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Toward Flight

Tiffani Marie
San Jose State University

ABSTRACT

This reflection attempts to make sense of the ecological wisdoms embedded within Morrison's (1977) *Song of Solomon* and their implications toward an embodied Apocalyptic Education. Particularly, the depictions of characters within the novel uncover an angst, uniquely illustrative of our experiences as hated people, while also placing emotional pressure on readers to think outside of civilization, toward healing, new ways of existing, even toward flight. Central to these pathways lie the significance of grief: grief as a function of consciousness raising, as a cultural tool toward re-memory, and grief as a communal endeavor toward flight.

Keywords: critical education, flying, Black health, Black education, healing, unschooling, abolition

Sometimes you don't survive whole; you just survive in part. But the grandeur of life is that attempt; it's not about that solution. It is about being as fearless as one can and behaving as beautifully as one can under completely impossible circumstances. It's that that makes it elegant; good is just more interesting, more complex, more demanding. Evil is silly; it may be horrible, but at the same time, it's not a compelling idea. It's predictable—it needs a tuxedo; it needs the headline; it needs blood; it needs fingernails; it needs all that costume, in order to get anybody's attention. But the opposite, which is survival, blossoming, endurance, those things are just more compelling intellectually, if not spiritually; they certainly are spiritually. This is [a] more fascinating job. We are already born. We are going to die. So you have to do something interesting that you respect in between. (T. Morrison, personal communication, May 4, 2001)

I want to talk about a subject that frightens most. One demarcated from the mundane, made strange, so as to divorce its tenets from every fundamental aspect of our lives;

one that weakens the strong and strengthens the weak. A subject most apropos amidst a decaying society: Death.

Regardless of gender, race, nationality, or any other prescribed or even chosen existence, death is the only identity we *all* must embody. Our avoidance to learn its architecture emboldens its peculiarity. And what a foregone conclusion to resist. I believe that death is the most avoided topic in the English language because it illuminates beyond the scintillating rays of modernity and exposes us to the emptiness of our pursuits of power; yet for the brave, it invites us to reconciliation through interconnectedness. Residing with death is, and I do not say this lightly, our only hope to transcend the confines of our current society.

I was fortunate to develop a deep and meaningful literary relationship with death through the works of Toni Morrison. *The Bluest Eye* profoundly informed my curriculum as a sophisticated eulogy on black girlhood; the text helped me cultivate vulnerable space within my classroom to challenge misogynoir. Morrison's grief work within *The Source of Self-Regard* influenced my colleague Kenjus Watson's and my response to a global pandemic. While the country grieved the loss of family, autonomy, and ways of life as we knew them, the slowness of the times encouraged deep reflection on our practice as educators. With Morrison's ancestral guidance, in 2020 we co-authored a piece called *Apocalyptic Education* that ceremoniously pronounced schools dead. In the piece, structured as a funeral of sorts, we wrote:

...individually and collectively, as Black educators attempting to survive the ravages of schooling. Along with a host of Black people, we too believed our schooling was a means toward liberation—a saving grace and way to honor the resilience of our people and their resistance to national investment in their undoing. We conflated our humanization with matriculation in schools. We now recognize the inextricable link between our social death and the function of schools. We have witnessed and experienced the social reproduction of Black death that schools rely upon for national order. As survivors, we lay to rest the schooling project, engaging Christina Sharpe's (2016) mournful meditation on the Wake to exhume how even critical education work can reinforce the very projects it seeks to fight against.

*We hold ceremonial space for prospective and veteran educators across the K-20 continuum to re-conceptualize their curricular posture and join us in a final farewell to schools. From Shujaa (1993), we distinguish schooling from education and propose the Root Work of *Apocalyptic Education*, a meditation, a posture, an epistemological stance rooted in African ancestral ways of knowing (Ani, 1994; Fu-Kiau, 2014) to help us make sense of our loss and usher us into new ways of existing and being beyond the afterlife of schooling. (Marie & Watson, 2020, p. 15)*

And as we sheltered-in-place from a deadly virus, I read *Song of Solomon* which, for me, functioned as a recessional, the space between the *acceptance* of the death [of schools] and the *what next*. Beginning with a literal failed attempt to fly, alongside

ongoing remembrances of elevation as a culturally mediated response to trauma, the novel centers the trope of flight as a critical response to the unique provocations and arrest of Black life. And while the depth of her work refuses summation, below I attempt to make sense of the ecological wisdoms embedded within Morrison's *Song of Solomon* and their implications toward an embodied Apocalyptic Education. Morrison depicts characters who uncover an angst illustrative of our unique experiences as hated people. These portrayals encapsulate the profound trauma and grief we endure, as Morrison seeks to enlighten us to the interconnectedness of trauma, grief, and the transformative power of healing. She prompts us to reimagine the vastness of what exists between birth, death, and thereafter. In so doing, Morrison places emotional pressure on readers to transcend conventional societal constructs and embark on a transformative journey of healing and new modes of existence, one that compels us toward the possibility of flight.

Central to our healing from named trauma is the significance of grief: grief as a function of consciousness raising, as a cultural tool toward re-memory, and as a communal endeavor toward flight. Grief is memory work. It is the process by which we intentionally hold the fullness of what was. The holding, or the grief, is always heavy because it embodies history, wisdom, and navigation. It is heavy because it reminds us of our temporality. And it is heavy only as long as we resist it. Grief work allows us to remember the freedom in death, its lessons in tow. When we embrace death, and engage in sacred memory work, in grief, we can then lay down what was, and with newfound lightness, take flight toward what now.

Song of Solomon and Apocalyptic Education can interdependently aid educators and other critical practitioners beyond the ravages of schooling toward the grief work necessary to access elevation. In this offering, I utilize a type of queering of discourse analysis (Bourdieu, 1991; Collins, 1990; Dumas, 2021; Morrison, 2019). This methodology serves as a means to recollect and comprehend the memories, imaginings, and insights that emerged from my engagement with Morrison's characters throughout *Song of Solomon*. The approach also reflects my motivations to escape the confines of normative scholarly conventions and take a creative flight in my writing that ventures beyond traditional educational boundaries. Specifically, Morrison's depictions of the characters Circe, Pilate, and Milkman help me understand the inextricable link between our grief work (the intimate relationship with death) and transcendence, what I believe to be an embodied Apocalyptic Education. As I read Morrison's characters navigate the depths of their trauma, I am offered a transformative lens through which I can distill the intricate process of healing, and the power of collective transcendence. In the pages that follow, I attempt to impart these revelations to you.

CIRCE, THE DEATH DOULA (CONSCIOUSNESS)

For centuries, educational theory has attempted to illuminate the innumerable cases of social death (Gordon, 2022; Patterson, 1982) enacted upon [Black] youth within schools by documenting the ongoing bodily harassment (Anyon, 1997; Wun, 2016), surveillance (Jones, 2010; Sojoyner, 2016; Wun, 2016) and assault on black children's psyches (Breggin & Breggin, 1998; Dumas, 2014; Fanon, 2008; Woodson,

1933). Cumulatively, these texts conclude that schooling fails to disrupt—and instead, exacerbates—the culture of social death, tethered like an umbilical cord to every black child at birth. This body of work uncovers the disturbing relationship between schooling and the systemic oppression inflicted on black youth; it further underlines the urgent need for holistic educational approaches to transmute embodied traumas into transformative healing.

Black youth have, ad nauseam, been directed to dress differently, acquire different language patterns, endure longer school days, enroll in various literacy programs, compete for limited positions in privatized institutions, pursue closer proximity to white people, work harder and be nicer in the face of fascist schooling agendas—essentially be less and less of themselves, all for the chance to escape the inevitability of their undoing. If we are serious about protecting black youth from these assaults, it is time to lay to rest the possibility that increased schooling can lead to their wellness. It seems that what it means to center [black] youth—their needs, voices, protection of their bodies—is an investment in the destabilization of schools as we know them (Clarke, 2022; Richards, 2020). This disinvestment requires a fundamental shift in our consciousness, an interrogation of our collective understandings of the function of schools, and of our ongoing commitments to the health and well-being of black children. Morrison’s *Circe* helps us to observe the futility of attempting to access freedom through structures designed for our demise.

Morrison depicts *Circe* as a black woman with good intentions. Within the novel, *Circe* learns that siblings Pilate and Macon Jr.’s father has been killed as a consequence of black capitalism. His land ownership compromised the colonial structure of his town and he was murdered in front of his children, shot off the fence while attempting to protect property he believed to be his own: “something ran wild through [Macon Dead, Jr.] when he watched the body twitching in the dirt. His father sat for five nights on a split-rail fence cradling a shotgun and in the end died protecting his property” (p. 51). Whiteness orphans the two children, as their mother died in childbirth. *Circe*, a family friend, finds the children and hides them within the house where she works and lives. In time, readers learn that *Circe* works for and lives with the very people who killed the children’s father, Macon Dead, Sr.

For some time, *Circe*’s efforts were valorized. She responded to the immediate trauma experienced by these young people, attempting to hide them to prevent their own deaths. *Circe*’s actions resonated with me because I embodied similar pedagogical strategies as a classroom teacher. I used the structure from which I worked (and my mother would also suggest, lived) to protect children from traumas that compromised their daily existence. Young people would leave a class and come to my classroom to discuss the racisms enacted on them by white educators, or violence enacted on them by deans who looked just like them. I would listen to their stories and send them back into those spaces. What’s more, I believed that I was protecting them by providing space to hide from external people and projects invested in their undoing. As mentioned in *Apocalyptic Education*, I believed I was protecting them from traumas that existed outside of schools, leaving “unchecked the daily terror that is schooling” (p. 30). I was hiding them from the violence of an anti-black society within the very house of the architects of anti-blackness.

Within the novel, Circe eventually comes to terms with the violence of her pedagogies. As well-intentioned as they were, she had to reconcile that healing and wholeness cannot be fully curated, let alone sustained in the manifestations of our oppressors. Years later, Circe sits outside of her oppressor's debilitating house and decides to let it crumble to the ground; she decides to let it die:

They loved this place. They loved it. Brought pink veined marble from across the sea for it and hired men in Italy to do the chandelier that I had to climb a ladder and clean with white muslin once every two months. They loved it. Stole for it, lied for it, killed for it. But I'm the one left. Me and the dogs. And I will never clean it again. Never. Nothing. Not a speck of dust, not a grain of dirt, will I move. Everything in this world they lived for will crumble and rot. (Morrison, 2019, p. 247)

Much like our advances in the Academy, in time, when the white violators that had killed Macon Dead, Jr. died off, they relied upon Circe to continue the project of her undoing, seeing it as redemptive and potentially transformative because she was now responsible for its maintenance. In my imagination, Circe looked into the eyes of the muses within the French inspired paintings and saw the wincing eyes of her ancestors' captors, that she even saw the maze of the Scandinavian patterns within the rugs as nothing more than a massive attempt to mute the haunting voices emerging from the once living trees, or as we know them, wooded floors. I wonder what it takes for classroom teachers to see the structure of the classroom, of schools really, as the outcomes of rape and murder of living beings, of trees. There has been no ceremony to grieve the loss of life, the raping of trees, the use of their corpses as slave ships, as plantations, as the very architecture of schools. And as Circe came to remember that we cannot sustain life within sites of death, so must we. She understood her investment in the space as its own form of captivity and instead pursued a freedom that could only come through death. Circe committed to seeing the space for what it was, stopped her maintenance, and allowed the decay to overgrow.

Within Apocalyptic Education, we liken Circe's critical shift in consciousness to the moss that overgrows death. We argue:

When looking at different structures covered in moss, it does not always register that they are in fact alive. However, mosses, small flowerless plants found throughout the world, are relevant to our Apocalyptic Education efforts in that they retain and dispense water (the lifeblood of the planet). As indicators of pollution, they refuse to build in toxic environments, and they can stop their metabolism almost completely during the hot periods of the year when water is not available. They provide us with lessons on how to move more deliberately through the past and present disasters. Armed with the awareness that, like our ancestors who've transitioned, (social) or actual death is never more than a period of dormancy. (Marie & Watson, 2020, p. 36)

Yet, for those of us privy to the complexity of death, there may be some common resistance to the implications of this charge. That is to say, the nature of our avoidance

of death is often heightened by an ignorance of our role(s) within it. The awareness of our identities as pallbearers, embalmers, eulogists, psalmists, clergy, death doulas even, fundamentally inform our willingness to engage with death. Consequentially, any serious commitment to school abolition is likely also a commitment to the interrogation of one's purpose amidst the death of schools. Therefore, we invite educators to question what it means to "align our methods and aims as a sort of moss that grows on top of the many statues of dead colonizers and slavers" (p. 38), that grows on top of schools. Ultimately, the refusal to continue to build within the toxicity of schooling and to redirect our efforts, our lifeblood, so to speak, leverages a critical imagination toward the depth of what we offer young people.

PILATE, THE GRIEVING APOTHECARY (CULTURE)

Emerging health literature has begun to re-conceptualize schooling and even the scope and reach of educational projects. These models range from trauma-informed approaches (Khanmalek, 2013; Valenzuela, 2021) to education that equips teachers with the tools to address what has adversely happened to youth (Hannegan-Martinez, 2019), toward offerings of school abolition that (re)imagine educational spaces and learning (Love, 2019). Similarly, in response to specific assaults on black children's personhood, research argues (Ginwright, 2015; Love, 2016; Marie & Watson, 2020) that healing interventions for black youth must contain two fundamental elements: (a) acknowledgment of the harm and loss of life caused by schooling, and (b) cultural medicines that both heal and protect black youth. The former is prevalent amongst a plethora of educational literature (e.g., Camangian, 2021; King, 2005; Meyerhoff, 2019). The latter—grotesquely emaciated. At best, educational literature has attempted to remedy school violence with prescriptions for continued schooling (Stovall, 2020). The research underscores the symbiotic relationship between trauma, grief, and healing in the context of schools, emphasizing the need to acknowledge the pervasive harm done to black youth and to then proactively use cultural tools as a protective shield. Left widely unsupported within educational theory, however, is evidence of the cultural tools that [black] youth can acquire to survive the trauma of schooling amidst an adjacent society invested in their undoing; what is missing is an Apocalyptic Education. Morrison's character, Pilate, represents an instructive analogy on the cultural aspects of Apocalyptic Education. She embodies and enacts the cultural tools necessary for black children to remain whole, self-determined beings.

Morrison depicts Pilate as a woman who has survived many world endings—the most traumatic being the assassination of her father. Pilate's grief process involves trek—she abandons the bondage of Circe's oppressive workplace and even the familiarity of her brother, Macon Dead, Jr., to entertain a nomadic lifestyle, traversing the lands, singing the songs of her ancestors. Her sensibilities, in effect, are informed by her time within maroon communities: "She learned that there was a colony of Negro farmers on an island off the coast of Virginia. They grew vegetables, had cattle, made whiskey, and sold a little tobacco. They did not mix much with other Negroes, but were respected by them and self-sustaining. And you could get to them only by

boat” (Morrison, 1977, p. 146). Her healing practices are informed by her time with these Root Workers. And the development of her consciousness follows:

When she realized what her situation in the world was and would always be she threw away every assumption she had learned and began at zero. First off, she cut her hair. That was one thing she didn't want to have to think about anymore. Then she tackled the problem of trying to rescue how she wanted to live and what was valuable to her. When am I happy and when am I sad and what is the difference? What do I need to know to stay alive? What is true in the world? (Morrison, 1977, p. 149)

Pilate's pilgrimages helped her acquire the cultural tools to both grieve her father's death and heal toward the role of apothecary that she was destined to become. This process would call her to return to the last place she saw her brother. There she would gather her “inheritance,” a heavy bag filled with what many believed to be gold.

Some years later, Pilate emerges in her brother's town wearing a memory of her father dangling from her ear, his handwritten expression of her name: “He wrote one word in his life; copied it out of the Bible. That's what she got folded up in that earring” (Morrison, 1977, p. 53). She abides with very little trace of her existence: “Pilate had no telephone and no number on her house” (p. 131). Regardless, she becomes well-known in the town, the place that was “neither ghetto nor plantation” (p. 56), particularly as the antithesis of her property-toting, miserable brother, Macon Dead, Jr. At this point, the only shared value amongst the siblings was their last name, and it is literally Dead. The polar responses to their father's death forged a proverbial diverting road, each pathway a home, a silo from the weight of anti-black sentiment.

Perhaps Pilate understood her father's demise in the way one would likely understand any other par for the course; it was simply the only feasible conclusion for a black man who *owned*. Consequently, she found refuge in doctrine foreign to her father's capitalist ways of being. Pilate was a “natural healer” and “acquired a deep concern for and about human relationships” (p. 149). Macon Dead, Jr., alternatively, found shelter within his father's pursuits of the American Dream. He understood his father's death, merely, as an untimely consequence of ignorance and exclusion—as if longer work hours and access to greater capital could protect him from disparagement; he believed that “Money is freedom...the only real freedom there is” (p. 163).

Succeeding her father's death, Pilate sharpened her grounding skills. When she had no bottom, no frame—nothing to bind her—she remembered a love so wide, it could hold the vastness of her grief. A love leveraged by adage, song, proverb, Fufu, dance. One that preceded and survived the slave trade. A love that is reciprocated through death. Pilate survived her apocalypse because of the love imparted to her from the medicines of her people, from her cultural knapsack. Within Apocalyptic Education, we analogize a surfaced mid-1800s unbleached cotton seed sack with the cultural tools necessary to survive apocalypse. Sewn inside the sack were the words:

My great grandmother Rose mother of Ashley gave her this sack when she was sold at age 9 in South Carolina it held a tattered dress 3 handfulls of pecans a braid of Roses hair Told her It be filled with my Love always she never saw her again Ashley is my grandmother Ruth Middleton, 1921. (Marie & Watson, 2020, p. 35)

The knapsack, for us, illuminates “the praxis of Apocalyptic Education” (p. 35), a loving response to the subtractive nature of black life. Pilate and Ruth Middleton passed on their cultural knapsacks so that their communities could envision beyond death, beyond the apocalypse, with the tools to access their remembered futures. Our cultural knapsacks encourage us to “re-member the items passed to us from our ancestors (the African-insisted life) within the same DNA that was colonized through unspeakable violence... [it] is an atemporal epigenetic declaration that the love from and of our people will, in the words of Stevie Wonder (1977), transcend the end(s) of the world(s) and always be with us” (p. 35).

Present to the siblings' grief was Milkman, Pilate's nephew, and Macon Dead, Jr.'s only son. He observed and he learned. Once, he attempted to steal the literal knapsack that Pilate kept tied to her ceiling in a moss green covering. Milkman was one who believed the sack to be filled with gold. He and his friend, Guitar, were arrested for their attempted theft and Pilate lovingly rescued them. Alongside Pilate and Milkman, readers learn that the sack was not filled with gold, but instead, her father's bones; part of Pilate's grief was to carry the weight of her father's bones (her past), long enough to learn and heal from them. Through Pilate's grief, we learn the significance and necessity of holding the heaviness of our histories, as they allow us wisdom on which parts to pick up and which parts to lay down. Pilate's grief is informative. She lays down the weight of historical transgressions, while holding the lightness of her people's cultural medicines. Pilate modeled a grief that birthed a richness in spirit. Pilate represented, for Milkman, an ontological rebirth, a stark contrast to the nurture (if we can call it that) of his father.

Despite the wealth of resources from his father, Milkman came to understand that they fell short in the face of Pilate's love; they were not enough. Not enough to divert the 12-gauge bullets from perforating his grandfather's chest, and it was not enough to leverage intimacy between a father and son. His father's wisdom was as meaningless to him as the pursuit of ownership for any previously owned person. Still, his father imparted his truths: “Pilate cannot teach you a thing you can use in this world, maybe the next, but not this one. Let me tell you right now the one important thing you'll ever need to know: own things. And let the things you own own other things. Then you'll own yourself and other people too” (p. 55). Milkman chose the tutelage of his aunt, Pilate, because at least in her poverty, there was wealth.

Some of us, like Macon Dead, Jr. prefer to teach young people to learn *the game*, and to play it well, in attempts to eventually change it. We encourage college matriculation and “seats at the table” in hopes that dead spaces will be enlivened with what remains of our spirits after years of self-denial, separation from ancestral ways of knowing and the death of our intuition—what it takes to be successful within the Academy. That type of sentiment, which is not love, runs the risk of spiritual bankruptcy (Lorde, 1984; ReelBlack, 2015; Somé, 1995). There are others (Somé,

1997; Wynter, 2003) like Pilate, who understand the interconnectedness of modernity and black suffering. Others (Dumas & ross, 2016; Wilderson, 2003), understand civilization, integration, and reform as synonymous with black death. Pilate represents educators who envision beyond reform (de Oliveira, 2021). They recognize schooling as a metaphysical entrapment that only the medicines of our ancestors can remedy (de Oliveira et al., 2015). The seriousness of our love for our students must be reflective in the resources we impart to them (Cariaga, 2019; Hannegan-Martinez, 2019). Any educator who employs a language of love must take seriously this central point: Love is leveraged through resource, not sentiment or intention (King, 1963). This love, the transference of medicine from one generation to the next, sustains.

As educators who understand the inevitability of the collapse of schooling upon us, we must ask ourselves, what is in our pedagogical knapsacks? What are the tools that we will pass on to youth so that they may survive the demise of schools? What are the reminders of the significance of our names and our people that we wear daily? How have we been stewards of the earth to the extent that we not only anticipate greater connection to her, but have supported the earth sufficiently enough so that it is willing to accept our connection? What are the songs that we sing? Are they allegiances to the settler state, messages of neoliberal reform or melodies of ancestral love? Are we providing young people with the tools that they can use in this world or the next one? How are we teaching youth to intentionally carry their histories? To learn from them? To sit with the weight of what has happened to us? And through ceremony, lay aside the weights which so easily beset us? The answers to these questions inform the extent of one's elevation.

MILKMAN DEAD, THE FLYING AFRICAN (COMMUNITY)

Some years ago, while teaching an Ethnic Studies lesson on hegemony, a student, Jaquez, shared his resistance to service of community. I asked him to elaborate. He said, "I don't want do all this [work] just to work for somebody else; I want somebody to work for me." In that moment, I discerned more clearly the dichotomized existence that settler colonial culture extends. We exist within a vacuum in pursuit of power, which in a capitalist system, translates to power over others. We gain our sense of self, as Macon Dead, Jr. shared, by what we own: people and property.

Educational theory has been confined by nature of its existence within the structure that by default, colludes with the binary to own or be owned—and all reality, practice, measurement, and value are based on that center (Watkins, 2001). Schools, based on their culture of measurement, value individualism, social isolation, and conformity. These value systems come from grade point averages, testing, and strict regimes of schooling; value systems that have (re)produced the society that we live in (Shujaa, 1994). Conveniently, our society also centers these same values, ones that have worked against black children—all children for that matter—ones that have affirmed, justified, and reproduced toxic stressors in their lives (Shange, 2019; Sojoyner, 2016). In many ways, black children have failed in schools because they have not adhered to these value systems (Lee et al., 1990). The entrenched structure of schooling, intertwined with an anti-black society, has engendered an environment

of trauma and grief for black children. Yet, it is their resistance to schooling, however, that mediates space for healing and transformation. For some time, black children have been attempting to rise above the confines of their oppression (Sojoyner, 2017).

Virginia Hamilton's children's book, *The People Could Fly* illustrates the mythology of Flying Africans that takes its shape from slave narratives oft recited in secrecy on and around plantations and later reified through the works of critical black memory workers like Toni Morrison (1977). Flight, within black traditions, represents a collective act of agency to transcend the violence within United States settler societies. Youth and communities can more readily access the protection and practices vital in maintaining the culture, community, and consciousness necessary for self-determination. Flight, in this regard, requires a removal of the weights of anti-blackness and colonialism that are often perpetuated through schooling. Or within Toni Morrison's framing of it: "In order to fly, you gotta give up the shit that is holding you down."

The passing on of black legacies of transcendence are, in some way, destructive in that they impart truths of black autonomy and black life that are disastrous to the architecture of anti-black infrastructure that is the United States. We associate these teachings with Apocalyptic Education. Flying, as we conceptualize it, represents the limitless possibilities that everyone is born with, and our sacred purpose functions as the wind that elevates us beyond potential toward self-actualization.

Currently, our society is composed of networks of people (many of whom are classroom teachers) who have not been able to self-actualize and thus have not been able to support themselves and those under their care toward self-determined futures. This is because schooling has served as one of the primary institutions that prevents flying; it isolates functions of the mind from functions of the body. In order to survive schooling, people have had to separate themselves from their bodies, and in essence, their histories and futures. Throughout our research (Johnson, 2019; Watson, 2019), we've found that reconnection to one's body produces people who are more critically aware of their social conditions, who desire empathetic connection to others, and who are drawn to indigenous practices that cumulatively propel them toward flight. Our research also suggests that children come to us desiring to fly. And as adults who have been talked out of (with some even beaten away from) the idea of elevation, we pass on our traumas to young people. We weigh them down with A-G requirements, "realistic" career choices, and a fast track toward additional schooling, even when they have barely survived 12 years of its lashes. Instead, our children resiliently pursue flight every time they resist the six-hour factory model of schools, when they challenge our toxic grading policies that do not reflect the fullness of their being, when they advocate for peers who have been left behind because of our adverse discipline policies. Our youth have been pleading with us to confront, what we call in Apocalyptic Education, "the dead baby" that is schooling since its inception and we the adults, the most wounded (often the most academically successful), have lacked the spiritual capacity to remember that we can fly, that our sacred time with young people can transcend the confines of capitalist mandates.

Consequently, it takes a community of [healing] adults committed to their own self-actualization, reclaiming of intuition and memory, to support young people toward flight (Somé, 1997). Morrison's Milkman was surrounded by a diverse

community of adults, some like his father, who were committed to the maintenance of capitalist sensibilities, and many others who remembered and practiced their ancestral ways of being, who were able to inspire and encourage his flight. Milkman's community taught him the nature of human existence outside of an owned versus ownership model, toward a more critical paradigm: "perhaps that's what all human relationships boiled down to: would you save my life? Or would you take it?" (Morrison, 1977, p. 331).

Through Pilate's mentorship, Milkman learned reverence for and relationship with the land: "he whispered to the trees, whispered to the ground, touched them, as a blind man caresses a page of Braille, pulling meaning through his fingers" (Morrison, 1977, p. 278). His community encouraged a peace beyond all understanding: "No light switch, no water running free, and clear after a turn of a tap handle. No napkins, no tablecloth. No fluted plates or flowered cups, no circle of blue flame burning in a stove eye. But peace was there, energy, singing and now his own remembrances" (p. 301). Through community, Milkman remembered a sacred (re)connection to community, land, and spirit ultimately encouraged a memory of his ability to fly: "Flying permeated its way to his dreams: it was a warm dreamy sleep, all about sailing high over the earth" (Morrison, 1977, p. 298).

It is important to note that Milkman's community was comprised primarily of women, women like Pilate who taught him to remember the possibility of flight, women like Hagar (Milkman's love interest) who loved him dearly, who saw beyond the patriarchal norms that evaded their intimate relationship because she knew, more than him at times, that he was destined for the skies. See, Milkman was the descendant of a man who flew away from the plantation, leaving his wife and 20 children behind. And some generations later, "While [Milkman] was flying. Hagar was dying" (p. 332). He pursued flight, leaving her to die of a broken heart, maybe because he was more like his father and his grandfather than he believed. Maybe the extent of his love for the women in his life haunted at what they could do for him, how they could move him—maybe it was bereft of reciprocity. Because right before Milkman stretched his foot to fly, Pilate took a bullet meant for him. "From the beginning, his mother and Pilate had fought for his life, and he had never so much as made either of them a cup of tea" (p. 331).

As the novel reaches its ending, we have not been able to confront the gendered dynamics, the misogynoir, that rears its ugly head amidst all healing movements. And maybe Morrison does not attempt to remedy this dynamic because it requires further meditation, richer frameworks, continued service to each other. Nonetheless, flying, transcending the nature of one's circumstance to experience life and life more abundantly, requires the messy immersion of our most dirty selves in relationship with each other. We are challenged to move toward paradigms in which all of us can fly, not in any particular order, and not before others. Flight must be imagined or remembered beyond patriarchal manifestations of freedom.

Nonetheless, Milkman teaches us that just like there is no perfect way to grieve, there is no perfect way to fly. We are all called to clumsily place one foot before the next toward our elevation. In his spiritual infancy, he learned to find freedom in the death of expectation, outside of the gaze of his father's parenting. He was able to hold the grief of his ancestry—the complexities of abandonment, patriarchal norms even—

in order to lay aside the weight of generational curses. With Pilate, he laid to rest his grandfather's bones, and with this ceremony he also buried the curse of neglect and toxic gendered norms. With the burying of the earring, they were able to lay to rest the cultural death that haunted their family, for it was affixed even to their name. Milkman shadowed Pilate to learn that: "You just can't fly on off and leave a body" (Morrison, 1977, p. 332). Flight requires accountability and interconnection, a hinging to the stories that birthed us as well as communal symbiosis.

Milkman was well positioned for flight, as all children should be. It is important to note that Milkman never needed to be convinced that he could fly. Instead, he needed a community of adults—elders, really—willing to buffer the blows of anti-blackness, harmful gendered norms, and settler colonial politics that weighed him down. As educators, our work here is simple (not easy). We are called to a certain lightness (manifested through our ongoing pursuits of well-being), a commitment to an ongoing practice of aiding in the removal of weights, so that youth may fly.

But what if the pursuit of flying transcends symbolism? To conceptualize flight as mythology is a training wheel of sorts, toward those who think small. Apocalyptic Education is a text and praxis that should stand on its own, but the content, in many ways, is equivalent to our perception of flight. The text is digestive only as metaphor; we are willing to engage abolitionist teaching practices, as long as they still operate within schools and, in many ways, maintain the practice of schooling simply with blacker vernacular describing/theorizing the phenomenon and with darker bodies leading the charge. Here, however, the death of schools is not proposed as symbolism.

When we think about death, or even the destruction of anything on a catastrophic scale, we often run back to the very systems we've run away from out of fear of the unknown. I once watched a video of a monkey who stayed caged for weeks, even after its owners opened the cage. I believe that much like us, the monkey became too familiar with caged life, so the possibility of freedom was a site of complete paralysis. I believe this fear is prevalent, in part, because of our engagement in and with white works of art and literature. White movies and works of art often identify the destruction of our worlds in a negative light; perhaps because those worlds have only aesthetically benefitted white people, it is logical to hold on to such a world. However, queer black literature has consistently painted apocalypse with bright colors. Because through the destruction of the systems and ways of being that compromise our health, we have the possibility of life more abundantly. Some may still ask: What's next? Where do we go from here? This has always been the answer: Colonization robbed many of us of our own indigenous practices that sustained our health for some time. Schools became a means by which we were separated further and further from these practices. It is time to return to these practices. Maybe instead of running from them, we should be moving toward apocalyptic educational models. An Apocalyptic Educational framework helps us to make sense of the weights of anti-blackness, settler colonial sentiment, and numerous supremacies (white, male, able-bodied) that have been normalized through American schooling, while also supporting the type of memory work necessary to remove them to ensure that all children can fly.

Finally, what becomes of our practice when we pursue flight literally? Virginia Hamilton and Toni Morrison draw from historical events to inform their *fictional*

pieces. They are based on what has been named as The Ibo Landing. First narrated as myth, then edited once 13 bodies were pulled from the St. Simons Island swamps in 1803, The Ibo Landing was still perceived as a mass suicide, in which captive Africans walked hand in hand into the waters, surrendering their life to the waves. But what happens to our perception of what is feasible, beyond schools, when we remember those 75 Igbo as cultural workers, who were able to transcend their tragedies, and transform their circumstances by literally flying away? How can our approaches to educating children transform when we understand the inextricable link between flying and the maintenance of people's stories, songs, ceremonies, languages, and tribal ways of being?

Today's critical educator must be committed to the belief in what they cannot see. The United States is quite literally a colony settled on sacred land, bodies, stories, and medicine. Through sight, we see a sickened society in which one compromises their commitment to themselves and their community's well-being to stay afloat. Sight won't get us there, which is why this work requires memory. And memory is destructive. Toni Morrison (2019) explained, "You know, they straightened out the Mississippi River in places, to make room for houses and livable acreage. Occasionally the river floods these places. 'Floods' is the word they use, but in fact it is not flooding; it is remembering. Remembering where it used to be. All water has a perfect memory and is forever trying to get back to where it was" (p. 243).

May we embrace the destruction of schools and schooling as we know them with the type of joy present at black funerals. Black funerals are often a peculiar spectacle for non-black people. The immense presence of joy amidst loss is often confusing to foreigners. But here's a secret: the hurt is still present. The confusion about what comes next is there. So many of the smiles amidst the singing, within predominantly open casket services, reflect one central tenet of black life: Death does not have the final say. Toward this remembering, I leave you with one more adage from our ancestor Toni Morrison. It encourages a sacred capitulation. A reminder that memory work will sustain us through the unknown. Morrison's (1977) final sentence of *Song of Solomon* stated: "If you surrender to the air, you could ride it" (p. 337). Selah.

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TIFFANI MARIE, PhD, is a Professor of Teacher Education and Ethnic Studies in the Department of Education at San Jose State University. Her major research interests lie in the area of health disparities, the study of anti-blackness as a social determinant of health, and the embodiment of critical pedagogies as an attenuating agent of toxic stress in black children. Email: tiffani.marie@sjsu.edu
