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Pink Transgressions

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This paper addresses what I term “Pink Transgressions.” I coin the phrase Pink Transgression to mean any oppression of one woman over another. For this research, the area of pink transgressions is focused on domestics, examining the impacts of race, class, gender, and transnationalism using a Black feminist perspective. Using feminist theory, I construct the web that connects me to my mother and both of us to Diouana, the domestic in the film, La Noire (Black Girl) by Ousmane Sembene (1966). The movie serves as an extraction of my life in the space of an “imagined-maid.” That “imagined-maid” status brought me to this close feminist study of the people whose lenses persistently visualize a maid in me.

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materialism, Black feminist thought, feminist standpoint theory, and existentialist thinking (Collins, 2004, 1998; Engels, 1884; hooks, 2004, 2000, 1996; Lorde, 1996; Woolf, 2002) Applying this amalgam of theories, I construct the web that connects me to my mother and both of us to Diouana, the domestic in the film, *La Noire* (Black Girl), by Ousmane Sembene (1966). The movie serves as an extract of my life in the space of an “imagined-maid.” That “imagined-maid” status brought me to this close feminist study of the people whose lenses persistently visualize a maid in me.

What I Believe

Woman can be just as power hungry as men. And women, like men, do not feel allegiance to groups that do not serve their personal goals and promote their financial and social status. There are many examples in books, films, and plays which document this phenomenon. Take for example the short film, *La Noire de (Black Girl)*, released in 1966 by Ousmane Sembene. The main character, Diouana, is a young Senegalese woman who was duped into leaving her country to take a job working as a nanny to a French couple’s three rambunctious young children. Upon her arrival to France, Diouana is enslaved. She is caged in the apartment

in Antibes in the South of France; her only freedom is furtive glances of the distant shores of the Mediterranean coast captured through the glass panes that lead to a balcony; her next area of seeming freedom was in the courtyard and only when she is attending to Madame’s children. Sembene’s film is short in length but deep in meaning; it is a lesson in intersectionalities of oppression.

I chose the title *Pink Transgressions* to codify women-over-women oppressions or intra-feminine oppression. I feel compelled to write my paper in this vein because, as a student in Women and Gender Studies, I find that much of feminist research and formalized activism evolved around the state, the corporations, and what white women want from their white men. I make this claim with measured reservation. Feminine intra-oppression is a most selectively invisible transgression. I dissent from this biased practice, and I use this paper to increase the voice of dissent against this status quo. I use this paper to shatter silence by giving names and voices to the women giving life to their untold stories from the fields of pink oppressions, working as domestics in the homes of the elite class of women in America.

Pink oppressions are a towering vertical. At the bottom are women of color, and for those who are domestics, they traverse many strata back and forth as they travel the spectra of class, race, nationality, and gender. The women are an ideal prototype for the works of the few feminists who study the intersections of oppressions and the value of knowledge from a standpoint position (Collins, 2004; Lorde, 1996; hooks, 2004). It is through the lens of those scholars, in addition to Sembene's Diouana and her voice as maid, that I develop this paper.

Transgressors and the Transgressed

Much like Ousmane Sembene's film, *Black Girl* (La Noire), my mother was an immigrant Black woman who doubled as a factory worker five days a week and then as a day worker in white women's upper middle class homes on Saturdays and Sundays. I recognize in my mother and in Sembene's film the ongoing racialized and class-based women-on-women oppressions and the fight for identity the plot explores. Diouana is a young Senegalese woman who began work in her native country, Senegal, which was just beginning to rise from under the dust of French colonial power. Back in her country, Diouana worked for a French colonist

couple and when she was invited to follow them to France, she jumped at the occasion, believing that her economic lot was about to improve and that she would be able to help her family back home. Upon her arrival in Antibes, South of France, Diouana faced harsh treatment and no pay for her services. Although she was promised a position as a nanny, Diouana was soon an enslaved domestic. The film winds up the tensions between mistress and domestic. The woman of the house whom Diouana refers to as Madame, demonstrates a deep-seated need to have Diouana perform her domestic status in all its aspects including wearing the domestic uniform of apron; her mistress' obsession with class, race, and identity differentiation make life very difficult for Diouana. But this dominance did not silence Diouana to submission as Sembene, using a voiceover that is audible only to the viewer, gave agency to Diouana, thereby offering a window to her reclaimed liberation. This also highlights the difference in Diouana's status between object, which is what she is seen as by her mistress, to subject in her own mind, her own voice, and her own consciousness. These apertures of freedom in subjugation lead me to conclude that Diouana never

submitted her identity to the oppressive incursions of her boss. The voiceover in the movie is critical as it lets viewers see and feel how Diouana processed the pink transgressions in the hands of her boss.

I acknowledge the legitimacy of hegemony and patriarchy and the way they control the intellectual, professional, and financial freedom of all women. But the overemphasis of this reality as a class-based binary oppression of men over women, both presumed white, limits the conversation to the very top of America's social pyramid scheme. Here, white men continue to be the primary rule makers and white women, with education and access, are close behind. This conversation about what those elite women have already achieved and still want to gain is faulty without the voices, bodies, and faces of house workers, day workers, maids, cooks, and nannies; women who toil in the shadow of the intellectual class cleaning their babies, their toilet bowls, and making sure their husbands were fed and kept in clean fresh linen. In America at least, those other women are primarily women of color in brown, black, and red skin, women who are mostly silent and often are marginalized because of race, class, language skills,

and nationality. As it was four decades ago and it is still so today, these invisible women and their contributions are indispensable to the achievement and freedom of men and women of the elite class. These unsung heroines experience a specific class of oppression; they are the women in servitude. They hire out their only tools: their hands, their backs, and their knees. These women are my mother and Sembene's Diouana. These women are also me to the extent that I have the ability to know their racial oppression, because I share in some of the intersectionalities of oppressions they confront.

The Virginia Woolf Syndrome

Women of the elite class including many feminists who teach the canon reflect that same tunnel vision that keeps the domestics in the margins of patriarchy. A good example is Virginia Woolf's (2002) famous writing that demands a woman have a room of her own and her own money for her own liberation. But it is important to note that Woolf lived in a house full of servants. Without acknowledging the hands that cared for the rest of the house, it creates the illusion that invisible fairies made it all possible. When Woolf transgressed in order to

subvert patriarchy and rejected her role to be caretaker, house cleaner, cook, and laundress and so on, that transgression created a vacuum in the home, and if that void was not filled by the domestic class, Woolf would not have had the leisure to develop her writing, a point raised in Blair's (2008) article, *The Horror of Dirt: Virginia Woolf and Her Servants*. Blair (2008) highlights the importance of servants' contributions to Woolf's success and her liberty to be productively engaged with her writing. Light's (2008) study of Woolf in *Mrs. Woolf and the Servants* underscores Woolf's privilege.

The use of domestic servants nearly always results in a woman-mistress lordship over a woman-domestic. This is not a problem if we concede that society is shaped around systems of governance where citizens agree to work towards goals that positively benefit all members. This, however, is a huge supposition whether a woman works in an haute class home like Woolf's (2002) or toils away in bourgeois homes in Brooklyn, New York. The life of a domestic for hire is one of subordination and self-effacement. This claim is supported by Dill (1994), who writes of the stratified existence of domestics and mistresses coexisting under one roof. Dill (1994)

writes that "Low income Black women who work as domestics in the homes of middle-class and upper-class White families experience two very different life-styles; their employees and their own (p. 4)." Dill (1994) explains that Black maids are cognizant of their location in the family structure. Dill's (1994) assessment provides a direct link into Collins' (2004) application of feminist standpoint theory. Collins' (2004) discussion of standpoint theory explains ways position and power relationships among differently situated individuals play out in a group. This means that my social location, for example, shapes the way I see my daily environment, and that this social location is used by others to shape external relations with me. It is therefore conceivable that Dill (1994) is correct in stating that "Black maids develop an awareness of the impact those material conditions have on them" (p. 4). Furthermore, Dill (1994) adds, these Black maids are living in two universes and that positioning "provides them with a unique lens to study the impact of race and class on the family life of two different but intersecting segments of society" (p. 4). These quotes from Dill (1994) directly coincide with Collins' (2004) application of standpoint theory, which is

concerned with the location of people and the stratifications of power.

What I Know

Big problems arise when women design a system of governance which oppresses some at the expense of others. My intimacy with female intra-oppression in America came first through my mother's lens. My mother lived in the enclave with other Caribbean nationals in Brooklyn, NY. Like many brown skinned women from the so-called developing world, she worked her share of long factory hours during the week. Her Saturdays and Sundays were often spent cleaning the houses of bourgeois women in far flung communities where well-heeled women with elevated educational and professional capital live. What I learned from my role as my mother's translator is that women who slave in other women's homes are often mistreated, disrespected, and violated by the hands of those they serve. Female domestics, also known as maids, servants, indentured servants, day-workers, or even slaves, are to my conception, invaluable to the success of the many women who strive for their piece of the patriarchal hegemonic power system. Without the knees, backs, and elbows of women like my mother, those

mistresses in those fancy homes would have had to contend with a less than clean Kosher Friday. They would not have had time for a Saturday morning trek to the hair salon, or the rights to a dolce vita of Sunday morning breakfast with a long serving of the New York Times, read twice over. Yet for all that my mother did, she was sometimes cheated out of her full pay for a full day of hard work. Those cunning women used the tools of patriarchy to rob my mother, a woman who was never allowed to sit at the very table she cleaned and polished or to linger in the kosher kitchens she scrubbed and sanitized. There is a place for women like her; women who hire their hands for low wages are rewarded with a hard cold chair in the frigid doorways on frozen steps with heads made to hang over in that obedient pose as they lower their mouth to another spoonful of a lunch dead from the long commute of three, maybe four trains, and a bus to boot; dead from sitting in the cold draft of the no-man's land between the side entrance and the kitchen door, her knees stiffened by cold draft and the unforgiving resistance of the steel chair. Still, she returns to the kitchen floor, obedient stiff knees bent to scrub the faint drops of coffee stains.

Broadly stated, while women as the commander in chief of their household can make patriarchy look kind and just, their abuses of domestic workers' human rights are downright ugly. They are indistinguishable from the familiar model of male hegemonic oppressions that their own class of women often decries. The home is a space long regarded as the sole responsibility of the woman for the glory of her husband who comes back to a clean house and a happy wife and children. Added to those intersections is "La Bonne," Diouana. "La Bonne" means the good one in a verboten translation from French to English. Throughout the movie, Diouana manifested Dill's (1994) positioning of the parallel worlds of domestic and mistress. Diouana has knowledge of being subordinated and existing in two worlds under the same roof. The mistress' world has freedom and material advantages, but the agency and access they provide were not available to Diouana in spite of her "intimate" physical proximity to those she serves. Washing the fancy dishes or making up the fancy bed do not equal ownership.

Domestic Service is Women's Work

In Sembene's film, *Black Girl*, Diouana is presented in all her Otherness. Her Black skin, her foreign language, her poverty, and her subversive streak as she strives for independence; these all collide with the fury of Madame, the oppressed, white middle class, educated mistress who stands helpless in the face of the patriarchal oppression of her husband and the hegemony of the state. Dill affirms, "Domestic service is women's work because housework is women's work" (p.5). Dill underscores the debased location assigned to household care on the occupation ladder when she describes that indispensable job as, "classified with unskilled labor because it has traditionally been thought that any woman knows how to do housework" (p.5). This classification gives important insight into Madame's disdain towards Diouana's abilities as maid. I argue, since the mistress was already devalued as the would-be housemaid, she could find no added value for the indispensable services another woman as maid can provide. Madame saw so little value in her maid's services that she demonstrated no regrets as she withheld Diouana's wages while keeping her imprisoned in the apartment in Antibes, France.

The strained relationship between Madame and Diouana the Black domestic required a further social devaluing of the maid because of the striking resemblance to Madame's status as a woman and Diouana's subordination as maid. In reality, both Madame and Diouana are members of the woman-class whose gender implies a lower social status next to men. But Madame is above Diouana in the intra-feminine strata, and unlike the domestic in Dill (1994), who *does* receive a low income, Madame in Sembene's film does not pay Diouana at all. This absence of any income places her once more into the distant margin of oppression. I assert, however, that this paradoxically brings her (Diouana) closer to the status of "housewife" because as I understand Dill's argument, it is Madame's assigned 'natural' role as housewife to keep house and there is no compensation attached to this housework role.

By withholding Diouana's earned income, Madame is clearly transgressing Diouana's rights using race, class, and national identification as tools of oppression. Diouana has no avenue for justice at her disposal. For one thing, she is prevented from leaving the apartment. She is also unable to read and has no money to pay her way back

to Senegal. An intersectionality of oppressions has predisposed Diouana for subjugation by Madame, beginning with the colonization of her country, Senegal. There she already experienced what Collins (1998) terms a "nexus of containment," a result of racial segregation and surveillance of African Americans (pp. 22). Diouana's freedoms of movement and association were already compromised under Colonial rule, where job availability was based on race, class, and national identity. In addition, like Black immigrant women in America who work as maids, Diouana had no formal citizenship upon reaching France. Collins describes intersectionality as a converging of "systems of race, economic class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, and age from mutually constructing features of social organization" (p. 278). In spite of these oppressions, I believe Diouana was not paralyzed by the aggressions of her white mistress. I would even argue that within the framework of Collins' (2004) outsider within standpoint theory, Diouana used her Afrocentric cultural knowledge against Madame's Eurocentric knowledge. Diouana showed an awareness of the knowledge that was uniquely hers and could only have come from her life experience in

the social locations of her existence in both France and Senegal, and all the statuses she either acquired or was forced to accept.

Adding to Collins, Harding (2004), a well-known standpoint theorist, integrates Marxist theory of the proletariat in capitalist society to the position of women in patriarchal society. This is a framework which captures the role of Madame as over Diouana, but in which Diouana's oppressed voice is large and visible. Hartsock (2004) adds to this by addressing the production of work and compensation allocation as well as the oppression of women in patriarchal society. Madame, from Sembene's movie, is a member of this oppressive proletariat. Looking at the narrow casting of the generic "women" and reverting back to my argument, that all women need a color appurtenance, when feminist theorists withdraw color, there is a danger in thinking that Hartsock (2004) is theorizing for Madame and not Diouana. hooks (1996) warns of the danger of clumping all women's lives into one lived experience and argues that women are not evenly disadvantaged since some women have more access to privilege than others. The point hooks is making is that a democratization of

marginalization does not exist. hooks, in qualifying Hartsock's universal treatment of women, points out that a shared gender is not grounds for equal subjugation in gender-based oppression. For example, hooks affirms that many white middle class women often operate as oppressors because of their privileged status in society and they often use and benefit from this dominant behavior.

The Virginia Woolf Synergy

Sembene's Madame, in her petit bourgeois class, is truly removed from the social class of Woolf (2002), who claimed that the woman's right to her own space within the home was wanting. Madame is unable to achieve Woolf's status. She has not Woolf's ideas of liberation of women. Using Woolf's lens, Madame is not yet emancipated. She has no room and no money of her own. Sembene made Madame's frustrations raw for the viewer but does not explicitly reveal their source. It is appropriate to contrast Woolf's belief against Madame's as she represents an unfulfilled woman; a woman who is oppressed and undeveloped under the patriarchy of her state, France, and her husband.

In *Black Girl*, Sembene built up well-crafted tensions to frame the close proximity of and the fluid space of power between the mistress and her “slave.” Again, since Madame has “no room of her own” to help solidify the necessary boundaries between class, race, culture, and nationality, she rages when she senses a seeming intrusion by Diouana. The subversive mood Sembene creates in the film is visible when one of the male guests transgresses by putting his white lips to the Black face of “La Bonne,” kissing both cheeks. These are the same lips that would have been kissing Madame’s own white middle class face just moments prior, at the arrival of each guest, as per French traditions. Even more, those same lips that still hold the heat of the Black slave’s face will grace the face of Madame at the closing of the night. The mistress’s dominant behavior, when she followed La Bonne to the kitchen to tell her that the white male guest’s kisses were only meant to annoy Diouana, and then barked an order to Diouana to prepare coffee, exemplifies ways Madame needed to reestablish the stratifications of her class and racial power over her slave. This is similar to Woolf’s (2002) privileged circumstances, but here,

there is no “upstairs and downstairs” stratified space.

Sembene’s film and his portrayal of Madame are good examples of the oppressions recognized in Betty Friedan’s (1963) *Feminine Mystique*, a groundbreaking feminist work that theorized the dull, empty, oppressive space of many privileged, white, middle class American housewives in the 1960s. Sembene presents to the viewer a woman so frustrated and numb from her own mental prison that she never was strong enough to name her aggressor. Madame is suspended between madness and evil planning her next attack against Diouana. Madame’s freedom is tethered to her husband and the state even as she tries to control Diouana’s freedom. The system of oppression is deeply encroaching; the French state sends their patriarchy to control the “animals” as the Senegalese are referred to, and Madame is obliged to follow. The husband transgresses, the state transgresses, but Madame is too lazy and too scared to act. When La Bonne transgresses and withholds her labor, Madame cannot make her work. Madame falls into the default position of the housekeeper if not the slave to her own husband in her own home. Her case closely mirrors that of the

white middle class woman typified in Friedman's *Feminine Mystique*.

The Shape of Pink Oppression: Women and Work

The many women-on-women transgressions in the domestic realm point to one fact: women never really embraced the intellectual positioning advanced by the Marxist mode of production. Women bristled against the feminization of free labor in the private space when the obligation of public labor production also imposed on their time or when the husband is never accountable for household cares. The binary view of housework and women is articulated by Engels (1884) Marxist' theory that the "division of labor is a capitalist construct for the partition of labor and power in the patriarchal home" (pp. 379). Engels (1884) categorized the "enslavement of wives and children as the first type of private property" (pp. 379). That private order in the home places the husband in the "bourgeoisie" role, thereby reducing the wife to the proletariat. With a desire to liberate women from the marital enslavement, Engels (1884) believed the "family form" had to be disrupted to subvert the privatization and denigration of household labor. To achieve his vision,

Engels encouraged women to choose the "public world of productive work over private domestic labor" (p. 379). That is not a bad idea except for the fact that "domestic labor and childcare never became [the] public and collective responsibilities Engels envisioned" (p.379).

It would seem that modern women have aligned their beliefs with Engels. Many consider the work of the woman in the home as menial and demeaning since it is not paid work and no recognition comes with the job; it is a thankless profession. Even when the woman, as is the case with Madame in *Black Girl* (1996), is at home and provided for by the husband, she rejects her perceived role as caretaker of her own children or the cleaner of her own house. Instead, she hires the hands of a Black domestic, Diouana. Sembene's deft cinematic execution transformed the small private space of that apartment in Antibes into a battleground for Madame, who insists on "ownership" of "La Bonne," Diouana. What follows is a vendetta, nothing short of raw hate of the domestic who is now an enslaved girl. Hiring out her duties as homemaker could not fill the void Madame feels. She is still contained between the walls of that apartment, with the maid, under

the “bourgeoisie” privileges of her husband. The rage against her husband’s patriarchal oppression was only surpassed by her great hate for Diouana. Ultimately, Sembene’s Diouana, who takes her own life at the film’s tragic conclusion, chose death as the only available escape from Madame’s intra-feminine tyranny.

The Conceivability of a 21st Century Diouana

Diouana’s death captures the most salient problem in Sembene’s film and in the politics of women’s fight for equality. There are three real transgressors who are responsible for Madame’s atrophied existence: she, patriarchy, and the state. Yet Madame did not confront the state or her husband. The state represents patriarchy and vice versa. By confronting her husband, she confronts the state. It is the state which decides on the laws that monetize her husband’s job and deny the same financial rewards for domestic responsibilities. It is the state that invades Diouana’s Senegal and makes her a second class citizen on her own land. It is the state that stratifies labor in Senegal and creates jobs for white French citizens and relegates the natives of Senegal to servitude. It is the state

that imposes a transnational agenda on Senegal. And most important here, Madame is incapable of self-examination; an intellectual capital very well developed in Diouana, the “animal,” who can only know by using “instinct.” Sembene, in offering death as liberty to Diouana, makes a bold statement about the transcendent value of freedom.

Diouana’s strong self-identity was an affront to Madame. Through verbal subjugation and threat against her physical safety, Madame tried to break Diouana to stem the flow of that seeping pride of the Black girl. The mistress was relentless in her mission to deconstruct and co-opt Diouana’s self-awareness. The mistress is a frustrated woman who is as much if not more trapped as the Black girl she seeks to confine to a prison made of walls of social status and patriarchal transgressions. Sembene sharply communicates the exasperations of Madame as she suffers what she interprets as one act after another of quiet rebellion from Diouana; but Diouana is simply a young woman determined to defend her honor. Madame’s aggravation is based on her perception that Diouana transgresses her authority by insisting to wear nice culturally distinguishable

clothes and also dress shoes that seem to elevate her to the same status as the mistress. Diouana refused to wear an ugly apron over her nice clothes, which becomes an important and symbolic point of contention. Diouana is a woman who cannot be owned; a woman who is every bit her own free agent even within the confinement of the kitchen walls, bathroom walls, living room walls, and bedroom walls. Diouana has agency that Madame can only dream of; her agency is the very reason why she can choose death over slavery and destitution over money whereas Madame can only wait for marching orders from her husband. Madame finds her voice only by denying voice to La Bonne.

I am Diouana: Pink Oppression and Transnationalism

Sembene's film was released in 1966, but I have lived Diouana's experience in varying degrees over four decades of living in America. I recognize Diouana in my mother. Her ghost never leaves me and I can still hear my mother defending her dignity, speaking in her native dialect to the women who oppressed her. She fought her best against all the injustices I was too young, too "immigrant," to fight against and to join her in wrestling her dignity

from the lashing tongues of ungrateful women spiting strange foreign words about this window, that table, or the new speck of errant dust on that kitchen counter.

To that petit bourgeois woman in the finer side of Brooklyn who was too scared to stop her pig husband at the door and instead let him drag his muddy shoes on the clean floor; the clean floor my mother scrubbed again and again under the watchful eyes of the Mrs. I say, "Go to hell and clean your own damned mess and get the hell away from my mother!" And to that other woman who, just like a plantation overseer, stood guard over my mother, breathing down her neck, then screaming in her face in that foreign tongue because my mother mixed the dairy side of her kosher kitchen with the meat side, I say, "To hell with you and your dairy kitchen, your meat kitchen, and all these arbitrary and invisible lines. And tell your God that my mother's hired hands are the same hands that touch and prepare the reviled pig for our own High Holiday celebrations." Hypocrites! And all of the women who clutched between your crimson gnarling fingers that extra five dollar bill, another reduction on a wage that is already so low. I say, "Give her back her blood and sweat." These elite

professional women cry for the Equal Rights Amendment to pass but reduce my mother's wages to less than half of the published minimum wage in the State of New York. I remember how these women pitted one friend against another, one sister against another, in that fragile community of non-European transnationals for the top choice to clean their filth.

It's difficult for women who hire out the domestic care of their home to see the hired hands of women oppressed in situ. Using what I call a capitalist consciousness, the woman-boss seeks to find the lowest bidder for the job. This is just like a business outsourcing undesirable jobs. As Romero (2002) writes, while the pay scale is flexible and is subject to the wishes of the employers, unfavorable work conditions and the realities of the social construct around domesticity are still fixed. The domestic space remains for the most part a "racial and class-based systems of inequality," favoring the white female elite class (Romeo, 2002, p.199). Romero submits that as long as this intra-feminine system of oppression persists, the feminist agenda will remain stymied. Romero believes that maids should strive for improved wages and work conditions. These goals, writes Romero, are attainable

through unionization efforts of household workers, childcare workers, and homecare workers. Romero believes organizing domestic workers will eradicate the practice that rewards "employers hiring poor and working class women of color, particularly undocumented immigrant women" (p. 201.) I agree with Romero that as long as immigrant women of color still need these jobs while they develop their skill for other type of work, it is necessary to organize around legalized labor practices. I do not agree with utopian feminism's idea to defeminize domestic work. For example, employing college men who self-report as members of the middle-class, and who, by their very race and class, are coming to the job with a different consciousness, is just a temporary solution, since these college males cannot deliver the same commitment in time that can amount to decades or more of cleaning houses (Romero, 2002).

The Worth of the Human Maid: Situating Diouana

I am aghast that like Diouana, "African American and Chicana domestic servants feel despised by the people they work for because of their status as low-wage workers" (Romero, 2002, p. 204). This kind of revelation

takes me back to the scenes in the film *Black Girl* where Madame refused to acknowledge that Diouana's melancholy for home and her enslavement could lead to depression; instead Madame attributed Diouana's rapid weight loss to her proclivity to laziness. According to Romero, African Americans, West Indian immigrants, and Latina domestics report that they were subjected to shared bedrooms and for the most part relegated to the isolation of the kitchen to eat alone, just like Diouana. I have established that housework is women's work and that some women do get to distance themselves from it by hiring other women who are usually of the poor and working class. In the America of the last few decades domestics are mainly Black and brown immigrants from poor developing countries. Women like Diouana are becoming more and more ubiquitous both in real terms and in the symbolic sense. Diouana is symbolic of instances in my life as an immigrant Black woman living in America. I have been offered the maid job or called the maid by some White women of the elite class. A few instances of my status as the ubiquitous maid in the United States follow.

To understand why race is so central to my paper, examine the following

incident which I label, "Sunday morning Pink Elevator Pitch." In America, there is a persistent saying that Sunday morning is the most segregated hour in the country. So it is only fitting that one of the most racist and class-based experiences I've had was on a Sunday morning as I was on my way to attend Sunday mass at a very segregated white church with a sprinkle of Black people. It was in the year 2000; a new millennium was afoot putting America at the dawn of the twenty-first century. At the time, I was living in an upscale apartment. I was elegantly attired, as were my three children, when the elevator made a stop on the way to the lobby. A well-coiffed and equally elegantly attired white woman I surmised to be some seventy something years old entered the big silver box. It took her very little time to peg me. In her eyes, I was out of place. She knew a transgressor when she saw one. She asked matter-of-factly as she was blind to our possible equality in social status, "Do you clean apartments in the building because my friend and I, we are looking for a cleaning girl?" To which I crisply responded, "No, but let me know if you do find such a girl, because I am looking for one too." This was one of the many moments where, like Diouana, I would ruffle "pink"

feathers because I was seen as transgressing, crossing boundaries and blurring lines. There was no need for patriarchy or hegemony to find me on that Sunday morning; there are women like her, the “pink” proletariat Madame fiercely guarding their class privilege. And these are the same pink proletariat who called my mother “their cleaning girl” when she was on her knees scrubbing their filthy floors. Today they see their cleaning girl in me, the daughter who transcended, even as I am standing tall and shoulder to shoulder with them.

I can also say that I look at my experiences as oppression based on my class, race, and nationality by interpreting pink aggression to arrive at a truth that serves my own strategies for empowerment. Feminist standpoint theory is one lens by which Black women can examine their lives as a minority amongst minorities (Collins, 2004). hooks (2004) and Lorde (1996) understand my location. Like Diouana in Sembene’s movie and the Diouanas that exist everywhere, we are not expected to have the same liberties. Sometimes, we must just take them. In *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*, hooks (2000) revisited the intersectionality of race and class. She reaffirmed that feminists were aware of

these fragmentations by class and race differences. hooks went back to Betty Friedan’s *The Feminist Mystique* to contextualize the parallel worlds and thus the parallel lines of race and class which coexist but never touch. I believe that this awareness is what drives the anger of these distressed white women in the same way that the woman on the elevator insisted on taking me back to her dirty toilet filth and nasty floors. She tried to subvert me just as Sembene’s Madame subverted Diouana. From a personal standpoint, the persistence of race is still the most deterministic factor in the intersectionalities of oppressions. I believe a case study of Diouana paralleling my own life and my mother’s remains the most salient challenge and proves the pernicious use of race as an identifier to open or close access to opportunities and personal freedom.

My mother, the factory worker from Monday to Friday and the day-worker on weekends, did not replicate that status in her girls. Because we came to America after the hard earned gains of the Civil Rights struggle, I was able to get a high school education. This required busing, a dislocation that inflicted trauma on often poor, often Black or brown, and sometimes immigrant children. We were asked to

straddle two worlds in one America; one world was privileged, the other world, *your* world, was not. My mother had as many if not more ambitions and high hopes for all her children. Over time it became clear that a middle-class life in America was not a given outcome through equal labor just because one in the margin aspires to it. My realization mirrors La Bonne's own expectation of a life in Antibes. Diouana believed that being in France would give her the same capital to self-actualization that the French had in Senegal. Unfortunately, she discovered that power most often flows in only one direction.

Unlike La Bonne I did transcend from one social class to the next, or so I thought. But funny things happened along the way to confirm that some women were determined to call me on my transgression time and time again. My experiences are similar to Diouana's struggles, because she and I share the same intersectionalities and process challenges from the same personal standpoint. Like Diouana, I have met people who, based on my race, felt compelled to put me in my place. These people, like Madame would have, see my presence in certain locales or my possession of certain material comforts as transgressing.

Sembene uses many symbols or totems throughout his film to represent the oppressions Diouana endures. His totems for transgression include the maid's elegant shoes, the lack of an apron, a nice Senegalese dress, and Diouana's silent rejection of her subjugation. I translate these totems as my education, my middle-class life, my children's school, the size of my house, the use of my dependent voice, and the right to name my own space. My bifurcated race and class through the Black woman's lens is not meant to deny that poor white women do not work as domestics in white middle class homes; they sometimes do. What I am claiming here is my observation that when white people, through hard work, transcend their social class; no one questions their entrance to the next level and no one ever doubts their membership. In contrast, for brown and Black people, these inquiries are always looming in the most sacred spaces, our home and our children's schools and concert halls, for example.

Fighting Women to Free Women

The genesis of this paper was to expose women-to-women oppressions. I termed these "Pink Oppressions" because it is my belief that my area of study, Women and Gender, though

long venerated for promulgating the struggle of women to overcome male domination, has not imposed the same scrutiny on intra-feminine oppression based on race and class.

Framing is everything in my field, so I use the movie *Black Girl* by Sembene to superimpose my own life experiences onto Diouana, the main character. Throughout the paper, I use incidents from her life as a maid or “La Bonne,” the good one, to demonstrate the tenacity of race-based oppressions and the malleability of class affiliation. I arrive at the conclusion that the experiences of women like me and Diouana are on a continuum and defy time and interpenetrate locations. Diouana’s life is my mother’s life as it is my own life. The real pages from my mother’s life and my own life experiences are fictionalized in Sembene’s film. My claim of intra-oppression between women is indubitable based on what I know to be true. Here, I testify: women are not always sisters and being woman is trumped by race and class affiliation. I believe elite white women-gatekeepers in America are the most threatening to the advancement of women of color because of their complicity with the state apparatus.

Borrowing from Lorde (1996), women not acknowledging “difference makes it impossible to see the different problems and pitfalls facing us as women” (p. 118). White women and Black women are not equally disfavored by patriarchy, in fact, white women benefit from it. They get enough from the system to make them willing accomplices. I posit that a white, educated woman most likely benefits from the privileged social location of the normative white males in her affiliations with fathers, brothers, sons, and husbands. Someone has to be first in a system based on surplus, a system that values some and oppresses others (Lorde, 1996). My own perception is that the binary white male and white female system is still intact, and in its current makeup, white women are still a close second to white men. Outside of a call to their compassion and the political activism of women in the margin, there is nothing else that can bring about change. The institutional machine must be deconstructed to allow more differences in order to create new, fully inclusive norms overtime. It is only with the development and establishment of that new norm that we can begin to mitigate the negative impact of pink oppression; only then can we stop the feminine

aggression of a Sunday morning elevator pitch. Only with the recognition of the rights of all to work toward self-improvement and access to the same resources can we end tragedies like Diouana's.

A Declaration of Sentiment

I close with an express call to women in the margin to use that marginal knowledge to penetrate the center and to act with intentions of self-actualization; to refuse to be subjugated to the brink of self-annihilation like Diouana. I submit that I willfully transgress the boundaries of class and race. I reject the sisterhood of

oppression and vow to fight it wherever I face it. American women of color, including Blacks, Latinas, Chicanas, and Caribbean, need to join the consciousness-raising about the plight of domestics in America. I surmise that maids need a political presence. I strongly encourage third wave Black and Latina feminists to promote labor laws to protect domestics in vulnerable locations in the margins of intersectionalities of oppressions in domesticity. Join my fight. Oppose pink oppressions of maids, servants, and women trapped in forced domestic-slavery.

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