

**(Dis)Remembering the Slave Mother:**

**Shame, Trauma, and Identity in the Novels of Michelle Cliff and Zoë Wicomb**

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**COMPULSARY DECLARATION**

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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## Abstract

The ‘new’ nationalisms that have developed in postcolonial Jamaica and South Africa invite the reclamation of the slave mother, while simultaneously ‘cleansing’ her body of slavery’s atrocities for the purpose of national healing. Michelle Cliff’s *Abeng* and *No Telephone to Heaven*, and Zoë Wicomb’s *David’s Story* and *Playing in the Light*, reveal this national practice of elision, and especially how the disremembering of slavery factors into personal identity formation. A deeper glance into this process exposes the lingering white supremacist, patriarchal symbolic at the centre of these nations, which maintains its centrality through the erasure of the slave mother and the disavowal of rape—two things which inevitably obscure the intersection of race and sex. The colonial residue of shame and trauma, left uninterrogated in the national script, imprints itself on women of colour and affects our legibility in society today. This dissertation evaluates the exclusion of slavery and the slave mother from the national script, and highlights this exclusion in postcolonial literature to reveal its impact on an intimate level.

In my analysis, I interrogate the Lacanian symbolic to showcase the white male universality it employs, which alongside the intersecting discourses of race and sex, render women of colour illegible. Furthermore, in burying the slave past, the traumatic histories of rape are buried with it. Without a platform to excavate this trauma in the national space, there is a resulting disidentification with the nation among the women of colour it fails to represent. Additionally, I suggest that the Post-Traumatic Stress Disorders that undeniably ensued post-slavery, including Rape Trauma Syndrome (RTS) and what Joy DeGruy calls Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS), are ultimately undealt with and therefore have potentially intergenerational, melancholic ramifications.

In narrating the lives of mixed-race characters, both Cliff and Wicomb reveal shame’s transgenerational chokehold, resulting from neglected legacies of trauma. For the

protagonists' ancestors, shame results in the denial of blackness, which manifests as a lost ideal among their descendants. As the search for identity collapses with ethnogenesis and the reclamation of the black mother, Clare Savage's, Marion Campbell's, and David Dirkse's trauma remains unresolved, leading to a state of melancholia and unbelonging. Because the national scripts in Jamaica and South Africa are so exclusive, it becomes necessary to invent alternative modes of belonging. The projects of rememory and memory justice have the power to engender this sense of belonging, and therefore also create a platform for past trauma to be reconciled. In conclusion, I posit that the mining of folklore is crucial in the search for slave memory and collective healing, but also, when the erasure of slave memory has rendered these stories hidden, it is important to generate our own stories, memories, and truths.

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**Dis(Remembering) the Slave Mother:**

**Shame, Trauma and Identity in the Novels of Michelle Cliff and Zoë Wicomb**

The children felt ashamed because their mother had slave marks . . . some changed their names to mask their origins, lied about their families, or moved to cities and towns where their dishonor could remain a secret. . . I explained, “Black skin is a slave mark in the States. But we don’t feel ashamed, at least not any longer. . . Black skin made you a slave and now it makes you expendable.”

--Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*

Throughout the colonial era, women of colour were perceived across the globe as nothing more than property and used as instruments of desire. Our skin is inscribed with a lingering colonial grammar that sexualizes us—proof of the proximity to the slave past and the rape of our mothers. In Jamaica and South Africa, mixed-race women<sup>1</sup> are also inscribed with a centuries-old history of miscegenation. Although gradations of skin colour point to this reality in the United States as well, the law of hypodescent characterised mixed-race women as black, which ultimately fostered a sense of solidarity in opposition to white superiority. On

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that the terms ‘mixed’ and ‘mixed-race’ are not synonymous with ‘coloured’ in South Africa in the contemporary period, but rather describe the offspring of parents with distinct racial designations, i.e. Black and white. A ‘mixed-race’ person in post-apartheid South Africa does not necessarily share the same history as a coloured person, because the coloured identity is specifically nuanced by a history of slavery, racial oppression and privilege, and colonialism. As Gabeba Baderoon argues, “racial heterogeneity was structured into the experience of being Muslim and enslaved” in South Africa (16); in other words, to be coloured, or ‘Malay,’ is inseparable from a history of enslavement and rape. I use the terms ‘mixed’ and ‘mixed-race’ to insert this project into the field of ‘mixed-race studies’ and to flag the gradations in skin colour between black and white that visually signal difference from blackness or whiteness in these postcolonial countries, especially since racism and sexism often operate without attention to cultural specificity. This negligence, in turn, creates common threads in the diverse fabric that comprises the experiences of women of colour in postcolonies. There are ‘mixed-race’ women in South Africa and Jamaica that do not have a direct relationship with slavery and are perhaps descendants of entirely free-born generations, but this fact does not alter their marginal positions or the colonial grammar inscribed on their varying degrees of brown, yellow, cream skin that is read from an outside, white patriarchal male symbolic in these regions and throughout the African diaspora. On the other hand, this is not to dismiss culturally specific racist tropes, but to suggest the broader commonalities between these undoubtedly different identities.

the other hand, post-colonies that employed a strict divide-and-rule strategy, such as Jamaica and South Africa, established distinct mixed-racial categories and with it, similarly three-tiered racial hierarchies. As lighter skin was achieved,<sup>2</sup> many mixed-race men and women were able to pass or play white in order to gain white privilege, even if it took several generations. As distance from blackness was attained, so too was distance from the slave past and the black mothers who came to represent dishonourable, meagre beginnings. In this dissertation, I suggest that there is a tendency to erase enslaved foremothers and their contributions to society, which is a direct reflection of the shame attached to the slave past. I primarily focus on slave mothers and women because the slave experience is gendered. The racialized, sexual violence inseparable from the slave past is similarly inseparable from our legibility in the contemporary world.

Michelle Cliff and Zoë Wicomb, both women of colour, engage with coloured<sup>2</sup> protagonists from light-skinned families who denied their blackness and passed into white society in Jamaica and South Africa, respectively. Both authors stage their stories in moments of national transition and liberation, which is particularly important for the renewed sense of

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<sup>2</sup> I use the term 'coloured' to signal the historically oppressed groups of mixed-race descent in both South Africa and Jamaica, but it is important to note their differences. As Gabeba Baderoon notes, in South Africa, 'coloured' is the official, post-emancipation designation for descendants of East Africa, South Asia (India), Indonesia and Malaya, originally labelled "slaves" or "Malays," (17). The offspring of white men and slaves were called 'coloured,' but this is not to say that the 'coloured' population originated from this union, and certainly was not simply a result of black and white sexual unions. As Baderoon suggests, "the VOC acquired slaves from the Dutch West India Company, which was deeply involved in the slave trade to the America. Most of the enslaved people were brought to the Cape Colony from the Indian Ocean region, including East Africa, the African islands of the Indian Ocean, and South and South-east Asia" (8). These slaves, though from different of territories, were not classified as black, but as "'Malays'" (Baderoon 13). Their descendants, as well as the descendants of black slaves and white masters, were later absorbed within the "apartheid racial category of 'Colouredness'" (Baderoon 13). This differs from the Jamaican coloured or 'brown' identity in that, as Arnold A. Sio suggests, "the bipolar structure of [Jamaican] society was gradually altered through the genetic intermixture of the masters and the slaves and the emergence of an intermediate racial group" (166). Although the children of this 'mixing' in Jamaica were often enslaved, it was not always the case. There was indeed a free coloured population, but "they were marginal to Caribbean slave society: neither black nor white, neither African nor European, neither slave nor free" (Sio 167). On the other hand, in South Africa, the 'coloured' population and identity, though historically treated as an intermediate racial group, is directly tied to slavery in the nation. In both places, however, coloured people share a distinct cultural history made prominent because of the relation to white power and their marginal position between blackness and whiteness.



nationalism and its implications with regard to race and national icons. More specifically, black mothers that are previously denied are re-remembered as national icons in order to promote national healing and multiracial harmony. In *Abeng* (1984) and *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987), Cliff's protagonist journeys into her past to recover the slave history her family has buried. Similarly, in *Playing in the Light* (2006) and *David's Story* (2000) Wicomb's protagonists attempt to recover a sense of self that their parents, ashamed of their blackness, ultimately erase.

In addition to being revisionist histories, Cliff's novels reclaim Nanny of the Maroons as Mother in order to oppose the imperialist discourse that renders black people weak and inferior. Implicit in this reclamation, however, is the national denial of Nanny's sister, Sekesu, who is known as the mother of all slaves. Wicomb, on the other hand, emphasises the nationalist rhetoric that ultimately touts racial harmony, but denies the slave past. In *Playing in the Light*, Wicomb critiques the generations of complicity in associating whiteness with superiority and obscuring the slave past, which the 'new' South Africa fails to interrogate. In *David's Story*, Wicomb is critical of the reclamation of Krotoa-Eva and Sarah Bartmann<sup>3</sup> as mothers of origin; in order to represent national healing, they are 'cleansed' of their slave pasts.

Aside from inevitable unquities such as the particularities of ethnic makeup and paths to freedom, Jamaica and South Africa loosely mirror one another. In her dissertation '—Empire's Progeny: The Representation of Mixed Race Characters in Twentieth Century South African and Caribbean Literature' (2006), Kathleen A. Koljian makes explicit the parallels between mixed-race subjectivity in both Jamaica and South Africa. She

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<sup>33</sup> There are many other spellings of Sarah's name, including Saartje and Saartjie Baartman, but as Pumla Gqola points out in *What is Slavery to Me?*, the name on her Baptismal is spelled 'Sarah Bartmann' (63). The other spellings are diminutive forms of 'Sarah' in Dutch and Afrikaans. As Wicomb suggests, her "very name indicates her cultural hybridity" ("Shame" (93). Since we do not know Sarah's true name, I opt to use the spelling that appears on her birth certificate.

acknowledges that Jamaica and South Africa share “large and distinct mixed-race populations whose existence stretches back centuries,” with “compelling” similarities that “grew out of [corresponding] colonial discourses of race” (9). I expand on Koljian’s formulation from a Black feminist perspective in order to examine the figuration of black and mixed women in these colonial discourses. In both Jamaica and South Africa, Europeans arrived with a set of beliefs about black women that they used to justify their enslavement. In both places, slave masters heavily depended on the productivity and reproductivity of black women to ensure that they would have a constant supply of slaves. And in both places, white men asserted their power by sexually violating black and coloured women as they pleased, resulting in mixed-race populations. Generally speaking, white women were considered respectable defenders of the race, while black women were considered hypersexual. Coloured women occupied the space between two extremes. A certain exoticness was attributed to their unfamiliarity--they were not offensively different, but just different enough to satisfy the white man’s fetish for alterity.

Colonial power and the white male gaze have afflicted Jamaica and South Africa in enforcing racial hierarchies as if they were innate, in placing a magnifying glass on the corporeality of women of colour, and in making invisible their agency as living, breathing, and thinking subjects. Much of my focus, therefore, is also on the agency of the subjects that have been registered in historiography as bodies and not as beings, as breeders and not as mothers, as property and not as humans. Not only will I identify the ways in which the white male gaze has permeated society to the extent of becoming a ‘norm,’ I will analyse the felt effects of this gaze and the internalization of what constitutes a legible subject. It is a fact that race is a social construct with no empirical foundation, but we cannot ignore the history that has constructed women of colour with invisible voices and hypervisible bodies.

I expect to elucidate the damaging discourses that formed throughout the course of colonial history, rendering black women invisible and marginalised. By tracing this discourse on a transatlantic scale, I will highlight the eugenicist thinking that has pathologised blackness and sexualized race. The differences in the ways black and mixed-race women were treated in intimate spaces is crucial to understanding contemporary formations of race and sexuality. For instance, the centuries-old preference for mulatto women over their darker-skinned counterparts is one of the origins of colourism. Even within black communities, a preference for lighter skin prevails; men and women with lighter skin are viewed in a more positive light. Colonial ideologies of race and sexuality have been internalized and perpetuated in a number of ways, some of which include the 21st-century concepts of multiracial exceptionalism and black transcendence.<sup>4</sup> It is no coincidence that implicit in the nationalist rhetoric that encourages rainbowism and racial harmony is the negation of black history<sup>5</sup>. Throughout my analysis, I locate the erasures of the slave past in order to illuminate its lasting effects on the development of black and mixed-race subjectivity, particularly among women.

### **Excavating the Layers of Erasure: A Feminist Overview**

In recent years, several feminist and womanist authors, transatlantically, have interrogated and supplemented historiography to illuminate the silences surrounding slavery. I string together their discussions of rape, nationalism, and shame in order to flesh out the ways in

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<sup>4</sup> In *Antiblackness and the Critique of Multiracialism*, Jared Sexton discusses the terms 'multiracial exceptionalism' and 'black transcendence' within a framework of antiblackness and postracialism. He suggests that contemporary discourses of multiracialism posit the multiracial person as exceptional in their "freedom from the exigencies of being identified, or identifying oneself, with racial blackness" (Sexton 6). This represents a "move 'beyond black,'" which similarly defines the concept of 'black transcendence' (6). In deeming the multiracial 'post'-racial, there are connotations of "elevat[ion] to the status of virtue," which implicitly maintains the white supremacist pathologisation of blackness.

<sup>5</sup> Here, I use the term 'black history' to loosely encompass the histories of black South Africans, Jamaicans, slaves, and their descendants in the post-colonial, African diaspora that is expunged in favour of the exceptionalised 'brown' multicultural medium.

which the slave woman/mother is (dis)remembered and dehumanised. In *Rape: A South African Nightmare* (2016), for instance, Pumla Gqola explores the intricacies of shame to show it works similarly to the discourses of “race and gender” that become internalised (39). She asserts that “patriarchy creates an inferiority complex in women that also depends on hatred for the feminine and therefore self-loathing” (39). Although this conceptualisation of shame is defined relative to rape, it has the same application for the slave past—even doubly so considering the inseparability of slavery and sexual violence. If “shame is produced through slavery,” the effects of slavery and rape must be twofold (Gqola 40). Historically, white patriarchy has rendered slave women inferior, and engendered within them a sense of shame for inhabiting that position. Furthermore, because “the obligation to provide sexual labour ‘is rape,’” the slave experience is gendered (Gqola 41).

This reality especially complicates notions of Mother and the politics of national memory, which Meg Samuelson emphasises in *Remembering the Nation, Dismembering Women?* (2006). Samuelson critiques the reclamation of black mothers and the disremembering of their pasts within nationalist scripts: “Through acts of amnesia and foreclosure, or ‘disrememberings,’ women are shaped into the ideal forms that reflect the desired national body – usually that of Mother, or simply ‘womb’” (2). In denying the “more messy aspects of their legacies,” including rape, complete degradation and dehumanisation, women such as Krotoa-Eva and Sarah Bartmann are stripped of their identities and transformed into instruments of the nation (Samuelson 2). On a more intimate level, Angelita Reyes’ *Mothering Across Cultures: Postcolonial Representations* (2001) explores the interiority of slave mothers and the transgenerational effects of slave history and memory “within the matrilineal diaspora” in USA, West Africa, and the Caribbean (9). Reyes adopts Farah Jasmine Griffin’s term “textual healing” to further convey our ability to imaginatively

render the memories of women for the purpose of individually and collectively ~~r~~ecover[ing] from the everyday repercussions of slavery, patriarchy, and colonization” (129).

In regard to memory, Gqola’s *What is Slavery to Me?* (2010) and Gabeba Baderoon’s *Regarding Muslims: From Slavery to Postapartheid* (2014) expand on the sexual violence in the Cape and the importance of this legacy in the contemporary. Despite amnesiac tendencies in South Africa, the slave past is everywhere; Gqola specifically invites rememory‘ in order to ~~r~~e-humanise” our slave ancestors (8). Lucille Mathurin Mair’s *Historical Study of Women in Jamaica, 1655-1844* (2006) similarly engages with the slave past through folklore and court records in Jamaica to reveal not only the indispensability of slave women in Jamaica, but also their resistance and tenacity in spite of their oppressed state. Mair notes that ~~n~~othing has surfaced to date in the Jamaican records comparable to the statements of a Sojourner Truth or a Harriet Tubman, or the remarkable testimony of the slave woman Harriet Jacobs,” (319). Since the same can also be said for South Africa, there is a particular responsibility for us to remember and re-humanise‘ our foremothers—to tell their stories without dismembering and disremembering them. In *The Ghosts of Slavery*, Jenny Sharpe considers the ~~l~~ost stories” of slaves to be ~~r~~e violence analogous to the uprooting that denied New World Africans their burial rites” (xi). For this reason, acts of amnesia, regardless of their survivalist beginnings, are akin to improper burials. In Cliff’s and Wicomb’s novels, the ghosts of slavery‘ haunt the present and remind us that while ~~s~~lavery may be a thing of the past,” its memory lingers (Sharpe xii).

In the epigraph above, Saidiya Hartman points out the intergenerational properties of shame and dishonour, which similarly haunt us in the present. In ~~S~~hame and Identity: the Case of the Coloured in South Africa,” Zoë Wicomb suggests this sense of shame rings especially true for the ~~b~~lack bodies that bear the marked pigmentation of miscegenation” (93). I expand on Wicomb’s project of ~~f~~ind[ing] a way of discussing the textual

construction, ethnographic self-fashioning, and political behaviour of coloureds in South Africa . . . through the concept of shame” by incorporating trauma studies, such as Joy DeGruy’s *Post-Traumatic Slavery Syndrome* (92) Additionally, my reading of shame in the context of the slave past and colonialism is specifically informed by David L. Eng’s and Shinhee Han’s “A Dialogue on Racial Melancholia,” which presents whiteness as an unattainable “lost ideal” among minorities, and notably among mixed-race individuals because they are white, but “not white enough” (671). Because black and mixed-race women have been historically debased, and have internalised this debasement, attaining legitimate membership in white society appears out of reach. Among passing families, as described by Cliff and Wicomb, erasing the slave past is a measure in achieving this legibility. However, constant “self-denial” as well as “disfranchisement,” results in the splitting of the psyche (Eng and Han 675). I argue that the active disavowal of the slave past is bound up with shame, trauma, and an inherited melancholia—one that is not only raced, but gendered.

The transition to “new,” “healed” nations in Jamaica and South Africa, as aforementioned, evoke multiracial harmony—the national mottos are “Out of Many One People,” and “Diverse People Unite” respectively. In my analysis of Cliff’s and Wicomb’s novels, I ultimately suggest that the “loss of whiteness” in previous generations is replaced with a “loss of blackness.” As the call for diversity manifests in a call for origins, “the melancholic is able to preserve [the lost object] but only as a type of haunted, ghostly identification” (Eng and Han 672). Although this call is ultimately problematic in its glossing over of imperialist discourse, the ghosts of slavery haunt the melancholic protagonists, begging for past trauma to be reconciled. It becomes clear, however, that fulfilling nationalist demands do not provide an adequate platform for “resolv[ing] and mourn[ing] the losses suffered” (Eng and Han 680). Disavowing shame depends, therefore, on imagining modes of

resistance and alternative histories, revising imperialist discourse, and creating our own, positive mythologies.

In chapter one, I suggest that the new nationalisms developed post-liberation have ultimately erased the slave past and therefore prematurely celebrate multiracial harmony. This erasure, however, ignores the white supremacist, patriarchal framing of the discourses of race and sexuality that were cemented by sexual violence. Therefore, women of colour in Jamaica and South Africa carry with them the trauma of being deemed unrappable and hypersexual, with no recourse but to assume the position of second-class citizens within the dominant white, heteronormative structure. Because the nation makes invisible their history, women of colour not only disidentify with the nation, but also become melancholic, unable to identify the source of their loss and trauma.

Chapter two discusses the importance of excavating folklore in the search for slave memory and suggests that white historiography is devoid of histories of slave resistance. Michelle Cliff's *Abeng* and *No Telephone to Heaven* trace Clare Savage's experience of reclaiming blackness, while simultaneously grappling with intergenerational melancholia caused by the erasure of the slave past. I critique Clare's turn to ethnogenesis as a method of healing, because it both replicates colonial notions of blood purity and insists that the subject can only be healed by recovering a subjectivity unsullied by slavery. Similar to the nationalist script, Clare chooses Nanny of the Maroons as national Mother because she serves as a model of strength and resistance since she was never enslaved. On the other hand, Sekesu, known as the mother of all slaves, is a reminder of perceived weakness and so-called unwillingness to fight for freedom. Her story is therefore viewed as unproductive to national healing and remains unavailable to Clare. The Savages' practice of associating slavery and sexual violence with shame ultimately obscures the slave mother's story and undermines her agency, which parallels the national desire to vanquish rather than engage

with the slave past. In my conclusion, I argue that excavating and imagining modes of resistance among enslaved women is a productive method for self-recovery and healing that does not repeat the denial of the slave past.<sup>6</sup> In chapter three, I acknowledge the absence of folklore available in South Africa, and interrogate the surplus of information that instils the slave past and the slave mother with shame. I also focus on Zoë Wicomb's novels *Playing in the Light* and *David's Story* in order to uncover the source of this shame, and to reveal the 'new' South Africa's refusal to engage with systemic violence in the slave past.

Ethnogenesis, yet again, presents itself as a solution to the losses felt by the melancholic subject, but Wicomb problematises this—showing that it only replicates the nationalist script of forgetting and erasure. In response to the absence in folklore, I suggest that we can develop our own fictions in order to create a place for slavery in the national imaginary. It becomes clear that national belonging requires exclusion, and the 'new' South Africa continues to exclude women of colour from its script. Therefore, it is also necessary to think outside of national boundaries—to fill and spill over marginal spaces with our voices until they transcend and displace oppressive norms and boundaries.

In chapter four, I return to the concept of 'new' nationalisms to emphasise the overt manipulation of collective memory in the pursuit of national healing. The celebration of multiracialism and inclusivity in Jamaica and South Africa ultimately disguise the elision of the slave past. With nowhere for trauma to go or be spoken, shame prevails and impedes identity formation, which is apparent in the novels of Michelle Cliff and Zoë Wicomb. After a brief comparison of their authorial strategies and protagonists, it becomes clear that belonging in the national narrative is thwarted by its exclusivity and its superficial acceptance

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<sup>6</sup> That being said, Nanny is not necessarily evoked to overwrite the slave past or emphasise its denial, but instead opposes the only representation of Sekesu available—that of a woman too weak to fight for her people. Cliff's character Mma Alli, a slave woman described in terms of her strength and not her weakness, addresses this problem of representation and urges the denial of oppressive frameworks that silence the strength of slave women.



## Chapter 1

of alterity. In erasing the slave past, the intersections of race and sexuality already mapped onto the bodies of women of colour become naturalised, and white privilege is maintained. In order to heal in these hostile spaces, we are called to disavow the nationalisms that erase our mother's memories, invent our own language in which to speak our trauma, and develop our own modes of belonging.

## **Mining Slavery and Intersectionality in the 'New' Nation**

When they told me my new-born babe was a girl, my heart was heavier than it had ever been before. Slavery is terrible for men, but it is far more terrible for women.

--Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*

National assertions of 'post'-colonialism and 'post'-slavery in Jamaica and South Africa carry with them the notion that colonialism and slavery are behind us. The fact is that these imperialist practices have on-going legacies that, as a result of being considered 'over,' are uninterrogated or disremembered. With this in mind, the respective Jamaican and South African mottos 'Out of Many, One People,' and 'Diverse People Unite,' broadcast a false sense of multiracial harmony that has not been achieved. In other words, because the colonial ordering and policing of race and sexuality is still prevalent in these societies, the celebration of diversity is premature. In *The Feeling of Kinship*, David L. Eng explains that liberal declarations of blindness to colour and sexuality, evident in the above mottos, "work[] to oppose a politics of intersectionality, resisting any acknowledgment of the ways in which sexuality and race are constituted in relation to one another" and continue to dictate the legibility of citizens (4). Furthermore, these false projections of unity are inscribed with a sense of national healing, which further implies the posteriority of collective racialized and gendered injuries, such as the rape of black women. If the nation is 'healed,' "race [and sex] can no longer be debated as . . . collective injuri[es] but can only be discussed as individual harm" (Eng 5). Because the legacies of colonialism and slavery are very much with us, it is fundamental to acknowledge collective injuries and put a spotlight on intersectionality in order to achieve true reconciliation.

In her illustration of the term intersectionality,<sup>6</sup> Kimberle Crenshaw states that “discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction . . . it may flow in another” (149). If two or more cars traveling in different directions collide at the intersection, it becomes the site of a multifaceted discrimination, bearing the mark of each car involved. In historically white-ruled, patriarchal societies such as Jamaica and South Africa, women of colour stand at the intersection of race and sexuality, where their bodies are at once inflicted with the discourses of race and sex from slavery until now. Although the force of the collision may have decreased over time, the injuries remain the same. Intersectionality is important because it impels us to ask “the other question” (Davis 70). When something appears to be racist, we are urged to examine other injuries, such as sexism. At the same time, intersectional analysis requires more than simply recognizing multiple forms of discrimination enacted on the body, it means interrogating the way these forms of discrimination interact: How does one form of discrimination nuance the other? How do “categories of difference” interact and, for my purpose, “shape the multiple dimensions of Black [and mixed] women’s experiences”?<sup>7</sup> (Davis 68).

Intersectionality as a theory is admittedly a vague concept, but as Kathy Davis notes, “this allows endless constellations of intersecting lines of difference to be explored” (77). These explorations bring the margin to the centre, disrupt the dominant frameworks of discrimination, and recognize the voices that “authoritative universal voice[s]” continue to silence (Crenshaw 154). The authoritative universal voice<sup>6</sup> projected by nationalist scripts ignore the distinct experiences of women of colour; furthermore, “their exclusion is reinforced when *white* women speak for and as *women*” or when black men speak for them

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<sup>7</sup> I distinguish between black and mixed women because discourses rooted in slavery have ultimately produced differences that are particular to the colour of skin. However, mixed women’s experiences are simultaneously inseparable from the experiences of black women. When I refer to blackness in particular, its relation to mixed-race is also implicated. The two cannot be divided, regardless of divide and rule tactics and the separatism that ensued in both Jamaica and South Africa.

as *black* (154). However, because the intersectional mode of conceptualising race and sexuality is of Western origin, as Heidi Hudson argues, it must be tailored to the postcolony in order to avoid collapsing and “overlapping identity qualities, as if they were all equal” (49). Blackness, “Colouredness,” sexuality, and class take on different meanings in postcolonial spaces, and as such, intersectionality in practice requires “postcolonial or decolonial sensitivity to (structural) power and privilege” (Hudson 49). On another level, as Amina Mama suggests, “to theorise is to generalise”; in order to make relevant “the general processes through which subjectivities are constituted,” we must do more than “share[] and describe[] experience” (14). With this in mind, by examining discourses of race and sexuality, I will reveal the unique discrimination experienced by women of colour in Jamaica and South Africa, which slavery has undoubtedly cemented under the white, patriarchal symbolic order. As I highlight the intersections of racism and sexism in these regions, I seek to theorise the shared, racialized and sexualized experience among women of colour in postcolonial spaces.<sup>8</sup>

Long before the concepts of race and sexuality were considered biological truths, they existed in the form of stereotypes and myths. In *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness* (1985), Sander L. Gilman stresses our need as human beings to create stereotypes—for the stereotype “buffers us against our most urgent fears” and allows us to cope with our anxieties (16, 12). According to Gilman, the projection of these anxieties onto the Other essentially “externaliz[es] our loss of control,” and we invest the Other with “good” or “bad” qualities depending on “the social world in which we function,” experience, myths, or other forms of reference constituted by the cultural symbolic (Gilman 20). Gilman uses this framework to imagine the pathologization of black female bodies, such as Sarah Bartmann’s in the nineteenth century. This stance, however, posits that the labelling of black

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<sup>8</sup> As Koljian suggests, comparisons such as this “assert the sustainability and lack of degeneracy in a myriad of mixed-race societies . . . [and] illuminate[] the cultural cohesiveness of racism” as well as sexism (34).

women as both less than human and hypersexual could be a natural reaction, which absurdly denies the racialized contexts in which [the bourgeois self] was built” in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Stoler 8). What Gilman fails to recognise, as Zine Magubane points out, is that —social relations, rather than psychological dispositions, provide the background and context for human encounters” (50). It was not the fear of the Other that caused the white men to label black women degenerate; rather, the discourse of degeneration —was a response to fears about the blurring of class and status difference within the European polity” (Magubane 51). Maintaining the bourgeois self within colonies similarly relied on —identifying marginal members of the body politic” and securing this positionality through the enslavement of racial Others (Stoler 7). Defining white, European superiority was a self-affirming, imperialist venture that required the defamation of black women in order to sustain that definition.

In general, the success of the discourses of race and sexuality relies on the dynamics of (in)visibility and the power of the gaze, which inform how bodies are looked at, visually classified, and entered into the cultural symbolic. Building on Lacan’s formation of the symbolic in *Is the Mirror Racist?*, Shannon Winnubst reads the ‘cultural symbolic’ as —a process that signifies some bodies as more powerful, more valuable and more meaningful than others-- namely . . . those bodies that are signified as white,” male, and straight (26). Like Lacan, Winnubst deems the cultural symbolic a network of symbols and signification that allows one to make sense of what is seen and to conceptualize the self and others as subjects; however, her formulation is cognizant of its phallogentric, white supremacist properties (26). In other words, the cultural symbolic and the visual field are tightly bound. Within a white, phallogentric framework, the cultural symbolic —speaks raced and sexed bodies more loudly and with a deafening repetition--a repetition that threatens paralysis of [deviant] bodies in any attempt to become individuals” (Winnubst 39).

Because the ~~law~~ of the symbolic speaks [white] man, “~~r~~acing and sexing bodies is a ~~p~~rimarily site of mastery and domination” (Winnubst 37). That is to say, the perspective of the white man reigns, or at the very least, frames and enforces the norm and its opposite. To deviate from the norm is to lack or to exceed one’s bounds. Because the gaze is phallogentric, for instance, women are visually classified in terms of lack, that is, lacking a phallus; the Freudian fear of castration after looking upon a vagina comes to mind, which immediately renders the woman not only not-male, but also a monstrous threat to masculinity. In a similar fashion, the black body is also defined in terms of lack—of lacking humanity and civility. The language of this cultural symbolic is spoken in binaries—that which *is* and that which *is not*, there is no in-between.

The bodies of women of colour, therefore, are seen in the ways which they ~~fail~~ to appear” (Winnubst 38). The white male body, considered whole, normal and universal, authorizes the wholeness of other bodies, codes them as powerful, and informs the way others see themselves. Since ego-formation depends on this cultural symbolic, deviating from the norm promises the internalization of inferiority. Only the white male body can ~~disavow~~ its own corporeality--its own peculiarity and specificity” in order to signify the universal and claim mastery ~~of~~ all bodies” (Winnubst 42). This mastery is not only performed when it renders invisible the black female body, but also when it renders these bodies hypervisible. Black women’s bodies are simultaneously depicted as both lacking and in excess of so-called normalcy; they are messy bodies that cannot be contained or controlled, demanding external regulation and surveillance (Winnubst 35). As both woman and black, her opposition to white masculinity, and therefore her deviance is doubly rendered. She is both invisible and hypervisible, marginal and yet the centred embodiment of difference. She is a slave.

Inasmuch as I use the word slave, as a metaphor for the dehumanised condition that women of colour currently embody within the white, patriarchal symbolic, the fact is that the

discourses of race and sex were carved into the bodies of slave women to strip them wholly of their humanity. The intersections of the past and present, therefore, similarly inform the subjectivity of women of colour. As Achille Mbembe suggests, “the postcolony encloses multiple *durées* made up of discontinuities, reversals, inertias, and swings that overlay one another, interpenetrate one another, and envelope one another” (Thomas 11). The slave past is so entangled with the present moment that the interrogation of intersectional oppression echoes a “vaguely familiar” story (Thomas 11). This is what Deborah Thomas, and Ella Shohat before her, refer to as “pampestic time”: the imperfect erasure of earlier inscriptions on the bodies of women of colour resurface again and again (11). It is difficult to see the etches of slave memory, but they are nonetheless visible if we look beyond the veil of Eurocentric historiography and let the silences between the lines speak.

Slavery began in Jamaica and South Africa during the mid-1600s and ended only in the 1830s. “Between 1655 and 1700, eighty-eight thousand [West] Africans” were taken from their homes and shipped as chattel to Jamaica, which set the standard for “black immigration that did not ease until 1807” (Mair 54). Although the dawn of the slavocracy in South Africa began with significantly fewer numbers, “the Council of Policy” at the Cape “was determined to increase slave numbers and to ensure the continuation of the slave system” (Worden 7). The Khoikhoi, who are indigenous to South Africa, were enslaved as a means to improve numbers, although their enslavement is contested because it was not actually legal to do so under the VOC (Vereenigde Ooste-Indische Compagnie). Such contestations, as Pumla Gqola points out, are unproductive because regardless of the legal circumstances, “the conditions of the Khoisan were very similar to those of legally called slaves” (*What is Slavery* 15). By tapping into the transatlantic slave trade and “indigenous Asian slave systems,” the VOC steadily increased the numbers of slaves in the country. The census records at “the end of the VOC’s rule in 1795” was “46,839,” which Nigel Worden asserts is severely underestimated

and does not count Khoikhoi labour (Worden 8). Regardless, slaves accounted for at least thirty to forty percent of the population at the Cape (Worden 11). What was lacking in both the Jamaican and South African population, however, was a balance between the sexes among the white population.

Within the master-slave dynamic, this gender imbalance rapidly led to white men ~~embrace~~[ing] black woman” as concubines (Mair 87). Embrace, however, is a mild word for the offenses committed, and insinuates that the interracial sex between white men and black women occurred only to satisfy sexual urges. Rape was inescapable—it was used ~~as~~ a brutal form of control and punishment,” (Mair xxvi). In Jamaica, if a black woman refused a white man’s sexual advances, ~~punishment~~ was not confined to the resisting female herself, but was extended to her parents and relatives,” even if her relatives were “*suspected to encourage her to retain her chastity inviolate*” (Mair 233, my emphasis). In South Africa, the rape of slave women was so prevalent that the Slave Lodge, ~~built~~ in 1670 . . . was also known as the first brothel” (Gqola ~~Rape~~ 42). Because black women were considered property, the sexual violence enacted on their bodies was not considered rape; rather, they were unable,” they were ~~objects to be used and as such could neither consent or dissent to the manner of their use~~” (Gqola ~~Rape~~” 68, her emphasis). In Jamaica, ~~the~~ law . . . gave the female slave no protection from sexual attack” until 1826 (Mair 223). The *only* case that received the attention of the court prior to this date is the trial of Thomas Simpson, a white planter who was ~~convicted~~ and sentenced to hang for committing rape on the body of a female slave child under ten years of age” (Mair 233). Because there were no laws to protect slaves, Simpson was acquitted. Similarly, as Gabeba Baderoon suggests, throughout ~~the~~ entire period of slavery at the Cape, not a single free or enslaved man was convicted of the rape of an enslaved woman” (149). Looking back, the dehumanised condition of black women in the past does not negate that fact that colonists achieved power through sexual



warfare. This *was* rape and it ~~posed~~ no contradiction within slave-ordered society,” (Gqola ~~–Rape~~” 43).

On the other hand, the rape of slave women was a profitable enterprise, which supported and sustained the slavocracy. In both Jamaica and South Africa, the children of white masters and slaves inherited the mother’s status. And in both places, the ~~–stereotype~~ of the unrapable Black woman, along with that of the rapist Black man” ensured that the offspring of interracial unions maintained the slave status (Gqola, ~~–Rape~~” 73). The myth of the rapist Black man, alongside the myth that white women were ~~–the~~ desired objects of colonized men,” highlighted the anxieties with racial-mixing where the wombs of white women were concerned (Stoler 183). The law of matrilineal descent meant that white women were the ~~–eustodians~~ of morality. . . [and the] guardians of European civility” (Stoler 183). As ideal models of domesticity, white women were represented as bereft of passion; their transgressions could forever jeopardize the white race and the bourgeois identity. White purity, as Ann Laura Stoler suggests, was linked to ~~–conjugal~~ white endogamy,” but only white women could truly be held accountable for this (184). This discourse of sexuality makes clear the patriarchal nature of colonialism; white men went to great lengths to justify their own actions, whilst maintaining a sense of racial superiority as they policed white female sexuality.

In order to remove culpability for the rape of black women and the blurring of racial lines, white men casted black women as hypersexual threats to the racial order. As Lucille Mathurin Mair notes, ~~–to~~justify the [Jamaican] plantation system and all its creatures, to support the case for white physical and moral superiority, the black woman . . . had to become insatiable temptress, sole agent of the white man’s fall from grace” (77). Likewise, in South Africa, ~~–black~~ women were labelled brazen and animalistic, rendering invisible the systemic sexual violence to which they were subjected” (Baderoon 153). Within the colonial regime,

white men managed to deny the role of perpetrator, and ~~in~~ a painful reversal” blamed black women for their own violations (Baderoon 155). Even while black women were habitually raped, white men flipped the colonial script to ensure that it would not be remembered this way; black women became the perpetrators, and white men their victims.

To make matters worse, white men simultaneously privileged and denounced the offspring of interracial unions in order both maintain superiority and gather allies: ~~e~~levating the coloured, within limits, went hand in hand with downgrading him or her, within limits” (Mair 95). Planters in Jamaica removed mixed, or mulatta slaves ~~from~~ the lowest category of workers . . . [and] promote[d] females from the field to the great house” (Mair 89). Mixed slave women were known to receive preferential treatment, but only to the extent that they remained useful to white men, especially as concubines. In fact, working in the great house as ~~housekeepers~~ or secondary wives, “” was synonymous with concubinage (Sharpe xvii.). Because white men were ~~out~~numbered by blacks, [they] needed browns; and as long as white female absenteeism prevailed to the extent to which it did, white men would need brown women most of all” (Mair 97). Due to her more European features, the brown woman was attributed qualities denied of the black mother, such as beauty and domesticity, which were particularly amplified in her distance from filthy, gruelling fieldwork. A position of ambivalence was forced upon the mulatto slave as the coloniser defined ~~the~~ blueprint for citizenship” as ~~property~~, Christianity, education (English style) and the white mate—[which] implied rejection of the slave heritage, which had none of these gifts to offer” (Mair 97). As a result, the mulatto woman learned to resent her own mother, whose blackness obstructed her full membership in white society. Mobility was gained through concubinage, to the extent that ~~mulatto~~ [became] a generic term for concubine[.]” (45). This is not to say that mixed-women were not raped, but as the acquisition of property and even freedom became possible, ~~the~~ tendency...was for mixed families to continue to lighten their complexions through their

women's selection of suitable sex partners" (Mair 97). Both black and mixed women endured unspeakable trauma, but nonetheless expressed agency by manipulating white men in order to thrive within the parameters dictated by the coloniser—even if it meant denying their own blackness.

In the same way, the hypersexuality attributed to black woman was also ascribed to the coloured woman in South Africa—achieving legibility in the white, patriarchal symbolic became a sexual venture. Gabeba Baderoon reveals that even the name of Cape Town is —evidence of the systemic nature of sexual exploitation" (150). The coloured offspring of slaves<sup>9</sup> and white masters were given the surname —van den Kaap" (Dutch for of the Cape), "therefore, the —very name of the city encodes" rape in the colony (Baderoon 150). As I have discussed, the coloniser quickly displaced rape by casting black women with an alluring, yet dangerous hypersexuality; the children called —van den Kaap" were similarly marked as sexual beings. In describing Cape slaves as exotic, attractive, and alluring, sexual violence was —ationalise[d] and obscure[d]" once more and —sexual license" was granted to their bodies (Baderoon 151). Like the mulattas in Jamaica, the coloured women at the Cape similarly received preferential treatment for their proximity to whiteness. Unlike the black slaves, who in —large numbers . . . evoked the unsettling trope of the slave rebellion," the colonial gaze saw the —Malays" as exceptional, —more reliable and —less unruly" (Baderoon 11). In *Women and Slavery*, Sharifa Ahjum notes the desirability of the light-skinned slave woman" in a manuscript by Samuel Hudson, a slave owner at the Cape, written sometime between 1803 to 1806:

I know one Gentleman—if he can by such conduct deserve the name—that at the time I left the Colony was considered among the richest of the Inhabitants. . . [he] was in possession of a white (or nearly so) Slave. He had children by

this Woman, several which as they grew up from their colour were considered very valuable. The connection continued with her own children and even with his Grandchildren. . . Many of them had all the features of Europeans not with[out] a tinge of their Ancestors [*sic*] complexion. (99)

The sexual violence, here, is redolent particularly in the fact that this gentleman produced valuable slaves by sleeping with his own children. As Ahjum suggests, “Slaves, being outside of the Father’s Name, are not subject to the prohibition against incest” (99). Above, I described the psychological distancing among kin experienced by mixed women as a result of the value placed on whiteness; here, coloured women are physically distanced from their kin as —~~the~~ exclusion [from the laws that govern civil society] undoes or overrides any blood lineage” (Ahjum 99). By rupturing kinship—the connections between mothers and their children—white men reinforced the dehumanisation of black women, attacking every fibre of their womanhood.

Denied every freedom, some slave women asserted control over their reproduction in order to claim motherhood and protect their children from the horrors of slavery. In Jamaica, “~~induced~~ abortion seemed . . . to have been widespread,” and infanticide was practised both in —~~personal~~ interest” and in resistance to the plantation’s —~~labour~~ needs” (Mair 241). As a method of protest, —~~prolonged~~ breastfeeding was [both] a meaningful affirmation of womanhood” and a natural form of birth control (Mair 241). Slaves in South Africa resisted the white men who used their wombs to generate property, and —~~in~~ extreme cases they . . . resorted to infanticide or suicide—acts of desperation that deprived owners of valuable property” (Loos 64). Even after slavery ended in South Africa, ex-slaves were policed for the impropriety that white men cast upon them. Pamela Scully notes that as the moral —~~weakness~~ of former slave women” was stressed, the —~~illegitimacy~~ and permanent casting out of perceived miscreants . . . became the causal factor in the narrative of infanticide” (98, 96).

Already considered less than human, unrapable, and unable to mother, ~~in~~ killing her child, a woman declared sovereign power over both her body and the body of her child,” but it was an act that deprived her of the freedom she gained post-slavery (Scully 100). Whether the slave mother buried her children or prolonged breastfeeding in order to feel a semblance of motherhood, these acts of resistance asserted agency. Still, they were simultaneously painful, sacrificial acts with haunting effects on the psyche. There was no respect for the slave or ex-slave mother in colonial society; the rape of her body was crucial to the success of the colony.

Rape, ~~one~~ of the world’s most powerful and destructive weapons against humanity,” was used as a weapon of war against slave women in Jamaica and South Africa for hundreds of years (4). Cassandra Clifford suggests that rape ~~de~~demoralize[s] and destabilizes entire communities, it weakens ethnic communities/ties, and affects populations with the exploitation of the reproductive rights and abilities of its victims” (4). White men conflated slavery and rape in order to achieve these same goals. As such, considering that rape has long-lasting effects on its victims, it is important to acknowledge the gaping, collective wound that bleeds in silence among women of colour. Additionally, if we consider what is known about Post-Traumatic Stress Disorders (PTSD) and Rape Trauma Syndrome (RTS), it becomes crucial to excavate slave memory within a psychological framework. Since we do not have written narratives that can attest to their feelings, but we have ~~re~~records written by those who did not see them as human at all,” we can make sense of their lives through ~~manifestations~~ of Rape Trauma Syndrome (RTS)” (Gqola, *Rape* 68).

Like other victims of Rape Trauma Syndrome (RTS), the slave women who ~~terminat~~ed pregnancies struggle[d] with the feeling of hate and shame regarding the conception” and likely also ~~face~~ed guilt and mental anguish for the loss of the child” (Clifford 6). In another ~~painful~~ reversal,” the slave woman subsumed the shame that white men deflected (Baderoon 155). Suffering from RTS, the slave woman regarded her condition

a repeated failure—to escape enslavement, to claim bodily autonomy,” and protect her children—which results in feelings of shame, guilt, and self-blame” (Gqola 58, 194).

Clifford further suggests that this anguish can last a lifetime and ripples into later generations:

The direct correlation between a mother’s well-being and the well-being of the child, physically and mentally, are well established. . . Children born as a result of rape . . . face endless struggles of identity and social hurdles both internally and externally. . . [They] carry the burden of their traumatic conception and mother’s pain with them. (7)

From the onset of the colonial period, the children of miscegenation were simultaneously favoured for their lighter skin, and degraded for the degeneration they represented. The Jamaican planter and eugenicist Edward Long, for instance, considered mulattoes to be illegitimate children,” that could never discharge the stain” of their blackness (261). As the product of two pure,” races, the mulatto, being an heterogeneous medley of both, was imperfect, ergo *inferior*,” inclined to prostitution, and actually of the mule-kind” (Long 336, 478, his emphasis). Similarly, Sarah Gertrude Millin, the South African novelist, suggests that coloured children were unlucky people” who could never truly distance themselves from the taint of blackness (175). Through discourses such as these, people of mixed descent [were] deemed almost pathological,” and as such, they could never transcend their flaw” (Erasmus 42). Because black and mixed female bodies threatened the white supremacist, patriarchal symbolic; their raced and sexed bodies were spoken in terms of deviance. Just as the oppressor used rape as a weapon to foster powerlessness and claim authority over bodies, he similarly shaped [language] to become . . . a weapon that can shame, humiliate, colonize” (hooks 168). Alongside language, shame also acts as a weapon, retaining its power as women of colour internalise racist, sexist discourse. In her essay Shame and Identity,” Zoë Wicomb posits that its after all the very nature of shame to

stifle its own discourse” (92). As a result, while the intersection of race and sexuality on the bodies of women of colour are entwined through multi-layered, systemic violence, residual shame prevents us from speaking about it.

“Post-slavery, the repertoires of violence enacted upon slaves were rendered invisible in a variety of ways. For example, ~~in~~ the dominant picturesque mode seen in landscape paintings in the nineteenth century,” Baderon notes, ~~the~~ “violence of the slave-holding Cape Colony was rendered into a pleasing and domesticated view” (42). Slaves are pictured as ~~skilled~~, reliable and compliant, while also mysterious and exotic” (Baderon 42). Traditions such as these give the impression that slavery in South Africa was ~~“mild”~~ and helps to craft an innocent beginning” (Baderon 62). In other words, depictions of history that erased slavery allowed white men to skirt the blame for the atrocities committed against men and women of colour. Similarly, Reyes notes that in the West Indies, mulattas were depicted as ~~“favoured”~~ because it ~~was~~ a comfortable image for whites”—it erased sexual coercion and incestuous rape (66). It was common knowledge that the ~~“beautiful fair-complexioned daughter[s] could very well become . . . fancy girl[s] (prostitute[s]) and hence . . . victim[s] of the slave master’s sexual aggressions”~~ (Reyes 66). These representations are only examples of the diverting ~~“miniaturization[s]”~~ and supplantation[s] of violence false images of harmony that the ~~“colonial state – and therefore the postcolonial state—used to legitimize the reproduction of its own authority (Thomas 12). What this essentially means is that the atrocities committed during slavery and afterward have not been acknowledged, and are continuously obscured within the discourses of race and sexuality.~~

Excavating the discourses of race and sex reveals only mere examples of the ways white men violated and divided women of colour. Although they were not stripped entirely of agency, the racing and sexing of their bodies deeply affected them, and continue to do so in traumatic ways. For example, the in-between positionality thrust upon on mixed women

—inevitably made [her] a social and psychological hybrid”; through experience, she was taught that whiteness was valuable, and blackness was not (Mair 97). As Mair suggests, —she would have to be extraordinary indeed if the values, so authoritatively imposed from above, did not sink deeply into her subconscious” (97). I argue that these so-called \_values‘ *did* sink deeply into a collective subconscious among women of colour. During the colonial period, the principal means of social mobility for both black women and mulattas was engaging in sexual relationships with white men. Women of colour were forced to conflate their sexuality with their self-worth, which is undeniably a form of terrorism on the psyche. In addition to this, how could the habitual rape of black women not have left some sort of impact on the psyche of black women? When their children were taken, sold as slaves and raped, how could this not leave a psychological imprint—a gaping wound--felt throughout generations? Considering again the \_palimpsestic time‘ that —interlocks[s] presents, pasts, and futures,” it is viable that this treatment of women of colour, which remains unrecognised on a collective scale, certainly leaves a psychic legacy (Mbembe qtd. in Thomas 11).

In *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome*, Joy DeGruy suggests that —survivor syndromes exist” among —groups that have experienced terrorism, oppression, and trauma,” and can persist —in the human development of second and third progeny” (231). To say that women of colour in Jamaica and South Africa experienced terrorism, oppression, and trauma is an understatement. DeGruy goes on to say that —vaant esteem” is one of the symptoms of Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS), which is marked by —feeling or believing oneself to be inferior or having minimal or even no self-worth” as a result of —the family, the community, and the society” (232). In disavowing the slave past and the violence that goes along with it, these societies have left uninterrogated the discourses of race and sex that historically dictated a black woman’s worthlessness and continue to do so. There is a reason that the rape of women of colour in Jamaica and South Africa is so common, but it has become a women’s



issue, recognised only on an individual basis. The refusal to recognise racialized sexual violence and deride the language that has normalised it only compounds feelings of worthlessness and unbelonging among women. Additionally, the reclamation of black mothers as national Mothers imitates inclusivity, but in reality ignores the intersections that complicate this reclamation—she can only be national Mother if cleansed of the slave past and appropriated as a symbol of multiracial harmony. The ‘new’ largely masculinist nationalisms” that have emerged in Jamaica and South Africa therefore appear to mimic the white supremacist, patriarchy symbolic on which these nations were built (Khanna 229-230). Like their predecessor, these nationalisms “put women’s issues on the backburner, but use their bodies to undergird the success of the nation” (Khanna 230).

In addition to carrying the trauma of unreconciled slave memory, women of colour are forced to “swallow[] whole . . . traumas that manifest as continuing symptoms” within the intersection of race and sexuality (Khanna 230). Alongside this burden, women of colour are treated as “second-class citizens”; their lack of representation in the new nation and its failure to acknowledge centuries of violations has led to a “disidentification with the nation” (Khanna 230). With no recognition in the space of national healing, where does this trauma go? Ranjana Khanna suggests that it lingers in the form of “despair, a form of melancholia,” (230). As long as the slave past remains hidden, a sense of unidentifiable loss haunts women of colour in the present. In the writing of Michelle Cliff and Zoë Wicomb, the melancholic subject grapples with this loss, which points to collective injuries neglected under the guise of ‘new’ nations and proves the extent to which history is disremembered. ‘New’ nationalisms, like palimpsests, obscure the past, yet there is colonial residue. It is our duty to look beyond the ‘lie’ that these nationalisms generate through the picturesque, the national Mother (absent a slave past), and declarations of multiracial harmony. In essence, deciphering the truth of our history and recovering slave memory demands that trauma be excavated and spoken.

## Forgetting Slavery, Claiming Resistance

### in Michelle Cliff's *Abeng* and *No Telephone to Heaven*

In every slave society, slave owners attempted to eradicate the slave's memory, that is, to erase all the evidence of an existence before slavery. . . A slave without a past had no life to avenge. No time was wasted yearning for a home . . . Never did the captive choose to forget; she was always tricked or bewitched or coerced into forgetting. Amnesia, like an accident or stroke of bad fortune, was never an act of volition.

- Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*

At her most powerful, the grandmother is the source of knowledge, magic, ancestors, stories, healing practices, and food. She assists in the rites of passage, protects, and teaches. She may be informed with the *ashe*, the power to make things happen, the responsibility to mete justice.

- Cliff "Clare Savage as a Crossroads Character"

The negation of slave women and their histories could not be possible without the desecration of motherhood. When the slave woman was sexually violated, commodified as breeder, and forced to endure the auction of her child, she could not pass on her culture or her history. To say slave memory has vanished, however, undermines the agency and resilience of black women, who held on to every fibre of their personhood despite their masters who raped, flogged, and made every attempt to break them. In other words, although attempts have been made to eradicate the memories of slaves, they are not lost. Studies such as Lucille Mathurin Mair's *A Historical Study of Women in Jamaica* and Jenny Sharpe's *The Ghosts of Slavery* utilize folklore as well as literature to "resuscitat[e] the lives of the dead by raising the painful memory of slavery" (Sharpe xi). Sharpe suggests that it is precisely because the

stories of slaves, ~~part~~ particularly those of slave women” have not been told, or rather emphatically erased, that ~~slavery~~ continues to haunt the present” (xi). Because historiography, in a Western sense, has notoriously featured and been dictated by white men, it is crucial that we look to alternative forms of record-keeping in order to trace our cultural continuities.

Folk songs and stories bear new meaning when we treat them as more than myths and fiction, as Michelle Cliff reveals in her novels. No longer can we ~~reject~~[ ] the folk memory as a valid base for scholarly theses,” rather, we must ~~acknowledge~~[-s] the ability of the folk memory to validate the authority of the printed page” (Mair 320, 325). The very rejection of folklore as legitimate knowledge itself is evidence of the colonizer’s strategy of erasure, which works to naturalize the illegitimacy of subaltern forms of knowledge. By re-inscribing folk memory as history and reading in-between the lines, we become privy to the memories of slave women that still linger in our communities, albeit in faint echoes after the forced separation of mothers and their children. Because the mother was unable to pass on stories to her children, the true form of the slave’s historiography, the future of unbroken memories and knowledge was severely compromised. Still, even the transformation of mothers into breeders could not strip them of their motherhood, their memory, or their stories, and so we have received them in fragments that we must piece together.

When slavery ended in Jamaica in 1834, the colonial mindset had already taken its toll on the children of white masters and slave mothers, whose proximity to whiteness allowed them a degree of privilege their mothers never knew. By privileging whiteness and shaming blackness, the white man gave with one hand and took with the other, essentially splitting the mixed race subject into conflicting and incommensurable pieces. In a society where blackness meant poverty and enslavement, the children who were able to pass for white actively disremembered or were coerced into forgetting their black mothers. Michelle

Cliff's 'Clare Savage' novels, both passing narratives, trace the ruptured transmission of the black mother's history in favour of white father's culture and privilege, leaving Clare in "so many bits and pieces" that "she is composed of fragments" (Cliff 87). Embedded in a revisionist history that harkens back to Jamaican folklore are Clare's "racial and gender identity crises" which demands her search for Mother (Feng 6). This matrilineal quest is fuelled by the collective trauma of complicity — that is, complicity with the slave masters who attempted to eradicate slave history and subjectivity — of the pain of slavery itself, and the desire to evoke the memory of those who resisted it. As Cliff traces tales of resistance among slave women and Maroons, her use of an omniscient narrator maintains Clare's outsider status to this inner circle of knowledge. In *Abeng* (1984), a twelve-year-old Clare struggles to glean her mother's history from the colonial school system, her nearly white father 'Boy' (descended from slaveholders), and her emotionally distant, mulatto mother Kitty. In *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987), a thirty-six-year-old Clare attempts to find herself in the 'mother country,' and her 'motherland,' as a result of her *motherless* state. These semi-autobiographical novels showcase the erasure of black women in historiography and the gendered experience of cultural reconstruction in a patriarchal, white-washed, and racially stratified society—a society which ultimately leaves the mixed race subject at odds with herself and searching for Mother.

Cliff's novels indicate that without the knowledge of a precolonial past, of strength and resistance in the face of oppression, the mixed race subject is forced to occupy a space of ambivalence and uncertainty between victim and oppressor. Clare's forced occupation of the rigid space of heteronormative whiteness impels her to seek and authenticate the discourse of her black womanhood. Although Clare is made oblivious to her history and must organically lay claim to her identity, it is crucial that Cliff's revisionist history counters the oppressive representations of her people through the black national mother, whose reinvigoration

subverts patriarchy and re-establishes the black slave woman as nurturing mother.

Furthermore, the evocation of the national mother or heroine, or as David Lambert posits, this “process of surrogation[,] is a key mechanism through which collective memory and cultural identity are reproduced in the circum-Atlantic world” (358).<sup>10</sup> However, it becomes clear that the process of surrogation has its limitations “because collective memory works selectively, imaginatively, and often perversely,” (Roach qtd. In Lambert 363) leaving gaps “in the cultural fabric” (366). In *Abeng*, Cliff echoes the Outlyerist framework that denies the resistance of slave mothers, which I will discuss briefly, so that the process of rememory is stunted and Clare’s journey into herself fails; as Cliff suggests, “She’s a fragmented character, and she doesn’t get a chance to become whole at all” (Schwartz 600-601). This is not a failure of the text, but rather a gesture to the necessity of positive identifications within slave memory, which Clare cannot access.

Nicola King posits that “the ‘re’ of rememory suggests the belatedness of traumatic memory” while also signalling the intersections between individual and collective memory” (150). In *Abeng*, Cliff’s omniscient narrator illuminates the disconnect between collective Maroon memory and the individual memory of the Savage family, whose division essentially disrupts the ability to re-member as one community. This rupture has occurred because of the Savages’ refusal to acknowledge a past of slavery, its impact, and the inability to heal forgotten suffering. On a larger scale, the Savages represent the islanders who have accepted England’s version of history. They represent the people who have chosen not only to dismiss slavery as an unfortunate thing of the past, but also continue to serve in *what they perceive* to be their ancestor’s image: that of “wuthlessness” (worthlessness) (*Abeng* 17). For instance,

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<sup>10</sup> Here, Lambert uses Joseph Roach’s concept of ‘surrogation’ from *Cities of the Dead*, which involves the employment of a conceptual surrogate to fill the ‘cavities’ caused by death and displacement in the context of slavery (345). Lambert specifically employs this term in order to challenge the creation of National Heroes in the Caribbean and their particular successes and failures in filling these gaps. The circum-Atlantic is less concerned with the “Atlantic Ocean itself as a place of memory, but with a circum-oceanic system formed by historical processes of connection, circulation, and interruption” (356).

the people in the Tabernacle, Kitty Savage's place of worship, "consist[ing] for the most part of Black women" who (Cliff, *A* 12):

Could trace their bloodlines back to a past of slavery. But this was not something they . . . knew much about. In school . . . They were given the impression that the whites who brought them here from the Gold Coast and the Slave Coast were only copying a West African custom. As though the whites had not named the Slave Coast themselves. No one had told the people in the Tabernacle that of all the slave societies in the New World, Jamaica was considered the most brutal. . . Or that . . . the grandmothers of these people sitting in a church on a Sunday evening . . . had been violated again and again by the very men who whipped them. (*Abeng* 19)

Set in the 1950s prior to Jamaican liberation, this excerpt directly implicates the colonial education system which was founded with the intent to move past slavery as if it never happened, to eradicate slave memory, and to maintain racial hierarchy. This lapse of knowledge among the people of Jamaica is not owed to their failure or their neglect, but to the masters who "tricked or bewitched or coerced [their mothers] into forgetting" (Hartman 155). By circulating the notion that slavery was a "West African custom," white men attempted to eliminate the black women's ability to harken back to a past prior to subservience—in essence, naturalising slavery and subservience for the black woman. As these women in the Tabernacle "served. Cleaned. Mopped. Cooked. Cared for babies lighter than their own," they could not fathom that their lives had not always been this way (Cliff *Abeng* 17). Cliff interacts with the colonial version of history to showcase its deficiencies—not only did black people have a rich history prior to slavery in Africa, but also there existed and continue to exist the descendants of the Maroons in Jamaica, who either escaped slavery or were never enslaved.

Rather than focusing on trauma, Cliff, informed by Black Consciousness,<sup>11</sup> remembers strength and resistance in order to combat the image of the subservient black woman, proving that in the slavocracy ~~the~~ black slave woman emerged as the most aggressive of women . . . tak[ing] centre stage as rebel” (Mair 322). As Suzette A. Spencer suggests, this epitomizes the Outlyerist stance, which ~~con~~centrates on the empowered gaze of the Outlyers . . . [who] assume a more assertive posturing than the marginalized” (6). Cliff celebrates female figures in Jamaica’s history who *chose* to ~~be~~ apart from the majority culture” of the slavocracy, such as Nanny of the Maroons, at the same time ignoring the fact that slaves themselves did not have the right to *choose*. (Spencer 6). Throughout her text, Cliff restores the history of Nanny of the Maroons, ~~the~~ sorceress, the *obeah*-woman . . . the magician of the revolution” (~~Abeng~~” 14) in order to ~~subver~~[t] and revers[e] . . . the colonial gaze” that exiles black women ~~to~~ the periphery of majority culture” (Spencer 6-7).

Nanny undoubtedly existed and her stories are still told ~~among~~ the enclaves of the Blue Mountains of Jamaica,” or Nanny Town (Reyes 78). She assisted in the resistance against slavery, was never captured, and for the Maroons in Jamaica, she remains a symbol of empowerment (Reyes 79). Cliff’s novels are set prior to Nanny’s widespread fame and official recognition; she was declared a National Hero and Mother of Jamaica in the 1970s (Lambert 353). Not to be confused as tributes to this declaration, Cliff’s novels evoke Nanny as a national, militant mother in order to enable an ~~intimate~~ recollection of the past,” (Reyes 79) and a means to empower the very women in the Tabernacle who may have been called

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<sup>11</sup> Black Consciousness in Jamaica, as Kathleen Koljian suggests, “has remained a fairly inclusive and egalitarian social construct” (218). Cliff aligns herself with this movement in solidarity against the coloniser and to “imagine[] the recuperation of, and re-identification with, African culture” (Koljian 218). Cliff therefore strongly identifies as a black woman despite suggestions that she is a ‘Jamaica white’ and assumptions that “[her] alliance is with the colonizer” (Schwartz and Cliff 608). Alternatively, in South Africa, there was a marked identification as black in the 1970s and 1980s among the coloured community during the anti-apartheid era, but this “did not negate Coloured identity but rather shifted its allegiance within South Africa’s racial hierarchy from a perceived solidarity with whites to an openly articulated solidarity with blacks” (Koljian 155). Despite this solidarity, the colonial racial groupings still stand, and coloured people are more likely to identify as coloured than black in the ‘new’ South Africa.

—Nanny, because they cared for the children of other woman, but . . . did not know who Nanny had been” (Cliff 21). Cliff emphasizes that Nanny and the Maroons were more than mere rebels seeking freedom—they sought —a communal space free from white hegemony and oppression, a space where identities could be forged independent of the racist views of slave masters” (Spencer 12). Recalling that *Abeng* and *No Telephone to Heaven* are narratives that mirror Cliff’s own coerced experience of passing, the Maroon communities become spaces of healing and recovery for her effaced blackness.

However, in valuing only Outlyerism, the slave woman’s autonomy and individual resistance sustain erasure—in Clare Savage’s search for Mother, the slave woman is deficient. It is important to note that according to Maroon origin stories, there had been two mothers, two sisters:

Nanny and Sekesu. Nanny fled slavery. Sekesu remained a slave. Some said this was the difference from the sisters. It was believed that all island children were descended from one or the other. (*Abeng* 18)

According to oral tradition, both Nanny and Sekesu were —captured in the Gold Coast and brought to Jamaica onboard the same ship” (Rucker 220). Nanny escaped her captors to become the mother of the rebels, while Sekesu was never freed from her chains, becoming the —mother of all plantation slaves” (Rucker 220). In the beginning, the slaves and the Maroons maintained close ties, and, as Kenneth M. Bilby suggests, —for a period of nearly a century following the founding of the first major Maroon communities, a steady flow of new refugees from the plantations . . . continued to augment the rebel groups” (10). The British attempted to divide this union by granting freedom to the slaves who —search[ed] out and destroy[ed]” the Maroons — becoming the *blackshots* of the white man” (Cliff, *Abeng* 20). As time continued and distrust worsened between both parties, the Maroons began to develop



—and identity of their own, and a culture which, although sharing a great deal with the slave culture that was developing alongside it on the plantations, was clearly distinct” (Bilby 10). The Maroons’ superior standard of living in the blue mountains was reinforced by treaties signed in 1739 that positioned the Maroons as “free British subjects” and granted them certain privileges in exchange for their assistance in “suppress[ing] . . . all future slave rebellions, and . . . hunting down . . . all subsequent refugees from the plantation” (Bilby 10). The British therefore further succeeded in suppressing slave memory by dividing the slaves from the Maroons, and transforming their growing rift into a thing of hatred, or at the very least suspicion and resentment. Retaining slave status had dire consequences for slave memory as the breach in Maroon-slave relations meant that Nanny was remembered and Sekesu was better off forgotten (Bilby 10). According to oral tradition, “the two sisters met and they were arguing. One said well, she was going to fight [and]. . . One said she wouldn’t fight, for she didn’t like the shedding of blood . . . it was better for her to become a slave” (Bilby 12). Nanny and the rebels became closely associated with qualities such as strength and power, while Sekesu and the plantation slaves were thought to be complacent and weak. The origin of Nanny and Sekesu, representing the “process of dual ethnogenesis” affirms the pervasiveness of colonial power in the eradication of slave memory and the division of a people once united (Bilby 11). While the Maroon mother is remembered and praised, Sekesu as ancestress is the “*wuthess*” sister who would not fight for her people. Sekesu’s representation as abject negates the possibility of fortitude within an enslaved condition.

Considering the rift between the Maroons and the slaves, it is likely that the story of Sekesu was invented to naturalize the “complacency” of slaves and the “superiority” of the Maroons. Mair concedes that records of Nanny certainly exist, but there is no mention of Sekesu in the archives (322) and Reyes refers to Sekesu as a “metaphorical sister” (101). Similarly, as Izabella Penier suggests, “Sekesu’s name, like Pocahontas’s name, is a synonym

for traitor” for, according to the Maroons, she allowed her body to be used sexually against her people rather than fighting for them (170). In the search for a national mother, or as Meg Samuelson suggests, “tractable symbols with which to express their ideals of homogenous unity, national and ethnic claims commandeered women’s bodies and deny the more messy aspects of their legacies that cannot be neatly enfolded with the nationalist script” (2). Nanny of the Maroons has been shaped into the culture-bearing, powerful, and resistant leader that we know so well, but her counterpart Sekesu, who did exist even if not by name, is disremembered because her legacy is one of disunity, trauma, and pain. The Jamaican national motto “Out of Many One People” evokes the nation’s multiracial roots, but opts for Nanny’s pure identity as uniting figurehead, rather than facing the rape of Sekesu’s and other slaves bodies that actually spawned the mixed race population. By claiming Nanny as Mother, Jamaicans simultaneously claim “imaginary wholeness and unity,” disavow their slave ancestry, and forget their slave mothers (Samuelson 232). This imaginary wholeness is not possible without harkening back to a pure identity, untainted by rape and subversion.

It is said that if during a “traditional ceremony of Kromanti Play”<sup>12</sup> an outsider is present, the “possessing Maroon spirits can instantly sense (‘smell’) the presence of ‘different blood’ (i.e. non-Maroon blood)” (Bilby 14). This notion of pure blood present in the Maroon community directly correlates to the so-called purity of white blood and the mobility associated with the proximity to whiteness in Jamaica. As Samuelson posits, “Narratives of ‘blood’ not only reproduce apartheid racial obsessions and appeal to a dangerous mix of folk wisdom and eugenics, but also silence and dismember women” (21). In other words, by dispossessing Sekesu and her children, the Maroons reinscribe eugenics, albeit in order to

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<sup>12</sup> Kromanti is an Akan language which survived the slave trade from the Gold Coast; Kromanti Play is a ceremony in which the Maroons call upon ancestral spirits. The presence of an outsider apparently disturbs the ceremony unless the non-Maroon “is assigned a Maroon protector; and in any case, he will have to undergo a ritual oath of secrecy in order to placate the enraged possessing spirit” (14). In *No Telephone to Heaven*, Cliff refers to the language as “Coromantee, a tongue barely alive” (106).

reverse hegemonic positions of power, and further silence and make abject the slave past. The British strategy of dividing and ruling in Jamaica successfully placed slaves and their Afro-Jamaican descendants on the lowest rung of society, even among people who have no physical difference. The descendants of slaves are excluded from Kromanti<sup>13</sup> cultural tradition and production, leaving them with fragmented notions of their history (Bilby 16). Still, Michelle Cliff reminds us that “all island people were first cousins,” (*Abeng* 18) or as Bilby suggests, “two sister pikni”—relations that, even with such a tumultuous history cannot erase the “metaphor of kinship” (17). Although Cliff does not attempt explicitly to mend the relationship between the Maroons and the slaves, her emphasis on kinship minimizes the influence of colonial power on Afro-Jamaican relations and maintains their shared African descent. The fact that this connection is evident means that shared cultural traditions are not lost and Sekesu still lingers as a haunting figure in the national imaginary. However, because Cliff leaves Sekesu out of the narrative, Nanny’s autonomy is not reconciled with the painful memory of Sekesu’s enslavement and the processes of rememory and surrogation do not meet Clare’s expectations for a compassionate, magnanimous, and all-knowing mother figure.

*Abeng* is a coming of age tale in which Clare’s development into a cultural being is stunted by her inability to access her history. Although Clare’s natural inclination to define herself begins with her “mother, ‘the matrix of . . . connection with the past, [who provides] the source of meaning and identity” (Boehmer 88)—Kitty Freeman, a “red”<sup>14</sup> woman of the Tabernacle, associates her slave past with that of victimhood and refuses to pass along this pain or “question th[e] structure” that privileges her lighter skin (Cliff, *Abeng* 54). This

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<sup>13</sup> Kromanti is a Maroon language similar to the Akan language in Ghana; similarly, traditions with Ghanaian influence among the Maroons are referred to as Kromanti.

<sup>14</sup> The term ‘red’ indicates both black and white parentage in Jamaica; one who has “brown skin and a wave to their hair” (Cliff, “Abeng” 54). Red is a term synonymous with coloured or mulatto, and as Patricia Mohammed suggests, “The mulatto woman in the British West Indies does not identify herself as black” (25-26).

refusal is exhibited as “enabl[ing] the continuation of trauma” rather than an effort to save Clare from the pain of racial discrimination (Croisy 144). The memories Clare receives are from her play-white father, Boy, whose English forefathers were “known all over Jamaica for [their] former wealth” as plantation owners (Cliff, *Abeng* 22). The fact that slaves supplied this wealth, that the “whipping of human beings, rape of human beings, lynching of human beings, buying and selling of human beings” only resulted in the collapse of the sugar industry and the depletion of this wealth “was never mentioned” (Cliff, *Abeng* 28-29). With one sign of status diminished, the mythology of whiteness persists among the Savages to protect their identities from the perceived regression to blackness. Because Boy Savage’s desire to “forget about Africa” is undifferentiated from social mobility, Kitty tolerates the erasure of their blackness in order to improve Clare’s prospects as a fair-skinned Jamaican, which effectively isolates Clare from her mother and her mother’s history (Cliff, *Abeng* 30). Kitty’s identification as “red” and her willingness to forge for Clare a “monogenetic, fixed identity” exemplifies the survivalist tendency to forget the slave past, while simultaneously demonstrating the dangers implicit in this act: of “forget[ing] mother” and losing history (Hartman 162). As Clare’s entrance into the Symbolic is dictated by the Nom du Pere, she enters a world of whiteness and the black mother is made abject; consequently, “she fe[els] split into two parts--white and not white,” unable to speak or access her blackness (Cliff A, 119). According to “traditional practice” in Jamaica, the lightest child belonged to the lightest parent; “this parent would pass this light-skinned daughter on to a white husband, so she would have lighter and lighter babies” until whiteness was achieved and darkness obliterated (Cliff *Abeng*, 129). Kitty’s awareness of and involvement in this process of “self-marginalization and self-denial” (Feng 10) characterizes her as deficient mother “who is responsible for the rupture of the Afro-Caribbean matrilineal line,” and whose coldness and silence represents “complicity with the colonial culture” (Penier 169, 167).

In *Abeng* we learn that Kitty “do[esn’t] believe in too much physical affection between parents and children,” because it had not been her experience (Cliff 52). Like Clare, she too has been denied an intimate, culture-bearing connection with her mother. Ann R. Morris and Margaret M. Dunn suggest that in the West Indies, the mother and the land are tightly bound: “if [a woman] has been denied a developmental bond with her own mother, then the ‘mother’s land’ itself may provide a surrogate” (219). Kitty’s reliance on Jamaica as her mother’s land, her strongest connection to her mother, is emphasized during the Savages’ move to America in the 1960s, where she begins work as a laundress under the alias ‘Mrs. White.’ In this foreign place, Kitty’s sense of displacement and lack of control is revealed as she “wander[s] through a graveyard in Brooklyn” (Cliff, *No Telephone* 63). She stumbles upon the grave of a man named Marcus, “a slave to some family, who had been frozen to death crossing the water during the perilous winter of 1702. . . And she fear[s] she would join him (Cliff, *No Telephone* 63). The law of hypodescent is particularly jarring to Kitty, whose mango-coloured skin and landowning parentage grants her privilege in Jamaica; unlike Marcus, she is not bound to the status of “faithful servant” once she crosses the water (Cliff, *No Telephone* 63). Kitty recalls her mother’s advice as she imagines sharing Marcus’s slave status and being permanently severed from her home: “Face it, gal. Your mama counsel you not to venture where you nuh welcome” (Cliff, *No Telephone* 76). Although Boy silences Kitty in her mother’s land, she is free to roam and speak in her melodic patois in the bush of Jamaica. In New York, Kitty speaks freely only in the secret notes hidden in the laundry of white customers—notes which address the racism she frequently encounters. In her final note, she writes, “Hello. Mrs. White is Dead. My name is Mrs. Black. I killed her” (Cliff, *No Telephone* 83). This act of resistance outlines Kitty’s desire to overcome her white oppressor, whose presence is more deeply felt within the rampant racism and rigid classification of

1960s America; her figurative murder of Mrs. White indicates her refusal to speak in hushed tones—to be silenced.

In a particularly telling scene, Kitty's first experience of menstruating in a foreign land intensifies her sense of alienation and displacement. As she searches for the "folded cloth she had been taught to use as a girl," she is met with countless unfamiliar products (Cliff, *No Telephone* 79). Among these products stands a statue of "La Morenita, La Virgen de Montserrat," or the black Virgin Mother of Catalonia, who the shopkeeper brought with her to America as an emblem of her country and her Mother (Cliff, *No Telephone* 79). According to Lucia Chiavola Birnbaum, "Black Madonnas may be considered a metaphor for a memory of the time when the earth was believed to be the body of a woman and all creatures were equal, a memory transmitted in vernacular traditions of earth-bonded cultures, historically expressed in cultural and political resistance" (3). Although Kitty does not know the significance of the statue, she dreams of "La Morenita beckon[ing] through the dark . . . inside the house of [her] mother" where she is "left to find her mother" (Cliff, *No Telephone* 82). Her vision of La Morenita, the Mother of "denied cultures" who nurtures the Other, immediately triggers memories of her mother, her mother's land, and her need to return to "vernacular traditions of earth-bonded cultures" that give her a sense of familiarity (if not equality) among subaltern classes (Birnbaum 9). Kitty's search for mother and cultural resistance ultimately lies in her return to a romanticized version of Jamaica, where "vernacular ways of knowing and believing, bypass[] establish[] knowledge and belief" (Birnbaum 4). Because the metaphor of the Black Madonna cannot hold true in racist and classist Jamaica, the land proves to be a deficient surrogate; Kitty is driven to madness as the ghosts of her mother "surround[] her,"—haunting her, perhaps, for the suppression and erasure of her mother's memory, of "keep[ing] her darkness locked inside" (Cliff, *Abeng* 129) which ruptures the "earth-bonded" connection between not only Kitty and her mother,

but between Kitty and Clare as well (Cliff, *No Telephone* 105). Kitty's burial ~~in~~ a cemetery which h[olds] no history for her family" affirms their broken ties and ultimately leaves Clare ~~a~~ "motherless child" in every possible sense (Cliff, *No Telephone* 103-4).

In *Abeng* and *No Telephone to Heaven*, Cliff revises the history of Jamaica to include these vernacular ways of knowing that Kitty, and in a larger sense colonial power in Jamaica, ~~bleached~~ "from our minds" (Adisa 14). The recovery of black memory, underpinned by Clare's search for mother, is attempted through the reclamation of Nanny of the Maroons and the denunciation of ~~the~~ "indoctrination of the colonizer" (Adisa 16). Although Clare-the-child is unaware of her Maroon ancestry, she recognizes her mother's blackness and resents her green eyes and light skin—features that privilege her as ~~the~~ "[Savage] family's crowning achievement... in a world where the worst thing to be—especially if you were a girl—was to be dark" (Cliff, *Abeng* 61, 77). This privilege, for Clare, is restrictive—as her father's child, she feels ~~separated~~ "from [the black women of the Tabernacle]" and forced to occupy a space of ideal white femininity (Cliff, *Abeng* 61). The women's sheer focus on her potential as a ~~chestnut hair[-ed]~~ "near-white girl, her exclusion from the killing of the wild hog, and her inability to ~~wander~~[ ] about alone," (Cliff, *Abeng* 61-2) persuades Clare to long for her darker friend Zoë, whose visible blackness grants Clare access into her mother's world. In addition to Clare's exclusion from cultural spaces and traditions, she is made an outsider to her own history. As Cliff notes:

The twelve-year-old Christian mulatto girl, up to this point walking through her life according to what she had been told—not knowing very much about herself or her past—for example, that her great-great grandfather had once set fire to a hundred Africans; that her grandmother Miss Mattie was once a canecutter with a cloth bag of salt in her skirt pocket—this child became compelled by the life and death of Anne

Frank. She was reaching, without knowing it, for an explanation of her own life. (—A”  
72)

Clare’s —father t[ells] her she [is] white,” but he silences the damning history of her white ancestors (*Abeng* 36). She knows that her mother is black, but she does not know the legacy of slavery that came before her. As Clare imagines —suck[ing] her mother’s breasts again and again . . . [and] enter[ing] some dream [she] imagine[s] mother and children share[ ],” she does not know that her foremothers suckled their children as a form of resistance against the white masters who tried, but could not take away their ability to mother, if only in this single act (*Cliff Abeng*). Even without the knowledge of her traumatic past and the extent of its erasure, Clare is drawn to stories of trauma. Significantly, Clare’s teachers link the treatment of the Jews during the Holocaust to the so-called inferiority of Africans; they suggest —both types of people were flawed in irreversible ways” (*Cliff, Abeng* 71). This whitewashed logic underscores the unjust death of Anne Frank and millions of other Jews, which for Clare, becomes analogous to the traumatic legacy of slaves and crucial to her conceptualization of racism: —just as Jews were expected to suffer in a Christian world, so were dark people expected to suffer in a white one” (*Cliff, Abeng* 77).

Although the story of Anne Frank enables Clare to define the Christian and white oppressor, it is the relationship between Anne and her mother that ultimately sparks her —interest in the *why* of the Holocaust” (*Cliff, Abeng* 79). Like Kitty, Anne’s mother —was a woman held back. Restrained by what seemed a combination of dignity and sadness” (*Cliff, Abeng* 79). Clare identifies this remoteness as an obstacle to Anne’s liberation; the mother of another Jewish girl named Kitty Hart —stood in contrast to the mother of Anne Frank. She had fought for her daughter’s survival,” and succeeded (*Cliff, Abeng* 80). Kitty’s coldness and silence are, therefore, obstacles to the liberation of Clare’s identity. Clare’s recitation of Anne’s mother’s death, Anne’s sister’s death, and Anne’s death clearly pins Anne’s mother



as a conspirator in their demise when placed alongside the mother that fought ~~and~~ confronted the horror” (Cliff *Abeng* 80). Because Kitty will not confront the horror of racism and fight for the survival of her African heritage, Clare fears the symbolic death of her culture. Implicit in this passage is the disdain for the slave mother who did not fight for her people and pride in the mother of the Maroons whose culture survived. Anne and Clare’s mothers are written off as weak and fearful, while Kitty Hart’s mother is resistant and powerful, which directly parallels the novel’s rendition of Sekesu and Nanny, respectively. Cliff claims, ~~people~~ “people make [Anne Frank] into a victim and not a resistor,” that ~~we~~ “we don’t know what she said at the end of her life” or ~~what~~ “what she experienced” (Raiskin 68). Furthermore, she goes on to suggest there were ~~many~~ “many levels of resistance...and of secrecy and fighting against enormous odds” in the Holocaust and in slavery (Raiskin and Cliff 68). This sound logic of interrogating resistance in the face of a victimizing narrative is swept aside, however, when it comes to mothers deemed inadequate or bad, especially within traumatic legacies.

This oversight echoes the exclusion of slave resistance from the national script, yet further points to the refusal to engage with damaging stereotypes informed by the oppressor. With the latter in mind, Cliff revises Jamaican history to include explicit events of female leadership within folklore, and even invents the character of Mma Alli, an enslaved descendant of Nanny, to show that resistance and slavery are not mutually exclusive. Mma Alli is described as a ~~one~~ “one-breasted warrior woman” who ~~ha~~ “[s] never lain with a man,” but knows ~~how~~ “how to touch a woman in her deep-inside and make her womb move within her” (35). This characterization of Mma Alli transcends the heteronormative paradigm Cliff seeks to deconstruct in her writing; for example, Cliff depicts sexual pleasure between slave women as healing and powerful in order to lend the slave woman sexual agency—something that is not considered feasible in the structure developed by her white oppressors:

When Inez came to Mma Alli to get rid of the mixed-up baby she carried, Mma Alli kept her in her cabin overnight . . . Mma Alli began to gently stroke her with fingers dipped in coconut oil and pull on her nipples with her mouth. . . Her tongue all over Inez's body—night after night. (*Abeng* 35)

Inez, a slave who is repeatedly raped by Judge Savage, is given "new-found power" through this lesbian encounter with Mma Alli, who assists her in aborting the child and escaping to freedom. This encounter directly contrasts depictions of Sekesu and displays a refusal to engage with negative representations of slave women, instead focusing on generating positive mythologies within a black feminist archive.

Because Clare does not have access to stories of slave resistance, she too easily judges her mother a woman complicit with colonial culture, refusing to imagine perhaps that she too is a silenced victim—she believes Kitty's strength and resistance to be "missing" (Cliff, *Abeng* 99). In Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, the stereotype of the "bad mother," is fleshed out to incorporate the resistance of the slave mother, Sethe. Infanticide, which at a glance appears destructive and murderous, is complicated to "constitute a moral response that does justice to her reality and her conditions" (Ashe 1036). Rather than imagining Kitty as complicit, we must consider her silence a consequence of the chokehold of white supremacy. As a woman of mixed race, Kitty "live[s] divided"; "she [is] not at home with [the] pretense" of passing and constantly "feel[s] her mother's loss" (Cliff, *No Telephone* 75). Although Kitty is not capable of rescuing Clare from the same divided sense of self, she frequently fights against Boy's touting of whiteness and superiority:

Kitty complain[s] that Boy [is] weak, and that he w[ill] never amount to anything; that he[is] intolerant of too many people; that he live[s] in another world. She complain[s] that his presence in her life as her husband [is]. . . an

error—but she seem[s] to have no desire to change the situation. (Cliff, *Abeng* 51)

As a child, Clare recalls the “unrelenting arguments” between her parents, but cannot comprehend the resistance implicit in her mother’s actions because she does not escape the figurative “shackles” of their marriage (Cliff, *Abeng* 51). In fighting against Boy—the proud “son of a plantation owner,” Kitty symbolically rebels against the white supremacist, patriarchal hegemony in Jamaica that privileges his “acquiescence” and intolerance (Cliff, *No Telephone* 75). In a final bout of rage, Kitty simultaneously reminds Boy of their slave ancestry and undermines Boy’s position as a “Jamaica white”:

Busha, is maybe time we cut the cotta . . . what you think? She broke the silence, addressing him as overseer, with reference to divorce among the slaves who had been among their ancestors. Slicing the device on which their burdens balanced. . . She smiled at him. You preffer “slave” . . . “massa”? (Cliff, *No Telephone* 82)

This outburst aligns Kitty with the “hot-tempered and sharp-tongued slave ‘vixens,’ for whom speech became pointed means of self-assertion” and refused to stay silent—despite their imposed subhuman status, they were able to incite fear and humiliation in their so-called superiors (Mair 235). Out of 150 trials “in which slave women appeared” in the courts of Jamaica, for instance, “42 cases involved language offences, described as ‘indecent,’ ‘scandalous,’ ‘outrageous,’ ‘insulting,’ ‘abusive,’ [and] ‘threatening’; they were directed against free persons, coloured and white” (Mair 235). Slaves were punished for this “black verbal expression” in the form of confinement and hard labour, yet “to be immobilized was not to be silenced” (Mair 236-237). This passage recalls the slave women that resisted their oppressors simply by speaking. In *Abeng*, Kitty “w[ears] her love for Black people—her

people—in silence” because she does not know about the existence of women like Nanny—she only knows the trauma of slavery and ~~east[s]~~ her people in the position of victim” (Cliff, *Abeng* 128). Kitty’s ability to break this silence in *No Telephone to Heaven* by leaving Boy and disobeying her mother’s instructions to ~~make~~ the best of [her situation]” allows her to cast away her people’s and her own self-proclaimed status as ~~oward[s]!~~” (Cliff, *No Telephone* 75, 78). Although she does not know Nanny as Mother, her ability to speak defiantly, despite crippling memories of trauma, shows that perhaps Nanny and Sekesu were not so different. Cliff, like Morrison, complicates the bad mother stereotype to show that in Kitty’s reality, she protects Clare in the only way she knows how—leaving her daughter, at the very least, with the instructions: ~~hope~~ someday you make something of yourself, and someday help your people . . . Never forget who your people are” (Cliff, *No Telephone* 103).

In *No Telephone to Heaven*, Clare declares herself ~~motherless~~ — Kitty’s burial in a place that has no connection to Clare’s foremothers leaves her ruptured from her ancestors (Cliff 104). Still, she follows in her mother’s footsteps by leaving her father in search for the motherland. Because Clare, unlike Kitty, lacks an intimate connection to Jamaica, she ~~choos[es]~~ London with the logic of a creole”(Cliff, *No Telephone* 109). England is the land she ~~is~~ taught to call Mother,” and for a short time, this satisfies her craving; she imagines herself heroic, like Jane Eyre who was also motherless and ~~left~~ to wander” (Cliff, *No Telephone* 111, 116). She soon realizes, however, that she is only passing as Jane—she bears more resemblance to the ~~wild-maned Bertha~~”: ~~Captive. Ragout. Mixture. Confused. Jamaican Caliban. Carib. Cannibal. Cimarron. All Bertha. All Clare~~” (Cliff, *No Telephone* 116). Sitting in complete ~~solitude~~” and darkness for days on end, Clare is ~~unable~~ to shake her longing” for mother, so she invests in ~~her~~ only sign[s]” of blackness (Cliff, *No Telephone* 116). Clare’s unwavering state of mourning and investment in her lost identity are indications that her search for mother is melancholically-induced. In conversation with

Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia," David L. Eng and Shinhee Han suggest that the "psychical erasure of one's identity—racial, sexual, or gender identity" leads to a specifically intersectional melancholia. In other words, Clare's melancholia is a product of the erasure of not only her blackness, but also the absence of womanly role models to assist her in defining her sexuality (672). Since the "melancholic makes every conceivable effort to the lost object, to keep it alive within the domain of the psyche," Clare's melancholia is exemplified in the loss and retention of her mother and what she stands for: her blackness, womanhood, and her sense of home (Eng and Han 672). Eng and Han expand this theory to include transferrable trauma within group identities, suggesting "if the losses suffered by the first generation are not resolved and mourned in the process of assimilation—if libido is not replenished by the investment in new objects, new communities, and new ideals—then the melancholia that ensues from this condition can be transferred to the second generation" (352-353). Individually, this transfer is marked by Clare's and Kitty's inability to recall their ancestors, and collectively, this narrative of forced forgetting represents an imposition of racial melancholia—the imposition of loss which yields the same emptiness Clare feels throughout her journey. Because Kitty cannot resolve her losses, instead "we[eping] quietly" as she imagines her people's oppressed state, Clare inherits this same sense of loss, her melancholia thriving as long as her psyche lingers in the unreachable past (Cliff *Abeng* 52).

Unlike Freud, however, Eng and Han depathologise melancholia in order to debunk the assumption that "minoritarian subjectivities are permanently damaged—forever injured and incapable of ever being 'whole'" (693). Clare's racial melancholia, like her upbringing, is a negotiation of conflict and a productive struggle that ultimately stresses her "refusal to relinquish the other—to forfeit alterity—at any cost[]" (Eng and Han 694). Clare wishes to preserve her blackness as loved object, "even at the cost of [her] own self," (Eng and Han 695). Masked in mourning and melancholia, therefore, is the "militant refusal to allow

[blackness] to disappear into oblivion,” which in Clare’s case triggers activism in order to demand social recognition (Eng and Han 695). Because Kitty negotiates her racial melancholia in the terms of the master’s narrative, which perpetuates blackness as a site of victimhood, the recovery of the past only compounds her sense of loss. On the other hand, because Kitty makes available her internal conflict, albeit in phases, she ensures that Clare is able to identify her oppressor and her kin, in turn providing the foundational tools to negotiate conflict within. Although Kitty is cast as a bad mother, her intentions imply that “[she] should have been the daughter of Inez and Mma Alli, and Nanny too—and had she known of the existence of these women, she might have shared her knowledge, her extraordinary passion, using its strength, rather than protecting what she felt was its fragility” (Cliff *No Telephone* 128). With this revised version of Clare’s matrilineal history, Cliff harkens back to the militant mothers who selflessly preserved their blackness, while simultaneously challenging the concept of Mother. Mothers are culture-bearing and self-loving, they share knowledge, strength and nurture their children. Because Clare is infertile, she is “challenge[d] to find alternative routes to maternity” (Smith 149). Returning to Jamaica is not enough to connect Clare to her matrilineage; the land is barren of the stories of resistance she so desperately seeks. It is the knowledge and culture-bearing Harry/Harriet, a black transgender character, who teaches Clare about activism and resistance, self-love and compassion. Harry/Harriet stresses the importance of memory, that “we are supposed to be remembering the grandmothers of our people,” and “do[ing] something besides pray[ing] for the souls of our old women” (Cliff, *No Telephone* 160). For this reason, she becomes Clare’s only “model of a maternal figure” and proves that maternity is a practice rather than a “biological circumstance” (Smith 151-2). It is through Harry/Harriet’s mothering that Clare learns to come to terms with her loss, and despite her own fragmentation, become part of a

“contingent whole” in joining the resistance and restoring the history of Nanny (Eng and Han 696).

Through Clare, Michelle Cliff intimates how “the loss, the forgetting . . . of resistance . . . of tenderness . . . is a terrible thing” (*No Telephone* 196). By restoring Nanny’s history and motherhood, as well as developing stories of slave resistance, Cliff “produce[s] a memory that enables black women to act in the present” and “extend[s] [Nanny’s] agency to all black women” (Sharpe xii, 29). The outsider status of the mixed-race subject, however, prevents total alignment with and acceptance among the Maroon community; “the maroons represent an oppositional consciousness that [Clare] cannot hope to approximate” (Sharpe 39). As Sharpe notes, “even as the maroon has come to represent rebelliousness and an African belief system, the mulatto signifies assimilation into European culture” (43). For this reason, the idealization of Nanny as mother does not prepare Clare for the judgment and distrust directed toward her as the child of both masters and slaves. Clare seeks an existence before slavery—the stories before the chains that affirm an existence prior to displacement and forced residence within a hostile country—but her birth and skin colour fragment her claim to these stories. Clare’s history of miscegenation is one associated with shame and trauma; the history that links her to powerful, enslaved figures like Mma Alli, cannot be recovered because it is permanently eclipsed by stories of sexual violence and abuse. Furthermore, if the imposed eradication of memory transforms, “what was once a loved and safe object”—the slave mother— “into an object of insecurity and shame,” then the invocation of Nanny does not confront this shame, and figures like Sekesu remain as uninterrogated, haunting reminders of the horrors of slavery (Eng and Han 357). This legacy of shame imprints itself on the mixed race woman in Jamaica and obstructs her ability to claim agency distanced from a history of oppression. Jenny Sharpe poses the questions: “How can we describe the agency of women who did not resist the white men who sexually

appropriated them but appear to have willingly given themselves to them? Is it possible to use the terms *resistance* and *submission* to talk about women who were so disempowered that they had little choice in the matter?" (43).

There is truth in that the mulatta concubine achieved a degree of privilege above her darker mother, but this privilege did not eliminate the master-slave divide or the fact of rape—and it certainly did not eliminate the act of resistance in her collusion. Therefore, redefining resisting subjectivities to include not only the Outlyers, but also the women who ~~achieved~~ "achieved a certain degree of autonomy" within an oppressed state, such as Inez, Mma Alli, mulatta concubines, etc., is paramount to navigating the fine line between resistance and submission, while also noting that the two are not mutually exclusive (Sharpe 44). Diversifying resistance and centralising subjectivities that destabilise the social structures developed by oppressors, as Cliff accomplishes even if only in myths and fiction, is crucial to engaging in processes of rememory and memory justice. As Amina Mama argues, ~~it~~ "it is . . . incumbent to deconstruct the categories woman and black in our consideration of black femininity" (148). In the same way, it is important to deconstruct the categories of slave and woman in order to invite ~~new~~ "new ways of being black[, coloured,] and female" that are not informed by the designations of the oppressor (Mama 149). Because forgetting was forced upon the slaves, and shame sustained this erasure, Cliff generates new stories that creatively alter the subjectivity of slave women, refusing to write back to stifling narrative of licentiousness, nonbeing, and unbelonging. By celebrating diverse forms of resistance, redefining slave mothers and forging female heroes, we can transcend the economy of slavery that stripped slave women of their motherhood in the first place and ~~shake~~ "shake off the oppressive legacies of centuries" (Mama 155).



**Haunted Recovery in Wicomb's *David's Story and Playing in the Light***

The past coexists with the present in this amnesiac country in this forgetful country. It is as Toni Morrison says in *Beloved*. "Everything is now. It is all now."

-Michelle Cliff, "History as Fiction, Fiction as History"

The denial of slavery and therefore, slave mothers, in South Africa is bound up with shame—it is not only a reminder of the slave past, but also the rape of slave women. In "Denying the Coloured Mother," Natasha Distiller and Meg Samuelson posit that the "memory of the slave past was repressed in virtually all sectors of South African society during apartheid," not only because it "locate[s] constitution of Afrikanerdom within a milieu of 'racial' and cultural mixing," but also because it casts the coloured population as "unwanted reminder[s] of primary 'miscegenation.'" During apartheid, acknowledging slavery as an Afrikaner meant degrading oneself, falling into blackness, and blurring the race-based divisions that secured one's status. For coloureds, it meant embodying the degradation that was so fervently denounced. It is not surprising then that in the process of forgetting slavery, "virtually nothing by way of folk-tales, stories, or songs has been retained" (Wicomb, "Shame" 99). While it is true that there are no South African slave narratives, we now know that "slave memory, is, in fact, everywhere" (Gqola, "Like three tongues" 30). This does not, however, mean it is readily accessible; because the desire to deny blackness and forget shame outweighed the desire to remember, slave memory is deeply buried.

With the rise of the 'new' South Africa or the "Rainbow Nation" in the 1990s surfaced yet another denial—that of racialized and sexualized violence. The call to celebrate diversity and rootedness in the land, rather than interrogating and reconciling hundreds of years of intersectional oppression, instead resulted in what Zoë Wicomb deemed "the fashionable scramble for alterity" ("Interview" 191). Those Afrikaners and coloureds who

previously denied blackness staked their claim on Sarah Bartmann and Krotoa-Eva as National mothers. In an effort to create national unity, the same women who “served a purpose in the fabrication of an imperialist discourse,” (Abrahams 435) were recuperated as Mothers only to “iron[] out the messy seams of the national past and the transitional present,” (Samuelson 204). In simultaneously claiming the black mother and disremembering her slave past, rebuilding and belonging in the new nation echoes the colonial power that claimed the bodies of black women and erased their subjectivity. Wicomb’s novels *David’s Story* (2000) and *Playing in the Light* (2006) straddle the “interstices of memory” in the transition to the “new” South Africa and more importantly, highlight the importance of literature in unearthing slave memory and complicating current representations of black women (Gqola “Like Three Tongues” 32).

In *Playing in the Light*, Zoë Wicomb reveals the tragic consequences of the repression and erasure of slave memory in post-apartheid South Africa through her protagonist Marion Campbell. Marion is raised to believe she is white, only to discover well into adulthood that she is actually coloured. This narrative mirrors the experiences in which numerous “play-white” or passing families, in order to gain social legibility and mobility within a white centre of power, erased not only their history but cut ties with their darker kin. Despite unyielding attempts to erase the past in pursuit of a better life, this history has not vanished. Wicomb’s “fiction makes the ghosts of slavery speak” and affirms the ways in which the “lost or forgotten [slave] past continues to exert its influence” as Marion is haunted by ghostly figures that ultimately provoke a journey of rediscovery and rememory (Sharpe xii). The reason behind Marion’s cold, silent upbringing is realized as she learns that her childhood servant, a black woman named Tokkie, is actually her grandmother. Because the play-white lifestyle leaves Marion devoid of history, it is through the black mother that she is able to claim “authenticity” and disavow her family’s complicity and shame.

While *Playing in the Light* foregrounds the difficulties in piecing together the fragments of the coloured identity in the wake of the pursuit of whiteness, Wicomb's *David's Story* reveals the nationalist practice of unifying these fragments, albeit imaginatively, through the black slave mother. David's preoccupation with roots and his conflicted sense of identity in the 'new South Africa,' leads him to research his Griqua past and hire an amanuensis to write his biography. This piece of writing is curiously centred on Krotoa-Eva and Sarah Bartmann, 'through whom Khoisan nationalists now trace 'biological and cultural continuity' to a pre-colonial past' (Samuelson 90). David's claim on these black women emphasizes for him a sense of racial purity and a denial of the very miscegenation that created the Griqua community. In other words, the validation of David's identity, like the 'validation of the new nation[,] becomes embroiled in a poetics of 'blood'' and racial obsession (Distiller and Samuelson). Marion's and David's claim on the bodies of black women serve only to validate their own histories; therefore, both characters 'perform acts of amnesia whereby the history of slavery and of unrecuperable loss is 'forgotten' or cast out' (Samuelson 83). Although these narratives represent the acknowledgement, versus the denial, of the black mother in the quest for identity, Marion and David's inability to engage with slavery and miscegenation ultimately proves that 'shame, cross-eyed and shy, stalks the postcolonial world broken mirror in hand, reproducing itself in puzzling distortions' (Wicomb, 'Shame' 92). At the same time, their individual experiences are a microcosm of the failures of the 'new' South Africa and the silences shame produces.

In *Rape: A South African Nightmare*, Pumla Gqola suggests that 'all systems of violent oppressive power produce shame in those they brutalise' (38). Shame in this context is not a consequence of wrongdoing, but an effect of being dehumanised. It lingers because humanity, which the white man claims as his right, is made unattainable for the slave woman and her children. Within the Lacanian Symbolic, it is the father who renders the child's

legibility as a subject. In “The Law of the (White) Father,” Sharifa Ahjum explains that this patriarchal structure is strategically collapsed in the slavocracy in order to emasculate the slave man and make concrete the abject positionality of the slave woman. In other words, the “selective law of uterine descent for slaves,” what Ahjum terms the “slave matronymic,” means that within the Symbolic, the child’s positionality is determined by the slave mother, thereby stripping black fathers of any power and white fathers of culpability (83). In post-slavery societies such as South Africa, this exception to the patrilineal rule ensured that reproduction was economically advantageous in that the child inherited slave status.

Centralizing the role of the slave mother in rendering her children’s legibility also served to “regulate[] the miscegenation taboo” because her central position was defined in opposition to “gendered order of [white] masculinity” and therefore humanness, outside the realm of desire, and within that of “dehumanized property” (Ahjum 86). “Even in the absence of sexual violence,” debasement was rationalised through the grammar of racial, and for women, sexual difference (Gqola 40). The fact that “the rape of slaves was an integral part of the architecture of slave-ordered Cape society,” a strategic form of “sexual warfare” from which shame materialised, meant that the progeny of these violent unions associated their very existence with shame (Gqola 42-43). In essence, the proactive exclusion of slave women from the normative family structure meant an illegitimate status was conferred upon their children. This process of erasing the slave woman, silencing her voice, and bastardizing her children simultaneously validated the hierarchy that privileged the “colonial, masculine imperative of power, subjectivity, and domination” (Ahjum 87). The negation of the slave woman, aside from her production and reproduction as a working body and vessel, translated directly into her hypervisibility as a valuable, sexualized body and invisibility as a human being. With her status equivalent to property and her womb reinscribed “breeding site,” the slave mother’s children were not recognised as her own (Ahjum 91).

Inasmuch as this treatment punctuates the commodification of black women, it also highlights the racial anxieties associated with miscegenation and the perceived importance of strictly designated racial boundaries. The rape of slave women, though it was not considered as such, was problematic because the children of this violence blurred the rigid colour line and threatened the very construction of whiteness. What had begun as a measure of European longevity in the colonies, a solution to sexual urges, and an answer to more slave labour became an embarrassment: ~~e~~children—abandoned, illegitimate and of mixed blood—had become the embodiment of what needed fixing in this colonial society” (Stoler, *Race* 46). The employment of the slave matronymic in tandem with the social erasure of black women ensured that any children who posed a visible threat to whiteness were rendered harmless via the transferal of the mother’s status, thus fixing their position outside of whiteness.

Born outside of the domain of the *Nom du Pere* and into captivity, the miscegenous products of white men and their slaves were living reminders of the sexual violations their fathers committed and were treated as ~~s~~pectre[s] of racial degeneration” (Adhikari 483). Although the rape of slave women yielded entrepreneurial results for white men, the benefits of this wretched act did not outweigh the horrors associated with racial mixing. Novels such as Sarah Gertrude Millin’s *God’s Stepchildren* (1924) considered the act of miscegenation to yield only tragic outcomes, not condemning the sexual violation itself, but the reproduction of the ~~fl~~aw of black blood” that prevented coloured people from ~~a~~scend[ing] toward the heaven of whiteness” (Coetzee 144). This obsession with eugenics in South Africa, reminiscent of Nazi Germany, dictated the shameful reception of mixed-race offspring; as Millin suggests, they were produced by weak white ancestors and ~~d~~egenerated blacks” (ix). The preoccupation with racial purity disguised and buried the numerous violations against black women and made their coloured children scapegoats for the sins of their fathers, doomed, as Millin believed, to a life of tragedy and unhappiness.

The tragic existence of the mixed race or coloured subject, known as the tragic mulatto, is a literary trope first described by Sterling A. Brown in the 1930s as a “victim of divided inheritance and therefore miserable” (77). Like the Eng and Han’s racial melancholia, the mulatto’s tragic condition “might be described as splitting the . . . psyche”; the melancholic subject “faithfully subscribes to the ideals of assimilation only through an elaborate self-denial” (675). This rings true for the coloured subjects who sought acceptance in a hostile, racist polity made inaccessible without the preliminary denial of blackness. The history of miscegenation in South Africa proves that more than just a trope, the tragic mulatto stereotype was entrenched in the cultural memory of coloured people who were made to feel “illegitima[te], inadequa[te] and displace[d] as a result of racial mixedness” (Mafe 19). The very development of the racial designation ‘coloured,’ is predicated on racism and shame, and as Diana Adesola Mafe suggests, “segregationist discourse” (41). With such a rigid line between black and white, the mixed race subject was forced to inhabit an ambiguous void. The absence of racial purity was depicted as just that—an absence, a lack—and with it the perception that a coloured person could not be or feel whole. Additionally, because “eugenic theories reinforced pre-existing notions that the products of ‘interracial’ sexual unions . . . were inferior hybrids,” it became necessary to bring an end to the contamination of the white race (Erasmus 41). The implementation of laws such as the Immorality Act in 1927 deemed the existence of coloured people not only undesirable, but also products of unlawful activity. Even after the “white dominated social order” under the VOC had been well-established, and after the British began to institute “equality before law,” a spotlight on miscegenation as a source of contagion remained (Elphick and Malherbe xx, 40). Because skin colour played such an important role in determining one’s status in South Africa, many near-white individuals played white or passed in order to escape marginalization and oppression.

Set in 1990s Cape Town, Wicomb's *Playing in the Light* engages with the aftermath of playing white in the advent of the 'new' South Africa and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in order to reveal the apartheid mentality imbued in national recovery. In the same way that Marion's family attempts to wipe clean the slate of their coloured history by playing white, Rainbow Nation rhetoric attempts to wipe clean "the racist slates of history" and begin anew (Mafe 146). Both ventures ultimately fail because the slave past and the trauma associated with it will not remain buried, refuting the idea that "in the New South Africa . . . the past [is] all done and dusted" (Wicomb, *Playing* 59). Faced with a wounded nation, The TRC encouraged victims to voice their trauma in order to promote national healing and unity, essentially displacing individual trauma to heal the collective. It is true that the TRC succeeded in exposing a number of past violations, but its advocacy of racial harmony meant that ordinary instances of racialized violence and rape were glossed over. As Pumla Gqola suggests, the TRC's employment of what she terms "rainbowism became an authorising narrative which assisted in the denial of difference" ("Defining People" 98). Under the veil of rainbowism, the TRC's desire to produce truths was undermined by a fantasy of "non-racialism" and "equal access" that simply does not exist, and therefore "dismiss[ed] the effects of history on the contemporary" (Gqola, "Defining People" 100, 103). The articulation of violence, as long as it did not point to the enduring nature of apartheid mentality, was considered conducive to the process of national healing. And perhaps, as Wicomb suggests, this sense of "nationhood . . . [was] a necessity produced by colonialism," Interview" 192). However, because current celebrations of multiracialism turn a blind eye to shame and the "ongoing marginalization and confusion in and about coloured identity (and all racial identities)," unequal relations persist in silence (Mafe 147, emphasis hers). The failure of the TRC begs the question: "what happens when the demand to sacrifice personal to collective interest is not accompanied by inclusion within—but exclusion by—the

larger group” (Eng and Han 673). Wicomb’s narrative answers this question as Marion’s journey of self-discovery is marked by an inherited sense of racial melancholia and shame built upon her family’s sacrifices.

Marion’s encounter with the TRC testimony of Patrica Williams, initially dismissed as one of the “endless stories of people’s suffering in the bad old days,” ultimately sparks her journey into the past (*Playing* 56). Despite Marion’s attempts to ignore the article, “it hisses a command to remember, remember, remember,” until William’s face “hovers in her gaze” and transforms into the face of Tokkie, her childhood servant (Wicomb, *Playing* 61). As an unknowing play-white, Marion habitually “trivialis[es] the languages of anti-racism,” insisting that the new South Africa has reconciled and transcended suffering of the past (Gqola “Defining People” 104). Marion’s vision of Tokkie, however, disrupts the nationalist script that declares the past “done and dusted” (Wicomb, *Playing* 59). When Marion discovers Tokkie is her grandmother, she realizes that the “identity cards . . . once pot-bellied with meaning” are still prevalent, that being “white, black or coloured” is not absent meaning after all in the new South Africa (Wicomb, *Playing* 113). She does not, however, know how to articulate her difference or the newfound, encumbering sense of displacement in a space where difference is denied. As a play-white, Marion “does not fit into the neat division between the perpetrator and the victim of Apartheid which the TRC favored” (Horn 128). Although she is a victim of a system that equated self-betterment with the whitening of the skin, her own family inhabits the space and the visage of the perpetrator. This narrative does not fit the “script of loss and sacrifice leading to reconciliation and redemption,” prescribed by the TRC (Samuelson 8). Instead, Marion’s truth highlights the racialized sexual violence that has plagued and shamed her family to the extent that they become complicit in exacting Tokkie’s suffering and sacrifice. This truth fills her with shame and splits the very fabric of her white identity at the seams.



The TRC, in promoting the fantasy of rainbowism, closed the chapter on the “shaming act” of rape and miscegenation that was foundational to racial colonial ordering in South Africa (Samuelson 106). In an effort to atone for this silence, the narrative was tweaked to incorporate the severe impact of rape on female victims. According to Samuelson, however, this transformed rape itself into an “experience peculiar to women” (106). Rather than racializing the act of rape and pointing to the white men who treated black men and women like chattel, speaking about rape solely as a woman’s issue fit the “script of loss and sacrifice” that could easily be reconciled. With this in mind, the victims of rape became the “mothers, who, through the ‘mixed race’ issue of rape, procreate[d] the ‘rainbow’ nation” (Samuelson 108). As women’s trauma was recast into a narrative of self-sacrifice, the memories of individual women and the pain inflicted on their bodies were appropriated to provide a sense of national unity and collective healing.

Marion’s own experience as a detached, distant observer of the plight of Patricia Williams and the sexual violence enacted on her body completely shifts once she, as a coloured woman, recognizes that this history is more than a truth outed for the purpose of reconciliation, but part of her. There is, however, no place for the shame Marion associates with her grandmother’s sacrifice in the new South Africa. Brenda Mackay, Marion’s coloured employee, dismisses the “terrible emptiness” embodied in her revelation:

So it turns out you’re coloured, from a play-white family, Brenda says. So what? Haven’t you heard how many white people, or rather Afrikaners of the more-indigenous-than-thou brigade, are claiming mixed blood these days? It’s not such a tragedy being black, you know, at least you’re authentic. (Wicomb, *Playing* 109).

Here, Brenda’s celebration of the Rainbow Nation and its unencumbered colour ousts Marion’s trauma as a thing of the past. The national narrative Brenda echoes serves as a

—diversion in order not to engage with her plight” or the pain of —human condition” (Wicomb *Playing* 109-110). This same narrative erases the agency of women like Krotoa-Eva and Sarah Bartmann, who are claimed as mothers of the Rainbow Nation and, therefore, sources of —authenticity‘. As Marion imagines her grandmother —[itting] in the backyard drinking coffee from a servant’s mug,” knowing —that [her] mother, [Tokkie’s] daughter, put that mug in her hands,” she is grief-stricken. Brenda's positive intention of welcoming Marion to her —authentic‘ community simultaneously denies the validity of her grief. Unable to voice —her story of rupture,” Marion is fed the —myth of biological and cultural continuity,” of origin and rootedness, which, in its attempt to conceal historical ruptures, —eovers over continuities between past and present violations of female bodies” (Samuelson 86). Haunted by the ghost of Tokkie, Marion is tasked with uncovering these violations and giving voice to Tokkie’s humanity rather than her sacrifice.

Recalling Elleke Boehmer’s assertion that it is the —mother, the matrix of connection with the past, [who provides] the source of meaning and identity” (3), it is unsurprising that Marion’s journey into the past begins with her late mother, Helen. As Marion searches through her mother’s possessions, she realizes —there is nothing among the meagre remains of Helen’s possessions that gives anything away” (Wicomb, *Playing* 123). Not only was Marion’s mother a play-white, but she —crossed over” into whiteness, completely erasing all traces of colour in her tracks, including any evidence that Tokkie ever existed (Wicomb, *Playing* 113). The extent of Helen’s erasure exhibits, as J. U. Jacobs suggests, —a deep-rooted, internalised sense of shame for their slave origins, for the miscegenation which produced them, and for being black,” which Marion observes but cannot comprehend (3). Stunned that her mother could vehemently suppress her past and cut ties with her own family in the pursuit of whiteness, Marion pins her —a calculating woman with no conscience, no heart, no shame” (Wicomb, *Playing* 123). Absent Mother, Marion redirects her journey to the

library in search of entries on play-whites, only to discover the term is not addressed. With the assistance of a woman Marion deems motherly, she continues her search, notwithstanding her desire to “bury her head in the strange woman’s bosom and sob over that motherliness” (Wicomb, *Playing* 128). This apparent call for Mother reveals that Marion’s desire to recover Tokkie’s memory, or at the very least the circumstances around her betrayal, is intensified by the lack of a relationship with her own mother. Although Marion chastises Brenda for asserting racial discourse in the face of her dismay, her claim on Tokkie as a source of unbridled culture and wholeness indeed provides an escape from the empty, fabricated whiteness that “wraps itself round and round her into a shroud from which she struggles to escape” (Wicomb, *Playing* 10). Because Helen denies the “rich complexity of the coloured identity,” Marion is left with a fictional personal history absent roots or substance (Jacobs 11-12). Marion muses that “her mother, like all mothers, [is] responsible for her insecurity” (Wicomb, *Playing* 10). Reclaiming the black grandmother that brought Helen shame provides a solution to this insecurity and a way for Marion to disavow complicity with the oppressive acts of her mother.

In her pursuit of social mobility, as most stories of passing begin, Helen Karelse “would settle for no less than respectable whiteness,” (Wicomb, *Playing* 138). She therefore becomes Helen Charles, and in doing so, commits cultural suicide. The racial melancholic, who mourns the loss of whiteness and the inability to attain it is “characterized by the tendency to suicide,” which can take the shape of “psychical erasure of one’s identity—racial, sexual, or gender identity” (Eng and Han 672). Faced with institutional exclusion and the desire to earn her keep, Helen vows to “redeem” her European ancestors from the indignity of “consort[ing] with hotnos and slaves” (Wicomb, *Playing* 138). Despite Tokkie’s likeness to the slaves Helen slanders, she insists, “Mamma . . . was forward-looking herself, would be delighted with the new identity cards, would see that they were the only way out”

(Wicomb, *Playing* 140). Helen's unwavering belief that becoming white is forward-looking indicates her deep-set internalisation of the discourse that classified racial-mixing as a taint to white purity and coloured people as "unnatural creatures" (Mafe 44). Furthermore, her derogatory opinion of "hotnos and slaves" also reveals she has "internalised the racist values of the dominant society" (Adhikari 482). Passing as white, or rather crossing over into a white identity, provides an escape from a community that Helen, like her oppressors, considers intrinsically flawed and an embarrassment to white gentility and morality.

Wicomb's repetitive use of the mermaid in her portrayal of Marion further showcases Helen's disdain for unnatural, mixed-up creatures, and with it, the extent of her self-hatred. Marion's father harmlessly nicknames her his "little mermaid," but Helen despises the name:

No good being half woman and half fish, half this and half that; you have to be fully one thing or another, otherwise you're lost. . . [They hide because they are] ashamed, said her mother, as they should be, of being neither one thing nor another. No one likes creatures that are so different, so mixed up.

(Wicomb, *Playing* 54).

This dialogue encompasses the history of shame associated with the coloured identity and the pressure to align oneself with a black or white identity. Helen's "strong emotional attachment to whiteness," as Adhikari suggests, "is product not only of the belief that western culture [is] superior," but also of the belief that assimilation with white culture would grant "inclusion into the body politic as well as social acceptance into the dominant society" (476). To use Sarah Gertrude Millin's analogy, Helen, firmly believing that her blood is tainted, has internalised the position of stepchild and must work harder than her "pure" siblings to appease the white parent and the god-like figuration of white supremacy. Helen's actions and beliefs are symptomatic of this "stepchild" syndrome imposed on the coloured community by the

white man in order to instil weakness and vulnerability. In exchange for a position of strength, or as Coetzee aptly remarks, “ascend toward the heaven of whiteness,” Helen must deny her own mother (144). This denial, fuelled by racist discourse and white oppression, silences —along with women’s voices. . . [the] story of rape” that lays the premise for Helen’s exclusion (Samuelson 25).

Tokkie marries outside the bounds of the strict racial hierarchy in apartheid South Africa. She is astonished that despite having skin as “black as the night,” she wins the attention of a “light-skinned man with dreamy hazel eyes” (Wicomb, *Playing* 142). Because she is accepted by the Karelse family, who “thought of themselves as white, and therefore superior,” she abandons her dreams of becoming educated (Wicomb, *Playing* 143). Tokkie’s ability to obtain social legibility and desire from a person with light skin is likened to “witchcraft” (Wicomb, *Playing* 144); not only is she recognised as human by her so-called superior—she is loved. The disbelief that a “superior” someone could love Tokkie’s blackness is indicative of the self-hate incited by what Ngugi Wa Thiong’o terms the “cultural bomb” (3). It is important to realize that the hatred of blackness and desire for whiteness is taught; “the effect of a cultural bomb” as a colonial strategy “is to annihilate a people’s belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle. . . It makes them see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement and it makes them want to distance themselves from that wasteland” (Thiong’o 3). According to the imperial imperative, the prerequisite to achieving this distance, and therefore success, is being white or assimilating into whiteness: “Whiteness is without restrictions. It has the fluidity of milk; its glow is far-reaching” (Wicomb, *Playing* 158). Because Tokkie comes to know a degree of privilege and esteem through her affiliation with the light-skinned Flip Karelse, her experience dictates that getting ahead and being white are synonymous.

Physically, Tokkie cannot achieve whiteness, so her sacrifice in playing the family servant allows Helen to obtain what she cannot.

The fact that white men violated countless black women to achieve success and dominance is not discussed among them. Although this silence reeks of complicity, Tokkie's and Helen's position as women restricted by the colour line creates a platform for resistance. Samuelson reminds us that "the positioning of women in a struggle fought along sharply drawn racial lines may mean that resistance is to be found in forms of collusion" (117). The line between complicity and resistance blurs as Tokkie provides the means for Helen to evade her designated position as a coloured woman. In doing so, she undermines the social structure developed by her oppressor. In the interest of being reclassified as white, Helen willingly endures sexual scrutiny and molestation at the hands of Councillor Carter. She stands "tall as a sunflower with her hands at her side," notably "without flinching," as the white man "tick[s] and pummel[s]" her blackberry nipples, the tell-tale sign of her colour within (Wicomb, *Playing* 150). This act of "collusion with her own violation" ultimately allows her to remake herself and defy the system that deems her unworthy of respect (Samuelson 119). As Helen obliterates history, and with it the agency of black mothers like Tokkie, she simultaneously eludes the weakness and vulnerability that defines her as a coloured woman. These experiences complicate the "simplistic division between victim and perpetrator," and invite inquiry into the types of resistance that were and are now realistically available to women of colour in a world of white power and racialized violence (Samuelson 120)

To Marion, Helen is the perpetrator who selfishly erases Tokkie's existence in order to achieve superficial sense of status and security. Yet, Helen too struggles with the silences of erased history and the blankness of assuming a white identity; Tokkie's visits "bring colour and sound . . . [and] an invented past for the family" (Wicomb, *Playing* 159). Similarly, Tokkie's re-entry into Marion's life brings, aside from shame, an ability to

recognise and fill the “vast emptiness” in her life (Wicomb, *Playing* 184). Marion’s “haunted, ghostly identification” which Tokkie is symptomatic of not only shame, but also inherited racial melancholia (Eng and Han 672). Helen’s unresolved “loss of whiteness as an ideal” leads her to live like a rat “scuttling between bushes[,] . . . nervously inspecting the world,” and dodging the light in an effort to stay hidden (Wicomb 30-31). Marion attempts to regard the rats objectively:

She is torn: she leans towards sympathy for the hazardous lives they lead, for their vulnerability, for the terrible reputation they have earned themselves among humans, and yet the revulsion cannot be overcome. No birds of prey sweep overhead, there is no hissing of snakes, but Marion can almost feel the panic-stricken heartbeat of the creature. . . . What kind of life is that—to be burdened with such timidity? To have to overcome so much in order to achieve so little, to be the object of such irrational fear and loathing? (Wicomb, *Playing* 31).

This moment is particularly emblematic of the way play-whites must live their lives. Much like the rat’s innate vulnerability, Helen is vulnerable due to the secret of her blackness. Because she is officially acknowledged as white, no predator can drag her secret into the light, and yet, she lives a timid, quiet life in order to avoid its gaze. The imagery in this scene, illuminated by the “grey light of dawn,” emphasises the play-whites’ and other marginalised groups’ inability to truly assimilate into dominant white society, at least at a psychic level (Wicomb, *Playing* 31). This image harkens back to the Nazi propaganda that compared Jews to rats in order to propagate the myth that they were less than human and carriers of contagion, but offers an alternate viewpoint that implicitly blames social relations and imperialist thought for “the terrible reputation they have earned. . . among humans.” I use this image in regard to racial melancholia because it evokes the “psychic consequences”

endured as an “object” seeking, but unable to grasp inclusion in society (Eng and Han 674). Surrounded by a silence so heavy “even ghosts spurned the house of choked history,” Helen fills the “gaps, the holes in her story” with the word “execrable” (Wicomb, *Playing* 156). Her only legacy to Marion is “a new generation unburdened by the past,” which in turn becomes a deafening emptiness and an inability to remember (Wicomb, *Playing* 156),

Marion’s whiteness, “once a loved and safe object[,] is retroactively transformed into an object of insecurity and shame” the moment its cost is revealed (Eng and Han 686). The image of Tokkie, much like “the *tokoloshe* of African mythology” takes hold of Marion’s spirit, shatters the illusion of whiteness, and forces her to remember the past (Horn 132). Aside from this individual call to remember, Tokkie’s return in the form of a ghost-like figure evokes the multitude of black mothers and slave women who “have been improperly buried” and demand a place in history (Sharpe xi). In the same way, as the image of Tokkie transforms into a “mermaid, holding like any mother a baby to her breast,” the coloured mothers who are denied as reminders of sexual coercion demand to be remembered by their children. Nevertheless, by the end of the novel, Marion only begins to delve into the stories of the past, only begins to question “how many versions of herself exist in the stories of her country” (Wicomb, *Playing* 197). But she does not know her own story, as Brenda points out, and therefore, she is unable to re-member the women who have played a part in shaping it.

Although it was published years before to *Playing in the Light*, *David’s Story* provides an answer to Marion’s shortcomings in its exploration of memory and authorship. Additionally, *David’s Story* self-reflexively interrogates the ways in which trauma is represented and reconciled. The novel follows David Dirkse’s attempt, with the help of an amanuensis, to write the story of his life, and at the same time, discern coloured history outside the bounds of imperial ideology. David is taught that his colour is a condition, that years of miscegenation predispose him to alcoholism and barbarity. With hard work, his



father believes they can escape the wasteland of colour, to “shake off the Griquaness, the shame and the filth and the idleness” (Wicomb, *David’s Story* 22-23). Despite his father’s wishes, much of this story revolves around David’s attempt to acquire an understanding of his Griqua ancestors, to “reclaim [the] culture” he has been deprived (Wicomb *David’s Story* 28). This “colonial disavowal functions” for David — “a form of melancholy” that impels his search for a pure identity (Khanna 167).

According to Robert Ross, “the Griquas were descendants of early Boer frontiersmen; of the remnants of Khoisan tribes—hunters, gatherers and pastoralists; of escaped slaves from the wine and wheat farms of the southwest Cape; of free blacks who could find no acceptable place for themselves in it; and of African tribesman (1). Despite this diverse ethnic makeup, David’s ancestor Chief Andrew Le Fleur declares, “We are a pure Griqua people with our own traditions of cleanliness and plainness and hard work” (Wicomb, D 90). In an ironic appropriation of the “European frame of reference,” the Griquas fabricated their identity in the same way that whiteness was created, and in doing so, “cut themselves off from the Africans among who they lived” (Ross 135). Much like Helen, who commits cultural suicide in order to cleanse herself of miscegenation, Le Fleur replicates imperialist ideology in order to invent his own “pure” nation. The failure of this nation reveals the dangers of nationalist mythology and the “ridiculous notion of pureness” as it pertains to the construction of identity (“Zoë Wicomb” 146). More than this, Wicomb evokes Le Fleur to interrogate the absurd search for roots, or “pure blood,” in the first place, suggesting that such quests only “replicate the old identities of apartheid (“Zoë Wicomb” 147).

In other words, Wicomb writes David’s quest for his identity and national belonging alongside the Griqua nationalist script in order to critique the preoccupation with roots in the “new” South Africa, particularly because of its reliance on symbolic ancestors. Because Krotoa-Eva has been inscribed biological Mother of the nation, “blood” remains the

determinant of inclusion and exclusion, now in terms of national belonging rather than racist state policy (Distiller and Samuelson).” Similarly, the reclamation of Sarah Bartmann represents “the last vestige of unbroken and uninterrupted Khoi heritage and identity” (Morris 106). It is important to acknowledge that, as Yvette Abrahams confirms, the “Khoekhoe were not free blacks,” they were enslaved (443-444). As slaves, Krotoa-Eva and Sarah Bartmann were exempted from the respectable discourse of mothering that white women experienced as guarantors of the race. Considering what is known about the treatment of slave women in the Cape, it is more than likely that Krotoa-Eva and Sarah Bartmann were raped.

In the journals of Governor Jan van Riebeeck, founder of the VOC, he discloses that Krotoa-Eva died at the age of twenty-two, allegedly as a result of her “adulterous and debauched life” as an alcoholic and prostitute after the death of her husband (Gray 46). This history erected the myth of the “Hottentot Eve” whose degenerate character led her to “immodest, anarchic, and brutish” persuasions; as a Khoikhoi woman, Krotoa-Eva was doomed to fall “into a welter of original sins . . . in accordance with the inevitable lot of all Eves” (Gray 44-45). Krotoa-Eva’s story convinced whites that despite her western “refinement,” the black woman would always revert to her primitive tendencies—a marker of her degenerate blood.

Sarah Bartmann was similarly degraded; her Khoikhoi identity, colour and gender were license enough to treat her like a zoo animal. Renamed the “Hottentot Venus,” Bartmann was seen in terms of her sexual organs and shapely buttocks, diagnosed “steatopygia,” rendering her body the site of symptom” (Mirzoeff 155). Prior to the development of the “new” South Africa, notions of racism and sexism were mapped onto her body (Abrahams 435). She was not considered a person, but a body that validated notions of biological difference that had been circulating long before the moment eyes were laid upon her.

Not much is known about Krotoa-Eva's and Bartmann's experiences of motherhood. According to Samuelson, "Krotoa-Eva had a vexed relationship to her children and her maternal identity," and Sarah Bartmann's first child "died of smallpox before she left the Cape" (203). Although their experiences as slave women were not exceptional, Krotoa-Eva and Bartmann have become exceptional, national icons at the expense of their interiority and through the denial of their status as slaves (Gqola 100). In *David's Story*, Wicomb critiques the national appropriation of women like Bartmann and Krotoa-Eva, which, in its denial of their truths, repeats the violence enacted on their bodies.

In his experience as a guerilla and activist for the South African liberation movement, David encounters the elusive Dulcie, also a guerilla, who is like a "scream somehow echoing through [his story]" (Wicomb 134). Nthabiseng Motsemme, building on Elaine Scarry's work, suggests that "systematic abuse to one's basic humanity[] has the ability to destroy the sufferer's language, as it has no referential in the content in the external world" (916). Dulcie's scream, as a pre-linguistic expression, is representative of women's trauma, both individual and collective, that cannot be vocalised outside of, perhaps, a scream, "crying, whimpering and inarticulate screeching" (Motsemme 916). Dulcie, as a "necessary silence in the text" speaks towards her shameful treatment as a woman in the Movement (Wicomb "Interview" 190-191). Similarly, the narrator's inability to produce a concrete representation of Dulcie is symbolic of the repressed voices of black and coloured women. As a man, David is privileged in his ability to voice his story replete with detail and interiority. On the other hand, women like Marion and Dulcie are denied the opportunity to gain visibility as agents of history; trauma and shame transfix their voices. Even so, David cannot delve into the history of his subaltern status, especially one untainted by imperialism, without recognising the importance of women. In fact, his biography becomes a story about women and the nationalist function their bodies provide him.

The women throughout *David's Story* resemble Sarah Bartmann in both steatopygous' physicality and name—Ouma Sarie and Sally being diminutive forms of Sarah" (Samuelson 93). Unlike David, Sally and her mother have no interest in the Griqua nonsense" or the nonsense about roots and ancestors" that he so desperately seeks (Wicomb, *David's Story* 18, 23). As a result, Sally (and perhaps her mother too), does not know the meaning of steatopygia, ' or the queens of steatopygia, the Griqua Lady Kok and Saartje Baartman" whom she so closely resembles (Wicomb, *David's Story* 13). Despite this lapse in knowledge, David further likens Sally to *his* memory of Bartmann; due to her domestic qualities and appealing character, ' Sally will arouse sympathy across oceans and landmasses as she lies tossing and turning in her Soweto bed" (Wicomb, *David's Story* 13). This narrative exhibits an underlying self-consciousness that evinces a critique on the domestication of women as they are transformed into nationalist symbols. Dulcie's presence in the novel, however, disrupts the idealization of women and the erasure of their trauma.

As David pieces together the story of Dulcie, we discover that unlike Sally, she is not pretty . . . not feminine, not like a woman at all" (Wicomb, *David's Story* 75). In this description, David echoes the sentiments of Cuvier—a comparison he conveniently disremembers despite his knowledge of the past. Dulcie's presence in the novel specifically contradicts that of the domesticated Sarahs, in order to insert representations of trauma, though unspeakable, into the figurations of the past. David is unknowingly haunted by this trauma, which manifests in his disidentification with the nation that failed to represent women" (Khanna 230). He realises that the ideals he fights for within the movement have not materialised, which results in his loss of the ideal of national independence" and urges his search for a new nationalism in which his coloured identity is represented (Khanna 221). Like Tokkie's face on the water, Dulcie's presence continuously appears on the pages of his story as a haunting reminder of her trauma. While she is aiding the fight in the liberation

movement, for instance, Dulcie's body is repeatedly violated. Her blackness, like Bartmann's, is invitation enough for this violation: as they raped her, ~~they~~ rhymed her blackness with her cunt" (Wicomb, *David's Story* 77). However, David deems this violence ~~irrelevant~~; it is the narrator who connects ~~images~~, snippets of Dulcie," expecting that this will reveal something about David (Wicomb, *David's Story* 75-77). David himself is unsure of his motivation to include Dulcie in his story: ~~her~~ story is of no relevance to his own," he admits (Wicomb, *David's Story* 74). More than a case of ignorance, this admission is undercut with the failure to engage with the shameful treatment of Dulcie's body and spirit, and therefore, his complicity. Just as the TRC could not address ~~the~~ rape of women . . . within the liberation movement" because ~~it~~ seem[ed] too painful for the victims to confront and work through, and too damaging for the new national order to fully acknowledge," David rather not excavate trauma and shifts his attention to Sarah Bartmann, whose trauma, in her positioning as a national symbol, is a distant fiction (Horn 128).

Bartmann, for David, is a figure who represents both his ancestry and the traumatic legacy of imperialism: ~~Baartman~~ belongs to all of us. Ergo, we are all Griquas" (Wicomb, *David's Story* 135). David's claim of the black mother allows him to forget his exclusion and shame. He appropriates Bartmann as mother figure, thereby asserting ethnic absolutism as the only response to imperialism, the only proof of belonging. Imperialism dons the face of the marginalised, as black women are evoked only as vessels, albeit vessels for authenticity in the new nation. Resistance against imperialism takes the form of the black woman's body as slavery is disavowed. As Pumla Gqola notes, although David makes a claim on Bartmann's body, Wicomb refuses to actually represent her, which in turn reveals the ~~failure~~ of representation" of slave women in the new South Africa (*What is Slavery* 77). In rendering Sarah Bartmann and Krotoa-Eva national symbols, they become ahistorical bodies absent stories of their own. As National icons, they are too far removed from the women who look

like them—from their skin, bodies, and hair, all things that ~~made~~ [their] humiliation possible” (Gqola, *What is Slavery* 100). The disavowal of slavery and racialized violence implicit in the act of making Krotoa-Eva and Sarah Bartmann instruments of the nation repeats the erasure they experienced during slavery and makes it ~~impossibl[e]~~ [to] excavate[] their relevance, ” their resistance, and their humanity (Gqola, *What is Slavery* 80).

Similarly, David’s amanuensis realizes that the silence surrounding Dulcie’s life and trauma stifles her story and makes her representation an impossible task. In a final image, the narrator sees Dulcie’s ~~steatopygous~~ form on the central perch of grass” in her garden:

She is covered with goggas crawling and buzzing all over her syrup sweetness, exploring her orifices, plunging into her wounds; she makes no attempt to wipe the insects away, to shake them off. Instead, she seems grateful for the cover of creatures in the blinding light and under the scorching sun. (209-210).

Unlike Sarah Bartmann and Krotoa-Eva, whose bodies have been deansed‘ of violence in their representation as healing, national Mothers, Dulcie’s body exposes each and every violation enacted on her body. As Samuelson suggests, ~~Dulcie~~ is an unstable figure of excess, a leaky sieve, unlike the virgin bodies or empty vessels. . . ethnic nationalist leaders like Wicomb’s Le Fleur, depend on to express their stable meanings” (100). In the blinding light of the nationalist gaze, she is afforded cover and privacy that Bartmann and Krotoa-Eva are not. Dulcie’s wounded body problematizes the rendering of slave women as national icons without the attempt to first bandage and heal their wounds, or more literally, without acknowledging slavery, rape, and making an effort to prevent future racialized sexual violence. Wicomb’s figuration of Dulcie as a metaphorical mother specifically draws upon the failures in representing Sarah Bartmann and Krotoa-Eva to show that, in the end, they are more similar than not.

In both *Playing in the Light* and *David's Story*, Wicomb critiques the 'new' South Africa and the denial of slavery and rape implicit in the nationalist script it employs. As Tokkie and Dulcie haunt Marion and David respectively, trauma deemed unrepresentable or too difficult to discuss is unveiled alongside the relevance of the slave memory in the present. This realization that 'the past coexists with the present' is important namely because the claim on Sarah Bartmann and Krotoa-Eva as National mothers is predicated on the same preoccupation with racial purity that buried the violations against black women in the first place. In a twisted revision of the slave matronymic, history is repeated as the 'national 'children's' need for a maternal figure to render the national family a home" displaces their individual stories and traumas (Samuelson 211). Rather than simply critiquing this misrepresentation, Zoë Wicomb reveals the healing power of literature and fiction in reconstructing the nation and cultural identity. Writing back to and against imperialist modes of discourse enables the empowerment of slave and marginalised subjectivity. By invoking the Rain sisters who could carry enough water on their 'bountiful behinds' to save a nation, or the beautiful mermaids whose hybridity grants them superpowers, for instance, Wicomb ascribes 'stautopygia' with positivity and power and the coloured identity with unprecedented mobility (*David's Story* 151). In the same way, imaginatively retelling the past has the power to revise what has historically engendered shame. Locating and creating stories of slave resistance, therefore, provides the means to disavow the shame imposed upon the descendants of slaves, invest in new memories, and imagine belonging outside of the national narrative.

### **Transcending Nationalism: Alternative Modes of Belonging**

In each of their novels, Michelle Cliff and Zoë Wicomb expose transgenerational legacies of trauma that ‘new’ nationalisms suppress, namely in the denial of the slave past. This denial presents nationalism as a clever ruse, concealing an underlying desire to maintain the raced and sexed positionality dictated by the slavocracy. In claiming the black mother and denying that she was raped, white patriarchy reveals itself and the centuries-old process of claiming authority over black and mixed women’s bodies in the construction of the nation and the maintenance of racial purity. What is more troubling perhaps is that the “internalized shame associated with sexual violence and miscegenation has led to a powerful form of forgetting among the descendants of enslaved people in South Africa” as well (Baderoon 155). Shame is an oppressive tool that keeps the slave past buried and leads the children of slaves to deny their own mothers. Yet, we rely on the slave past in order to make sense of our position in the world, of the sexuality visible on our skin, and the unceasing violation of our bodies today. In the same way that individual traumas are appropriated for national healing, the past is revised in order to regulate and manipulate collective memory. As such, the celebration of multiracialism, and implicitly ‘post’-racialism, in Jamaica and South Africa coerces us into forgetting past atrocities, leaving collective traumas unreconciled and individual identities in fragments.

Both Cliff and Wicomb engage with mixed-race characters whose identities are fragmented after generations of self-denial and cultural suicide. For Clare, Marion, and David, the negation of the past and the erasure of blackness manifests in the search for a richer identity. In seeking symbolic ancestors and culture ‘untainted’ by slavery, their projects mirror the nationalist script of appropriating black women’s bodies as representatives of ‘authentic’ culture and national belonging, while discarding their subjectivities. Denied intimate connection with her mother and forced to play white, Clare claims Nanny of the



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Maroons as culture-bearing, militant Mother in an effort to redeem what she perceives to be her own mother's weakness. In Clare's refusal to understand her own mother's motives and inability to identify resistance in enslavement, there appears an unwillingness to engage with forms of resistance and empowerment within enslavement or imperial control. A history of erasure leads to Clare's disdain for the slave mother who, like her own mother, did not "fight" for her people. Despite Cliff's invention of and probing into stories of resistance, she depicts the descendants of slaves as victims unaware of these stories. To account for this void, she imagines alternative forms of resistance in order to replace lost memory and create positive identifications, proving that the inability to recover slave memory leaves a door open to creative expression. At the same time, as a light-skinned woman herself, Cliff "recognizes her unconscious complicity in the conspiratorial politics of race-based privilege," and her shame in occupying this position bleeds into her often unsympathetic readings of passing as complicit with the oppressor (Aegerter 10). To Cliff, resistance is bold and takes the shape of warrior women, it denies the coloniser outright and refuses to abide by his rules. Although Kitty's silence occasionally reads as resistance, it ultimately is not enough to relieve her suffering. Without a voice to speak her trauma, she is instead absorbed by it, which suggests that silence overtakes potentially productive voices and obstructs national healing.

Divergently, in *Playing in the Light* and *David's Story*, Wicomb carefully weaves through the shame of self-denial and erased blackness in order to complicate the victim-perpetrator divide. In doing so, she makes visible resistance in collusion and invites her readers to interrogate acts deemed complicit with the coloniser. Helen, for example, is simultaneously complicit in oppressing her own mother and a victim of sexual violence and internalised racism. Although Marion attempts to deny the actions of her mother in claiming Tokkie, she cannot truly know Tokkie's story without first excavating the trauma she and Helen experienced. Similarly, David's search for his identity is ultimately thwarted as he

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superficially claims wholeness and ‘purity’ through Sarah Bartmann and Krotoa-Eva. His unwillingness to engage with the unspeakable acts of sexual violence enacted on their bodies echoes the nationalist habit of appropriating black bodies as vessels for unity and national healing. Dulcie’s presence in *David’s Story* specifically points to the difficulty in representing women, and the violence inflicted on their bodies when they are misrepresented and misremembered. Ultimately, Wicomb criticizes the ethnogenetic claims on black women and mother’s as symbols of national belonging, and calls upon her reader to engage with their memory in more meaningful ways.

Despite their differences, both Cliff and Wicomb urge the memorialisation of the slave past outside of colonial historiography and equally participate in the imaginative retelling of Jamaican and South African history. As Pier M. Larson suggests, “Victims of social trauma often engage in purposeful and explicit remembering as a form of empowerment and identity formation” (335). As mixed-race women, Cliff and Wicomb share histories that have been plagued by sexual violence, trauma, and shame. In displaying and complicating acts of resistance, they move towards “alternative modes of visibility for black subjectivities” (Baderon 182). Similarly, although “collective identities and memories of trauma are deeply intertwined,” trauma does not define our existence (Larson 335). However, because black’s women’s bodies are appropriated as national symbols and employed to signify an end to a collectively traumatic and shameful past, memories of trauma and resistance are effaced and therefore unreconciled. Even as we attempt to explicitly re-remember the past, “perpetrators and their descendants seek to obliterate and question the validity of such memories and thereby undermine the empowerment and identities they generate” (Larson 335). Just as white men relied on the bodies of black women in order to define their superiority in the past, white male privilege in the contemporary similarly depends on the posteriority of their violations. In erasing trauma, we are unable to cast blame

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or speak about our wounds, and in erasing resistance, we are left without the tools to overcome it.

Fortunately, as Pumla Gqola reminds us, ~~memory~~ “memory operates now and not in the past” (*What is Slavery* 92). The silences in our history serve as meaningful evidence, and due to hundreds of years of oppression and repression, the silences are limitless. In order to let the silences speak, it is important to understand the ways in which silencing us services ~~political~~ “political conquest and unification” (Larson 345). It may seem that reclaiming black women as national mothers is a progressive leap in that they are finally recognised as agents in the nation’s history. As Gqola suggests, ~~although~~ “although claiming a woman of colour as foremother superficially undermines white supremacist narratives of white racial purity, this subversion paradoxically works to mask historic and current meanings of whiteness” (*What is Slavery* 124). It becomes clear that in order to achieve national unity, the domesticated, sacrificial Mothers portrayed in the national narrative are completely ahistoricized and cleansed of atrocities. In claiming Sarah Bartmann and Krotoa-Eva, for example, as Mothers of the Rainbow Nation, ‘we elide their trauma and rape, and in turn they become sacrificial lambs for the prosperity of the postracial’ nation. In other words, they are not portrayed as agents of history at all—they are used as instruments that once again serve the interest of upholding the meanings of whiteness and patriarchy. The reclamation of the black mother ~~recuperate[s]~~ “whiteness” as antiracist in its expression of ~~multiple~~ heritages ‘ . . . in the same moment that whiteness is interrogated” (Sexton 66). This postracial agenda sanctions the repudiation of racism and responsibility in past transgressions. Through the national script, the black Mother is transformed into a fashionable symbol of alterity.

This alterity, however, is also superficial, because it ~~depoliticise[s]~~ “race and ahistoricise[s] power relations” by obfuscating the intersections of race and sexuality (Gqola

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*What is Slavery* 130). Therefore, not only does the nationalist script render slavery something of the past, it erases the discourses of race and sexuality that were mapped onto the black woman's body through enslavement and rape—it erases the “white male insistence on the essentially sexual nature of our identity” and the practice of “insulting that which we hold most holy” (Abrahams 437). Moreover, as David L. Eng suggests, “if race is defined in terms of its enduring social consequences, its ongoing legacies, and its continuing presence of substantive inequalities, we can hardly say that we have entered a colourblind age” (5). Even beauty constructs rooted in the colonial era, for instance, maintain the stigmatization of darker skin and afro hair, while Eurocentric beauty ideals are valorized. The very persistence of colourism<sup>15</sup> in the contemporary negates the productivity and possibility of colourblindness. In the “scramble for alterity,” this “colourblindness” is implicated—the postracial cannot be achieved because whiteness has not been destabilised, and blackness is still tainted with the language of degeneracy: “reconciliation becomes impossible because there is no acknowledgment of a past conflict, violence and white collective privilege” (Gqola, *What is Slavery* 130). Without the reflection on and interrogation of the past, the categories of the past remain a constant.

Furthermore, absent the memory of slavery, the construction of racialized sexuality becomes naturalised, which also means that the justification of rape implicit in attributing hypersexuality to black skin disappears. In an effort to “transcend” slavery, the “new” nation denies the history that branded black women with difference and concupiscence and refuses to deal with the repercussions. Considering again that rape was endemic to slavery, and that Rape Trauma Syndrome “leaves victims in torment and mental anguish, [causing] increased

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<sup>15</sup> In *The Global Beauty Industry* (2016), Meeta Rani Jha goes to great lengths to explore colourism on a global scale, as well as the culture of skin bleaching in Jamaica and South Africa. Her project “aims to introduce beauty as an analytical category to examine the intersectionality of gender relations” and to examine the effect of colonialism on beauty standards (12). She maintains that white, patriarchal “symbolic power . . . devalue[s] and denigrate[s] some physical features while idealizing and privileging others” which affects the treatment of women of colour economically and socially (Jha 18).

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long-term psychological stress and damage,” the “culture of silence” that has followed is appalling (Clifford 9). Such immense silence on such a gaping, collective wound in a project as important as the reconstruction of a nation can only be strategic—it allows the shame to persist unquestioned, the trauma to remain debilitating, and the culture of fear to thrive.

Unlike the “new” nations they inhabit, Cliff and Wicomb examine shame as well as its transgenerational residue to show the psychological damage and fragmented identities it produces. Kitty and Helen, for instance, are encouraged to deny their blackness in order to play-white, but their self-repression fills their existence with silence and restriction. Unable to fully assimilate into white society, their shame lives on in their children. The lack of racial purity emphasised in miscegenation discourse implicates their families in concupiscence and degeneracy—the “lost” ideal of whiteness cannot be resolved within the white supremacist, patriarchal symbolic that speaks their existence. Clare and Marion, on the other hand, are distraught by the fragmented identities they have inherited. As mixed-race women, they are similarly imagined with the miscegenation discourse which renders them illegitimate, and therefore “face endless struggles of identity and social hurdles both internally and externally” (Clifford). Although he does not pass for white, David also struggles with his family’s repression of blackness in favour of an essentialised coloured identity. Similar to RTS, their trauma “manifest[s] into guilt, viewing [the] self as a source of misery, a mistake, tainted, and evil as they see themselves as genetically connected” to the people complicit in their own repression (Clifford 7). Here, shame sparks “intergenerational conflicts,” which in the “new” nation remain uninterrogated, leaving the subject split and in a state of melancholia (Eng and Han 667).

It is important to note that the state of melancholia developed from these lost ideals and unresolved trauma is not permanently damaging, but “potentially productive” (Tillet 9). Eng and Han demonstrate that the “continuum between mourning and melancholia allows us

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to understand the negotiation of racial melancholia as *conflict* rather than *damage*,” which invites the potential to resolve and heal trauma through “communal building” and love (693, their emphasis). The suppression of the slave past, the elision of rape, and the haunting trauma that comes with the improper burial of our ancestors and their memories can also be thought of as a conflict with the potential to be resolved. We have been coerced into forgetting our ancestors, into being ashamed of our bodies, our skin, our hair, and our very existence. However, because “forgetting is not the opposite of remembering, but its complement,” we are still capable of recalling our ancestors and recovering our memories in imaginative (and imaginary) ways—they are not lost (Larson 350). Furthermore, in “Shame and Identity,” Wicomb notes that “shame is still inscribed in the tragic mode routinely used to express coloureds where assumed cultural loss is elevated to the realm of ontology” (100). This construction of shame perpetuates loss and trauma as unredeemable and unresolvable, respectively. On the other hand, Salamishah Tillet posits that “shame is an affect that requires recognition of responsibility,” which demands we flip the white supremacist, patriarchal script and cast blame on our perpetrators (92). Through what W. James Booth refers to as “memory-justice” we can work through shame and fight against the imperialist discourse that equates our self-worth with our sexuality, “reclaim sites of slavery and reimagine democracy” (Tillet 136).

The national narratives in Jamaica and South Africa insufficiently include women of colour and fervently exclude slave memory in the rebuilding process, thereby thwarting national belonging, repeating erasure, and maintaining the categories of the past. With this in mind, it becomes essential to create alternative narratives and modes of belonging, or what Wicomb calls “multiple belongings . . . in which modalities of blackness can wipe out shame” (“Shame” 105). Michelle Cliff and Zoë Wicomb reveal the pitfalls of revisionist history and the inability to speak in the language of the oppressor. Likewise, Kimberlé

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Crenshaw suggests that we have too readily accepted the dominant framework of discrimination [that] has hindered the development of an adequate theory and praxis to address the problems of intersectionality” (152). If we continue to revise the national narrative, we will only iterate the modes of discrimination enacted on our bodies. The slave past is not something to insert into the margins of historiography, it is constitutive and powerful in its own right. Rememory is not a project of revising past paradigms, it requires the creative production of our own truths and the invention of our own language. Through memory justice, we can begin to heal our collective wounds and bring symbolic closure to our ancestors.

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