Curious Disappearances: Affectability Imbalances and Process-Based Invisibility

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In this paper, we analyze the recent public scandal involving Nafissatou Diallo and Dominique Strauss-Kahn to offer an account of the role affectability imbalances play in process-based invisibility. Process-based invisibilities, in this paper, refer to predictable narrative gaps within public narratives that can be aptly described as disappearances. We demonstrate that compromised, complex social identities, maladjusted webs of reciprocity, and a failure to fully appreciate basic affectability in large part cause affectability imbalances. Ultimately, we claim that affectability imbalances and the three imbricated conditions that facilitate such imbalances—complex social identities, reciprocity, and basic affectability—are integral features of process-based invisibility.

I. Introduction

In her preface to *Wild Women in the Whirlwind: Afra-American Culture and the Contemporary Literary Renaissance*, Audre Lorde writes, "It's not that we haven't always been here, since there was a here. It is that the letters of our name have been scrambled when they were not totally erased, and our fingerprints upon the handles of history have been called the random brushing of birds" (Lorde 1990, xi). Lorde here eloquently outlines a set of problems with which many Black women have struggled. She highlights that though Black women are a persisting presence in US culture, there is a rather routine inability to maintain particular kinds of manifest presences in larger public narratives. The term public narrative here refers simply to narratives created for public consumption and/or commonly held narratives. Lorde highlights three ways many Black women have had problems maintaining a public presence in common narratives and narratives for common consumption within the US. They include: 1) obfuscation, 2) erasure, and/or 3) blatant indifference. To say that some of the lives and experiences of Black women are rendered invisible in public narratives is not to say that they are always already invisible, but rather should aspects of

our lives and experiences become subject to public narratives, they can quickly be dismissed due to machinations aimed at obfuscating, erasing, and/or discounting those lives and experiences. We understand these forms of rendering invisible to be process-based invisibility. That is to say, obfuscation, erasure, and indifference are enacted in public narratives according to processes that can be tracked by the very disappearing in question. In this way, we are not discussing the many populations who never gain, for example, warranted public attention. Rather, we aim to identify imbricated conditions where populations or persons have gained public attention only to be rendered invisible or disappeared.

There is a rich legacy of Black feminist and/or Black women-centered scholarship in the US that seeks to highlight imbricated conditions for process-based invisibility in larger public narratives. Lorde was not the first or the last Black woman to draw attention to the disappearings of many Black women's lives and experiences. Fannie Barrier Williams made similar comments about the "colored girl's" unknowability (Williams 1905). Zora Neale Hurston echoed her sentiments in her essay, "What White Publishers Won't Print" (Hurston 1950). More recently, Rebecca Wanzo in her book, *The Suffering Will Not be Televised: African American Women and Sentimental Political Storytelling*, draws attention to Black women and other populations of people whose suffering does not manifest appropriately in public narratives (Wanzo 2009). In this vein, there remains a strong legacy in Black women's social theory that draws attention to the process-based invisibilities shrouding many aspects of Black women's lives (see also Lorde 1984; Crenshaw 1989; Cooper 1992; Crenshaw 1992; Combahee River Collective 1995; Harris-Perry 2011).

This paper adds to the ongoing project of highlighting and exploring aspects of process-based invisibilities concerning Black women within public narratives. Rather than dissecting public narratives, however, we outline several conditions that aid in such disappearings. Specifically, we highlight the role affectability imbalances play as a condition for the possibility of process-based invisibility. We define affectability imbalance in public narratives as a discrepant range of narrative impacts that follows from and causes disempowerment. Such imbalances, on our account, have at least three imbricated conditions: 1) compromised, complex social identities, 2) maladjusted webs of reciprocity, and 3) the failure to appreciate basic affectability. All parties to some event, for example, affect one another but the degree to which this occurs is discordantly skewed and, important for this inquiry, discordantly recognized. We show that affectability imbalances are, in large part, caused by complex social identities that contribute to maladjusted webs of reciprocity along with a failure to fully appreciate basic affectability. *Ultimately, we claim that affectability imbalances and the three imbricated conditions that facilitate such imbalances—complex social identities, reciprocity, and basic affectability—are integral features of process-based invisibility.* To demonstrate this claim, we examine the disappearing of Nafissatou Diallo in public narratives.

This paper will proceed in three parts. First, we outline the terms we use to explain affectability imbalances and their relationship to process-based invisibilities, that is, complex social identities, webs of reciprocity, and basic affectability. Second, we offer an example of two components that create affectability imbalances, that is,

reciprocity-based disempowerment and failures to appreciate basic affectability, with the case of Nafissatou Diallo's emergence and disappearance in public discourse. Third, we offer an account of affectability imbalances and the process-based invisibilities they encourage that can be detected in her case. Specifically, we will describe how affectability imbalances contribute to process-based invisibilities.

II. Establishing Our Terms

This paper will highlight three features of our social existence: 1) complex social identities, 2) webs of reciprocity, and 3) basic affectability. Complex social identities refer to the fact that we are all simultaneously members of multiple communities that have hermeneutic impact. Webs of reciprocity, or social reciprocity, refers to the robust owning of needs that creates imagined and real obligation structures as well as tracks empowerment and disempowerment. Finally, basic affectability refers to the fact that part of human existence is the ability to affect and be affected by others. The difficulty of tracking complex social identities, maladjusted social reciprocity, along with a failure to fully appreciate basic affectability enables affectability imbalances, which are large components of process-based invisibilities.

Complex Social Identities

Complex social identities arise from the reality that our social spheres include innumerable different communities. Complex social identities simply refer to the fact we are all simultaneously part of multiple communities that can influence how we are "read" or understood in social space. In this way, complex social identity does not refer to an inner structure of identification, varying notions of subjectivity, or even the ways we would personally identify, but rather to socially readable identities. "Readable" does not refer only to those social identities that can be detected by sight. Complex social identities are formed by community memberships that hold hermeneutic impact. Hermeneutic impact, with respect to readable identities, refers to community memberships that appear to provide interpretive clues about people included in such communities. For example, big-bloc communities like "Black" or "women" are often taken, for good or ill, to provide explanatory clues about Black people, cis-gendered women, trans-women, Black cis-gendered women, or Black trans-women. Readable membership in social groups that manifest hermeneutic impact according to particular social, historical, and political landscapes are the building blocks of complex social identities.[1]

We all simultaneously belong to multiple socially readable communities. It is common to be part of multiple communities with hermeneutic impact that result in negative, positive, or relatively neutral, though often false, interpretive clues. For example, the fact that we, the authors, are Black women in the US has definite hermeneutic impact. However, the fact that we are both employed academics with PhDs also matters for how we are read in space, if these facts about us emerge. It also matters for

readability in social space that at least one author is from a lower socioeconomic background, which can be "read" in the cadence of her speech. In addition, one of the authors is from the southern US and has a speech cadence other than what is expected in her working environment in the midwestern US. These kinds of community memberships have interpretive impacts. To be clear, these details matter only in particular social landscapes, and how they matter changes as these readable social identities change interpretive landscapes. As a result, complex social identities are dynamic identifiers that are influenced by the circumstances and environments in which one finds oneself. Details like race, gender, class status, speech cadence, employment, sexuality, nationality, and so on are considered identifiers precisely because they often do have significant hermeneutic impact. To be clear, hermeneutic impact is not an indication that those interpreting complex social identities have gotten something "right." However, the fact that we are Black women from the US, for example, can and often does influence how we are "read" in social space, again, for good or ill.

Complex social identities, then, refers to identities that are readable in social landscapes according to our (real or perceived) membership in multiple communities whose membership has hermeneutic impact. This understanding of complex social identities attempts to move away from understanding social identities according to one salient or foundational identifier, which often serves to render unintelligible the fact that we simultaneously belong to multiple communities with different social and political features *that travel and change through the traveling.*

Webs of Reciprocity

We understand reciprocity straightforwardly as the active sharing and meeting of needs (Mayer 2007, 26). Communities and how we define them often have profound effects on reciprocity. How questions surrounding reciprocity relations are negotiated (that is, whose needs we feel obligated to meet; how to conceive these needs; and how to articulate principles of need-sharing and need-creation, for example) effect structures of empowerment and disempowerment that shape a given community and its membership. In fact, delineations of different communities can be seen to map squarely upon one's place within dynamics of reciprocity. For example, disempowerment is materially and ideologically reflected in at least two nodes of relations within webs of reciprocity: the disregarded and the villainized.

Within a given community, *disregarded* communities are those whose needs are considered unimportant. Nothing is categorically wrong with the needs; they are accidentally or historically deemed unimportant. Hortense Spillers's concept of interstices captures the position of the disregarded with respect to Black women's sexuality, for example. In her essay, "Interstices: A Small Drama of Words," Spillers writes, "I am interested here in what we might call discursive and iconic fortunes and misfortunes, facilities, abuses, or plain absences that tend to travel from one generation of kinswomen to another" (Spillers 1984, 73). Spillers here highlights a kind of absence that persists over time, that is, travels from generation to generation. Spiller's claim is that

Black women's sexuality, for example, is given the "status of non-being" as a result of the many ways Black women's sexuality has been cast so as to deem it as a site of "chaos" (77). What is important to note about Spillers's claim here is the kind of neglect of Black women's sexuality that results from failed signification. That is to say, when aspects of one's life are publicly given a status of "non-being," those aspects are simultaneously deemed worthy of disregard.

Disregard, then, as a node of reciprocity, which is actually a failed reciprocity, aids in determining which needs will be seen as worthy of being met and which needs will be ignored or rendered invisible. For Spillers, "sexuality as a term of power belongs to the empowered," or to those with access to discourses and claims for justice. She locates empowerment in this case with those whose sexuality has not been given the status of non-being. In this light, disregard, which is being relegated to the status of non-being, is a radical form of disempowerment as it compromises one's ability to make claims for redress publicly given the range of missing words and contexts of signification such a status promotes. Spillers explains:

> The structure of unreality that the Black woman must confront originates in the historical movement when language ceases to speak. . . . I wish to suggest that the lexical gaps I am describing here are manifest along a range of symbolic behavior in reference to Black women and that the absence of sexuality as a structure of distinguishing terms is solidly grounded in the negative aspects of symbol-making. (77)

She goes on to label the negative aspects of symbol-making "the interstices." The aspects of people's lives that fall into interstices of signification have a direct impact on whose needs are disregarded and/or whose needs are met and, as such, affect empowerment and disempowerment within a given web of reciprocity relations.

Villainized communities, in contrast, constitute those whose needs should *not* be considered important, either due to some kind of secondary status or due to the particular need's violation of an assumed moral code. That is to say, villainization can occur in at least two ways: either due to the villainization of a given population or to the villainization of the need(s) in question. In either case, the needs of a villainized group have been deemed secondary or insignificant. Michelle Alexander, for example, highlights the ways an "under-caste" is being created of populations who have been found guilty of a felony in the US. Alexander writes:

> Once a person is labeled a felon, he or she is ushered into a parallel universe in which discrimination, stigma, and exclusion are perfectly legal, and privileges of citizenship such as voting and jury service are off limits. It does not matter whether you have actually spent time in prison; your second-class citizenship begins the moment you are branded a felon. (Alexander 2012, 93)

For Alexander, acquiring the descriptor "felon" ensures that many of one's basic needs will be deemed less worthy of being met than those of a person without such a descriptor. Alexander goes on to explain:

> [F]or drug felons, there is little hope of escape. Barred from public housing by law, discriminated against by private landlords, ineligible for food stamps, forced to "check the box" indicating a felony conviction on employment applications for nearly every job, and denied licenses for a wide range of professions, people whose only crime is drug addiction or possession of a small amount of drugs for recreational use find themselves locked out of the mainstream society and economy—permanently. (94)

Drug felons, then, are barred from necessities for their livelihood, like shelter, good jobs, and regular access to food, given the difficulties of finding regular work, according to Alexander. She describes a population that has been villainized.

To say that people living with felony convictions constitute a villainized population is to indicate that their needs are considered secondary or less important to fulfill. We must note here that the needs of villainized populations may be needs that most, if not all, of us would consider important. Food, shelter, and economic means are not "special" needs; they are basic human needs. Villainized populations, then, are populations whose basic needs are deemed unimportant and are, hence, disempowered by this position within webs of reciprocity.

The *villainization of needs* is often conflated with the villainization of populations, but this, it seems to us, is a mistake. The basic needs of persons living with felonies are often taken to be villainized needs due to the population that possesses them. But as we indicate above, food and shelter are not villainized needs. Some villainized needs are nefarious, for example, the so-called need of serial killers to murder. However, most villainized needs are not so unreasonable, even if they remain morally objectionable in a given landscape. The needs created by teenage heterosexual sexuality is often villainized and left without accommodation in the US, to say nothing of the far more intense villainization often accorded to teenage same-sex sexuality, for example (which is compounded with membership in an, at times, villainized population). Teenage sexuality, in all its forms, is often denied and left unaddressed, leading to very predictable conclusions. Teenage parents often become villainized populations, for example. But this villainization, arguably, starts with the villainization of teenage sexuality in the US. The point we are trying to highlight is that disempowerment that results from villainization can be identified on at least two fronts: either in terms of the population or in terms of the needs themselves, which often includes a population, but is centered on the need itself. What is common across villainized populations and villainized needs is a perceived compromise to real or imagined moral codes. What distinguishes them is whether the existence of the population or the need itself violates a given moral code.[2]

Disregarded and villainized communities can be understood as suffering different forms of disempowerment due to occupying varying nodes of relations within webs of reciprocity. The forms are value-sensitive in the sense that it is important to disempower the needs of serial killers to kill whereas, for many, it is oppressive to disempower felons to the extent that they cannot maintain their own lives. The

value-sensitive nature of these kinds of disempowerment are enabled by how needs are taken up individually, locally, socially, and globally. We have been calling this landscape "webs of reciprocity." Empowerment and disempowerment, on our account, are in part the product of how we are situated within webs of reciprocity, which can be viewed at times via our complex community memberships. We call this reciprocity-based disempowerment or empowerment.

Basic Affectability

With the concepts of complex social identity and webs of reciprocity in place, basic affectability is fairly easy to identify. Basic affectability or unqualified interdependence accords with the reality that we exist as beings who variously affect and are affected by others. This ability to affect one another, whether interpersonally, locally, nationally, transnationally, or globally, will never go away. It is a basic state of human existence that we can ignore, but never truly abrogate. Erinn Gilson highlights the affect-prone nature of human existence. Through her understanding of vulnerability, Gilson claims that affectability is a universal human condition and defines vulnerability as "a condition of openness, openness to being affected and affecting in turn" (Gilson 2011, 310). Vulnerability, or what we are calling basic affectability, is an ambivalent human condition. That is, the human condition of affecting and being affected is neither wholly negative, as that which enables harm, or wholly positive, as that which enables positive activity (309). It is simply a characteristic of human existence. It is, however, a feature that marks the condition for the possibility of the empowerment or disempowerment enabled by webs of reciprocity. That is to say, disregarding needs from a given community is only detrimental because routine disregard of one's needs by others can and does affect the lives of the disregarded. Empowerment and disempowerment are terms that are possible only due to the basic affectability of human existence, that is, our brute interdependence. This is not to say that villainized populations, for example, cannot bond together and create buffers against general disempowerment. Disempowered groups do, at times with amazing success, resist and thrive in the face of disempowered placements within webs of reciprocity. However, this kind of "banding together" is required by and effective because of basic affectability. The case of Nafissatou Diallo can be shown to demonstrate how these three features of social existence, that is, complex social identities, webs of reciprocity, and basic affectability, can malfunction to create deleterious affectability imbalances.

III. The Curious Case of Nafissatou Diallo

What happens to communities where these three features of social existence malfunction? Deleterious affectability imbalances are discrepant ranges of impact that facilitate process-based invisibility, on our account. They exist where compromised, complex social identities, maladjusted reciprocity, and a failure to appreciate basic

affectability intersect to create the conditions of disempowerment that constrict narrative contributions. The case of Nafissatou Diallo illustrates nuances of affectability imbalances, that is, reciprocity-based disempowerment and failures to appreciate basic affectability.

Both the *New York Times* and the *Guardian* report that Diallo, who was employed as a housekeeper, entered Dominique Strauss-Kahn's (known in Europe as DSK) $3,000 per night suite in Manhattan on May 14, 2011 after being assigned to clean the suite and informed that the room was empty. Upon entry Diallo is surprised when Strauss-Kahn

> emerged from the bathroom naked, chased her down a hallway and pulled her into the bedroom where he began to sexually assault her. New York police department spokesman Paul Browne said Strauss-Kahn had been naked when he "grabs her and pulls her into the bedroom and on to the bed." The 62-year-old then deliberately locked the door to the suite, it was alleged. "She fights him off, and he then drags her down the hallway to the bathroom," Browne continued. There, Strauss-Kahn sexually assaulted her again, forcing her to perform oral sex on him and trying to remove her underwear, according to the Associated Press. The woman was able to break free and escape the room, alerting colleagues, who dialed 911 for the police. (Chrisafis 2011)

The former Director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) was no longer on the premises to offer a statement when the police responded. Detectives eventually located him in first class aboard a flight awaiting departure for Paris. Strauss-Kahn was removed from the plane and charged with "a criminal sexual act, attempted rape, and unlawful imprisonment" (Chrisafis 2011). Despite Strauss-Kahn's attempt to flee, he was detained and arrested pursuant to a criminal investigation of Diallo's account of their encounter. This is *basic affectability* in practice—the capacity to affect and be affected. The encounter in the hotel suite affected both Diallo and Strauss-Kahn and caused them to continue to be affected by each other. However, issues of complex social identities and maladjusted reciprocity quickly complicate this characteristic of human existence.

The case had all of the makings of a media spectacle. After Diallo's identity was revealed, she was characterized as "a liar" (Eligon 2011), part of a conspiracy to end Strauss-Kahn's political ambitions, involved in a scheme to extort money from the accused (Germain 2011), and questioned about being HIV positive (Bain and Fredericks 2011; Smith 2011).[3] In her *Good Morning America* exclusive interview, Robin Roberts noted press accusations of Diallo's involvement with prostitution asking, "Are you a prostitute?" (Katersky 2011). To be certain, attempts at impeaching the credibility of victims of sexual violence by making their sexuality scandalous is not a new legal or media strategy. Characterizations of Black women in particular as wanton, licentious, or sexually deviant are frequent as well.

On August 2011, "(t)he coda to one of New York's most gripping and erratic criminal dramas lasted all of 12 minutes… and just like that, the sexual assault case

against Dominique Strauss-Kahn was dismissed" (Eligon 2011). It is in this final act —the dismissal of criminal charges with no legal opportunity for retrial—that the nature of complex social identities is revealed. Nafissatou Diallo, an immigrant from Guinea, is simultaneously a member of multiple communities. Nafissatou Diallo is "Black," a "woman," an "immigrant," a "domestic worker," and she is all of these at once; any one or all of these identities can serve to disempower her in the US landscape.[4] This list is grossly oversimplified but exemplifies the nature of the interwoven identities that served to thwart Diallo's attempts at justice. Diallo's complex social identities inscribe her as "other," placing her among disregarded communities. She is thereby situated within webs of reciprocity as disempowered, rendering unsuccessful her attempts to fulfill her needs for criminal justice.

Spillers's understanding of Black women's sexuality as a site of chaos is a useful point of reflection when considering Diallo's early failed attempts at uptake. This analysis helps to frame Diallo's reciprocity-based disempowerment in two ways. First, her account is disregarded on the basis of an indescribable, hermeneutically indeterminate sexuality, affronts to which are seemingly undetectable. Could "DSK" truly assault Diallo when Black women's sexuality is unquantifiable? Recall that disregard is one of the ways needs are deemed unworthy of being met in a community. Without a hermeneutical framework of Black women's sexuality, it is difficult to perceive affronts to it or the needs such affronts produce. Spillers suggests that when language fails there is no recourse. Thus Diallo takes residence among the disregarded—but she does not rest here. Second, accusations of mendacious personal character and questionable sexual history serve to villainize Diallo's needs. In this case, questions of credibility and an already persisting disregard of Black women's sexuality can be seen to facilitate Diallo's transition to the villainized, suggesting her needs, as a woman who was allegedly sexually assaulted, *should not* be met. Diallo, on our account, finds herself disempowered via maladjusted webs of reciprocity, which we have been calling reciprocity-based disempowerment.

Hedging on the witness's compromised credibility, lead prosecutor Joan Illuzzi-Orbon noted, "physical evidence was not conclusive of a sexual assault and she was the only witness" (Eligon 2011). Diallo is a part of the service industry in a city with one of the most tourist-driven economies in the world. The city would scarcely function without Diallo and the labor of countless nameless others like her. Yet the unfortunate truth is that Diallo's complex social identities were used to undermine her credibility. Hotel maid, immigrant, African woman are complex social identities that facilitated dismissal of her claims. Wanzo describes these identities as contributors to a less than ideal candidate status that prevents activism for justice on Diallo's behalf (Wanzo 2009). The complexity of her community memberships implied a permissive disregard for her needs for adjudication—the needs of a Black, immigrant domestic worker are not important *enough* to warrant reciprocity, that is, the meeting of those needs. Once disregarded then villainized, Diallo's needs signal the end of community responsibility. She is subjected to reciprocity-based disempowerment in two steps. First, her complex social identities served to place Diallo in a disregarded community. Second, villainization renders her particular need for criminal justice

illegitimate. What results is a predictable disempowerment that follows from how she is positioned within webs of reciprocity. One is not obligated to credit or accept her testimony as the *only* witness, nor is there any requirement to extend reciprocity. Her plight is best described in two words: *case dismissed*.

Why then, is there an affectability imbalance enacted upon the parties involved in this encounter? Although we highlight Diallo as a marker of affectability imbalance in the US context, even international commentary has detected this phenomenon. Reporting for the *Guardian*, Germain notes sentiments of sympathy in response to images of an unshaven Strauss-Kahn in handcuffs, portraying him as a pitiful victim of political conspiracy. "And yet, nothing has been mentioned about the plight of his victim, or about how hard it is to speak out about sexual violence of seduction. And if we finally start talking about this alleged victim, it's to suggest she was a honeytrap" (Germain 2011). Thus the disparate treatment that leads to Diallo's disappearance in public narratives is recognizable even beyond the US landscape as a harm that resonates in other communities.[5] Still, in this recasting of Strauss-Kahn as victim, it becomes easy to forget how both actors became involved in the case. Both actors find themselves in the hotel suite as a function of their employment. Strauss-Kahn was in New York, and in the hotel, in an official capacity as a world leader in finance. Diallo entered the suite under the conditions of her employment —to clean the room. Though unable to continue at the IMF and unlikely to make a bid for the French presidency, Strauss-Kahn returns to a $250,000 pension in France—despite his inattention to the global financial crisis during the episode that led to his removal (Gendar and Schapiro 2011). Clearly Diallo, a former domestic worker, is not affected in the same way. Diallo finds herself relying on worker's compensation awaiting a civil suit against Strauss-Kahn that is later settled in her favor in December 2012. Yet this is only part of this story. Strauss-Kahn's presence in public narratives does not fade; it is not clear that the same can be said for Diallo. What emerges from this public narrative is skewed recognition of the roles each actor plays and the impacts of this event on their lives. We call this dynamic an affectability imbalance in public narratives, that is, a discrepant range of impacts in public narratives.

The complex social identities of this case's actors highlight differing levels of empowerment and disempowerment that affect the telling of this event. Diallo's "domestic," othered, gendered identity precluded her access to reciprocity relations in her claims against a person with community membership in legitimated, authoritative, wealthy communities. During the media circus surrounding this event, we watched Diallo transform from a woman in need of help to a disregarded and villainized subject. In this case, Diallo is not altogether absent in this narrative, but rather she is almost entirely overwritten within the narrative. Simply, her complex social identities place her outside webs of reciprocity, which then permitted assaults on her character, and determined she had no recognizable right to a sympathetic community audience. The reciprocity-based disempowerment Diallo faced as a result of her complex social identity led to a predictable narrative lacuna surrounding Diallo's story, that is, the narrative concerning Nafissatou Diallo herself.

IV. Since There Was a Here: Who is Nafissatou Diallo and Why Do We Care?

One of the authors of this article discussed Nafissatou Diallo and reciprocity-based disempowerment in a 2013 presentation at a US university and received two notable and predictable responses: "who is Nafissatou Diallo?" and "who cares about her?" To be clear, these questions, properly stated, ask, "how would Nafissatou Diallo have gained my attention?" and "why should anyone care about Diallo?" Both of these questions are predictable given what we have offered here. In what follows, we will address the predictability of these questions given the affectability imbalances present in this case, starting with the latter question and proceeding to the former.

Why Should Anyone Care about Diallo?

With respect to this question, the reciprocity-based disempowerment identified in public narratives surrounding Diallo function to erode "care," making this question predictable even among those who happen to know how Diallo enters into national and international public narratives. That is to say, on our account, reciprocity-based disempowerment turns on dispensing or withholding care for particular needs and particular populations that often manifests as a lack of care for the people in question. Take, for example, the felony analogy. As a villainized population, the basic needs of people convicted of felonies are often ignored. The villainization of Diallo via alleging her involvement with prostitution operate to place the idea that Diallo is herself a member of a population that is generally villainized, hence possessing needs that ought to be ignored. This is not to say, of course, that those who are involved in prostitution ought to be villainized and their needs ignored, but rather to say that those involved in prostitution are often villainized. This is but one example. Diallo already found herself persisting with a compromised, complex social identity by being read as a Black, female, immigrant domestic in the US. These social identities, to be sure, aid in the ease with which Diallo is villainized. However, the effect of such villainization is an erosion of "care" for Diallo and her needs.

The public narratives we mention work to encourage the withholding of care concerning Diallo on many levels. What needs are worthy of being met and who has a demand on our sense of obligation is often cast in terms of what needs and which populations are considered worthy of "caring about" within given webs of reciprocity. The dubious status of care afforded Diallo, in this way, is quite predictable. Her appearance in the public narratives we discuss serves to cast her needs as worthy of disregard and, by virtue of being cast as a member of a villainized population, worthy of being ignored. The inability to track why one should care about Diallo results from reciprocity-based disempowerment demonstrated in public narratives. Such disempowerment has the added effect of thwarting a full appreciation that there would be no public narratives surrounding this event *without the life and experiences of Nafissatou Diallo*. That is to say, it thwarts a full appreciation of basic affectability at play in this event.

Basic affectability refers simply to the fact that though Strauss-Kahn affects Diallo negatively, Diallo also affects Strauss-Kahn. And it is this affectability that is a condition for the possibility of the production of these public narratives. Their mutual ability to affect each other is by no means equal. It does, however, exist. Why should we care about Diallo? The answer is simple, even if easily ignored. Because Diallo has been in this event since there was an "event" to be registered in public narratives. Reciprocity-based disempowerment, along with these kinds of failures to appreciate basic affectability, are affectability imbalances on our account. An affectability imbalance refers to a discrepant range of impact that follows from reciprocity-based disempowerment along with blatant failures to appreciate basic affectability. Here, affectability imbalance refers to narrative impact. Such disempowerment and neglect of the affectability conditions that facilitate public narratives contribute to differing ranges of one's ability to impact such narratives. This varying range of ability to impact public narratives is a major catalyst for process-based invisibility. That is to say, the failure to appreciate basic affectability demonstrated by the question "why should anyone care about Diallo" is tied to an already present disappearing. Who, after all, is Nafissatou Diallo?

Who is Nafissatou Diallo?

Of course, if this question concerns who Diallo is personally, it cannot be answered. Public narratives of the sort we target here rarely provide this kind of information.[6] However, as stated earlier, we take this question to concern how Diallo came to public attention. As such, this is a question asking where one should "remember Diallo from." It refers to the past, a question begging for a reminder: "Who is Nafissatou Diallo, again? Refresh my memory." Very few people who are even marginally informed concerning recent world affairs would ask the same of Strauss-Kahn. This claim, as some would assume, does not translate into the simple position that Diallo, as an immigrant, African, woman, domestic worker, would not immediately capture public attention in the way Strauss-Kahn, a European, then-director of the IMF, would, although this is undoubtedly the case. Rather, affectability imbalances work to obscure and promote indifference concerning the very real sense in which Strauss-Kahn makes news only with respect to those he affects and those who affect him. The disappearing of Diallo in public narratives—though many recall the incident, few recall her name specifically—speaks to the role affectability imbalances play in process-based invisibilities, that is, obfuscation, erasure, and/or blatant indifference.

Who is Nafissatou Diallo? She is the person who claims that Strauss-Kahn sexually assaulted her in a New York hotel during the course of her day working as a domestic laborer. Why do we care? *There would be no public narrative around this event without Nafissatou Diallo*. Without a full appreciation of these two answers, Diallo is taken as somehow interchangeable with any other person who could bring forward such charges. Diallo becomes less than a footnote to Strauss-Kahn. This is characteristic of process-based invisibility or narrative disappearing. It is far more complicated than

simply saying that Diallo does not have the public presence of Strauss-Kahn; it is also that Diallo is *barred* such presence given reciprocity-based disempowerment as a result, in part, of compromised, complex social identities and gross failures to appreciate basic affectability. Strauss-Kahn emerges, even as a maligned former world leader of finance; and Diallo vanishes, demonstrated by the question, "Who, after all, is Diallo again?"

Process-based invisibilities of the kind gestured to by Lorde are conditioned, in many ways, on affectability imbalances. That is to say, reciprocity-based disempowerment and a failure to appreciate basic affectability serve to aid in disappearing Diallo in public narratives. She becomes a foil without relevant narrative impact, only marginally part of the public narratives themselves. When discussed at all, Diallo, who is subject to a number of social identities that have hermeneutic impacts, in this case, to ill effects, finds herself subject to a public interrogation drawing on these impacts to "understand" her "role" in her claims about Strauss-Kahn's sexual assault. Her role in the incident is interrogated according to whether we, the public, should care about Diallo. This significantly shifts attention away from the fact there would be no incident to report without Diallo and the basic affectability her existence invokes. Without full appreciation of basic affectability, Diallo does not fully manifest in public narratives that are conditioned by her very existence. She is disappeared via process-based invisibilities, where the processes themselves are constituted by the machinations of affectability imbalances, that is, reciprocity-based disempowerment and failures to appreciate basic intelligibility.

In conclusion, let us address one telling objection to our account of affectability imbalances and process-based invisibilities. Some might ask: doesn't our interrogation serve to render Diallo ever more disappeared? After all, Diallo was able to settle her civil suit against Strauss-Kahn and *The Post*, which falsely labeled Diallo a prostitute, in her own favor. She expresses her thanks to the courts and her supporters around the world. And some even credit Diallo with the demise of Strauss-Kahn's IMF career and hopes to secure the French presidency. Would not this outcome suggest that Diallo was not subject to process-based invisibilities as our account claims? And even if this is conceded, might the ending settlement between Diallo and Strauss-Kahn suggest that the reciprocity-based disempowerment in this case is overstated? These are all good observations, in our estimation. However, they fail to fully appreciate the parameters of basic affectability. Saying that Diallo is capable of affecting Strauss-Kahn, which is what these comments highlight, is consistent with our position. Yes, indeed, Diallo is capable of affecting Strauss-Kahn negatively. This fact cannot be theorized away.[7] Rather, our account tracks the way her ability to affect Strauss-Kahn is consistently overlooked in broader public narratives to the point where one can expect, with extraordinary frequency, to be asked who she is and why anyone should care about her experiences. In this way, we are not commenting on Diallo's access to basic affectability, which, for us, cannot be abrogated even if recognition can be suppressed. But rather we are commenting on why the criminal case was dropped and why the mention of her name to most audiences within a US context results in a conversation about Strauss-Kahn and not Diallo.

In being disappeared, Diallo's public narrative is not completely invisible. A process-based invisibility operates in the narrative telling of this event that makes Diallo visible only to be *made* invisible. We are commenting here on what conditions facilitate such a *disappearing* and not whether Diallo has the ability to affect Strauss-Kahn. She did and she does. This, however, is but half the story. Here we propose an answer to the question of why her basic ability to affect Strauss-Kahn is often overlooked to the point where Diallo's actions can take on the appearance of being the "random brushing of birds," even if those brushings had notable consequences. To this end, we show that reciprocity-based disempowerment via complex social identities along with failures to fully appreciate basic affectability can, and often do, catalyze process-based invisibilities. That is to say, we explore dimensions of affectability imbalances as a source for curious disappearings within public narratives.

Notes

1. It is important to note that complex social identities are often collapsed with discourses on personal identity and subjectivity. However, this project takes seriously the reality that how we are interpreted in social space impacts one's social privilege and/or underprivilege outside of one's subjective formation or one's personal identification. As a result, we bracket important understandings of persons and subjects and focus on social identities within social landscapes, which may or may not accord with one's own identification. In an anti-Black sphere, for example, one's own decision not to identify as Black, when one manifests a readable identity as being Black, does not assure that one is not simply perceived as a member of the social group or raced as "Black," nor does it automatically exempt one from the so-called interpretive clues or the hermeneutic impact that being identified as "Black" may entail.

2. At times, this is not a neat and easy distinction. Drug felons appear to be part of both a villainized community, that is, persons living with a felony conviction, and possibly in possession of a villainized need, that is, drug abuse. This exacerbates the intensity of their villainization in predictable and unpredictable ways. There may be very few villainized needs that do not accord with villainized populations; however, they do exist.

3. Of all of the character assassinations hurled at Diallo, the charge of "liar" was perhaps the most damning. The accusation of being a liar is not a particularly new experience for women from countries rife with conflict. In fact, the accusation of lying about personal experiences with violence or sexual violence has inspired scholarship interrogating the role and nature of truth in trauma narratives or narratives of extreme civil unrest. For example, work inspired by Rigoberta Menchu's narrative and David Stoll's so-called exposé interrogates different conceptions of truth when recounting extreme violence and civil unrest (see, for example, Arias 2001; Binford 2001; Beverley 2004).

4. Though we focus on a US context, this kind of analysis can be conducted in most, if not all, geopolitical spaces. That is, identifying sources for reciprocity-based disempowerment can be done in any landscape. This is primarily because of basic affectability itself. Empowerment and disempowerment follow from affectability as part of human existence. Identifying factors that disempower populations and obscure this disempowerment

can be done in any context. It is important to note, however, that the features enabling such disempowerment will not be the same in every context. For example, though being "Black" in a US context can be a significant source of reciprocity-based disempowerment, it would not be such in many other contexts. However, being an "immigrant" signals, in most contexts, vulnerability to disempowerment. What reciprocity-based disempowerment is made of, then, depends on the geopolitical climate one is analyzing. This is not to say all such disempowerment is relative. One can expect to find a range of similarities, but they will need to be found from within the context(s) one is analyzing.

5. Germain's analysis identifies the problem of Diallo's affectability imbalance in French and US media. To be sure, Germain's critique underscores the importance of acknowledging Diallo's disappearance. However, the implications of affectability imbalances in a French context are beyond the scope of this project. Detailed analysis of affectability imbalances in France requires an extensive investigation of French landscapes of reciprocity.

6. We cannot invoke, nor will we attempt to approximate, "Diallo's voice" in our account. Such a performance pretends access to Diallo's inner life and sentiments that the media accounts surrounding this event do not allow. This reality leads to another set of issues concerning the social nature of agency. See Alisa Bierra on this point (Bierra 2013). Our account, however, is not aimed at identifying Diallo's agency in this event, which we assume. Rather, what we are highlighting is the way Diallo's role in this event is overshadowed and disappeared in the narrative telling. Not because Diallo has no voice, but because the impact of her voice can be neutralized via reciprocity-based disempowerment and failures to appreciate basic affectability.

7. It is important to note, however, that in many cases in which one can detect process-based invisibility, one's ability to affect another is often exceedingly discordant. See for example, Patricia Williams's commentary on Tawana Brawley (Williams 1991) and Crenshaw's analysis of public narratives surrounding Anita Hill (Crenshaw 1992).

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