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Recommended Citation

Francis, Gladys M. 2021. "Remapping Disability through Contested Urban Landscapes and Embodied Performances." *Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry* 8 (2): 277–85. <https://doi.org/10.1017/pli.2020.36>.

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Remapping Disability through Contested Urban Landscapes and Embodied Performances

Gladys M. Francis

Through the themes of disability, fear of contamination, displacement, and race, this article provokes a critical conversation on the political implications and mechanisms of socialization that form Blackness within the fields of cultural, Francophone, and post-colonial studies. An exploration of unchoreographed movements, dance, and textual representations of dance provides new forms of understanding and visibility to socially sanctioned Afro-Diasporic movements in contested urban spaces. Are also revealed the ways in which black bodies and their “alter kinetic aesthetics” are othered within racialized biologics and inscribed in politics of transfiguration. Are explored: 1) the racialized misappropriations and epidemiological implications that link black performances to disability in the jagged dances of the 1920s–1940s; 2) how disabled bodies move through complex and contested urban landscapes in New Orleans’ second line jazz parade tradition; 3) disability, race, and catastrophic landscapes (socio-ecological disparities) through the mediated images of disabled people in New Orleans after the ravages of hurricane Katrina; 4) the cinematic framework of Grigris (2013) in which filmmaker Mahamat-Saleh Haroun expounds the social and material relationships implicated in disability, poverty, and institutionalized systems that support corruption. This interdisciplinary study invites the readers to re-envision objectifying and pathologizing discourses about disability through a focus on the “strategic abilities” of the disabled body and its porous creative spaces, which are presented as embodied knowledge.

Keywords: Blackness, disability, disease, disparities, embodiment, epidemiology, gender, Haroun Mahamat-Saleh, Hurricane Katrina, jagged dances, jazz, kinaesthetics, New Orleans, performance, race, second line parade, transgression, urban networks

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From antiquarian references to early modern corporealities, in her book *Choreomania: Dance and Disorder* (2018),¹ theater and performance studies scholar Kéline Gotman probes the archives to expound how colonial, medical, and ethnographic discourses cultivate the materialization and dissemination of the choreomania concept. Through a process she calls “translatio,” Gotman examines popular journalistic, medical, historical, and socio-cultural repositories in order to contextualize the ways in which various spontaneous and disorderly bodily movements, occurring in public spaces, are politicized and imagined as threatening (to the social order). Using conceptual frames such as the rhizomatic (Deleuze)² and the genealogical (Foucault),³ the author gives rise to an emergent series of critical readings on the epidemic disease. She remaps the historiography of choreomania and presents seminal embodied “choreotopology” in addition to contested “choreozones.” By centering on the importance of socially sanctioned movements as well as the fitness (control, sexuality, and beauty) of bodies on public display, *Choreomania* exuviates the pernicious orthodoxies that hinder advancement on issues of disability.

It is of significance that Gotman positions her study at the borderline of dance, which enables a comprehensive survey of dance, unchoreographed movements, as well as textual representations of performance (what Murray-Román termed “performance events as ekphrases⁴”). Using this framework, in chapter eleven titled “Monstrous Grace,” Gotman discusses issues of “Blackness and Gestural Modernity” from the 1920s to the 1940s; more precisely, how new animal jagged dances, jazz, and the Charleston gave lieu to a “white brand of hysteria”⁵ that constructed jagged bodily movements as savage and primitive. Perceived as diseased and “monstrous,”⁶ these “alien bodies of modernity” were subsequently othered and inscribed in what cultural studies scholar Paul Gilroy called a “politics of transfiguration”⁷ (partially transcending modernity by constructing both an imaginary antimodern past and a postmodern yet-to-come). Through canonical historiography of the time, Gotman observes by what means the “alter kinetic aesthetics”⁸ (of such embodied language or movements) are dislocated and reappropriated (rearticulated) within reductive Africanist fantasies and racialized biologics. Hence, the Blackness of “Modern Choreomanias” becomes synonymous with disability, disease, unsoundness, madness, and disorder (illustrating Freud’s “return to the repressed”).⁹

1 Kéline Gotman, *Choreomania: Dance and Disorder* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 278.

2 Gilles Deleuze, *Différence et répétition* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1968).

3 Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” in *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology: Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984*, ed. James D. Faubion, trans. Robert Hurley, vol. 2 (New York: New Press, 1998), 369–91.

4 Jeannine Murray-Román, *Performance and Personhood in Caribbean Literature: From Alexis to the Digital Age* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2016).

5 Gotman, *Choreomania*, 278.

6 René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1977).

7 Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

8 Gotman, *Choreomania*, 277.

9 Gotman, *Choreomania*, 274. See also Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, trans. A. A. Brill (New York: Vintage Books, 1946).

“Blackness and Gestural Modernity” relates to my scholarship on bodily pain and transgressive kinaesthetics. Through a process I term “corpomemorial tracing,”¹⁰ I give focus to how artists, scholars, and activists (re)present embodied transgressive Black experiences through kinesthetic traditions (such as dance), which they ritualize and symbolize as embodied memories—while inscribing them as (noncanonical) historical archives (of public records). I posit that “corpomemorial tracing” captures embodied knowledge, movement, memory, and agency that are decentralizing, stratifying, and anticanonical. It characterizes cartographies of bodily pain (Lionnet)¹¹ that make Black people’s transgressional agency of resistance visible. “Blackness and Gestural Modernity” fosters similar connections with the scholarship of Shannon Sullivan¹² and Diana Taylor,¹³ who, likewise, probe Afro-diasporic performances and mnemonic transmissions as embodied knowledge. The performatic repertoire is thus analyzed as one of the bearers of Black people’s complex experiences, negotiations, and identity formation. It is also conceived as an embodied trace/record of their sociopolitical agency. Hence, probing the embodied knowledge of such repertoire contributes to decolonizing the ways in which the mainstream obscures and devalues Afro-diasporic performatic repertoire, intangible traditions,¹⁴ and embodied knowledge pertaining to the global south. In other terms, through the performatic repertoire, the Black body in movement *becomes* landscape, text—and most importantly, historical archive. “Blackness and Gestural Modernity” provides new forms of understanding and visibility to the Afro-diasporic performatic repertoire structured as embodied knowledge through discourses about disability.

I propose to bridge “Monstrous Grace” to contemporary discussions around disability. My aim is to provoke a critical conversation on the political implications and mechanisms of socialization that form Blackness across ability, gender, locality, and class within the fields of Francophone, postcolonial, and cultural studies. This article does not define disability but brings together debates around disability, fear of contamination, displacement, race, and the ways in which they intertwine with postcolonialism.

In her essay “The Dancing Ground,” Santoro¹⁵ entails a process of “corpomemorial tracing” as she analyzes the embodied knowledge found in New Orleans’s second line jazz parade tradition. Using medical anthropology, Santoro brings together dance and disability in the second line parades led by (approximately forty) neighborhood associations called “social aid and pleasure clubs.” Created as a response to exclusionary and

10 Gladys M. Francis, *Odious Caribbean Women and the Palpable Aesthetics of Transgression* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2017).

11 Françoise Lionnet, “Geographies of Pain: Captive Bodies and Violent Acts in the Fictions of Gayl Jones, Bessie Head, and Myriam Warner-Vieyra,” in *The Politics of (M)Othering: Womanhood, Identity and Resistance in African Literature*, ed. Obioma Nnaemeka (New York: Routledge, 1997).

12 Shannon Sullivan, *Living Across and Through Skins: Transactional Bodies, Pragmatism, and Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001).

13 Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

14 Tanya L. Shields, *Bodies and Bones: Feminist Rehearsal and Imagining Caribbean Belonging* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014).

15 Daniella Santoro, “The Dancing Ground: Embodied Knowledge, Disability, and Visibility in New Orleans Second Lines,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Disability Studies*, ed. Blake Howe, et al. (Oxford University Press, 2016), 305–26.

segregationist policies of the Jim Crow era, these groups provided burial and medical insurance (among other services) to Blacks. These social clubs are as relevant today as they were in the nineteenth century: “In addition to the second line parades, many clubs host parties, fundraisers, funerals, and charity drives, contributing to a larger year-round ‘second line culture’ and extended urban social network.”¹⁶ In fact, second lines bring attention to urban racial stratification as well as economic and sociopolitical complexities prevalent in New Orleans.¹⁷ These unconventional second lines parade in Black neighborhoods such as the seventh ward, Central City, and Tremé, which are “a palimpsest of complex racialized geographies,” where residents “may be disconnected [from] mainstream establishment and aid institutions.”¹⁸ By moving through “local historical memories of the Jim Crow era segregation [or] recent encroachment of gentrification,” the second line, as anthropologist Regis puts it:

articulates the transformative nature of the parade as it remaps contested urban landscapes ... transcending the quotidian struggles of the ghetto. [All] become a single flowing movement of people unified in the rhythm ... creating relationships that would not otherwise be possible in everyday life, which is dominated by the moral economy of the postindustrial city.¹⁹

In New Orleans, racial disparities indicate that Blacks are more impacted by low income, poverty, including limited access to employment and health care.²⁰ Racist policing of Black bodies is also prevalent in New Orleans, where the murder rate is one of the highest in the country (200 murders in 2001; 175 in 2016; 196 in 2020). Moreover, racial disparities in New Orleans indicate that Blacks are more impacted by disabilities (higher than the national average).

Individuals that have been physically disabled as a result of gun violence are statistically and socially invisible ... undercounted ... undeserved, relegated to the margins ... contributing to a recognizable ... social group of disabled residents, so-called street veterans.²¹

Members of social clubs and the Second Line Task Force tangibly contribute to campaigns against gun and urban violence (such as “Stop the Violence”). Similarly, in 2013, second liners who use wheelchairs created “Push for Change,” a social aide and pleasure club. Santoro notes that outside of the parades, it is still challenging for disabled individuals using wheelchairs to move freely in these Black neighborhoods. Cars, uneven or damaged terrains, or sidewalks without curb cuts continue to impair their mobility.

16 Santoro, “The Dancing Ground,” 307.

17 See Helen A. Regis, “Second Lines, Minstrelsy, and the Contested Landscapes of New Orleans Afro-Creole Festivals,” *Cultural Anthropology* 14.4 (1999): 472–504. See also Rachel Breunlin and Helen Regis, “Putting the Ninth Ward on the Map: Race, Place, and Transformation in Desire, New Orleans,” *American Anthropologist* 108.4 (2006): 744–64.

18 Santoro, “The Dancing Ground,” 308–09.

19 Santoro, “The Dancing Ground,” 308–09.

20 Lakshmi Fjord, “Disasters, Race, and Disability: [Un]Seen Through the Political Lens on Katrina,” *Journal of Race and Policy* 3.1 (2007): 7–27.

21 Santoro, “The Dancing Ground,” 315.

Hence, Santoro gives value to an embodied repertoire that bears physical, psychological, and structural pain.

Improvised footwork (jumps, shuffling, leaps) is infamously a dominant feature in second lines' dance aesthetic. In addition, the dancer must be skillful in call-response forms, self-styling, stunts, "do whatcha wanna aesthetic,"²² and "clowning."²³ Looking at dance and disability in the long-standing African American traditional practice of the second line, Santoro expounds that

despite the importance of "footwork," the improvisational and adaptable idiom of second line dance enables participation by people whose impairments make traditional "footwork" unfeasible ... individuals here construct signature moves based on their individual preference and the intersection of their physicality with the technology of the wheelchair.... Their dance moves [playfully] infuse a paralyzed lower body in renewed vitality and visibility.²⁴

Therefore, disabled dancers "work it out" and "clown," tilt back their mobile chairs, maneuver their bodies in and out of their wheelchairs, slide onto the ground, "buck" and jump, "... shake and pop [their] torso, throb to the syncopated jazz beat, match their wheelchair technology to 'the specifics of their injury.'"²⁵ Santoro stresses that in second lines, both the transformative power of participation and the opportunity at self-representation constitute an embodied cultural form or lived experiences inclusive of the visibly disabled. The second line, in this respect, makes visible disabled bodies "systematically excluded, discounted, and devalued"²⁶ in the everyday life of New Orleans. It embodies a space in which disability moves from "need of intervention" to "creative asset."²⁷ In fact, in this context, disabled bodies create space for themselves within the urban landscape, revealing agency inside systemic racist policies that limit and control how and where they move. New Orleans's brass bands second lines create an embodied space in which "disabled people [are able] to define their own bodies and differences in terms of personal experience and self-authorization, free of diagnoses imposed by medical authorities."²⁸

Disability can provoke discomfort or symbolize vulnerability to able bodies,²⁹ it can also draw feelings of fear of contamination or feelings of rejection.³⁰ Bridging disability

22 Rachel Carrico, "On the Street and in the Studio: Decentering and Recentering Dance in the New Orleans Second Line," Paper presented at the joint meetings of the Society of Dance History Scholars and the Congress on Research in Dance, Riverside, California, November 14–17, 2013.

23 Regis, "Second Lines, Minstrelsy, and the Contested Landscapes of New Orleans Afro-Creole Festivals," 1999.

24 Santoro, "The Dancing Ground," 310–18.

25 Santoro, "The Dancing Ground," 321.

26 Santoro, "The Dancing Ground," 312.

27 Santoro, "The Dancing Ground," 312.

28 Anita Silvers, "Feminist Perspectives on Disability," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, 2009. Revised August 29, 2013.

29 See Robert Murphy, "Encounters: The Body Silent in America," in *Disability and Culture*, eds. Benedicte Ingstad and Susan Reynolds White (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 140–57, and Robert Murphy, *The Body Silent* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1987). See also Ann Cooper Albright, "Strategic Abilities: Negotiating the Disabled Body in Dance." *Michigan Quarterly Review on Disability, Art, and Culture (Part Two)* 37.3 (1998): 475–501.

30 Tobin Siebers, *Disability Aesthetics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010).

and embodied performance, Santoro probes the performatic repertoire of disabled bodies in the second line, which she presents as an intersectional space that gives visibly to able and disabled bodies coming together to move through complex and contested urban landscapes. By combining disability and dance, Santoro's essay reveals the "strategic abilities"³¹ disabled dancers put in place in New Orleans's second lines. It reveals the ways in which second line dance engages the audience on the social meanings of disability and mobility. Similar to Gotman's *Choreomania*, Santoro offers to reenvision "objectifying and pathologizing discourses about disability."³²

As Gotman demonstrates in *Choreomania*, representations of Black bodies dancing have been deeply associated to disability and have socially constructed Blackness as freakish, grotesque, dangerous, and pathological. The polyrhythmic and syncopated sound of jazz, as she further explains, was also described as disabling to White people who could get contaminated if partaking in these jagged dances.

Marginalized as a racialized other,³³ the Black performance becomes a synonym to disability.³⁴ Such racialized misappropriations and epidemiological implications recall cultural anthropologist Lakshmi Fjord's essay "Disasters, Race, and Disability."³⁵ In this study, Fjord expounds how mediated images of disabled people in New Orleans, after the ravages of hurricane Katrina, contributed to the "disproportionate losses borne by African Americans and nursing home residents."³⁶ Similar to Gotman, Fjord is concerned with the subjective imaginings of the able-bodied and about what being disabled constitutes. In our era of global mass media, we observe the dominance of sensational branding, shock-driven culture, and aesthetics that spread to information, entertainment, and facts. They create confusing environments the public is left to read and interpret.³⁷ These mediated representations are imbued with issues of power,³⁸ and as such, their spectacle affects social relationships between individuals (as contends Marxist theorist Guy Debord).³⁹ These practices have become common in contemporary society, gradually limiting our freedom, by supporting, and at times reinforcing forms of inequality and oppression. In fact, Fjord presents media discourses on the social impairments of disabled, elderly, and poor African Americans as a "narrative prosthesis." In this fashion, African Americans' "lack of" is stigmatized as a racialized pathology; their lack of social mobility becoming, for instance, a pathology making them responsible for not evacuating their homes. In short, African Americans' suffering is relegated to their own fault. Fjord sees correlations between the "commodity on sale" in

31 Albright, "Strategic Abilities."

32 Gotman, *Choreomania*, 307.

33 Dea H. Boster, *African American Slavery and Disability: Bodies, Property, and Power in the Antebellum South* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

34 David A. B. Murray, *Opacity: Gender, Sexuality, Race, and the "Problem" of Identity in Martinique* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002).

35 Fjord, "Disasters, Race, and Disability."

36 Fjord, "Disasters, Race, and Disability," 10.

37 See Luc Boltanski, *Distant Suffering: Morality, Media and Politics*, trans. G. Burchell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). See also Necati Polat, "Poststructuralism, Absence, Mimesis: Making Difference, Reproducing Sovereignty," *European Journal of International Relations* 4.4 (1998): 447–77.

38 David Levi Strauss, *Between the Eyes: Essays on Photography and Politics* (New York: Aperture, 2012), 45.

39 Guy Debord, *La Société du Spectacle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), 4.

carnival freak shows of the nineteenth century and the media coverage of Black bodies on display post-Katrina:

Those gazing upon the dramatically impaired people, with origins located in some non-white, exotic land, could be assured of their own superiority as able-bodied European Americans whose hard work would lead to advancement; their “choice” vs. the primitives’ lack of “choice.”⁴⁰

Through a process of “enfreakment”⁴¹ or “biopolitical artifactual reproductions,”⁴² the narrative prosthesis that accompanies disability images construct Black impaired bodies as “expected dead.”⁴³ Such photographic lens narrative of “the epistemology of a disaster bioethic [create] disaster plans that will disable people not included in ‘common good’ paradigms [and cast] those ‘disabled’ by this planning as the cause of their disablement.”⁴⁴ Focusing on disaster epidemiology, Fjord explains how such disaster bioethic constructs the disabled body as opposed to the “[white, adult, able, heterosexual] ‘standard’ body.”⁴⁵ Having “special needs” or preexisting conditions of vulnerability (ranging from social, economical, and political domains), disaster rhetoric (as seen with hurricane Katrina) would posit the disabled bodies as “expected losses.”⁴⁶ Fjord also stresses the paternalistic, oppressive, and disrespectful acts against African Americans, which are associated with the sickening fact that “living as black is something you can die for in the U.S.”⁴⁷ These structural environments necessitated then initiatives from the civil rights movement, and continue to necessitate initiatives today (as seen with Black Lives Matter, or local social clubs’ involvement in New Orleans’s second lines).

Bringing together disability, race, and catastrophic landscapes (natural disaster, mediated disaster, socio-ecological disparities), Fjord argues that we can all become vulnerable people and victims of situational inabilities in disaster situations. Hence, disaster preparedness and the design of inclusive emergency and disaster policies should fold “into everyday, inclusive practices [and] recognize [that] all people live in interdependent kin and larger social networks.”⁴⁸ Echoing Gotman, Fjord’s study challenges canonical standardization and homogenizing discourses on disability, which stigmatize individuals and affect the way they move in public spaces. These racialized tropes that invade popular culture and the media glide over the social terrorism disabled Black people endure. Fjord’s deconstructivist approach seeks to “open out the moral contract of national citizenship beyond the individual”⁴⁹ and accounts for the creation of new inclusive ecologies on disasters, race, and disability.

40 Fjord, “Disasters, Race, and Disability,” 14.

41 Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, ed., *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body* (New York: New York University Press, 1996).

42 Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

43 Fjord, “Disasters, Race, and Disability,” 14.

44 Fjord, “Disasters, Race, and Disability,” 14.

45 Fjord, “Disasters, Race, and Disability,” 21.

46 Fjord, “Disasters, Race, and Disability,” 21.

47 Fjord, “Disasters, Race, and Disability,” 16.

48 Fjord, “Disasters, Race, and Disability,” 24.

49 Fjord, “Disasters, Race, and Disability,” 25.

A focus on the “strategic abilities” of the disabled body⁵⁰ creates a comprehensive modus operandi that recognizes its porous creative spaces. Such heterogeneous lenses are developed in *Grigris* (2013), a film by French-Chadian filmmaker Mahamat-Saleh Haroun,⁵¹ starring Souleymane Démé (Grigris), a twenty-five-year-old man with a withered paralyzed left leg. Captivated by Démé’s dancing, Haroun decided to craft a movie script around him. The film centers mostly on Grigris’s everyday hardship and survival in N’Djamena, the capital city of Chad. During the day, Grigris assists his mother, pushes her heavy laundry cart to and from the river; he also provides a variety of services in his stepfather’s shop, from tailoring to photography. At night, to improve his income, Grigris crafts unique dance routines in a discotheque under the enthralled eyes of a large audience composed of his soon to be girlfriend, Mimi (Anaïs Monory), employed as a prostitute for rich foreigners. Dancing to the beat of Senegalese composer Wasis Diop, Grigris’s performance incorporates suspense (fire), humor, and creative uses of his withered leg that stands for a firing machine gun or twirls like a baton. Dancing is the space where Grigris’s disability is not problematized as a “lack of.” Yet he remains a victim of a corrupt system in which he does not benefit from the large amounts of money his dance abilities bring to the club’s owner. When his stepfather falls ill, Grigris’s tips will not suffice to pay off the exorbitant cost of his health care, summing to 700,000 francs. His economic fragilities lead him to transgressive modes of survival; therefore, he resorts to trafficking petrol over the border to Cameroon for a local gang. He comes close to being arrested by the police as he tried to swim in the Chari River with jerry cans filled with petrol or by driving them through the border. Using the cinematic framework of *Grigris*, I will expound the ways in which writer and director Haroun challenges the perpetuation of negative stereotypes on disability. More precisely, how he invites critical reflections on the complex social and material relationships implicated in disability, poverty, institutionalized systems that support corruption, and *vampiric* forms of globalization and consumerism; how they shape Grigris’s identity and agency.

Grigris’s name refers to the *gri gri* amulet used largely in Western Africa for luck or to chase evil. In an interview with Rigoulet, Haroun discusses the ethical and aesthetic approaches he chose to film disability perceived, in Chad, as a malediction. While filming *Grigris*, he did not want Démé, a disabled man in real life, to choreograph his steps or to do a “performance of disability.”⁵² For this reason, most of the dancing scenes were filmed with an audience unaware of the filming. People were, as Haroun explains, spontaneously cheering “Grigris! Grigris!” without being asked to do so. Furthermore, it was important for Haroun to capture the various forms of disabilities that affect abled and disabled bodies in the urban landscape of N’Djamena, where public lightning is absent and people become “almost invisible.”⁵³ Thus, Haroun aimed to reproduce a *clair-obscur* aesthetic (similar to Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio’s paintings), to *enlighten* the disabled people moving, by contrast, in the obscure public space of

50 Albright, “Strategic Abilities.”

51 *Grigris*. Directed by Haroun Mahamat-Saleh. Pili Films, 2013.

52 Mahamat-Saleh Haroun, “Mahamat-Saleh Haroun, réalisateur de *Grigris*: Un film de danse qui bascule dans le milieu des trafiquants,” interview by Laurent Rigoulet, *Télérama Cinéma* (<https://www.telerama.fr/cinema/mahamat-saleh-haroun-realisateur-de-grigris-un-film-de-danse-qui-basculer-dans-le-milieu-des-trafiquants,99948.php>).

53 Haroun, “Mahamat-Saleh Haroun, réalisateur de *Grigris*.”

N'Djamena. Throughout the film, Grigris and Mimi's love relationship develops within the commodities of their bodies, mainly reflected in Grigris's minimalist and functional dialogues: "I want a job," "Give me a second chance," "I need money." Similarly, Mimi, whose body is for sale, is a constant victim of male physical and verbal violence by the same men who pay her to satisfy them sexually. As an adept of socially minded art, Haroun questions a transnationalism that encompasses, as seen in the film, convoluting relations at local and global levels through the oil industry. He also ponders the standardization of transgression, which marginalizes individuals irrespective of their yearning for self-authorization or their abilities. Grigris and Mimi are thus presented within the neocolonial and global contexts that factor into their creation of subjectivity. Recalling Dominick LaCapra's notion of "commodified experience,"⁵⁴ the consumption of violence is itself commodified "along with the commodification of goods and services."⁵⁵ Hence, in the material world of Chad, Haroun's characters perform anti-moral codes that the filmmaker commodifies as new sociocultural forms of interaction to expose a landscape in which social, financial, and sexual exchanges emerge as a performative script unduly influenced by imperialism and capitalism.⁵⁶ Through Grigris and Mimi's love relationship, Haroun writes collective experiences of marginalized lives portraying what bell hooks names "the commodification of Otherness,"⁵⁷ in which cultural difference can be interpreted as ways of consuming other people's lives.

Haroun avoids "a narrative prosthesis"⁵⁸ by remapping the characters' structural economy of violence to their abilities within difficult everyday negotiations. In fact, he complicates concepts of mobility, ability, and institutionalized impairment. Ultimately, Grigris and Mimi flee their condition of sexual and labor exploitation by going to a village (refuge) of women where hard work and poverty operate inside a nexus of solidarity and appreciation of abilities. There, Grigris marries Mimi after offering to father the child she carries. Haroun invites the viewers not only to see the utterance of Black able and disable corporealities, but he also creates an embodied witnessing of that structural pain and that coming to "becoming" impaired by corrupted institutions. This embodied experience is constructed as a collective practice "so that others can [cross] paths with it or retrace it."⁵⁹ Consequently, resisting in the transgressive is an experience that affects the subject's identity, which can be constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed. Through Grigris's disabled body's abilities, the audience witnesses the experience of his agency. No matter its outcome, it is his experience of resistance the viewer is called to witness.⁶⁰

54 Dominick LaCapra, *History in Transit: Experience, Identity, Critical Theory* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 46.

55 LaCapra, *History in Transit*.

56 See Francis, *Odious Caribbean Women and the Palpable Aesthetics of Transgression*, 2017. See also Michel Foucault, "How an 'Experience-Book Is Born,'" in *Remarks on Marx: Conversations with Duccio Trombadori*, trans. R. James Goldstein and James Cascaito (New York: Semiotext, 1991), and Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la Prison* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975).

57 bell hooks, "Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance," *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End, 1992), 336.

58 Fjord, "Disasters, Race, and Disability."

59 Foucault, "How an 'Experience-Book Is Born,'" 38–40.

60 Foucault, "How an 'Experience-Book Is Born,'" 36.

Through the works I put in conversation with Gotman's "Monstrous Grace," I have argued that issues of disability must be engaged in the locality, historicity, socio-cultural, and political contexts within which they construct themselves. It is inside these paradigms, as examined in this article, disabled individuals experience exertions of dominance, subservience, and transgressive belonging. Indeed, transgression is always cultural in nature and signifies what appears to be a violation of socio-cultural norms of the symbolic order.⁶¹ Through these works, trauma is voiced, embodied, and demystified. The transgressive performatic repertoire resists the monologist canon through (re) domestications and re-narrations; it ensues within abjection and participates in the birth of heterogeneous and public dialogues. As Bakhtin states, the dialogic space between violence and the body is an *inévitabile passage* to experience resistance and reach freedom.⁶²

61 James Carey, *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society* (New York: Routledge, 1989).

62 Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays of M. M. Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).