Labour, love, or violence? Farieda Nazier's *Don't Make Me Over* (2021)

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ABSTRACT

Don't Make Me Over (2021) is a videographic piece by South African artist Farieda Nazier comprising performance, music, poetry, curated settings, and sculptural assemblages, which forms part of her Post(erity) Project. The title—*Don't Make Me Over*—is based on the 1962 song of the same name originally recorded by Dionne Warwick and later covered by Sybil in 1987. While an integral and fundamental component of the work, the artist emphasises that her interpretation of the popular hit is *not* a music video. Throughout this article, I discuss how Nazier enacts scenes of both compliance and defiance against the conflation of femininity and the domestic milieu, and the embodied violence of patriarchal norms dictating feminine 'beauty' and behaviours—the former exasperated by a history of racialised oppression and unequal power relationships in South Africa, which further conflate blackness with labour, but particularly domestic labour. Moreover, I examine how the video implies an abusive relationship dynamic in which the female subject appears entangled, set against the backdrop of The Forge theatre in Johannesburg, thereby implying the masquerade of gender identity and emphasising the narrative quality of the work as a whole.

Keywords: Labour, love, gender-based violence, Don't Make Me Over, Farieda Nazier, South African femininity.

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Hitting home: representations of the domestic milieu in feminist art

Introduction

Don't Make Me Over (2021) is a videographic piece by South African artist Farieda Nazier comprising performance, music, poetry, curated settings, and sculptural assemblages, which forms part of her Post(erity) Project. The title—*Don't Make Me Over*—is based on the 1962 song of the same name originally recorded by Dionne Warwick and later covered by Sybil in 1987. While an integral and fundamental component of the work, the artist emphasises that her interpretation of the popular hit is *not* a music video. Throughout this article, I discuss how Nazier enacts scenes of both compliance and defiance against the conflation of femininity and the domestic milieu, and the embodied violence of patriarchal norms dictating feminine 'beauty' and behaviours. Moreover, I examine how the video implies an abusive relationship dynamic in which the female subject appears entangled, set against the backdrop of The Forge theatre in Johannesburg, thereby implying the masquerade of gender identity as theorised by Judith Butler (1999), and emphasising the narrative quality of the work as a whole. Throughout this discussion, I draw from various feminist paradigms to frame my insights and for the purpose of analysis, namely postmodernist,[1] psychoanalytical,[2] and intersectional feminism.[3]

Nazier's practice has consistently been characterised by her subversive deployment of primarily installation and performance art as modes to tackle socio-political injustices within a post-colonial framework. As an activist-artist-educator, she is committed to disrupting the legacy of colonial and apartheid exploitation in contemporary South Africa in the form of racial and gender inequalities.[4] Her often collaborative processes[5] demonstrate her impetus for conscientisation, decolonisation, and transformation (Nazier & Van Veuren 2015). Of late, her oeuvre has been marked by an interest in the museum, archive, or heritage site as a space warranting critical intervention. Thus, much of her recent work responds specifically to selecting spaces that house and record South African history and collective memory. *Don't Make Me Over* is one such piece conceptualised in this light, and this article is the first to formally examine it in a scholarly manner.

Gender roles concerning the domestic milieu are exasperated by a history of racialised oppression and unequal power relationships in South Africa, which further conflate blackness with labour, particularly domestic labour. In her catalogue accompanying *Don't Make Me Over*, Nazier (2021a) writes that the artwork tells 'a story of entanglement: one untold and taboo, hidden to most'; she insinuates women's subjugation within the home by virtue of it being private and therefore hidden, allowing for all manner of abuses to play out inconspicuously. In these

instances, the domestic *remains* a repressed space for women, and particularly women of colour. The word 'taboo' further points to abusive relationship dynamics and the shame which shrouds them—a theme weaving throughout the work and one I return to later in this article.

The term 'labour' has a multitude of meanings and associations. The first and most common is that of physical labour as an act of service resulting in some form of outcome or quantifiable end. But what of so-called 'women's work', which cannot be quantified and has no end? These so-called 'labours of love', which by their very nature are cyclical and unending? Such labours are bound up with caregiving and thus assumed the territory of femininity, rendered oppressive through a process of socialisation. For Nazier, as demonstrated through the artwork under discussion, these pressures, as dictated by society and at times policed by our intimate partners, equate to an immeasurable violence. Whether in the form of everyday household duties (the essential tasks of cooking and cleaning), raising our children, playing caregiver to our direct and extended family members, and even fulfilling the sexual needs of our partners, acts which typically demonstrate love, are rendered at times perversely obligatory.

Thus, in the case of domestic labour, refusal is often a privilege, since acts of labour are underpinned by gendered and racialised power dynamics which weave inexorable structures in society. As aforementioned, Nazier (2021b) is particularly interested in this intersectional violence experienced by women of colour, and she explains that her:

> [P]ost(erity) Project is a series of art-interventions and dialogues, that seeks to extend our present-day quotidian experience to a seemingly long-past socio-political phenomenon—the Dutch colonization at the Cape. Its far-reaching effects still haunt the harsh realities of life in South Africa today. Essentially, I seek out traces and continuities of the colonial and neo-colonial and how these legacies reverberate in the psychological strata of contemporaneous South Africa […] the old ever-present in the new.

In line with the broader incentives of her Post(erity) Project, Nazier (2021c) elucidates that *Don't Make Me Over* was a response to her visit to the Castle of Good Hope in 2019. The castle is a bastion fort built by Dutch settlers in Cape Town in the seventeenth century, which now stands as a heritage site. The artist spent three to four weeks familiarising herself with the location and, on entering the women's slave quarters, envisaged a site-specific work that responded to the architectural space and its haunting vacancy (Nazier 2023). The colonial fort presented a shell that lent

itself to artistic intervention and conceptualisation of the injustices that had occurred within. *Don't Make Me Over* was thus instigated by Nazier's reimagining of the historical lived experiences of female slaves, their disempowerment and displacement, and the duality one surely experiences when occupying a residence against your will: one you are forced to call 'home' but to which you are an outsider. For the artist, envisioning the chilling dehumanisation female slaves were subjected to by their male owners in the form of sexual violence was a starting point for articulating 'home' as a space that strips one of their subjectivity.

With the abovementioned notions of slavery and associated sexual and other acts of violence as its point of departure, *Don't Make Me Over* developed after that to consider the multitude of ways in which women of all races may find themselves 'enslaved' in the contemporary moment, particularly those bound to toxic relationships and cyclical patterns of abuse. This exploration reveals Nazier's interest in intersections and pluralities of power which occur (particularly) in heteronormative relationships, and the role of patriarchy in this imbalance. Therefore, Warwick's song, as sung by Nazier throughout the video piece, was apt for conveying a message centred on covert abuses. Having been familiar with the R&B version of the song by Sybil, which often played on the television and radio in the late 80s and 90s when she was growing up, and to which she and her sister would sing along with as children (oblivious to its darker undertones), Nazier began thinking about the subjectivity of violence and how trauma continually remakes one's identity (Nazier 2021c).

The lyrics, as quoted below, while appearing sentimental, on closer analysis, convey a duality that resonates with Nazier's initial concept: the loss of power.

> *Don't make me over*
> *Now that I'd do anything for you*
> *Don't make me over*
> *Now that you know how I adore you*
> *Don't pick on the things I say, the things I do*
> *Just love me with all my faults, the way that I love you*
> *I'm begging you* (Warwick 1962).

In the song, the singer implores her lover to accept her as she is, not as he imagines she should be. It fundamentally expresses the inner conflict experienced by women entangled in abusive relationships, which generate a love/hate oscillation within oneself and towards one's partner. This is precisely the dynamic Nazier sought to portray in *Don't Make Me Over.* After running an informal six-month-long workshop on gender-based violence alongside four counsellors in 2018,[6] wherein twenty-two

women from different areas of Johannesburg participated and shared their stories with the artist and each other, it became evident to Nazier that abuse in intimate relationships is not uncommon, nor is it simple. The dynamic is toxic precisely because of its duality, because often, the abuser has two sides to their persona. Emerging from the workshop were commonalities among the participants: consensus that an abuser is seldom 'all bad' nor always abusive, making it complex and confusing for victims to leave the relationship, compounded by the love they continue to feel for their partner or the financial and other dependencies that limit their agency. Thus, two relationship 'stories' may run parallel, one in which the perpetrator is loving, another in which they are violent. Nazier (2021c) explains that her choice of song was also reminiscent of historical cases where female slaves would, as a further violation, be subjugated into marrying the men who enslaved them, and even made to bear their children—an act constituting the ultimate colonisation of woman's life, body, and identity.

When considering that *Don't Make Me Over* was conceptualised during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic and the nationwide lockdown (beginning 26 March 2020), the work has further resonance with the harrowing statistics that emerged revealing the resulting surge of gender-based violence (GBV) cases in South Africa.[7] Instances of intimate partner violence (IPV) increased significantly at this time due, in part, to movement regulations and curfews, which isolated affected women and prevented them from circumventing abusive households, evidently exacerbated by interpersonal tensions arising from economic and other stressors (Roy *et al* 2022).[8] Charlotte Roy *et al* (2022) further elucidate that during lockdown, GBV prevention and government response services were deprioritised, and resources primarily shifted to Covid-19 economic and social relief initiatives,[9] thereby contributing to the 'Shadow Pandemic', a term used to describe the rise in GBV that occurred worldwide and alongside Covid-19. Thus, the pandemic exposed not only the lack of resources and funding assigned to GBV well before it but also 'the disparities and de-prioritisation of the well-being of women and girls that have long pervaded many societies around the world' (Roy et al 2022), whish was acutely felt in a local context.

For the purpose of contextualisation, it must be noted that the subject in the video is the artist herself; she is also the narrator who first recites the poem and later sings *Don't Make Me Over.* At the start of the piece, Nazier is filmed wearing a teapot sculpture, which she constructed using a lace tablecloth (see Figure 1). She is seen bending over as though under the weight of the teapot while balancing it on her back and scrubbing the floor. It is later worn on her head as a hat (see Figure 2) and is the first of the costumes to be stripped away in later scenes. The teapot as a garment rather than simply a prop metaphorically represents the burden of

everyday mundane labour that goes unrecognised and weighs heavy on a woman's mind and physicality, but more significantly, demonstrates the way a woman is rendered utilitarian and literally objectified by such duties. The scene brings to mind the popular children's nursery rhyme *I'm a little teapot*:

> *I'm a little teapot*
> *Short and stout*
> *Here is my handle*
> *Here is my spout*
> *When I get all steamed up*
> *Hear me shout,*
> *Tip me over and pour me out.*

FIGURE **Nº 1**

Farieda Nazier, *Don't Make Me Over.* 2021. Single-channel video. Co-directed by Jade Bowers. Videography, photography, and editing by Andi Mkosi. (Image courtesy of the artist).

FIGURE **Nº 2**

Farieda Nazier, *Don't Make Me Over.* 2021. Single-channel video. Co-directed by Jade Bowers. Videography, photography, and editing by Andi Mkosi. (Image courtesy of the artist).

In this case, the rhyme has darker connotations for what it insinuates and disseminates concerning stereotypically feminine roles as inseparable from servitude. The teapot and the woman are interchangeable; 'tip me over and pour me out' plainly invites anyone to deplete her of her time, energy, and life force until no substance remains. Woman-as-teapot assumes the image of her domesticity here, and it would seem that Nazier complies with these expectations in these earlier scenes. Nevertheless, at one point, she looks over her shoulder anxiously (see Figure 3), suggesting an element of surveillance at play, and giving the first indication that this setting may not, in fact, be her home at all. Thus, the scrubbing of the red wool in this scene represents the 'blood, sweat, and tears' as an idiom for hard physical labour, but may also imply exploitation in the workplace, particularly between a domestic worker and her so-called 'madam'.

FIGURE **Nº 3**

Farieda Nazier, *Don't Make Me Over*. 2021. Single-channel video. Co-directed by Jade Bowers. Videography, photography, and editing by Andi Mkosi. (Image courtesy of the artist).

This dynamic and its inclusion in *Don't Make Me Over* speaks to intersectional feminist concerns and the dangers of 'women' as a homogenising category, emphasising that while women of all races may experience oppression, the voices of white, middle-class women have historically been privileged in the fight for gender equality, since they are both the oppressor (by virtue of their race) and the oppressed (by way of their gender) within complex social hierarchies that afford them power over women of colour, particularly within the domestic milieu. Christi Van der Westhuizen (2017:6) argues that within a South African context, the identity of

specifically white Afrikaans women is complicated by this duality, which is particularly evident in the relationship between white women and their black domestic workers (Van der Westhuizen 2017:7).

In current South African race- and class-based labour divisions, interracial social interaction is often limited to that of a service relationship (Van der Westhuizen 2017:40). White women who occupy disempowered gender positions within the domestic sphere, often derive power from the authority they exercise over black women employed to 'serve' them in their homes (Van der Westhuizen 2017:40). This arrangement 'enables white women [...] to draw on black women's bodies as resources to lighten their own gender load'. Thus, black domestic workers are purposed as surrogates for feminised household labour (Van der Westhuizen 2017:40). Although Van der Westhuizen's (2017) investigation centres on the complexities of white, female, heteronormative, Afrikaans identity, it nevertheless provides valuable insight into blackness as a signifier of servitude in South Africa and the role of white women in perpetuating this imbalance to their advantage. This echoes bell hooks (2000:viii) assertation that 'all of us, female and male, have been socialized from birth on to accept sexist thought and action', and that women too can be overt or covert perpetrators of sexist discrimination not unlike those they have been subjected to themselves—re-enactment worsened by the interrelatedness of racial privilege. This repetitive re-enactment of gendered and racialised roles solidifies outdated identity categorisations stemming from colonialism, which are, in turn, internalised by women of colour as integral to their selfhood and thereafter self-perpetuated. As Frantz Fanon (2008:8) writes in *Black skin, white masks*:

> The inferiority complex [of the black wo/man] is the direct result of dehumanisation in the colonial context, where he sees himself only as the white man sees him. The black man sees himself as inferior because he looks at himself through the white man's eyes. The white man has constantly portrayed the black man as less-than human, an "object" without a soul, an animal, and years of such indoctrination have made the black man believe this to be true.

Another conflation, between domesticity and sexuality, is evident in the scene under discussion, given that the subject styles herself in an arguably seductive manner through false eyelashes, heavy makeup (see Figure 4), and long nails. The artist styling herself in this manner interrogates issues of consent—what part of the female experience is choice, and what part is foisted onto us? It highlights the complexities of sexualisation, which are bound up with a woman's fertility, and yet also a mode we have adapted to in order to endure and perhaps even outwit patriarchal society. Women's fecundity is alluded to through the eggs and phallic ceramic dish, also reminiscent of a cervix (see Figure 5), which the subject uses to enact an Indonesian

tea-making ceremony,[10] the ritualism of which speaks to the ritualistic nature of household chores and perhaps even sexual intercourse. It is not unnatural to procreate or seek sexual gratification or an intimate partner, yet these primal urges have been conflated with the sexualisation of the female body in politics of patriarchal desire that render us as women theatrical and, at times, in conflict with our very nature. Indeed, emphasis lies on the artifice and excess of these aesthetics in *Don't Make Me Over*; they are emphatically false and, in the case of the giant wig and teapot hat, borderline ridiculous. Their inclusion thereby articulates tongue-in-cheek commentary on the folly of attempting to conform to often conflicting and thus impossible societal expectations of women and bring to the fore that sexualisation is not biological nor innate, but a mode of behaviour or appearance which women are taught through a complex process of socialisation. The nature of these items as costumes is plainly disclosed when the video shifts to scenes of the artist removing them, layer by layer.

Moreover, Nazier's performance as another self conveys that gender as a construct is staged—a concept reinforced by the location of The Forge Theatre in De Kort Street, a community-based and politically charged initiative where the video was shot and later exhibited. In fact, *Don't Make Me Over* was initially conceptualised as a piece to be performed live at both the Castle of Good Hope and The Forge. However, in response to the physical limitations of the Covid-19 pandemic, Nazier opted to film her performance instead and incorporate her sculptures to create a videographic work more appropriate for online viewing.[11]

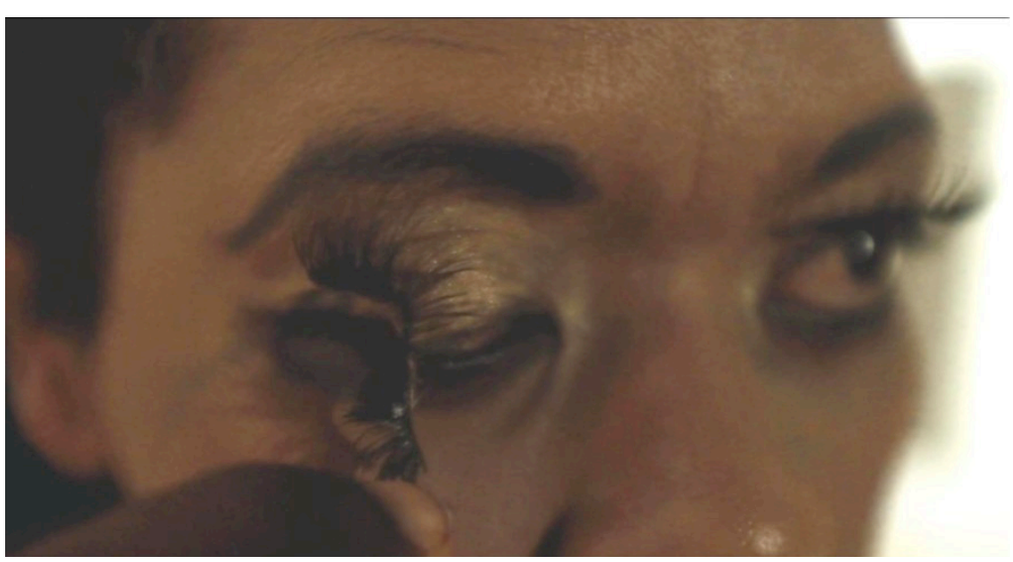

FIGURE **Nº 4**

Farieda Nazier, *Don't Make Me Over*. 2021. Single-channel video. Co-directed by Jade Bowers. Videography, photography, and editing by Andi Mkosi. (Image courtesy of the artist).

FIGURE **Nº 5**

Farieda Nazier, *Don't Make Me Over*. 2021. Single-channel video. Co-directed by Jade Bowers. Videography, photography, and editing by Andi Mkosi. (Image courtesy of the artist).

Nevertheless, her representations of the female body echo Judith Butler's (1999:xv) theory of gender performativity, positing that the gendered body comes into being through the ritualised enactment of bodily signs and gestures, which are then assumed to be natural. While notions of masculinity and femininity may *appear* absolute, Butler (1999) asserts there is no pre-existent identity behind the acts performed on the surface of the body: these performances construct and constitute the appearance of gender identity, which is then assumed to be innate. In this way, gender can be understood as an outer performance that conveys the illusion of an inner self (Butler 1999). Identity can thus be understood as 'a culturally restricted principle of order and hierarchy, a regulatory fiction', for what appears to be the coherence or continuity of identity is, in fact, a 'socially instituted and maintained [form] of intelligibility' (Butler 1999:23;33). In this sense, conventional and binary gender identity is informed by 'social sanction and taboo', to the extent that gender categories and their associated norms are regarded as natural precisely because they are iterated and reiterated in a process driven by both subtle and explicit societal coercions that reward conformity and punish transgressions, resulting in internalised self-policing that perpetuates the fiction of gender (Butler 1999). For, 'performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual' (Butler 1999:xv).

Thus, conceptually speaking, the costumes and props constituting Nazier's performance are essential to the 'correct' display and embodiment of femininity, but progressively fall away in an act of rebellion as the video unfolds. This includes

a pair of high-heeled shoes made from the same lace as the teapot hat and dress. The subject is seen to teeter precariously before eventually removing them altogether to reveal more practical pumps underneath (see Figure 6), perhaps suggesting that for women who do not conform, these roles sit uncomfortably and are embodied awkwardly. The removal of the heels signifies a rejection or momentary setting aside of the duties performed thus far in the video, and what is seen thereafter is the subject lapsing into an increasingly more 'authentic' self, previously concealed beneath her masquerade. Nazier (2021c) explains that the video in its entirety is a process of unravelling, re-enacting the making and remaking of self that is required of a woman on a daily basis, whether physically, or regarding the domestic tasks, which frustratingly seem to 'reset' at the start of each new day.

FIGURE **Nº 6**

Farieda Nazier, *Don't Make Me Over*. 2021. Single-channel video. Co-directed by Jade Bowers. Videography, photography, and editing by Andi Mkosi. (Image courtesy of the artist).

FIGURE **Nº 7**

Farieda Nazier, *Don't Make Me Over*. 2021. Single-channel video. Co-directed by Jade Bowers. Videography, photography, and editing by Andi Mkosi. (Image courtesy of the artist).

Stripping away these layers begins first with the giant wig, which uncovers yet another underneath it, resembling an afro and made from the steel wool used to scour stubborn dirt from pots and pans (see Figure 7). This reiterates the earlier association of black femininity with unpleasant domestic tasks and the function of a domestic worker. The subject gazes at her reflection in the mirror while consciously discarding the various superficial signifiers of her identity, implying introspection and confrontation with her self-image. In many ways, the subject appears split in two throughout the following scenes, first by way of her reflection and second by the sculptural figures that appear alongside her. The first of these was created using a plastic laundry basket, which the artist evidently deconstructed (see Figure 8), and the other using wire, hangers, and a lampshade (see Figure 9). Nazier proceeds to dress the laundry basket in her own uniform and accessories, echoing the notion of women's bodies as utilitarian, disposable, and cheapened, as though a receptacle for dirty laundry (Nazier 2021c). However, on a deeper level, the sculptural figures begin to mirror the subject and reveal glimpses of her inner world.

FIGURE **Nº 8**

Farieda Nazier, *Don't Make Me Over*. 2021. Single-channel video. Co-directed by Jade Bowers. Videography, photography, and editing by Andi Mkosi. (Image courtesy of the artist).

FIGURE **Nº 9**

Farieda Nazier, *Don't Make Me Over*. 2021. Single-channel video. Co-directed by Jade Bowers. Videography, photography, and editing by Andi Mkosi. (Image courtesy of the artist).

Discussing the notion of 'self as other' emerging through the motif of the doppelgänger, Gary Faurholt (2009) elaborates:

> The doppelgänger is an uncanny motif comprising two distinct types: (1) the alter ego or identical double of a protagonist who seems to be either a victim of an identity theft perpetrated by a mimicking supernatural presence or subject to a paranoid hallucination; (2) the split personality or dark half of the protagonist, an unleashed monster that acts as a physical manifestation of a dissociated part of the self.

Originating from the German *Schauerroman* or 'shudder novel' and British Gothic novel, 'doppelgänger narratives involve a duality of the main character who is either duplicated in the figure of an identical second self or divided into polar opposite selves' (Faurholt 2009). Its central premise 'poses the paradox of encountering oneself as another; the logically impossible notion that the "I" and the "not-I" are somehow identical' (Faurholt 2009). I argue here that the duality of subjectivity evident in *Don't Make Me Over* is reminiscent of the doppelgänger and is relevant to this discussion through its relationship to the theme of identity. Faurholt (2009) elaborates on how the doppelgänger has implications for identity politics, particularly in light of psychoanalytical theory, in that the motif 'fuses supernatural horror with a philosophical enquiry concerning personal identity and a psychological investigation into the hidden depths of the human psyche'. He contends that the doppelgänger motif subverts notions of coherent identity, presenting an 'identity in crisis' (Faurholt 2009).

While socialisation indeed plays an active role in the formation of gendered identities, so too does the unconscious mind significantly influence this process. Psychoanalytical theory 'poses questions about the origins of the unconscious meanings of the body, desire, pleasure, phantasy[12] and identification' (Minsky 1996:4) and delves into dimensions of our personal identity, which exist independent of our conscious knowledge. In *Don't Make Me Over*, Nazier brings to the fore certain less consciously examined aspects of femininity, specifically the role that the unconscious mind may play in the construction (and perhaps subversion) of gender and racial identities.

FIGURE **Nº 10**

Farieda Nazier, *Don't Make Me Over*. 2021. Single-channel video. Co-directed by Jade Bowers. Videography, photography, and editing by Andi Mkosi. (Image courtesy of the artist).

Linking the doppelgänger and the process of socialisation to post-Freudian Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, Faurholt (2009) explains that 'the case of the identical alter ego belongs to the mirror stage which states the necessity of identifying with an external image in order to develop an ego; I must identify as that "I" which is not me'. This 'crisis of identity' is certainly evident in *Don't Make Me Over*, but rather than a literal duplication, Nazier's complication of subjectivity is conveyed through her image reflected in the mirror (see Figure 10) and fragmented by the two sculptures previously mentioned. As theorised by Lacan (drawing from Freud's theory of primary narcissism), the 'mirror stage' can be understood as a metaphor to describe how an infant first comes to perceive itself as a separate self from the mother through viewing its own reflection. The mirror is, therefore, a pivotal symbol in the psychoanalytical and social process of self-identification. As expanded on by Meskimmon (1996:4):

> Yet another critical meaning of the mirror pertains specifically to the definition of the 'self' and thus to its visual representation. In psychoanalytical theory, it is through the so-called 'mirror stage' that the infant's undifferentiated psyche becomes part of the social fabric and acquires its identity as an individual subject or 'self'.

The mirror image is both 'self' and 'not self', intrinsic yet external (Minsky 1996:145). Nazier's preoccupation with her reflection thus appears an intimate encounter with her selfhood—an existential contemplation on the ways in which her image does not, perhaps, conform with prescribed femininity. She effectively poses the question: How do I identify with the 'I' that is not really me? Namely, the external image constructed by complex patriarchal systems of oppression. What are the implications for misidentification with this 'other' or external self? It is precisely these tensions that give rise to a 'crisis of identity' or 'splitting of self' described by Faurholt (2009). While on the surface, duplicity may appear advantageous, it essentially signifies the tragic loss of self and one's inability to form a stable and coherent identity or 'belong' within the symbolic order.[13] Nazier thus enacts and reveals the extent to which patriarchal and colonial violence dehumanises women of colour to the degree that their very subjectivity is irreconcilable.

Again, Fanon's (2008) theory of subjectivity proves pertinent here, where he maintains that for the person of colour, a torturous existential crisis occurs when attempting to formulate selfhood independent from the hegemony of the white imagination and the 'white gaze', owing to racist paradigms that are not only externally imposed, but which are internalised and embedded into the black body, ultimately resulting in an alienation from self. Nielsen (2011:366) reflects on Fanon's account in *Black skin, white masks,* of seeing himself through the eyes of the oppressor, noting that to be defined by whiteness in the present is also to be 'swallowed by a past, a long tradition of white erasure and re-scripting of black history and culture'. This is relevant to Nazier's practice given that the artist grapples with South Africa's colonial past; specifically, the injustices of slavery informing *Don't Make Me Over*, and its consequences on post-colonial identity formation. The 'white erasure' that Nielsen (2011) speaks of implies that that which is silenced and suppressed is as detrimental to the formulation of coherent black subjectivity as that which is misrepresented; it is these historical silences which Nazier intuited when visiting the Castle of Good Hope, and which she attempts to redress and give to voice to in *Don't Make Me Over.*

Moreover, the aforementioned sculptures may also serve as alter egos, imagined others, or versions of the subject's self, perhaps unrealised. The scene that follows is notably more playful; the music turns upbeat while Nazier dances sensuously

with the hanging sculpture (see Figure 9), and technicolour lights fall across her body and the room. It is unclear whether the 'other' is a substitute for her lover, supplants his presence in a memory of happier times, or perhaps acts as the lover she envisioned for herself, as opposed to an abusive one. As I posit, the figure may also model a joyful, liberated doppelgänger of the artist. Irrespective of these possible scenarios, the scene provides insight into the subject's imagination or repressed fantasies, contributing a psychoanalytic dimension to the work which reaffirms the doppelgänger as representative of identity in crisis. Moreover, the sculpture appears ghostlike as it hovers beside her (see Figure 11), evoking Nazier's practice as a 'homage to the presence of past selves as a manifestation of living and ancestral spectres' (Nazier 2021b). I contend that an archive of historical acts of violence is evoked in this scene, implying the ways in which the personal and collective past haunts the subject and, in a broader sense, has presence and tangible socio-political ramifications for present-day South Africa.

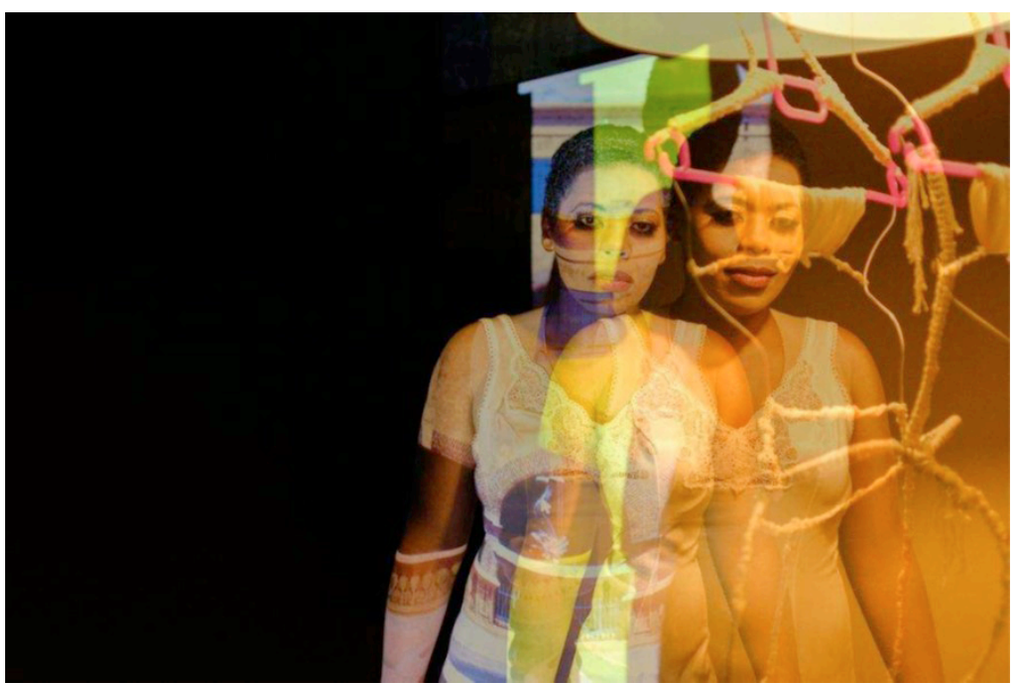

FIGURE **Nº 11**

Farieda Nazier, *Don't Make Me Over*. 2021. Single-channel video. Co-directed by Jade Bowers. Videography, photography, and editing by Andi Mkosi. (Image courtesy of the artist).

The red thread seen to recur originates from a rug that the artist sourced from a second-hand shop and then literally unravelled as a metaphor for psychologically 'falling apart at the seams' (Nazier 2021c). Its explicit colour evokes blood and

viscera, whether resulting from childbirth or menstruation, through which the artist suggests an association between violence and the womb as a signifier of womanhood (Nazier 2021c). The motif of red thread initially emerged within the context of the 2018 GBV workshop (previously described), where Nazier introduced red wool and beads as materials for participants to create with while sharing their stories. The artist was responding in particular to the topic of blood that had been raised in group discussion, and she describes working with these red materials as 'an incredibly powerful moment and turn in the workshop, when things just kind of really opened up' (Nazier 2023). This is perhaps due to the different and seemingly conflicting associations with the colour, ranging from the more common notions of love, passion, and romance to the more abject or corporeal. Moreover, the artist found the ambiguity of the colour red to have a conceptual link with the complexities of love and violence in abusive relationships and the thin line between them (Nazier 2023).

In *Don't Make Me Over*, these threads combined with red leather pieces trail behind the subject as she walks up the stairs; they are embedded in her stockings as though under her skin and integral to her flesh, pushed through a mincer, and finally engulf her entirely in a bathtub (see Figure 12). She later pulls at the pantyhose on her arms and legs as though tearing at her own skin and attempting to escape the physicality that binds her to being a woman (see Figure 13). Much like the three Fates in Greco-Roman mythology who weave the fabric of time, Nazier fighting against the thread is akin to her fighting her fate[14] already predetermined by her biology, or so convention would have us believe.

FIGURE **Nº 12**

Farieda Nazier, *Don't Make Me Over*. 2021. Single-channel video. Co-directed by Jade Bowers. Videography, photography, and editing by Andi Mkosi. (Image courtesy of the artist).

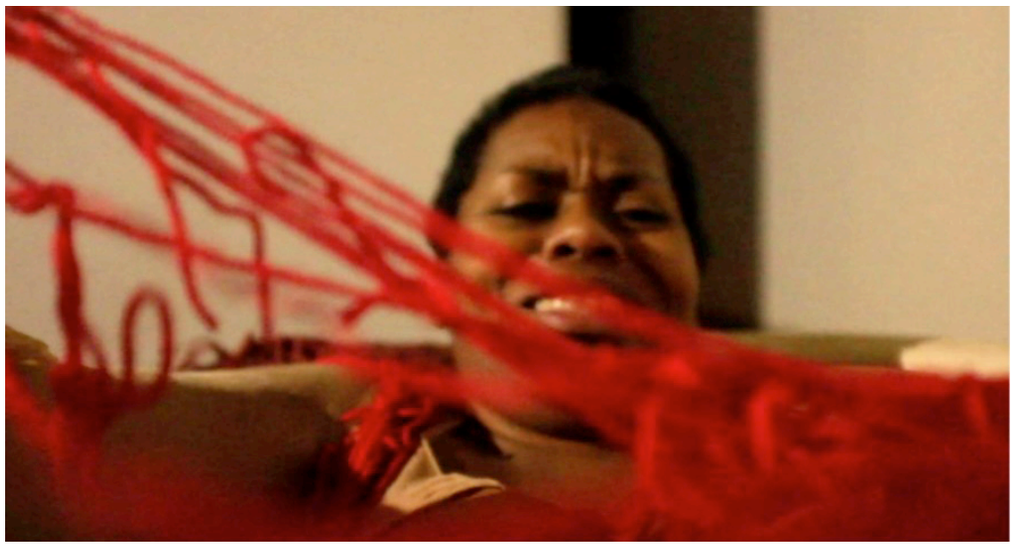

FIGURE **Nº 13**

Farieda Nazier, *Don't Make Me Over*. 2021. Single-channel video. Co-directed by Jade Bowers. Videography, photography, and editing by Andi Mkosi. (Image courtesy of the artist).

The closing scene shows Nazier exiting The Forge Theatre onto its rooftop in downtown Johannesburg as though awakening from a dream. She is dressed comfortably in sleepwear and, instead of serving tea, now drinks it herself while sitting on the ledge of the building. In the accompanying audio, she recites the following words before disappearing from the frame entirely:

> *The stench*
> *Of caking blood*
> *awakes me with a jolt.*
> *Your love is not love*
> *but a violence immeasurable*
> *And only I*
> *Have the key*
> *To release my shackled mind*
> *From this recurring dream*
> *This violence immeasurable*
> *Embodied, now mine*
> *Escapes my mind through taught*
> *lips*
> *And my body through a raised*
> *knife yielding hand*
> *As I strike*
> *I commit a*
> *violence, immeasurable*
> *On your sordid filthy loving*
> *and I smile*
> *turn*
> *and walk away.*

Her sudden disappearance evokes the suicide of female protagonists in classical mythologies or Shakespearean novels,[15] and Nazier (2021c) elucidates that this ambiguous ending and the implied suicide of the subject is intended as a subversive act and reclamation of self by virtue of it (at times) being the only one available to disempowered female characters whose agency lies only in removing themselves from their painful circumstances.[16] As Marina Galetaki (2019:189) notes, 'A question that often arises in the context of discussions on suicide is that of agency, and more specifically of the way to determine the extent to which agency manifests in an act of self-killing, [which] has serious implications for our understanding of the conditions under which non-normative gender identities might emerge'. Moreover, I argue that in the case of *Don't Make Me Over*, suicide more metaphorically represents the death of the subject's selfhood. The self-sacrifice of living in service to others, performing prescriptive appearances of our gender according to society's expectations, and remaining entrapped in abusive relationships all warrant a form of self-betrayal and, ultimately, the death of our authentic selves. What is normative is, in fact, sanctioned violence. When patriarchal demands are so deeply embedded in our psyche, our identities, and the framework of our bodies, is death our only means of transcending our female physicality? Faurholt (2009) explains that nineteenth-century interest in the doppelgänger was 'derived from the superstitious belief that seeing one's double is an omen of death'. He goes on to say that 'the doppelgänger is indeed a harbinger of death' perhaps not in the literal sense, but because its existence threatens the illusion of the protagonist's previously stable and socially conforming identity. Such a conceptual relationship is certainly evident in *Don't Make Me Over*, a narrative that unexpectedly concludes in the literal and/or metaphorical death of its only character.

Interestingly, when Don't Make Me Over was eventually exhibited at the Castle of Good Hope in 2021, the artist opted to install it in the Ammunition Room (see Figure 14) instead of the slave quarters below as initially intended. A decision which, I maintain, succeeded in conveying the work's activist intentions and figuratively situating it as 'ammunition' in the ongoing 'war' against white hegemony and patriarchy. Within the Ammunition Room was a hole in the ground into which Nazier embedded her display of the video screen (see Figure 15). The shape and dimensions of it were uncannily similar to an empty grave and facilitated the audience looking down onto the work when viewing it, as though partaking in a funeral. Nazier (2021c) further describes the emptiness of the space as facilitating an echo of her voice as recorded in *Don't Make Me Over,* which began to repopulate the vacancy of the castle in an auditory sense, with a woman's words.

FIGURE **Nº 14**

Farieda Nazier, *Don't Make Me Over*. 2021. Single-channel video. Co-directed by Jade Bowers. Videography, photography, and editing by Andi Mkosi. (Image courtesy of the artist).

FIGURE **Nº 15**

Farieda Nazier, *Don't Make Me Over*. 2021. Single-channel video. Co-directed by Jade Bowers. Videography, photography, and editing by Andi Mkosi. (Image courtesy of the artist).

Conclusion

Women's image and self-image and its implications for subjectivity are important when examining the song *Don't Make Me Over* and the notion of being 'made over' into an image determined by patriarchal desires. I contend that through parodic repetition, Nazier's performance in *Don't Make Me Over* allows for a reading of gender identity as mimicry and an act. The artist effectively makes a mockery of gendered and ethnographic assumptions of her identity by staging these very stereotypes theatrically and within ostensibly contrived settings. In *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity,* Butler (1999:189) poses the question as to what kind of gender performance may enact and reveal the performativity of gender itself, in ways that destabilise the naturalised categories of identity and desire. I argue conclusively that the intentionally exaggerated performative representations by Nazier in *Don't Make Me Over* achieve this outcome by calling attention to the construct of femininity through reiteration with difference, as well as subverting the plethora of racial stereotypes associated with the artist's physicality. *Don't Make Me Over* thereby illustrates Butler's (1999:30-31) proposal concerning the 'possibilities of doing gender that repeat and displace through hyperbole, dissonance, internal confusion, and proliferation the very constructs by which they are mobilised'.

I have found that where Nazier deploys the doppelgänger and mirror as metaphor, she speaks intimately of her identity and the psychological formations of sexual difference, and the extent to which colonial violence permeates and fragments the black female psyche. What *Don't Make Me Over* further brings to light is that femininity is enmeshed with labour and the domestic in a manner that originates externally, but invariably internalised as integral to how one identifies as a woman. Thus, it is a violence immeasurable; insidious in that one cannot always place its origins, yet at some point in a girl child's development, limited patriarchal constructs of her femininity are assimilated and, later, self-imposed—'This violence immeasurable, embodied, now mine'. The artist effectively counters the assumption foregrounded by hooks (2000:59) that 'white girls are somehow more vulnerable to sexist conditioning than girls of colour'. For the vast majority of South African women of colour, their identities remain a signifier of servitude, consequently giving rise to internalised gender *and* racial inferiority. While different women may certainly share commonalties by virtue of being suppressed by patriarchy, *Don't Make Me Over* evokes the inseparable interconnection of gender, race, and class disadvantages and their dehumanising consequences for marginalised women of colour, whose lived realities cannot be overlooked in the feminist fight to destabilise patriarchal

systems of oppression (hooks 1984), particularly in South Africa where racial and socio-economic inequalities are extreme.

In conclusion, it further complicates the very nature of heterosexual love, when a man's love for a woman is premised on her capacity to conform physically and behaviourally to his expectations, to be hacked, minced, or juiced into a desirable, loveable, lesser version of herself—'Your love is not love, your love is violence'.

Notes

1. As with postmodernism, postmodern feminism rejects phallogocentrism and interrogates notions of 'the symbolic order', women's 'otherness' and her conventional authorship, identity, and selfhood (Tong 1998). This paradigm will be crucial when examining Nazier's *Don't Make Me Over* as a postmodern work, which similarly seeks to destabilise conventional gender roles and power relations as dictated by the symbolic order (discussed in further detail to follow).

2. Psychoanalytical feminism draws on Freudian theories such as the pre-Oedipal stage and the Oedipus complex and argues that women's identity and behaviour is fundamentally rooted in their psyche and/or early childhood development (Tong 1998:131). Although it rejects patriarchal notions of 'penis envy' and 'biological determinism', psychoanalytical feminism involves a reinterpretation of Freud's texts in order to engage with feminist imperatives (Tong 1998:136;138). This paradigm will prove particularly useful when engaging with Nazier's use of the doppelgänger and mirror metaphors in the work under discussion. Fanon's (2008) theory of subjectivity, falling within a postcolonial framework, will provide further insight in this regard, as his writings deal implicitly with internalised racism and its psychoanalytical implications for black subjectivity.

3. The term 'intersectional feminism' was originally coined by Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989, who 'stresses the multidimensionality of the black experience, the intersectionality of race and sex that both play roles in the systems of discrimination' (Biana 2020:14). However, several other feminist theorists contributed to intersectional feminist thought well before this, notably bell hooks in her publication *Feminist theory: From margin to center* (1984). Intersectional feminism identifies the historical suppression of marginalised women in the fight for gender equality, through which the plight of white women was centralised and the experience of unprivileged women of colour neglected. In *Feminist theory: From margin to center*, hooks (1984:31) suggests an approach to feminism which considers not only women's subjugation on the basis of their gender, but the complexity of interlocking webs of oppression including racism, classism, and imperialism affecting marginalised groups. This is precisely the premise of Nazier's practice, as a woman of colour exploring the intricacies of her racial identity within a post-colonial context. Thus, intersectional feminist theory proves crucial to my analysis of *Don't Make Me Over* and the layers of systematic oppression explored therein.

4. Of her own practice Nazier (2019) states, 'Decentering grand narratives is a fundamental part of my practice, which I explore through foregrounding idiosyncratic, individual and quotidian histories and experiences. My focus is fueled by the continued blindsiding of the deep psychological and symbolic damage that haunts us and keeps us locked on repeat; rehashing the violence, atrocities, violations of apartheid on a micro-scale'.

5. For instance, her collaboration with Alberta Whittle for their *Right of Admission* project (an ongoing performative intervention since 2014) deals with 'the negotiated presence of blackness within racially stratified spaces' through the pair deliberately inserting themselves into institutionalised spaces and re-enacting grooming trends and classification processes highlighting the continued othering of black bodies (Creative Feel 2021a). According to *Creative Feel* (2021b), during the performance, 'Nazier and Whittle performed the roles of glamorous officials supervising the classification. Audience members were invited to have their appearance manipulated with different props as well as be measured in minute detail using vernier calipers, pencils, a weighing scale, paint chart samples, and tape measures. Throughout these processes of measurement, audiences were interviewed and invited to define their racial and cultural identity through a series of prompts which were then transcribed into an elaborate form. An extension of this classification is the public administration of the collected data. Audience members were expected to wait for their data to be processed. Each participant had a numbered slip which was called, and a judgement or classification made public'.

6. This series of workshops was held at the University of Johannesburg in partnership with the university's Community Engagement Office and took place between March-August 2018. The workshops were initiated by Nazier when she approached Garth Stevens (a fellow lecturer at UJ) with the prospect of collaborating with a selection of his Masters students in Clinical Psychology and Community Psychology. Nazier did so with the awareness that engaging with vulnerable groups with a focus on GBV would require the presence of skilled counsellors to co-facilitate the process. The cohort would meet once a week for sometimes five hours at a time; the sessions were conversational in nature and informed by Paulo Freire's dialogic pedagogy, which maintains that critical consciousness emerges through dialogue between teachers and students (in this case, participants, and facilitators). The incentive behind the workshops was not to provide therapeutic intervention for participants, but rather to initiate critical dialogue around violence as a phenomenon as experienced and understood by women, although not necessarily and always inflicted by male perpetrators. The findings of the workshop were not intended to contribute to research output, but rather as a form of community engagement with the hope for conscientisation around GBV, informed by socio-educational and liberatory psychology frameworks. Thus, emphasis throughout the process was less on psychoanalysis and predominantly on learning and unlearning, developing understanding, awareness, critical thinking and reasoning skills, and developing practical tools to assist participants and facilitators alike, with the potential for collective healing. Artmaking was thereby employed as a means to gently evoke dialogue around the topic. This culminated in Nazier's solo exhibition *Post, Present, Future* in 2019 at the Apartheid Museum, for which participants co-created an artwork during the workshops held in 2018, by way of making objects while they spoke, in the form of knitting and other processes (Nazier 2023).

7. Roy *et al* (2022:2) indicate that, '[I]n South Africa, a national counseling hotline called Lifeline SA documented a 500% increase in the number of GBV calls in the 2 months after the lockdown began [...] Although hotlines do not accurately measure GBV incidence, changes in call volume may be suggestive of changes in incidence, particularly early in a crisis when rigorous surveys are not available'.

8. Contributing factors include fears around contracting the Covid-19 virus, which had no pre-existing research surrounding it, nor a vaccine or cure; the widespread loss of employment and livelihoods caused by lockdown; the corresponding rise in physical and mental health illnesses; collective and individual grief caused by millions of Covid-19-related fatalities; the closure of schools and necessitation of homeschooling; and the anxiety of unprecedented and unpredictable laws and measures taken by government, including, perhaps, the ban on alcohol and cigarettes exclusive to South Africa and instituted by President Cyril Ramaphosa in an effort to curb escalating GBV cases.

9. President Cyril Ramaphosa later issued a statement on 13 April 2020 emphasising and enforcing that GBV services remain operational (Roy *et al* 2022). The qualitative study by Roy *et al* (2022) thus found that South Africa's early prioritisation of GBV prevention and related service provisions during the pandemic contributed positively to the availability of support for GBV victims in comparison to Kenya, Uganda, and Nigeria.

10. Beyond its ritualistic significance, although not explicitly stated by the artist, the Indonesian tea-making ceremony performed by Nazier has further resonance with the history of the slave trade in the Cape (where the Castle of Good Hope is located) whereby the vast majority of slaves were displaced from Madagascar, South-East Asia, and the Indian subcontinent by the Dutch East India Company.

11. The artist originally envisioned the performance as approximately ten minutes long and constituting a bathtub installed in the physical space of the Caste of Good Hope and The Forge respectively. She had planned to engage with the bathtub during her performance in much the same manner captured in *Don't Make Me Over*, by first disrobing then immersing herself in the 'water' of the red thread, as well as pushing it through the mincer, which incidentally features less in the videographic work than was intended for the live version. These actions were to be executed while the song *Don't Make Me Over* played concurrently in the room. However, once the work was adapted into a videographic format, it took on a more complex narrative quality comprising multiple scenes, settings, and costumes, albeit shorter in duration. Its development was the result of the collaboration necessitated between the artist and a production team, including co-director Jade Bower and photographer Andi Mkosi (Nazier 2023).

12. Phantasy can be defined as 'a powerful form of primitive thinking which pre-dates reason or emotional insight, and which originates in the unconscious, as distinct from a fantasy or piece of conscious day-dreaming' (Minsky 1996:7).

13. Theorised by psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (Tong 1998:196), the symbolic order can be understood as a system 'which regulates society through the regulation of individuals; so long as individuals speak the language of the symbolic order—internalizing its gender roles and class roles—society will reproduce itself in fairly constant form'. It is an order that ensures, predominantly through language, that signs or the symbolic (rather than the imaginary) determines the subject.

14. Red thread as a metaphor for fate recurs throughout classical mythology, and in *Don't Make Me Over* is further reminiscent of the tale of Theseus and Ariadne, wherein the Cretan princess Ariadne fell in love with Theseus and wove him a ball of red thread to assist him with escaping the Minotaur's labyrinth after he devised to enter it and slay the monster. It was Ariadne's plan that saved Theseus' life, yet she is later abandoned by him following his crowning as king. The character of Ariadne is therefore associated with mazes and labyrinths but is furthermore one of countless female love interests exploited by male mythological 'heroes' in their quest for eternal glory. In *Against our will: Men, women and rape* (1975), Susan Brownmiller examines the concept of the heroic rapist in examples of myth, literature, film, and non-fictional accounts. She states that within classical mythology 'up there on Olympus and down here on earth and in the sea and below, the male gods, Zeus, Poseidon, Apollo, Hades, and Pan, raped with zest, trickery and frequency. Yet on the other hand, the goddesses and mortal women who were victim to these rapes, Hera, Io, Europa, Cassandra, and Leda, rarely suffered serious consequences beyond getting pregnant and bearing a child, which served to move the story line forward' (Brownmiller 1975:283). The pantheon of Olympic gods typifies the trope of the heroic rapist, as they remained idealised despite (and in fact bolstered by) their acts of sexual violence. Although Theseus is only a demi-god and does not rape Ariadne, his *modus operandi* is not unlike his divine counterparts; he is one of many such male 'heroes' in classical myth who objectifies, violates, and exploits multiple female characters at will.

15. One is reminded particularly of Ophelia, the lead female protagonist in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, who drowns herself in a brook after being driven to madness by Hamlet's actions, or Jocasta in the classical mythological tale of *Oedipus Tyrannus*,

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