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Rethinking Katrina's Bodies:
The Ethicopolitics of Survival in Jesmyn
Ward's *Salvage the Bones*

카트리나의 육체 다시 생각하기:
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주 나 윤

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Abstract

Rethinking Katrina's Bodies: The Ethicopolitics of Survival in Jesmyn Ward's *Salvage the Bones*

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Salvage the Bones is Jesmyn Ward's own answer to the question of how an event that deeply affected so many should be construed. Moving away from perceiving Katrina as a punctual event, Ward situates the hurricane within an extended and diffused temporality where time seems not to have passed but accumulated in its injury. This thesis attempts to define *Salvage* as a twenty-first-century survival narrative, in that it depicts the ordinary people's struggle to stay attached to life. Locating how the crisis becomes an endemic, durational, and normative state in Ward's detailing of the debilitated lives of the Batistes, this thesis further identifies a timeline in which the suffering manifests in an ongoing and repetitive state and thus invites injuries not only from the past but also from the future. At the same time, Ward puts forth affective labor and care as which that provide continuity amidst the discontinuity of life, as well as assemble new social and political collectivities.

Chapter 1 explores how uneven power structures stemming from neoliberalism's

weakening of the state safety net and other oppressive sociopolitical processes are projected and etched onto the maternal bodies of Rose and Esch. Focusing on the effects of such violence which manifest in quotidian but constant suffering under biopolitics, the chapter details how Rose's motherhood and Esch's pregnancy become violence against their bodies.

Chapter 2 locates possibilities despite such debilitation of bodies and explores Rose's motherhood through Esch's act of affective labor wherein memories of feelings provide resources for her very survival. Esch's understanding of motherhood also hinges on her own feelings of heterosexual desire and the two experiences of motherhood and sexuality that have been foreclosed to black bodies become mutually informative and constructive to Esch's subjectivity.

In Chapter 3, I conclude how *Salvage* is Ward's micropolitical response to a foreclosed futurity. Focusing on the relationship between Skeetah and China, this chapter first examines how Ward deconstructs and reconstructs Skeetah's racialized masculinity as well as his racialized intimacy with China. Furthermore, China's affective companionship leads to Skeetah's animalization which signals how his embracing of otherness allows inter- and intra-species connections of non-familial kinship. This suggests a different future based on ethics of care.

Keywords: *Salvage the Bones*, Hurricane Katrina, neoliberal biopolitics, motherhood, affective labor, sexuality, care, kinship

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Introduction

On August 29th, 2005, Katrina made landfall as a Category 5 hurricane just east of New Orleans, hitting the border of Louisiana and Mississippi. It initially seemed New Orleans was spared the catastrophic flooding that many had feared. However, within hours, reports of water flooding up to 80% of the city, families stranded on rooftops, and the chaos of thousands of people waiting for help that did not arrive filled the entirety of the news media. In the end, Hurricane Katrina became one of the most devastating natural disasters in the history of the United States, with its “1336 known fatalities” and an estimated “\$75 billion in total damage” (National Hurricane Center 9–12). How a case of a bad weather became of major significance in American history was not just because of its statistics but also, as Ron Eyerman suggests, of how it was experienced, understood, and interpreted (5). Characteristic of its fast and sensational delivery and portrayal of the crisis as a live disaster event, initial (mis)reports and the spectacles of the bodies of victims and sufferings of survivors became common knowledge through a 24-hour news cycle. As images were constantly produced for consumption, the country was said to be suffering from “Katrina fatigue.” In the end, victims became a mere fatigue to the nation as an ideology was disguised as “the destructive wrath of Mother Nature” that “no one could have predicted” under disaster language. The victims remained as invisible and oppressed as before and the rest of the nation who understood Katrina as a sudden and unexpected disaster that ruptured their every day soon resumed back to their life.

The fictional and creative accounts of the Katrina experience that emerged in the aftermath were especially in response to the detrimental discourse that continued from the initial media portrayal which infused the terms “victim” and “survivor” with particular racial and class characteristics while spotlighting criminality and constructing

them as both irresponsible and a general threat to society. The narratives, with their underpinning explicit political critiques, aimed to give voice to the voiceless, moving away from viewing Katrina as an isolated event and instead towards situating Katrina within extensive historical inequalities and injustice stemming from decades of racial neglect and state violence. These narratives usually feature several symbolic Katrina elements such as the levees or distressing images of floating dead bodies in their efforts to reclaim the voice of the victims and survivors. The specific location of New Orleans plays a prominent character as well. For example, Spike Lee's four-part documentary *When the Levees Broke: A Requiem in Four Acts* (2006) is known for his representation of dead bodies that emphasizes the disposability of the bare lives of poor, black citizens of New Orleans, as the result of long-standing governmental neglect. David Simon and Eric Overmyer's television series, *Treme* (2009–2013) equally criticizes the way the disaster was handled by the federal government but focuses on the intertwining stories of individual loss and traumatic experiences within the space and place of New Orleans, the city which Michael Samuel notes as the main character of the series (33).

While these narratives resist the discourse that portrays Katrina as a self-inflicted tragedy and delves into invisible and intricate workings of state violence, they were still, as Glenn Jellenik points out, along the lines of many polemical and polarized narratives that focused on overtly political issues of race and poverty which “perhaps reduc[ed] the storm and its effects to a series of basic talking points [that] stymied and pigeon-holed the Katrina narrative” (229). Other narratives that emerged later oriented towards domestic renderings of Katrina's trauma and mourning. Benh Zeitlin's *Beasts of the Southern Wild* (2012) received much attention for shifting post-Katrina narratives toward the realm of creativity, combining elements of magical realism with an affecting depiction of poverty and precarity. Some works tend to connect Katrina to other existing political discourse, connecting the Katrina victims outwards to a larger,

different frame, entangled in other disasters. Dave Eggers' *Zeitoun* (2009), a nonfiction considered a representative post-Katrina narrative, carries the weight of two catastrophes, 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina, in which the images of black bodies floating reveal a racialized and regionalized component of the storm's effects that connects the novel to a pernicious denigration of humans to animal life within post-9/11 politics.

The works of post-Katrina narratives, thus portray Katrina as symptomatic and a culmination of the past context. In this sense, Jesmyn Ward's *Salvage the Bones* is also considered part of the post-Katrina narrative, as one of the most successful, garnering substantial literary and scholarly attention. Almost always mentioned in the list of Katrina fiction, *Salvage* is narrated by a young fifteen-year-old female named, Esch, who lives in the poverty-ridden Mississippian coastal town of Bois Sauvage with her neglectful father and three male siblings. Her mother has passed away when Esch was still young while giving birth to her youngest brother, Junior, and as the only female in the family, Esch is utterly alone when she discovers that she is pregnant with the child of Manny, her brother's friend with whom she is infatuated. The novel chronicles the twelve days in the lives of the Batiste family as they prepare for the impending Katrina, which makes its brief appearance at the end of the novel. Not only is Hurricane Katrina explicitly, although few times, mentioned, the symbolic scene of flooding that strands the Batistes in the attic is also depicted at the end of the novel, linking their abandonment as a result of intertwining and embedded historical and structural neglect and injustices.

Such portrayal of Katrina in the aforementioned works follows a unified pattern in how Katrina as a crisis, especially as a traumatic event is observed. Instead of perceiving the tragedy of Katrina as a punctual event related to the exceptional and the extraordinary, or a sudden moment of discontinuity and dissociation, Katrina is treated in a less spectacular but no less damaging way in connection to decades of unfettered

privatization, government deregulation, and deep cuts to social spending. Many critics have commented on the limits of the existing discourse on trauma. Reexamining how a traumatic event is defined in Cathy Caruth's influential trauma model, Ann Cvetkovich writes, "Caruth focuses on trauma as event rather than on everyday trauma [in which] . . . she uses the example of the "accident" as a way of describing trauma's contingency and lack of agency—a model that may not work well for traumatic histories that emerge from systemic contexts" (19). Lauren Berlant also argues that the logic of trauma is "fundamentally ahistoricizing" (10) and tends to be exclusively focused "on exceptional shock and data loss in the memory and experience of catastrophe" (10). In this sense, *Salvage* as well as other post-Katrina narratives depict Katrina as more than a startling revelation and not as aberrant as the initial coverage treated it as but a result of the past and present practices of governmental and neoliberal practices.

Yet, *Salvage* in comparison pivots the focus of Katrina to the more human side of the story. Glenn Jellenik points out that Ward's novel is among the new wave of Katrina narratives that offers a more broaden focus to Katrina. Ward's novel deconstructs the oversimplified political points into a unifying narrative that highlights inclusive aspects of unique cultures and identities that "exist as an act and artifact of preservation" (229). In this sense, *Salvage* is Jesmyn Ward's own alternative Katrina narrative, her answer to the question of how an event that affected so many of the most invisible and vulnerable, should be construed in the narrative and memory of the nation. Remembering her own terrifying experience of living through Katrina, Ward states that she "was dissatisfied with the way it had receded from public consciousness" (Hoover). *Salvage* is an attempt to not simply remember but to argue for a particular memory of Katrina and its victims "where a different kind of Katrina, a different kind of catastrophe related to Katrina, had occurred" (Hartnell 215). Indeed, Ward's narrative

shifts focus away from the drowned dead bodies displayed in the public but turns inward to the private sphere of the yet-to-be drowned bodies who tread water in everyday life, offering us a different kind of witnessing of traumatic sights unseen that eludes tidy closure.

Such focus on the more mundane and daily struggles and trauma renders the relevance of Katrina even more tenuous than other works in comparison which prominently feature the catastrophic event at the forefront of the plot, either directly or indirectly alluding to it. *Salvage* has the least explicit allusion to Katrina. There is no mention of dead bodies or levees. The novel does not mention New Orleans, a city sensationalized and dehumanized by the media's Katrina coverage while rendering those suffering elsewhere invisible. Instead, *Salvage* depicts an extremely hermetic and isolated world in a piece of land called the Pit where there are barely any outside sources of media or news. All the Batiste children have is each other and the nature that surrounds them. Narrated in the first-person voice of Esch through her quiet thoughts and observations, the novel's linear framework of twelve days portrays a life the residents have led for generations and that is already always precarious, of which only the scale and intensity of their deep-rooted suffering is disrupted with the occurrence of Katrina. *Salvage* thus assumes Katrina less as a contingency for a social exposé than situating it as one of many sufferings that renders the life of poor African Americans, in particular, an enduring struggle to stay attached to life not just during Katrina but throughout pervasive environmental, political, and social fragility.

I suggest that in articulating the human side of the story in this extreme turn towards a deeply intimate domestic sphere, Ward adopts a diffused and dispersed temporality rather than just focusing on the eventuality of Katrina as a culmination of systemic practices of oppression and inequality. Examining the neglected and silenced bodies among the Katrinas of the past, present, and future, in which time seems to not

have passed but accumulated in its injury, Ward magnifies into individual lives to explore their everyday precarity. That is, the Pit is a world characterized by a noticeable absence of Katrina or rather a relegation of its significance to the background which yet lurks behind as an ever-advancing and omnipresent threat, affecting the Batistes in a profound way. I suggest this is characteristic of Ward's novel, making *Salvage* different from other works, her novel a new form of post-Katrina narrative that depicts a different world, not transformed solely by Katrina but a world already changed and changing.

Instead of viewing Katrina as an event-focused, time-bound, and body-bound disaster, Ward looks to a normalization of such crisis, wherein crisis is omnipresent yet unnoticed, or only noticed through the spectacles of a punctual disaster. As what Lauren Berlant terms as the notion of 'crisis ordinariness' in her description of the ongoing activity of precariousness of our present, Ward portrays Katrina as "a moment in extended crisis" (7), that is, as an endemic, durational, and normative state. Crisis in the present time is increasingly becoming less singular than general, the effects of which are not atypical but regular and routinized. Berlant's notion is parallel to what I mentioned in discussing everyday trauma, in which traumatic effects may come from the accumulation of a systemic context. But what I wish to emphasize here is the way Ward not only observes the regularity but also the repetition of crises into the future as well. This means that Ward is projecting a certain world to continue into the future in which the ordinary and crisis are not two opposite notions but the ordinary itself an "impasse shaped by crisis" in which "people find themselves developing skills for adjusting to newly proliferating pressures to scramble for modes of living on" (Berlant 8). *Salvage* does not stop at criticizing the fantasies of American dreams and ideals characterized by "upward mobility, job security, political and social equality, and lively, durable intimacy" (Berlant 3) or "illustrat[ing] the gap between the American dream and the American reality," (Hartnell 209) but further departs from them by depicting a

sheer precarity, a less idealistic and a more pragmatic age for survival.

Furthermore, Ward's peculiar temporality is not just in its diffusion but also in its rechronologization. *Salvage* focuses on unspectacular time as do other post-Katrina narratives but the novel also rethinks the linear model of time in regards to understanding Katrina. As extreme weathers like Katrina are normalized, it is no longer the punctual eventuality that possesses traumatic possibilities but also the *interim* within the routinization of catastrophic events that may also pose anxiety and injury.¹ Then, a new chronology arises in the present suffering of traumatic events like Katrina in that not only the past but the future haunts the present, in which the prospect of a predetermined future acts as a violence to the present. The uneasy anticipation of a potential disaster along with an actualized one negatively affects the present. That is, the repetition of a crisis causes a futureless landscape of post-Katrina time and the reshaping of the present.

Salvage does look to the past but it also maintains a tentative glance toward the future. The issue of a stationary future after the deluge is what comes off as the key issue in the plot. What Ward indicates is that the American dream has ceased to function as an enabling fiction for those that are excluded from the government's safety net or help. She asks how do one get out of, let alone live and survive such situation? How do they imagine their future from now on? My thesis argues that Ward's *Salvage* cannot be

¹ The damaging effect of such rechronologization may further be illuminated by Paul Saint-Amour's explication of the "traumatizing power of anticipation" in *Tense Future* (17). Interestingly, Saint-Amour coins the term "pre-traumatic stress syndrome" which he describes it as a symptom to the mass traumatization during the interim of two World Wars and during the Cold War. Modern military practices during the war, especially air raids, consisted of drills in which civilians had to practice and pre-live the traumatic moments of life-threatening danger. Saint-Amour argues that the routinization of emergency produces the same debilitating effect as the actual event, blurring the distinction between event and expectation (13). Focusing on the circulation and proliferation of doomsday scenarios of films, Ann Kaplan also commented that the ubiquity of dystopian and catastrophic narrative in the media produces a trauma culture in which such films cause "a sickening sense of déjà vu" which exacerbates anxiety and causes what Kaplan terms as "Pretraumatic Stress Syndrome" (PreTSS). That is, due to films of "pre-trauma genre" people suffer from "an immobilizing anticipatory anxiety about the future" (xix).

contained by the title post-Katrina narrative but more so as a twenty-first-century survival narrative, and focuses on how Ward's narrative is based on the everyday leftovers and attritions of the fantasy of the American dream, of piles of overwhelming and impending crises, in which they must salvage what they can to survive the urgent now where no one is promised tomorrow. Yet, this paper also attempts to identify and rethink agency, survival, and freedom, and envision a future where (de)formations of life worth living can still be exhibited in the absence of resistance and freedom. I try to highlight the micropolitics of minor and minuscule movements, glimmers of hope, scraps of waste, and the interrupted desires found in those spaces deemed devoid of full human life.

Chapter one explores the extremely uneven and complex power structures defined by the intersections of neoliberal capitalism, racism, and other sociopolitical processes of criminalization and violence and how such hierarchization is projected and etched onto the bodies of Rose and Esch. The chapter particularly focuses on how the effects of such violence manifests in quotidian but constant suffering which renders their maternities as violence against their bodies. I establish Rose as the female bearer of the corporeal legacies of slavery, especially in terms of reproductive violence while also portraying her death from a contemporary biopolitical perspective, construing her body as available-for-injury, for whom long-term bodily health and integrity are already statistically unlikely under exclusion from the state's safety net. If Ward showed Rose's childbirth as an urgent sense of desperation and vulnerability in the unavoidability of her actual physical and premature death, symbolizing an absolute no way out, Esch's pregnancy is shown as yet another distinctive exitlessness whose machination is more protracted and comprehensive in the governance and policing of life. I demonstrate how Esch's pregnancy, which may not be identified as essentially or conventionally disabling, assumes different dimensions of debilities and disabilities.

Chapter two locates possibilities despite such debilitation of bodies explored in chapter one. Continuing to focus on the experiences of motherhood² and desire grounded on black female bodies, this chapter explores Rose's motherhood through Esch's act of affective labor, where memories of feelings provide the resources for surplus survival. Her quotidian labor of forging an affect of maternal love is what makes life bearable and livable. Esch's understanding of motherhood is informed not only by her memories but also hinges on her own feelings of heterosexual desire. By examining the relationship between male and female partners, I also bring sexuality into discussion and seek how the experiences of motherhood and sexuality that have been foreclosed to black bodies are possible and are mutually informing experiences that prove to be constructive for Esch's understanding of her own body and survival. Ward foregrounds bodily experience that becomes a site for the production of desires and emotions as part of an eroticized survival strategy, that rises often unexpectedly in the context of survival.

Chapter three shifts the temporal focus by exploring Ward's affective response to a foreclosed futurity. The chapter explores the shared precarity and disposability in the comparison between animal and human life prominent throughout the novel. I

² Other critics of *Salvage* also delve into the prominent theme of motherhood, especially focusing on the maternal bodies of Esch and Rose in the generational context. Mary Marotte places *Salvage* among historical narratives written by African American women writers such as Harriet Jacobs, Alice Walker, and Toni Morrison that deal with pregnancy and childbirth. All of the writers, including Jesmyn Ward, grapple with similar subjects of mothers steeped in pain and loss, but they "provide enlightenment and hope where society would predict only despair" (20). Many other critics have connected motherhood with the act of literary salvaging. Benjamin Eldon Stevens considers Ward's classical reception of the Greek mythology of Medea as a transformative salvage, in which the continuation of the past that sheds insight on the particularities of the present allows Esch to understand a different kind of motherhood. John T. Matthews suggests that Ward's rewriting or salvaging as an aesthetic mode that offers divergent forms of mourning that such a legacy of maternal loss generates. I focus on the aspect of motherhood that has yet to be explored in that I connect the affect of maternal love with survival and view them as Esch's unique labor. I also discuss motherhood in relation to eroticized sexuality.

especially focus on the relationship between Skeetah and China to examine how Ward deconstructs the discourse between black and canine bodies and reconstructs Skeetah's racialized masculinity. Then, moving away from a gendered and racialized framework, I focus on how the relationship continues into Skeetah's animalization which signals his waiting that is also a mourning for China at the end of the novel. Examining how this embracing of the otherness through an affective transfiguration as well as the inter- and intra-species connections of non-familial kinship suggests a different route to an opportunity or possibility for a different future, I conclude that Ward envisions new affective solidarities and social collectivity based on care.

I. “Each unbearable day”: Neoliberal Biopolitics and Reproductive Injustice

To perceive and situate Hurricane Katrina within the context of a longer, ongoing history is to mediate between the disaster’s hypervisibility of racialized violence and suffering and the invisibility of a more complex biopolitical regime. This mediation is best illustrated through the characters of Rose and Esch in *Salvage the Bones*, in that their bodily experience of motherhood not only entails the legacy of slavery but also the contemporary institutionalization of their own bodies and experiences into violence against themselves. When Ward writes “[b]odies tell stories,” it is precisely the wounded and suffering bodies, through which she tells the Katrina experience of a Southern family, the Batistes (83). The first chapter of *Salvage* opens twelve days prior to the arrival of Katrina as Esch witnesses the birthing of Skeetah’s pitbull, China, which prompts her to recall her mother, Rose’s labor of Junior as well. By situating two alternating scenes of birth at the very beginning of the novel, Ward introduces her readers to historic layers of gendered reproductive injustice embodied by Rose. Employing a physically destructive lexicon, Ward presents birthing as a display mired with self-annihilation, pain, and death. As Esch observes China’s birth she thinks “China’s turned on herself. . . . I would think she was trying to eat her paws” (Ward 1). Instead of birthing, “[w]hat China is doing is fighting” (2) and her body bristles with pain: “[h]er sides ripple. She snarls, her mouth a black line. Her eyes are red; the mucus runs pink. Everything about China tenses and there are a million marbles under her skin, and then she seems to be turning herself inside out” (4). However, China’s sight soon gives way to Esch’s memory of Rose as she points out that China’s birthing is nothing like Rose’s. Still, the same breaching of the body reminds Esch of her mom’s labor: “Sometimes I think that is what killed Mama. I can see her, chin to chest, straining to

push Junior out, and Junior snagging on her insides, grabbing hold of what he caught on to try to stay inside her, but instead, he pulled it out with him when he was born” (3-4). To Esch, birthing is a wounding of the body during which an inversion of interiority/exteriority occurs, a rupture in the bodily boundaries. As puppies are born, China “growls. Yelps. Splits” and as Junior is delivered, he drags Rose’s insides out with him, killing his mother (9). For both China and Rose, birthing implies corporeal suffering and death.

Positioning this scene at the novel's very beginning is a gesture of establishing a genealogy of black motherhood, invoking a return to the body as a historically traumatic and wounded site of racialized and gendered violence and its centrality in the making of a black female subject. This examination of maternal bodies is an evident reminder of black corporeality that can be traced back to the slavery era. Besides from the visibly distressed canine and black bodies that points to the ways in which African American racialization has always been implicated with animals in their shared precarity, what I wish to focus on here is the way the wounded body is birthing and the birthing body is wounded which adds a particular nuance to the scene. The historical relation between black bodies and pain is well established. In her seminal essay on the impact of slavery on contemporary African American black families in which she traces the historical pathologization of the black family and the “misnaming” of black mothers, Hortense Spillers examines the total objectification of the black bodies into commodities during the transatlantic slave trade in which bodies are reduced to flesh. Under an elaborate apparatus consisting of various torture and violence, or the “high crimes against the flesh, as the person of African females and African males registered the wounding,” the body is inscribed with wounds until eventually their blackness and physical trauma intricately operate to function as a marker of the Other, inviting further injury and perpetuating the continual and legitimate “theft of the body” (Spillers 67). This

maiming of the body marks the captive with “a cultural text whose inside has been turned outside,” which displaces the body with a “concentration” of metaphoric blackness on which various social meanings of depersonalization and commodification gather (67).

As the deformation of the black body configures African Americans as the dehumanized and objectified Other, the female black body further attains its otherness not only through torture but also through reproductive violence. The violation of the body does not just create a commodified body but also a specific female subject who occupies a singular position “precisely [at] a moment of converging political and social vectors that market the flesh as a prime commodity of exchange” (Spillers 75). Since property relations gain supremacy over blood kinship where the bondswomen and her children can be separated at any time and marriage is prohibited, birth cannot be seen as a “reproduction of mothering” (78) but only a means for genetic reproduction within the limits of a property expansion. The gender and sexuality of the enslaved female carry few of the patriarchalized and heteronormative benefits and are excluded from any conventional or cultural notions of the female gender, womanhood, or motherhood. As a result, the captive female loses its “‘motherhood’ as female blood- rite/right,” (75) and “only the female stands in the flesh, both mother and mother-dispossessed” (80). Thus, the beginning scene of Rose’s birthing is twofold; a scene that invokes the theft of the body as well as a misnaming in which “the dominant culture, in a fatal misunderstanding, assigns a matriarchist value where it does not belong” (80). It is in and through such categories of gender and sexuality that the barring of black female subjects from the domain of the human occurs.

Saidiya Hartman describes this process of misnaming as “losing your mother,” which has continued to affect the descendants as they are now given the challenging task of reclaiming their mother after centuries of being forced to forget (154). In her

memoir, *Lose Your Mother*, Hartman remarks that “the most universal definition of the slave is a stranger,” stranger to one’s past and oneself who is forced to forget and lose one’s mother (5). Yet, she also finds that a stranger still retains a particular relation to the past. She writes that “[i]f the past is another country, then I am its citizen. . . . I am a reminder that twelve million crossed the Atlantic Ocean and the past is not yet over. I am the progeny of the captives. I am the vestige of the dead” (18). Identifying such persistence of the past in the present, Hartman locates an ongoingness of slavery, a history that is still “an open wound” (166). The abolishment of the institution of slavery and segregation only rearranged into what Hartman describes as “the various strategies of state racism produc[ing] a subjugated and subordinated class within the body politic, albeit in a neutral or egalitarian guise” (Scenes 10).

In *Salvage*, readers find situational details that remind them of the past, including extreme poverty. The dilapidated Batiste house is in no way an ideal dwelling for a home birth with its slapdash structure, yet Rose gives birth to all her children in her own bed. In the end, the Batiste children lose their mother when Rose dies giving birth to Junior. They come to assume a motherless family foundation, also producing socially orphaned children. This echoes what Spillers have described of kinship within the captive community. The enslaved baby finds himself born an orphan since the offspring “neither does not ‘belong’ to the Mother, nor is s/he ‘related’ to the ‘owner,’ though the latter ‘possesses’ it, and in the African-American instance, often fathered it, . . . ” (74). Junior also finds himself in an orphaned state when Rose dies at his birth and Claude renounces his paternal responsibility soon after. With no one to take care of him, he is sent to Mudda Ma’am who watches “kids for money while their parents were at work” (Ward 91). Junior is thrown into the same “social ambiguity” of being without lineage, without origin, suspended as a non-belonging outcast. Black mothers are deprived of their motherhood once again and the children traumatized from its

inception. Even though she thinks to herself, “[w]hat’s the use of naming her to die?” (50), Esch’s determination to name a dying puppy contaminated by the Pit’s dirt reminds the readers of the divested right of black mothers to name their own children. The readers see a return to the trauma, an overall equation of the wounded body to the birthing body, and the misnaming of the black female body persisting throughout history.

Ward presents Rose as the female bearer of the corporeal legacies of slavery and segregation, and by making Esch observe the birthings, Ward situates Esch as a witness to such history, establishing the continuum of the gendered racial genealogy. In this way, Ward also situates herself in the narrative history of African American women writers who thematizes the lineage Spillers established and wrote of motherhood, pregnancy, and childbirth that were “typically so fraught with pain and loaded with potential for destruction” (Marotte 208). However, it is also imperative to note that this is not to equate the present conjunction of history to slavery but to register the concomitance of body politics in the dominant social order’s disciplining of black corporeality, and how the past has persisted in devious ways under which we find a similar yet different formation of a new subjectivity in the line of mother/mother-dispossessed. The ghost of slavery still haunts its descendants but in different means. While perceiving Rose’s death as a legacy of slavery, I also focus on how contemporary biopolitics diverges from that under captivity, especially in its scale, causality, and temporality of the impact. That is, the “hieroglyphics of the flesh” endure and facilitate a wide-reaching political, economic, social, and cultural disciplining in a biopolitical sphere (Spillers 67).

One could assume that Rose’s death is a sudden and unexpected misfortune, unlike other home-births prior to Junior’s. However, Junior’s birth, which Esch describes as rupturing of bodily boundaries is no accident, but a result of mutilations

and injuries that took place long ago, as part of ongoing, non-exceptional modes of physiological and psychic violence in the Pit before being visibly taken into account by Esch. Esch's father, Claude, is already receiving disability checks even before his three fingers get sliced off in an accident. Randall has a bad knee which "swells up like a water balloon" after each basketball game (Ward 84). Such disabilities are not isolated phenomena but manifestations of suffering bodies that result from the constant exposure to violence endemic in their environment. The phrase "sickness in the dirt" epitomizes such an environment. After one of China's puppies dies of parvovirus in the dirt, Skeetah worries his whole litter will get affected, reminded of the time when Big Henry told him of his cousin's puppies: "the puppies had just opened their eyes, and then the first one died, and then each day after that, . . . he would find another puppy dead, so small and hard that it was difficult for him to imagine that they might have once lived" (40). In a place where "[i]t's all contaminated," (52) it is hard to imagine life far from death. Throughout the span of the next nine days, another puppy dies when China kills it and the rest drowns in the flood. This stands as a compact metaphor for how a generation fares in a depleted and toxic environment.

As such, the Batistes are best described as symptomatic of long accumulated generational inequalities infesting the environment, all exposed to premature death and incapable of occupying the futurity with their precarious present. Their ways of surviving are themselves a form of violence and maiming, just as Skeetah sends out China to dog fights even though he loves her to death. This form of struggling is their way of earning money to buy food, to send Randall to his basketball camp, just for a chance to make it out of the Pit. Behind Claude's forsaking his paternal responsibility also lies his need to be out all day to make a living, and also drowning himself in alcohol out of frustration, seeking futile comfort to escape their powerlessness, further perpetuating the vicious cycle of poverty and violence. The people of the Pit are trapped

in the cycle just like the summer heat slowly closing in and choking the bodies. In an environment “where everything else is starving, fighting, struggling” which Ward unflinchingly and unabashedly portrays, we find everyday violence that is and was already at work, the invisible violence, seemingly without causality, slowly eroding away the life of African Americans (Ward 94).

Similarly, Rose’s death is no isolated accident but an accumulation of long-standing and deep-rooted inequalities and injustices. Rose shows a strong reluctance to the hospital despite her critical condition: “She said she didn’t want to go to the hospital. Daddy dragged her from the bed to his truck, trailing her blood . . . ” (Ward 2). Annie Bares notes that Rose’s unwillingness to go to the hospital stems from a long history of abusive medical practices against African Americans, citing “racialized, ableist medicine” of “surgical experiments . . . without anesthesia . . . to the ongoing practice of forced sterilization; . . . inferior healthcare” (30). Hortense Spillers also notes the enslaved body’s usage for medical research through its profitable atomization:

Assortments of diseased, damaged, and disabled Negroes, deemed incurable and otherwise worthless are bought up, it seems. . .by medical institutions, to be experimented and operated upon, for purposes of 'medical education' and the interest of medical science [. . .] the procedures adopted for the captive flesh demarcate a total objectification, as the entire captive community becomes a living laboratory. (68)

However, Rose’s exclusion from the state safety net and inaccessibility to public welfare, and the subsequent atomizing and maiming of the body that leads to death, no longer relies on the condition of captivity or that her body is “diseased, damaged, and disabled.” The category of how a body is measured and defined has evolved so that not only has the racial difference in the flesh itself become a defect, but that race no longer stands alone but needs to be thought of in collision and collusion with other minutely

categorized criteria that creates a body more susceptible to risks and violence. The probability of death or overall low quality of life is not affected simply by physical traits, but also by biopolitical and structural within economies of risk and survival. Thus, the black body continues to be exploited, damaged, and disabled not under medical experiments but state experiments of weakening welfare state and the micromanagement of biopolitics so that entire groups of populations, excluded from the safety net, become vulnerable and disposable to premature death. Her aversion is justified by structural inaccessibility based on economic reasons including bills and transportation. The Pit is not only an extremely isolated place in location but also isolated in terms of various social strata such as wealth and public resources. Thus, Rose involuntarily being brought to the hospital only when she is on the verge of dying exposes how the historically abusive, discriminative, and privatized healthcare system directly causes her death.

Rose's death and home birth are, then, no accident but a result of the fact that her body is an available-for-injury body, for whom long-term bodily health and integrity are already statistically unlikely under state institutions. Rose's home-birthing and death are indications of a generational and structural expunging of African Americans from the state's safety net, as Rose is driven off the domain of social protection and divested of her right to be protected as the nation's citizen. In this sense, the African American mother-child relation is no longer disrupted by property relations, but by what can only be construed as state-sanctioned violence under neoliberal capitalism. These framings should be situated within the endemic rather than the epidemic or exceptional. Rose has survived Hurricane Elaine and Camille, both respectively category three and five hurricanes. Rose's memory of hurricane Camille forebodes Katrina in its aftermath: "a smell like garbage set to rot, seething with maggots in the hot sun. She said that the newly dead and the old dead littered the beaches, the streets, the woods. She said Papa

Joseph found a skeleton in the yard, gleaming, washed clean of flesh and clothing, but she said it still stank like a bad tooth in the mouth” (Ward 218), and “fourteen of them drowned in Camille. In their attic” (229). In the end, Rose survived both of these hurricanes only to be let die by the state, which points to the fact that she is already living in a place endemic with violence and debilitation in all aspects of life regardless of the fact that the place is prone to natural disasters. The future, either in a form of a hurricane or death, is already here, but unevenly distributed, in bits and pieces in time and space, as extremes and also as banalities.

If we view the Katrina experience of the Batiste in that the crisis is no longer marked by temporal transitoriness but rather extends and expands into the normalization of everyday, we also find that the suffering and violence of Katrina are also an extension or even constitutive of debilitation that is already endemic. If Ward showed Rose’s childbirth as an urgent sense of desperation and vulnerability in the unavoidability of her actual physical and premature death, symbolizing an absolute no way out, Esch’s pregnancy is shown as a distinctive exitlessness whose machination is more protracted and comprehensive in the governance and policing of life. While it is statistically likely that Esch will face the same fate as Rose as in premature death, it is also likely that Esch will face social death and be trapped in a protracted living of a low-quality life as a disenfranchised and marginalized person. Esch’s life may face a “disaster” but it is already caught up within a debilitating condition that pervades her life. In other words, Esch displays a particular motherhood that represents a much more comprehensive and institutionalized regulation and policing of the black female’s body.

Examining Esch’s life as laid out within the twelve days, readers can glean facts that prove that her environment, endemic with violence, is formulated to waste the victim out, thinning the boundary between life and death. As Esch wonders when and how she got pregnant, what litters her memory as she thinks back to all the times she

has had sex, are “gold and silver condom wrappers, like chocolates covered in golden foil to look like coins, that the boys leave behind once they get up, once we pull apart” (Ward 30). Despite these contraceptive measures, Esch still finds herself pregnant. Marotte suggests that “[t]he golden coins are a kind of currency in this environment, representing one’s ability to ward off unwanted pregnancy, unwanted responsibility” (212). Indeed, despite the condoms, Esch still lacks the currency, the power in making a decision for her body. She starts her life deprived of the most elementary foundation of social protection as a minor – the lack of parental guidance. The maternal absence resulting from Rose’s death eliminates any sort of female guidance regarding biological and reproductive knowledge which likely contributed to Esch’s early sexual awakening and subsequent teen pregnancy. Esch’s first sexual encounter occurred when she was twelve and she describes it as “[t]he only thing that’s ever been easy for [her] to do, like swimming through water” (Ward 22). Not only is she motherless, but Esch also cannot rely on her father for advice as he is emotionally estranged after his wife’s death and is never much around. All she has is her brothers and their male friends in the secluded Pit. Schools may teach them tornado drills but public education seems to have failed Esch, for it is through the gossip of the girls that she has to learn of the ways to get rid of her pregnancy. Esch says, “I’ve heard girls at my school talk. These are conversations I snatch from the air like I take down clothes that have crusted dry on a clothesline. The girls say . . .” (102). It is almost as if pregnancy is an inevitable certainty given the paucity of resources available to Esch.

Just like the uselessness of public education, state welfare fails to provide her with the necessary information and protection. The choice remains equally limiting under lack of access to public healthcare, resources, and support system.

Only thing I wouldn’t be able to find is the birth control pills; I’ve never had a prescription, wouldn’t have money to get them if I did, don’t have any

girlfriends to ask for some, and have never been to the Health Department. Who would bring me? Daddy, who sometimes I think forgets that I am a girl? Big Henry, one of the few of our friends who has a car? . . . These are my options, and they narrow to none. (Ward 102-103)

The details of this thought process show Esch's foreclosed access to her own reproductive rights. Ironically, the only available options Esch has are self-annihilative, lethal ones where she would have to physically harm her own body along with the growing baby – to jump on something hard and big or to consume bleach (102). As it did for her mother, there never is an institutionalized safety net to provide choices of a safe and legalized termination of the pregnancy.

What is interesting is that due to such workings of state-sanctioned violence that excludes Esch from resources and support for a higher quality of life, her pregnancy ultimately functions as a disability. Her pregnancy as an impairment makes her already marginalized life worsen into “unbearable day[s]” (205). From her self-diagnose of pregnancy to being exposed for her “terrible truth” (36), Esch is alone, isolated, and pathologized, bearing all its disgrace for who she is. The baby inside her is not a developing fetus, but a death sentence. It is something that will consume and destroy her. She writes “[t]he terrible truth of what I am flares like a dry fall fire in my stomach, eating all the fallen pine needles. There is something there” (36). It is a “thing” (30) that remains at the bottom of her stomach no matter how much she throws up, a “bully” (37) that keeps her awake at night, an “animal” (109), a “lie,” (41) a “secret” (45) that estranges her from her closest friend and when discovered will “turn us to stone” (88). It is proof of something terrible that she is in denial of. She avoids looking at her stomach “the way the man refused to look at the woman lying at his feet, sleeping in the long grass,” who is likely injured or dead (36). Calling it “the hurt,” (153) Esch regards her pregnancy within a frame of woundedness: “This is what it means to be pregnant so far:

throwing up. Sick from the moment I open my eyes, . . . I turn the water on so no one can hear me vomit” (37). Overlapping with how irregular and unhealthy diet makes her feel, the unsettling but subtle changes in her body gives Esch a feeling that “something’s wrong,” (30) as if her body has been afflicted or impaired. It causes nausea, sickness, and fatigue, dis-easing her life in not an extreme but in a gradually damaging way.

Ward’s description of pregnancy as an invisible yet insidious and gradual crippling of a body shows how distinct and systemic Esch’s reproductive injustice is. The speed becomes central in the injurious nature as her enlarging belly, itself a result of oppression, turns to assume the function of slow, quotidian violence against Esch’s body in this ongoingness of racial and neoliberal injustice. Pregnancy adopts a disabling nature, hindering what few activities Esch had pride in being capable of: “This is that other thing that I can do. Run” (Ward 80). Now, Skeetah notices that she cannot run as fast as she used to: “‘You ran slow yesterday.’ . . . ‘Why?’” (86). Its characteristics as physical exhaustions, daily discomforts, and emotional apprehension cripple Esch’s everyday life, making her “off balance. . . . clumsy” (45). Her uncontrollable bladder interferes with her task as a lookout, partly sabotaging a plan with her siblings and endangering them. Esch’s pregnancy acts as an impediment that intensifies rather than ameliorates her and her family’s already precarious existence. That is, the process of reproduction is transformed into a political phenomenon of incapacitating effect that has a special way of contributing to Esch’s branding as a ‘failed’ body.

The labeling of Esch’s pregnancy as a disability warrants closer examination, for it sheds much insight on how contemporary biopolitics operates in between daily debilitation and disability. I rely on Jasbir Puar’s informative and nuanced way of framing the relation between the concept of disability and debility under neoliberalism. She asserts the necessity to redefine and rearrange the non-disabled/disabled binary as

disability is no longer a fixed essential or phenomenological state but something that traverses across “social, geographic, and political spaces” (xiv) and intersects with “with other kinds of binary categorizations propagated . . . by neoliberal constructions of failed and capacitated bodies” (14). Stressing the temporality of the endemic that has been obfuscated in the exceptionalization of disability, Puar rejects disability as only perceived or felt as the “result of an unfortunate accident, or . . . an exceptional circumstance” (65) and instead endorses disability as now a condition that is solicited and manufactured as a result of the regulatory functions of the state’s biopolitical category. The biopolitical population metrics are mediated through race, class, gender, and region under different debilitative contexts such as racist incarceration and policing practices, and other modes of community disenfranchisement (Puar 65). Disability is thus informed by the biopolitics of debility, which actively produces an already always predisposed body that is deemed available for injury under the disciplinary apparatuses of containment and control (Puar 76).

In the mechanism of biopolitical population racism, racialization becomes itself a process of debilitation, cohering “along the long-standing avenue for policing, surveilling, and securitizing deviant bodies from slavery through the prison-industrial complex” (Puar 81). Quoting Spillers, Puar calls the black body an already disabled body in the context of slavery in the Americas as “the inferiority of black flesh is literally inscribed by the master’s whip, suturing the constructed association of blackness with defect to the physical attribution of disability” (81). Thus, it is at this historical moment of the middle passage that black bodies become disabled and disabled bodies become black. Blackness enters the circuitry of signification and production of disability, rigidifying this racialization as a form of impairment. Thus, while today’s supranational capitalism’s predatory profit-seekingness mass produces countless racial, class, and sexual Others, this does not mean that pre-modern products

of oppression are eradicated but rather intensified and reproduced, evolved and tailored to the current modern setup and its markets to suit the hyper-individualized, yet mass-produced curation of body policing.

The lack of public welfare state allows an aggressive and exploitative capitalist machine to mine, multiply and profit off from debilitation, and the body is treated as a portfolio for neoliberal investments so that some disabled bodies from the disciplinary institution can be transitioned into forms of incorporative biopolitical control. However even as the consumer attitude refers the whole of life to the market, and everyone can be profited off, they are also always potential waste as once someone becomes unrelated to the program of ‘development,’ they are labeled as redundant, dysfunctional, and unnecessary human wastes. Bodies like those of Esch or Rose, which are deemed neither productive nor profitable because they are not in any way redeemable through cultural rehabilitation or a reorganization of resources, are thus, constructed as objects of disposability, continually subjected to violent institutionalization and debilitation. Because hyper-consumerist society “privatizes . . . issues so that they are not perceived as public . . . individualizes tasks so that they are not seen as social” (Bauman 204), responsibility and blame is further placed on the debilitated individual according to their markers of race, class, debt, or region, either as the fault or as the virtuousness of the body.

Esch’s racial capital is then considered to fall short in this complex neoliberal and biopolitical curation of bodies as her pregnancy, which may not be identified as essentially or conventionally disabling, assumes different dimensions of debilities and disabilities due to her “foreclosed access to legibility and resources” (Puar xv). Without family or a partner, Esch’s pregnant body stands all the more vulnerable against political powers. The powers that caused the physical death of Rose similarly operate to cause the social death of Esch wherein her body is exploited by state policies which

prominently relied on the mobilization of racist imagery and propaganda to create a more “sanitized, controlled, and regulated” visual landscape of American life (Giroux 172). By penalizing and demonizing black youths and trapping them in a visual economy of criminal black boys and morally lax black girls, disenfranchised youths like Esch are foreclosed from any chances of legibility or state support. Black teen moms are especially seen as draining the vitality of the state, as the state policy considers them to be a burden of economic responsibility and a challenge to the cultural ideology surrounding traditional values of young female sexual propriety. Thus, black corporeality is dealt with criminal contempt and disdain under public scrutiny, while the unjust neoliberal dismantling of the social state by privatization goes unnoticed. Esch is given the visual currency that makes her as disposable as those discarded golden condom wrappers - the image of an irresponsible and immoral black pregnant teen, and once a mother, the images of ‘welfare queen,’ the parasites of the state, milking off welfare. Esch cannot expect help either on a private or public level.

In contrast to Rose’s “happy accident” of a pregnancy with support from her husband and parents (217), Esch’s pregnancy remains a lonely, stress-filled, and anxiety-ridden path. This social gaze is most prominent in the paternal characters of the novel. Although Esch’s situation is too secluded for us readers to even visualize the dominant society’s gaze on Esch, it is partly reflected in Manny and Claude’s perception. Both of them vehemently reject Esch, also rejecting their own responsibility and consequence of her pregnancy. When Manny finally realizes that Esch is pregnant, he physically repudiates Esch:

He is seeing me, and his hands are coming around to feel the honeydew curve, the swell that is more than swell, the fat that is not fat, the budding baby, and his eyes are so black they are all black, and they are a night without stars. . . . He knows. “Fuck!” Manny yells, and he is throwing me up and off of him. I hit the

door behind me, [. . .] I am crying again for what I have been, for what I am, and for what I will be, again. (146-7)

Once Manny realizes the physical changes in Esch, he throws her off as if he is repulsed, violently separating himself from something untouchable. Manny makes clear early on in the novel what he feels about motherhood; pregnancy is a price a female has to pay, a liability (95). Esch feels contempt and disdain in Manny's eye as he regards China who recently gave birth: "*She ain't shit, ain't got no heart*. He looks at China when he murmurs, but it feels like he looks at me" (173). When Esch confronts Manny, he labels her a "slut" denying his paternal responsibility. Claude similarly rejects Esch in the heat of the moment: "Daddy's face shuts, and he pushes. Daddy saw it, that second before he pushed me" (234). Claude shoves Esch into the hurricane flood, and although he immediately tries to catch her again, the message of his action is plain and glaring. Both are denying what Esch represents, a future that will likely marginalize their already disenfranchised life. Depositing on Esch's body their own failure and anxiety, they violently separate themselves from her contagious liability. Through Manny and Claude, we see the society's sterile gaze that isolates, pathologizes, and debilitates Esch's body.

Instead of what Rose tried to instill in her, Esch cannot help but internalize this gaze: "Mama was wrong: I have no glory. I have nothing" (123). As she is isolated further and further by her condition from her siblings, especially Skeetah whom she is closest to, her world grows smaller and smaller until she is confined to the tiny space of her bathroom. Confronting herself in front of the only private mirror in the house, Esch tries to see her ailing and mutating body as others might see: "I have to see myself as Skeetah, Randall, Junior, Daddy, and Manny do" (87). However, even the mirror does not provide her with the comfort and privilege of privacy to process her condition for Esch's life continues to be laid bare under public scrutiny and condemnation. Here, we

see Esch internalizing the society's values, solely burdened with the consequence. As the only person to pay the price for being pregnant, for her compromised body capital, Esch is branded as the social evil of an irresponsible black teen mom, her unwelcomed pregnancy marking her body as abnormal, non-valuable, and disposable, excluded from the legitimate system of heteronormative patriarchal social order. Rather than a victim, Esch becomes, as Sinéad Moynihan writes, "according to neoliberal logic, . . . [an] exemplary of a 'mismanaged life'" (555).

II. “Bold as a Greek”: Affective Labor and Surplus as Survival

Strategy

The previous chapter elucidates the absence of a safety net, foreclosed support, and accessibility to public resources, and deconstructs the mythologies and institutionalization of the black female body. While Ward acknowledges the violence and exploitation under which Esch suffers, she does so without completely divesting her of her agency. This chapter attempts to examine the way Ward’s narrative outlines the route of oppression that simultaneously speaks to the emotions and desires of struggle that places an affective spotlight on the operations of biopolitics. While chapter one delves into the social exposé of motherhood as an institution, this chapter explores Ward’s dual work of reclaiming motherhood as an experience for females. Ward’s discourse is, however, in no way a completed one. Ward deconstructs while reconstructing, negotiating in that liminal space between competing experiences. Here, I identify how each maternal subject practices different motherhood and how these daily practices are accumulated and evolved into an asset that characters like Esch may benefit from. More importantly, I focus on the production of desires and emotions as motherhood is examined away from the public sphere into a more private and intimate sphere of experience. In this framework, Ward delves into the mother-child relationship in which Esch’s affective labor of memory-making enlivens her debilitated and dying body. Furthermore, she explores mother figures’ relationship with father figures by introducing the subject of womanhood as an inseparable aspect of motherhood, positively reconfiguring Esch’s subjectivity and sexuality through her feelings of heterosexual desire.

Ward deliberately introduces plural and fluid motherhood that transcends boundaries between human and non-human entities in a place of stagnancy and

isolation. In *Salvage the Bones*, motherhood is less a bodily essence than a bodily experience that is ambivalent and fluid, deadly and life-giving at the same time. It is portrayed as something contingent and unpredictable, that is nurtured and informed by complex socio-cultural, political, and historical factors. While motherhood can be found across various characters regardless of gender or species, the most nurturing and constructive motherhood is embodied by Rose in a form of memory that guides Esch and her siblings. Often portrayed through animal metaphors, memories of Rose are littered across the novel with lasting affects of love that provides strength and comfort for them. One of the most memorable scenes includes Esch's memory of egg hunting with her mother:

She'd leaned over like Randall, her strong hand soft on the back of my neck, steadying me like a dog. . . . *The eggs look that way because of the mama. Whatever color the mama is, that's what color the egg is.* Her lips were pink, and when she leaned over like that I could smell baby powder drifting from the front of her dress, see the mole-marked skin of her chest, the soft fall of her breasts down into her bra. Like me and you, she said. *Like me and you. See?* She smiled at me, and her eyelashes met her eyelashes like a Venus flytrap. Her thick arm would rub against mine, . . . The hens would lurk, murmuring. The cock, he always running off being a bully, she said. *But the mama, the mama always here. See?* (Ward 199)

This tender and beautiful memory comes to Esch's mind while she prepares for Katrina and Esch seeks the safety and warmth she felt around her mother's presence. In the fond memories, it is through the softness as well as solidness of Rose's bodily parts of lips, chest, hands, and arms that Esch feels the profound bond and maternal love. If her body is portrayed in its suppleness here, she is equally remembered as being capable and strong in other memories:

She was the one that caught a baby shark; . . . as long as her arm, and strong. Daddy tried to take the pole from her and she wouldn't let him. His friends laughed, tried to get her to give it to them, but she held it in both hands and walked the shark up and down . . . She walked it tired, her arms big and round, strong under the woman fat. She coaxed it to death. . . . When we ate it, it was tender, sea salty, and had no bones. (Ward 85)

In Esch's memories, Rose's feminine and maternal body is both bone-hard strong and bone-less tender, capable of killing and nurturing. Such multifaceted maternal guidance that Rose offers is most prominently represented and passed on in the corporeal configuration of hands, even after her death. It is the "sure" (52) yet "careful" (110) hands of Rose that steady and tend to the children's ailing bodies, the hands that Esch recalls down to the exact details of her endearing wound: "Whenever she would walk me through the store or through a crowd when we were out in public, holding the back of my neck with her hand, I'd feel the scar and see those pelicans. . . . Her hand was special, her own, one. Mama" (86). When Rose would wake the kids up for school, "she would touch us on our backs first," (114) the tenderness of which stands in sharp contrast to Claude's loud banging on the wall. After she's gone, Esch sees Rose beaming in the photograph, her "hands caressing Daddy, smiling" (140). As a wife, Rose is also nothing but supportive, taking care of an alcoholic husband with maternal attention. When Claude came home dazed drunk, Rose "would walk out to meet him, gather him to her like a child. She was only a few inches shorter than him and could bear all of his weight" (103). Such tender-hearted maternity functions as both an emotional and physical pillar of an expanding but vulnerable family.

Rose embodies a nurturing nature that enlivens those around her with her tenacious vitality and resourcefulness, fostering a sense of family despite the fragile dynamics within their home. At the same time, Rose's motherhood does present a risk

of recycling the old mythical, ideological, and didactic maternal value that results in a sentimental portrayal of a divine and sacrificial mother, whose ever-nurturing motherhood seems to be essentially timeless as captured in how she “smiles serenely from the photo” even after her death (Ward 135). However, while clearly acknowledging such risks, one may ask what it means to discuss motherhood in this age and time and what kind of intervention Ward’s discussion makes in this specific twenty-first century survival narrative when there are more Katrinas to come in an already unevenly precarious life. What is motherhood for a woman deprived of the ability to care for and protect her child? What is motherhood for those whose reproductive activities are criminalized and pathologized?

If what evokes the fondness and lovingness towards her mother are the hands of Rose, Ward’s contour of her motherhood, distinct in its tender and careful memories, suggests that touches have memories and memories have touches across time and space. Ward foregrounds the physique of Rose’s hands that Esch cherishes most, and translates and preserves this touch of love through memories. Through this, Esch detects the affective capability in her memory of Rose’s touch and is able to maintain a meaningful relationship with her even in the absence of the physical body. That is, although her absence makes the whole family vulnerable, Rose’s secure and steady motherhood is able to give sustenance to Esch’s literal and figural dying body. At one point, Esch imagines her body slowly drying up in her barren environment:

The sun is bearing down on me, burning, evaporating the sweat, water, and blood from me to leave my skin, my desiccated organs, my brittle bones: my raisin of a body. If I could, I would reach inside of me and pull out my heart and that tiny wet seed that will become the baby. (Ward 122)

Despite the ‘sickness in the soil,’ which might not nurture certain seeds, we see that the life-giving memories of Rose have a decisive hand in the survival of Esch to carry on. It

is also true that the “wet seed” that persists in such an environment, is also the only thing with moisture in Esch’s withered body, and thus, represents a source of life not just for itself but for Esch as well. Then, it is the excess affect of the tactile maternal love that lingers on after the body is gone, an affective surplus that attains a singular object of its own free from subjectivity. This is represented by the touch and/of memories that ultimately fortify and nourish Esch’s present and future. The seed endures and even as death and disaster loom, life, including that of Esch, inevitably continues and grows in an unfavorable and powerless condition as Esch’s. Just as Esch notes while she sees one of China’s puppies as “her mother’s daughter. . . a fighter [who] breathes,” (13) Esch’s survival depends on maternal love.

Furthermore, if Rose’s motherhood is to be perceived as a pre-completed, essential quality, it is imperative to understand that her motherhood is only as formed in Esch’s memories. Regardless of how Rose’s own journey was as a maternal subject, which was in fact prematurely cut short, it is mostly up to Esch to construct Rose as a mother in her memory. Indeed, Esch fits the memories “together like a jumbo puzzle” (Ward 136), gleaning from her daily life and in situations as random as the hospital nurse she encounters whose tooth gap reminds her of Rose, her siblings’ expressions, the photos scattered in her house, and in the surrounding nature. Rose’s mother figure is made from Esch’s memory and its affects that overflow into Esch’s present. Rose’s motherhood is then, less a problem of what she was than Esch’s own imaginative approach as one encounters and mediates the past in the present. Thus, Rose’s representation lies in the act of affective creation, where feelings hold the currency for survival. It is precisely such quotidian labor of forging an affect of maternal love that makes life bearable and livable *within* the excess of the existing regimes of meaning where Esch’s existence is defined as nothing but literal waste. Ward does not provide a fake consolation of incorporating or rehabilitating Rose and Esch back into the

dominant regimes. The end of the narrative does not urge the return of a loving mother and thoroughly excludes any nostalgic reinstatement. Rose remains dead, China is swept away, and even though Esch claims that China will return to see that she is a mother, the readers are promised nothing but the reality itself. But in this reality devoid of life, in Esch's otherwise debilitated, disabled, and dying body, it is precisely her affective labor of memory-making based on Rose's motherhood that allows life, however, starved and wasted, to endure.

As a human waste, Esch is also able to discover, explore, and affirm the affective surplus of desire and feeling that arises from her body's heterosexual encounter which ultimately leads to the survival of her surplus existence. Within that excess, affect is a mode of emotional and physical interaction to reinvigorate those lives abandoned, not just to sustain life, but also to create freedom. While Esch's life will continue, mired in violence and suffering but nevertheless tenacious and persistent, it is because there are moments that do make her feel alive, in the affective space between pain and pleasure, love and hate, and life and death. Ward does not suture those wounds left in the bodies, the trauma of a wasteful life, but relies on Esch's creative and affective labor to understand and construct her own experience that is born out of reality but created out of imagination that potentially deterritorializes the reality. Then, Esch is the social subject who, according to Spillers' foundational work, is placed "*out of the traditional symbolics of female gender*" but also makes space *within* such symbolics (80). She becomes a social subject that exerts a different kind of agency that is not defined as an independent control over her environment and the oppressive external forces, but as deviance and resilience within a place where she intends to survive without resources.

I further delve into the subject of bridging black women's motherhood and womanhood and reading this space as a crucial site of political reiteration. Through the

complex love-hate relationship between mothers and absent fathers, Ward rewrites the sexual grammar of legitimate suffering, focusing on the unexpected affect of desire and love that redefines and disrupts the prescribed power dynamic. Interrogating what motherhood and womanhood mean under extreme conditions, Ward suggests possibilities to rethink how black women's sexuality may function as a resource for both individual and collective survival and preservation. Esch's understanding of motherhood is informed not only by her memories but also hinges on her own feelings of heterosexual desire. Medea, one of many mother figures in Esch's life, is most relevant to Esch in her emotional identification as a love-torn young girl as she identifies her desire for Manny with Medea's desire for Jason. As she prepares to walk out to where Manny and her brothers are, Esch's thoughts turn back to Medea: "I wondered if Medea felt this way before she walked out to meet Jason for the first time, like a hard wind come through her and set her to shaking" (Ward 7). As she proceeds with her summer reading of "Eight Brief Tales of Lovers," Esch experiences overwhelming emotional sensations for Manny with whom she is as "bold as a Greek" (57). She "recognize[s]" herself in Medea through her emotions towards Manny (17). However, her strong identification with Medea wanes as she worries about what betrayed love entails. Esch notes that she cannot move on with the book. She is stuck in the part where she realizes that "for Medea, love makes help turn wrong" (154). Esch is troubled whether her unreciprocated love might wreak havoc on her brothers as well as on her unborn child just like Medea did.

Esch's concern about how her womanly feelings of desire might affect her family suggests that the heterosexual desire for the father often precipitates or is related to one's motherhood. In *Salvage*, all mothers are women too. One of the many memorable moments Esch has of her mother includes an intensely erotic scene:

Mama had been on the dance floor; I'd never seen her dance before that, and I

never would again. She was dancing with a man, not Daddy, while Daddy sat at the edge of the floor and watched. She had shook like China, threw her head back so water glistened down her throat, and her body ran in curves when normally she was all solid. She was beautiful. (Ward 93)

The extremely sensual scene of their mother dancing with another man as Claude watches comes as such a shock to Esch and Randall who stumbles upon this charged performance. While Randall responds somewhat violently, grabbing Esch's shoulders "so hard they hurt," Esch finds Rose absolutely beautiful and captivating. Their mother is unlike what the children have known her to be, radiating an alienating but dazzling beauty through her physical movements. It is an unfamiliar transformation and discovery of femininity that has been always a part of her mother. The feminine affect that emanates from Rose coexists with her maternal side as part of the multifaceted sexuality of Rose.

Ward shows that femininity assumes different forms, affecting differences in motherhood as well. China's motherhood traverses across her relationship with Kilo and Skeetah. Just like Medea, China seems a spiteful and revengeful mother against the father. As a destructive and indifferent mother, China's relationship with Kilo is based on competition and power play, in which she asserts her dominance: "When they mated, China had let Kilo lick her from behind, let him mourn. Smiled like she liked it...She'd snapped at him, figured it for a hold. Hated the submission of it. She nicked him, snapped at him until she threw him off. She'd drawn blood; he hadn't" (Ward 95). At the same time, China is also a feminine lover to Skeetah. In a parallel to Rose's dancing scene, China and Kilo enter a dog fight while Skeetah watches on:

China grabs Kilo at the back of the neck again. She sinks her face into him.

When she draws back, her jaws are shut, and she rips fur. [. . .] China kisses the side of Kilo's face, a face-tonguing lover's kiss, mother to father, deeply. . . .

“China!” Skeetah calls, and China lets Kilo go even though he still gnaws at her foot. She looks back at Skeetah as if to say, I am coming, love, I am here. . . . She is bounding toward Skeetah, her smile red like smudged lipstick. The blood on her leg is a crimson garter. [. . .] They meet. They rise. They embrace. They bite, neck to neck. (171-5)

This scene is at once a bloody fight and a romanticized dance, mixed with vicious bites and kisses. In a sort of love-hate relationship, China is not only a spiteful mother/fighter against Kilo, but she is also a sensual woman for Skeetah dressed in ‘lipstick’ and ‘garter.’ This scene epitomizes how love can be born out of violence and vice versa, and how a weary mother can be a sensual female.

This can also be seen in Rose's story of how she met Claude. She “hit him in the chest so hard, he lost his breath. Then he stopped pulling her hair, but started leaving her presents . . . That was their beginning” (141). The two parallel dancing scenes of Rose and China and their relationship with father figures demonstrate how motherhood is mutually informative, not mutually exclusive with femininity and womanhood. Thus, Ward’s narrative explodes what Spillers indicates as the “signifying property plus” of the “layers of attenuated meanings, made an excess in time, over time, assigned by a particular historical order” (65) to black female subjects, prompting us to rethink the experience of motherhood and womanhood the hegemony foreclosed as something that necessarily contradicts and excludes each other. Instead, Ward focuses on the unruly affective possibilities that locate this area as a place ripe for reclamation.

In a form of oppressive masculinity against femininity in the deadly dance, violence reaches its climax when Kilo rips off China’s breasts, a feminine signifier as well as a source of maternal nutrition. Interestingly, Ward centralizes violence in her exploration of sexuality and motherhood here. Ward is employing violence and using its traumatic point as an opportunity to oscillate and connect the two feminine areas of eros

and motherhood. In particular, China's fight/dance scene of bodily entanglement shows how carnal pain can also be very sensual and engaging, loosening any reified prescription between biological pain and societal meanings, especially in racial discourse. That is, Ward is foregrounding the feeling that escapes or is released when bodies collide in both pleasure and pain. Pain is central to *Salvage* in that racialized pain is reduced to an illiterate and distorted, even invisible phenomenon within the dominant order and operates as a marker of otherness and legitimate targets of violence. However, Ward avoids defining black women's bodies as solely powerless conduits and sites of trauma. While they might be undeniable products of the past and shaped by the present, they are not wholly controlled by it. To make this possible, Ward centralizes the body and its unruly affect of sensation to retain its potential of individuating experience. If the body is capable of non-essential and affective experiential sensations that are always in motion, Ward's revisitation of scenes of violence against the black body in her novel is also an attempt to rethink its affects as possibilities to reinventing the relationship between body and subjectivity. Focusing on the thin line between a bloody fight and a dance of love, between misdirected love and hatred, between pain and pleasure, Ward utilizes affect and sensations as sites to rethink black desire and intimacy within the quotidian nature of trauma.

Esch rarely articulates her feelings, especially negative ones of anxiety or grief. Instead, Esch follows what Claude rebukes her to do so, to suppress her emotion in a sort of defense mechanism: "After Mama died, Daddy said, *What are you crying for? Stop crying. Crying ain't going to change anything.* We never stopped crying. We just did it quieter. . . . This was the only thing that we could do" (Ward 206). With her teenage pregnancy, Esch also remains mostly disassociated, avoiding the confrontation of the truth and seemingly accepting Manny's equation of her motherhood as an antithesis to femininity and strength. But the moments of cathartic expression that she

lets off during intensely painful experiences and emotions, rather give her force by making them the organizers of her current experience, shaping and affecting other types of emotions too. The moments that Esch releases her pain, rage, and grief against Manny, albeit scarce, are also the time Esch becomes genuinely in tune with her own body's desire and feelings. Although pregnancy is obviously a traumatic and debilitating condition as examined in the previous chapter, it also coincides with Esch's scrutiny and self-knowledge of her own body, probing open the possibility of an agency within powerlessness. Her teenage pregnancy inadvertently helps Esch understand herself as a woman and find a toughness within her. Despite being "disowned" by both father figures (251), her journey through pregnancy helps her grow more confident about her sexuality and as an affective and autonomous subject. When Esch decides to no longer hide who she is to Manny which is also a time when she is the most vulnerable, we see Esch at her most assertive. Esch embraces herself through an active gesture like never before: "I grab his face. . . . He will look at me. He shrugs, twists his head to the side. . . . He will look at me. . . . I grab again. He will look at me" (145-6). Navigating her pregnancy is also a process of becoming hyperaware of the state of her body, which coincides with her increasing desire for Manny as well. Pregnancy only functions to intensify something that Esch is already feeling. Like Rose and Claude, China and Skeetah, her body's change into a mother is not seen as something exclusive to her journey of sexual awakening but as a mutually informing process that is both equally physical, painful, and essentially transformative. Embracing her traumatic pregnancy becomes part of accepting her body and sexuality.

Black female teenagers' sexual desires have always been pathologized. Among cultural scenarios to dehumanize and downplay female sexuality and sexual pleasure, black girls occupy a particular vulnerability in relation to the body politic as they are already assumed to be precocious and promiscuous which renders sexually active girls

unsympathetic subjects who are unworthy of social support. Because the family is an extension of the state, endowed with the power responsible for policing the sexual and reproductive behavior of youths, the way a black family is formed is inextricably linked to state practices that govern body politics. Then, it can be said that Rose's premature death causes Esch's premature sexual activity. With no one to guide her, Esch is unsure about her own body and her budding sexuality. At the beginning of the novel she recounts her first sexual encounter which she describes as "[t]he only thing that's ever been easy for me to do, like swimming through water, . . . when I started having it" (Ward 22). Although Esch describes it as easy, sex is only easy in that "it was easier to let him keep on touching me than ask him to stop, easier to let him inside than push him away, easier than hearing him ask me, Why not? It was easier to keep quiet and take it than to give him an answer" (23). The term 'easy' belies an element of trauma that is less a violent incident of sexual assault than a muted environment of peer pressure in which the area of consent is murky at best. With no guidance except those hijacked by peer pressure and social pathologization, Esch's sexuality becomes inevitably traumatic away from self-love. Such vulnerability manifests in the uneasiness and aversion Esch feels in her body: "[b]ut I looked in the mirror and knew the rest of me wasn't so remarkable: wide nose, dark skin, Mama's slim, short frame with all the curves folded in so that I looked square" (7). She feels almost invisible in her unremarkable body, noting how she is looked over, and registered as not even a "prey nor threat" to Manny's girlfriend (56). Manny himself refuses to see who she is, emotionally detached and seeking nothing more than bodily pleasure from her.

Furthermore, sexual penetration has been long associated with the sexualized power of domination and violence. To talk about Esch's sexuality within the scope of her teenage relationship is to acknowledge the subtle gradients of power that stands within the boundaries of violence and intimacy and the inevitably traumatic formation

of physical and emotional vulnerabilities, especially for a black teenage girl. However, it would be remiss to describe Esch's relationship with Manny as only exploited and victimized. Largely left unexplored are the public and private possibilities for such fundamental concepts and behaviors such as desire, pleasure, and sex in the exploration of the relationship of race and gender with the dominant power. Many things are lost within the dearth of vocabulary surrounding female sexual vulnerability. To regard Esch as solely traumatized and vulnerable would be to misunderstand and oversimplify the complexity in the relation between sex and power, how these two realms inform, shape, and sometimes, contradict each other, producing varied meanings and affects. With Manny, Esch experiences overwhelming emotional sensations that also translate into somatic ones: "I imagine that this is the way Medea felt about Jason when she fell in love . . . that she looked at him and felt a fire eating up through her rib cage, turning her blood to boil, evaporating hotly out of every inch of her skin. I feel it so strongly . . ." (Ward 57). Unlike others whom she "let [them] have because they wanted it, and not because [she] wanted to give it," she is as "bold as a Greek" with Manny and slowly asserts control over her own bodily experience (16). Her timidity and passivity in her expression of heterosexual desire change with Manny and learns to express her longing and desires. Here, Esch's body is reclaimed and redefined as a private and pleasurable site, against the public discourse and scrutiny of her body under which erotic desire is shamed and erased.

The power dynamic in this relationship becomes complicated when we take into consideration Esch's own desire and pleasure, allowing us to reconsider the boundaries of somatic as well as traumatic dimensions in a sexual relationship. Ward challenges the constructions of sexuality as only fundamentally traumatic and suggests the possibility of reconstructing bodily boundaries to allow how foreclosed, oppressed, and prescribed sensations can become an eroticized power for Esch to reclaim. Moving away from

sexual discourses that center around penetration and its negatively associated trauma and violence toward a discourse concentrated on everyday sexual intimacy and touch, Ward foregrounds the body and its affects to negotiate new possibilities and meanings of gendered and sexualized forms of power. Esch's want for physical intimacy, especially touch, allows her to become more assertive and communicative, changing the power dynamic with Manny. If she had formed a sort of emotional crust to numb herself against other boys whom she really did not want to be with, with Manny Esch freely accepts the intense, almost traumatic deluge of sensations to penetrate her, whereby a process that would otherwise have been solely traumatic becomes a process that can mean so much more: "I showed him with my hips. My hair my pillow in the red dirt. My breasts hurt. I wanted him to lean down, to touch me everywhere. He wouldn't, but his hips would. China barked, knife sharp. I was bold as a Greek; I was making him hot with love, and Manny was loving me" (16-7). Esch felt "beloved" with other boys, but with Manny, she loved with her body and mind, an evident emphasis on agency and proactiveness. This new configuration reveals a different way of experiencing power in a sexual relationship.

To articulate and express her own emotional and physical needs, Esch learns to manipulate her body to a certain degree, successfully eroticizes her emotional needs, and negotiates a positive continuum between her psychic and somatic experiences. Although Esch's communication remains a one-sided attempt, I highlight that moment of intimacy where she is able to gain a deeper corporeal understanding, the awakening of her agency through a relationship that foregrounds sensation and touch. Touch now consists of affective love enduring across time and space, as well as a moment of affective closure for a rejected girl. Mobilizing the physical suffering from the political and historical violence as a conduit to new forms of living, Ward acknowledges the biological domain as the natural site of vulnerability and transforms the space of

transgression into a space of cultural surplus of erotic affect and experience that returns the body to a responsive, receptive, and autonomous condition.

In the end, it is Manny who fails to read her body. Touch seems to be equally visceral for him, although it produces a different affect compared to how it is for Esch. Manny is averse to the emotional vulnerability intimate touch entails and such touches render Esch illegible to him: “so I reach out under the water to touch his chest, . . . Manny says it like he’s disappointed, like he doesn’t know who this girl who reached out to touch him is. ‘You crazy?’ . . . ‘Naw, Esch.’ He kneads the water, pushing himself up and kicking away from me” (55-6). For Esch, it is exactly these unnerving pleasures, the unexpected affects that arise which make the trauma of the bodily and emotional violation be experienced as a “risky vulnerability” but not necessarily a “crisis of subjectivity” (Cvetkovich 80). Esch finds herself at the edge of pathology and trauma but with her affective affirmation, she develops an inclusive and expansive understanding of the black female desire within the foreclosed boundaries of motherhood and womanhood. The black body becomes a form of self-creation and self-sufficiency when one gives free play to the discriminatively refused and erased impulses.

Then, foregrounding touch through a sensation-oriented analysis posits trauma and pain as productive spaces of agency and self-making, diverging black sexuality under policing practices of state and economy. Most importantly, Esch has been able to negotiate the unequal power play she is in, whether it is in a heterosexual relationship or state citizenship, and dictate whatever experience she goes through in her body. Here, her own body and sexuality become an eroticized survival strategy, part of choices that arise from desperate necessity. The driving force of her choice may be love or the fulfillment of physical desire, but it is also an action driven by sheer necessity. Esch’s sexual subjectivity does not necessarily or actively create political resistance, liberate

black women, or redeem black men. However, the maternal and the sexual manifest in the body in the form of micro-politics in that it is always related to her very survival. Just as Esch claims that “it is the only thing I can do; if this is strength, if this is weakness, this is what I do,” (Ward 206) it is what people living with limited resources and restricted agency do to secure basic human rewards such as pleasure and desire. Breaking the rule administered by the public against all odds, against those who “thought [they] could dim [China], that [they] could convince us she wasn’t white and beautiful and gorgeous as a magnolia on the trash-strewn, hardscrabble Pit,” (94) Esch learns to appreciate the female body and love herself amidst pain and suffering, with the support of Jason, Skeetah’s real name. Remembering the mantra Skeetah would repeat “Make them know make them know make them know they can’t live without you,” (175) Esch embraces her own erotic desire of womanhood as well as motherhood and survives, waiting for China who will return “dull, but alive, alive, alive” (260).

III. “Great waiting silence”: Post-Katrina Care and Kinship

While previous chapters have focused on the past and its influence on the present, this chapter examines how Ward envisions and enables a different kind of future even within a foreclosed futurity. In leaving the details of the Batistes’ post-Katrina experience blank, Ward gestures toward an alternative futurity that is staunchly based on reality but expands via (re)imagination. Her stark and realistic depiction of the plight of an African American family does not make the narrative complete. In the context of the post-Katrina community and kinship, Ward comments on how life is possible by revisioning what it is to survive in the twenty-first century. Ward specifically focuses on the increasingly porous and penetrative human-animal demarcation in the everyday lives of the excluded, dispensable, and marginalized bodies of the pit, especially on the relationship between China and Skeetah, examining the way these two characters interact from a racialized, gendered, animalized perspective. Thus, Ward interrogates Skeetah’s transfiguration in his ‘becoming-animal’ and as a figure of an othermother, who along with other characters participates in maintaining a kinship of care in the Post-Katrina world.

The (non)differentiation between human beings and animals is one of the fundamental ways in which Ward represents the way biopolitics exerts itself in the Pit. Shared trauma and suffering between human bodies and animals are embedded throughout the novel. The Batistes are continuously blended into the background of the Pit’s larger ecosystem, pictured as non-human entities of animals, portrayed in the way they live, move, and feel. As a child, Esch “ate figs careful as a bird,” and, as a baby, clung “like a monkey to Mama” (Ward 59). Rose cleans the children’s food-smearred faces “like kittens” (69). As a teenager, Esch’s body is compared to a “cocoon of [a] rib cage” and “crawl[s] around like an ant” with her siblings. They “slither like snakes”

(69) while moving through a forest as friend Big Henry “tears through low bushes like a startled bear” (80). More specifically, what this connection entails is that it occurs between minorities - the animals and the residents – which Esch makes clear as those discriminated against and abandoned. Esch compares her family to the small animals she sees in the woods:

When Mama first explained to me what a hurricane was, I thought that all the animals ran away, that they fled the storms before they came, [. . .] And maybe the bigger animals do. But now I think that other animals, like the squirrels and the rabbits, don’t do that at all. Maybe the small don’t run. Maybe the small pause on their branches, the pine-lined earth, nose up, catch that coming storm air that would smell like salt to them, like salt and clean burning fire, and they prepare like us. (215)

The affinity between the animals and the marginalized humans that Ward portrays is beyond physical resemblance, simple comparativeness, or bestiality, but which can only be construed as a process of animalization that occurs in their parallel experience of shared legibility for violence and suffering. Christopher Lloyd similarly notes the enmeshing of human and animal bodies in *Salvage* that occurs through a “precariousness of ontology” (252) which he notes that black southern corporeality in memory always was rendered “vulnerable, precarious, and creaturely” (261). Quoting Eric Santner on how the residents of the Pit exhibit a creaturely life in which there exists a “peculiar proximity of the human to the animal at the very point of their radical difference” at the moment of the human’s “exposure to a traumatic dimension of political power and social bonds,” (Santner 12) Lloyd connects this to how the South’s inhabitants were similarly exposed to social, historical, and natural forces during Katrina revealing a kind of creatureliness where “humans and nonhuman animals were simultaneously stripped of security, defenses, and bodily stability” or “in some sense

more creaturely . . . by virtue of an excess that is produced in the space of the political” (248).^[1] Similarly, what Ward entails when she situates the soon-to-be Katrina victims and survivors in comparison with animals is the continual rearticulation of that rationale that justified enslavement in which the enslaved were demoted as nonhuman animals lacking humanity within the hierarchy of speciesism, and therefore consequently subjecting them to ownership and whatever violence the transition to a property entailed. Thus, in the state’s abandonment of African American communities in the aftermath of Katrina, amidst the sheer but invisible biopolitical power contemporary states have in determining whom of its citizens should live or die, we see the regurgitation and reinforcement of the non-differentiation or closeness between those ethnically different or minor and undesirable animals to justify a system of inequality and injustice.

Perhaps the most prominent example of indistinction in *Salvage* is between the character of China, Skeetah’s prized pit bull, and the Batiste siblings. Ward’s visceral descriptions of China’s birthing coupled with Esch’s memory of her mother giving birth to Junior which has been discussed earlier indicates the shared suffering. What is of interest here is that the affinity also extends to Esch’s pregnancy as well. Esch recognizes herself in China, associating her own body with her’s from the very beginning of her pregnancy. For the entirety of the novel, Esch does not touch China, and even though she is in close proximity to her, it is never without the presence of Skeetah to mediate their distance. However, witnessing the similarity between the way Rose and China’s body ripples and tears affects Esch deeply so much so that when she realizes something is off with her body, Esch promptly blames China: “Maybe it’s China that made me get it” (30). In other words, Esch does not find out her pregnancy simply from bodily change, but rather, the causality is rerouted to include affects and feelings that arise from her shared pain and affinity with China. Thus, “Esch and China

together, make each other up, reflecting and mirroring one another's throwaway existence" (Lloyd 255). Despite Esch's yearning to better understand China through verbal exchange, identification occurs based purely on witnessing, feeling, and experiencing: "China's ear twitches in her sleep. I wish she could talk" (Ward 122); "If she could speak, this is what I would ask her: Is this what motherhood is?" (130). Inability to communicate decentralizes the anthropocentric privilege of human language and denies an easy solution through verbalization and texts, further making the distinction pervious. What intensifies instead is solely the sharing of trauma, of being the suffering, ailing, toxic bodies, somehow forming a discontinuous yet connective tissue across species lines.

While China's existence is influential to the siblings, especially Skeetah, their connection does not center solely around the shared ontological experience of otherness. To delve deeply into how profoundly and intricately race and racism shape their bare life and biopolitics, it is imperative to touch on the discourse of black masculinity in relation to canine bodies which interestingly Ward explores less from a categorical gender system but via animalization. Noting the Eurocentrism of Giorgio Agamben and Michel Foucault whose constructions of theory dismiss the experiences of racialized bodies, Alexander Weheliye calls attention to the overlooked colonial societies and conflicts which provided the context of how the concentration camp emerged as the "sine qua non of modern politics as sovereignty" as well as secured the context for Foucault's influential definition of biopolitics (34). Asserting that race is a set of sociopolitical processes of differentiation and hierarchization, and their precarious existence diversely and convolutedly framed within discourses, I examine the pit bull's racialization in which black masculinity is inscribed through associations with illegality, violence, bloodshed, and toughness, emblemizing the racist stereotypes and myths that black manhood has been stigmatized in America.

Tracing the history of pit bulls, Harlan Weaver writes that pit bulls were historically owned and raised for dog fights by white elite males and then working-class white males of a lower socioeconomic status. However, as sensationalized media coverage of pit bull attacks began appearing alongside popular rap icons and other subversive minority males, implicit and explicit connections were made between pit bulls and the criminalization of specific races, reinforcing and augmenting raced, classed, and gendered notions of pit bulls as dogs for urban, minority males. Even as pit bulls represented strength and rebellion, self-sufficiency, undying loyalty to a group or an individual, and a willingness to defend oneself at any cost – the qualities most necessary to survive on the streets for the black community, the companionship of bully breeds to black males underwent a racialization of intimacy. While violence against black men was considered culturally legitimate, any sort of violence portrayed by black men was deemed illegitimate and criminalized by mobilizing its close canine relationship. If racialization is understood not as a biological or cultural descriptor but as a conglomerate of sociopolitical relations that discipline humanity into full humans, not-quite-humans, and non-humans, then blackness designates a changing system of unequal power structures that apportion and delimit which humans can lay claim to full human status and which humans cannot.

Ward's description of Skeetah and China evidently falls into the category of a young black male and his loyal and fierce fighter dog and notes how the torn and bloody flesh of the dogs compares to the flesh of their black male owners and those around them. However, in her suggestion to diverge from its mainstream discourse, she does not resort back to the speciesist logic of maintaining the difference and restoring hierarchy. She shows how in this shared precarity also lies the characters' willingness to embrace, not disavow, each other's otherness and reinterprets the affinity between animals and humans. That is, in Ward's literary universe the antagonistic relationship

between humans and animals is subverted by encouraging and transcending the species line in order to probe the very category of the human itself as part of envisioning a new future. Skeetah's masculinity stands in stark contrast to his father, Claude's. Esch notes that "Skeetah is Daddy's copy: dark, short, and lean" (2). But Skeetah is far from his toxic masculinity. In a sort of wretched hopelessness and defeated frustration, Claude's scrambling of labor creates tense animosities between Skeetah who tries to provide for China the same safety Claude tries for his family. When he comes home drunk one day after searching all day for a truck part so that he can repair it to earn money after the storm, he takes out his anger on Skeetah, accusing him of stealing from the wood pile he scavenged to board up the house during the storm. Claude yells "'everything I do for y'all and y'all don't appreciate shit!' [. . .] 'All I do!' . . . 'I'm trying to save us. Y'all need to learn to appreciate me. You hear me?'" (106). Here, Esch notes Claude's regular pattern of abusing his children.

[Daddy] reaches to grab Skeetah's arm, to pull him to standing and then shove him, probably. This is what he does when he wants to manhandle, or humiliate; he pulls one of us toward him, shakes, and then shoves us hard backward so that we fall in the dirt. So that we sprawl like toddlers learning to walk: dirt on our faces and our hands, faces wet with crying or mucus, ashamed. [. . .] they grip Skeetah's shoulders, hard. He shakes Skeetah. (Ward 105)

Unlike Claude, Skeetah is seldom violent, always quiet and gentle with Esch and China, and does not project or misdirect or repeat the pent-up frustration or resentment towards his closest. While Claude pokes fun and jokes about women with his sons' friends, Esch's perception of Skeetah has always been centered around dogs and "assumed he missed more than half of what went on at the Pit" away from the heterosexual interest common in his peers: "What does he know about lovers? He's the odd one, the one that always smells like sweaty fur when all the boys are together, the one the girls probably

think stinks” (33). Furthermore, his sole display of violence against humans or animals has been out of necessity. He winces while hunting and shooting a squirrel but it is only because there “wasn’t enough cans of meat to steal” and they “need[ed] something to eat” (47). He gets into a physical fight with Rico and Manny who disrespects Esch. In other words, Skeetah’s masculinity as seen through Esch is not built through violence or toughness, unlike the stereotypes that frame his manliness to be formed through the victimization of or the violence exercised upon the animal or human other.

Instead, Skeetah affirms those around him, instilling and reassuring the strength that external forces try to dim. He rejects that motherhood diminishes the strength of women but that through childbirth, through femininity, women, especially in China and Esch, become stronger and more powerful. He states, “[t]hat’s when they come into strength. They got something to protect....That’s power” (96). Skeetah’s comments and feelings towards Black mothers stand in opposition to Manny’s, providing reassurance both to Esch and China. China, in turn, becomes that one for Skeetah, as Esch writes as the one “who likes the boy like Skeetah” (33). What Ward does in portraying the relationship between China and Skeetah is to rewrite the grammar of intimacy between canine bodies and black bodies, portraying their relationship in varied ways including loving, and romantic ways.

China and Skeetah interact in complex ways in which he acts like a lover of China. Skeetah sleeps in the shed for a week with China until she gives birth. As China gives birth, Esch notes that as Skeetah delivers the puppies, he is also “focused on China like a man focuses on a woman when he feels that she is his, which China is” (3). After China stands “on one side, and Skeetah on the other like a pair of proud parents” (17). Skeetah confesses that he feels like a father after the puppies’ birth: “You know how you hear daddies on TV talking about seeing birth being a miracle? . . . Them puppies is *real*” (20). He later builds China a proper place with a floor, something Esch

thought “a man did for a woman when they married: build her something to live in” as if “[h]e knows love” (60). Indeed, for Skeetah, China is a feminine lover. Esch observes, “[w]hat tore through the gray dog yesterday is now a woman approaching her partner on the floor of the Oaks, the first lick of the blues guitar sounding from the jukebox, a drink in her hand” (101). China’s “whole body shimmies like a woman dancing down at the Oaks” (91) and she “smiles lazily like a woman in a new Fourth of July outfit” (84). Esch imagines how China feels toward Skeetah, “the way that all girls who only know one boy move. Centered as if the love that boy feels form them, anchors them deep as a tree’s roots, holds them still as the oaks, which don’t uproot in hurricane wind. Love as certainty” (119). In return, Skeetah “caresses her face like he would kiss her” and “watch[es] China with something like respect and love in his face,” affirming that China’s ability to bore puppies “is to know what’s worth fighting for. And what’s love” (96). Just as Esch notes, China is his girl.

The feminization of China can be seen as a method of deconstructing hyper-aggressiveness associated with pit bulls and mitigating the detrimental stereotypes of black masculinity as well. However, while Ward does comment and criticize the ways of gendering and racializing, and reverses this to a certain extent, it does not fully encompass the relationship between China and Skeetah. China and Skeetah do reverse traditional gender roles in which China is a fierce fighter and Skeetah is at one point depicted as a mother and as pregnant: Skeetah “turn[s] from lover to father. She, his doting daughter” (98) and tends to her as “careful as Mama used to take biscuits from the oven” (110). “Skeetah puts the bundle of bags under his shirt. He looks pregnant now” (41). Skeetah is in a way one of the othermothers, another figure similar to Esch, China, and Rose. However, while this China and Skeetah’s gendered representation in this human-animal relationship disrupts the traditional masculine/feminine binary attributed to black males and females, the keenly complicated and emotionally-charged

relationship between China and Skeetah symbolizes a kinship based on care and intimacy that goes beyond breaking off or reversing prescribed gender roles. In reconfiguring sexuality and kinship, the survival of the present and the future is made possible. Seeing how China is deeply implicated with the fate of the Batistes, it is less about deconstructing and reconstructing a certain masculinity or femininity but enacting and performing a certain affective alliance and equal connection of care kinship between humans and nonhumans as part of survival. When Skeetah mentions how “[e]verything deserve to live” (Ward 213), he is also indicating how “[e]verything need[s] a chance” (214) and how everybody needs to fight (169). Ultimately the place they live in is not just the Pit, but a fighting pit “where everything else is starving, fighting, struggling” (94). It is a space radically disconnected from any sort of private and public protection which calls for radically different ways to reimagine human as well as interspecies relationships as reciprocal relations filled with care, expanding the boundaries of intimacy in this kinship.

A dog fight is not just about violence and masculine ideals but about how everybody fights for survival. Ward depicts more than a simple analogy between oppressed groups and the figure of the non-human animal. It touches on the complex and specific ways of how Ward is interested in “bodies that are never quite entire, intact, or solid” (Lloyd 255) and how these bodies form a care system to survive. This is especially true considering that the impending Katrina constantly hangs over the dog fight between Kilo and China: “Katrina is somewhere out there in the Gulf, coming like the quiet voice of someone talking before they walk through the doorway of a room” (159). As the dogs prepare to fight, Esch thinks “Maybe Daddy is right; maybe Katrina is coming for us” (163).

In the end, China is not a coddled family pet, but an equal member of the kinship who has every stake in keeping the family together, to earn and fight her way to

her place. China must give, just as she takes way: “she is giving like she once took away, bestowing where she once stole” (1). She is an active agent who must endure the similar brutality and violence as when Skeetah walks China tirelessly for two days for her to sweat out the wrong dosage of dewormer, mate with Kilo to have puppies, and fight for the money that will help the family. Just like everyday survival entails getting maimed and subjected to violence, “China [must fight], like she was born to do. Fight our shoes, fight other dogs, fight these puppies...” (2) to survive and be a part of the community, regardless of the life she could potentially lose. In turn, Skeetah also regards China as his equal, eating razor blades, because “*Why should China be the only one with teeth?*” (60). Although there are many diverse aspects of the relationship between China and Skeetah, Skeetah being a mother, a father, an owner, and a lover to China, Ward mostly depicts Skeetah as a dog himself who is literally an equal being to China. Skeetah “ignores everyone like they’re pits of inferior breeding” and as he separates one of the puppies from the others to let die from Parvo, Esch observes that Skeetah “has to kill his own” (41). When Esch can only wonder what China is thinking, Skeetah’s unspeakable connection is more based on certainty and profundity: “Skeetah watches [the small animals] the way he watches China: like any second she might speak, and he’s sure when it will happen, she will reveal all the answers to all the things he has ever wondered about” (45). Skeetah is also as “ruthless, quiet, focused as China,” (48) “[h]is head forward and down like a dog standing . . . , straining, ready to fight” (68).

China’s disappearance initiates Skeetah waiting and a subsequent physical transfiguration into China herself. As the Batistes wait in the attic of mother Lizbeth’s house for the water to recede, Esch consoles him:

I could hold him together, but he jerked so hard it felt like he was trying to shake himself apart, separate at the knuckles, pop loose his ribs, dislocate his

shoulders, and dislodge his knees: shudder into nothing, a pile of skin and bone and limp muscle. *No Skeet* (238; my emphasis).

Then, just as China vanished into the water, Skeetah walks off into the still dangerous water, intent on finding her and disappearing himself. Later the Batistes find Skeetah back in their house, now a pile of debris, waiting for China. Here, Esch witnesses Skeetah's metamorphosis:

Skeetah rubs his head from his neck to the crown like his skin is a T-shirt he could pull off and over his skull. Like he could pull who he is off and become something else. Like he could shed his human shape, in the dark, be hatched a great gleaming pit, black to China's white, and run off into what is left of the woods. (257-8)

Skeetah's transformation into 'nothing' but pile of skin, bone, and muscle, also signals his shape shifting into China. Although he has been likened to his dog throughout the novel, this paragraph signals a desire to actively shed his human form into a canine one. That is, Skeetah loses his individual subjectivity or body in welcoming possibilities of a new form. He is no longer occupying a realm of stability and settled identity, but the process of being in-between. Then, the transformation of Skeetah, in the end, is less of a shared traumatic element or a loosening between two fixed identities than a question of a non-identity, of being unrelated to the bipolarity of difference. There is no fixed articulation or conceptualized representative but only life and its lived experiences that enable rather than foreclose possibilities. What Esch witnesses are Skeetah's desire to break free from his life and follow China elsewhere, assuming China's place on the borderline, at the edge of a catastrophic ending but also at the interval before China returns. What does it mean for Skeetah to take her place through the process of transfiguration while he waits for China, so sure of her return?

The ending not only anticipates China's return but also the return of Katrina,

‘the murderous mother.’ Katrina has manifested herself in the everyday of the present time throughout the narrative, and the ending presumes a very specific type of foreclosed futurity as an uneasy apprehension pervades the survivors. That is, the present time of waiting is impregnated with the anxiety of an impending future. After suffering the catastrophe, Esch ruminates over its aftermath:

The mother that swept into the Gulf and slaughtered. . . . She was the murderous mother who cut us to the bone but left us alive, left us naked and bewildered as wrinkled newborn babies, as blind puppies, as sun-starved newly hatched baby snakes. She left us a dark Gulf and salt-burned land. She left us to learn to crawl. She left us to salvage. Katrina is the mother we will remember until the next mother with large, merciless hands, committed to blood, comes. (Ward 255)

Katrina, as mother nature, came to claim her name as the murderous mother, as she swept through the town and left the land devastated, leaving her children crippled and crawling in the midst. She alienates one from one’s home like the terrible savagery of the “dangerous Aegean Sea” (160). Unlike Rose’s careful hands, the destructive “giant hand[s]” of Katrina wrings the black bodies empty into vulnerable newborn babies and blind puppies who now anticipate her next arrival: “[I]n the star-suffocated sky, there is a great waiting silence” (260). Thus, during this suspended interim, before the next Katrina returns, Skeetah’s waiting is mainly a mourning of China, and the Batistes’ waiting is the mourning of those who did not survive, who has swept away in the waters like China was.

While the novel depicts the twelve days prior to Katrina and very little about the post-Katrina experience, Ward’s outline of the days is peculiar in that the past, present, and future co-exist to present the days as not necessarily a linear sequence but a suspension in the *interim*. For the fear of Katrina is the fear of *when*, *not if*, the next natural disaster will hit (Ward 257). Ward emphasizes the normalization and

routinization of hurricanes in Bois Sauvage and how the anticipation of the next one shapes their present. Hurricane Camille and Elaine remain clear in the memory of Claude and his children – through memory or direct experience – and the storms of the past keep them prepared as a way of life. Esch narrates that “We ain’t had one [hurricane] come straight for us in years, time enough to forget how many jugs of water we need to fill, how many cans of sardines and potted meat we should stock, how many tubs of water we need” (4). Yet, Claude, although emotionally absent in Esch’s life, is always in the background preparing and hammering supplies for the upcoming hurricane. Esch remarks

Daddy’s crazy, I think, obsessed with hurricanes . . . [h]e was convinced . . . that the Gulf Coast would be a new tornado alley. He spent the entire summer pointing out the safest places in the house to crouch . . . he made him practice the tornado drill we were all taught in school; kneel, fold over your thighs, tuck your head between your knees, cover your neck with your bony fingers to protect the soft throat underneath. (46)

Without ever depicting a post-Katrina experience, the novel gives a glimpse of what life will be like in a place where hurricanes are pervasive yet excluded from the public safety net. We see that the Batiste family is suspended in the “temporal space of a future conditional anxiety” in which the prospect of a predetermined future acts as a violence to the present (Saint-Amour 17). The traumatizing power of anticipation resulting from the normalization of extreme weather leads to a trauma of an encompassing and comprehensive nature in that “there is no past tense” since humans “are being subjected, in real time” (4) to an “ever-present, ever-advancing” threat (Woodbury 5). It has been observed that the Pit’s temporality has its own different politics of time in its endemic, diffused, and unspectacular temporality in regards to the suffering of its residents. However, the temporal scale in understanding Katrina and its victims can also be

reconceptualized through rechronologization, in which the focus on time shifts from the past to the future.

Thus, Skeetah's waiting becomes a mourning of China and Katrina, as well as a crippling apprehension of a foreclosed, repetitive futurity. However, this is not without hinting at a different envisioning of the future. The previous chapters have examined how the past manifests in the present, indicating that poor African Americans lacked the ability to inhabit the future. But unlike those who believe blackness remains incongruent with emphasis on futurity, Ward does believe in it, envisioning a future based on the solidarity formed among imagined alliances between debilitated human and non-human bodies in the community. The fact that China's disappearance triggers Skeetah's waiting which coincides with his transfiguration points to Ward's alternative approach by utilizing the distancing literary mechanisms of mythic figures, nonhuman others, and epistemological dislocation to make strange what we assume we already know, allowing increasing levels of contamination or hybridization of the body to survive the post-Katrina world. Against the encroaching past, unbearable present, and the anxiety of a foreclosed, impending future, Ward twists open a different temporality of an affective time born out of Skeetah's transfiguration in this interim, which leads to an alternative kinship of inter- and intra-species that forms outside of legal, biological boundaries, a symbol of humanity's collective future.

As Esch narrates "[n]ow we are a pack" (80) as Randall, Skeetah, Junior, Esch, and Big Henry run away from the white man and his dog, these characters form a horizontal communal relationship within Bois Sauvage. Big Henry becomes part of their support system in the end when he lets Esch know that the baby "got plenty daddies" and that she always has him to count on (255). Esch envisions a support system in which mothers need not be women, and fathers need not be biological. This includes those that are in touch with the female within such as Skeetah as well as Big

Henry who “gets his careful hands” from his mother (244). However, at the same time, it is not up to solely black females or Skeetah, but every single constituent of the kinship who participates in occupying the future through their affective labor. As mentioned earlier, Ward’s post-Katrina future is not about simply reversing gender roles or assigning new roles within the boundaries of family, for the concept of familial sacrifice and responsibility based on blood relations can be a form of violence itself. What forms, then, is an improvised community born out of necessity, both literal and imaginative, to help counter the isolation and anxiety that comes from feeling economically and psychologically unsheltered by precedent.

Just as Esch reinterprets what it is to be a disposable human waste and relies on salvaging literal garbage and debris to make sense of Katrina at the moment when language fails her, the bits and pieces of non-human and human waste will become part or the foundation of the ultimate narrative that is prescient rather than nostalgic, communal rather than egoistic. Esch’s labor to “tie the glass and stone with string, hang the shards . . . so that they will . . . tell the story of Katrina,” (255) revises and gives new meaning to their own bodies and lives that have been relegated as “invisible, utterly disposable,” (Giroux 175) carrying the temporality of a future-orientedness that will offer glimpses of possibility and survival.

Skeetah's waiting/mourning/becoming is also the same affective labor that Esch does with her mother’s memories and the non-memories of garbage, in that this allows a new form of caretaking network and alternative kinship, and thus, survival in the future. It is the creation of progressive communal bonds in social spaces that demand new forms of cognition between subject and environment. Esch states,

When [Skeetah] looks back up at me, he is still again: sand seared to rock.

“She’s going to come back to me,” he says. “Watch.” We will sit with him here, in the strange, insect-silent dark. We will sit until we are sleepy, and then we

will remain until our legs hurt, until Junior falls asleep in Randall's arms, his weak neck lolling off Randall's elbow. Randall will watch Junior and Big Henry will watch me and I will watch Skeetah, and Skeetah will watch none of us.

(260)

Ward translates the suffering of Katrina victims through not a narrative of salvation in which the residents of the Pit become the recipient of any hierarchical generosity without but through rendering mutual vulnerability and dependence within as an alternative form of collectivity grounded in an ethics of care. Both Esch and Skeetah's recuperative acts turn something traumatic into historical narratives, persevering testaments of their experience, and gestures towards the future, ultimately transforming the dominant narrative of plight and destruction into that of resilience and choice. What Ward proposes is to break free beyond the principle of the organization itself, how the value of care or affect should just not be in the hands of family, but how it should be understood better as a communal work that must be supported by the public sphere beyond the private. Katrina is not just an economic, political, or a health crisis but an issue of the reproduction of life, and therefore an issue of care. Thus, the significance of *Salvage* as Ward's alternative Katrina narrative lies in the envisioning of a different futurity that gestures towards a narrative of survival, rather than death.

Conclusion

Departing from treating Katrina as a punctual event, this thesis has attempted to situate the disaster in a broader and expanded temporality to highlight the suffering as well as the struggle for survival of those living in twenty-first century precarity. Focusing on the fact that Katrina is bound to repeat in the context of a foreclosed futurity, I try to make visible the quotidian and ongoing sufferings and their daily scrambling for existence that have continued from the past and will continue into the future. At the same time, I also attempt to productively reimagine the radically uneven power relations and within conditions of heightened dependency and vulnerability, I find affective possibilities for agency and survival through a collectivity based on the ethics of care.

While acknowledging certain parts of my thesis that risks sentimentalizing, for example, motherhood as seen in Rose's tactile and affective capability, as well as a disregard on the meaning of Hurricane Katrina's eventuality, my arguments are not to presuppose and essentialize a certain type of maternity but to gesture towards a more nuanced understanding of what a specific kind of motherhood signifies and does for a life that has been characterized with a distinctive existlessness from its marginalization and precarity. In addition, my close emphasis on a diffused temporality in rethinking Katrina is not to necessarily downplay the significance of the destruction Katrina caused or the plight of the victims and survivors, but to think of what comes next in the future. I contend that my arguments have meaning and implications in perceiving a different consequence as well as providing implications in a number of fields that are not directly but implicitly related to Katrina such as climate change and the post-humanist field.

In the end, I conclusively consider *Salvage the Bones* as affective and political possibilities of micropolitics that touch on the value and meaning of care, especially in

an ever more disproportionately precarious society. Ward looks to an alternative society where the issue of care emerges as a response to imagine new potential worlds. This can also be viewed as Ward's attempt to theorize an African American feminist survival politics as well as a new post-Katrina genre, in which she locates and engender meaning, not in or through the violence of the event itself but rather through a post-humanist and affective bonding.

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카트리나의 육체 다시 생각하기:

제스민 워드의 『바람의 잔해를 줍다』에 나타난 생존의

윤리정치학

본고는 제스민 워드의 『바람의 잔해를 줍다』가 허리케인 카트리나라는 재난을 어떻게 다루고 해석하는지 분석한다. 소설은 기존의 포스트 카트리나 서사들과 마찬가지로 카트리나를 단발적 사건성의 재난으로만 보지 않고 신자유주의 생명정치와 약화된 국가 안전망으로 인한 주변화와 이어 역사적인 맥락에서 본다. 이와 동시에 소설은 카트리나를 확장되고 확산된 시간 안에 위치시켜 늘 맞닥뜨려왔고 앞으로도 일어날게 분명한 재난으로 보며 카트리나의 이해에 미래의 시간성 또한 들어온다. 따라서 본고는 과거뿐만 아니라 미래로부터도 현재에 부상을 불러오는 워드만의 카트리나 재연혁을 식별하며 소설을 전면적 삶에 대한 애착을 유지하려는 평범한 사람들의 투쟁을 묘사한다는 점에서 21세기 생존 서사로 정의한다. 고질적이고 규범적인 위기 속에서의 바티스테 가족, 특히 로즈와 에쉬의 모체에 집중해 그들의 지속적이고 반복적인 상태의 고통을 주장하지만 이와 동시에 삶의 불연속성 속에서 연속성을 제공하는 정동 노동과 보살핌에 기반한 새로운 사회적, 정치적 연대를 통해 특유의 출구 없는 삶 속에서의 가능성을 제시한다.

본론 1장은 신자유주의의 국가 안전망 약화와 다른 억압적인 사회정치적 과정으로부터 비롯된 불균일한 권력 구조가 어떻게 로즈와 에쉬의 모체에 투영되고 각인되는지 살펴본다. 생물정치하에서 일상적이지만 끊임없는 고통으로 나타나는 폭력에 초점을 맞춰 1 장은 로즈의 모성과 에쉬의 임신이 어떻게 그들 자신의 몸에 대한 폭력으로

돌아오는지 설명한다.

본론 2장은 앞서 서술한 상해된 육체와 삶 속에서 가능성을 찾아낸다. 감정의 기억이 에쉬의 생존을 위한 자원이 되는 에쉬만의 정동 노동 행위를 통해 로즈의 모성을 탐구한다. 모성에 대한 에쉬의 이해는 또한 그녀 자신의 이성애적 욕구에 대한 감정에 달려 있으며, 흑인 육체에게 배제되어 왔던 모성과 성애에 대한 두 가지 경험은 에쉬의 주체성에 상호 유익하고 생산적인 경험으로 탈바꿈한다고 주장한다.

본론 3장에서 소설은 닫힌 미래에 대한 워드만의 미시정치적 대응으로 본다. 스키타와 차이나의 관계에 초점을 맞추어 먼저 워드가 어떻게 스키타의 인종화된 남성성과 차이나와의 인종화된 친밀감을 해체하고 재구성하는지 살펴본다. 또한, 차이나의 정동적 반려는 스키타의 동물화로 이어지는데, 이것은 그가 타성을 포용하는 것이 어떻게 비가족적 그리고 인간과 비인간 간의 새로운 연대 관계를 가능하게 하고 돌봄의 윤리에 기초한 다른 미래를 암시한다고 주장한다.

주요어: 『바람의 잔해를 줍다』, 허리케인 카트리나, 신자유주의 생명정치, 모성, 정동 노동, 성, 돌봄, 연대

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