with those who chose to stay including going over moments of conflict (most notably, one man in the action group spoke over some women) and potential ways in which to approach similar conflicts in the future or to hold accountable those who created conflict. At the very end of this debrief, the organizers led the group in the Shakur chant.

*Participant observation, Highway arrest jail support (8.10.2015-8.11.2015)*

This action revolved around performing jail support, waiting for those who were arrested (sixty-three people) during the shut down of all six lanes of Interstate 70 on “Moral Monday” August 10, 2015.<sup>287</sup> Jail support started early in the evening and lasted well into the next day, with protestors feeding each other, helping charge each other’s phones, sleeping in shifts and

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<sup>286</sup> For example, DeRay Mckesson (deray) Twitter Post. December 26, 2014 2:54 PM, “Airport. STL. Protest. #Ferguson” with attached three pictures of people lying on the ground with protest signs. <https://twitter.com/deray/status/548612792534573056>; This tweet had the highest retweet count of the night: 234 retweets and 183 likes.

<sup>287</sup> KMOV, “63 arrested after 1-70 shutdown; traffic backs up for miles,” *KMOV News St. Louis*, August 10, 2015 <http://www.kmov.com/story/29753887/activists-shut-down-i-70-near-blanchette-bridge>

legal teams strategizing. Most of the night, we were waiting for the buses holding the protestors to arrive, since they couldn't be released until processed through the system. When the bus finally arrived, we rushed around the building to catch a glimpse at the bus and the whole crowd followed the folks (largely Brittany Ferrell, as her voice is distinctive and unmistakable) inside the bus in chanting Shakur's quote. That same night, livestreamer Chuck Modi tweeted the tweet quoted in Chapter Three, "STLC Justice Center 4am: You cannot separate #Ferguson spirit of resistance from its radical love for one another."<sup>288</sup>

*Participant observation, Ferrell and Templeton jailed and released (8.11.2015 - 8.12.2015)*

After Ferrell was processed and released (Templeton was initially arrested during the shutdown, but released before transport because officers could not remember who the arresting officer was), both Ferrell and Templeton were re-arrested on serious charges regarding the highway shutdown of all six lanes of Interstate 70. They were picked up while directly outside the county detention facility doing jail support for members of the original highway arrests who were still waiting to be bailed out the next morning.<sup>289</sup> After hearing about their arrests, a small crowd gathered outside to hold a short vigil as jail support on the evening of the eleventh. During the vigil, Pastor Traci Blackmon led the group in a prayer for justice and a quick release, and we finished by screaming the Shakur quote as loud as possible, with the express intention of getting the sound inside. Ferrell and Templeton were released the next day, to a cheering and confrontational crowd, gathered to demand their immediate release. Amid hugs and cheers, both led the Shakur quote.

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<sup>288</sup> Chuck Modi (@POPSspotSports) Twitter Post. August, 11, 2015 5:00 AM  
<https://twitter.com/ChuckModi1/status/631027320472645635>

<sup>289</sup> Rebecca Rivas, "MAU leaders charged."

## **Love's function in MAU actions**

MAU's use of Assata Shakur's quote in protest serves the interconnected functions of linking protestors together across dislocated spaces and performing opposition and defiance to the state. These functions are certainly interrelated. Creating a loving community in the face of police brutality is itself a form of resistance against a violent and atomistic neoliberal world. Likewise, activists can perform repeated acts of opposition and defiance in part because of the safety established through their commitment to a community based on love and support. In this space of embodied action and risk, MAU provides a complex addition to the politics of love performed, which is not merely descriptive of ties between protestors (as in the case of Twitter's use to archive love shared), but *creative* of possibility in a defiant orientation towards both what exists and what could be.

### *Linking*

The language of love and perhaps an individual feeling of love towards others creates a momentary connection between otherwise unrelated people, potentially challenging the neoliberal terms of relating to one another. While these bonds include the protective bonds necessary to persevere in the face of uncertainty, they also create links that manage unsystematized lines, and contest their own boundaries while orienting the protest community toward alternative possibilities. In some cases, people leverage these fleeting moments of love to create more lasting relationships. For example, my mother sent Christmas cards to her protest friends, they regularly spend social time together, support each other in times of family or individual conflict. Of course, many more times, these moments pass and the people sharing them only return to each other in the next moment of protest togetherness. I have felt affectively connected to many people in protest whose names I may not have known and who I have

consequently never seen. Creating community is an essential part of the protest movement, to create safety and trust in a climate of violence and police efforts to disrupt the aims of the movement. These moments can establish important connection to a certain goal or shared purpose—it is our duty to fight, we must love and support each other. The repeated articulations of Shakur’s quote perform a linking together of protestors in community that includes the commitment to love and support, indicating that the community will stand with its members, support them in times of precarity and uncertainty. These moments can create a feeling of “strength in numbers,” which provides security in the face of the risk taking (of arrest, possible harm, social norm violation) necessary for bold and inventive direct action. Personally, the feeling of love and connection and responsibility to others has created the affective space in which I am willing to take risks in service of a shared goal.

When this also occasionally takes place at the end of a protest, as in the airport action, it can partially smooth over any potential disagreements that existed during the protest. While I do think these moments can be described as “binding” in the sense that they create emotional bonds between protestors, they are best understood in terms similar to Lauren Berlant’s description of the elasticity of the affective space of love<sup>290</sup> – some bonds are fleeting, others lasting, and while they create certain boundaries, drawing distinctions between those inside and outside of the protest moment, they are also fluid and changing. While this may sound potentially contrary to a love invested in disruption, it nevertheless feels important to the sustained, internally disruptive, externally disrupting community of a movement that requires both a shared commitment to external justice and internal accountability. Love bonds may exist momentarily and strategically between people who disagree, they may temporarily pass over disagreement in order to

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<sup>290</sup> See: Janaina Stronzake. “People Make the Occupation and the Occupation Makes the People,” in *We Are Many: Reflections on Movement Strategy from Occupation to Liberation* ed. Khatib, Kate, Margaret Killjoy and Mike McGuire. (Oakland: AK Press, 2012), 87



accomplish a shared goal, but still return to a practice of accountability and internal disruption when away from the threat of police response. In the case of the airport action, the use of the quote came after an extensive discussion of the dynamics of the protest, it created in my mother and I a sense of shared purpose and accomplishment, despite the conflicts. In this instance, the chant served to close the evening, connecting us to a larger history of love and support through struggle that I interpret as an attempt to re-center the group despite possible distractions in the moment of protest, perhaps attempting to ensure the future involvement of protestors present.

Jail support in particular is deeply grounded in love and care – waiting for those arrested to get released so that they have bail, food, water, a cellphone charger, a hug, or a ride home certainly demonstrates a deep-seated value for other people in the movement and the sacrifices and risks they take in the name of the struggle. The politics of jail support are not unlike those of occupation<sup>291</sup> – they articulate a desire to wait, a refusal to leave until fictive kin, those connected to the movement, are returned to those gathered. Generally jail support involves things like lawyers demanding bail and immediate release and others waiting with supplies and resources which those in jail might require upon release. Hearing chants from the bus was a powerful moment of connection between those inside and those outside, and a reassurance that the spirits of those who had been in custody for hours was high. For those outside, it aims to create solidarity and support for those inside, linking across artificially enforced lines of police custody. For those inside the bus, it appears to serve both that purpose and demonstrate defiance, that even from within custody (having been held many hours at that point), their spirits were not diminished, their love for the protest community not wavering.

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<sup>291</sup> On the politics of occupation, see: Janaina Stronzake, “People Make the Occupation and the Occupation Makes the People,” in *We Are Many: Reflections on Movement Strategy from Occupation to Liberation* ed. Kate Khatib, Margaret Killjoy, and Mike McGuire (Chico: AK Press, 2012).

In the case of Templeton and Ferrell's arrest and the initial vigil held for them, against the helpless and impossible as the task of being heard across layers of steel and concrete, we attempted to perform connection in its absence, between those inside and those outside using Shakur's quote. However, perhaps this also reimagines what constitutes relationships themselves, both in who the audience is and how the message is received. First, it relies on the community norms, that even if Templeton and Ferrell could not hear this particular gesture, they know there is an expectation that those outside will send love and support to those inside. Secondly, it demonstrates to the police officers that those outside support those inside. This suggests a different possible model of relationality, that we could meet each other in love rather than desire for dominance, love which crosses physical boundaries and fervently attempts to ensure better treatment the people inside, insisting on their importance to the community.

I believe that certain rituals of affective connection and commitment to a group of people or a cause are necessary for successful and lasting movements and certainly happen both online and offline. Moreover, these rituals of affective linking which in this case include constant boundary contestation help understand the quality of linking love that exists in the streets of Ferguson. These linking bonds also allow protestors to create bonds of solidarity between protestors inside police custody and those waiting for them outside – bonds which transgress the physical space by relying on the norms of the protest community, that the community will perform jail support, waiting for those arrested to be released even late into the night. In their nature as public acts, these moments of connection have an element that opens out rather than closing inward, both by supporting community inside and demonstrating to police or the possible viewing public that the community insists on the values of love and valuation for all of its members, even while they are in jail.

### *Opposition and defiance*

Oppositional love displays the power of the Shakur chant to point out what could either be called the “non-love” or the white supremacist patriotic love of the police state. While the power to bond or connect is oriented inward toward the protest community, oppositional love orients outwards towards the human representatives of oppressive power systems. Sometimes this is highly literal, and the examples I am drawing from here involve protestors using the chant directly at the police line, this opposition may be less clear, as in the case of those inside the bus yelling for those outside and against the police. The oppositional performance of the phrase has an object: opposition is directed outward, at the state and its actors, the police.

When Templeton says, “thank you for letting us say that,” they point out that the chant is directed at the cops, said to them, almost as if it is supposed to be a learning moment, a moment that says, watch this, listen to this, we are going to tell you what this should look like instead of what it looks like now. What you are doing is wrong and instead you should be more like us, more like love. The opposition is then also a performance of how things could be different, how a world could be built on the principles of mutual love and support. In thanking the cops for letting the crowd say the phrase, it seems there is part sarcasm, part sincerity – sarcasm because the cops continue to stand guard, riot shields drawn against a line of unarmed, peaceful, protestors chanting about love. There is also a sad sincerity that the cops could and have responded much more violently to much less. This creates a performance, a moral drama, as many advocates of civil disobedience might call it, that casts the protestors as loving, and the police as failing to love, but in chanting at and demanding love “we *must* love and support each other” it opposes police by calling them to a different orientation towards protestors.

Defiance, too functions in these moments – in refusing the legitimacy of police orders or directives, expressing a lack of concern for legal consequences – and offers an opening toward something different. It differs from opposition in its lack of direct object – it does not come from a direct confrontation with the state, but from the attitude or performance that the actions of the state are irrelevant and inconsequential. This love forgets the state all together. In the instance of Templeton and Ferrell’s release, the immediate performance of the Shakur chant created a moment of joy – while moments before we were close to risking arrest, this quickly changed the dynamic, as we celebrated their release. In this moment, while the police had earlier been incredibly willing to arrest the protestors, they seemed unsure of how to respond, as we had abandoned direct protest goals and were instead merely celebrating the release of our community members. This instance on celebrating despite the watchful eye of the police performs a complete disregard for the treatment of corrections officers and police just seconds before, it performs joy in the face of impending legal actions, preservation of community even when it has been wrenched from us.

This is a moment in which we are both linked together and defiantly oriented towards the possibility of a world with different relationships. This defiance is both about how protestors perform themselves to the state, as in demonstrating jail support, but also how love represents a resource with the potential to ignore or refuse to address the state. This performs love as another way of being – a possibility beyond friend enemy lines – which insists on an ethic of community love and support. The affective links simultaneously create the space in which this we perform this possibility. Those gathered outside of the “Injustice Center” are linked to each other by a history of protest and affect and *(re)creating* love; we were there *because of love* for Ferrell and Templeton and also there *enacting love* for them and for the broader community of protest

against the reality of their imprisonment. These links between us both illuminate the possibilities of another world in their stark contrast to unloving systems of violence and denial of freedom and orient us towards in opposition and defiance of the world that exists.

## **Conclusion**

The use of love in protest, especially by Millennial Activists United, provides an affective linking and defiance, which can withstand the complex articulations of love I developed in the previous chapter. Love similarly performs the affective linking to guard against the uncertainties and precarity of the movement. Moreover, this love demonstrates a different manner of being in relation, of commitment to the community of protest. This love affect connects protestors across space, as in those inside and outside of jail, but also across time, in linking protestors together at the close of actions, it provides space for protestors to come back together multiple times over a disjointed landscape of protest through moments of affect. Moreover, it provides space for protestors to come back to the space of protest differently over time. Ending a critical conversation about how an action went with the linking move of using Shakur's quote encourages both connection to the community and reflection. This includes reflection on the ways in which the community either successfully upholds the values of love and support, or fails, and in the case of failure, encourages commitment to returning to behave differently.

Investing in the performance of love in the embodied space of protest raises more questions than answers. MAU continues to shift over time, promising new directions in coming months, as they move “to create a place where we transform how we see and show up for each

other.”<sup>292</sup> The way that protestors perform love in the streets will certainly change over time. Moreover, as I have previously articulated, love for many in Ferguson protests involves a fair deal of care labor, in the provision of food, first aid, and in jail support. I will take up the implications of care labor’s place in the movement, as a feminized labor often expected of women, especially women of color, in the conclusion. Indeed considering the diminished role MAU currently plays, whether and how love will persist as an affect in protest remains an open question.

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<sup>292</sup> Millennial Activists United (millennialau). Twitter Post. March 3, 2016 12:35 PM. “to effectively work to transform this system, we have to create a place where we transform how we see and show up for each other.” <https://twitter.com/MillennialAU/status/705491917006442496>

## Conclusion - Labor of Love Implications for ongoing protest and community building

I argue that the love that circulates and resonates among those involved in activism in and around Ferguson should be taken seriously as an engagement with the reality of police violence and white supremacy. Moreover, these expressions of love have an intellectual and theoretical history, which deserves full consideration. The shimmering moments of love – as care, solidarity, defiance, connection – challenge both an unloving world and the understanding of love as private, romantic, or nationalist. This love, as an affective force, *moves* protestors – not just to action or away from it, but within actions, within communities. This love holds us together at the same time as it allows us to fall apart. What I mean is, we are held together in community but that community is in constant contestation; we are affectively assured of ourselves in moments of risk but we are also allowed to change, to make attempts to think, act and relate differently. Love in Ferguson's protests is an act of imagination in the face of impossibility: how might we make a different world? How might we become different in love? These imaginations are enacted at the level of bodies: how protestors relate to each other and practice a culture of risk-taking and support or care on behalf of one another.

Yet, crucial limitations remain: expectations of labor and love are distributed unevenly in the movement, and structures of power influence and discipline our capacity to enact love that opens space rather than closing it. As the movement in St. Louis approaches its second year, love remains powerfully resonant. Against the burdens of time and transgression in community, love's limits are tested and transformed. Love within the movement as I have described it includes a complex relationship to care and embodied labor mediating against profound risk. The queer Black feminist love built in Ferguson is also a work of survival and necessity. In the

repeated return to a space of precarity and violence at the hands of police, protestors turn to care labor because it is necessary to the survival of individuals and the movement, and, unable to rely on the state for support or relief, it must be performed by those within the movement. Care work is a socially gendered labor associated with and assigned primarily to women.<sup>293</sup> These dynamics do not fall away in the space of organizing, and the gendered and racialized histories of labor very much impact the way that protestors perform and experience love as labor.

In my own experience of care work in Ferguson, those performing care work (attending to food, first aid and childcare) are almost always women. This deep and necessary work of building and sustaining community articulated by many as an act of love relies heavily on the emotional and bodily engagement of women. Indeed, Millennial Activists United talks about their own nascent organization feeding people, caring for those injured in protest.<sup>294</sup> The labor of creating spaces of relaxation and self-care, which do exist in the movement, have also relied on the efforts of women – much of the behinds the scenes work, including Cards for Ferguson which allows people from all over to send messages of love and support to Ferguson protestors are organized by women. This last holiday season, the movement had a holiday party as a space for restorative community time, an effort that was planned, organized, and prepped mostly by women. Presently, I have only anecdotal evidence to support these conclusions, but the pattern remains, with certain exceptions, that women perform the bulk of labor and preparation for movement-related self care events and community meals (as well as the fundraising for these events), as well as the care labors performed internal to action – tending to the injured, making sure people have food, water, warmth. These sorts of spaces and projects are undeniably important to sustaining a movement consistently existing in such precarity: they allow protestors

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<sup>293</sup> Arlie Hochschild and Anne Machung. *The second shift: Working families and the revolution at home*. (New York: Penguin, 2012).

<sup>294</sup> Braswell, “#FergusonFridays”



to relax in each others company, to bond outside of the necessary connection in moments of external threat. Yet, these spaces too are built and sustained through labor and who does that often unnoticed or underappreciated labor matters.

Looking to academic studies on the gendered dynamics of social movements, women's involvement often represents a paradox: political involvement may transgress social norms about women's place in the private sphere, but the structures of social movements simultaneously reinforce certain restrictions on women's participation.<sup>295</sup> As Mary Fonow found in her study of the gendered dynamics of the Wheeling-Pittsburgh Steel workers strike, the union leadership assigned men and women different roles and jobs based on gendered divisions of labor. In the case of roles assigned by the picket captains of the striking workers, "Although men and women were supposed to work both kitchen duty and picket duty, women were more likely to be assigned kitchen duty."<sup>296</sup> Even within kitchen and food arrangement duties, gendered divisions existed, "Men were more likely to be involved in purchasing, stocking, and distribution, while women were involved in meal preparation and cleanup."<sup>297</sup> In both these cases, food provision labors were displaced onto women involved in the strike, with male strike leaders giving women roles that involved more behind the scenes work with less visibility and authority. This division of labor, which leaves women involved in the strike in positions without notoriety or decision making authority, creates the conditions in which women have to simultaneously perform the majority of the daily, sustaining work of the movement and struggle for their contributions to be taken seriously. Bernice McNair Barnett similarly finds in a study on the "Invisible Southern

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<sup>295</sup> Guida West and Rhoda Lois Blumberg. *Women and social protest*. (Oxford University Press: 1991), 24

<sup>296</sup> Mary Margaret Fonow, "Protest Engendered: The Participation of Women Steelworkers in the Wheeling-Pittsburgh Steel Strike of 1985" *Gender and Society*, 12: 6 (Dec. 1998), 718

<sup>297</sup> West and Lois Blumberg, 719

Black Women Leaders in the Civil Rights Movement,” that many women involved in leadership were often underpaid and unrecognized.<sup>298</sup>

These same internal pressures exist in organizing in Ferguson: many small, less established organizations headed or organized by Black women and queer folks do a disproportionate amount of both action organizing and care work related to the movement, while receiving less of the money and acclaim than established organizations. These dynamics came to a head during the “Cut the Check” campaign. Many young Black activists demanded that established organizations recognize their labor for the movement and accordingly award money raised because of the visibility of Ferguson protests.<sup>299</sup> At the same time, while this action was a productive and insightful critique of the dimensions of the non-profit industrial complex and the distribution of funds and labor within the movement, right wing media, as well as many in the movement, covered it mercilessly often implying that community organizing should be an unpaid labor of love.<sup>300</sup> Movement organizing work already exists in a category that many stand to benefit from, but fewer are willing or able to perform, moving to the margins of the labors necessary to a movement, care work for the movement becomes doubly undervalued, as a feminized labor and a labor for a ‘volunteer’ movement. The narrative that “everyone has a role to play” in movement organizing often obscures the way that marginalization and power dynamics simultaneously internal and external to the movement divides these roles along lines of gender and class.

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<sup>298</sup> Bernice Barnett McNair, “Invisible Southern Black Women Leaders in the Civil Rights Movement: The Triple Constraints of Gender, Race, and Class” *Gender and Society*, 7:2 (June 1993)

<sup>299</sup> Angel Carter, “Cut the Check” *Liberated Souls (blog)* May 25, 2015 <https://liberatedsouls.co/ferguson-reflections-2/cut-the-check/>

<sup>300</sup> Matthew Vadum, “Ferguson Rent-A-Mobs Exposed,” *FrontPage*, May 18, 2015, <http://www.frontpagemag.com/fpm/257130/ferguson-rent-mobs-exposed-matthew-vadum>; Jamala Rogers, “#Cutthecheck is not a movement,” May 28, 2015 [http://www.stlamerican.com/news/columnists/jamala/article\\_b712cdc0-04e4-11e5-824b-83e71b951fc3.html](http://www.stlamerican.com/news/columnists/jamala/article_b712cdc0-04e4-11e5-824b-83e71b951fc3.html)

The subtle and continuous marginalization of women organizing and women's labor in social movements along with the pressure to provide crucial work the sustaining the possibility of community suggests the reality of extremely high rates of burnout among women in organizing. This dynamic leaves women and other folks marginalized on the basis of gender identity, among other things, continually fighting for their spot in the movement while enduring the slights and expectations of the broader movement reflects what I have seen in Ferguson. For many complicated reasons, including ongoing criminal charges and fissures within the movement, Millennial Activists United has stepped back from organizing. Templeton, in particular, frequently reminds their Twitter followers, "if u follow me for 'social justice' reasons, don't. i quit the movement."<sup>301</sup> Against the backdrop of long court battles, misogyny, homophobia and transphobia within the movement, the commitment to love can easily become a demand for silence, for doing the most labor with the least recognition. Moreover, in the larger picture of the hostile public, attempts to address these internal failings are met with vitriol from both within and without, making the cost of dealing in these shortcomings incredibly high for many people.

Love, in this sense, may provide as many pitfalls as it does promises for movement organizing. As Rosemary Hennessy writes, participants in social movement organizing,

fall in love fall in love with the possibilities held out by a collective movement; they fall in love with their leaders and with each other. These loves are levers that activate their good sense, courage and action. But they also adhere to the strong pull of familiar norms, and they can corrode a group's fragile hold on each other and their collective goals.<sup>302</sup>

Love created between those organizing allows the transformation of individuals through relationships to each other. At the same time, facing the intense scrutiny and pressure from

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<sup>301</sup> Alexis Templeton (audreoverlorde) Twitter Post. December 30, 2015 12:02 AM  
<https://twitter.com/audreoverlorde/status/682079209112535040>

<sup>302</sup> Rosemary Hennessy, "Bread and Roses in the Common" in *Love: a question for feminism in the twenty-first century*. ed. Anna G. Jónasdóttir, and Ann Ferguson. Vol. 14. (New York: Routledge, 2013), 270-1

within and without, love itself can fall apart - pulled towards conventional understandings reproduce gendered divisions of care and responsibility within movements.

If we can fall in love with the movement, we can surely fall out of love. In Hennessy's account, many of the women who initially participated in loving bonds of organizing community left as the group was beset by infighting and consequences for organizing were high.

Understanding the use of love by activists in Ferguson, I am left wondering at the consequences of these fleeting entrances and exits into the affective spaces of love. I believe that bringing love to the space of political organizing names and troubles the way people attach to organizing communities and goals in spaces of intense conflict and risk. Perhaps love, as Moore argues, could help us move beyond the model in which organizers become "workers in the domain of justice," allowing instead a deeper and more honest accounting of how we relate in organizing communities. However, looking to the work of Millennial Activists United, it seems that a movement-conception of love may also threaten the expectation of relentless care labor even for those who would simultaneously ignore women and queer people in organizing against white supremacy.<sup>303</sup> The turn to understand the gendered and racialized history<sup>304</sup> of care labor is crucially important in considering the implications of the way in which organizers in Ferguson talk about care labor as a component of love. Perhaps, as Ahmed warns us, love's conditions threaten constantly to close in, to require things we are not always willing or able to provide. Affect, however spontaneously generated we believe it to be, is still subject of and to the regulating powers which preexist any individual emotional moment.

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<sup>303</sup> Natalie Moore, "Critics Say Women Are Neglected By Black Lives Matter Campaign," *Morning Edition, NPR News*, October 12, 2015 <http://www.npr.org/2015/10/12/447911196/critics-say-women-are-neglected-by-black-lives-matter-campaign>

<sup>304</sup> Kat Riascos, "We Need To Stop Making Black Women the Mammies of Our Movements (And Our Friend Groups) Right Now," *Black Girl Dangerous*, June 30, 2015 <http://www.blackgirldangerous.org/2015/06/stop-making-black-women-the-mammies-of-our-movements/>

Yet, Millennial Activists United remains an active and changing organization. On March 3<sup>rd</sup> 2016, the organizational account sent a series of tweets referencing the future of the group.

They say,

we're working to transform into something beautiful and necessary for St. Louis. something that is open and inclusive to the voices of young black and brown people, under the age of 40. something that gives a base and a platform to do the liberation work that will free ALL black people. something that welcomes tough conversations and challenges internalized patriarchy and white supremacy. where the goal is to lean into our own discomfort & transform into being a leader who believes in & exemplifies radical love & truth telling. since the birth of MAU, our hearts have been set on freedom. to effectively work to transform this system, we have to create a place where we transform how we see and show up for each other. and sitting in our disregard and discomfort that is rooted in our misunderstandings of one another isn't getting anyone free. loving and supporting is an action. a new direction is coming soon.<sup>305</sup>

Maybe this moment indicates that MAU members have not (at least not entirely) fallen out of love with the movement. Love remains a central part of this vision: a part of creating the spaces in which people have the courage to change themselves in order to live differently, to work towards a different world. MAU reminds us, “loving and supporting is an action,” as a criticism of the move to see love and support as the background requirement of other work, instead foregrounding the work of love and community as an engagement with movement organizing. Love and support remain labors of change – they allow the actor to confront internalized systems of oppression in order to become different people, to work towards collective liberation.

Love is an affective space of possibility in Ferguson: the possibility of breeching the regular organization of the world but also an uncertain possibility, a fleeting affective movement,

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<sup>305</sup> Millennial Activists United (@MillennialAU). Twitter Post. March 3, 2016. 2:30 PM  
<https://twitter.com/MillennialAU/status/705490591409315840>; 2:31 PM  
<https://twitter.com/MillennialAU/status/705490695742582784>;  
<https://twitter.com/MillennialAU/status/705490807688593408>;  
<https://twitter.com/MillennialAU/status/705490879591555072>; 2:32 PM  
<https://twitter.com/MillennialAU/status/705491117853151232>; 2:33 PM  
<https://twitter.com/MillennialAU/status/705491193942114305>; 2:35 PM  
<https://twitter.com/MillennialAU/status/705491917006442496>; 2:38 PM  
<https://twitter.com/MillennialAU/status/705492481350066177>; 2:43 PM  
<https://twitter.com/MillennialAU/status/70549378365633312>

which as Gould argues, gestures “towards uprising,” but the business of uprising in this case is not so linear as the word might suggest. In embracing the fleeting nature of affect, this love admits failure, the reality that deeply entrenched structures of power influence the ways we live and love for the worse and that even our best moments of love will not last. I think that love does, and will continue to fail. The kind of love that MAU performs rejects a narrative of success as an achievable end goal, and that moving toward creating this space of possibility and transformation crucially broadens an understanding of the work of transformation. This includes the notion of its own possibility of failure, as I discussed at length in chapter four. But the love articulated here also usefully fails to reproduce romantic love, commercialized love, privatized love,<sup>306</sup> instead performing the complex, internally incoherent flows of affect seeking something different. Even the failure of love, might show us how we could choose to be different. Even in our own moments of failure, we could continue to reach toward not just a vague and utopian possibility, but toward a different world constantly in creation between and among us.

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<sup>306</sup> My thoughts on the purchase and politics of failure are deeply influenced by J. Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).