Identity, Geography and Culpability: The Contours of Black Women's Fiction of Enslavement 1976-2016

Poppy Williams
Master of Arts by Research
Department of American Studies
School of Art, Media, and American Studies
University of East Anglia
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Abstract

This thesis takes up the history of slavery in order to argue for the particularity of historical fiction as a tool for redressing the archival fissures obfuscating our understanding of this past. Specifically, I explore the representation of enslaved women in two generations of the Black women's liberatory narrative tradition, represented in this study by Gayle Jones' *Corregidora* (1976); Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987); Octavia Butler's *Kindred* (1979); Morrison's *A Mercy* (2008); Tiya Miles' *The Cherokee Rose: A Novel of Gardens and Ghosts* (2015); and Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* (2016). Published between 1976 and 2016, the emergence of new historiographical developments and socio-political contexts have dramatically influenced this genre. My analysis thus takes an interdisciplinary approach, representing the ways in which these fictions have been influenced by the cultural contexts and shifting contours in the historiography of slavery within which each text was conceived. The work of revisionist historians provides a vital framework for this study, but it is not my focal point. Instead, I demonstrate the idiosyncrasies of historical fiction, exploring how Black female novelists have rectified the myriad gaps in the historical archives. The organisation of this thesis reflects the three significant historiographical developments influencing the arc of this literary tradition: enslaved women's subjectivity; the mutable geographies of the slave trade; and the ambiguous allocation of responsibility for the enslavement and racial oppression of Black peoples. While the thematic concerns of this literary tradition metamorphose in light of the texts' moment of production, the two generations of work remain connected by a perpetual urge to elevate enslaved womanhood from historical obscurity. Therefore, I argue that taken collectively, the Black women's liberatory narrative tradition transforms the representation of this past, imagining an unprecedentedly intimate account of enslaved womanhood.

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Introduction

The history of enslavement is obscured by silences and absences. The extant written records of this past have kept the individuals at its core enigmatic, particularly limiting our understanding of the subjectivity and personhood of enslaved women. This thesis takes up this history in order to argue for the particularity of historical fiction as a tool for redressing the archival fissures distorting our understanding of enslavement. Specifically, I explore the representation of enslaved women in the redemptive literary tradition of the liberatory narrative. This genre, as identified by literary scholar Angelyn Mitchell, "[counters] the disempowering, hegemonic discourses which have been perpetuated about the enslaved woman and her reality," ever concerned with representing "African American women specifically […] more authentically as agents, as subjects."[1] As Mitchell concludes that "the liberatory narrative […] disrupts history as we know it in order to illuminate what has not been told, what has been ignored, what has been silenced and what has been forgotten," I extend her discussion of this form as a twentieth century concept into the twenty first century, tracing its trajectory from 1976 to 2016.[2] This thesis thus explores how Black female novelists have continuously utilised historical fiction to rectify the myriad gaps in the historical archives while simultaneously expanding our understandings of enslaved womanhood. Over the forty-year span encapsulated by this project, the emergence of new historiographical developments and socio-political contexts have dramatically influenced the production of this genre. I therefore acknowledge that the liberatory narrative tradition is ever-changing in light of the texts' moment of production. Yet, bound together by a continual urge to excavate the experiences of enslaved womanhood, I propose that taken collectively this literary tradition transforms the representation of this past. In the way that fiction focusses upon individual subjects so as to "expos[e] and revers[e] the enforced silences" of the historical record, this thesis argues that the Black women's liberatory narrative tradition articulates an unprecedentedly intimate account of enslavement.[3]

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[1] Angelyn Mitchell, *The Freedom to Remember: Narrative, Slavery and Gender in Contemporary Black Women's Fiction* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2002) pp.1,5

[2] Ibid p.21

[3] Ibid p.9

Over the course of her scholarly career, Toni Morrison roots the inadequate historical representation of the enslaved in two bodies of archival records. In 1976, she observes that the quantitative documents that dominated the archive—such as ship manifests and newspapers—dehumanised the enslaved by "equating human beings with commodity."[4] Such statistical records erase the humanity of this Black population and, in turn, efface the immeasurable, intimate details of the individual.[5] These documents can be placed in conversation with a second archive, comprising the first-person slave narratives of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Typically written by fugitives to convey their personal experiences from slavery to freedom, these narratives offer a more qualitative (re)telling of this past.[6] Yet, despite their autobiographical form, Morrison notes in 1987 that these texts kept many historical truths shrouded, repeatedly "[pulling] the narrative up short with phrases such as 'But let us drop a veil over these proceedings too terrible to relate."[7] As Morrison describes it, not only did "the milieu [dictate] the purpose and the style" of such narratives, they also censored the more "sordid details of their experience."[8] Even taken collectively, these records do not provide a comprehensive understanding of the enslaved, representing an "absence of the interior life, the deliberate excising of it from the records," even in those texts "that the slaves themselves told."[9]

The redemption of this past, working "to fill the blanks that the slave narratives left," has been a multidisciplinary endeavour, providing an unprecedented account of Black subjectivity, resistance, and testimony.[10] The task of elucidating the experiences of the enslaved, using speculation and imagination, has been simultaneously performed by authors of historical fiction and revisionist historians alike. Blurring the lines of fiction and non-fiction, historians such as Saidiya Hartman, Stephanie Camp and Marisa J. Fuentes fill archival silences by "[employing] the imagination, closely reading our documents in their

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[4] Toni Morrison, "Moral Inhabitants" in *The Source of Self Regard: Selected Essays, Speeches and Meditations* (New York: Vintage Books, 2020) p.42
[5] Ibid pp.41, 42
[6] Eighteenth and nineteenth slave narratives examples: Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*; Frederick Douglass *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*.
[7] Morrison, "Inventing Truth: The Site of Memory," in *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir.* William Zinsser eds. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998) p.190
[8] Morrison, "The Site of Memory" in *The Source of Self Regard* pp.236, 237
[9] Ibid p.238
[10] Ibid p.239

context and speculating about their meanings."[11] However, this thesis focusses upon the parallel, but separate, project of historicised imaginings performed by the authors of historical fiction. While historical scholarship is "committed to [representing] the lives of the nameless and the forgotten" thus transforming the representation of enslaved womanhood, Hartman admits that historians remain forced to "respect the limits of what cannot be known."[12] Accordingly, the work of such historians provides a vital framework for this study, but it is not my focal point. Informed by Morrison's insistence that fiction holds a unique power "to find and expose a truth about the interior life of people who didn't write it," I centre upon the particularity of historical fiction.[13]

While the body of fiction considering the history of slavery is vast, this thesis deliberates how the Black women's liberatory narrative tradition has redressed the gaps in slavery's historical archives, simultaneously redeeming the experiences, identities, and humanity of enslaved womanhood. The six liberatory narratives explored in this study— Gayle Jones' *Corregidora* (1976), Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) and Octavia Butler's *Kindred* (1979) alongside Morrison's *A Mercy* (2008), Tiya Miles' *The Cherokee Rose: A Novel of Gardens and Ghosts* (2015) and Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* (2016)— explicitly demonstrate the ways in which female authors of African American descent have addressed the historical occlusion of enslaved women. In considering texts written from 1976 to 2016, I demonstrate the ways in which these fictions have been influenced by the cultural contexts and shifting contours in the historiography of slavery within which each text was conceived. I argue that the first generation of texts, represented by *Beloved, Kindred* and *Corregidora*, were concerned with filling the silences left by antebellum slave narratives (and the archives more generally) by describing the interiority of enslaved women's lives in an American context. The second generation, embodied by *A Mercy, Homegoing* and *The Cherokee Rose*, is no less concerned with this question; however, these texts look beyond their literary predecessors, addressing subsequent absences in the historical record. These latter texts turn their gaze to the transatlantic nature of the slave trade as well as the complicated issues of non-white

[11] Stephanie Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004) p.95
[12] Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe* 12, No.2 (2008) p.4
[13] Morrison, "The Site of Memory" p.239

responsibility in the enslavement of African people. Despite the transformations in form, setting, or historical focus, these novels speak to one another in various ways. Demonstrating a shared concern with representing the interiority of enslaved women's lives, I argue that these texts constitute a continuous tradition divided into two generations, the second of which responds to the first.[14] Importantly, the notion of an ever-developing literary tradition leaves space to be filled by future generations as the task of excavating the lives of enslaved women continues, inspired by subsequent historiographic developments and contexts.

This is not the first study investigating the connections between historical fiction and the representation of slavery. Ashraf Rushdy's 1999 analysis of what he called the neo-slave narrative was an early work of literary criticism that delineated a critical space in which to consider the representation of slavery in recent literature. Rushdy categorises neo-slave narratives as "contemporary novels that assume the form, adopt the conventions and take on the first-person voice of the antebellum slave narrative," proposing that this genre is reflective of the "renewed respect for the truth and value of slave testimony, the significance of slave cultures and the importance of slave resistance," emergent in the 1960s.[15] Emphasising the sustained influence of the critical discussions that characterised the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, Rushdy builds his analysis upon a "specific kind of intertextuality" that he perceives to be essential to "the Neo-slave narratives produced during the seventies and eighties."[16] Elevating the importance of "[how] texts mediate the social conditions of their formal production," rather than the relationship between one text and another, Rushdy premises his analysis on the perpetual intertextual relevance of "the politics of the sixties."[17]

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[14] While this study is limited to a time period of forty years, African American women writers have long employed literature as a tool to reclaim the experiences and identities of their maternal ancestors, simultaneously imagining redemptive futures for the contemporary descendants of the enslaved. The novels investigated in this thesis are thus part of a much longer literary tradition. Nella Larsen and Zora Neale Hurston, for example, are literary foremothers of the liberatory narrative tradition. Larsen's *Quicksand* (1928) and Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) address the unremitting legacies of enslavement starkly influencing Black women's lives. Such texts are demonstrative of the roots out of which this Black female literary tradition has grown.

[15] Ashraf H. A. Rushdy, *Neo-slave Narratives: Studies in the Social Logic of a Literary Form* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) p.4

[16] Ibid

[17] Ibid pp.14, 5

Rushdy's study serves as a starting point for my research, not least due to its limitations which my project probes. His analysis of the neo-slave narrative fails to address social forces and significant events beyond the 1960s that influenced the production of contemporary slave literature; moreover, the primarily male-authored texts studied by Rushdy overlooks the body of work produced by Black women during the time frame that his investigation spans.[18] Other scholarly work on fictions of enslavement, such as that by Angelyn Mitchell, pose important interventions where Rushdy's study falls down. Mitchell works "to shift the gaze [...] from neo-slave narrative to liberatory narrative," offering an alternative to Rushdy's conception of form, focussing on meditations on freedom contained within these explicitly female-authored texts.[19] Mitchell identifies the liberatory narrative as a genre "that derives from the nineteenth century emancipatory narrative."[20] While the emancipatory narrative was written to "[reveal] the unspeakable realities of chattel slavery," she recognises the twentieth century liberatory narrative to be different in that "it reveals the unspeakable—indeed the unacknowledged—*residuals* of slavery in the context of Black womanhood [revealing] the enduring effects of our racist and sexist American history in today's society."[21] Rooted in the proliferation of a Black feminist movement in the 1970s, Mitchell's study offers an alternative contextual focus. Exploring the overarching motivations driving the Black Women's Literary Renaissance and its recovery of the omitted narratives of female ancestry, Mitchell's study recognises the power of literature to "[disclose] the subjectivity and interiority of enslaved Black women and their worlds" underlying my investigation.[22]

Mitchell's study fills numerous gaps left by Rushdy, looking beyond the Civil Rights era, and paying attention to Black women's literature. However, published in 1999 and 2002 respectively, the scholarship of Rushdy and Mitchell is unavoidably restricted by their temporal frame. I propose that the liberatory narrative tradition has extended into the twenty-first century, continuing to reveal the "unacknowledged residuals of slavery" not

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[18] Rushdy, *Neo-slave Narratives* p.4
[19] Mitchell, *Freedom to Remember* p.4
[20] Ibid p.xii
[21] Ibid
[22] Ibid, p.21

only in the "context of Black womanhood" but in the context of new, transnational research into the tangled implications of enslavers of colour in the history of slavery.[23] These second-generation narratives exhibit a continuous version of Rushdy's theory of intertextuality, demonstrating the correlations between literature, its socio-political surroundings, and new historiographical developments. My overarching question is thus: in what ways is the subjectivity of enslaved women articulated in the liberatory narrative tradition between 1976 and 2016, and how do these efforts reflect the historiographical advances and socio-political contexts in which the texts were conceived?

To answer this, I turn first to more recent literary criticism that reflects the developments shaping the twenty-first century novels, specifically, I consider the slave trade's transatlantic geography, the contemporary legacies of slavery, and the reality of non-white accountability. These extended themes are exhibited, in part, by literary scholar Markus Nehl's analysis of what he calls the "second generation neo-slave narrative."[24] Nehl proposes that these twenty-first century texts are markedly different from those of the twentieth century, "[contributing] to an enormous broadening of the genre of neo-slave narratives."[25] Focusing upon Toni Morrison's 2008 *A Mercy*; Saidiya Hartman's 2007 memoir *Lose Your Mother* and Yvette Christiansës's 2006 *Unconfessed,* his analysis foregrounds the transatlantic scope of the slave trade's historiography. His discussion is also framed by an active engagement with the Afro-Pessimist school of thought "[reflecting] on the lasting impact of the transatlantic slave trade and slavery on twenty-first-century black life, [deconstructing] the naïve idea of history as progress and to focus on loss, dispossession and grief as defining features of the African diaspora."[26]

Nehl offers an important point of entry into more recent representations of enslavement. His exploration allows for an engagement with more contemporary contexts, events and historiographical developments which are naturally absent from Mitchell and Rushdy's 'first-generation' analyses. However, Nehl's work still leaves room for intervention. A key

[23] Ibid p.xii
[24] Markus Nehl, *Transnational Black Dialogues: Re-Imagining Slavery in the Twenty-First Century.* (Bielefeld: Verlag, 2016) p.23
[25] Ibid pp.34, 35
[26] Ibid p.12

historiographical development neglected by his study is the difficult question of non-white responsibility and implication. The issue of African participation in the transatlantic slave trade, as well as Native American slaveholding, have been recent topics of discussion among historians, subsequently becoming crucial sites of literary exploration. Historical scholarship such as that by Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Saidiya Hartman have probed African participation in the slave trade while historians, such as Michael F. Doran and later Barbara Krauthamer, have brought to light Native American slaveholding. My study speaks to the work of these historical scholars as I probe the gaps left by literary criticism regarding the fictional representations of non-white responsibility.

Afro-Pessimism is a key theoretical framework informing this project. Exemplifying one strand of contemporary understanding regarding the conditions of Blackness, this school of thought elucidates the importance of the current socio-political climate of racial capitalism and state-sanctioned violence that shapes the contours of this literature. Its overarching argument posits that Black people have consistently remained at a significant disadvantage in society because they remain defined by the ontology of enslavement. Saidiya Hartman, a leading scholar within the field, delineates the primary theory of Afro-Pessimism. Stressing the continuous enmeshment of slavery and freedom in the twenty-first century, she argues:

> If slavery persists as an issue in the political life of Black America, [it is] because Black lives are still imperiled and devalued by a racial calculus and political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago. This is the afterlife of slavery— skewed life chances, limited to access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment.[27]

Therefore, the concept of the afterlife of slavery—a term rooted in the observation that Blackness remains characterised ontologically by the social death imposed on Black bodies during enslavement—is central to understanding why slavery has been consistently returned to as a site of study.[28] The afterlife of slavery is illuminated by scholar Christina

[27] Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*: *A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2007) p.6

[28] Social death was a term coined by Orlando Patterson to theorise the dehumanised status of the enslaved; Afro Pessimist theorist, Frank Wilderson, applies it to delineate the primary arguments of Afro-Pessimism: "Blackness is social death, which I to say that there was never a prior moment of plenitude, never a moment of equilibrium, never a moment of social life." Frank B. Wilderson III, *Afro Pessimism*. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2020) p.226

Sharpe's conclusion that society perpetually operates in what she terms slavery's "wake": "to be in the wake is to occupy and to be occupied by the continuous and changing present of slavery's as yet unresolved unfolding."[29] The transatlantic slave trade's "deeply atemporal" nature is evidenced as the effects of this historical moment bleed from one generation to the next, blurring temporal and spatial boundaries. It is within this framework that contemporary fictions of enslavement can be understood, articulating how the "residuals" of slavery recognised by Mitchell are perpetuated in the twenty-first century and continue to influence literary production.[30]

Morrison's claims regarding the unique power of fiction vis-à-vis historical scholarship have been drawn into recent conversation by Portia Owusu. Owusu reflects upon "the endeavour on the part of Black writers to fill the void of history by questioning whether historians alone can be entrusted to properly investigate slavery, which by its very nature is a history incomplete, inaccurately recorded and unknown."[31] She endorses Morrison's "[undermining] of the authority of scientific historiography and its reliance on concrete evidence and laws," suggesting herself that "evidence, namely fact and figures [is unable] to properly represent slavery."[32] Owusu's study places several West African and African American texts in conversation, demonstrating how this history has been remembered and represented by two populations with entwined yet divergent histories. However, Owusu neglects to acknowledge the immense value of the work produced by revisionist historians which also undermines the authoritative scientific historiography by employing imagination, blurring the lines of fiction and non-fiction. My readings of the liberatory tradition therefore closely employ such works, recognising the interwoven endeavour of historical fiction and historical scholarship in the redemption of enslaved womanhood from the archives.

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[29] Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016) pp.5, 14

[30] This thesis is grounded in Black Feminist Theory and Black Studies. A plethora of twentieth and twenty-first century works rooted in these fields have thus guided the conception and development of this project, including but not limited to: bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman?* (1981); Angela Davis, *Women, Race and Class* (1981); Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens* (1983); Jesmyn Ward, *The Fire This Time: A New Generation Speaks About Race* (2016); Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (2019); Frank B. Wilderson, *Afropessimism* (2020). Specifically, the work of such Black Feminist thinkers is intrinsic to the six novels investigated throughout this thesis. These scholars embody a perpetual influence over the production of Black women's ever-metamorphosing fictions of enslavement.

[31] Portia Owusu, *Spectres from the Past: Slavery and the Politics of History in West African and African American Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2020) p.17

[32] Ibid p.18

Nevertheless, even as her concern with West African fiction differs from my own, her emphasis upon the importance of historical representation within fiction is also a cornerstone of my analysis. Owusu's contemporary exploration thus supports my understanding that twenty-first century literature continues to perform the task initiated by its predecessors, supplementing any inadequacies in the historical record even as the historiography expands.

My study extends these existing critical conversations, filling the absences in scholarship by placing six liberatory narratives by African American women—three from each textual generation—next to one another. Charting the continuities and discontinuities of this literature, I demonstrate that while this tradition is in no way static, it is tethered by shared thematic concerns and the necessity of redressing archival absences in an ever-changing historical landscape. Beginning with the publication of Jones' *Corregidora* in 1976, and concluding with Yaa Gyasi's 2016 *Homegoing*, my chosen timeframe examines how the concerns of foundational women writers of the Black Women's Literary Renaissance have been adopted and transformed over the course of four decades.[33] This starting point is a moment of significant revisionist historiography, which saw the experiences of enslaved womanhood represented in an unprecedented depth and intimacy. While the African American women's literary tradition long preceded the 1970s, the application of a range of methods—including historiographical intervention, historical fiction, and the resurrection of eighteenth and nineteenth century texts— enabled the proliferation of a specifically Black female voice that sought to rectify the historical invisibility of their foremothers.[34] Although it is impossible in this thesis to encompass the breadth of Black women's creative work produced during this moment, I argue that *Corregidora, Kindred* and *Beloved* are representative of the first generation of liberatory narratives due both to the ways in which they exhibit an intertextual relationship with their moment of production and to their particular emphasis on the "residuals" of slavery well beyond Emancipation.

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[33] 1976 and 2016 are dates emphasising the ongoing legacies of enslavement, marking the Bicentennial of American Independence and the presidential election of Donald Trump. Even as we progress throughout the twenty-first century, events in contemporary history demand that we return to slavery as a point of study to understand slavery's enduring effects.

[34] Examples of the historical scholars emergent at this moment include Deborah Gray-White; Hortense Spillers; and bell hooks.

In tracing the development of this tradition to 2016, I explore how the project initiated by Black female novelists in the 1970s has been perpetuated in the twenty-first century; I thus consider how Morrison's initial task of "[finding] and [exposing] a truth about the interior life of people who didn't write it" has developed.[35] The timeline of this study therefore encompasses the emergent historiographical developments informing the liberatory narrative tradition as it moves from the first to the second generation. My chosen second generation liberatory narratives— *A Mercy, The Cherokee Rose* and *Homegoing*— are once again representative of the work produced at the turn of the century, but not exhaustive. They have been selected due to the ways in which they exemplify both continuities with, and clear breaks from, the twentieth century texts. Morrison's work provides the pivot here in that her writing spans both generations. The generational shift apparent from *Beloved* to *A Mercy* explicitly illuminates how Black women's historical fictions develop according to the differing needs of a national past and present. The latter novels express concerns beyond the recuperation of Black women's subjectivity, delving into the slave trade's multifaceted and multi-spatial nature as they embrace new themes and knowledges.

My analysis takes an interdisciplinary approach, arguing that revisionist historiography is intrinsic to the socio-political frameworks that produced these novels. Charting the continuous intertextual relationship between history and fiction, my study demonstrates that these parallel forms apply similar methodologies: imagination becomes the tool of historians and fiction authors alike to breakdown the restrictions posed by written records. For example, Saidiya Hartman's methodology of critical fabulation provides a recombinant narrative of fiction and non-fiction "to displace the received or authorised account, and to imagine what might have happened or might have been said."[36] Such methodologies represent a pivotal shift in the writing of history, consciously engaging with the interiority of the enslaved. Nonetheless, even as these works speculate the intricacies of this past, the research of revisionist historians remains rooted in non-fiction: "Narrative restraint, the refusal to fill in the gaps and provide closure, is a requirement of this method."[37]

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[35] Morrison, "The Site of Memory" p.239
[36] Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts" p.4
[37] Ibid p.4

Consequently, my thesis emphasises the particularity of historical fiction in successfully rectifying the inadequacies of the archives. Characterised by Hartman as "a death sentence, a tomb, a display of the violated body, an inventory of property," the archive—the extant sources that make up the historical record—marginalises and erases the representation of enslaved women.[38] Yet through the use of literary conventions—such as non-linear narratives, the supernatural and the fantastic, the construction of complex characters—the authors of historical fiction conjure an unprecedented counternarrative of Black women's history which goes beyond that of historical scholarship.

In the following chapters, I consider the idiosyncrasy of historical fiction as I examine how the subjecthood of enslaved women and their descendants is manifested throughout the two generations of liberatory narratives. The organisation of this thesis reflects the three significant historiographical developments influencing the arc of this literary tradition: enslaved women's subjectivity; the mutable geographies of the slave trade; and the ambiguous allocation of responsibility for the enslavement and racial oppression of Black peoples. Each of these focal points reflect the historiographical concern inherent to their moment of literary conception. Consequently, this thesis structure is thematic *and* chronological as I trace the trajectory of the liberatory narrative tradition's core focuses over the course forty years. As I explore these thematic concerns, moving in a linear fashion from this study's earliest novel, *Corregidora* (1976) to *Homegoing* (2016), I demonstrate that there are intersections as well as disparities between the two generations. Nonetheless, the central focus of each chapter is demonstrative of the intertextual relationship between the texts and the historiographical and socio-political context informing their production: the representation of aesthetic identity is particular only to *Corregidora, Kindred* and *Beloved*; the significance of geography spans both generations; but implication is particular only to *A Mercy, The Cherokee Rose* and *Homegoing*.

The opening chapter of this study asks: how have the authors of *Corregidora, Kindred* and *Beloved* used historical fiction to redeem the archival representations of enslaved women, in particular the brutalisation and dehumanisation of their bodies? In answering this

[38] Ibid, p.2

question, I argue that these novels reveal various subjective aspects of enslaved women's intimate worlds that are inaccessible to historical scholarship. By subjectivity, I refer to the individuality and consciousness inherent to each character, shaped by their personal experiences. Reflected through intimate thoughts, experiences, and emotions, the literary representation of subjectivity revitalises the humanity and femininity too often omitted from the archives. Specifically, I argue that one way literature presents the subjectivity of enslaved women, is through 'rescuing' the physical bodies of enslaved women through the construction of what I term 'aesthetic identity.' This concept speaks to the sense of self derived from the 'one-of-a-kind' nature of a person's appearance. Aesthetic identity enables us to visualise these enigmatic ancestors and comprises both the features a person is born with, for example facial features, height, skin colour, and the bodily marks acquired throughout a lifetime. Such imposed marks are unique to the individual, corporeally embodying the ways in which personal experiences have shaped them. In the context of this study, these bodily marks are those occasioned as a consequence of slavery, such as scars, brandings and wounds.

Too often, enslaved women have been dehumanised by reductive representations that depict them as anonymous, brutalised bodies. The aesthetic identity rectifies this as, while the focus is on the body, the physical appearance becomes an expression of the individual subject's inimitability. This concept deconstructs the quantitative representation of enslaved peoples, transforming Black women from racialised and sexualised objects, into subjects defined by humanity, femininity and resilience. Therefore, even as we bear witness through fiction to the oppressive circumstances marking enslaved womanhood, the aesthetic identity ensures that we do not lose sight of the individual. Necessarily constructed from imagination, as well as being informed by historical record and research, I propose that fiction is therefore the only way to recuperate fully the aesthetic identity of enslaved women.

In Chapter Two I ask: how is the representation of enslaved women and their descendants affected by geography and place, not only within the national geography of the United States but in the transatlantic world more broadly? Significantly, I do not use geography and space as synonymous terms. By geographies of enslavement, I refer to the physical locations

of slavery and its legacies. The first-generation novels operate within an American geography of enslavement, destabilising the dichotomy of Northern freedom and Southern bondage. *Corregidora, Kindred* and *Beloved* take place across various temporal and spatial geographies within the United States including Kentucky, Maryland, Ohio, and California, from the era of enslavement into the twentieth century. The second-generation narratives speak to the next gap in the archives by expanding the geography of enslavement to take in its transatlantic history, encompassing colonial America, the Atlantic Ocean, and West Africa. I use geography, landscape, and place interchangeably, referring to the *material* environments of bondage and its afterlife. Conversely, the spaces of enslavement signify the intangible organisation of these overarching geographies. Throughout the first and second-generation texts alike, the various articulations of space considerably influence the identities and interior worlds of women of colour. While spaces of domination are characterised by slavery, colonialism, and racist ideologies, we also encounter redemptive spaces in which women of colour resiliently navigate methods of survival in the face of such identities.

The final section of the thesis is concerned with who should be, and who has been, held accountable for enslavement and its legacies, asking the question: how do the authors of the liberatory narrative tradition insert alternative narratives of responsibility and implication without losing sight of enslaved women's subjectivity and interior worlds? The second-generation narratives most explicitly complicate the entrenched racial and gender dichotomies of oppressed and oppressor, implicating white women, the Cherokee Nation and West African populations. However, it is important to note that none of these novels, nor my analysis of responsibility and implication, are concerned with placing blame. The intimate portrayal of slavery's various 'antagonistic' populations means that, even as the novelists of *A Mercy, Homegoing* and *The Cherokee Rose* represent the uncomfortable realities of female and non-white responsibility, the ambiguous intersections of these populations are at the forefront of the novels. As there is never a singular definition of 'the oppressor', I propose that the thematic concern of responsibility and implication within the second generation of texts is a matter of ambivalence, using fiction to bear witness to difficult historical realities while blurring the dichotomies of power and vulnerability, freedom and unfreedom.

Each section of the thesis offers close readings of my selected novels, demonstrating how each of the three thematic concerns are expressed throughout the liberatory narrative tradition. My first chapter focusses upon the first generation of liberatory narratives, embodied in this study by Gayl Jones' *Corregidora*, Octavia Butler's *Kindred*, and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. Read alongside a framework of twenty-first century revisionist historical scholarship by Stephanie M. Camp, Marisa J. Fuentes and Saidiya Hartman, I explore how these late twentieth-century texts address the first of many gaps in the archive of slavery: remedying the historical anonymity of enslaved women through the construction of aesthetic identity. The first half of this chapter investigates the various ways in which these novelists contrive the aesthetic identity. Significantly, I suggest that the methodological differences used to do so are indicative of the developmental nature of the liberatory narrative tradition, even across the first-generation texts inherent to the same cultural milieu. *Corregidora* and *Kindred* imagine and reclaim the lost aesthetic identity of enslaved women through the appearance of contemporary descendants, using historical and speculative fiction techniques so to conjure what these maternal ancestors looked like during their own time. Conversely, the protagonist of *Beloved* is born into bondage thus returning us to the historical moment of slavery, in turn, offering the most intimate and direct imagining of enslaved women's appearance. Despite these differences, the representation of physical appearance across the three texts re-inscribes Black womanhood with the femininity and inimitability that has too-often been eclipsed by the violence of slavery and the archives.

However, it is not enough to only acknowledge the inherent humanity of enslaved women. Demonstrative of the ambiguities marking the reclamation of these foremothers, we also bear witness to their encounters with, and legacies of, violence and brutality. I thus appropriate literary scholar Jarvis McInnis' question "can [one] indeed imbue geographies of domination with new meanings and indexical possibilities," in the context of recovering enslaved womanhood.[39] Nevertheless, as liberatory narratives, I argue that *Corregidora*,

[39] Jarvis McInnis, "Black Women's Geographies and The Afterlives of The Sugar Plantation," *American Literary History* 31, no. 4 (2019) p.744

Kindred and *Beloved* do not allow their protagonists to be consumed and overwritten by the degradation of this past. The latter half of this chapter considers the recuperation of enslaved women by reconfiguring what it means to be a 'marked' woman. In each text, in varying ways, disfigurement comes to be embraced as a signifier of subjectivity, not objectification.

Chapter two explores the influence of geography and place upon Black women's identities in *Corregidora, Kindred*, *Beloved* and the twenty-first century novels *A Mercy,* by Toni Morrison, and *Homegoing* by Yaa Gyasi. This thematic focus represents the axis of the two textual generations because they are both concerned with the spatial processes shaping Black womanhood in the various geographies of slavery. The opening section discusses the American geography of the first-generation novels, arguing that *Beloved, Kindred* and *Corregidora* each insist upon the nationwide and timeless effects of slavery upon the articulation of Black womanhood. Applying a framework of Gloria Anzaldua's 1987 *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, I demonstrate how these novels refute the notion that the effects of enslavement are confined to the antebellum South; Morrison, Butler and Jones destabilise the temporal and spatial conceptualisation of geographies of enslavement in the United States.

The rest of the chapter, and the primary focus of this section, centres upon what I identify as the next gap in the archives addressed by the liberatory narrative tradition. In line with the historiographical developments of the 1990s and early 2000s, *A Mercy* and *Homegoing* look beyond slavery as an American phenomenon, narrating enslaved womanhood from a transatlantic perspective. I consider the foundational work of cultural theorist Paul Gilroy and historian Marcus Rediker who bring about this shift, pushing the understanding of enslaved women's subjectivity into new terrain.[40] The influence of geography and space upon enslaved women's identities is more explicit within these second-generation narratives, portraying the degradation and fragmentation of women's selfhood to be an inherently spatial act. Coerced into spaces of domination in the broader, interconnected geography of colonial America, Africa and the Atlantic Ocean—embodied, for example, by

[40] Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1996)

the slave ship and the castle dungeon—the women of colour of these novels are forced to undergo dramatic metamorphoses in self because of their new multi-spatial landscapes. Consequently, enslaved womanhood comes to be marked by a condition of rootlessness and dispossession under the colonial, racial and patriarchal organisation of transnational space.

Nonetheless, this thematic concern once again illuminates the ambiguity marking the reclamation of this history. The transatlantic geographies of *A Mercy* and *Homegoing* cannot be singularly defined by oppression and exile as, I argue, they also hold the path resistance and/or liberation for women of colour. The repossession of selfhood is achieved to varying levels across the two texts meaning that my discussion of each is framed differently. While ascertaining liberation for the enslaved women of *A Mercy* is an impossibility, I draw upon Camp's notion of the "rival geography" to demonstrate how enslaved women resiliently carve out spaces of survival in the transatlantic world. Conversely, the temporal frame of *Homegoing* extends far beyond the years of enslavement, alluding to the possibility of renegotiating transatlantic spaces so to liberate the descendants of the enslaved. Returning to McInnis' scholarship on the redemption of the plantation, I apply his concept of "reterritorialization [defined] as the process by which African Americans attempt to reconcile and imagine a new relationship [to spaces of oppression,]" to demonstrate Gyasi's reappropriation of transatlantic spaces, transforming them into sites of contemporary redemption.[41] While the articulation of a self-defined, coherent identity manifests at different levels within *A Mercy* and *Homegoing*, Morrison and Gyasi alike emphasise the centrality of embracing a transatlantic, multi-spatial identity in order to navigate self-empowerment. I consequently guide this discussion with allusions to Gilroy's focus upon the "inescapability and legitimate value of mutation, hybridity and intermixture" in the formation of Black identity.[42]

My final chapter investigates the developing depictions of responsibility and implication across the liberatory narrative tradition. Focusing upon *A Mercy*, *Homegoing* and Tiya Miles'

[41] McInnis, "Black Women's Geographies and The Afterlives of The Sugar Plantation" p.744
[42] Gilroy, *Black Atlantic* p.223

The Cherokee Rose: A Novel of Gardens and Ghosts, I argue that these novels confront what I recognise to be the next gap in archive: the difficult realities of female and non-white responsibility for the slave trade and the oppression of Black peoples. This chapter is concerned with how my selected novels push against the 'master' narrative of enslavement, undermining the entrenched understanding that this was an institution driven solely by white, patriarchal omnipotence. I begin with a discussion of *A Mercy,* exploring the complicity of white women in the hardening of racial binaries in colonial America. Morrison returns to the earliest moments of American history so to revise our perception of responsibility in this history. Focussing upon the gradual fragmentation of a diverse community of women in this space, Morrison offers an intimate account of a poor white woman's betrayal of the women of colour she is surrounded by, choosing racial alliance over loyalty to her gender and status.

As the tradition moves further into the twenty-first century, the increasingly uncomfortable realities of non-white responsibility are addressed. The primary focus of this chapter is consequently on very recent scholarship on Indigenous and West African involvement in the slave trade and slavery itself. First, a discussion of *The Cherokee Rose* reveals that this narrative was never a matter of white and Black, implicating the Cherokee nation in slaveholding and the perpetuation of racial binaries. Miles diversifies the definitions of the oppressor through representations of the Native American enslaver, forcing our eyes open to the dark realities of Cherokee enacted brutality. The intimacy between historical fiction and scholarship is suggested as I intertwine my analysis with Miles' non-fictional work as well as that by Barbara Krauthamer, exploring the multi-disciplinary effort to fill archival gaps; however, I illustrate that as a work of historical fiction, *The Cherokee Rose* conveys the convoluted character of this past in a manner inaccessible to scholarship. Framed by Tiffany Lethabo King's analogy of the shoal as "a space that exists beyond binary thinking" to theorise the intersections of Native and African American histories, I demonstrate that the coming together of these populations during enslavement cannot be categorised by one definition.[43] By offering an intimate insight into the plantation's diverse community of

[43] Tiffany Lethabo King, *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies* (Duke University Press, 2019) p.28

women, Miles highlights the potency of solidarity in its ability to blur racial divisions and overcome hierarchies of power.

I subsequently explore the representation of West African responsibility in Gyasi's *Homegoing*. Depicting the active role of the Fante and Asante nations in the transnational slave trade, Gyasi demonstrates the multifaceted entanglements of European and West African populations in the capture and sale of human beings. Throughout my investigation, I allude to the historical scholarship which has expanded our understanding of the complex operations of the transatlantic slave trade, drawing upon the work of Saidiya Hartman, Marcus Rediker and Henry Louis Gates Jr. Nonetheless, I remain focussed upon the particularity of fiction in the portrayal of West African responsibility, specifically considering Gyasi's representation of the subjective effects of this history of betrayal upon the enslaved *and* the enslaver. Significantly, like Miles, Gyasi suggests the inappropriacy of indiscriminately allocating this responsibility throughout West African populations. Demonstrating the importance of the individual woman as a point of difference and dissent, *Homegoing* troubles the potential dichotomy of power and vulnerability emergent between West African nations.

The Cherokee Rose and *Homegoing* are both set between the temporal realm of slavery and the contemporary moment, exploring the oppressive realities of Cherokee slaveholding, the self-motivated involvement of West African populations in the slave trade, as well as the difficult legacies these histories have created for future generations. Thus, the latter half of this chapter investigates the afterlife of slavery explored by Miles and Gyasi. Returning to the importance of the liberatory narrative form, I explore how these second-generation texts suggest that the wounds inflicted by non-white implication in the history of enslavement can begin to heal. This is achieved through the coming together of the ostensibly antagonistic populations of oppressor and oppressed, reinscribing the former relationships of treachery and division with newfound definitions of unity and security.

Shaping Subjectivity: Visualising Enslaved Women in the First Generation of Liberatory Narratives

This chapter explores the ways that writers of first generation liberatory narratives have answered the question: "How do we narrate the fleeting glimpses of enslaved [women] subjects in the archives?"[44] Through recent historical scholarship and literary exploration, an unprecedented account of Black subjectivity has actively transformed the representation of enslavement. This chapter explicitly focuses on the remedial efforts of the liberatory narrative tradition initiated in the late twentieth century and considers the ways that historical fiction has transformed our understandings of enslaved womanhood. Unrestricted by the boundaries of realism and historical fact that circumscribe its scholarly counterpart, such novels are particularly well placed to represent the subjectivity of enslaved women. While the speculative efforts of the revisionist historiography to "[listen] for the unsaid, [translate] misconstrued words, and [refashion] disfigured lives" are vital to my investigation, Hartman acknowledges that historians remain forced to "respect the limits of what cannot be known."[45] This chapter thus considers how Gayl Jones' *Corregidora* (1976), Octavia Butler's *Kindred* (1979), and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) offer accounts of the interior and subjective lives of enslaved women. Specifically, I explore the significance of what I call "aesthetic identity," proposing that unlike historians' accounts, these novels construct an image of what these women physically *looked* like. Much scholarly and literary

[44] Marisa J. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women and the Archive* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016) p.1
[45] Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," p.4

emphasis has fallen upon redeeming the "ephemeral archival presences [of] the fragmentary, disfigured bodies of enslaved women," as represented in the historical archives.[46] I propose that the granting of aesthetic identity in the liberatory novels uniquely supports this process, restoring subjectivity to enslaved women, but also giving twentieth century readers the ability to imagine them as fully embodied subjects.

The construction of complex characters within the liberatory narrative genre provides a crucial corrective to history at the end of the twentieth century: (re)constructing narratives of Black women's experiences where they have been absent from the historical archive. The work of liberatory narratives, ensuring that enslaved women "are represented more authentically as agents, as subjects," is closely related to the redemptive work of historical scholarship.[47] This is demonstrated by revisionist historian Stephanie Camp's theorisation that "[e]nslaved people possessed multiple social bodies."[48] Camp emphasises the importance of three particular "bodies": the oppressed body; the body "lived in moments and spaces of control and force, of terror and suffering;" and the resistant, outlawed body.[49] The building of fictional characters by Jones, Butler and Morrison precedes Camp's scholarship but I read these literary narratives and the historical scholarship as part of the same trans-disciplinary project of recovering the breadth of enslaved women's experiences. However, as this chapter elucidates the particularity of historical fiction, I am therefore interested in exploring where fiction diverges from such scholarship in its intimate representation of what enslaved women's bodies physically looked like.

My literary analysis extends Camp's historicist theorisation, exploring how fiction can reclaim enslaved women's 'whole' bodies in ways not open to historians. Crucial to my argument is therefore the manifestation of enslaved women's physical appearances, or what could be considered the enslaved woman's "fourth body," only visible in fictional texts. This fourth body is wholly founded upon imagination, and thus, I propose that fiction can reconstruct enslaved women's physical appearances in ways that history ultimately

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[46] Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives* p.1
[47] Mitchell, *Freedom to Remember* p.5
[48] Camp, "The Pleasures of Resistance" p.543
[49] Ibid p.549

cannot. Rather than relying on Camp's terminology to articulate my own understanding of the specific abilities of fiction, I refer to this fourth body— or what these figures *look* like— as their "aesthetic identity." I am interested in the ways in which these novels represent enslaved women's corporeal bodies beyond their brutalisation and dehumanisation, drawing an explicit connection between these characters' external appearance on the one hand and their interiority and self-hood on the other. I demonstrate that in the literary reconstruction of enslaved women's pasts, aesthetic identity cements subjectivity and personhood by shaping aspects of character inaccessible to historical scholarship.

And yet, even as Jones, Butler and Morrison reclaim and redefine Black women's bodies, the extent to which this is possible must be considered. In this I follow and extend literary scholar Jarvis McInnis' question about the space of the plantation: "can [one] indeed imbue geographies of domination with new meanings and indexical possibilities[?]"[50] I apply his query to consider whether the bodies of enslaved women can ever be fully 'recovered' from their historical expendability. Moreover, the resulting visibility of the physical body makes the relaying of these experiences increasingly immersive and tangible for the reader. The intimacy of 'seeing' raises questions of voyeurism, as suggested by Portia Owusu's understanding that such slave narratives are "a tour de force to the point of being voyeuristic."[51] I consequently explore whether the act of recovering these figures is even desirable. Importantly, I argue that *Corregidora, Kindred* and *Beloved* address these complexities by reclaiming what it means to be a 'marked' woman. These novels transform scarification from a sign of objectification into one of subjectivity, signalling not victimhood and subjugation but resilience and survival. This chapter therefore traces how Morrison, Butler and Jones create multi-faceted characters, demonstrating both the distinctive role played by fiction in the shaping of enslaved women's subjectivity and the ways in which they negotiate the ambiguities of reclaiming and representing these bodies.

The possibility of visualising what enslaved women physically looked like is achieved differently throughout each of these first-generation novels. I draw parallels between how

[50] McInnis, "Black Women's Geographies and The Afterlives of The Sugar Plantation" p.744
[51] Owusu, *Spectres from the Past* p.22

this is accomplished in *Corregidora* and *Kindred*: the aesthetic identities of enslaved women are manifested vicariously through the visibility of their twentieth century descendants. Taking up Fuentes' discussion of how historical research can counter the ways that the "violence of slavery concealed enslaved bodies and voices from others in their own time," I explore the temporality of these texts to show how these authors *reveal* bodies and voices in *our* time.[52] While the archival representations of enslaved women are sparse, Fuentes probes those records which do exist, "[stretching] archival fragments by reading along the bias grain to eke out extinguished and invisible […] lives."[53] This chapter highlights the related work of "stretching" done by fiction writing.

While *Corregidora* and *Kindred* precede Fuentes' work, these texts similarly demonstrate that the violence of slavery obscured the perception of enslaved women's bodies, perpetuating a condition of invisibility throughout the historical archive. Consequently, these novelists extend the era of enslavement to the present, demonstrating how these lost aesthetic identities can be reclaimed in the faces and bodies of their descendants. The existence of photographs and racially unbiased descriptions of enslaved women are largely absent from the archive, meaning that there is a lack of historical evidence explicitly depicting what enslaved women looked like. In contrast, the physical appearances of Black women in the twentieth century are visible and known. The matrilineal line of descent therefore serves to visualise the characters' ancestors. However, this is a vexed project, made clear by Butler's and Jones' exploration of what it means to inherit the likeness, and therefore the trauma, of the past.

Therefore, as Fuentes later does with written records, historical fiction allows Jones and Butler to manifest the appearances of contemporary Black women in order to speculate what enslaved women looked like in their own time. Butler and Jones imagine enslaved women as fully embodied individuals by rooting their aesthetic identities in the highly visible and tangible bodies of the twentieth century: the recovery of enslaved women in *Corregidora* and *Kindred* can therefore not be achieved without the 'evidence' found in the

[52] Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives* p.7
[53] Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives* p.7

contemporary moment. In Morrison's *Beloved*, the imagining of enslaved women's bodies is achieved differently. Unlike the protagonists of *Corregidora* and *Kindred*, Morrison's protagonist is born into the historical moment of slavery. We do not see Sethe *through* the aesthetic identity of her successors; instead, her appearance is distinctive and untethered to that of anyone else. Despite these literary differences, Jones, Butler, and Morrison each demonstrate how easily the subjectivity and personhood embodied by the aesthetic identity came to be effaced by the historical records, the institution of slavery and the act of being scarred.

The Fraught Imagining of Enslaved Women's Aesthetic Identities

The violent objectification of enslaved women's bodies is portrayed by Gayl Jones' transgenerational trauma narrative, *Corregidora,* in the way that Jones' protagonist, Ursa Corregidora, inherits her maternal ancestors' memories of enslavement. Under the tyrannical rule of "Old man Corregidora, the Portuguese slave breeder and whoremonger," enslaved women were branded by their ability to "breed well or make a good whore."[54] Succeeding their legal freedom, redemption from these dehumanising definitions is possible. However, to paraphrase Fuentes, the violence of enslavement continues to distort and conceal the bodies of the Corregidora women.[55] Consequently, Jones does not construct an explicit visual of them in the period of their enslavement, rather manifesting their subjectivity, femininity and humanity through their successive generations. The aesthetic identity of *Corregidora's* twentieth century descendants, Ursa and her unnamed mother, is therefore mapped onto the enigmatic bodies of enslaved women. When Ursa returns to her hometown, she notes that "[her mother] had gotten bigger around the waist, and looked like Grandmama and Great Gram used to look, the graying hair plaited on the sides and tied in a knot in the back [...] the way I knew I would look when I got to her age."[56] Despite the visible signs of aging, "she was still beautiful in *their* way of still being beautiful, and the way I knew I would still be beautiful when I got to be their age."[57] Significantly, the construction of this shared appearance enables us to visualise the novel's enslaved women beyond the subjugation marking their past. The femininity and personhood of Ursa's mother

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[54] Gayl Jones, *Corregidora* (London: Virago Press, 2019) pp.7, 133
[55] Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives* p.7
[56] Jones, *Corregidora* p.114
[57] Ibid p.115

is recognised, in turn, gifting their maternal ancestors with these personal characteristics too. The anonymising group identity defining Great Gram and Gram as two of Corregidora's many "coffee bean [coloured]" women is replaced by the intricacies of the way they did their hair and the increased softness of their physique gained with age.[58] Moreover, Ursa's study of her mother overwrites the former status of property, stating that this beauty is "theirs." The italicising of this possessive pronoun emphasises their self-possession, indicating that their beauty, naturally inherent to their bodies, cannot be owned nor defined by anyone else. This matrilineal aesthetic identity thus reinstates bodily ownership.

Typically, the enslaved were unable to leave a physical inheritance to their descendants. Those things which have been inherited are largely intangible, for example, the passing down of oral stories.[59] As part of a remedial literary tradition, Jones uses historical fiction in order to rectify this. *Corregidora* imagines this aesthetic identity, in particular the beauty of the Corregidora women, as a bodily heirloom passed between generations, re-establishing maternal bonds. Ursa's mother's physical appearance— passed down from Great Gram to Gram, and later to Ursa— enables the visualisation of enslaved women formerly absent from written and oral archival accounts. Even if this depiction is indirect, meaning we gain access through the descendants living in and/or native to a non-slave society, we are given the opportunity to imagine enslaved women as embodied subjects.

Published in 1976, *Corregidora* is the earliest liberatory narrative examined in this study. Our opportunity to visualise enslaved women through this matrilineal line of descent is one of the first gestures toward the reclamation of enslaved women's aesthetic identity. Perhaps because of this early status, of the three texts explored in this chapter, *Corregidora* is the most faithful to the archives. Redefining enslaved women as subjects is a lesser force in the novel, instead focusing upon how the violence of slavery and its historical records negated aesthetic identity, humanity and subjectivity. Jones comments upon the problematic representation of enslaved womanhood in the archives— or in the context of

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[58] Ibid p.182

[59] Oral tradition and folklore within African American culture is discussed by literary scholar Aoi Mori, proposing that spoken word was depended upon "almost exclusively […] to preserve their thought because access to literacy was forbidden during slavery." Aoi Mori, *Toni Morrison and Womanist Discourse*. (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 1999) p.20

this text, lack thereof. Ursa's grandmothers zealously stress the necessity of bearing witness to the history of Brazilian slavery because, in the wake of abolition in 1888, "[authorities] burned all the documents," so to "leave no evidence of what they done."[60] While the institution of slavery, its inherent oppressions and, in turn, enslaved women, are wiped from the historical record, these events still happened: "*They burned all the documents, Ursa, but they didn't burn what they put in our minds."*[61] The Corregidora women maintain their historical visibility by conjuring an oral and bodily archive, passing their narrative onto their daughters. However, the women do not reimagine the lost written archive by inserting an account of their subjectivity, instead conveying their experiences in a dialogue reflective of Hartman's contemporary criticism of such records: "the stories that exist [in the historical archives] are not about them, but rather about the violence, excess, mendacity, and reason that seized hold of their lives, transformed them into commodities and corpses."[62] Jones therefore reappropriates the objectifying language of the archival records in order to denounce it.

We are not given the opportunity to visualise the particularities of the Corregidora women during their enslavement beyond the opening depiction of Dorita: "[Corregidora] took her out of the field when she was still a child […] She was the pretty little one with the almond eyes and coffee-bean skin."[63] This physical depiction is rooted in her objectification and commodification. Dorita's identity and worth are immediately defined by her sexualization, suggested by the way she is described through metaphors of food which allude to the consumable nature of her body. The connection between the edibility of Black bodies and their degradation is drawn by literary scholar, Kyla Wazana Tompkins, in her readings of nineteenth century literature. Tompkins proposes that "the libidinous logic of American racism leads to the extreme image of the Black body itself as food;" this, in turn, "reduces the Black body to total dehumanisation as it allows the consumer to digest and symbolically destroy that body."[64] This edibility demonstrated in nineteenth century works is re-

[60] Jones, *Corregidora* pp.75, 12
[61] Ibid p.75 (original emphasis)
[62] Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts" p.2
[63] Jones, *Corregidora* p.9
[64] Kyla Wazana Tompkins, *Racial Indigestion: Eating Bodies in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 2012) pp. 90,95

appropriated by Jones, suggesting that Dorita is harvested from the field, 'grown' to be devoured by her enslaver. By alluding to the living, natural world, Dorita's youth is imbued with a softness and vivacity. However, plucked from this natural environment when suitably ripe and ready in the eyes of the European 'consumer', her personhood is brought under threat.

At first, Great Gram and Grandmama perpetuate this objectification as they narrativise deeply personal accounts of their abuse, representing themselves as unfeeling, detached bodies. Owusu's notion of the voyeuristic portrayal of enslavement through fiction is thus particularly relevant to *Corregidora*, reflected through uncomfortably vivid accounts of the past relayed to Ursa by her grandmothers.[65] Ursa's maternal ancestors offer graphic depictions of brutality, for example, when Dorita is taken "up in [Corregidora's] room [as] that's where he bring me when he want to scold me."[66] Here, Great Gram recounts how "he was squeezing me all up in the pussy and then digging his hands up in there."[67] In this depiction of abuse, we lose sight of the individual at its core, focusing largely upon the actions of the oppressor. The lack of personal, possessive pronouns, referring to her beaten genitals as 'the' rather than 'my pussy,' reproduces the archival depiction of enslaved women as "a display of the violated body, an inventory of property."[68] These intensely intimate moments of voyeurism therefore risk perpetuating the dehumanisation of the original event as, while the physical body is at the centre of this memory, personhood is erased.

Moreover, the verb usage of 'squeezing' and 'digging' is not only inherently sadistic, it additionally alludes to the "similitude of the land and a woman's body, of colonization and sexual mastery."[69] In an analysis of sixteenth century discourse on discovery in the New World, historian Louis Montrose observes the tendency to "[gender] the New World as feminine and the sexualizing of its exploration, conquest and settlement."[70] As a Black

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[65] Owusu, *Spectres from the Past* p.26
[66] Jones, *Corregidora* p.131
[67] Ibid
[68] Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts" p.2
[69] Louis Montrose, "The Work of Gender in the Discourse of Discovery," *Representations*, No.33 (1991) p.12
[70] Ibid p.2

woman in the slave economy, Great Gram is part of this landscape of conquest. Even as Jones reproduces the reductive language of historical records, this telling from the Black woman's perspective provides an important change from the sixteenth century texts, written from "a masculine subject position for readers to occupy and share."[71] Narrated by Great Gram, the female object becomes the (albeit detached) subject meaning the readership no longer "[occupies] and [shares]" the subject's position. Instead, we are onlookers to the heinous violence of slavery, embodying a key transformation enabled by fiction, "[placing] slaves at the centre of the history of slavery."[72] Consequently, even as Dorita perpetuates her bodily degradation, her position as narrator of this graphic account of oppression produces a discomfort not previously elicited by the traditional telling of this past. Jones uses the counter-archive of fiction to draw our attention to these problematic representations. She causes unease so to challenge a re-examination of the representation of enslaved womanhood, illuminating how the language of the archives has erased their humanity. Therefore, *Corregidora* makes the first gesture toward the significance of the aesthetic identity as a factor comprising subjectivity and identity. However, Jones' literary resistance is largely conveyed through the re-appropriation and re-orientation of the violence of the archives, rather than the construction of enslaved women as embodied subjects. The importance of the aesthetic identity is expanded in *Kindred* and *Beloved*.

Butler's 1979 novel *Kindred* exemplifies a second literary space for the redemption of enslaved womanhood. However, even as Butler manifests enslaved women's aesthetic identity through the matrilineal line of descent, this account is more intimate than that of *Corregidora*. Butler's protagonist, Dana Franklin, physically returns to antebellum Maryland, enabling the visualisation of enslaved women as embodied subjects in their own historical moment. Dana, an African American woman living in 1976 California, is repeatedly transported to nineteenth century Maryland by an inexplicable need to protect her bloodline, thornily embodied by her white, slaveholding ancestor Rufus Weylin, and her enslaved foremothers. As within *Corregidora*, *Kindred* not only exposes the violence of slavery as an institution, but also the destructive nature of slavery's historical records. These

[71] Ibid p.13
[72] Owusu, *Spectres from the Past* p.26

novelists illuminate the archives' ability to erase the humanity, and the physical existence, of people. Without retelling their narrative, all memory of the Corregidora women would have been erased by a lack of written records. This erasure happens to Dana's maternal ancestors, demonstrated when discussing her family records: "Grandmother Hagar. Hagar Weylin, born in 1831. Hers was the first name listed. And she had given her parents' names as Rufus Weylin and Alice Green-something Weylin."[73] In being the first name listed, the significance of those preceding Hagar is undermined. Butler thus sends her protagonist to the enigmatic years prior to documentation, ensuring that those individuals lost to the archives are found. These women are made visible through their distant descendant Dana, specifically through her aesthetic identity. Dana is brought face to face with her maternal ancestors, transposing her aesthetic identity onto their previously anonymous bodies. Significantly, Dana, Alice and Alice's mother are introduced as free women during the antebellum period, establishing their innate subjectivity and femininity in these early encounters. This is not to suggest that subjectivity is only possible under freedom, instead enabling Butler to trace the effects of enslavement on identity by showing the changes in Dana, Alice and her mother as they move from freedom to enslavement.

Dana's appearance is reflected in the image of Alice and her mother in their early meetings, enabling us to vividly imagine this familial line. This similarity is first signalled when a young Rufus observes "If you wore a dress and tied your hair up, you'd look a lot like [Alice's mother.]"[74] This is affirmed when Dana meets Alice's mother after a violent encounter with a white patroller: "I wet the mother's face a little, washed blood from around her nose and mouth. From what I could see of her, she seemed to be about my age, slender like her child, like me in fact. And like me, she was fine boned."[75] While Alice's mother is not enslaved, the ontology of Blackness as less than or non-human renders her vulnerable to various forms of abuse. However, Dana does not view Alice's mother as a brutalised body, looking beyond the externally imposed marks of Black inferiority, literally washing away the blood that distorts her aesthetic identity. Yet even as Butler reimagines this history so to reappropriate the reductive representations of enslaved womanhood, *Kindred* acknowledges the

[73] Octavia Butler, *Kindred* (London: Headline, 2018) p.23
[74] Butler, *Kindred* p.24
[75] Ibid p.34

contentious realities of this past and its archive. While Alice's mother is somewhat redeemed through this mirrored aesthetic identity, she embodies the fragmentary, violent nature of the archive. Alice's mother remains unnamed, disappearing from the narrative without explanation. Her fate echoes the historical reality of the countless anonymous, unspoken-for enslaved women that the liberatory narrative tradition works to redeem. Butler's subsequent depictions of Alice and Dana are more extensive, redressing the overarching unknowability of history's enslaved women, but also of Alice's own mother.

This shared physical appearance becomes increasingly visible when Dana arrives in the past following Alice's rape at the hands of Rufus: "What had happened here seemed obvious. The girl, her torn dress […] her face was swollen on one side."[76] Like her mother, Alice is legally free, yet her race and gender generate an entitlement to her body that permits Rufus to rape her. Dana's gaze once again looks beyond the markings of abuse disfiguring Alice's physical identity—her torn clothing and bruised face— instead focussing upon her feminine form. When Dana "looked at her in surprise [she observed that Alice was] tall and slender and dark. A little like me. Maybe a lot like me."[77] Omitting the imposed markers of racialised and gendered inferiority, Dana builds a vivid image of *their* aesthetic identity. Consequently, these previously absent maternal ancestors are not only given a space in this historical narrative, but Butler's visual of three fine boned, tall, dark, and slender women also makes them tangible for the reader and for their distant descendant.

The doubling of Dana and Alice establishes an interchangeability that is maintained throughout the novel, represented as "two halves of the same woman."[78] This should not be read as an undermining of the individuality of the enslaved, though. Butler shows an active appreciation for the distinctiveness of the enslaved population, establishing separate aesthetic identities for the other figures of the novel. For example, Sarah—the "Mammy" figure of the plantation—is described as having "large dark eyes set in eyes set in a full unlined face several shades lighter than my own. She had been pretty herself not long

[76] Butler, *Kindred* pp.127, 128
[77] Ibid p.129
[78] Ibid p.254

ago."[79] Despite the comparison between skin tones, Sarah is not represented in Dana's image but is seen as an individual. Conversely, Alice and Dana— "beheld" by Rufus as "the woman"— are collectively distinct from the novel's other women.[80] As within *Corregidora*, Dana's physical resemblance to her lost foremothers can be read as commentary on, or a creation of, the inheritance left by the enslaved. The aesthetic identity is a core aspect of an individual's subjectivity and personhood. In being passed down from Alice's mother to Alice and, a century later, to Dana, Butler alludes to the indestructible tether between foremothers and their descendants. This communal aesthetic identity not only allows us, and Dana, to visualise these invisible figures of the past: this is her inheritance, connecting Dana to her previously unknowable maternal ancestors.

However, once Alice's freedom is rescinded, Butler demonstrates the violent threat enslavement posed to Black women's subjectivity. While the liberatory narrative works to redefine enslaved womanhood, these authors also recognise the need to bear witness to the brutal realities which objectified enslaved women. Therefore, in an effort to fill one of the many gaps of the historical records, Butler explores the previously overlooked reality of women's encounters with physical brutality. The indiscriminate nature of slavery's physical oppression is theorised by the work of Black feminist scholars such as Hortense Spillers. Spillers observes that enslaved women were "not only the target of rape [as archival records often reiterate,] but [were] also the topic of specifically externalised acts of torture [...] that we imagine as the peculiar province of male brutality."[81] Enslavement, Spillers proposes, "[kept] feminisation at bay," leaving the Black female body exempt from the protection of the virtues of white womanhood.[82]

Alice endures a horrific capture after fleeing Maryland with her enslaved husband, demonstrating the atrocities felt by Black men and women alike when she is brought back to the plantation "bloody, filthy and barely alive."[83] When recovered, Alice recalls: "They

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[79] Ibid p.101
[80] Ibid p.254
[81] Hortense J. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book" *Diacritics* 17, No. 2 (1987) p.68
[82] Ibid p.73
[83] Butler *Kindred* p.159

beat me […] The dogs, the rope... they tied me behind a horse, and I had to run but I couldn't... then they beat me..."[84] Mitchell theorises that in *Kindred*, the "brutality inflicted on [enslaved women's] bodies signals how devalued [they are] as [women], as potential [mothers], as human [beings]."[85] Butler's provocative image of a hunt supports this claim, indicating that in the eyes of her white captors Alice is a wild animal. Her existence as a woman, potential mother and a human being is negated by the ontology of Blackness. Supporting Spillers' assertion that the enslaved were reduced to ungendered flesh, the period's notions of femininity could not even protect Black women from sadistic bodily harm.

The process of being enslaved is written upon Alice's body. As literary critic Marc Steinberg notes in relation to *Kindred*, "slavery is a physical condition— it affects the body on a base level; therefore, it changes, subtly or corporeally, one's body."[86] This corporeal change is reflected in the aesthetic identity—or more accurately, the ways in which it is overwritten by the "slave body". Unlike the earlier depiction of Alice after being raped, Dana is now unable to see beyond her new marks of slavery. She is perceived through her wounds and physical degradation: "She put her hand down to her thigh where a dog had literally torn away a mouthful [...] She would have a big ugly scar there for the rest of her life."[87] This scar does not simply embody the ways in which the Black body was subject to abuse; its indelibility, there for the rest of her life, alludes to the permanence of the enslaved body. The aesthetic identity no longer takes precedence, demonstrating how easily this could be stripped away by the violence of the institution. This is cemented by the psychological and emotional trauma experienced by Alice, reverting to behaving as "a very young child again."[88] This condition of mental infancy indicates that her loss of freedom has coerced a sort of renaissance as she is seemingly reborn in slavery, witnessing her free woman persona die, replaced by her newfound, involuntary "slave-self".

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[84] Ibid p.173

[85] Angelyn Mitchell, "Not Enough of the Past: Feminist Revisions of Slavery in Octavia E. Butler's "Kindred," *MELUS* 26, No.3 (2001) p.56

[86] Marc Steinberg "Inverting history Octavia Butler's Postmodern Slave Narrative," *African American Review* 38, No.3 (2004) p.474

[87] Butler, *Kindred* p.168

[88] Ibid p.167

This voyeuristic account of Alice's physical and psychological defilement raises McInnis' question "can [the plantation] be a place of recovery […] or are they simply sites of re-wounding?"[89] Dana's failure to look beyond Alice's marked body reaffirms this concern in the context of reclaiming enslaved women's bodies, no longer viewing her ancestor as a reflection of herself. This can be read as a refusal to identify with Alice's reality, disassociating her experiences from the oppression she witnesses so not to 're-wound' herself as a contemporary Black woman. While the earlier depiction of Alice's aesthetic identity ensures that the readership does not lose sight of her humanity and womanhood, Dana's inability to look deeper illuminates slavery's ability to distort enslaved women's humanity and subjectivity. For Dana, Alice has become one of the many disfigured enslaved women of the historical archives. However, it is impossible to detach the realities of Dana and Alice; the doubling of the two women established early in the text suggests the precariousness of Dana's presence in the antebellum South, unable to evade eventually being a marked body herself.

Of the texts explored in this chapter, *Beloved* provides the most intimate imagining of enslaved women and their physical bodies. Unlike *Corregidora* and *Kindred*, *Beloved* is set in the reconstruction era. Consequently, the aesthetic identity of Morrison's formerly enslaved protagonist is untethered to anyone else, visualising Sethe directly. Nonetheless, parallels can be drawn between the manifestation of aesthetic identity by Morrison and Butler. The earliest depiction of Sethe's appearance, as constructed by Paul D, is nostalgically rooted in the past. This allows us to trace the derogatory effects of enslavement on Black women's subjectivity, echoing the opening representations of Alice and her mother in freedom. Morrison thus illustrates the Sethe that Paul D first encountered— the Sethe yet to be touched and moulded by oppression:

> Halle's girl—the one with the iron eyes and backbone to match. He had never seen her hair in Kentucky. And though her face was 18 years older than when he last saw her, it was softer now. Because of the hair. A face too still for comfort, irises the

[89] McInnis, "Black Women's Geographies and The Afterlives of The Sugar Plantation" p.744

same colour as her skin which in that still face, used to make him think of a mask with mercifully punched out eyes.[90]

Enslaved people not only lacked subjectivity in the archive, but our sense of what they look like– their aesthetic identity– is also obscured by an archive that views Black faces and bodies in objectifying and racist terms. Fiction enables Morrison to actively challenge this, returning to the past via immersive memory to present a unique description of enslaved womanhood. Labelled as Halle's girl, Paul D's representation of Sethe is not unproblematic, alluding to the ways in which Black women have been dispossessed of their bodies beyond white ownership. Yet, despite this patriarchal logic of female possession, his nostalgic description of her aesthetic identity allows an important visualisation of an 'unsullied' Sethe. She embodies somewhat of a blank slate, not yet brutalised by the effects of Black womanhood during, and after, her years of enslavement. While he acknowledges that her face is 18 years older, his allusion to her girlhood and the softness of her face imbues Sethe with the ideals of female virtue. Moreover, her "too still" face suggests that his earliest memory of her has remained frozen in time, painting her as an unblemished and youthful figure of feminine innocence. This sentimental illustration imagines the untarnished "girl" at the core of this narrative. We can subsequently chart how her successive personal experiences have physically and psychologically shaped her.

Paul D's romanticised understanding of Sethe's personhood is subsequently complicated by the intertwining of this innate aesthetic identity and the physical marks of oppression acquired over the past eighteen years. Morrison negotiates the layered nature of enslaved women's identity, representing a complex overlapping of humanity and imposed objectification. These interwoven bodies of personhood and enslavement are represented by the marks of slavery that Sethe carries into freedom, embodied by the "chokecherry tree. Trunk, branches, and even leaves […] Could have cherries too now for all I know," on her back.[91] Sethe's scars exemplify Black women's lack of protection under the same virtues safeguarding their white counterpart; her untouched innocence as remembered by Paul D could thus only ever be fleeting. These marks are not inanimate nor static, instead described

[90] Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (London: Vintage Books, 2007) p.10
[91] Morrison, *Beloved* p.18

as a living, ever-growing entity. The slave body is 'rooted' within the now legally free Black woman, continuously growing as she does. Even in the years succeeding enslavement, Black womanhood remains intrinsically tied to and shaped by the history of slavery: one grows from the other.

Sethe reveals her marked body to Paul D, exposing "the sculpture her back had become."[92] His reaction reveals the complexity and ambiguity marking the historical recovery of enslaved women and their bodies. Mere moments after they have slept together, the dehumanising effect of being a marked woman is apparent: "Out of the corner of his eye, Paul D saw the float of her breasts and disliked it […] And the wrought-iron maze [on her back] was in fact a revolting clump of scars. Not […] like any tree he knew because trees were inviting."[93] Just as Dana cannot see beyond Alice's scarification, for Paul D, Sethe's subjectivity is eclipsed by the physical expressions of her lost virtue. To convey this, Morrison reappropriates the representation of the scarred enslaved woman of eighteenth and nineteenth century abolitionist literature, identified by literary scholar Jennifer Putzi as "grotesque figures whose very visible, very vulnerable bodies evoke a complex mixture of disgust and sympathy in the reader."[94] Putzi observes that the scars of enslavement "are a symbol of black women's vulnerability to the abuse that marks them as less than woman, less than human, [robbing] them of control and ownership of their own corporeality."[95] Within these nineteenth century texts, enslaved women's bodies were thus "ungendered by oppression, [becoming] a grotesque parody of the ideal female body."[96]

Morrison wholly inverts the "ideal female body" that Paul D first perceives her to be, transformed in his view into the grotesque figure identified by Putzi. His shift in focus from the nostalgic and curious exploration of her face to a disdainful glance at her breasts conveys the shame-filled sexualisation of Black women. Her nudity, the act of sex and her scarred body fractures his memory of Sethe as a pure, unblemished girl. She is a *woman* of

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[92] Ibid p.21
[93] Morrison, *Beloved* p.21
[94] Jennifer Putzi, *Identifying Marks: Race, Gender, and The Marked Body in Nineteenth Century America* (Athens: University of Georgia, 2006) p.141
[95] Ibid pp.151, 141
[96] Ibid p.141

traumatic experiences who, through this patriarchal lens, is reduced to a sexual object, rather than human subject. While this is ultimately an expression of Paul D's unwillingness to bear witness to the horrors of Sethe's past so to safeguard the repression of his own, we are reminded that such scars held the omnipotence to "mark [Black women] as less than woman, less than human," capable of effacing personhood and worth.[97] Her "revolting" scars which repulsively push her lover away therefore raise questions about the desirability of reclaiming enslaved women's bodies.

Significantly, as a redemptive text addressing such reductive historical accounts of enslaved womanhood, *Beloved* does not simply represent Sethe through Paul D's gaze. Instead, Morrison uses Sethe's aesthetic identity to provide intimate access to her protagonist's subjectivity beyond his observations. Paul D's opening depiction of Sethe invites this access, specifically his representation of her face as "a mask with mercifully punched out eyes."[98] Proposing that her eyes "were like two wells into which he trouble gazing," Paul D concludes that they "[need to be] marked with some sign to warn folks of what that emptiness held."[99] This difficulty holding her gaze suggests that we are not brought eye-to-eye with Sethe to look *at* her. Instead, we are called to fill this void so to see *through* her eyes. Neither we nor Paul D can understand Sethe's subjecthood by solely looking at the physical expressions of her identity. We are therefore given a personal insight into "what that emptiness held" as the narrative unfolds, bearing witness to the traumatic experiences intangibly and corporeally shaping her identity. Only once we have focussed upon that *within* Sethe, watching her past from her perspective, can we re-turn our attention to the particularities of her appearance and the value of her body.

Liberating Black Women's Bodies from Enslavement and its Legacies

While *Corregidora, Beloved* and *Kindred* represent the ways in which the humanity of enslaved womanhood was disfigured, they are *liberatory* narratives. Consequently, in line with Mitchell's definition of the genre, each text is ultimately "centred on its enslaved protagonist's attainment of freedom [and] is focused on the protagonist's conception and

[97] Ibid p.151
[98] Morrison, *Beloved* p.10
[99] Ibid

articulation of herself as a free, autonomous and self-authorised self."[100] The rest of this chapter thus investigates how these liberatory narratives "provide new models of liberation" by transforming how we perceive the indelible marks of enslavement.[101] This returns us to McInnis' questions regarding the possibility of Black women unproblematically remapping the plantation, asking "whether one can indeed imbue geographies of domination with new meanings and indexical possibilities."[102] McInnis subsequently concludes: "these artists rescue their foremothers from obscurity, even as they sometimes spectacularise the violence they endured and find themselves still entangled in the tentacles of the plantation's persistent economic viability."[103] The fraught reclamation of Black women's bodies and aesthetic identities within liberatory narratives mirrors this complexity, perpetually "entangled in the tentacles" of enslavement's coercive bodily definitions, even as new meanings are introduced. Putzi's analysis of the marked body is again useful here when she questions "Does the mark [give] the individual a way of looking back and reclaiming agency through the mark rather than despite it?"[104] *Corregidora, Kindred* and *Beloved* encapsulate the unerasable marks of oppression in order to ascertain self-possession, suggesting that the inborn aesthetic identity is not the only source of external subjectivity for Black women. Instead, the autonomous self is articulated by uniting the natural body *and* the physical manifestations of oppression as collectively vital expressions of self-hood.

The trans-generational aesthetic identities of *Corregidora* and *Kindred* are not without problem for the contemporary protagonists. While the matrilineal aesthetic identity reinstates the eclipsed humanity and femininity of their foremothers, this bodily inheritance also jeopardises the subjectivity and liberty of Ursa and Dana, transposing the legacies of enslavement onto their distinct realities. To overcome this, Butler and Jones shatter the contemporary connection to these ancestral, mirrored aesthetic identities. The pathway to liberation is therefore navigated by experiencing a corporeal loss, becoming a 'marked' woman.

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[100] Mitchell, *Freedom to Remember* p.4
[101] Ibid
[102] McInnis, "Black Women's Geographies and The Afterlives of The Sugar Plantation" p.744
[103] McInnis, "Black Women's Geographies and The Afterlives of The Sugar Plantation" p.770
[104] Putzi, *Identifying Marks* p.7

For Ursa, becoming physically disfigured emancipates her from the fate determined by her maternal ancestors. The Corregidora women maintain the memory of their enslavement by "making generations"— an act recognised by literary scholar Stephanie Li as a "powerful form of resistance […] employed in order to endure and tell their stories."[105] The threat of historical erasure is surmounted by passing their memories down the matrilineal line, "[keeping] what we need to bear witness […] We got to keep it visible in our blood."[106] However, in zealously keeping the past alive, this generation's trauma suffocates their descendants, restricting the formation of an independent selfhood in the twentieth-century. The inability to achieve self-definition is signaled by Ursa's mother's aesthetic identity. Represented as the reincarnation of her deceased ancestors, her redemption of their bodily obscurity threatens her own subjectivity. Labelled as "beautiful in *their* way of still being beautiful," her mother's appearance is not unique or her own, but communal.[107] Although having never been enslaved, Ursa's mother's appearance demonstrates that this legacy is written upon her body. Consequently, she does not control her identity: her mother and grandmother do. Dispossessed of her body, Ursa's unnamed mother is completely detached from her own experiences, only ever "[bearing] witness to what she'd never lived, [refusing] what she had lived."[108]

Ursa possesses this same aesthetic identity as seen in a photograph: "When I saw the picture, I knew I had it. What my mother and my mother's mother before her had."[109] However, despite these aesthetic parallels, she also acknowledges "But I am different now […] I have everything they had, except the generations. I can't make generations."[110] After being pushed down the stairs by her husband, Mutt, Ursa has a hysterectomy, taking away her ability to continue the Corregidora matrilineal line. Ursa's bodily "difference" represents an important turning point. Even though the loss of her womb is not visible, it is a distinction marking her as non-identical to her maternal ancestors— her aesthetic identity transcends

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[105] Stephanie Li, "Love and the Trauma of Resistance in Gayl Jones's *Corregidora*" *Callaloo* 29, No. 1 (Winter, 2006) p.132
[106] Jones, *Corregidora* p.75
[107] Jones, *Corregidora* p.115
[108] Ibid p.108
[109] Ibid p.62
[110] Ibid

generations, but this bodily difference is hers alone. Her maiming, while tragic, frees her from the logic outlined in the legislation of slavery which determined: "*Partus sequitur Ventrem*" the child follows in the condition of the mother. Accordingly, Ursa is splintered from her matrilineal predestination, enabling her to analyse the intangible effects of slavery's legacies more generally, questioning "but was what Corregidora had done to *her*, to *them* any worse than what Mutt had done to me[?]"[111] In this moment of clarity, Jones suggests that it is not enough to reclaim enslaved women's bodies, at risk of eclipsing the worth of their successive generations. Ursa is marked by a contemporary act of male-perpetrated abuse, drawing attention to the significance of Black women's experiences beyond enslavement. Ursa remains inescapably "stained with another's past," but her consideration of the violence inherent to her own relationship signals that she is no longer defined by the past alone.[112] Unable to continue the Corregidora matrilineal line, she is not ensnared by its overwhelming definitions. In turn, she finds value in the individual subjectivity rooted in her personal experiences. Jones therefore suggests that to *not* be marked is where risk lies, threatening to diminish autonomy and self-possession.

In *Kindred*, the dehumanisation of Dana's enslaved ancestors is similarly mapped onto her reality, as represented by their mirrored aesthetic identities. In Dana's final return to the Weylin plantation in the wake of Alice's suicide, Rufus transfers his sexual desire from the-now-unobtainable Alice onto Dana. The interchangeability of Black women as seen by white men is evident when he states, "You're so much like her I can hardly stand it."[113] Rufus' perception of Dana and Alice as "One woman. Two halves of a whole" reiterates the dehumanising group identity imposed upon Black women—as illustrated by the "coffee bean-coloured women" of *Corregidora*, reduced to a series of transposable objects.[114] However, the aesthetic symmetry of Alice and Dana is also indicative of Dana's potential morphing into her maternal ancestor, literally becoming one woman. Like the Corregidora descendants, in being a mirror-image of her maternal ancestor, she risks inheriting Alice's lived experiences of coercion and dispossession. This is affirmed when Rufus moves to rape

[111] Ibid p.195 (original emphasis)
[112] Jones, *Corregidora* p.46
[113] Butler, *Kindred* p.287
[114] Ibid p.287; Jones, *Corregidora* p.182

her and she proposes “slowly I realised how easy it would be for me to continue to be still and forgive him even this.”[115] Yet, Dana is not acquiescent, performing the more difficult task of resisting his oppression. While she “could accept [Rufus] as [her] ancestor, [her] younger brother, [her] friend,” she could “not as [her] master and not as [her] lover;” she therefore murders him, saving herself from total objectification and dehumanisation.[116]

After stabbing Rufus, Dana is expelled from antebellum Maryland. Arriving in 1976, she realises “somehow my arm was being absorbed into something […] Flesh joined plaster [in the] exact spot Rufus’ fingers had grasped.”[117] Dana loses her arm as a result of her violent resistance. Significantly, the symbolism embodied by her “empty left sleeve” is multifaceted.[118] In part, it illuminates the perpetual grasp of this past by transforming its intangible legacies into a visible mark. This exposes the interwoven nature of the past and the present, witnessing this historical era continue to shape the lives of Black women far into the centuries succeeding emancipation. Black womanhood thus continues to be entangled in the bodily definitions imposed by the status of enslavement centuries earlier.

Furthermore, Dana’s mutilation shatters the aesthetic symmetry between her and her maternal ancestors. She no longer neatly fits into her half of the mould filled by her and Alice to make “one woman.”[119] Had she permitted the rape, Dana may have remained bodily whole, but like Alice, she would have become psychologically fragmented. The corporeal difference between these distant relatives therefore embodies Dana’s liberation from the lethal fate of enslaved womanhood. Butler transforms the act of becoming a marked woman from one of dehumanisation to one of empowerment as Dana’s disfigurement symbolises an ardent rejection of the objectification attempted by Rufus. Echoing the importance of Ursa’s bodily defacement, Butler and Jones alike suggest to not be marked represents a threat to personhood. We are thus returned to Putzi’s argument that the mark can provide a way to claim agency as Dana’s subjectivity is reinstated *through* the process of becoming marked. Consequently, Alice’s earlier scarification is reframed.

[115] Butler, *Kindred* p.290
[116] Ibid p.291
[117] Butler, *Kindred* p.292
[118] Ibid p.295
[119] Ibid p.254

While Alice's brutalisation blurs Dana's perception of her as an embodied subject, it should be remembered that her scars are acquired because of an attempt at resistance. Her marked womanhood should be read as a symbol of her survival and tenacity after being brought to the plantation "bloody, filthy and barely alive."[120] *Kindred* therefore not only allows us to visualise these invisible figures of the past, but also transforms the perception of enslaved women's scarred bodies as such marks become intrinsic to the aesthetic identity. While these features are not naturally occurring, for Alice and Dana they are not a signifier of weakness, instead representing the subjective experience of reclaiming autonomy.

Significantly, redefining scarification in *Beloved* manifests in a different manner to that witnessed in *Corregidora* and *Kindred*. In Jones and Butler's novels, becoming a marked woman is a form of salvation and liberation, yet in *Beloved*, this act ostensibly enacts the degradation and dehumanisation of enslaved womanhood. This is apparent when Sethe flees Sweet Home plantation after receiving her "first [and] last beating," emboldened by the need to protect her children from the same fate: "The best thing she was, was her children. Whites might dirty *her* alright, but not her best thing, her beautiful, magical best thing—that part of her was clean."[121] Sethe views her children as an extension of herself, but one that embodies a seemingly celestial purity demanding her protection from white oppression. In contrast, her own experiences of brutalisation have stripped her of that same cleanliness. The self-offered sacrifice of herself, willing to let whites dirty her, is indicative of the lack of worth she attributes to her body; even in her own eyes, being a marked woman renders her the "grotesque parody of the ideal female body" that Paul D perceives her to be.[122] Morrison thus negotiates the reclamation of Sethe from these negative definitions, reorienting how Sethe and others label her body. Scarification has not dirtied her, instead indicative of her resilience in the face of white tyranny. Sethe, and those around her, must understand this to re-instate the humanity and subjectivity she falsely believes to be erased.

[120] Ibid p.159
[121] Morrison, *Beloved* p.296 (emphasis in original)
[122] Putzi, *Identifying Marks* p.141

Sethe's journey to understanding that she is a subject of worth is manifold. First, she must be embraced the community, externally recognising her worth and humanity. The community initially fail Sethe. Their shortcomings inspire the decision to kill her children because "nobody warned them" when the slavecatchers entered town, driven by a collective "meanness [which] let them stand aside or not pay attention."[123] They are given the opportunity to redeem themselves when Sethe becomes lost in the past, embodied by her parasitic relationship with Beloved whose spectral existence "ate up her life, took it, swelled up with it."[124] The community of women conclude "that rescue was in order" as, like the Corregidora women's consumption with the past, this connection must be broken.[125] While some argue that Sethe's condition is deserved because "you can't just up and kill your children," others conclude that "what's fair ain't necessarily right."[126] Therefore, whatever her "past errors," Sethe is a subject deserving of their protection: "children can't just up and kill the mama."[127] The community come to her aid, exorcising Beloved's ghost to bring Sethe back into the present. This act externally validates her value, in turn, making it possible for Sethe's importance to become self-apparent, concluding the voyage to autonomy initiated by the community.

That Sethe is now able to claim a coherent sense of self is signaled by her aesthetic identity, as seen through the eyes of Paul D. His earlier depiction of Sethe's scarred body as tarnished and sullied reflects how she sees herself. However, he now unites her subjective-self and her objectified body, representing her bodily appearance as an embodiment of her strength and life journey. Paul D "[gathers] the pieces" that comprise Sethe's whole self, "[giving] them back to [her] in all the right order" as he reads her body in its entirety, "[thinking] about her wrought iron back, the delicious mouth still puffy at the corner from Ella's fist. The mean black eyes."[128] His study of her body serves as a map of where her body has been, encapsulating each aspect of personhood: her naturally occurring aesthetic identity is

[123] Morrison, *Beloved* p.185
[124] Morrison, *Beloved* p.295
[125] Ibid p.301
[126] Ibid
[127] Ibid
[128] Ibid p.322

indicated by her mean black eyes; her slave body through her wrought iron back and her experiences since slavery are gestured by her "still puffy" mouth.

This representation of Sethe's aesthetic identity represents several crucial shifts. Firstly, Sethe's eyes are no longer blank, now "black" and filled. At the novel's close, we have seen the myriad past experiences shaping her present, thus understanding the intangible and internal manifestations of Sethe's identity. We no longer need to see *through* her eyes, allowing us, Paul D and Sethe to appreciate the external expressions of such experiences. In turn, the portrayal of Sethe's scars moves from revulsion to reverence. Her "wrought iron back" is a gateway to her past, using this metaphor so to conjure an empowering image of resilience. This all-encompassing reading of Sethe's body demonstrates that, if the aesthetic identity externally embodies the humanity and inimitability of the individual, the scars of enslavement convey another crucial facet of subjectivity. This aspect of Sethe's appearance no longer embodies impurity, instead symbolising the survivalism intrinsic to enslaved womanhood. It is significant to note that we are part of this transformative perception of Sethe's body with Paul D, reading the numerous elements of her body through his eyes. Consequently, Morrison suggests that for enslaved women to be redefined as more than a site of oppression, the observer must recognise the multiplicity of their identity.

Thus, in the final moments of the novel, after we have seen the unification of Sethe's aesthetic identity and scarred body, we see what literary scholar Elaine Tuttle Hansen describes as "a gesture toward the empowerment of Sethe as female social subject rather than misnamed matriarch."[129] Hansen substantiates this claim with Sethe's final words, suggesting that by responding "Me? Me?" to Paul D's assertion, "You your best thing, Sethe," she has begun to perceive her personal worth beyond that of her children.[130] Completing the reclamation of selfhood, Sethe is viewed in this closing moment as a complex subject, defined by her many life experiences—including enslavement. Therefore, for Sethe to accept that she is her "best thing," the marked, slave-self must be embraced as

[129] Elaine Hansen, *Mother Without Child: Contemporary Fiction and the Crisis of Motherhood* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1997) pp.65, 66
[130] Morrison, *Beloved* p.322

part of the *whole* self.[131] Morrison re-articulates what it means to be scarred. No longer a source of shame, the wounds of enslavement are instead integral to the success of Sethe's liberatory narrative 'quest', now able to "[conceptualise] and [articulate] herself as a free, autonomous and self-authorised self."[132] Her interwoven, multi-faceted identity is corporeally impressed upon and expressed by her body. While her innate aesthetic identity communicates her previously overlooked femininity, subjectivity and individuality, her scars convey her tenacity. Morrison therefore demonstrates that in reclaiming enslaved women's bodies from the abyss of history, it is impossible to erase the brutalisation they endured; it is however possible to reorient how the scarred body is perceived.

Conclusion

In an exploration of Black women's literary output of the 1970s and 1980s, literary scholar Marjorie Pryse observes that "black women novelists have become metaphorical conjure women, 'mediums' […] who make it possible for their readers and for each other to recognise their common literary ancestors."[133] As historical scholarship expanded into the twenty-first century, this plight becomes increasingly multi-disciplinary: revisionist historians and novelists alike become conjure women, working in conversation with one another to produce a complex account of enslaved womanhood. This chapter is specifically concerned with how the writers of first generation liberatory narratives have uniquely fulfilled the role of medium, constructing the aesthetic identity so to manifest an image of what enslaved women physically looked like. This literary shaping of enslaved women's bodies and faces re-presents the humanity, femininity and inimitability inherent to their existence. We are, in turn, brought into intimate proximity with these previously lost maternal ancestors. Therefore, in answer to the question posed by Fuentes', the aesthetic identity is manifested by these authors in order to "narrate the fleeting glimpses of enslaved [women] subjects in the archives."[134]

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[131] Ibid

[132] Mitchell, *Freedom to Remember* p.4

[133] Marjorie Pryse, "Introduction: Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker and the Ancient Power of Black Women," in *Conjuring: Black Women, Fiction and Literary Tradition*, eds. Marjorie Pryse and Hortense Spillers. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985) p.5

[134] Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives* p.1

Even as they work to redeem those "ephemeral archival presences [of] the fragmentary, disfigured bodies of enslaved women," the liberatory narrative must reproduce them.[135] *Corregidora, Kindred* and *Beloved* bear witness to the ways in which enslaved women were distorted, and even wholly erased, by the violence of slavery and its archives. Redeeming Black women's bodies from the historical abyss of slavery and its legacies is thus an ambiguous process, articulating the inescapability of this past through scarification and transgenerational aesthetic identity. However, as detailed in this chapter, this first generation of liberatory narratives renegotiate what it means to be marked for the enslaved and their descendants. Ursa, Dana and Sethe physically embody resilience and empowerment, reorienting how we should perceive the disfigurements of slavery when we inevitably encounter them. This, in turn, re-articulates how we understand slavery's perpetual influence over Black womanhood. Echoing Afro-Pessimist scholarship, *Corregidora, Kindred* and *Beloved* illuminate that the subjectivity of contemporary Black women—and the ontology of Blackness more generally—continues to be shaped by the afterlife of slavery. However, this connection to the past is re-presented by these novelists as an inheritance of endurance and tenacity in the face of Black women's specific oppressions.

The aesthetic identity remains a prominent construct in the recovery of this history, even as new archival gaps are identified and addressed. We are thus able to consistently visualise enslaved women in new historical geographies and under unexplored forces of oppression throughout the varying contours of Black Women's fiction of enslavement. This is demonstrated in the following chapter, considering how the next generation of Black female novelists have further redressed this history by expanding the spatial and temporal geographies of enslavement beyond the antebellum South so to explore how the various spaces of slavery have shaped the subjectivity of enslaved women and their descendants.

[135] Ibid

Enslaved Womanhood from the American Plantation to the Gold Coast: The Mutable Geographies of the Liberatory Narrative Tradition

This chapter demonstrates continuities between the first and second generations by examining their treatment of various geographies and spaces. I argue that the formation, and the degradation, of non-white women's subjectivity are not only the bodily experiences explored in Chapter One: these are also spatial processes. As observed by Katherine McKittrick, "social practices create landscapes" meaning that "Black women [are] both shaped by, and challenge, traditional geographic arrangements."[136] This chapter explores the spatial processes shaping non-white womanhood in American and transatlantic landscapes.[137] Arguing that this literary tradition has consistently problematised how the geographies of the slave trade and racial slavery have been conceptualised, I investigate the ways in which space and geography undermine the various facets of self which are linked to spaces of home and/or freedom, for example culture, family, and humanity.

The first part of this chapter examines the American geography of enslavement in *Beloved*, *Corregidora* and *Kindred*, specifically its representation as nationwide and transgenerational. Extending beyond the years and the physical place of the antebellum South, I argue that Morrison, Butler, and Jones challenge the idea that the evils of enslavement, and its aftermath, were contained within the geographical boundary of the Mason Dixon line.[138] Through the concepts of rememory, traumatic repetition, and time travel, the seemingly dichotomous spaces of free and unfree are placed contiguously, barely divided by highly traversable borders. In this way we can think of their settings as borderlands, engaging Gloria Anzaldua's foundational 1987 *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. Anzaldua theorises that the "US-Mexican border [is an open wound] where

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[136] McKittrick defines a traditional geography as the "formations that assume we can view, assess and ethically organise the world from a stable (white, patriarchal, Eurocentric, heterosexual, classed) vantage point." Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006) pp.xii, xvi

[137] This chapter specifically refers to women of colour and non-white women, rather than Black and enslaved women, so to encompass the range of women impacted by the geographies of slavery as conveyed in these texts.

[138] As the women of *Corregidora* are enslaved on a Brazilian plantation, the text's geography is trans-hemispheric. However, as the characters later settle in the American state of Kentucky, my investigation focuses specifically on Jones' representation of the United States.

the third world grates against the first and bleeds […] the lifeblood of two worlds merging."[139] I adopt and expand Anzaldua's conception of the US-Mexican border to explore the intimacy between the ostensibly contrasting geographies of slavery and legal freedom, of past and present. This concept of the borderland is central to my analysis of the first-generation texts as the spatial expressions of this past continue to flow into the geography of the contemporary moment, eternally influencing Black womanhood.

Toni Morrison's 2008 *A Mercy* and Yaa Gyasi's 2016 *Homegoing* enact a spatial and temporal shift away from the American geographies of the first-generation novels, depicting the intrinsic relationship between identity and geography in a transatlantic framework. The second part of this chapter investigates the ways in which Morrison and Gyasi address the next gap in the historical archives, exploring how transnational spaces shape the subjectivity of enslaved women and their descendants. These second-generation authors demonstrate that the New and Old Worlds are spaces of metamorphosis for women of colour. Drawing this connection between transnational space and transformation, my literary analysis speaks to Marcus Rediker's proposal that "the slave ship had not only delivered millions of people to slavery," it also physically and psychologically "prepared them for it."[140] This emphasis on the centrality of space in the changes to the literal and figurative identities of captive Africans underlies my investigation of *Homegoing* and *A Mercy*. Even as I look beyond Rediker's focus upon the Middle Passage and African captives so to encompass the additional spaces and peoples of transformation in these texts, I argue that non-white women's identities are "prepared" by the colonial and patriarchal organisation of transatlantic geographies.

While these transatlantic spaces of domination detrimentally redefine women of colour, this landscape also holds the path to a self-articulated identity. In the remainder of this chapter, I demonstrate how women of colour navigate survival in transatlantic geographies. This is achieved through *hybridising* their identity. By hybridising, I refer to the construction of a multifaceted self-hood which is influenced by more than one geography. This observation is

[139] Gloria Anzaldua, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2007) p.25
[140] Marcus Rediker, *The Slave Ship: A Human History* (New York: Penguin Group, 2008) p.350

framed by Paul Gilroy's 1993 work *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Emphasising the transatlantic flow of ideas from the era of slavery into the contemporary moment, Gilroy defines Black identity as a site of "inescapable hybridity and [an] intermixture of ideas."[141] In line with Gilroy, subjectivity is founded within *A Mercy* and *Homegoing* by embracing a hybrid transatlantic identity, influenced by the geographies of their home and their coerced settlement. Set in different temporal and spatial geographies, this takes place on varying levels across these second-generation texts.

A Mercy is a parable about the New World, set in a seventeenth century transatlantic landscape. Conversely, *Homegoing* is both transatlantic and transgenerational. Opening with the narratives of Esi and Effia, two estranged half-sisters who suffer different fates at the hands of the slave trade, each chapter details the life of a new generation in either Africa or America. These textual disparities mean that while women of colour are threatened in similar ways across both texts, redemption manifests in distinctive ways. The enslaved women of *A Mercy* cannot attain liberation in colonial America, alternatively finding strength through the hybridisation of identity; conversely, Gyasi's transgenerational narrative speaks to the possibility of liberating the descendants of Effia and Esi once West Africa and America are embraced as collective elements of self. This is achieved through the return to, and reclamation of, ancestral sites of domination. To demonstrate this, I draw upon Jarvis McInnis' theorisation of "reterritorialization."[142] McInnis discusses the new relationships constructed between African Americans and the plantation, defined as "the process by which African Americans attempt to reconcile and imagine a new relationship to land […] directly opposed to the exploitative racial capitalist regimes engendered by the plantation."[143] I propose that Gyasi enacts reterritorialization in her novel but on a transnational scale, renegotiating the transatlantic geographies in *Homegoing* so that contemporary Black subjects can forge a coherent sense of self.

Taken collectively, the liberatory narrative tradition has consistently destabilised understandings of slavery's geographies, illuminating the intimacy between enslaved

[141] Paul Gilroy, *Black Atlantic* p.xi
[142] McInnis, "Black Women's Geographies and The Afterlives of The Sugar Plantation" p.744
[143] Ibid

women's identities and geographic organisation. However, the second-generation narratives embody an important distinction, representing America as just one geography within slavery's larger landscape. Therefore, addressing the next gap in the historical archives, Morrison and Gyasi's articulation of the transnational identities of women of colour is the primary focus of this chapter.[144]

American Geographies of Enslavement in First Generation Liberatory Narratives

As discussed in Chapter One, the first generation of liberatory narratives demonstrate that even in the years succeeding emancipation Black womanhood is ensnared by slavery's legacies, as suggested by the indelible, bodily manifestations of this past. The representation of geography and space within *Corregidora, Kindred* and *Beloved* is an extension of this, suggesting that non-southern states in the centuries succeeding abolition remain saturated with the legacies of slavery. Extending far beyond the spatial-temporal boundaries of the Antebellum South, bondage is represented as physically and temporally inescapable for Black women. I frame this discussion with scholar David Jansson's criticism of the othering of the American South through what he terms "internal orientalism."[145] Jansson proposes that the South has been conceptualised as a degenerate region distinct from the rest of the United States: "The vices of racism, poverty, xenophobia, violence, backwardness, and intolerance have been spatialized (one might say "regionalised") through the national discourse, so that this set of undesirable traits is held to inhere in the imagined space called "the South."[146] Recognising that there is undeniably "racism [and] poverty in the South," Jansson's commentary does not try to absolve its responsibility.[147] Rather, his exploration seeks to expand how these issues are spatialised: "We can find racism and poverty […] everywhere in the US. They permeate all the national space."[148] I apply Jansson's exposure of this mythologised perception of America's flaws to explore how

[144] Hybridity is now theorised in uplifting and redemptive terms, but this was not always the case. While the focal point of this thesis remains the positive connotations of this concept, I acknowledge the colonial violence underpinning this term and its deployment throughout the history of enslavement and the years in its wake.
[145] David R. Jansson, "Internal Orientalism in America: W.J. Cash's The Mind of the South and The Spatial Construction of American National Identity," *Political Geography* 22 (March 2003) p.311
[146] Ibid
[147] Ibid
[148] Ibid p.313

Corregidora, Kindred and *Beloved* trouble the dichotomies of slave and free, North, and South during the antebellum era and its afterlife.

Using historical and speculative fiction, Morrison, Jones, and Butler expand the geographic and temporal scope of slavery so that, to paraphrase Jansson, it permeates all national space and time. The "regionalizing" of American slavery is collapsed through the revelation of borders as permeable ensuring that slavery's social structures and legacies cannot be localised to the antebellum South.[149] Anzaldua's definition of the borderland as "an open wound where the third world grates against the first and bleeds," is central to this analysis in the way that the ideologies of enslavement cannot be spatially contained, spilling from one geography into the other.[150] Because of these highly traversable borders, *Corregidora, Kindred* and *Beloved* represent the ostensibly opposing American geographies of the slave past and the 'free' present as inextricable, emphasising slavery's perpetual influence over Black womanhood.

As a work of historical fiction, *Beloved* looks beyond historical fact to demonstrate slavery's unremitting presence in Black women's lives. Haunted by her intimate experiences of past via traumatic memory, Sethe remains immersed in a geography of unfreedom, even after attaining legal freedom. Morrison collapses the temporal and spatial distance between her protagonist's antebellum past and reconstruction present through eruptions of "Rememory." Rememory, as defined by scholar Marianne Hirsch, "is a noun and verb, a thing, and an action […] it is spatial and material."[151] Remembrance is thus represented as a material experience, demonstrated when Sethe observes:

> Nothing else would be on her mind […] Then something. The plash of water, the sight of her shoes […] and suddenly there was Sweet Home rolling, rolling, rolling out before her eyes [...] It never looked as terrible as it was, and it made her wonder if hell was pretty too.[152]

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[149] Jansson, "Internal Orientalism in America" p.311
[150] Ibid
[151] Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012) p.83
[152] Morrison, *Beloved* p.7

Rememory intertwines the site of Sethe's enslavement, and therefore of her most traumatic experiences, with contemporary Ohio. This imposing and all-encompassing geography of enslavement, suggested by its repetitive "rolling, rolling, rolling," engulfs her present and with it her freedom. Sethe's alignment of Sweet Home and hell emphasises this. The afterlife of slavery, like hell, is suggested to be a physical place of eternal suffering. The unremitting, tangible resurrection of the geographies of enslavement means that Sethe is tortuously ensnared in its grip, unable to escape its influence even in freedom. Therefore, despite Sethe's efforts, "[working] hard to remember as close to nothing as was safe," rememory uncontrollably enmeshes the past and present.[153] To paraphrase Anzaldua's conception of the Mexico-US border, the border of antebellum Kentucky and reconstruction Ohio is an open wound where the slave past grates against freedom and bleeds, trapping the Black population of *Beloved* in an inescapable geography of unfreedom.[154]

The representation of traumatic memory in *Beloved* is paralleled in Jones' *Corregidora*. Immersive memory once again maps a geography of unfreedom onto a contemporary space of ostensible freedom. However, while Sethe attempts to repress the past, the formerly enslaved women of Jones' novel keep it alive for themselves and their descendants. The memories of Ursa's maternal ancestors are therefore transgenerational, marking her in the geography of 1940s Kentucky. These memories are not simply inherited but actively maintained, "[passed] down from generation to generation so we'd never forget."[155] Ursa's life revolves around the cyclical retelling of their historical narrative: "My mother would work while my grandmother told me, then she'd come back and tell me. I'd go to school and come back and be told."[156] In Chapter One I argue that Ursa's inherited aesthetic identity suggests that, although never enslaved, her body is not her own. Extending this analysis, Jones suggests that Ursa's relentless immersion in her ancestral past means that she is neither explicitly shaped by, nor has any claim to, mid twentieth-century Kentucky; this United States geography is simply an extension of Corregidora's dominion.

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[153] Morrison, *Beloved* p.6
[154] Anzaldua, *Borderlands/La Frontera* p.25
[155] Jones, *Corregidora* p.7
[156] Ibid p.106

The women carry Corregidora's ghost from the site of their enslavement into this new geography, ensuring that their enslaver remains omnipresent. Ursa cannot "forget what they'd been through," evidenced through frequent disruptions to the linearity of the narrative via the remembrance of, and dreams about, her ancestral experiences.[157] In one particularly vivid nightmare, Ursa "gave birth" to Corregidora who subsequently rapes her: "I felt his stiff penis inside me. Those who have fucked their own daughters would not hesitate to fuck their own mothers."[158] This dark manifestation of the psyche illuminates the repercussions of keeping this past alive. The act of giving birth to Corregidora suggests that the women laboriously give life to his memory in the twentieth century American South. They are, in turn, figuratively raped by Corregidora's influence in this space of legal freedom, ensnared by the same definitions of degradation defining them under enslavement. Ursa is therefore touched by a subjugation that is not directly her own. Haunted by an oppression inherent in a different time and place, Jones conveys the intimacy between these supposedly distinctive temporal-spatial geographies. Consequently, even in the legally free American South, her maternal ancestors' memories of enslavement are intrinsic to Ursa's conceptualisation of self and space.

Butler again speaks to the inescapability of slavery's legacies through the intertwining of different geographies in *Kindred*. Rooted on the West Coast in 1970s California, Butler expands the temporal and spatial reach of slavery and racism's influence. The unique capacity of speculative fiction unites two physically and historically distinctive American geographies, collapsing the temporal and spatial distance between 1976 California and nineteenth-century Maryland though the motif of time travel. In 1976, ironically the bicentennial of American independence, these two places represent the antithetical epicentres of freedom and oppression respectively. While the antebellum period, in particular the South, is characterised by enslavement and Black degradation, the West coast, in contrast, never legalised slavery, naming California a free state in the compromise of 1850; even now it stands for progressive ideals and liberal social values. However, supporting Jansson's criticism of the regionalizing of America's flaws, Dana's travels through

[157] Ibid p.104
[158] Jones, *Corregidora* p.80

time and space reveal the entanglements of this 'egalitarian' contemporary society and the slave past.[159]

Mapping these falsely dichotomous moments on to one another exposes the numerous ways in which contemporary Black womanhood remains defined by the legacies of enslavement, one example being perpetual sexual objectification. Dana's travels "more than three thousand miles" and over a century away from home bring her face to face with the unique vulnerabilities of enslaved womanhood, ontologically defined by race *and* gender.[160] Her ancestor, Alice, exemplifies this. As Rufus' property, her body is "Not [hers], his. He paid for it."[161] Alice is consequently reduced to an object of Rufus' personal desire that he could and "would just rape […] again—and again."[162] On her return to 1976 California, Dana is neither enslaved nor the victim of rape. However, even in this geography Black womanhood is not wholly free from the definitions of sexual objectification marking their maternal ancestors. This is demonstrated through the crude reactions in the workplace to Dana and Kevin's interracial relationship. Target to the repeated jokes of the "agency clown," Buz, their relationship is reduced to a sexual commodity: "you gonna write some poor-nography together!" followed by the cruder "chocolate and vanilla porn!"[163]

Rufus' sexual appropriation of Alice occurs in the relative privacy of the domestic sphere. In juxtaposition, Buz's repeated reference to pornography indicates that Black women's bodies were deemed public property in the 1970s. Moreover, he does not refer to Dana's union with Kevin as sex, but specifically as pornography, suggesting that they are producing something inherently public and designed for voyeurism. Even in the temporal-spatial geography of 1970s California, this interracial dynamic is seemingly so exoticised and fetishised that it is open to being devoured and consumed, emphasised by the metaphor of their edibility as "chocolate and vanilla." While not legally enslaved, the various meanings and uses externally imposed upon captive women resonate into this physically and temporally distinct space. Through time travel, Butler places enslaved and 'free' Black

[159] Jansson, "Internal Orientalism in America" p.311
[160] Butler, *Kindred* pp.6, 43
[161] Ibid p.183
[162] Ibid p.178
[163] Ibid pp. 53, 54, 56

women side by side, collapsing the historical and physical distance between these supposedly antithetical geographies to enable their direct comparison. Dana's sexualisation is therefore a 'modernized' expression of the same definitions marking Alice, embodying the legacies of slavery bleeding into the present.

Entangled in the spatial legacies of the past, the protagonists of *Beloved, Corregidora* and *Kindred* alike are living "in the wake" of slavery, meaning "the past that is not past, it reappears, always to rupture the present."[164] The first-generation of liberatory narratives therefore acknowledge that the geography of contemporary America is a space of hybridity, comprised of the temporal-spatial geographies of the past *and* the present. This speaks directly to the second-generation narratives in which the protagonists are shaped by the multiple spaces of the slave trade's transnational geography. This subsequent section explores the ways in which the women of colour of *A Mercy* and *Homegoing* become subjects defined by a pluralistic transnational identity, acknowledging how transnational spaces degrade but also redeem enslaved women and their descendants.

The Transatlantic Geographies of Enslavement in the Second Generation of Liberatory Narratives

A Mercy and *Homegoing* represent a temporal and spatial shift from the first-generation liberatory narratives. Deviating from the accounts of nineteenth century American slavery represented in *Corregidora, Kindred* and *Beloved*, these twenty-first century texts address the next gap in the archives of enslavement. Exploring the slave trade and its legacies in a transatlantic geography, Morrison and Gyasi narrativise the origins of non-white womanhood's subjugation under the growing influence of colonialism and racial slavery. In *A Mercy*, this degradation is represented in the paradoxical space of seventeenth century America. On one hand, the text's transatlantic perspective characterises the New World as a site of coalescence, physically uniting Europe, America, and Africa in this space. This is conveyed through the diverse group of women brought into proximity in the colonies: Rebekka, a poor white woman of European descent; Lina, an Indigenous woman; and an

[164] Sharpe, *In the Wake* pp.14, 9

unnamed woman of African origin and her child, Florens. Yet despite the convergence of these women, the colonies are increasingly a space of marginalisation and failed solidarity. The exclusionary nature of this geography is exacerbated as "gender and race [become] intertwined components of the social order in colonial Virginia," embedding white, elite, patriarchal control in the colonies.[165] Moreover, whiteness increasingly afforded privileges even to women, as discussed in the research of Kathleen M. Brown: "colonial settlement [generated] new social practises, in some cases creating opportunities for white women to expand the limits of their personal influence and liberties."[166] In line with Brown's research, Morrison "[weaves] a narrative about the changing meanings of race and identity," representing "gender, slavery, and elite dominance as interrelated relationships of power whose histories intersect and mutually shape one another."[167] The various characters comprising universal womanhood in *A Mercy* thus reveal how, and by whom, power and freedom was allocated and solidified in the seventeenth century New World.

As this chapter explores the shaping of enslaved women's subjectivity, I am interested in Morrison's representation of Native American and African enslaved women. As proposed by historian Justin Leroy, there is an often overlooked "historical intimacy between colonialism and slavery."[168] Morrison uses literary exploration to open the possibility of recognising "the full scope of slavery and settlement's interconnected history," representing African diaspora and indigenous peoples' loss of sovereignty in conjunction.[169] Consequently, the American colonies are represented as a site of exile for those native to this space as well as those who endured transatlantic diaspora. This analysis explores the ways in which the identities of African and Indigenous enslaved women alike come to be defined by a condition of detachment.

The African geography of the transatlantic slave trade is at the centre of Gyasi's *Homegoing*. Opening in the West African geography of the Gold Coast, the novel explores the ways in

[165] Kathleen M. *Brown, Good Wives, Nasty Wenches and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race and Power in Colonial Virginia* (University of North Carolina Press, 1996) p.1
[166] Ibid p.3
[167] Ibid pp.6, 3
[168] Justin Leroy, "Black History in Occupied Territory: On the Entanglements of Slavery and Settler Colonialism" *Theory & Event* 19, no.4 (2016)
[169] Ibid

which the subjectivity of two estranged sisters, Esi and Effia, is shaped by this space. Gyasi problematises the utopian status which African Americans have continuously ascribed to the continent. Saidiya Hartman proposes that since the era of enslavement, Africa has been conceptualised in myriad hopeful, yet wistful, ways by the enslaved and their descendants: "Was Africa merely a cipher for a lost country no one could any longer name? Was it a remedy for our homelessness or an opportunity to turn our back to the hostile country we called home?"[170] For many Black Americans, Africa embodies a mythical homeland, as suggested in Maya Angelou's autobiographical text, *All God's Children Need Travelling Shoes.* Angelou becomes one of the many African Americans in the post-civil rights era turning away from the United States, toward Ghana, "longing for a home," concluding "in the yearning, heaven and Africa were inextricably combined."[171] However, Angelou's conceptualising of the African continent as synonymous with a utopian home is problematised by several contemporary works, including Hartman's 2006 *Lose Your Mother* and Gyasi's 2016 *Homegoing.*

Emerging from the parallel enterprises of history and fiction, these texts collectively represent the ambiguities of West African geographies. Collapsing any illusion that a unique structure of liberty prevailed in the Old World, Hartman defines Ghana as a space of binaries: "The lines of division between kin and stranger, neighbour and alien, became hard and fast during the era of the Atlantic slave trade. It decided who lived and died, who was sold and who was protected."[172] Focussing upon the particularity of fiction in the representation of this history, I explore how Gyasi represents these growing divisions in the heterogeneous space of the Gold Coast. *Homegoing* exemplifies that in this landscape controlled by colonialism and tribal rivalries, commodification is not localised to the enslaved, instead, represented as a universal female experience. Esi endures captivity in West Africa, while her estranged sister Effia is alternatively married off to a white slave commissioner, James Collins. Space is central to their communal dehumanisation, embodied by their inhabitation of Cape Coast Castle. Located on the edge of the Gold Coast where the ocean and land meet, the castle symbolises the ideologies of the New and Old Worlds

[170] Hartman, *Lose Your Mother* p.30
[171] Maya Angelou, *All God's Children Need Travelling Shoes* (London: Virago Press, 2003) pp.19, 20
[172] Hartman, *Lose Your Mother* p.75

merging. They occupy this space in different capacities, either because of marriage or enslavement, but it is here that both women are severed from their past, culture, and ancestry. Therefore, addressing the next gap in the archives of enslavement, Gyasi and Morrison explore the ways in which, to paraphrase McKittrick, women of colour are shaped by traditional geographic arrangements in the transatlantic world, impressed with an identity of dislocation and dehumanisation.[173]

Morrison demonstrates that for the enslaved women of the New World, homelessness is an unavoidable, all-consuming identity. This identity is not only intrinsic to those forced into transnational diaspora, as demonstrated by Lina's experiences as an Indigenous American woman. Historian Louis Montrose proposes that the emergent colonialist discourse of this era repeatedly "denies the natural right of possession to indigenous peoples by confirming them to be heathens, savages."[174] Defined as a savage by white colonialists, Lina is symbolically expelled from her native space, denied sovereignty over the land which was formerly her home. She endures the annihilation of her family at the hands of European disease, subsequently watching soldiers "circle the whole village in fire."[175] Rescued, "she was taken to live among kindly Presbyterians," where, "terrified of being in the world without family, [she] acknowledged her status as heathen and let herself be purified."[176] While Barbara Krauthamer's work illuminates the religious efforts of "evangelical Protestant men and women who understood themselves as benevolent reformers and hoped to "civilize" Indians through the spread of Christianity," Lina's 'civilisation' extends beyond faith.[177] The Presbyterians purge her Native identity as "they burned her deerskin dress [and] they clipped the beads from her arms and scissored inches from her hair."[178] Each of these acts—to burn, clip and scissor—are inherently forceful, destroying the physical manifestations of her cultural identity. Even her name, "Messalina" but Lina for short, is bestowed upon her by the Presbyterians.[179] Lina's birth name is lost, "along with the rest of

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[173] McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds* p.xii
[174] Montrose, "The Work of Gender" p.8
[175] Morrison, *A Mercy* p.43-44
[176] Ibid p.44
[177] Barbara Krauthamer, *Black Slaves, Indian Masters: Slavery, Emancipation, and Citizenship in the Native American South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013)
[178] Morrison, *A Mercy* p.44
[179] Ibid

her language," supplanted by a label signalling the seemingly inherent corruption of Indigenous peoples.[180] As this space is reorganised under colonial definitions, Lina's native identity is collateral damage.

Lina's geographic dislocation extends beyond the undermining of her cultural identity. Aligned with the narrative of settler colonialism, her physical presence is ostensibly purged from this space. Morrison again alludes to the discourse of discovery which not only denied Native sovereignty but "symbolically [effaced] the very existence of those indigenous peoples from the places its speaker intended to exploit."[181] This erasure is apparent in Lina's invisibility in the eyes of her European enslaver, Rebekka. Initially the women "were company for each other [becoming] friends," despite their status.[182] However, Rebekka gradually solidifies their racial superiority-inferiority binary. On her sickbed, Rebekka is visited by the "ghostly presence" of her London-derived, female shipmates from her journey to America, "[soothed] by stories they told."[183] She concludes: "better false comfort than none […] and listened carefully to her shipmates."[184] Significantly, as she listened to their words, "Lina snored softly at the foot of the bed."[185] Rebekka thus *chooses* false comfort and fictitious security in the spectral manifestations of women from her past. She overlooks the corporeal figure caring for her suggesting that Lina's enslavement, and her Indigenous identity, invalidate her existence in the eyes of this free white woman. Lina's invisibility in this intimate sphere— an embodiment of the systematic erasure of Native peoples in America's falsely perceived "wide untrammelled space"—leads her to conclude when speaking to a forest of beech "You and I, this land is our home," she whispered, "but unlike you I am exile here."[186] Settler colonialism, and the solidifying of racial differences, renders Lina a foreigner in her own home. Her "exile" identity alludes to criminality and corruption. However, this self-identified title is attained in innocence, bestowed by a colonial reorganisation of space. Severed from her family and excluded from solidarity, Lina's

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[180] Morrison, *A Mercy* p.52 Lina's namesake is Messalina Valeria: the third wife of the Roman emperor Claudius, notorious for her corrupt and licentious behaviour.
https://www.britannica.com/biography/Messalina-Valeria

[181] Montrose, "The Work of Gender in the Discourse of Discovery" p.8

[182] Morrison, *A Mercy* p.50

[183] Ibid p.86

[184] Ibid p.87

[185] Ibid p.87

[186] Ibid p.56

experiences of enslavement thus embody Hartman's assertion that the slave is a stranger "torn from kin and community, exiled from one's country […] the slave defines the position of the outsider," even as she inhabits the space which was previously her home.[187]

The narrative of Florens' unnamed mother reiterates the estrangement intrinsic to enslaved womanhood in colonial America from a diasporic perspective. Her alienation is multi-spatial, represented as a product of her experiences in Africa and America. Historian Ira Berlin acknowledges that African people's oppression was never created by just one body of people, instead "a product of the momentous meeting of Africans and Europeans and then their fateful rendezvous with the peoples of the New World."[188] Morrison illustrates this, suggesting that the ideals of colonialism traverse the Atlantic, beginning the processes of enslavement, and dislocation, in Africa: "The men of their families burn we houses […] Bound with vine one to another we are moved four times, each time more trading, more culling, more dying."[189] As articulated by Berlin, the life of American enslavement destined for Florens' mother is established prior to leaving her native continent. Like Lina, she experiences the destruction of her family and the burning of her home. The resulting homelessness defining enslaved womanhood is absolute and irrevocable, forcibly removed from their home spaces but also made to bear witness to their destruction. Even if they had the opportunity, the women have no home to return to.

The unnamed mother is subsequently brought to "the house that floats on the sea," substituting her binding vines for "chains around [her] neck [her] waist [her] ankles."[190] Perceiving the slave ship as a floating house, Morrison alludes to her newfound rootlessness as she is coerced into a space of no permanence or stability. This middling, liminal space becomes the site of her metamorphosis. Rediker explores the centrality of the slave ship and the Middle Passage in the process of readying African captives for slavery. In this space, the soon-to-be slaves were physically prepared, "readying the bodies for sale by the crew: shaving and cutting the hair of the men, using caustics to hide sores, dying grey hair black

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[187] Hartman, *Lose Your Mother* p.5
[188] Ira Berlin, *Generations of Captivity: A History of African American Slaves* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2003) p.23
[189] Morrison, *A Mercy* p.155
[190] Ibid p.156

and rubbing torsos with palm oil."[191] Their time on the slave ship prepared them for what life in bondage would entail, "[experiencing] the "white master" and his unchecked power and terror."[192] Rediker's research thus demonstrates that in this space, located somewhere between the motherland and the involuntary site of settlement, the enslaved are physically and psychologically moulded to expect and accept their lives as property.

Like Rediker, Morrison suggests that the Middle Passage is a journey of transformation, signalled by the unnamed mother's new conception of self on arrival in the New World. However, as a text of historical fiction rather than scholarship, the transformation of Florens' Mother is not bodily, shedding the intimate facets of her identity tied to her home geography. This transformation is apparent once Florens' mother arrives in the British slave-holding colony of Barbados, experiencing Berlin's proposed "fateful rendezvous with the peoples of the New World."[193] Here, the imposed identity of enslaved womanhood is revealed: "It was there I learned how I was not a person from my country, nor from my families. I was negrita. Everything. Language, dress, gods, dances, habits, decoration, song—all of it cooked in the colour of my skin. So it was as a black that I was purchased."[194] The process of estrangement initiated in Africa is seemingly complete on her arrival in this space. In this new geography, Florens' mother is branded by a status of isolation and solitude. While her former identity as "a person of [her] country [and] from her families," signals a position of unity and belonging, in colonial Barbados this is displaced by the label "negrita". This all-encompassing identity not only suggests the erasure of Florens' mother's identity, but it also signals her alienation. "Negrita" supplants her shared culture and ancestry with a superficial identity premised wholly on the colour of her skin and gender Under the white, patriarchal hegemonic order of the colonies, the nuances of her subjectivity are displaced by Blackness, solidifying race as the indicator of superiority and inferiority.

[191] Rediker, *The Slave Ship* p.350
[192] Ibid
[193] Berlin, *Generations of Captivity* p.23
[194] Morrison, *A Mercy* p.157

The colonial organisation of slavery's transatlantic geographies is seemingly omnipotent, able to erase and redefine even the most fundamental and personal aspects of the self. However, the particularity of historical fiction enables Morrison to convey the ambiguity of these spatially influenced identities. The intimate narratives of Florens' mother and Lina demonstrate McKittrick's proposal that "The physicality of [geographies of oppression] contributes to the process of social concealment and dehumanization but, importantly, black subjectivity is not swallowed up by the [geography] itself."[195] These women are thus complex, witnessing the concealment of subjectivity through the imposition of racial identities, but not its total erasure.

The narrative of Florens' mother touches upon the transatlantic experience of estrangement initiated in Africa and perpetuated into the New World. *Homegoing* expands this representation of the transatlantic world, showing how the Gold Coast specifically shapes the subjectivity of West African women. The colonial organisation of this geography is integral to the metamorphoses of the estranged sisters, Esi and Effia. Literary critics Nonki Motahane, Oliver Nyambi and Rodwell Makombe draw the connection between geography, movement, and identity within *Homegoing*, proposing that "For Esi […] identity is inherently linked to two places […] that is Africa and America. [Her] previous identification with aspects of [a] free Africa [is] shattered and, in its place, an imposed splitness."[196] Significantly, Esi's identity is intrinsically bound to different places, but her fragmentation of self cannot be simplistically divided between Africa and America. While Rediker stresses the centrality of the slave ship, proposing that "to board the sinister ship was […] a terrifying moment of transition from African to European control," Gyasi omits the Middle Passage from this narrative.[197] Esi's moment of transition consequently takes place in West Africa in the wake of her capture, manifesting an intra-regional divide between her home in "the heart of Asanteland" and the Cape Coast Castle dungeon.[198] Her arrival to the Cape Coast Castle dungeon marks the moment in which her life and identity are fractured: "Esi learned to split her life into Before the Castle and Now. Before the Castle she was the daughter of Big Man

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[195] McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds* p.xii
[196] Nonki Motahane, Oliver Nyambi & Rodwell Makombe, "Rooting Routes to Trans-Atlantic African Identities: The Metaphor of Female Descendancy in Yaa Gyasi's Homegoing," *African Identities* 19, No.1 (2021) p.19
[197] Rediker, *The Slave Ship* p.106
[198] Yaa Gyasi, *Homegoing* (St Ives: Clays Ltd.) p.28

and his third wife, Maame. Now she was dust. Before the Castle she was the prettiest girl in the village. Now she was thin air."[199] The timeline of Esi's life is divided into two dichotomous temporal and spatial geographies embodied by Before and Now.

The resulting spatial manifestations of Esi's identity are signalled through the antithetical conditions of visibility versus invisibility. Like Florens' mother, formerly defined as a multifaceted "person of [her] country," Esi's identity in the Before is structured by the different aspects of her home which collectively shape her subjectivity.[200] In the spatial-temporal geography of Before, she was a highly visible figure as Big Man's daughter. Her identity as a daughter particularly emphasises her humanity, defined by familial love and belonging. Moreover, specifically the daughter of a Big Man and the prettiest girl in the village, she is evidently a woman of eminence. Distinct from the other girls in her community, Gyasi suggests her inimitability. However, as the unnamed mother in *A Mercy* comes to be defined as an anonymous 'negrita' in the New World, the various elements comprising Esi's subjectivity are erased. Transformed from the vivacious "daughter" and "girl" into inanimate "dust" and "thin air", she is rendered invisible and insignificant. This transition is evocative of cremation and oblivion. Her figurative death—alluding to the funeral rites of ashes to ashes, dust to dust— seemingly embodies Orlando Patterson's definition "of the slave […] as a socially dead person."[201] Patterson premises the slave's condition of social death on their "[alienation] from all 'rights' or claims of birth, [proposing] he (sic) ceased to belong in his own right to any legitimate social order."[202]

In this tomb-like space, Esi is stripped of any meaningful social existence, defined by a condition of detachment and absence. However, Gyasi's allusion to Patterson's theory of social death is figurative rather than literal. She does not articulate the literal erasure of Esi's selfhood, instead conveying how these spatial processes of severance from family *felt* for the newly enslaved. Her personal loss is immense, represented as comparable with death, but Esi's Asante identity does not simply disappear. This is suggested in the later chapter of

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[199] Gyasi, *Homegoing* p.31
[200] Morrison, *A Mercy* p.157
[201] Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982) p.5
[202] Ibid

her daughter, Ness, who inherits aspects of her mother's Asante heritage, for example "a little Twi tune her mother used to sing sorrowfully."[203] Esi has carried her culture into the New World, eternally connected to her life "Before the Castle." Historical fiction therefore conveys the ambiguities of the spatial identities of enslavement. While transatlantic spaces of domination fragmented enslaved women's personhood, this is not to suggest that they literally became a different person. Instead, aspects of their 'old' identity perpetuated into their new environments, inherited by their descendants— consciously and unconsciously— in the form of a transatlantic identity.

Homegoing thus provides an account of women's enslavement in this West African geography, as identified by Motahane et al: "Before Esi in *Homegoing*, the African ancestor in narratives of becoming African American was particularly male," in turn causing the "masculinisation of [this] ancestry."[204] However, Esi is not the novel's only maternal ancestor remedying the masculinisation of this lineage. Effia's experiences illuminates that objectification and ostracism were not the reserve of the enslaved in West Africa. Entering Cape Coast Castle as a spouse rather than a captive, Effia's experiences are in many ways incomparable to the tragedy marking Esi's enslavement. Her life is represented as one of relative security, physically elevated from the "women down there [in the dungeon] who look like us."[205] However, this space is nonetheless marked by ambiguity even for its 'free' women. *Homegoing* narrates "the creation of exploitable categories of racial difference," from a West African perspective, demonstrating that African womanhood had become a site of universal exploitation under a transatlantic racialised patriarchy.[206] The white, patriarchal hierarchy dominating *A Mercy* is therefore not confined to the American colonies, subjecting Effia and Esi alike to unfreedoms in various ways.

The commodification of humans in West Africa extends beyond the capture and trade of people overseas, evidenced on an intra-regional scale through the forced marriage of Fante women to white men. Effia's marriage is represented as a business transaction: "If the white

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[203] Gyasi, *Homegoing* p.84
[204] Motahane et al. "Rooting Routes to Trans-Atlantic African Identities" p.22
[205] Gyasi, *Homegoing* p. 16
[206] Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches and Anxious Patriarchs* p.2

man wants her, he may have her. All the better for our business with them. All the better for the village."[207] Demonstrating that Fante women do not have to be enslaved to be objectified, Effia involuntarily sacrifices her body to enhance the standing of the village. As her father proposes that "[the Fante] must give [the white man] things in return" for goods such as iron and millet, it is apparent that Effia is one of these "things," sold to colonising forces under the guise of marriage.[208] Subsequently, her movement to Cape Coast Castle once again marks "the dissolution and destruction of the family lineage."[209]

Effia's later return to her home village, pregnant with James' child, demonstrates the indelibility of her spatially imposed estrangement. Upon learning that the woman who raised her, Baaba, is not her mother, she is defined by an irrevocable rootlessness in the wake of her father's death: "You are nothing from nowhere. No mother and now no father." She looked at Effia's stomach and smiled. "What can grow from nothing?"[210] Effia's pregnancy paradoxically solidifies her ancestral severance and personal isolation, even as she carries new life. Effia being "nothing from nowhere" echoes Esi's analogy of dust and air, suggesting that since occupying the Castle, the sisters have figuratively become empty, insignificant bodies. Although literally with child, Gyasi indicates that Effia's disconnect from family and lineage renders her barren, prohibited from preserving and perpetuating a meaningful bloodline. She consequently imbues the identity of her descendants with the same loss and alienation inherited from Effia's father in his final moments: "His unrest had kept him alive and now that unrest belonged to Effia. It would feed her life and the life of her child."[211] While the connotations of the verb "feed" are typically positive, alluding to growth and nurture, in this moment, Gyasi suggests that Effia's newly blossoming family tree is to grow in hostile conditions. This act of feeding is toxic and destructive, dooming this line of descent to grow in West Africa without stability. She continues to occupy the Gold Coast, but, like Esi, she is defined by the spatially influenced identity of exile. Therefore, in answer to Baaba's maliciously posed question, a family tree can grow from nothing; it is,

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[207] Gyasi, *Homegoing* p.15
[208] Ibid p.7
[209] Ibid p.17
[210] Ibid p.27
[211] Ibid

however, pre-destined to be defined with the anxiety and restlessness that marked its initial planting.

The slave trade's influence in West Africa thus fractures the lineage and kinship even of those remaining on the continent. Speaking to the next gap in the archives, *Homegoing* demonstrates the powerful influence of transatlantic spaces of domination over West African women's subjectivity. It is important to return to Angelou's theorisation of the Black population's relationship to Africa, admitting a "boundless envy of those who remained on the continent, out of fortune or perfidy [because] the lowliest could call the name of ancestors who lived centuries earlier."[212] Effia embodies a futility in such envy, challenging the representation of West Africa as a geography of ancestral clarity. Alternatively, Gyasi indicates that even for those remaining in this space, family trees do not date back centuries, instead beginning anew with West African "wenches" and their slaver husbands.[213] *Homegoing* subsequently traces the resulting transgenerational identity of rootlessness as it traverses centuries, reckoning with its communal inheritance in Esi and Effia's twenty first century descendants.

Survival and Liberation: Articulating Transatlantic Identities

In the second generation liberatory narratives, the temporal and spatial movement away from the antebellum South toward the seventeenth century transatlantic world means that, unlike their predecessors, they do not "centre on [the] enslaved protagonist's attainment of freedom."[214] *A Mercy* and *Homegoing* depict the reverse of this, representing the spatial processes which dispossessed women of colour of their freedom in slavery's early transatlantic landscape. However, these novels *are* liberatory narratives, focussing "on the protagonist's conception and articulation of herself as a free, autonomous and self-authorised self."[215] Morrison is thus concerned with how enslaved women use space to survive in the face of hardening racial binaries, aligning *A Mercy* with McKittrick's theorisation that enslaved women challenge traditional geographies.[216] While the women

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[212] Angelou, *All God's Children Need Travelling Shoes* p.76
[213] Gyasi, *Homegoing* p.19
[214] Mitchell, *Freedom to Remember* p.4
[215] Ibid
[216] McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds* p.xi

are not freed, they are not defeated. By defiantly shaping transnational identities as a means of tenacity and protection, Lina and Florens' mother carve out their own spaces in the New World. In juxtaposition, Esi and Effia cannot forge their own transatlantic identities of liberation. Instead, *Homegoing* looks beyond the era of enslavement, enabling this for their descendants, Marcus and Marjorie. The redemption of ancestral identity is made possible through the return to, and reclamation of, the West African geography. To demonstrate this, I apply McInnis' theorisation of "reterritorialization," which proposes that contemporary African Americans have articulated new relationships to plantation space beyond those of exploitation and dehumanisation under enslavement.[217] Conversely, Gyasi's representation of reterritorialization is written from a transatlantic perspective. She therefore reappropriates the pluralistic geography of the slave trade, and Black history, so that a coherent identity can be achieved.

I focus upon how these second generation liberatory narratives "provide new models of liberation" by re-presenting slavery's transatlantic geographies as the source of redemption, or at least of survival, for those burdened by a condition of displacement.[218] This is manifested in different ways, but at the centre of *A Mercy* and *Homegoing* alike is the embracing of a multi-spatial, transatlantic identity. This section thus speaks to Paul Gilroy's theorisations of the hybridity of Black identity. Gilroy refutes the notion that Black identity is static or "[rooted,]" instead defined by "a process of movement that is more appropriately approached via the homonym routes."[219] In line with Gilroy's scholarship, I argue that Morrison and Gyasi suggest that strength and possibility lie in the creation of a trans-spatial non-white identity; enslaved women and their descendants therefore reappropriate the same geographies which degrade them so to defy their imposed identities of exile.

A Mercy criticises the failings of universal womanhood in the New World, suggesting that the society we meet in *Beloved* could have been prevented by solidarity and family. Lina's estrangement is temporarily remedied by the familial relationships formed across racial lines on Vaark's farm. Their "small, tight family" comprised of European, African, and Native

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[217] McInnis, "Black Women's Geographies and The Afterlives of The Sugar Plantation" p.744
[218] Mitchell, *Freedom to Remember* p.4
[219] Gilroy, *Black Atlantic* p.19

American peoples on the homestead embodies a microcosm of what colonial America could have been.[220] Lina embodies a point of intersection within this community, becoming friends with Rebekka and a surrogate mother to Florens. The bonds of womanhood are a site of refuge, providing "company for each other," in this space of dislocation, in turn, "[assuaging] the tiny yet eternal yearning for the home."[221] Family is again a source of comfort in the face of trauma for Florens' mother. In the wake of the "taking of me and Bess and one other to the curing shed," to be "broken in," she finds relief in the resulting role of motherhood: "And it would have been all right. It would have been good both times, because the results were you and your brother."[222] The creation of family holds a redemptive quality, seemingly ameliorating the horrors of rape through the manifestation of maternal love. Kinship thus defines these women of colour by more than their enslavement and their solitude. However, in this geography, the maintenance of such relationships could only ever be transient. The women of Vaark's farm are disbanded by the solidifying of racial binaries, evidenced when Rebekka sells Florens and replaces the "talk and [laughter]" of her friendship with Lina for a white religious community that her former companion "cannot enter."[223] Moreover, Florens' mother cannot fulfil her maternal role because in bondage, the enslaver wrests dominion over her daughter. Florens is thus sold and her mother, alone again, "stayed on her knees. In the dust where [her] heart will remain each day and night."[224]

Unable to rectify their spatially imposed identity of exile through the literal unity of people, Morrison suggests that they must do this figuratively by uniting different geographic identities within themselves. Carving out alternative, private spaces of survival within their transatlantic landscape, Lina and the unnamed mother demonstrate that "Geography is not […] secure and unwavering; we produce space, we produce its meaning."[225] Challenging her spatially induced subjugation, Lina hybridises her identity as part of her process of "self-invention," carefully "[sorting] and [storing] what she dared to recall and eliminated the

[220] Morrison, *A Mercy* p.55
[221] Ibid pp.50, 56-57
[222] Ibid p.157
[223] Ibid pp.152, 151
[224] Ibid p.158
[225] McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds* p.xi

rest."[226] Severed from her native geography, Lina redefines herself so to survive, combining elements of her innate and her imposed identities:

> She decided to fortify herself by piecing together scraps of what her mother taught her […] she cobbled together neglected rites, merged Europe medicine with native, scripture with lore and recalled or invented the hidden meaning of things. Found, in other words, a way to be in the world.[227]

Despite the efforts of settler colonialism, Lina demonstrates that the traditions and cultures of America's Indigenous populations are not erased, even as her sovereignty is lost. In the wake of "the death of the world," Lina carries the wisdom of her village into the temporal and spatial geography of colonial America.[228] However, like her, this knowledge is out of place in its new context. Consequently, Lina fuses these ideas with Western teachings, suggested as she actively pieces together, cobbles, and merges the knowledge from each place. As indicated by the verb "fortify," Lina constructs an intangible form of protection through the articulation of this multi-spatial identity. The blending of Native and Eurocentric cultures echoes Gilroy's theorisation that Black identity is a product of "mutation, hybridity and intermixture," emphasising the transatlantic movement of ideas as well as bodies.[229] As an Indigenous American, Lina has not endured transatlantic diaspora, yet her occupation of colonial America means that she is a product of a multifaceted, transnational geography. To survive, she *chooses* to embrace both spatial identities, conjuring an identity comprised of European and Native American teachings. While she is not liberated, Lina exhibits resilience and defiance in the face of settler colonialism. Her private reappropriation of the same geography which externally defines her as an exile enables some redemption from solitude, thus finding a "way to be in the world."[230]

The narrative of Florens' mother is shorter than Lina's, but it similarly illuminates how enslaved women became the embodiment of "inescapable hybridity," to survive in the hostile geography of the New World.[231] The racialised and sexualised label of "negrita" is

[226] Morrison, *A Mercy* p.47
[227] Ibid p.45
[228] Ibid p.47
[229] Gilroy, *Black Atlantic* p.223.
[230] Morrison, *A Mercy* p.45
[231] Gilroy, *Black Atlantic* p.xi

only surface deep, masking but not erasing elements of her native identity. An additional study exploring transatlantic Black identity during the era of the transatlantic slave trade was undertaken by Alan Rice, proposing that diasporic Africans "carried their culture in their heads, which meant that even in America, Africa was part of their existence."[232] In particular, Rice emphasises the movement of "art forms which were easily transportable, such as chanted songs."[233] The intimate relationship of historical and cultural scholarship with fiction is apparent as we observe Florens' mother "singing at the pump. A song about the green bird fighting then dying when the monkey steals her egg."[234] In line with Rice, Morrison illuminates that song perpetuates intangible, undetectable aspects of the Old World into her new environment. While Florens' mother's forced diaspora severs her from her home, the cultures of this space remain intrinsic to her and her identity even in America. However, the unnamed mother's narrative suggests that survival is again reliant upon adapting to this new geography. Empowering herself and her children, Florens' Mother navigates the articulation of a defiant, amalgamated identity by comprising elements of her new and old geographies.

To shape an identity which exists beyond her imposed dehumanisation, Florens' mother occupies what historian Stephanie Camp identifies as a "rival geography," defined as the "alternative negotiation and mapping of plantation space."[235] Camp proposes that "bondspeople had their own plans for their bodies," finding spaces within and beyond the plantation in order to challenge their prescribed bodily definitions.[236] In *A Mercy*, this is apparent when the mother and her children, "forbidden to leave this place," illicitly learn to read and write under the tutelage of a Catholic Reverend "[hiding] near the marsh."[237] In this transatlantic geography where "There is no protection. To be a female in this place is to be an open wound that cannot heal," Florens' mother seeks out a rival geography so to arm herself and her children with the only weaponry they have access to: knowledge.[238] The

[232] Alan Rice, *Radical Narratives of the Black Atlantic* (London: Continuum, 2003) p.24
[233] Ibid p.206
[234] Morrison, *A Mercy* p.158
[235] Camp "The Pleasures of Resistance" p.535
[236] Ibid
[237] Morrison, *A Mercy* p.3
[238] Ibid p.155 Rebekka's narrative demonstrates that there *is* protection in the New World for women, accessible through an exclusively white solidarity. As racial binaries in America solidify, women of colour are denied access to this source of security, forced to find alternative means of self-protection.

realising of a hybrid identity is thus not passively acquired, endangering herself so to become an emboldened bodily site of Afro-European unity. Western knowledge is perceived as a source of protection, implied when she proposes "What I know is there is magic in learning."[239] Mirroring Lina's blending of Western and Indigenous practices as an act of fortification, the understanding of learning being a "magic" force alludes to its inherent power. Learning does not liberate enslaved womanhood in this geography, but its magic provides an unobservable line of defence. Therefore, "[hopeful that] if we could learn letters somehow someday [Florens] could make [her] own way," the mother uses the only means at her disposal to safeguard herself, but more so to protect her soon-to-be estranged daughter in this landscape where motherhood is inevitably unstable.[240] We therefore witness women of colour conceive a self-authorised transatlantic identity by carving out alternative, private spaces within the colonial American geography. Though liberation for enslaved women is unobtainable in this temporal-spatial geography, by tenaciously appropriating its resources, it is possible to navigate a path to survival.

Homegoing speaks to the possibility of redeeming Effia and Esi's descendants who remain in the perpetual bind of enslavement's legacies. The homelessness and dislocation staining these West African ancestral identities transcends both generations and the Atlantic, as observed by Motahane et al.: "the motif of descent reflects connections—not only of ancestry but also of a of a shared condition of racial precarity."[241] Each generation from the seventeenth century onwards is tainted by an ontological lack of belonging which is expressed in their fraught relationships with space. Consequently, while Effia and Esi's most contemporary descendants, Marjorie and Marcus, live in a geography of literal freedom in the twenty-first century United States, like the West African landscape of their ancestors, their home embodies a site of detachment. Marjorie's fractured sense of self derives from her inability to identify fully with either of the transatlantic components of her identity. While she grows up in America, she maintains a strong, but confused, affiliation to her Ghanaian heritage:

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[239] Morrison, *A Mercy* p.3
[240] Ibid pp.154, 155
[241] Montahane et al. "Rooting Routes to Trans-Atlantic African Identities" p.21

> At home they had a different word for African Americans. *Akata*. That *Akata* people were different from Ghanaians, too long gone from the mother continent to continue calling it the mother continent […] she could feel herself being pulled away too, almost *akata*, too long gone from Ghana to be Ghanaian.[242]

Unable to align herself wholly with either geography or identity, Marjorie identifies as neither African American nor Ghanaian. Her physical and prolonged separation from Ghana ostracises her from the Ghanaian identity; however, only "almost akata," she has also not been in America long enough for this geography to define her sense of self. Marjorie accordingly occupies a liminal space between Ghana and Alabama, fracturing her selfhood. In the geography of the United States, Marjorie's identity is overwhelmed by a condition of homelessness, demonstrating that the unrest inherited from Effia's father continues to grow within her.

Unlike Marjorie, Marcus has only ever known the United States. Nevertheless, his identity is again marked by a spatially induced incoherence. Marcus possesses an extensive knowledge of his ancestral experience within the American geography. Consequently, his sense of self in contemporary California is burdened by the heavy weight of African American history dating back to his Great Grandfather's experiences under the convict leasing system; Jim Crow and the Great Migration; the ghettoization of Harlem and substance abuse; the war on drugs and the prison industrial complex.[243] His identity is further fragmented by the unknowability of what precedes this tangible Black history rooted in the United States. The inaccessibility of his transnational heritage manifests in a phobic conceptualisation of the ocean. He proposes that his fear derives from its sublimity and liminality: "It's because of all that space. It's because everywhere I look, I see blue, and I have no idea where it begins."[244] Specifically referring to the Atlantic, this in-between space separating Africa and America is a site of division rather than continental unity. The ocean embodies Marcus' personal experiences of displacement as well as the overarching dislocation created by the slave trade and African diaspora. Oblivious to where this space begins, Marcus alludes to the enigmatic character of his ancestral identity, unable to identify the place or the peoples of

[242] Gyasi, *Homegoing* p.273 (original emphasis)
[243] Ibid p.289
[244] Ibid p.296

his West African origins. His perception of this space as something vast and uncontainable therefore embodies the boundless rift tearing apart his identity, as well as that of African Americans more generally. For both Marcus and Marjorie, identity is influenced by two separated geographies—Ghana and America— physically and metaphorically divided by "endless blue."[245]

Redeeming Black identity is possible once Marcus and Marjorie meet. Gyasi suggests that the distant relatives have wrongly sought after an identity which is rooted to one geography. Therefore, appealing to Gilroy's theorisation of the transatlantic Black identity defined by movement and hybridity, Gyasi demonstrates the need to embrace their "routed," trans-spatial selfhood.[246] They consequently embark on the transnational journey to their original site of ancestral dispossession: Cape Coast Castle. Marcus and Marjorie confront this space of dominance, initiating the task of reclaiming Black identity from a state of perpetual incoherence. However, this process is furthered in a different space, evidenced once Marcus explodes through the "Door of No Return," entering the ocean and "looking out at all the water before him."[247] Marjorie joins him, "welcom[ing him] home."[248] Previously the Atlantic Ocean is represented as a space of severance and mortality, aware that "the ocean floor [is] littered with Black men."[249] In this moment it is imbued with new meanings. The act of being welcomed home takes place in this middling space, enabling Marjorie and Marcus to begin the process of tending to the open entangled wounds of their conjoined histories.

McInnis' theorisation of "reterritorialization" is particularly relevant here.[250] Looking beyond McInnis' focus upon the plantation, Gyasi forges new relationships between the Atlantic and Black psyche. In finding home in the oceanic space lying between Ghana and the United States, Gyasi demonstrates that liberation and the reclamation of self-hood lies in embracing the transatlantic Black identity. Echoing my theorisation that Black women's

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[245] Gyasi, *Homegoing* p.284
[246] Gilroy, *Black Atlantic* p.19
[247] Gyasi, *Homegoing* p.300
[248] Ibid
[249] Ibid p.284
[250] McInnis, "Black Women's Geographies and The Afterlives of The Sugar Plantation" p.744

bodies cannot wholly escape the inscriptions of the scarred slave body, it should again be stressed that the renegotiation of this spatial relationship does not omit the complex identities of Blackness perpetuated throughout history. The previous connotations of this space are not erased, "still entangled in the tentacles" of its oppressive, divisive definitions.[251] Nonetheless, the home found by Marcus and Marjorie in this borderland transforms it into a site of geographical unity. The fractured identities of Majorie and Marcus are somewhat resolved by revisiting and reterritorializing the site of ancestral estrangement, welcoming the oceanic space as the familial home of Blackness. Through the embracing of a hybrid, transatlantic Black identity, Gyasi therefore imagines a redemptive space of Black liberation and fulfilment.

Conclusion

In relation to the overarching literary tradition of Black women, Hortense Spillers defines the construct of tradition as "an active verb," proposing "that the "tradition" for black women's writing community is a matrix of literary *discontinuities* that partially articulate various periods of consciousness in the history of the African American people."[252] As illuminated throughout this chapter, the shifting representations of geography and place within both generations of this literary tradition supports this. Each categorised as a liberatory narrative, these novels exhibit continuity as well as innovation. The two generations are tethered by a continuous representation of the intrinsic relationship between space and the articulation of identity in enslaved women and their descendants. However, this is also a literary tradition of *discontinuities*. In *Corregidora, Kindred* and *Beloved*, the articulation of geography and space is an extension of the task set out in Chapter One: addressing the holes in the historical archives concerned with the subjectivity of enslaved women. These novels represent American slavery, and its effects, as nationwide and transgenerational. Traversing the boundaries of time and space, the legacies of this history ensnare Sethe, Ursa, and Dana in a contemporary geography of enslavement, directly influencing the manifestation of their subjectivity and identity. In suggesting the

[251] McInnis, "Black Women's Geographies and The Afterlives of The Sugar Plantation" p.770

[252] Hortense Spillers, "Afterword: Crosscurrents, Discontinuities: Black Women's Fiction," in *Conjuring: Black Women, Fiction and Literary Tradition*. Eds. Marjorie Pryse and Hortense J. Spillers. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985) pp.260, 251 (emphasis in original)

intimacy of past and the present geographies, Morrison, Jones, and Butler further communicate the multifaceted character of Black womanhood, influenced by the spatial legacies of enslavement *and* their contemporary environment.

The affiliation between geography, space, and the identities of women of colour is even more explicit in the second-generation narratives. The transatlantic geographies of *A Mercy* and *Homegoing* are sites of estrangement, fracturing the identity of non-white women as they are severed from their spaces of home. However, dispossession is not all that defines this geography. In their representations of the transatlantic geography of slavery, Gyasi and Morrison couple the dislocation marking these historical spaces with defiance and self-possession. By either carving out alternative, covert spaces in the geography of the New World or reclaiming the physical space of ancestral dispossession, the enslaved and their descendants reorient their relationships with transatlantic geographies. By unifying facets of the Old and New Worlds, of Africa and America, the condition of rootlessness is supplanted with resilience, coherence, and hybridity.

Diversifying the Oppressor: Responsibility and Implication in the History of Enslavement

This chapter explores "the remarkably messy" history of responsibility and implication for the slave trade.[253] While the 'master' narrative of this history has emphasised the role of white men—whether European colonisers or American plantation enslavers— several developments in historical scholarship have illuminated the multi-faceted issue of accountability. Since the turn of the twenty-first century, this field has undergone continuous expansion, for example, acknowledging the implication of white women who "stood to personally and directly benefit from the commodification and enslavement of African Americans."[254] More complex historical work implicates non-white populations in this exploitative trade, specifically African populations and Native Americans. Non-white responsibility has remained shrouded, identified by Tiya Miles as "an aspect of history that both Black and Native people had willed themselves to forget."[255] While Miles' scholarship refers specifically to the "spectre of slave owning Indians [as] an unspeakable thing," the same silence marks the responsibility of African peoples in the transatlantic slave trade.[256] Saidiya Hartman speaks to this, proposing that the censorship of this history has "[sanitised] the whole ugly business [permitting Africans] to believe that they were without scars."[257] The works of Miles, Hartman as well as Marcus Rediker, Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Barbara Krauthamer engaged with throughout this chapter expand and diversify the definitions of the 'oppressor.' While such historical scholarship is thus pivotal to the splitting open of this past, I emphasise the particularity of historical fiction to deal with this difficult, and ambiguous, past.

This chapter explores the representation of white women's accountability for enslavement in *A Mercy* before examining the representation of Native American enslavers in Tiya Miles' *The Cherokee Rose*, and African participation in the trade in Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing*. Illuminating the overlap of historical scholarship and historical fiction, these novels

[253] Henry Louis Gates Jr., "Ending the Slavery Blame-Game" *The New York Times* (April 23, 2010)
[254] Stephanie E. Jones-Rogers, *They Were Her Property: White Women as Slave Owners in the American South* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019) p.205
[255] Tiya Miles, *Ties That Bind: The Story of an Afro-Cherokee Family in Slavery and Freedom* (London: University of California Press Ltd. 2006) p.xiv
[256] Ibid
[257] Hartman, *Lose Your Mother* p.72

complicate the entrenched understandings of slavery's power-victim dynamic, obscuring even the hierarchical relationships outlined in the first-generation narratives and *A Mercy*. My exploration is not concerned with placing blame, however. Instead, I argue that fiction is uniquely equipped to tackle these difficult histories, allowing readers to imagine the ambivalence of responsibility and implication through its subjective effects on the individual, the community, and their descendants. Gyasi and Miles represent the details of this submerged past on an intimate scale, demonstrating that accountability cannot be simplistically allocated along racial binaries. Dealing with the intersecting forces of race, gender, and status, *Homegoing* and *The Cherokee Rose* stress the ambivalent relationships between the enslaved and the populations of 'power.'

Despite the ugliness of this history, Gyasi and Miles suggest that the wounds inflicted by Native American and African responsibility for enslavement can heal by reconfiguring the antagonistic relationships of enslavement in the contemporary moment. I consequently argue that *The Cherokee Rose* and *Homegoing* represent a point of distinction from the "African American literary fiction [of the twenty-first century]" which, as observed by literary scholar Candice M. Jenkins, is marked by a "widespread pessimism about both our present moment and what is to come."[258] Jenkins observes that Black literature has supplanted "the long cherished notions of Black progress [for] the most painful figurative and literal aspects of black reality."[259] Conversely, as second generation liberatory narratives, I propose that *The Cherokee Rose* and *Homegoing* stand apart from this literary shift, inserting a sense of hope and reparation for future generations by "describing how to achieve freedom."[260]

Despite their differing historical experiences, Native American, African American, and African peoples continue to be afflicted by the unceasing legacies of slavery, settler colonialism and white supremacy. The liberatory narrative thus supplements the anguish of resuscitating the past with possibility in the present. Rejecting the pessimism of other

[258] Candice Jenkins, "Afro-Futurism/Afro-Pessimism" in *The Cambridge Companion to Twenty-First Century American Fiction,* eds. Joshua Miller. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021) p.123
[259] Ibid p.125
[260] Mitchell, *Freedom to Remember* p.4

contemporary Black literature, these second-generation texts open a space for the actualisation of freedom, in turn, “[eclipsing] the deterministic condition of racial enslavement.”[261] *Homegoing* and *The Cherokee Rose* therefore confront the taboos of Native American and African implication in the history of slavery, simultaneously manifesting unity and kinship among these groups in order to demonstrate that this history does not have to define the present.

The Complicity of White Women in the History of Enslavement

Recognising the participation of white women in racial slavery is a significant movement toward broadening of how responsibility and implication within this history is understood. Historian Stephanie E. Jones-Rogers emphasises the prevalence of this demographic, proposing that “slave-owning women not only witnessed the most brutal features of slavery, they took part in them, profited from them, and defended them.”[262] Jones-Rogers demonstrates that white women were not only as financially invested in the domestic slave trade as men, but they were also just as brutal, concluding that “Southern white women’s roles in upholding and sustaining slavery form part of the much larger history of white supremacy and oppression […] They were not passive bystanders. They were co-conspirators.”[263] Written several decades prior to Jones-Rogers’ research, the first generation of liberatory narratives implicate white women, speaking to the cruelty of plantation mistresses evident in non-fictional slave narratives of the nineteenth century.

The narrative of Solomon Northup demonstrates the cruelty elicited by Mistress Epps, driven by an “insatiable thirst for vengeance” against Patsey, an enslaved woman.[264] Unable to challenge her husband for his infidelity, Mistress Epps’ anger falls upon this hapless enslaved woman, frequently “[working] herself to the red-hot pitch of rage” only quietened by Master Epps “with a promise that Patsey should be flogged.”[265] The first-generation texts allude to such narratives, illuminating the spiteful jealousy of plantation wives inspired by

[261] Mitchell, *Freedom to Remember* p.4
[262] Jones-Rogers, *They Were Her Property* p.ix
[263] Ibid, p.205
[264] Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave: Narrative of Solomon Northup, a Citizen of New-York, Kidnapped in Washington City in 1841, and Rescued in 1853* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1997) p.198 https://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/northup/northup.html#northup250
[265] Ibid

white men's exploitation of enslaved women for personal pleasure. The plantation mistress of *Corregidora* is described as having "some hot prongs she come after me with [and] I know where she was going to put them, right between my legs. Cause she knew he was getting his from me too."[266] This inherently sexual, torturous act is rooted in jealousy. Yet rather than scorn her adulterous husband, the recipient of such anger is the enslaved woman, powerless at the hands of her white superiors—male or female.[267] *Corregidora* thus demonstrates the inappropriacy of labelling white women "passive bystanders" in this violent past, bearing the weight of active responsibility themselves.[268]

However, the first-generation novels only allude to the implication of white women in the history of slavery. Moreover, white women such as Mrs Garner or Amy Denver in *Beloved* are sympathetic allies to Black womanhood. While represented as ultimately powerless in the face of society's racial-gender hierarchy, both Mrs. Garner and Amy Denver show Sethe kindness. The problematic white woman is instead fleshed out in Morrison's second-generation liberatory narrative, *A Mercy*. Morrison explores the origins of America's national identity that, in *Playing in the Dark,* she asserts to be deeply associated with race: "American means white and Africanist people struggle to make the term applicable to themselves."[269] She concludes that Americanness is inherently exclusionary, proposing that "the distinguishing features of the not-Americans [in the New World was] their slave status, their social status— and their colour."[270] In *A Mercy*, Morrison explores the role of white women in the creation of this discriminatory national identity through Jacob Vaark's wife, Rebekka, a poor white woman sold in England by her father into marriage to Vaark.

Initially represented as a sympathetic figure, Rebekka fulfils the role of mother in the transracial "family" occupying Vaark farm: "A good hearted couple (parents), and three female servants (sisters, say) […] Each member dependent on them, none cruel, all kind."[271] However, this family dynamic is interrupted by the death of Rebekka's husband. Once

[266] Jones, *Corregidora* p.181
[267] Butler, *Kindred* p.88
[268] Jones-Rogers, *They Were Her Property* p.205
[269] Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark* (London: Pan Books Ltd. 1993) p.47
[270] Ibid p.48.
[271] Morrison, *A Mercy* p.137

stripped of her spousal identity, she is suspended in liminality: "Without the status or shoulder of a man […] a widow was in practice illegal."[272] Jacob's death leaves Rebekka unprotected and undefined. Severed from patriarchal support, she is rendered powerless by her gender. However, when Rebekka falls ill, Morrison suggests that despite her femininity, she still occupies a position of difference. If she was to also die, "[Lina], Sorrow, a new-born [and] Florens" would be left "female and illegal," consequently "alone, belonging to no one [becoming] wild game for anyone."[273] While Rebekka is also female and outside the law, as their free, white mistress, she personifies the only protection available for the farm's enslaved women. Nevertheless, when Rebekka survives, she abandons her parental role. Without the protection of her husband, she sources security elsewhere, choosing solace in whiteness rather than in the women who have been a make-shift family for Rebekka. Immersing herself in a strictly white religious community, Rebekka cleaves herself from her adoptive daughters, symbolising white women's more general severance from universal womanhood.

The resulting racial binaries are suggested by the religious beliefs she espouses, proposing that "Natives and Africans had access to grace, but not to heaven—a heaven [the Anabaptists] knew as intimately as their own back gardens."[274] The Anabaptists have a domesticated sense of heaven, one that is as exclusive to racialised others as their own gardens might be. The resulting divide between these populations, signalled by whether one had access to the Promised Land, is inherently hierarchical. Rebekka's newfound 'Divine' freedom is a privilege of whiteness, leaving the women whose labour supported not only Rebekka's household, but her own emotional state, unprotected against the forces of colonialism, patriarchy and racism increasingly defining American space. Morrison demonstrates that the implication of white women in the history of racism and enslavement reaches back to the founding moments of American history.

While *A Mercy* exemplifies the failings of white women, this chapter argues that responsibility within the history of slavery cannot be categorically allocated along the

[272] Morrison, *A Mercy* p.93
[273] Ibid p.55
[274] Ibid p.94

binaries of white and Black. Therefore, Rebekka does not embody universal white womanhood. This is supported by Tiya Miles' *The Cherokee Rose: A Novel of Gardens and Ghosts* which narrativises a history of Native American slaveholding from the perspective of Anna Rosina Gamble— a white, female Moravian missionary. *The Cherokee Rose* tells the story of three women individually drawn to the Hold House plantation in Georgia: a seemingly typical remnant of the Old South, except it was built for and owned by Native Americans. Miles suggests that this distinction keeps the plantation's past steeped in myth, as demonstrated through the character of Cheyenne. After purchasing the plantation house both to explore her heritage and run a bed and breakfast, Cheyenne's blurred understanding of this history is apparent. The other women, Ruth, an African American journalist, and Jinx, a Creek-Cherokee historian, are aware that the Hold House was "a working plantation [where] Blacks were owned as property;" yet Cheyenne challenges this notion, "[assuring them that] this place is just what it seems: paradise."[275] Once the women recover Anna's lost diary, it is confirmed that the plantation was anything but paradise under the oppressive rule of Cherokee Chief Hold. Crucially, this diary unveils the atrocities committed by Native American slaveholders, simultaneously complicating the understandings of white women's role in this past.

The earliest entries in Anna's diary implicate her in the hierarchical judgement of people of colour, venturing to what she terms a "heathen land" with her husband on the civilising mission of "[spreading] God's word."[276] She is thus originally an outsider in this space. However, as the narrative progresses and the pressures created by the intersecting forces of gender, race, and status exacerbate, Anna is embedded in the plantation's community of non-white women. Expanding the sympathetic figures of Mrs Garner and Amy in *Beloved*, Anna is a friend, sister, and mother to women of Cherokee and Black descent.[277] Told from Anna's perspective rather than a first-person account from the enslaved, *The Cherokee Rose* deviates from the other novels explored throughout this study. However, this stylistic

[275] Tiya Miles, *The Cherokee Rose: A Novel of Gardens and Ghosts* (Winston-Salem: John F. Blair Publisher, 2015) p.103
[276] Ibid p.144
[277] Anna becomes a mother in numerous ways, adopting a girl of Creek and African descent, Mary Ann Battis, as her own daughter *and* giving birth to a biracial child, Isaac, after an interracial relationship with Samuel Cotterell. Ibid pp.205, 198

divergence is arguably most aligned with existing historical sources. Krauthamer highlights that "a great deal of what is known about the lives of the early generations of Black slaves in the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations comes from the records of northern missionaries."[278] While missionaries never set out to create an archive of biographical material of enslaved people held by Native peoples, their recordings of life on the missions in Indian territory resulted in "both general and detailed images of the enslaved people."[279] As an historian first and foremost, Miles respects this archival reality, appropriating and adapting the medium of the Moravian memoir.

As a woman in a patriarchal environment, Anna endures her own limitations. Nonetheless, her whiteness protects her from the intersecting forces of gender *and* race. Anna consequently occupies a pivotal position, bearing witness to the horrors bestowed upon Cherokee and enslaved Black women as an ally, not a passive observer. Her perspective, influenced by sororal love, transforms the archival form of the missionary diary into an intimate historical imaginary of what Black and Indigenous womanhood looked like under Cherokee enslavers. By grounding this novel in the archives of the privileged, *The Cherokee Rose* represents an overlap of historical fiction and revisionist historiography, echoing Hartman's proposal that "we cannot access the subaltern consciousness outside the dominant representations or elite documents;" such archival material is reappropriated and "[read] against the grain in order to write a different account of the past."[280] Miles similarly adopts the form of elite documents so to represent an alternative account of this history. However, as a work of fiction, *The Cherokee Rose* goes beyond simply reading against the grain of archival glimpses. Not bound by historical fact, Miles' reappropriation of the Moravian memoir provides an unprecedentedly detailed focus upon enslaved and Cherokee women's lives. *The Cherokee Rose* represents white womanhood as a crucial access point to the subjectivity of enslaved and Cherokee women. Even as Miles diverges from representing

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[278] Krauthamer*, Black Slaves, Indian Masters* p.47
[279] Ibid
When writing *The House on Diamond Hill: A Cherokee Plantation Story*, the non-fictional text informing *The Cherokee Rose*, Miles' research was dependent upon "Moravian missionary diary entries and letters;" these texts revealed the complex intersections of Black, White, and Cherokee populations on the plantation. Tiya Miles, *The House on Diamond Hill: A Cherokee Plantation Story* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010) p.219
[280] Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery and Self-making in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) p.10

this history from a first-person perspective of the individual enslaved, she thus does not neglect the task of reconstructing the interior world of women of colour. In its dealings with the complexities of responsibility and implication, *The Cherokee Rose* balances the inner workings of the oppressed while diversifying the figure of the oppressor.

Unlike Rebekka, Anna both supports and finds strength within a diverse sisterhood, exemplifying that the history of slavery cannot be defined by a simplistic power dynamic of race. While Morrison conveys the hardening of racial binaries between white and Black, contextualising how whiteness became synonymous with a unique supremacy, in *The Cherokee Rose*, women's relationships complicate divisions of race. Moreover, these ambiguities are not contained to a binary of white and non-white, also marking the relationships of Cherokee and African American peoples, complicating the issue of responsibility and implication in more ways in than one. Therefore, Anna's position in this community and as a narrator is crucial; nonetheless, the primary focus of my investigation is on Miles' representation of Cherokee and African American encounters in the history of slavery.

The Complexities of Native American Responsibility

Many Native American communities embraced racial hierarchies which defined Blackness as marker of lesser humanity. This is explored by Krauthamer's research, revealing that various Indigenous communities embraced "those elements of Euro-American racial ideologies that identified people of African descent as an inherently and permanently inferior group."[281] Citing the examples of the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations, Krauthamer observes that from the late eighteenth century through the end of the U.S. Civil War, "like their white Southern counterparts, Indians bought, sold, owned, and exploited black people's labour and reproduction for economic and social gain."[282] Native American slaveholding remains a contentious issue, only recently explored in depth by historians.[283] Its taboo nature is discussed in the historical scholarship of Miles:

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[281] Krauthamer, *Black Slaves, Indian Masters* p.4-5

[282] Ibid p.2

[283] See William G. McLoughlin, "Red Indians, Black Slavery and White Racism: America's Slaveholding Indians," *American Quarterly* 26, No. 4 (1974) pp. 367, 369

> For Black and Indian peoples in the United States, this imperative to "disremember" is even more pressing because memory contains not only the suffering we have endured in the vise of colonial expansion, genocide, and slavery, but also the suffering we have endured at the hands of one another in this context of brutal oppression.[284]

Taken collectively, Miles' historical scholarship and fiction offer an important intervention in the repression of this past, prohibiting the perpetuation of this willed amnesia. *The Cherokee Rose* contributes to this task, shattering the façade that has kept the historical relations of Black and Indigenous populations defined by romanticised accounts of "Indians as the historical protectors of black runaways" and benevolent 'masters'.[285]

The act of imagination embodied by Anna's diary paints a detailed account of life on the Hold plantation in the nineteenth century. Significantly, before any "high crimes against the flesh" are witnessed, Miles constructs an aesthetic identity for her characters.[286] In its representation of aesthetic identity, *The Cherokee Rose* exhibits both continuity with, and rupture from, its literary predecessors. The first-generation novels visualise the enslaved, explicitly focussing upon the oppressed rather than the oppressor. Conversely, Anna's narration depicts both the enslaved *and* the enslaver, describing Chief Hold at length:

> Mr Hold's skin is as fair as that of any white man [...] He wore his wavy, pitch-black hair shorn at the ears, a tailored shirt of Irish linen and a silk cravat. His dark eyes are brooding, his jaw squarely cut, his lips the colour of a bruised summer plum.[287]

Hold's aesthetic identity—fair skin and Eurocentric dress—encourages readers to reconfigure any potential stereotypes held regarding the appearance of Native Americans. By the nineteenth century, the Cherokee Nation were one of several tribes deeply engaged in the antebellum market economy; this in part came as an effort on behalf of government officials "to "civilise" or assimilate Native peoples by forcibly channelling them further into the market economy and transforming their material conditions."[288] The overwhelming influence of colonialism is indicated both on a superficial level, as demonstrated by his

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[284] Miles, *Ties That Bind* p.xiv
[285] Ibid p.xiv
[286] Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe" p.67
[287] Miles*,* *Cherokee Rose* pp.155,156
[288] Krauthamer, *Black Slaves, Indian Masters* p.24

appearance, but also ideologically, as he carries with him "an avalanche of useful and frivolous things [and] a coffle of slaves."[289] In *Beloved, Kindred* and *Corregidora*, the representation of the face is central to the aesthetic identity of Black women, prohibiting protagonists from being perceived as interchangeable Black bodies. It is therefore noteworthy that Miles focusses upon the face of Chief Hold. Despite his 'white-washed' appearance, Hold is of Cherokee descent. A non-white tyrant is the focal point of the novel, shattering the white-Black binary that has typically defined the dynamic of enslaver and enslaved. In tackling the reality of Native American responsibility, an ominous description of his brooding eyes, dark lips and chiseled jaw prevents the readership from losing sight— literally and figuratively— of the man responsible for the acts that ensue as the narrative unfolds and, importantly, his indigeneity.

Despite this focus on the enslaver, Anna's diary does not neglect the enslaved. Amidst the coffle of slaves "whose lives were now entwined by the thick rope that bound them," is Patience.[290] Her subjectivity is not subsumed into the amorphous status of slave, nor is it eclipsed by Hold's:

> A young woman […] flicked her gaze about, keenly taking in the surroundings. The smooth skin of her face glowed a buckeye brown. Her eyes flashed the colour and shape of almonds. Her hair wound around itself in a series of spiral knots. Her limbs were long and lithe.[291]

Establishing their antagonistic dynamic, Patience is represented as a picture of purity against Hold's evil, as suggested by his "brooding", "bruised" visage versus her "glow" and elegance. Her alignment with the natural world, suggested by her "buckeye brown" skin, almond eyes, and lithe limbs, emphasises a condition of innocence which renders Patience, like an untouched landscape, defenseless.[292] Destined to be conquered and exploited by colonising forces, Patience mirrors the representation of enslaved women in *Corregidora*. Jones portrays the "similitude of the land and a woman's body, of colonization and sexual mastery," in Great Gram's graphic accounts of abuse, suggesting that the dehumanisation

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[289] Miles, *Cherokee Rose* p.155
[290] Ibid p.157
[291] Ibid
[292] Ibid

incurred by enslavement renders her a physical site of conquest.[293] Echoing Louis Montrose's reading of the sixteenth century discourses of discovery which observes the tendency to feminise the New World landscape, Anna's antithetical depictions of Patience and Hold suggest that she too is a feminised object "[arousing] excitement at the prospect of despoiling it," while he is the masculine figure desecrating her.[294]

Anna subsequently narrates the horrors of Hold House, bearing witness to the brutal gang rape of Patience by Hold and five other men. She describes the scene, once again emphasising Hold's appearance:

> Mr Hold, in his cleanly knotted blue silk cravat, was the most civilised in appearance among them, and the most brutal […] When Mr Hold defiled her, he forced her eyes open pressing her lashes apart with his thumbs as he crushed her with the weight of his body. Sated, he threw her to her knees […] cajoling the other men to take her then but only from behind. Only he, her master and possessor, had free reign to search her gaze.[295]

This total disregard for Black women's humanity exemplifies that Hold not only adopts the fashions of whiteness, but also the racial and gender ideologies that determine "to be an enslaved woman was to be subject, always, to the sexual will of another."[296] This graphic account utilises myriad violent verbs—defiled, forced, pressing, crushed, threw— to emphasise Hold's terrorising omnipotence over his property. Hold's tyranny is overwhelming, resulting in Anna neglecting to provide any portrayal of Patience. While the former manifestation of Patience's aesthetic identity ensures that she is not wholly overshadowed by the brutality of her enslaver, the reader is not privy to whether she fights back, acquiesces or if she elicits physical signs of emotion. The absence of Patience in the representation of her own rape represents a significant rupture from the first-generation of liberatory narratives. The interiority of the enslaved victim is supplanted by a voyeuristic focus upon the figure committing the act of sexual violence. The rapist is too often eclipsed by the immensity of their actions and the trauma incurred. Consequently, the detailed

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[293] Montrose, "The Work of Gender in the Discourse of Discovery" p.12
[294] Ibid pp.12, 2
[295] Miles, *Cherokee Rose* p.171
[296] Miles, *Ties That Bind* p.47

description of Hold's appearance and actions ensures that the spotlight falls upon the perpetrator, explicitly assigning accountability where it previously has the potential to be lost. Moreover, this focus upon Hold enables Miles to imply the complexity of Native American masculinity.

As a man of Cherokee descent, Hold's claims to patriarchal dominance are restrained by an imposed racial inferiority; this is suggested by Anna's relative safety from his abuse, shielded from the vulnerabilities of femininity by her whiteness. Anna's coupling of Hold's aesthetic "civility" with his sadistic brutality thus indicates his desperate claims to superiority. Even as Hold cajoles the other men to violate Patience, he ensures that he is the all-powerful figurehead in this show of masculinity, controlling his Cherokee 'peers' as well an enslaved woman. Such acts of tyranny over enslaved women, and his Cherokee wife, embody an ardent effort to align himself with the superiority of the patriarchy. The performance of this atrocity by "her [Native American] master and possessor" is therefore multi-faceted. Miles demonstrates that Black women's subjugation cannot be confined to the realms of white responsibility. Yet the implicit racialised emasculation driving Hold's actions indicates the complexity of Native American responsibility within a slaveholding past in a society dictated by racial *and* gender hierarchies.[297]

The rape of Patience is the only display of physical brutality explicitly witnessed by Anna. Further acts of tragedy that burden the plantation's women of colour are recorded from second-hand accounts. This lack of eye-witness testimony represents an important shift in attention: no longer narrating scenes of violent spectacle, Miles centres upon how Hold's sadism shapes the plantation's racially diverse community of women. The focus upon women's subjectivity in Anna's diary again exemplifies "the effort to brush history against the grain" as performed by Hartman, a task which "requires excavations at the margins of monumental history in order that the ruins of the dismembered past be retrieved."[298] Embedded in the plantation's female community, Anna is rooted in the margins of this past, unearthing several disremembered aspects of this history including the intimate details of

[297] Miles, *Cherokee Rose* p.171
[298] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection* p.11

oppressed women's lives— not just the violence enacted upon them. Therefore, as *The Cherokee Rose* portrays the brutality of Native American slaveholding, Miles also conveys the ambivalence of Black-Cherokee relations through representations of transracial solidarity. Many women come together in this diverse solidarity, including Anna. I however focus specifically on the relationship of Patience, a Black slave, and Peggy Hold, Chief Hold's Native American wife, exploring the personal effects of their encounters with oppression.[299] Both Peggy and Patience are victim to Chief Hold's abuse, frequently "mistreated […] so badly that it cannot be repeated."[300] It is as a result of such trauma that the women become one another's "most intimate companion[s]."[301]

Tiffany Lethabo King's work enacts a conversation between African American and Native studies which is useful when juxtaposing the transracial relationships of Peggy and Patience versus that of Hold and his slaves. King uses the analogy of the shoal, "a place where the water is of little depth; a shallow, a sandbank or bar," to theorise the complex overlapping of Indigenous and Black histories.[302] The shoal is simultaneously water and land, embodying where Black and Native histories, cultures and experiences "have come into formation together, or where they are one."[303] Consequently, "the shoal represents a process, formation, and space that exists beyond binary thinking," teaching us that the intersections of Native and African American populations cannot be categorised by one definition.[304] In *The Cherokee Rose*, these relationships are conceptualised beyond racial binaries, instead representing Indigenous responsibility through the intersections of race and gender. While Cherokee brutality is coupled with patriarchal power, the sororal bonds of Patience and Peggy represents the capacity of female relationships to blur the definitions imposed by racialised patriarchal hierarchies.

Women's relationships are a recurring motif in Black women's literature, as discussed by Black feminist scholar Patricia Hill-Collins: "Black women writers have led the way in

[299] Anna's narration reveals that multiple forms of oppression were at work on the plantation, echoing Miles' investigation of women's life on the Diamond Hill plantation. Miles*, The House on Diamond Hill* p.111
[300] Miles, *Cherokee Rose* p.187
[301] Ibid p.200
[302] King, *The Black Shoals* p.1
[303] Ibid p.27
[304] Ibid p.28

recognising the importance of Black women's relationships with one another, [representing] their friendships with other women as vital to their growth and well-being."[305]

Encompassing Black *and* Native American women, this affirming relationship is reconfigured within *The Cherokee Rose* in the friendship of Peggy and Patience. Significantly, like Anna, Peggy is not enslaved. However, their racial disparities as women of white versus Cherokee descent mean that her experiences are inherently different from Anna's. Peggy is instead aligned with the experiences of Patience, both vulnerable to the intersecting forces of race and gender. Their intimate kinship is forged out of their communal trauma, evidenced after one exceptionally brutal night. While no insight is given to the horrors of the ordeal, several days later, Anna observes:

> Peggy and Patience walked into the outside air for the first time since the ordeal. Arms interlinked like ivy, they made their way to the bubbling waters of the spring on the property, called sacred by the Indians. There, with Peggy, holding each of Patience's hands to guide her into the deep sand creek, together they bathed.[306]

Patience and Peggy embody the same racial dynamic as the graphic rape enacted by Hold. However, as a moment of unity between two women, this scene is antithetically imbued with intimacy, security, and purity. The depiction of the rape is one sided, focussing upon the omnipotence of Hold as a 'racial and gendered superior.' In contrast, this tender moment between Patience and Peggy emphasises their togetherness. Their linked arms, held hands and the communal act of bathing manifests a unity between the two women. Moreover, the simile of their arms being interlinked "like ivy" alludes to the intimacy of women's lives: interwoven, they 'bathe' in sacred water, not to do the impossible and cleanse themselves of the traumas incurred, but to purify and immortalise this interracial relationship. In this patriarchal environment, the bonds of womanhood override the significance of racial dichotomies, finding support in one another in the face of oppression.

As discussed in Chapter Two, transracial solidarity in the New World geography of *A Mercy* similarly provides a source of (albeit fleeting) refuge, predominantly for Florens and Lina. While Rebekka primarily finds solace from "the intricacy of loneliness," in her husband, this

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[305] Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and The Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 1991) p.104

[306] Miles, *Cherokee Rose* p.201

is unavailable to Lina and Florens.[307] Embodying the same racial dynamic as Patience and Peggy, the intersecting forces of race and gender render them vulnerable and isolated. These women of indigenous and African descent thus become each other's family in the absence of their own: "[Florens] belonged to Lina. They slept together, bathed together, ate together."[308] Solace is found in the unity of their parental-child bond, somewhat relieving their "mother hunger—to be one or have one."[309] However, Morrison signals the cruciality of a universal womanhood encompassing "Cherokee, Negro and white alike."[310] While "Lina had fallen in love with [Florens] right away," without the friendship of Rebekka, their identification as mother and daughter could only ever be fragile.[311] This is apparent when Rebekka aligns herself with the white Baptist community rather than the farm's women of colour, "[advertising] the sale of Florens," in turn, fracturing their adoptive mother-daughter bond.[312] Conversely, Miles does not suggest that in the absence of Anna's friendship, the bonds of womanhood would have come under the same fragmentation as that manifested by Rebekka. Yet, without her integration within "the [plantation's] women, the network of caring," we would not have access to the subjective experiences of non-white womanhood.[313] Anna's narration depicts the examples of Peggy and Patience's kinship, teaching us that the relationships between white, Native and African Americans cannot be dichotomously defined as enslaved and enslaver, oppressed and oppressor.[314] As an analogy for the coming together of Native American and African American histories, cultures and experiences, King's definition of the shoal is thus vital. Unable to be categorised by a singular, static meaning, the shoal encompasses the hierarchical relations of Hold and the enslaved, as well as the intimacy and safety found in the plantation's interracial female community.

The friendship of Peggy and Patience establishes an important precedent, overcoming racial binaries to find strength in an unexpected togetherness. Consequently, women's transracial

[307] Morrison, *A Mercy* p.84
[308] Ibid p.119
[309] Ibid p.59
[310] Miles, *Cherokee Rose* p.216
[311] Morrison, *A Mercy* p.56
[312] Ibid, p.147
[313] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection* p.10
[314] Miles, *Cherokee Rose* p.211

relationships are reconfigured in the novel's contemporary moment as a site of reparation in Native American and African American futures. This is apparent in the relationship between Jinx, who is Creek-Cherokee, and Ruth, who is African American. The biracial friendship modelled by Patience and Peggy undergoes a dramatic shift in the twenty-first century, becoming a lesbian relationship. King discusses the significance of Jinx and Ruth's romance as an example of using "creative storytelling to build worlds where Black and Indigenous people have a future. More specifically, Black, and Indigenous people make a future, or worlds, for one another by drawing on the power of the erotic."[315] For King, the erotic is a crucial construct for decolonisation, proposing that "Within Black and Native thought, the space of the erotic often figures as a liberatory space [meaning] a space of possible futurity for Black and Indigenous people."[316] Ruth and Jinx forge their relationship as they confront the past and bear witness to their Native and African American maternal ancestors. Their relationship is an important intervention in the contemporary moment, as suggested via the image of them sharing a bed, "their bodies curved together like question marks at the end of a wandering sentence."[317] In this moment of intimacy, a sense of clarity and conclusion is indicated. As a history consistently marked by silence and ambivalence, this "wandering sentence" embodies the enigmatic experiences of their predecessors. However, even as Miles alludes to the necessity of continuing to query and interrogate this past through their resemblance to question marks, the coming together of Ruth and Jinx manifests a newfound closure, somewhat completing this narrative. The possibility of understanding this past, and in turn achieving freedom, is therefore dependent upon the contemporary unity of Native American and African American women.

King's application of the erotic is a useful framework in understanding Jinx and Ruth's relationship and the liberatory space it occupies. Nevertheless, she overlooks the importance of their gender. The power of female identification, first exemplified between Peggy and Patience, extends beyond the temporal geography of the antebellum era. For Jinx and Ruth, the overlapping of the erotic with female relationships actualises the possibility for Native American and Black futures. To overcome the intersecting forces of racial and

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[315] King, *The Black Shoals* p.143
[316] Ibid p.144
[317] Miles, *Cherokee Rose* p.233

gender oppression endured by their maternal ancestors, their union crosses racial binaries *and* digresses from the heteronormative framework. As a biracial, lesbian couple they "[make] a life that could bridge their separate pasts and entwine their futures."[318] Jinx refers to their personal histories and futures, but their relationship embodies something that extends beyond the boundaries of than their personal world. Therefore, as the motif of "entwining" reappears, echoing Peggy and Patience as they entered the water, this interlacing goes beyond the immediate experience of Ruth and Jinx. Representing the intimacy of Native and Black populations' histories and now their futures, Miles affirms the connection between two populations repeatedly omitted from the histories of the United States, in turn, paving the way for a deeper interrogation of this past.

Miles confesses that the impetus behind *The Cherokee Rose* was that "as a scholar I was not happy with how the real story ended for enslaved women and Cherokee women on the Vann plantation. But as a novelist, I had the opportunity to write my own ending."[319] Demonstrating the particularity of historical fiction, this act of imagination transforms a bleak historical reality by inserting optimism where history denies it. The lesbian union of these contemporary descendants thus fulfils the plight of the liberatory narrative tradition, "[engaging] the historical period of chattel slavery to provide new models of liberation."[320] Therefore, while the novel tackles the repressed narrative of Native American responsibility, Miles ensures that contemporary relationships between these peoples are not ensnared by the same ambivalent definitions. She couples her representation of difficult historical realities with an effort to navigate a future of connection between Indigenous and Black populations. If the solidarity between Peggy and Patience suggests that the bonds of womanhood have historically provided escapism in the face of trauma and racial division, Jinx and Ruth exemplify that in the contemporary moment, this same connection "[provides] the opportunity for healing wounds, the shame, and the pain of that past."[321]

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[318] Miles, *Cherokee Rose* p.241
[319] Miles, *Cherokee Rose Reader's Guide* (Winston-Salem: John Blair, 2016) p.1-2
[320] Mitchell, *Freedom to Remember* p.4
[321] Ibid p.150

The Contentious Allocation of West African Responsibility and Implication

As explored in Chapter Two, West Africa is a geography of ambiguity. Frequently romanticised as a space of lost freedom, the continent's reality is a less desirable entanglement with the transatlantic slave trade. The task of opening the wounds of African responsibility was initiated by historical scholarship in the twenty-first century. Henry Louis Gates Jr. argued in his 2010 op-ed for *The New York Times* that the role of Africans "turns out was a considerable one, especially for the slave-trading kingdoms of Western and central Africa."[322] Extending the allocation of responsibility, Gates concludes that "the sad truth is that without complex business partnerships between African elites and European traders and commercial agents, the slave trade to the New World would have impossible, at least on the scale it occurred."[323] Due to the contentious nature of this conversation, confronting these undesirable historical truths has not occurred without backlash. Michael Gomez responds to Gates, questioning "since Europe and America were responsible for the broad design and implementation of the slave trade, to what extent can we assign blame to those African elites who facilitated that trade?"[324] Gomez does not deny that Africans played a role within the trade, but he does challenge Gates' allocation of responsibility, suggesting that "it is difficult to imagine assigning equal culpability to a community fending off the slave trade with the European nations bank rolling and in ultimate control of the entire affair."[325]

The implication of African populations within the transatlantic slave trade is therefore a subject of significant debate. Consequently, in its ability to extend beyond the boundaries of historical fact, historical fiction is a crucial tool in exploring this complex past. Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* demonstrates this, representing the numerous lives implicated in, and touched by, the slave trade. The matter of West African involvement is at the forefront of the text. Yet, even as *Homegoing* diversifies the definitions of oppressor, Gyasi emphasises that there was never a simplistic divide between those responsible and those enslaved, between those remaining in West Africa and those coerced overseas.

[322] Gates Jr. "Ending the Slavery Blame Game"
[323] Ibid
[324] Michael Gomez, "When it Comes to the Slave Trade, All Guilt is Not Equal," *The Root*, 27 April 2010. https://www.theroot.com/when-it-comes-to-the-slave-trade-all-guilt-is-not-equa-1790879360
[325] Ibid

While Africa as an entire continent was touched by the slave trade, *Homegoing* deals with its impact on the West Coast. Involvement in the slave trade within this space was prolific, as surmised by Rediker's historical research: "over the course of the eighteenth century, the Gold Coast produced more than a million slaves, about fifteen percent of the total shipped from West Africa as a whole."[326] Rediker identifies the "major players" of the Gold Coast's slave trade as the Asante and the Fante nations.[327] The Asante were "the mightiest group in the region," empowered by their military prowess and state building; their thirst for dominance and money, in turn, made them "reliable and valuable partners to the Europeans in the slave trade."[328] The coastal Fante additionally played a crucial role within the trade's maintenance and expansion, "[acting] as middlemen, connecting the Asante in the interior to the English slavers on the coast."[329] As the Asante captured slaves, the Fante "served the slave trade in myriad ways, selling people from inland regions and hiring out their own to work for wages on the slavers."[330] Returning to Gomez's query regarding the appropriacy of assigning blame to African populations, Rediker's research explicitly demonstrates that the participation of these nations was not out of passive submission: it was strategic and self-serving.

The historical scholarship of Rediker and Hartman dramatically expands the understandings of African responsibility, recognising Africa's heterogeneity and the dynamic roles of its distinctive populations. This is expanded within Gyasi's historical fiction, exploring the accountability of the Fante and the Asante peoples in a broad sense, while also looking *within* these populations. Her uniquely intimate account of the past emphasises the importance of the individual, providing a subjective insight into those conducting the business of slavery on the Gold Coast. Gyasi's transgenerational narrative explores how the descendants of Effia and Esi—the estranged sisters at the novel's heart—are touched by the slave trade and its legacies. The novel's third chapter, narrated by Effia's son Quey, focusses on the active role of "big men, warriors, chiefs and the like who would bring in slaves each

[326] Rediker, *The Slave Ship* p.88
[327] Ibid p.87
[328] Ibid
[329] Ibid p.88
[330] Ibid p.87

day."[331] Quey and Anna as narrators in *Homegoing* and *The Cherokee Rose* respectively, occupy, to various extents, a position of privilege. While Anna's womanhood subjects her to patriarchal dominance, her whiteness provides some protection. She is thus a sympathetic observer to enslaved and Cherokee women's oppression. Quey again holds the position of outsider and observer. Educated in England, he grew up distant from the inner workings of the slave trade; moreover, as son to James Collins and Effia, his familial status guarantees protection from enslavement. Importantly, gender generates a key distinction between the observational roles of Anna and Quey. Anna's womanhood aligns her with the plight of the oppressed, but Quey's masculinity affiliates him with the oppressor. Once summoned to Africa, he is no longer able to obscure the dark realities of the trade by "logging numbers that he could pretend didn't represent people bought and sold."[332] Quey is brought face to face with this human cargo *and* with those orchestrating their capture and trade.

While Quey is implicated, it is his voyeuristic representation of powerful West African men that personalises Rediker's "major players" of the trade.[333] Gyasi constructs the aesthetic identity of individuals within the Fante and Asante nations, enabling us to visualise figures such as Quey's uncle, Fiifi: "Fiifi looked powerful, his body a graceful alliance of muscles […] Fiifi's power came from his body, from the fact that he looked like he could take anything he wanted."[334] Significantly, Gyasi's manifestation of Fiifi contrasts her later representations of white American enslavers. She gives no attention to their appearance, as exemplified in Ness's chapter in which the plantation master is simply referred to as "the Devil."[335] The actions of the white perpetrator are in no way insignificant, but this figure is already well-historicised. Consequently, no tangible image, or even a name, is assigned to this man. Instead, Gyasi cements his villainy while ensuring that he does not become the focal point, referring to him in abstract and mythical terms. In juxtaposition, Fiifi is tangible and corporeal. This emphasis on his aesthetic identity is thus indicative of an effort to broaden and diversify the figure of the oppressor. In turn, the readership is unable to lose sight of

[331] Gyasi, *Homegoing* p.64
[332] Ibid p.50
[333] Rediker, *The Slave Ship* p.87
[334] Gyasi, *Homegoing* p.51
[335] Ibid p.75

this Fante Big Man, forced to acknowledge the prolific role of such individuals in the capture and trade of fellow Africans.

Quey does not focus upon Fiifi's face as Anna does in her description of Chief Hold, instead, emphasising his body and physical strength. Fiifi's physique exudes masculinity and authority, suggesting that his power and gender are inextricable, defining his very essence. This bodily focus is indicative of the type of man his uncle is, demonstrating that those who participated in the commodification of human life were elite and prestigious men. This shatters the romantic image of these past figures to which Hartman proposes African Americans have clung:

> The heirs of slaves wanted a past of which they could be proud, so they conveniently forgot the distinctions between the rulers and the ruled and […] refused to admit royal power emanated from the abuse of human beings and things.[336]

Gyasi opens our eyes to these repressed distinctions, revealing the abuse of human beings that earn Fiifi his title as "The authority. When he shook his head, the whole village stopped."[337] Fiifi's callous actions highlight that European colonisers were not alone in their ruthless pursuit of wealth and status. Accepting the 'dirty' role of "tramping through bushland finding slaves [while the British] keep their hands clean," Fiifi participates in the slave trade of his own volition.[338] This is clear after a particularly treacherous mission north in which Fiifi returns with several slaves including Nana Yaa: "the eldest daughter of Osei Bonsu, the highest power in the Asante Kingdom."[339] He kidnaps the Asante princess so to enhance the status and security of his village, informing Quey that "tomorrow, you will marry Nana Yaa so that even if the Asante king and all of his men come knocking on my door, they cannot deny you. They cannot kill you or anyone in this village."[340] Nana Yaa is not enslaved in the traditional sense, but she is dehumanised by Fiifi and the Fante. Rendered a political bargaining tool, her self-possession and freewill are erased to elevate Fiifi's village and family. This capture and arranged marriage echoes Effia's transactional

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[336] Hartman, *Lose Your Mother* p.164
[337] Gyasi, *Homegoing* p.52
[338] Ibid p.61
[339] Ibid p.67
[340] Ibid p.69

marriage to James Collins.[341] While Effia is not captured like Nana Yaa, she is gifted to a (white) man as an inanimate object, void of the same self-possession as a captive destined for life across the Atlantic. Nana Yaa is therefore another example of African womanhood diminished to the status of commodity by fellow Africans: her freedom stolen, usurped of royal status and self-control.

On one hand, this dictated partnership between a royal captive and Fiifi's nephew suggests that few were completely protected from the hungry logic of the slave trade. Like his mother, Quey is a pawn in a larger game of social advancement. However, Quey's willing acceptance to "marry for protection" is multi-faceted.[342] Quey and Fiifi are consistently represented in opposition to one another. The Fante Big Man is the pinnacle of masculinity and authority, contrasting Quey's literal and figurative weakness: "Quey had taken after his father, skinny and tall, but not particularly strong."[343] By figurative weakness, I refer to the "danger in himself" represented by Quey's implicit homosexuality, suggested by his attraction to his childhood friend, Cudjo.[344] As Chief Hold's patriarchal authority is undermined by his racial identity in *The Cherokee Rose,* Quey's sexuality threatens his ability to meet the 'ideals' of masculinity. Quey does not perform an act of physical abuse that matches Hold's tyrannous show of masculinity and omnipotence. Nonetheless, he participates in the objectification of women to 'prove' his strength. Agreeing to marry Nana Yaa, he accepts that "sacrifices had to be made" so to empower the village, but also himself.[345] His decision to "never go to Cudjo's village. He would not be weak," thus represents a repression of the 'danger' his sexuality poses to his masculinity.[346] He adheres to heteronormative standards to be strong, simultaneously undermining the humanity and subjectivity of womanhood in the process. Like Patience, Nana Yaa is an object of masculine elevation. Gyasi and Miles alike demonstrate how throughout the history of slavery, women of colour were used in patriarchal spaces for the public, but also the private, advancement of men. Their commodification in West African and American geographies is not performed

[341] Gyasi, *Homegoing* p.15
[342] Ibid p.69
[343] Ibid p.51
[344] See Gyasi, *Homegoing* p.60-61
[345] Ibid p.69
[346] Ibid

by white men alone. Yet, even as these novels implicate African and Native American populations, individuals such as Quey and Hold emphasise the multi-faceted nature of this history. Gyasi and Miles do not ask us to feel sympathy for these oppressive figures, but through historical fiction's unrestricted application of imagination, they do demand recognition of their complexities. These second-generation narratives suggest that the disregard for humanity fuelling slavery runs deeper than the capture, sale, and labour of humans, as conveyed by the pressures of masculinity and status in spaces defined by a logic of "eat or be eaten. Capture or be captured."[347]

While Fiifi illuminates the influence of the individual in terms of responsibility, *Homegoing* also demonstrates that the individual can be a point of difference, complicating the allocation of accountability. Africa's diversity is noted by Hartman in her travels across the West Coast, noting that "African people represented no unanimity of sentiment or common purpose or recognisable collectivity, but rather heterogeneous and embattled social groups."[348] Gyasi illustrates this heterogeneity via intraregional distinctions, but also in the disparities found *within* those group identities. These internal differences are indicated in the chapter of Quey and Nana Yaa's son, James. After the death of Nana Yaa's father, the family return to her former Asante village. Here, a young woman refuses to shake James' hand: "Respectfully, I will not shake the hand of a slaver."[349] Confused, he internally questions "Who was she to decide what a slaver was?" unable to make sense of her statement due to the mutual accountability of the Fante and the Asante:

> [He] had spent his whole life listening to his parents argue about who was better, Asante or Fante but the matter could never really come down to slaves. The Asante had power from capturing slaves. The Fante had protection from trading them. If the girl could not shake his hand, then surely, she could never touch her own."[350]

James' understanding of responsibility is pluralistic. This focus upon the mutual roles played by the Fante and the Asante placates his own guilt, subsuming his individual responsibility in the collective. When he subsequently confronts Akousa, she confirms that "Everyone is a

[347] Gyasi, *Homegoing* p.69
[348] Hartman, *Lose Your Mother* pp.230, 231
[349] Gyasi, *Homegoing* p.98
[350] Ibid p.96

part of this. Asante, Fante, Ga. British, Dutch and American […] you are not wrong to think this way."[351] However, while in his earlier chapter, Quey readily accepts that in the bush it is "eat or be eaten. Capture or be captured," Akousa rejects this logic, cleaving herself from her people and her family.[352]

In the wake of a war that caused the loss of three of her brothers, Akousa notes "my village mourned them as we redoubled our military efforts. And what does that say? We avenge lost lives by taking more. It doesn't make sense to me."[353] Her dismissal of this response sets her on an alternative path, declaring "after I lost my brothers, I decided that as for me, Akosua, I will be my own nation."[354] Akousa's personal secession from the ideologies of her people highlights the importance of an individual's subjectivity as a site of conflict. Through this analogy of the independent nation, Gyasi suggests that the beliefs of the individual, specifically the ideologies of a *Black woman*, hold enough potency to sustain Akosua's identity beyond national or tribal affiliations. Her self-bestowed nationhood suggests that it is not enough to simply recognise Africa's regional heterogeneity, challenging even the notion that total unanimity existed within independent nations. She is "proud to be Asante," but in her dissent she demonstrates that the implication of West African peoples is convoluted.[355] Group identities are contested terrain, signalling the inappropriacy of indiscriminately holding all Asante and Fante peoples equally accountable.

Homegoing thus represents an extension of the work initiated in *A Mercy,* further demonstrating the capacity of individual women to blur historical definitions. Even as Morrison establishes white responsibility in the New World for the hardening of racial divisions, she also complicates this with allusions to African implication in the slave trade. African implication is touched upon early in the novel by Peter Downes, a sugarcane planter that Jacob encounters: "Africans are as interested in selling slaves to the Dutch as the English planter is in buying them."[356] Yet, it is the voice of Florens' mother, a singular

[351] Gyasi, *Homegoing* p.98
[352] Ibid p.69
[353] Ibid p.98
[354] Ibid p.99
[355] Ibid p.98
[356] Morrison, *A Mercy* p.28

enslaved woman, that explicitly casts light on the ambivalence of responsibility in the history of enslavement. Florens' mother establishes an important distinction between those who are accountable for and those who fall prey to the slave trade, defining "we families" as those murdered and taken captive and "their families" as those orchestrating the "trading [and] culling."[357] Anonymity marks these populations, but a dichotomy of oppressed versus oppressor is nonetheless apparent, distinguishing between "the [Black] men guarding we and selling we," and those being guarded.[358] Even as Morrison diversifies white accountability so to encompass womanhood, she further exemplifies that there has never been a binary of white and non-white delineating responsibility and victimhood. Through the perspective of the African female captive, Morrison illuminates that there is no clear definition of 'the oppressor' in the history of slavery.

While the binary of white and Black responsibility is blurred in *A Mercy* from the perspective of an enslaved woman, neither Peggy nor Akousa are enslaved; instead, they are affiliated by national identity or descent with the oppressor. Miles and Gyasi thus look *within* the populations of 'power' to complicate this history, representing individual women as a point of distinction and/or dissent. In the history of Black oppression under Native American slaveholding, Peggy's character imagines the exceptions who elicited sympathy and kinship in the face of oppression. Akousa similarly stands apart from her national identity, representing the nuances of West African responsibility and implication. Accountability is therefore not assigned universally, illuminating that the individual cannot necessarily be defined by the actions of his or her nation. Peggy and Akousa cannot make significant differences in the larger historical picture conjured by these novels, however, in the patriarchal and racialised societies of *A Mercy, The Cherokee Rose* and *Homegoing* alike, it is individual women reminding the readership of the ambiguity of non-white responsibility.

Hartman discusses the personal distance between those of African and African American descent initiated by coerced diaspora, proposing "those who stayed behind told different stories than the children of the captives dragged across the sea."[359] However, toward the

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[357] Ibid p.155
[358] Ibid p.156
[359] Hartman, *Lose Your Mother* pp.232, 231 (emphasis in original)

end of her journey, Hartman concludes that the identities of these fractured populations remain "tethered to conflicting narratives of *our* past," recognising that there is a "bridge between the people of [Africa] and [herself]."[360] Despite their multiple subjective differences, ancestral and contemporary Black peoples are intrinsically bound by a collective past. This two-fold, but unified, narrative is reflected in *Homegoing.* Separation marks those who stayed behind and those forced into diaspora, embodied structurally in the unfolding of two lineages subject to different fates. Nonetheless, Gyasi reveals that these populations were never segregated, but intertwined by the same, all-embracing history. This is embodied when the contemporary descendants of these ostensibly divided populations—the enslaved and the implicated— become entangled. Mirroring the unity of Jinx and Ruth in *The Cherokee Rose*, the coming together of these distinct ancestral lines imbues the novel's denouement with recovery, imagining a future of unity between these falsely detached populations.

The convening of Marcus and Marjorie, the distant grandson and granddaughter of Esi and Effia, in twenty-first century America represents a path to redemption. Together they interrogate their ancestral past, supplanting the separation marking their ancestral relationships with inclusivity. The indestructible tether between those of African and African American descent is apparent in Marcus' anxious awareness of the breadth of Black history:

> How could he explain to Marjorie that he wanted to capture with his project the feeling of time, of having been part of something that stretched so far back, was so impossibly large, that it was easy to forget that she, and he, and everyone else, existed in it— not apart from it, but inside of it.[361]

In the chapters leading up to this moment, *Homegoing* gives voice to the "everyone else" of this historical narrative. Intertwining the lives of himself, Marjorie, and their ancestors, Marcus acknowledges that they are each encompassed in the same expansive construct of time. His emphasis upon existing "in" and "inside" this history emphasises the inclusivity of the past, uniting ancestors and descendants in an intimate co-existence; this includes the antagonistic populations of the Africans implicated as well as the enslaved. The merging of

[360] Hartman, *Lose Your Mother* p.231
[361] Gyasi, *Homegoing* p.295-6

Marjorie and Marcus enables an exploration of the expansive historical intimacy between these ostensibly incompatible populations. As suggested by Marcus' project, the ugly truths of West African responsibility and implication cannot be set "apart from" Black history. It is thus vital that they are represented in contemporary interrogations.

Once the lives of Marcus and Marjorie overlap, a sense of closure and personal resolution is achieved. This is evidenced when Marcus reflects upon his feelings when he sees Marjorie, relating this to the day he was taken by his estranged mother:

> Marcus thought about that day often. [Not] the fear he'd felt [but] the fullness of love and protection he'd felt later when his family had finally found him. Not the being lost, but the being found. It was the same feeling he got whenever he saw Marjorie. Like she had somehow, found him.[362]

Marcus and Marjorie's reunion is thus rich with optimism and hope. Significantly, their union does not fall under the "erotic" space used by King as a framework for Native American and African American futures.[363] Instead, Marcus places their relationship in the context of the "love and protection" elicited by his grandmother and father, imbuing his connection to Marjorie with a familial intimacy. While this differs to the romantic union of Jinx and Ruth, these contemporary descendants occupy a similar liberatory space of futurity between formerly separated populations.[364] The analogy of these strangers "finding" one another suggests that they have always been bound; the "fullness" felt once together emphasises this, implying that Marcus and Marjorie embody the converging of two halves of the same whole. The coming together of these contemporary descendants therefore represents the larger unity of two peoples. This salvation from "being lost" extends beyond Marcus, redeeming their lineage from its historical definitions of instability by merging these formerly antagonistic populations.

Crucially, the intimacy of Marcus and Marjorie additionally overwrites the historical separation of men and women demonstrated in the experiences of Esi, Effia, Nana Yaa and Akousa. The narratives of these ancestral women demonstrate the complexity of West

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[362] Gyasi, *Homegoing* p.293
[363] King, *The Black Shoals* p.143
[364] Gyasi, *Homegoing* pp.143, 144

African responsibility in the history of slavery, in particular the influence of gender hierarchies. Consequently, where Miles represents futurity in women's relationships in *The Cherokee Rose*, Gyasi shatters the patriarchal definitions of this past by uniting the genders. Marcus recognises Marjorie as an empowered and dynamic figure, acknowledging that *she* finds and saves him. The precedent of strength set by Akousa is thus transformed in the twenty-first century: the female subjugation prohibiting Marjorie's maternal ancestor from informing change in her historical moment has been overcome, fulfilling Akousa's legacy of female empowerment. In recognising the might of Black womanhood, a shift is actualised in the relationships of men and women of African descent. Gyasi imagines a future for these formerly antagonistic peoples reliant on the coming together of unconsciously tethered peoples, but also on the equality of the genders. While the past cannot be undone, this twenty-first century union begins the process of making amends for Effia and Esi's estrangement and, more generally speaking, for Black men and women. Marcus and Marjorie's harmony therefore establishes a contemporary model of liberation, eclipsing feelings of shame and resentment with possibility and optimism by navigating a future between the descendants of the enslaved and the implicated.

Conclusion

Mitchell proposes that the significance of the liberatory narrative tradition lies in its "[creation of a] discursive space of interrogation [which] recast[s] and augment[s] our understanding of our sometimes painful, but always collective past."[365] While her analysis is rooted in twentieth century literature, this chapter demonstrates that this interrogative space is perpetuated into the twenty-first century by the second-generation texts. *A Mercy*, *Homegoing* and *The Cherokee Rose* "illuminate what has not been told [and] what has been silenced," thus representing a moment of literary continuity and rupture.[366] Addressing the uncomfortable histories of responsibility and implication, these texts utilise similar methodologies to their literary predecessors as they redress new archival silences. Yet even as Morrison, Miles, and Gyasi demonstrate that there was never just one oppressor in the history of slavery, they portray the complexities of this past, emphasising that the power

[365] Mitchell, *Freedom to Remember* p.21
[366] Ibid

dynamic of enslavement never operated along a simple binary of white and Black, men and women.

Burdened by the legacies of enslavement, settler colonialism and white supremacy, Miles and Gyasi transform the relationships of these formerly antagonistic populations in the contemporary moment so to achieve liberation. The power-victim dynamic apparent between Fiifi, Chief Hold and their captive populations is supplanted by the biracial relationship of Jinx and Ruth and the coming together of Marjorie and Marcus. Therefore, just as Hartman concludes that "[her] future was entangled with [Africa,] just as it was entangled with every other place on the globe where people were struggling to live and hoping to thrive," Gyasi and Miles demonstrate that the inextricability of peoples of Native American, African and African American descent.[367] Hartman's connection to other struggling populations does not derive from "what we had suffered or what we had endured," but from "the aspirations that fuelled fight and the yearning for freedom."[368] This is echoed in the contemporary descendants of *The Cherokee Rose* and *Homegoing,* witnessing their mutual resilience and "yearning for freedom" embody a unifying force. It is therefore the overcoming of historical divisions that holds the capacity to heal the wounds of the past, representing a "new model of liberation" offered by the second generation liberatory narratives.[369] Using historical fiction, Gyasi and Miles "[describe] how to achieve freedom" by shaping alliances that traverse formerly distinctive populations, in turn, manifesting hope in the contemporary moment.[370]

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[367] Hartman, *Lose Your Mother* p.233
[368] Ibid p.234
[369] Mitchell, *Freedom to Remember* p.4
[370] Ibid

Conclusion

This thesis has argued that historical fiction and historical scholarship inform one another, entangled by their shared endeavour to split open the past and rectify the numerous gaps distorting our understanding of enslavement. Nonetheless, this thesis has demonstrated the particularity of historical fiction within this task. Specifically, I have investigated how two generations of the liberatory narrative tradition represent the subjectivity of enslaved women and their descendants in line with three significant thematic contours: enslaved women's subjectivity, transatlantic geographies and non-white responsibility and implication. Both generations of liberatory narrative explored throughout this study have demonstrated that redeeming this past, and the reappropriation of enslaved womanhood, relies on bearing witness to *all* aspects of this past, encompassing the traumatic and the salvific, the objectifying and the subjective.

My close readings of *Corregidora, Kindred* and *Beloved* in Chapter One explicitly convey the vexed nature of redressing the archival silences of this history—specifically, the act of elevating enslaved women out of historical obscurity. Jones, Butler and Morrison offer multifaceted accounts of Black womanhood, narrativising their interior, personal lives *and* the ways in which they were brutalised. Significantly, the concern shown by the first-generation novelists for the bodies of enslaved women indicates that the appearance embodies a vital expression of subjectivity. We thus visualise Ursa, Dana and Sethe in their entirety, building the aesthetic identity out of the corporeal expressions of Black women's inimitability and femininity alongside the indelible marks of enslavement. It is the fusing of these two bodily identities—the objectified and the subjective—that transforms the representation of this history. Concerned with the residuality of enslavement in the contemporary moment, the first-generation texts reappropriate what it means to be a marked woman. Corporeal signs of oppression become ambivalent expressions of individuality and resilience. Jones, Butler and Morrison thus not only re-imagine enslaved women by conjuring an image of what they physically looked like; these novelists also navigate a path to empowerment for contemporary Black women characters who remain plagued by the 'marks' of enslavement first endured by their foremothers.

Chapter Two demonstrates the development of the liberatory narrative tradition by exploring the mutable geographies of the first and second generation. Spanning both generations, I illuminate that such texts have consistently repudiated the 'traditional' historicising of the geographies of the slave trade and racial slavery, while also representing space as a central influence on subjectivity. The first section of this chapter investigates the American geography of the first-generation texts, demonstrating how *Corregidora, Kindred* and *Beloved* destabilise the myth that enslavement, racism, and their legacies are phenomena confined to the antebellum South. The particularity of historical and speculative fiction is pivotal as these texts use the concepts of rememory, immersive memory and time travel to represent the influence of slavery as permeating all national time and space. Through these imaginative techniques, the traumas of enslavement bleed into the protagonists' contemporary moments: Ursa is raped by the memories inherited from her grandmothers; in twentieth century California, Dana feels the pressures of racial and sexual objectification inherited from her foremothers; and Sethe's past consumes her contemporary moment, immersed in an unsolicited temporal-spatial geography of enslavement. Speaking to the first-generation novelists' overarching concern with the afterlife of slavery as a relentless influence over Black women's subjectivity, the landscapes occupied by Ursa, Dana and Sethe are an enmeshment of America's past and present. Slavery's geographic boundlessness therefore suggests the impossibility of representing Black womanhood without recourse to this past.

However, the primary focus of this chapter is on how *A Mercy* and *Homegoing* address the transatlantic geography of the slave trade. These second-generation novels illuminate the spatial subjugation of women of colour under the increasingly white, patriarchal and colonial organisation of America and West Africa in the seventeenth century. Inherently vulnerable to the intersecting forces of gender and race, Morrison and Gyasi's characters are burdened by an imposed identity of exile and dispossession. Whether their coerced deracination is diasporic or intra-regional, as experienced by Florens' mother and Lina respectively, whether enslaved or free by technicality in their home geography as evidenced by Esi and Effia, the spatial organisation of the transatlantic world severs these women from their homes, families, cultures and ancestry.

Yet, even as Lina and Florens' mother, Effia and Esi are marked by a condition of estrangement, they have become subjects of multiple spaces. Morrison and Gyasi therefore suggest that the fragmentation of selfhood induced by these transatlantic geographies can also be overcome by hybridising the identity. While Lina and Florens' mother cannot achieve a permanent safe haven in familial and/or women's relationships, they *can* embolden themselves by forging a multi-spatial, transatlantic identity. Unable to rely on anyone else for security, they challenge their imposed identity of dispossession by fusing together elements of their New and their Old worlds. In *Homegoing*, the act of embracing a transatlantic identity again represents the path to redemption; however, set in a different temporal frame, we witness Marcus and Marjorie—the contemporary descendants of Effia and Esi—achieve a coherent identity by revisiting and reterritorializing the site of their ancestral estrangement. The oceanic space which formerly embodied African severance comes to enable and symbolise the unity of their personal identities but also of peoples of African descent more broadly. Gyasi and Morrison thus imagine that the wounds incurred by forced diaspora, racism and colonialism can begin to heal by embracing a hybrid, transatlantic selfhood.

My final chapter explored how the second generation of liberatory narratives diversify who should be, and who has been, held accountable for enslavement and its legacies. While *A Mercy* begins this process, representing the complicity of white womanhood in the crystallising of a discriminatory national identity, my primary focus is upon how *The Cherokee Rose* and *Homegoing* tackle the difficult reality of non-white accountability. These novels do not undermine the immense significance of the white patriarchal oppressor. Instead, they look beyond this well-historicised figure in order to demonstrate that there was never just one 'villain' in the history of slavery. I demonstrate that as Miles and Gyasi explore the realities of Cherokee and West African responsibility, they both reappropriate the literary construct of the aesthetic identity used by the first-generation narratives to shape Black women's subjectivity. As *Beloved, Kindred* and *Corregidora* invite us to imagine what enslaved women physically looked like, *The Cherokee Rose* and *Homegoing* address this next gap in the archives by making the enslaver a focal point, representing Chief Hold and Fiifi as tangible, embodied figures. Reflective of how the liberatory narrative is a tradition defined by continuities and shifts, we are given an unprecedented ability to

visualise such men formerly shrouded by historical censorship. Miles and Gyasi thus give us insight into the atrocities and crimes committed by individual men of Cherokee and West African descent.

While these texts expand the allocation of responsibility, they do not lose sight of the complexity of the slave trade. Because Miles and Gyasi are not interested in assigning blame, these 'new' definitions of responsibility are convoluted and blurred. The allocation of non-white responsibility in *The Cherokee Rose* and *Homegoing* remains inherently patriarchal. Women belonging to these 'oppressive' populations, whether in solidarity or standing alone, embody a point of difference. The multifaceted task of the liberatory narrative, driven to redress the gaps in the archives *and* to bear witness to non-white women's interior worlds, is fulfilled by representing Akousa, Peggy Hold, Patience as well as Anna Gamble as figures of alliance and dissent. Historical fiction is therefore uniquely equipped to deal with the betrayal and tyranny perpetrated by populations of colour upon those of African descent; its intimate access to the past imagines the ways in which these populations were defined by so much more than the acts of power-hungry men.

The Cherokee Rose and *Homegoing* perpetuate the precedent set by these historical heroines into the contemporary moment in order to navigate a future for the descendants of these fractured populations. The unity of Jinx and Ruth, women of Native and African American descent, as well as Marcus and Marjorie, descendants of the enslaved and the 'implicated', reorients the relationships of these formerly antagonistic peoples. Miles and Gyasi therefore navigate how to make amends in the twenty-first century, manifesting togetherness in the communal and continued struggles against the legacies of enslavement, settler colonialism, racism and gender inequality. It is through this newfound unity, whether romantic or familial, that liberation is imagined for the descendants of these historically troubled populations.

I have therefore illustrated that the reappropriation of this history through the liberatory narrative tradition is ambiguous and manifold. As both generations fill the ever-emerging gaps of the historical archives, simultaneously redeeming enslaved womanhood from the oblivion of the archives, they also force our eyes open to the ugliness of this past. Yet, as

liberatory narratives, “centred on [the] enslaved protagonist’s attainment of freedom,” the novels explored in this thesis imagine a future defined by more than the intersecting definitions of slavery, patriarchal dominance, settler colonialism and their legacies.[371] Significantly, when tracing what the various “new models of liberation” look like over the two generations of texts, even as the historiographical concern shifts from enslaved women’s subjectivity, to transatlantic geographies, to non-white responsibility, resolution is consistently achieved through an act of unity and fusion.[372]

As I take this research forward, I intend to further explore the role of white women within Black women’s historical fictions. This thesis has demonstrated the immense power of Black women’s fiction to extricate the nuances and the intimacies of women’s relationships within the historical period of enslavement and the years ensnared by its legacies. The dramatically divergent roles of Anna Gamble of *The Cherokee Rose* and that of Rebekka in *A Mercy*, the power of transracial solidarity but also the threat posed by white womanhood raise important questions regarding what it means to be an ally to the plight of women of colour versus what it is to be implicated in their experiences of oppression. I therefore emphasise that this work is not to reorient the focus of African American women’s literature onto white women. Instead, I hope to take further the discussions of implication and allyship begun in this thesis, exploring the ambiguous intersections of white and non-white womanhood as represented by African American women’s historical fiction. This will once again be a multi-disciplinary endeavour, representing how historical fiction and its scholarly counterpart inform one another, applying the historical research of Stephanie E. Jones-Rogers and Kathleen M. Brown utilised in this study as a starting point alongside what Sharpe theorises African American life to look like in the wake of slavery: “we are Black peoples in the wake with no state or nation to protect us, with no citizenship bound to be respected.”[373] I wish to investigate further the ambivalent junctures of white and non-white relations in the development of African American women’s fictions, in consideration of ever-relevant concerns with both white allyship and white responsibility for the perpetuation of the afterlife of slavery.

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[371] Mitchell, *Freedom to Remember* p.4
[372] Ibid
[373] Sharpe, *In the Wake* p.22

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