

The Knowing of Monstrosities: Necropower, Spectacular Punishment and Denial

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Abstract This study examines how newspaper accounts of criminality conceal and illuminate particular types of monstrosity in the postbellum United States. The paper offers an analysis of Gothicism—which typically frames the criminality of marginalized groups—as a technique of racial domination in narrative sites that construct knowledge on criminality and punishment. Analysis reveals a paradoxical lens of Gothicism in which oppressive groups can conceal monstrosity within a colonial context. The analysis of gothic accounts of criminality challenges the ways in which denial shapes modern monstrosity.

Gothic Denial

Understanding the dynamics of historical racial domination in American history requires an investigation into narrative modes of social control. Gothic storytelling in the media provides an opportunity to inscribe transgressors of modern borders with elements of horror, necropolitical power (Mbembe 2003) and deserved punishment (Valier 2002, 2004). The years following the Emancipation Proclamation represent a time of transgressed borders and contested racial control. Racialized newspaper accounts of criminality offer spaces to illuminate the relationship between the colonized and gothic criminology. Additionally, newspaper accounts of criminality within this paper challenge the efforts of the colonizers to depoliticize black bodies through Gothicism and punishment.

In a historical sense, the account of criminality in newspapers is a primary site in which the relationship between a colonial state and racial subjects can be shaped. Newspaper accounts carry a particular weight in cataloging the boundaries of identity in the postbellum United States. Stories of criminality and their relationship with identity compose a central site of conflict in the transgression of boundaries experienced during the great liberation in 1863. By establishing a relationship between Gothicism and identity,

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colonizers can legitimize spectacular punishment to secure geographical and epistemological borders. Crime stories that frame state-sponsored violence as legitimate can be read as modern methods of racism which are used “to regulate the distribution of death and to make possible the murderous functions of the state” (Mbembe 2003, p. 17).

Conflating the Gothic and crime in the imaginary of the public has real consequences for punishment. By culturally and imaginatively locating black bodies in the shadows of horror stories, the public can establish a tool of racism that acts as “a precondition for exercising the right to kill” (Foucault et al. 2003, p. 256). Gothicism can depoliticize criminals and provide the public the ability to neutralize the death of black bodies by producing a “death-in-life” (Butler 2006; Mbembe 2003). In this way, the production of knowledge about crime can be examined in a relationship with punishment; where gothic stories are seen as “unrecognized extension(s) of defenses to crimes” (Sykes and Matza 1957, p. 666). Thus, Gothic crime stories provide a platform for colonizers to neutralize the injury of spectacular punishment bestowed upon victims of the state.

Further, the relationship between gothic discourse and crime accounts demonstrates a powerful analytical tool when repackaged within forms of denial where the victim’s suffering is neutralized, and in which, the colonizer can reject their own monstrosity (Cohen 2001; Matza and Sykes 1961; Sykes and Matza 1957). A framework of “implicatory denial” provides a lens to view the justification of violence by the state and the public in the face of crises—specifically here, the perceived threat of black bodies abruptly gaining political identity. In turn, state and public can use rationalized stories to avoid moral consequences—in which monstrous punishments are the only logical responses to monstrosity. As Cohen (2001, p. 9) notes, stories are integral to the denial of moral consequences: “These techniques of evasion, avoidance, deflection and rationalization should draw on good—that is, believable—stories....Implicatory denials come from some rather banal folk techniques for avoiding moral or psychological demands, but are invoked with mystifying degrees of sincerity.” Newspaper stories of state and public violence can be morally framed as a response to the gothic in order to illuminate or conceal their own gothic proportions.

Excerpts shared in this paper come from a dataset of historical newspapers collected from the years 1865–1870. The search of newspapers from Pennsylvania and South Carolina rendered 90 total newspapers from which 242 clippings were extracted. The analysis rendered thematic underpinnings of modern forms of othering in early American history. For the remainder of this text, these typologies are used to effectively draw the connections between the Gothic stories and crime reporting for black individuals after the Emancipation Proclamation. These typologies illuminate the manner by which white society experienced ontological dissonance, the ways black bodies were othered through the gothic imaginary, and validation of the use of spectacular punishment by the state and public.

The Gothic, Monstrosity and Modernity

Gothic crime stories can be understood through post-colonial theoretical work, which has demonstrated the evolving relationship between colonizer and colonized (Agozino 2003; Tatum 2000, 2002). Post-colonial theorists (Tatum 2000, 2002) have catalogued phases of the colonization process. Cultural imposition, disintegration and recreation are at the heart of the process by which colonial reign is formally established. The colonizer reifies a distinct colonizer/colonized relationship through cultural recreation; where the colonizer represents the other in a morally repugnant form and portrays the morals of the colonized as the “quintessence of evil.” Painting the other as morally repugnant is a primary residual

tool of colonizing power and is often accomplished through the use of zoological and bestial language (Fanon 1963; Tatum 2000, 2002).

Gothic criminology interweaves the cultural recreation of racial domination and the propensity for colonizers to paint morally repugnant pictures of the colonized. Theories of gothic criminology bring together themes of border transgression and punitive populism through storied accounts of criminal action (Sothcott 2015; Valier 2002, p. 320). Accordingly, gothic criminology provides conjured images of monsters and gore to influence the framing and narrative accounts of justice and crime (Greek 2007, 2016; Picart 2006, 2012; Picart and Greek 2007; Sothcott 2015; Valier 2002, 2004). The gothic stands for an affront to modern society by sensationalizing the transgressive behaviors of marginalized groups as threatening to public spaces and value systems. Punishment plays an important role in gothic scenes of domination, in which spectacle is used as “racial repression” (Garland 2005, p. 798) to validate public understandings of state violence (Brown 2009; Wagner 2010). Valier notes how gothic vernacular is endemic to the processes and narratives of late-modern crime control making it necessary to “explore the powers of horror in contemporary penalty as they are invoked through texts and images” (Valier 2002, p. 321). As described by Ingebretson (1998, p. 27) the “rhetoric of the monster” produces a knowledge of marginalized groups that is “politically very useful.” Therefore, the storied action of transgression and gothic trope is central to the relationship between colonizers and colonized in late-modern society, where “the dangerous ‘other’ is interpellated as monstrous...rendering society insecure” (Neocleous 2005, p. 134).

To write crime stories of black bodies within a gothic discourse is to crystallize black subjectivity within a “state of death” in which individuals are analyzed as “corpses, of who kills and who is targeted for death” (Holland 2000; Wright 2011, p. 709). Unlike the zoological, the gothic represents a threat that must be vanquished for the benefit of progress. Thus, Mbembe’s (2003) notion of necropolitics illuminates the deathly essence of efforts to depoliticize a newly freed and visible generation of black bodies. A gothic narrative helps return the hierarchal state of colonizer and colonized as a “loss of home, loss of rights of his or her body, and loss of political status” (Mbembe 2003, p. 21). The gothic can provide a horror context by which the guilt of gruesome and extreme punishment can be denied, as both “turning a blind eye” to the suffering of another and “not admitting to one’s self” what one already knows, in order to strengthen a collective group’s ontological security. Narrative accounts that locate black crime within a context of a gothic vernacular can be an important element of depoliticizing the colonized, by relegating criminal transgression as a sign of dispossession, where the “walking dead [is] a category of material existence...in which physical death [is] a mere formality” (Linnemann et al. 2014, p. 17). This existence of the “living dead” (Mbembe 2003, p. 40) can validate spectacular punishments of the state or those imposed by the public as a logical response to a natural threat—which can be used politically and psychologically—to undermine the monstrosity required in modernity in which people are “simultaneously appalled and attracted to it” (Sothcott 2015, p. 8).

Scientific Narratives of Crime and Control as a State of Denial

Counter-colonial perspectives have investigated the extent to which rationalized scientific narratives have perpetuated the dominant colonizer relationship. For example, counter-colonial theorists have documented the ways that contemporary criminology perpetuates a white and Western-centered focus where criminological knowledge imbues imperialist power (Agozino 2004; Du Bois 1992; Fanon 1963). Additionally, in line with Lombroso’s

Gothicization of the criminal (Rafter and Ystehede 2010), biological scientific narratives have provided scientific legitimacy to increased social control of colonized black bodies. Biological perspective principles, in which Lombroso situated criminality as a problem of ethnicity and located criminal action within regressive genes and lower evolutionary stages of human development, are politically useful narratives as tools of validating racial domination (Gabbidon 2015; Lombroso 1871). The implications of existing on a lower evolutionary stage (i.e. feeble-mindedness, lack of self-control and tendencies towards aggression and violence) corroborate racialized crime stories as aberrations of nature. Likewise, speaking of gothic criminology in the historical United States implicates an intersection between the classic horror monster, “as a terrible aberration from human nature” (Halttunen 1998, p. 46), and rationalized scientific discourses where knowledge about criminality and responses to the criminal were produced (Rafter and Ystehede 2010). Conjured gothic images represent a “rejection of enlightenment values such as order and reason, instead embracing emotion, adventure, the imagination, and irrationality” (Rafter and Ystehede 2010, p. 271). The threat identified by external horror stories and rationalized discourses formulate knowledge of criminals at the time, and is central to the colonizer and colonized relationship where monsters are illuminated and monstrosity, concealed.

Crime control responses often invoke monstrous and gothic conditions themselves, as Valier (2002) notes: “gothic tropes are embedded in the practices of the institutions of crime control and punishment themselves.” For instance, Smith (2003) demonstrates the symbolic power of the guillotine—a symbol of rationalized state response to crime—that is betrayed by its own gothic visualizations: “Although intended as a material celebration of scientific Enlightenment codes and dramatizing these in its efficient operation, the guillotine stimulated a febrile counter-discourse of heteroglossic, grotesque and Gothic symbolism” (p. 27). Likewise, the biological origins of criminology (Gabbidon 2015; Lombroso 1871; Rafter and Ystehede 2010), heralded as a rationalized approach to understanding and controlling crime is filled with gothic visions of criminality and punishment. In these state responses to criminality, rational responses carry an alter-ego, a “double, its flipside, a dark underbelly” (Rafter and Ystehede 2010, p. 277). In the monstrous acts of punishment, there is little distinction between real actions of the colonizer and storied scenes of the colonized. As Sothcott (2015, p. 7) notes, a “gothic paradox” exists in the protection of modern borders; that is, “how to morally justify the hero’s extra-legal vigilantism?”

The production of gothic crime stories implicates a monstrous response as a necessary violence to rid modernity of premodern monsters. Thus, monstrosity becomes a shared act between colonizers and the colonized, where values can be attributed through cultural sites such as newspapers. By drawing from a larger state of denial (in which scientism and the gothic validate state punishment), a technique of neutralization can allow the colonizer to label the monstrosity of the other as deviant and neutralize their monstrosity as a reflection of one’s own state violence (Matza and Sykes 1961). Reading the Gothic as a technique of neutralization insists that the public and the state feel compelled to maintain connection to the dominant social and ideological order, and thus, employ rationalizations which allow those implicated to mollify moral guilt (Sykes and Matza 1957). By writing and reading the colonized as grotesque monsters in crime stories colonizers can undermine the existence of the victim. In modernity—in which epistemological borders increasingly become fluid—gothic narratives implicate monstrous violence as a shared subterranean value where state and public violence must be morally aligned as rightful and just. Repackaging “denial” from the point of departure of Cohen’s *States of Denial: Knowing of Atrocities and Suffering*, crime horror stories serve as a useful theoretical tool to examine spectacular

punishment and the “state of mind...in which we know and don’t know at the same time” about modern monstrosities (Cohen 2001 p. 4–5). As gothic criminology demonstrates a call for social control and an ability to “turn a blind eye” (Cohen 2001, p. 1) in the production of scenes of spectacular punishment, this study demonstrates that a gothic paradox returns the focus to the colonizer to investigate their own monstrosity.

Knowing Monstrosities: Ontological Insecurity, Gothic Crime and Spectacular Punishment

Ontological Insecurity

Newspapers displayed the dissonance felt during this time period by white society as the emancipation of slaves destabilized reified ontologies of the time. Media often engaged in *reductio ad absurdum* arguments when coming to terms with the logics of the recent liberation of slaves in order to diminish the staked claim of black bodies to visibility in the political world. In the face of geographical and political transgressions, it was common to describe the world as being flipped on its head: “...and none of these oppressed nations ever had thrust upon them by their conquerors degradation half as infamous as negro rule—the filthy, polluting, barbarous supremacy of an inferior and despised race” (Clearfield Republican. February 13, 1868. PA). Emancipation represented that a disruption in power could reverse the current political order. Indeed, to white society it was not that black bodies had simply been liberated but that power had shifted altogether: “...unless the people of the South forge their own chains by surrendering their independence and manliness of spirit to the dictation of a temporary and infamous military pressure, and fail to protest against the great crime of forced negro domination sought to be fastened upon them...” (The Anderson Intelligencer. December 25, 1867. SC).

White society in the South interpreted the emancipation of black bodies in terms of such dissonance that the horrors of the natural world felt to be encroaching upon the order of the colonial state. Slavery was constructed as a positive system in many capacities and was integral to the functioning of modern society. Newspapers argued that slavery was beneficial to the African-American race: “Think of it—if the niggers of Louisiana could be isolated or left to their own volition or freedom, 50 years hence they would recover their natural aptitudes and be exactly as they are now in the interior of Africa, simple, useless, nonproducing heathens, without tradition, thought, word, or name even that they have now from the white people” (Clearfield Republican. August 31, 1870. PA).

Newspapers documented that a power shift was taking place in the criminal justice system and the response to criminal activity: “And when every form of law is thus violated to protect the negro in crime, when General Sickles’ orders are in vain pleaded against the negro, but the white man is stringently bound by them, who can expect peace, who can look for quiet submission to authority?” (Edgefield Advertiser. July 03, 1867. SC). Dissonance from the emancipation led many to make statements that constructed themes of unjust practices. In effect, the abrupt political presence of black bodies was seen as a catalyst to the deterioration of the processes and structures of modernity. Due to the benefit of slavery and white domination, many believed it important to once again return the world to a normative status: “...it is the duty of the white man at once to assert and make good at all hazards the prerogatives of this race as rightfully the dominant one in the South”

(Clearfield Republican. February 13, 1868. PA). Newspapers echoed insecurities felt by the public and made powerful cases for increased social control.

It was regularly established that the Emancipation Proclamation and the emergence of black autonomy resulted in a crime spike: “It will be observed by this report that crime among the freed negroes has increased over eight hundred per cent; while among the whites it is less than ten per cent” (Clearfield Republican. March 21, 1867. PA). Newspapers communicated a clear message that the liberation of black individuals meant criminal activity was on the rise, and as result, society was less secure. In a manner that seemed neutral, newspapers offered statistics without any context that appeared to suggest black individuals were a source of crime and insecurity: “A late enumeration shows that the State contains 650,000 whites and 150,000 negroes, and that last year 144 of the former and 220 of the latter were sent to the penitentiary or one white person for every 4513 and one negro for every 381 of the population” (Clearfield Republican. March 21, 1867. PA). The Emancipation Proclamation was effectively couched in explanations of crime fluctuation in the following years. In this way, to speak of black liberation was to also speak of increases in crime—especially violent crime—and incarceration.

Indeed, the conflation of emancipation and crime meant the simple presence of black bodies was cause for alarm to white society and lived-spaces were compromised: “The Norfolk Day Book gives a sad account of the once pleasant town Hampton; having now a population of 4000 negroes, the greater part of whom are the most ‘unmitigated scoundrels’ alive, who, in the face of open day, and before the eyes of the merchants, pick up and walk off with whatever they can place their hands on” (Edgefield Advertiser, January 16, 1867. SC). The newspaper interpreted the presence of black bodies as a town under siege. Public thought automatically resurrected images of crime stories when in proximity of black bodies and were free to play to the Gothic imaginary: “The rumors of conspiracies among the negro population in Mississippi have become so frequent, that Governor Humphreys has been compelled to issue a proclamation warning them to desist. The organizations are stated to be for purposes of murder and plunder, and mean white men are mixed up in them” (The Anderson Intelligencer. December 25, 1867. SC). The presence of black bodies conjured horrific and violent possibilities that required state or public intervention and although the newspaper admits no material evidence, an official proclamation was necessary to quell the violence taking place within the minds of the public. Such passages reinforce the hegemonic view that to speak about black liberation was to discuss the threat of increased crime. The existence of black bodies, and their sudden political visibility, reified that even a particular presence in space and time was, at its heart, breaking a universal law and that their new political existence threatened modern borders of space and identity.

Gothic Crime

Opposing vernaculars between stories were used with different racial subjects to play to the horrific scene of breaking laws and destabilizing the norm. The alternative vernaculars offer readers a way to frame the information they interpret. A gothic passage frames individuals as monsters to fear, while intersecting with beliefs about a natural hierarchal structure of society. Newspapers used a gothic technique of storytelling to frame black crime by anchoring a passage with classic horror phrases and moral terms. Thus, by framing the excerpts with gothic and moral terminology newspapers could make visible the grotesque monstrosity of black crime. The storied distinction between classic monster and conflicting, internal mad scientist (Pinedo 2004) offers a look into the politics of

illuminating or concealing particular acts of monstrosity in order to exact racial domination in a historical context. Botting (1996) notes the tendency for early gothic depictions to locate monstrous characteristics outside the human form, where it is not until late 19th century that Gothicism sees horrors functioning internally as part of the psyche. The logic of the gothic paradox—that it takes a monster to kill a monster—is both used to illuminate the monstrous nature of the marginalized and conceal the deeds of spectacular punishment. Storied accounts of classic monsters, then, are deeply connected with colonizer responses as internal horrors of the mind.

Central to the gothic paradox is the “morally ambiguous” position of the colonizer; that one is both “appalled by transgression yet simultaneously attracted to it” as a means of protecting increasingly fluid boundaries (Sothcott 2015, p. 8). That is, the “morally ambiguous” position of the hero means that the classic monstrosity of black bodies must be interpreted as iniquitous. Such an interpretation allows colonizing groups to consider one’s response as justifiable and palatable. In effect, gothic framing tools require additional alignment terms that create hierarchies of just and unjust monstrosities: “Yesterday, a noted negro desperado named Charles Wilson, who had been in prison for beating his wife, went to colonel A.J. Martin’s, at Buntyrio Station, near this city, where she had gone, and attempted to kill her. She ran to the house, and was met by Mrs. Martin, who, in attempting to save her, was shot by the villain, probably fatally” (The Evening Telegraph. August 10, 1870. PA). Such a passage is littered with gothic interpretations, such as the individual compelled to repeat criminal activity, moral terms inciting themes of danger—such as “desperado” and “villain”—and preying on presumptively innocent victims. A combination of gothic and moral terms limits the perspective of the reader by dehumanizing the actor in the passage.

Accounts demonstrate that limiting perspective, through moral alignment, is a vital aspect of merging criminalized black identities and Gothicism. Moral terms intersect particular types of monstrosity within a horror context: “The two negro brutes, who so fiendishly maltreated a white woman on Sunday, fearfully expiated their crime yesterday afternoon, hoped that better counsels would prevail and that the guilty wretches would left to the regular course of law... the abominable and brutal crime committed by the negroes” (Edgefield Advertiser. August 23, 1865. SC). Note that gothic framing used for black crime is not morally ambiguous for the oppressed group, as terms of “brute,” “fiendishly,” and “wretches” ensure the perspective of the black individual from an iniquitous position. Moral terms, such as “villain” or “desperado,” do not necessarily have gothic dimensions. These descriptions are presented as moral terms, not gothic terms. Moral terms are, it is argued, used to understand and interpret monstrosity in modernity. Since the colonized are accused of monstrosity while colonizers recognize the need to commit monstrous acts, narrative accounts must morally align the shared value to be different (Matza and Sykes 1961; Sothcott 2015). Put differently, black monsters must be constructed as the storied villain while white monsters are storied as the mad scientist trying to achieve the greater good. In contrast, it is the dominant group that is free to ambiguously shift in and out of monstrosity to rectify a moral wrong. The moral indication of the gothic black body places subjects outside of social and legal frames of thought. In other words, extra-legal recourse is the only remaining option.

Black thought is framed as thinking iniquitously—a biological tie to the monstrous descriptive language inscribed upon their bodies: “Anything to keep the idle at work—for while at work they cannot be carrying out their thieving mischievous plans” (Edgefield Advertiser. January 03, 1867. SC). This is an automatic type of thinking, where the black individual is predisposed to evil thoughts. Falling in line with paradigmatic understandings

of criminality (Lombroso et al. 2006), the external characteristics expose the classic twisted mind of the individual which organically oppose important value constructs: "...there they sit, cheek by jowl, and for the most part as silent as Quakers in convention. Tis likely, however, they 'keep up a devil of a thinking'" (Edgefield Advertiser. January 16, 1867. SC). The grotesque appearance of black bodies is written as demonstrative of a primitive mind morally colluding with religious symbols of evil.

Oppositely, white criminality was often lacking gothic framing terms, and instead, constructed as cerebral, sophisticated or as goodness gone awry: "Last evening a man of genteel appearance engaged boarding at Mrs. Dare's, No. 225 South Broad street. This morning he decamped. Tagging with him three gold watches, one gold chain, one gold eyeglass and an overcoat" (The Evening Telegraph. March 05, 1869. PA). The account anchors the narrative of the white criminal as "genteel" where black criminals are described as "monsters" or "fiends." The white criminal is framed as being overly sophisticated, intelligent and crafty. To contrast perspectives, black individuals are depicted as committing crime because they were genetically predisposed to violence while white crime demonstrates a non-violent internal horror that navigates a brittle border between genius and madness.

Notice the reverence of the intelligence in the story of white crime: "They bored several holes in the back door, and removed one of the panels. They were then met by the sheet-iron backing, and removing just enough of this to put an arm through, they succeeded in unlocking the door and obtained entrance. They then had to burst open the safe with 'jimmies.'" (The Evening Telegraph. January 04, 1867. PA). This burglary was explained with admiration of the ingenuity of the culprits, almost celebrated for sophistication and intelligence in the operation symbolizing positive attributes of an enlightened society: "In street-shooters, and gentlemen who set the little difficulties in the public highways, were certain of hitting their mark, and of not hitting, or frightening to death, an innocent bystander, their exciting amusement might have been tolerated... But the merits of the particular case have nothing to do with the feet (sic). Street-shooting must be condemned by gentlemen, and left to the enjoyment of rowdies, and drunken bullies, whose home is in the watch house. There are ways enough of shooting, and being shot, without having recourse to sidewalks and hotel entrances; and a man who cannot be fought on the field should not be fought on the street" (The Charleston Daily News. November 18, 1866. SC). The murderous behavior, of "gentlemen" who duel in the streets, is labeled as a disorderly pastime whose rowdiness disturbs the peace. It is impossible to consider such criminality in terms of regression or to witness the monstrosity of murder in broad daylight.

The narrative lens does not produce visible, external cues for the conflicting horror of colonizers. An external horror discourse, however, visually identifies the moral predisposition of black bodies and makes their perspective "the ultimate incomprehensibility" to white society (Halttunen 1998, p. 4): "Fate of a fiend—The negro was arrested on Monday last and committed to jail in Lexington, where he made a full confession of his guilt, and also that previous murder he had outraged the person of his victim.... little sympathy exists for the wretch who expiated his crime in so horried (sic) a manner, even among the negroes." (The Orangeburg News. June 26, 1869. SC). The gothic passage is replete with necropolitical power (Mbembe 2003), as the passage identifies that classic horror monsters deserve particular fates placing black bodies in a framework of "who is targeted for death" (Wright 2011, p. 709). Indeed, the passage insists that a reader should not be able to empathize with the monster—as a rational human should not be able to reason with irrationality—and instructs a lack of empathy for the "wretch."

Literal horror scenes were resurrected and composed by narrative accounts of black crime: “Another Horror—The Marshall Republican gives an account of an affair in Rusk County, that forms a climax of horrors.... while eating it, he was seized by five negroes, who tied his hands behind him, dragged him about a half mile and hung him. They treated him very brutally, throwing him over fences as they reached them, bruising his face, and otherwise maltreating him. While he was hanging, they rolled back a log, dug a trench and threw him in it before life was extinct” (The Daily Phoenix. May 13, 1869. SC). The gothic transgressions do not simply execute the individual, but extend beyond the possibility of logical retaliation bordering on amusement and enjoyment. The story ensures readers this cannot be an act of justified defense or retribution, and place the classic monster within a framework of deserving elimination.

In these accounts, classic monsters do more than kill as they are predisposed to brutalize the body illogically and incessantly. They have no agenda—opposing the mad scientist—other than taking pleasure from ravaging and mutilating the body. Such mutilation represents a “death within a death” (Linnemann 2016), as monsters transfigure the body to an unrecognizable state by imputing the figure with monstrous dimensions permanently captured in the storied narrative: “Subsequent developments, and the confessions of two of the hands, show that the four assailed the captain and after mutilating him horribly threw him overboard...” (The Evening Telegraph. March 05, 1869. PA). As Rafter and Ystehede (2010, p. 274) describe, “doublings too, expressed identity anxieties,” monstrosity is not identical but rather exists across a moral continuum. Internal monsters—where the mad scientists’ moral goodness turns against them—commit heinous acts to pursue and progress a moral agenda, whereas the classic monster—symbols of a dystopia wilderness—is predisposed to the archaic gore of ravaging the body and making what is civilized, grotesque.

The senseless violence of the classic gothic monster feeds a nonexistence that upends a rational modern morality of scientific progress. The senseless ravaging of the body is a means with no end: “The deep sleep produced by a sultry heat was upon her, and she awoke no more. When the parents visited the child in the morning, an offensive, putrid mass of corruption, in which they could hardly recognize the loved countenance, was all that met their sight” (Yorkville Enquirer. May 09, 1867. SC). The classic monster was able to relegate the girl to a “putrid mass of corruption,” directly opposing the progressive horror of pursuing an agenda by contaminating and corrupting individuals and is seen to have no redeeming value. This necropolitical narrative submits black bodies as a force that corrupts and mutates figures of modernity to unrecognizable proportions—inflicting death and atavism—that must be removed in order to progress.

Newspaper accounts noted a regular concern with “miscegenation,” or the mixing of races, that could result in a loss of human progress. This propensity of classic monsters to produce a regressive effect falls in line with degeneration (Rafter 2008) theories where individuals “can devolve or go backward down the evolutionary scale” (Rafter and Ystehede 2010, p. 273). Brutal gothic violence not only kills, but begins to ruin progress in a rational society by representing wild and savage violence: “Just as we expected, Cyrus Coachman, colored, convicted at the last term of our court, of a most deliberate, cold-blooded and brutal murder—a murder which, in the language of Judge Rutland, ‘exceeded in brutality any he had ever heard of or read of’” (The Daily Phoenix. April 30, 1869. SC). The existence of these classic monsters represents an amoral perspective in a scientific narrative lens, where society tumbles backwards in time, returns the modern to the primitive and renders chaos.

The anxieties of a rational society are exposed in a rendition of crime as classic horror where monsters prowl the streets and the chaos of the wilderness creeps into town: “He was out at night attending to the burning of some logs in his field, when he was shot by some person concealed in the dark. Seven shots took effect on his person. He had a difficulty, a few days previous with a negro, who is supposed to be the part who committed the act” (The Daily Phoenix. February 19, 1870. SC). The literal overkill, where the individual is shot seven times over, illuminates the necessity for violence and gore against monsters in modernity. Yet, the predator is not fully illuminated by infiltrating the space of the victim from a primal and wild perspective. Rather, the gothic figure of the black individual embodies premodern principles encroaching civilized spaces of modernity. Thus, Mbembe’s (2003) conception of necropolitics is revealing here in terms of Sothcott’s (2015) insight—framed here as a “gothic paradox.” As Rafter and Ystehede (2010) write of Lombroso’s gothicization of the criminal: “When Lombroso proposed ways to dispose of born criminals, he was proposing ways to restore stability to the human form” (p. 280). Media accounts reporting criminality within a gothic vernacular becomes a way of inscribing necropolitical power into the monsters that are suddenly visible and grotesque. The gothic identity of bodies controlled by state accounts of crime in newspapers can be written as alien bodies encroaching the normative spaces of America. This gothic dynamic within a historical context is a powerful tool that bases the reality of horror on (un)real understandings of representation and truth (Seidman 1991, 2012).

Spectacular Punishment and the Overkill

The gothic call for social control is a well-documented phenomenon in modernity (Rafter and Ystehede 2010; Sothcott 2015; Valier 2002, 2004; Picart and Greek 2007). Indeed, as Linnemann et al. (2014) demonstrate, constructing images of gothic figures roaming the streets validates powerful and violent responses of the state apparatus. Gothic narratives are politically useful mechanisms to extend control of the state and legitimize expansive growth of social control instruments. Yet, combining this understanding of media narratives with Sothcott’s (2015) gothic paradox and Rafter and Ystehede’s (2010) dual-sided concept of criminological scientism, this paper encourages exploration of the methods by which colonizers eliminate their own monstrosity endemic to modern social control.

A predilection for such a gothic dynamic is represented well in media narrative accounts of black bodies committing crime: “As the negroes had shipped at Baltimore, it was supposed that they would return to that point. News of the murder was sent without delay, and a large police force was detailed to watch for the murderers in that locality” (The Evening Telegraph. March 05, 1869. PA). Crime, interpreted as classic horror, demands equally heinous responses from the state, demonstrated as an over response from law enforcement. Such as the “overkill”—where the monster is shot repeatedly—police departments promote numbers and superior technology to be seen as destroying black monsters. Such overkill maintains gothic proportions, where monstrous individuals are not just defended against but have no chance to succeed; the response is to massacre and slaughter reciprocally as a form of power mutilation.

In effect, police offered techniques of ostentatious violence against black vigilantes. The mythologized images of gothic black bodies were met with equally gory and gaudy representations of power: “Upon the policeman reaching the spot Jerry assumed a defiant attitude and refused to surrender, and in endeavoring to escape was fired upon and instantly killed” (The Charleston Daily News. February 25, 1869. SC). The defiant gothic individual is outdone by the state’s display of brute force serving as reinforcement of the power

dynamic that the monster compromised. In a gothic war, archaic monsters are crushed under the weight of rationalized modern progress narratively crystallizing a lack of power that black monsters bear: "...when the day came and the speakers, with a band and procession, they ambushed, fired upon, and butchered as many of them as possible, hunting and shooting the fugitives for hours...If Frank Blair is a statesman, then the Rebel Murderers at Camilla were patriots; and their action was far more justifiable than that of Seymour's 'friends' in this city in burning a colored orphan asylum, and hanging or roasting 'niggers' who were not even accused of carrying a penknife" (The Evening Telegraph. October 14, 1868. PA). Interestingly, the heinous acts of the state are seen in a positive light, where acts of gore are narratively constructed as the state's hand being forced. The narrative presuppositions indicate a process of denial and concealment where Gothicism embodies the "wrongs committed *on* him rather than *by* him" (Cohen 2001, p. 34). All of these responses exceed basic options of defensive action, but instead seek to commit monstrosity upon the monstrous.

A revealing passage celebrates a savage dog that causes a black monster to abandon their attempt as senseless murder: "He too, in all probability, would have been murdered, but for the valor of a savage dog, which compelled the murderers to move on" (Keowee Courier. September 30, 1870. SC). The passage lauds the efforts of the savage animal, but only in a particular direction. The excerpt identifies the savage nature of the dog and exposes an interesting conflict in the epistemic context. The capacity of the dog to be savage allows it to counter the inevitable brutality of the classic horror monster. As Sothcott (2015) notes the gothic paradox points to the fluid motion of monstrosity that exists for the colonizer. It is not simply the physical attribute of the dog that makes a savage, but the act required to remove the threat. This dog was particularly savage because it had to save the civilized victim; identifying the monstrosity as a savagery of valor. Colonizers are able to identify their own monstrosity as rightful in the defense of human progress.

Monstrous responses to crime had to be as vicious and devastating as the crimes being perpetrated in the horror scenes of the imaginary: "At Bardstown, Ky., a week ago, a negro, guilty of an infamous crime, was forcibly taken from jail, shot, and the body thrown thirty feet down a ledge of rocks" (The Charleston Daily News. December 28, 1869. SC). The gaudy demonstrations of monstrosity by the colonizing group indicates a constant interplay of visibility between a primitive threat upon the values of society and the monstrous punishment necessary to maintain a steady course: "Since writing the preceding, we find the result of another military commission for trying Anthrum McConnell, Scipio, Wm. Arnell, Billy Wilson and Gabriel, all colored citizens, for the murder of J.W. Skinner, at the plantation of Joseph Ford, of Georgetown District. They were all found guilty and sentenced 'to be hanged by the neck until dead.' We fear this catalogue of crime is destined to be fearfully increased" (The Daily Phoenix. September 13, 1865. SC). The passage offers a particularly gothic imagery as opposed to simply reporting the execution. The visual formed in the newspaper account highlights the particular manner in which monsters are removed using a symbol of state power. As the individuals are "hanged by the neck until dead," penal technology visually demonstrates state progress over premodern monsters.

As Foucault (1977, p. 32) noted the scaffolding was a central theatrical symbol of punishment upon the body. The scaffolding, as a state symbol, embodied the monstrous quality of the state in a similar manner that the savage dog was able to counter black criminality. It was not only the execution, but the grotesque representation of the modern execution that countered monstrous symbolism:

So frequently is the scaffold brought into use in that desperate region, that it is kept standing all the year round, and, moreover, is made large enough to swing five miserable human creatures into eternity at one and the same time. It is said, also, that the scaffold stands on open ground near the jail, in full view of such as choose to witness its practical operation. If this be true, a grand concourse of the unterrified (sic) and unreconstructed denizens of the town and its vicinity may be anticipated on Friday next, for on that day three men will suffer the extreme penalty of the law, and each of the three is a negro (The Evening Telegraph. November 30 1868. PA).

Note the gothic justification, where the scaffolding is used for “human creatures,” or rather those gothic monsters that are removed from any possibility of empathetic response by the reader. The grotesque power and theater of the scaffolding only makes sense in response to the observed and automatic understanding of the black individual as a predator that is not quite human.

The gothic visual of the scaffolding becomes a necessary symbol in eradicating the antithesis of Enlightenment values that promote a particular image of modern society. Thus, the symbols of a particular form of the gothic are used as a narrative to eliminate the classic, senseless monster: “The Gallows ... The scaffold was in the jail yard, to which only the clergy and the reporters were at first admitted, but after a while the officers consented that the crowd outside should come in. Rev. Fathers Hamilton and Langaree officiated.” (The Charleston Daily News. September 13, 1869. SC). Thus, the crowd is permitted to view the violent execution of creatures that are predisposed to senseless violence. State and public are able to share the experience of gothic punishment, constructed as a response to monstrous black criminality. Framed as a gothic response, public and the law occupy a state of mind in which the monstrosity required to participate in the scene is erased through a valorizing effect.

The colonizing gothic narrative, where marginal groups are framed as senseless monsters, paired with the notion that it takes a monster to kill a monster allows a carefully concealed gothic framework where public and state violence against minorities is written off as self-defense or a necessary act for progress: “But, after noon, the crowd assembled again, and the excitement had evidently increased and continued to increase until about 3 o’clock, where the front door of the jail building was broken open with a siege [upon] and the crowd rushed into the jail. How they reached the prisoners we did not learn but they were soon dragged forth...the street, beaten down with clubs and...After they were dead, they were...and hanged to a lamp post on the corner of the street, where they were hanging at a late hour in the evening. They were ultimately, we learn, taken down and buried...” (Edgefield Advertiser. August 23, 1865. SC). Such passages replicate similarly gothic actions attributed to classic monsters when identifying black criminality. Because the gothic framing is absent—no uses of “fiends,” “wretches,” “brutes,” etc.—gory punishments are mistaken as rightful retributions where monstrosity is concealed. Instead the gothic visuality of the act—“roasting,” “hanged by neck,” etc.—are penal responses of monstrosity necessitated by the existence of predators. The monstrosity of state violence—through storied forms of overkill—is seen to originate from the gothic proportions of black criminality. The logics of gothic denial demonstrate that monsters force out overkills from the state and public by molding punishment as a rational response.

In a denial of the victim, the public preemptively turns the monster’s own horrific scenes against them, by dragging, beating, and hanging in a visual performance. Such an interpretation of the relationship between lynch mobs and the media makes for an interesting analytical lens of Gothic denial. In visual depictions, such as Whale’s *Frankenstein*,

the mob riots against the monster that deals savage consequences to a local village. The village mob, with pitchforks and torches, are legitimized in their pursuit of the monster as they attempt to exact extreme forms of violence against him. Indeed, this type of horror scene paints the picture of racial domination, power mutilation and overkill in American history. The horror scene helps to excuse public monstrosity that seeks and exacts punishment on potential monsters through neutralization of the victims' suffering and denial of their own monstrosity (Cohen 2001; Sykes and Matza 1957). The monster is adjusted for the screen as senseless and anti-rational in combination with the moral identifiers as "brutish," "fiend," "monster" and so on. The horror genre plays out what could happen if preemptive punishment and violence are not used against monsters that haunt imaginaries and threaten lived-spaces. As Rafter and Ystehede (2010) argue that gothic vernacular is the flip side of a rationalized language of born criminals, sovereignty relies on what type of horror is visible and conceals those horrors that look no different. Visibility downplays the monster inside on the basis of interpreting what is real, and in turn, Victor is the scientist gone astray while the Frankenstein monster is hunted. "Hysterical blindness" forms a complex system of (un)real visibility of monstrosity when scientism and the gothic are entangled (Gordon 2008, p. 15).

These passages bring the Gothic paradox to life, as the public and the state visually frame their own monstrous capacity to ensure the public that weaknesses in modern borders are actually quite strong. In tow, however, the mere presence of gothic language that frames black bodies as monstrosities entails recognition of one's own necessitated monstrous actions.

Almost noiselessly they left the vicinity of the village with the criminal and proceeded to a grove about a mile distant where they halted. The negro was then placed beneath a large oak tree and without any commotion whatever a rope was fixed around his neck. He was then ordered to ascend the ladder placed against the tree. With great trepidation the criminal obeyed and he was made to straddle the lowermost limb, about twelve feet from the ground. He was then desired to make his peace with God as quickly as possible, as he had only a few moments to live. *His reply was a mere groan* [emphasis added]. Immediately afterwards he was pushed from the limb. *The wretched man with great desperation held fast to the limb* [emphasis added] and it required considerable exertion to make him let go. At length he gave way and in another instant he was hanging in mid air, struggling violently with death. His neck was not broken by the fall and it was evident he died from strangulation after a few moments of terrible agony... (The Orangeburg News. June 26, 1869. SC).

By locating the individual in terms of horror in the imagination, the mob can deny the visceral groan in fear of death as a call for human empathy and allows the mob to neutralize dehumanizing punishment by framing the individual as a "wretched" man—the archaic and demonstrative wretchedness of the man begets the monstrosity bestowed upon him in the lynching. Yet, the monstrosity of the colonizer is concealed as rationalistic principles drive understandings of the monstrous; that is, the colonizers own monstrosity is constructed as a precondition to the existence of black monsters.

Crystallizing black identity inside gothic tropes leaves behind important criminological artifacts that expose narrative and punitive actions of the colonizer in racial domination. While certainly the Gothicism of crime stories demonstrates an attempt to neutralize suffering of the victim (Sykes and Matza 1957, p. 668) as a strategy of silence (Hallsworth and Young 2008)—that is, appeasing the moral weight of extreme punishments on black bodies—gothic tropes also betray the colonizer by offering a silent protest. By merging the

logics of the gothic paradox with Cohen's (2001) paradox of denial, the analytical lens demonstrates crystallized insecurities of modern borders. The paradoxical state of "knowing and not-knowing" is powerful for "those who deliberately inflict suffering," but also reveals the perceptual insecurities of the perceiver. When gothic tropes are read as "perceptual insecurities of the perceiver" (Cohen 2001 p. 44), the gothic paradox insinuates a strange connection between classic and conflicting horror—in which the external and internal forms a monstrosity continuum. For colonizing states, then, the protection of denial plays an interesting role where "we are not responsible" (Cohen 2001, p. 39) for our own "sublime Gothic proportions" (Sothcott 2015, p. 8).

Storied transgressions of gothic proportions are inscribed with power dynamics that reveal deep textual connections where the internal monstrosity of the creator can be revealed through the horrifically surreal images of the other. Denial demonstrates a process by which "self-deception" can take hold in gothic narratives; in which colonizers are "allowed compartmentalization, self-manipulated focusing, selective insensitivity, blind persistence, uncanny responsiveness" on a continuum of monstrosity which conceals and illuminates (Cohen 2001, p. 41).

Conclusion

Reading and writing gothic narratives offers a powerful site of knowledge production in historical contexts. As analysis reveals, monstrosity is an important feature of colonizing power where it is deemed as a righteous response to the monstrous. Further, this paper offers an interesting view into the practice of defending modern borders, where state and public monstrosity is viewed as a rational and moral action against degeneration—or the risk of devolving to premodern conditions. Writing gothic narratives is a site of knowledge production in which violence is disguised by rightful action and moral alignment. Thus, particular types of monstrosity are applicable to discerning whether horrific acts are justified.

An intersection between gothic and denial paradoxes—where the perceived betrays the perceiver—allows a refocusing of gothic criminology to understand historical frameworks of justifying punishment by state and public. The gothic imagery produced in narratives that frame marginalized groups, illuminates a moral ambiguity for the colonizers own "sublime Gothic proportions" (Sothcott 2015, p. 8). Read in this paradoxical lens, crime stories offer an interesting site of necropolitical power where the narrative framework is written through mechanisms of concealing and illuminating monstrosity. Scenes of spectacular punishment plays into a narrative economy that writes state and public violence as an invisible "hand" that "shape" what the colonizing are obligated to do (Gordon 2008); this locates gothic punishment as an "invisible hand" being forced.

Colonial mechanisms of coded necropower necessitates inquiries as to what information does the story of the Frankenstein monster leave behind about Victor and what does Mr. Hyde convey about Dr. Jekyll? Such story devices offer deep-seated intersections about gothic narratives and identity, or truths about danger and harm. Narrative accounts demonstrate the moral rationality in the horrors of the mad scientist, the regressive amoral irrational monstrosity of the other and the valorized overkill of state and public punishment. The modern scientism in which the world interprets, reads and writes monstrosity produces an epistemic spectrum where violent acts are concealed and illuminated. In this way, the gothic colonial narrative does the practical job of disguising the "murderous

functions of the [colonial] state” (Mbembe 2003) and inscribes dynamics into criminal relations and popular knowledge of monstrosity.

Compliance with ethical standards

Conflict of interest The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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