

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Megan Spencer for the degree of Master of Arts in Women, Gender, & Sexuality Studies presented on June 13, 2016.

Title: Cartographies of Haunting: Black Feminist Refusal in Toni Morrison's *A Mercy* and Octavia Butler's *Kindred*

Abstract approved:

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This thesis explores the gendered histories of slavery through the concept of haunting in two neo-slave narrative novels: Toni Morrison's *A Mercy* and Octavia Butler's *Kindred*. I offer readings of these texts through slavery's geographic and temporal implications, in order to argue that the logics of antiblackness remain a fundamental pillar of the settler state that is the United States. Chapter two, "To Flavor the Soil of the Earth" discusses how slavery haunts the land, using Morrison's text to understand how transatlantic slavery and settler colonialism unfold in relation to each other, and produce, through constructions of race, gender, and nation, particular ontological positions for Black women. I examine the way that the narrator's response to enslavement and racialization threatens to dismantle United States empire. Chapter three, "But I Was Still Caught Somehow", is framed by a discussion of the temporal aspects of haunting. I argue that Butler's novel makes sense of the ongoing logics of racial slavery that have transformed, yet continue to be attached to U.S. empire, discussing how the narrator's body is changed by her experience of traveling in time to an antebellum slave plantation. Finally, the concluding chapter of this thesis explores Black feminist refusal as a politics that rejects narrow parameters of inclusion, and instead insists on ways of being beyond colonial domination.

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Cartographies of Haunting: Black Feminist Refusal in Toni Morrison's *A Mercy* and
Octavia Butler's *Kindred*

by
Megan Spencer

A THESIS

submitted to

Oregon State University

in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the
degree of

Master of Arts

Presented June 13, 2016
Commencement June 2017

Master of Arts thesis of Megan Spencer presented on June 13, 2016

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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

Megan Spencer, Author

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I offer my sincere gratitude to everyone who has supported me during this journey. Wado to my committee chair, Dr. Qwo-Li Driskill, for your thoughtful feedback and encouragement. Thank you to the members of my thesis committee, Dr. Patti Duncan, Dr. Lily Sheehan, and Dr. Christina León. I am so fortunate to have been able to learn from each of you. Thank you to my WGSS cohort, I am grateful to have met each of you and to have been able to learn from all of your collective brilliance. Thank you to the students in WGSS 223 and WGSS 235, who were excited to learn and made teaching a fulfilling experience. Thank you to Leonora and Whitney for your words of encouragement. To my friend and mentor, Crystal, thank you for your endless support and belief in my work. To my dear friend and co-conspirator Daryl, thank you for all of the laughter, road-trips, hilarious Black Tumblr posts, family dinners, and Black feminist theory brilliance. Your friendship has sustained me in so many ways. Thank you to Leola for making Oregon feel like home. To my family, especially my mom and sister, thank you for supporting and encouraging me always. I love you all so much. Finally, thank you to the Black women poets, writers, and artists, both elders and ancestors, whose work has helped me understand the world.

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“The United States is permanently haunted by the slavery, genocide, and violence entwined in its first, present and future days. Haunting doesn’t hope to change people’s perceptions, nor does it hope for reconciliation. Haunting lies precisely in its refusal to stop” (642).

–Eve Tuck & C. Ree, *A Glossary of Haunting*

Introduction

The histories of the colonization of Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island and the theft and enslavement of African peoples are often written out of dominant versions of United States history, or if included, they are presented as short-lived lapses in an otherwise progressive trajectory. These historical violences are not aberrations; rather they are foundational to the discursive and material construction and continued existence of the United States. While the logics of racial slavery and settler colonialism have distinct characteristics, they are overlapping and mutually constituted, and their legacies of antiblackness and Indigenous erasure and genocide contribute to various forms of racial, sexual, and gendered violence and precarity that Black and Native people continue to experience.

This thesis calls forth haunting as a way to think about the presence of the past in relation to histories of settler colonialism and transatlantic slavery and contemporary Black life. In this project I offer an analysis of two texts by Black women novelists who take up issues of memory, kinship, and geography as they relate to the history of transatlantic slavery in the context of U.S. Empire. These two texts, Octavia Butler's *Kindred* and Toni Morrison's *A Mercy*, can be described within the genre of neo-slave narratives, both having enslaved Black women as protagonist. Each of these novels are threaded with similar themes related to slavery, such as familial separation, belonging, sexualized violence, and gendered racialization. Both Butler and Morrison construct non-linear plots, with each novel's opening scenes describing what the reader comes to realize is the end of the narrative. In choosing these two novels in particular, and by providing a reading of each that is in conversation with the other, I will illuminate a two-fold understanding of haunting. First, in relation *A Mercy*, I describe spatial and geographic haunting in which stories, memories, and feelings of historical and ancestral violence are embedded within

and informed by land; and secondly, via *Kindred*, a kind of temporal haunting in which the violence of conquest, slavery, and settler colonialism has material, corporeal, and affective consequences contemporarily. The epigraph above from Eve Tuck and C. Ree's essay *A Glossary of Haunting* gestures that the historical violence that haunts our present moment does so despite being made invisible within the colonial imaginary. Tuck and Ree's conceptualization of haunting does not center resolution or reconciliation, in so far as a telos of reconciliation to haunting appeases the settler colonial state's anxieties that are concerned first and foremost with ending haunting, not settler colonialism. Tuck and Ree's eschewal of reconciliation informs this project in so far as my efforts here are not to suggest solutions to or closure from the legacies of racialized forms of violence, but rather to excavate the wounds and ruptures that have resulted from such violence, and explore possibilities that exist in this space of refusal/rupture/wildness. The questions I consider in this project include the following:

- How are histories and concepts of antiblackness, Black fungibility, and transatlantic slavery imbricated with those of settler colonialism, genocide, and the erasure of Native people?
- What are the processes of racialization, sexualization, and gendering that characterize Black women's relationship to space and settler colonial landscapes?
- How does the concept of haunting help to make sense of the legacies and continuities of racial and colonial violence?

This project relies on a number of theoretical perspectives concerning haunting, antiblackness and settler colonialism, history and ancestral memory, and racialized and gendered aspects of geography. Maile Arvin, Eve Tuck, and Angie Morrill define settler colonialism as "... a persistent social and political formation in which newcomers/colonizers/settlers come to a

place, claim it as their own, and do whatever it takes to disappear the Indigenous peoples that are there” (12). Scholars of settler colonialism and Native studies have articulated the way that settler colonialism exists as an on-going structure, rather than an event (Wolfe, 388). This is a critical point indicating that settler colonialism is constantly transforming and changing shape, often making itself invisible through discourses which normalize it and construct it as a completed event that has taken place in the past, rather than a structure that continues to organize and manage politics, economies, land, and bodies. Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill suggest that “...settler colonialism must be understood as a multi-fronted project of making the First Peoples of a place extinct; it is a relentless structure, not contained in a period of time” (23). What these scholars identify is that such conceptualizations of settler colonialism as a completed event imagine Native people as only existing in the past, and this erasure of Native presence is used to legitimize settler claims to land ownership. While this project centers Black feminism as its mode of inquiry, I want to call attention to the work that Native queer and feminist scholars and activists have done to resist colonial erasure and violence, and to think about how Black feminism exists in relation to such work.

Black activists and scholars of Black studies and slavery in particular have attempted to demonstrate how slavery’s residual logic of Black people as commodities continues to define Blackness as outside of the realm of humanness. Saidiya Hartman uses the phrase the ‘afterlife of slavery’, to describe the continuities between slavery and freedom, emphasizing the point that antiblackness continues to structure society and produce various forms of violence and precarity for Black lives, despite the promise of Emancipation. Hartman writes,

If slavery persists as an issue in the political life of Black America, it is not because of an antiquarian obsession with bygone days or the burden of a too-long

memory, but because Black lives are still imperiled and devalued by a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago. This is the afterlife of slavery - skewed life chances, limited access to healthcare and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment. (*Lose Your Mother*, 6)

Similarly, In *Unbearable Blackness*, Jared Sexton highlights how myriad responses to state violence against Black people organized around the phrase ‘Black Lives Matter’ have demonstrated the persistent and structural existence of antiblackness by drawing attention to cases of unarmed Black people killed by police and how infrequently police face consequences for this violence within the U.S. legal system, as well as the ways that antiblack violence is shaped by racialized forms of heteropatriarchy and heteronormativity, resulting in the erasure of violence against Black queer and trans people and Black women. Such scholarship and activism addresses how contemporary violence against Black people is rooted in the logics of racial slavery. Sexton argues that to say ‘Black lives matter’ is to acknowledge that in the current order of society, they do not, and that to assert that they do is to call for a radical transformation of society and what it means to be human.

Tiffany King and Andrea Smith, among many others, have contributed extensively to the realm of thought regarding the relationship between racial-sexual domination and processes of nation-building. King and Smith offer insight into situatedness of Black and Indigenous women within processes of settler colonialism and slavery, as well as the ways that these two sites of domination are mutually constituted. For this project, I am particularly interested in tracing the positionalities of Black women within this matrix. In the context of these two systems, Black women’s bodies have historically been sites of colonial violence, upon which U.S. nationhood

and citizenship have been constructed. Enslaved Black women within settler colonial landscapes bore the responsibility of both the physical and reproductive labor needed to further the project of empire. In her dissertation *In the Clearing: Black Female Bodies, Space and Settler Colonial Landscapes*, King suggests that Black women in settler colonial landscapes exist as metaphors for terra nullius and the unending, unfettered accumulation of land, slaveable bodies, and wealth (23). King, drawing on the work of Sylvia Wynter, suggests not only that slavery and settler colonialism are intertwined, but also that the spatial processes of both are implicated in the construction of Blackness and more specifically Black femininity. King writes, “The Black female body functions as a site where the spatial order of the master and settler is realized as well as where it unravels” (39). In this way, King suggests that the construction of the Black female body simultaneously shapes and is shaped by constructions of the settler/master, and that Black female body is a site where one can witness the confluence and collaboration of both slavery and settler colonialism. My interest here is in making note of how understandings of gender and sexuality are inherently and always already racialized, since they emerge from the same epistemic frame that constitutes the matrix of racial slavery and settler colonialism. King argues that through Black fungibility, Black women’s bodies exist in the settler imaginary as possibilities for limitless wealth and expansion. She writes, “The Black female form in the New World appears as a metaphor for *terra nullius*, the plantation (or the planting of settlements), unfettered access to property, and the unending reproduction of bodies and land” (23). Black women’s bodies are used, through slavery, to further the project of settler colonialism, and thus the gendered antiblackness of slavery is a fundamental component to the settler state, and vice versa. In “Labor’s Aphasia: Toward Anti-Blackness as Constitutive to Settler Colonialism”, King further argues for a more nuanced understanding of the role of Black labor in the service of

settler colonialism, positing Black fungibility as a framework for understanding the material and discursive positionality of Blackness in the United States. In *Scenes of Subjection*, Saidiya Hartman describes Black fungibility as "... [T]he joy made possible by virtue of the replaceability and interchangeability endemic to the commodity ... the fungibility of the commodity makes the captive body an abstract and empty vessel vulnerable to the projection of others' feelings, ideas, desires, and values ..." (21). King suggests that thinking about antiblackness and slavery only in terms of stolen labor conceals the significance of Black fungibility. Understanding Black fungibility can make clear how antiblackness is not merely a *tool* of settler colonialism, but rather a central component of its structure.

In *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*, Alexander Weheliye makes the case for the significance of racializing assemblages for understanding race as the processes that organize and manage populations. Weheliye writes, "The idea of racializing assemblages...construes race not as a biological or cultural classification but as a set of sociopolitical processes that discipline humanity into full humans, not-quite-humans, and nonhumans" (4). Weheliye draws significantly on the work of Sylvia Wynter, who has theorized extensively about what she calls the genres of the human, that is, the determination of who can indeed *be* human, and how such categorization was implemented in post 1492 European colonial conquests. Wynter's work suggests that *Man*, that is the liberal European human subject, is defined through categorizations of difference that posit Black and Indigenous peoples as *other* than or outside of the realm of Man. In this project Wynter is interested in how conquest, slavery, and other violences of western modernity are connected to the making of the human, that is, defining western bourgeois Man as the only possible ontology of humanness. Wynter's work is especially important to my thesis, particularly as I think through issues of

humanness and refusal in *A Mercy*. Katherine McKittrick historicizes geographies of antiblackness by engaging with Sylvia Wynter's writings on the construction of 'Man' and humanness as they relate to colonialism, imperialism, and transatlantic slavery in the 'New World'. McKittrick's analysis of how racial and sexual domination unfold as spatial projects is especially important to this project as I consider the geographic implications of slavery and settler colonialism.

The theories of Black and women of color feminists inform my approach to this project. The work of many women of color feminist and womanist thinkers posits literature and storytelling as critically important epistemologies, which have the potential to illuminate the workings of various interwoven systems and histories of racial, gender, and colonial violence. In her widely lauded work *A Race for Theory*, Barbara Christian critiques hegemonic versions of literary theory and criticism, suggesting that often literary criticism functions to maintain knowledge hierarchies that marginalize and devalue the writings and knowledges of people of color. Theorizing by people of color, which Christian argues has long taken on a myriad of creative and narrative forms, is often overlooked and discounted, particularly within academic institutions, which tend to value and favor knowledge that is legitimized by western Eurocentric epistemic frameworks. Of course, these western epistemologies which favor reason, logic, and objectivity emerge from the same historical processes that produce racial and colonial violence. I am interested less in moving towards the legitimacy and legibility of black women's writings within an institutional vantage point, than in thinking about what such writing can do when it is not read in terms of its potential to be recognized as important by institutional standards defined by wealthy white men. In her discussion of ghosts, theory, and alternative epistemologies, Malea Powell reflects on the way that stories have the capacity to teach. Powell writes, "Not only those

[ghosts] arisen from the mess of blood and bones upon which ‘America’ is literally built, but also those rooted in other knowledges, other ways of knowing, other ways of being and becoming that frequently go unheard and unsaid in much scholarly work” (12). Writers and theorists such as Christian and Powell inform my approach to literary analysis, because these writers disrupt hegemonic and colonial discourses about knowledge production, and connect literature and theory to survival. Christian writes, “I can only speak for myself. But what I write and how I write is done in order to save my own life. And I mean that literally. For me, literature is a way of knowing that I am not hallucinating, that whatever I feel/know is. It is an affirmation that sensuality is intelligence, that sensual language is language that makes sense” (78). Christian identifies an approach to reading that is outside of a fixed or static method, one that is flexible and sensitive to the particularities and complexities of a given text, suggesting an epistemology that is rooted in the potential of literature to make us feel or be moved in a particular way. My understanding of literature’s significance has been shaped first and foremost by own experiences reading Black women’s literature. Furthermore, Christian writes, “the literature of people who are not in power has always been in danger of extinction or of co-optation, not because we do not theorize but because what we can even imagine, far less who we can reach, is constantly limited by societal structures” (78). Christian’s assertion that even what we can imagine is limited by societal structures also informs my approach to this project and my interest in ways of reading these texts for the possibilities they invite of futures that we do not know or have not yet imagined. Moreover, my methodology for this thesis relies heavily on the work of Katherine McKittrick, particularly her book *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle*. McKittrick describes the way that Black feminist geographies can be used to resist the hegemonic, antiblack, settler colonial geographies of racial-sexual domination, particularly

through Black women's creative works such as fiction writing, poetry, film, and theory, which, as she writes, have the potential to ". . . name the world, conceptualize the world, and therefore give the writer/reader access to new forms of life" (144). McKittrick's discussion and engagement with Sylvia Wynter's work suggest that Black women's geographies, as demonic grounds, have the potential to shift and expose traditional spatial arrangements as unfinished and thus alterable. In thinking about demonic grounds as creative terrain, McKittrick is interested in how acts of creation, imagination, and expression hold possibilities for disrupting the genres of Man and the spatial arrangements that simultaneously uphold and make illegible these genres. Following McKittrick's method of reading for the demonic in various articulations of Black women's relationships to geography, I use the concept of demonic grounds both to analyze the novels, as well as to think about how the texts themselves constitute demonic grounds, as they challenge normative understandings of time, space, memory, and nation. I offer a more detailed engagement with both Wynter's and McKittrick's work later in this project.

In chapter two, *To Flavor the Soil of the Earth*, I consider the discursive and material violence against both the land and racialized Black bodies that is inherent to the U.S. settler state, meditating on Toni Morrison's 2006 novel *A Mercy*, which focuses on the construction of race and racialized bodies during the 1680s and 1690s in what has become known as the United States. In my reading of *A Mercy*, I engage with theories of humanism and queer of color critiques to think about how refusal and wilderness push back against colonial constructions of the human. The theoretical context I use here draws heavily on the work of Sylvia Wynter's genres of the human, Alexander Weheliye's racializing assemblages, Katherine McKittrick's demonic grounds, and Tiffany Lethabo King's work tracing Black female bodies in settler colonial landscapes. Much of *A Mercy* is told from the perspective of Florens, a young girl born

into slavery, who is eight years old when she is given away by a Portuguese trader, known as Senhor, as payment for a debt. Throughout the novel Florens navigates various forms of violence, abandonment, and relationality with people around her. My interest in writing about *A Mercy* is in some ways itself a story of haunting. I have returned to this text many times, becoming more enthralled with aspects of Florens's life and narrative with each reading. The details of this narrative that have haunted me the most are the glimpses of refusal that Florens displays. I am interested particularly in the way that she interacts with processes of racialization as her body becomes marked by them. I use José Muñoz's notion of disidentification to make sense of Florens's relationship to tropes of Blackness as wild and chaotic, noting how such tropes rely on settler conceptualizations of land. I argue that Florens's refusal to distance herself from such tropes haunts the geographic landscape upon which the U.S. settler state is constructed.

Chapter three, *But I Was Still Caught Somehow*, explores time, kinship, and corporeality in Octavia Butler's *Kindred*. I examine the main character Dana's experience of travelling through space and time from 1970s California to a slave plantation in antebellum Maryland in 1815, where she encounters her ancestors—both enslaved Africans and white slave owners. With each return to the past, Dana's life becomes entwined with that of her ancestors, and she struggles with navigating violence while trying to ensure her own survival in the future. Dana's time and space travelling, her complex connections to her ancestors, and ultimately her dismembered body each allude to the way that the ancestral memory and trauma of slavery disrupts spatial and temporal boundaries and continues to shape the present. Butler's novel suggests an affective and corporeal epistemology, one that cannot be made sense of using normative logics of history and time, in its demonstration of how ancestral trauma related to

slavery calls up a specific temporal embodiment of geographic space. In this chapter I draw on Hortense Spillers's discussion of the violence that transforms Black bodies into flesh, as well as discussions of disability, time, and the afterlife of slavery. In an interview with Patricia Saunders, Hartman asks, "[W]hat does it mean to have this psychic inheritance of an experience for which one has no memory, where people are still living in the temporal space of being an ex-slave?" (8). Hartman's question informs my approach to *Kindred*, particularly as I grapple with what to make of Dana's fantastical and impossible encounter with the dead. In the concluding chapter of this thesis, I explore the concept of refusal from the perspective of Black feminist politics, and how it might offer possibilities for thinking about the genres of the human and disruptions the coloniality of being from which slavery and colonialism emerge.

Chapter Two | *To Flavor the Soil of the Earth*

In this chapter, I am interested in the spatial aspects of Florens's story: how her experiences of subjection, abandonment, and racialization are tied to enslavement and colonization, and how her navigation of grief, loss, trauma, and antiblackness threatens to disrupt the geographic and discursive construction of U.S. empire. In my reading of *A Mercy*, I turn to Sylvia Wynter's theorizing on the construction of the human that emerges from the processes of colonization and enslavement that characterize post-1492 European conquest of the "New World". Wynter's notion of the genres of the human is of particular significant in my attention to moments of racialization that occur in the novel. I also draw upon the writings of Tiffany Lethabo King and Katherine McKittrick for an analysis of the interconnectedness and mutual constitutedness of racial slavery and settler colonialism, paying particular attention to the historical moment Morrison constructs in *A Mercy* and how she situates racialization,

antiblackness, and racial slavery in conversation with the unfolding geographic and discursive processes of U.S. empire, nation building, and Indigenous dispossession and genocide.

A Mercy tells the story of a small community of people living in Virginia during the late seventeenth century. The community consists of a myriad of characters that have been uprooted from their families and homes and have come to live with a Dutch trader named Jacob Vaark, referred to as *Sir*, and his wife, Rebecca. The characters include the Vaarks, as well as their servants/slaves from a variety of racial backgrounds. The central character of the novel is Florens, a young slave who is eight years old when she is separated from her enslaved mother and given away by a Portuguese trader, known as Senhor, as payment for a debt. Florens's mother believes Sir to be a more ethical man than Senhor, so in hopes of preventing Florens from experiencing sexual violence, she up Florens to be traded to Sir. Throughout the novel however, Florens grapples with her perception of being abandoned by her mother and not being able to speak to her mother for an explanation of this abandonment. Among the characters, Florens is closest to Lina, a young Indigenous woman who is sold to Jacob Vaark, after her family and tribe are killed by disease. Upon Florens's arrival to the property, Lina takes care of Florens, and the two bond over their shared trauma of being separated from their mothers. Sorrow, a young girl who becomes pregnant several times also works and lives with the Vaarks. Agnel Barron argues that the characters in the novel exist as a microcosm analogous to the larger social and political processes taking place at that time, in the way that the characters' interactions reflect the racial and gender hierarchies that shaped and were shaped by the ideological and legal discourses that privileged propertied white male settlers. Barron writes, "I maintain that the novel uses the micro-community of the Vaark household to demonstrate the way this process of "exclusionary citizenship" took hold in the early US. The novel details the settler colonialism that saw the

white, propertied male establishing ‘ownership and control’ of ‘land’ and ‘people’” (32). Barron notes that many analyses of *A Mercy* have failed to take into account Morrison’s critique of empire and colonization, using instead a nationalist framework that takes for granted the United States’ existence and frames the novel in terms of demands by racialized people for full inclusion or citizenship into the U.S. society. My reading of *A Mercy* aligns with Barron’s critiques, as I believe that the novel offers a commentary of Black peoples’ relationship with the United States that creates possibilities beyond inclusion or recognition, with the understanding that the U.S. settler state is foundationally reliant on antiblackness, and thus Black inclusion is a paradox making allowable what Audre Lorde might call only the “most narrow parameters of change”.

In an explanation of *A Mercy*, Morrison stated that she wanted to write a novel about slavery before it was explicitly connected to race. As such, *A Mercy* focuses on the construction of race and racialized bodies during the 1680s and 1690s in what has become known as the United States. In the novel, Morrison details a historical event known as Bacon’s rebellion in 1675, which had as its outcome racialized and gendered Others being written out of citizenship for the benefit of white property-owing males. Morrison writes:

By eliminating manumission, gatherings, travel and bearing arms for Black people only; by granting license to any white to kill any Black for any reason; by compensating owners for a slave’s maiming or death, they separated and protected all whites from all others forever. Any social ease between gentry and laborers, forged before and during that rebellion, crumbled beneath a hammer wielded in the interests of the gentry’s profits. (10)

In writing “they separated and protected all whites from all others *forever*”, Morrison alludes to the ongoing legacy of such laws in her evocation of the notion of a timeless, unending racial and

gender hierarchy in which white landowning men's claims to citizenship were mutually constitutive with the marking of white women, Black people, and Indigenous people as Other. Additionally, the discourse around these laws suggested their necessity based on maintaining 'order' and preventing 'chaos', thus further reifying settler colonialism's discursive connection between bodies and land, and the metaphor of racialized bodies as a frontier in need of being tamed and conquered. Furthermore, various characters and objects in *A Mercy* reflect the dynamics of U.S. nation building. Throughout the novel, both the community of characters and the geographic spaces they inhabit signal processes of settlement and conquest. While Jacob Vaark is initially portrayed as a relatively gentle and benign settler who takes in people who have been orphaned, he ultimately becomes a slave owner and trader in order to accumulate wealth and land, and thus his economic and spatial self-actualization is reliant on the transatlantic slave trade as well as the theft of Indigenous peoples' land. Vaark insists upon building an extravagant mansion with the funds he receives from participating in the slave and sugar trades in Barbados. Lina observes that the mansion is Sir's third house and that it "required the deaths of fifty trees" (50). In this way, the construction of the mansion is profoundly incongruous to Indigenous ecologies. Vaark's building of the mansion directly correlates to the signs of wealth he observes while visiting other plantations. Lina notes that the mansion brings Sir joy more than anything else ever has: "The last few years he seemed moody, less gentle, but when he decided to kill the trees and replace them with a profane monument to himself, he was cheerful every waking moment" (51). Thus, in the way that the characters embody a microcosm of society's larger social and political relations, Sir's interest in constructing a mansion parallels settler interests in constructing a nation. Sir's mansion comes to symbolize the nascent settler state, while his construction of the mansion and the joy he gains from it would not be possible without his

participation in the slave trade and the theft and destruction of Indigenous land. The mansion as a metaphor for empire remains important throughout the novel, particularly given Florens's spatial connection to it and the way that the mansion's existence requires the dehumanization and enslavement of Black people.

The work of Tiffany Lethabo King demonstrates the imbrication of slavery and settler colonialism. In her dissertation, *In the Clearing: Black Female Bodies in Settler Colonial Landscapes*, King argues that slavery and white settler colonialism fundamentally structure and shape each other. While focusing specifically on the gendered construction of Blackness, King avoids a position of arguing that one produces the other, suggesting instead that the material and discursive power of both slavery and settler colonialism shape the violence of modernity from which antiblackness emerges. Taking King's critiques seriously means fleshing out the complex ways that the logics of antiblackness and Native genocide have and continue to exist and interact. King writes, "Settlement is more than transforming the land. It is more than the teleological process of weary white people making a home and Native people naturally disappearing over time. Settlement is an assemblage of technologies and processes of makings and unmakings" (91). The logics of settlement determine specific ontological positions for both Black and Native people. Within these logics, as Andrea Smith suggests, Native people must always be disappearing, so that settler claims to land can be legitimized, while the ontological position of Black people must be one of social death. King's dissertation focuses on Black female bodies as sites where one can observe the simultaneous power of slavery and settler colonialism, in the way that the productive and reproductive potential of Black female bodies creates possibilities for settler/master self-actualization and the expansion of settler claims to territory. She suggests that Black female bodies in the imaginary of racial slavery and settler colonialism signify terra

nullius, or access to empty, claimable land. Indigenous land is imagined as wild, chaotic, uninhabitable for Man, in need of being tamed, and is made inhabitable for European settlers by recasting the realm of the human, defining humanness against Indigenous and Black people. During this process, settlers, Indigenous people, and Black people are each distinctly, geographically, and discursively marked. The logic of terra nullius suggests that Indigenous people could not legitimately make claims to their own land, because they did demonstrate ownership through domination (i.e. exploitation) of the land. Under this logic, Indigenous land is imagined as empty land available for white settlers to claim and make profitable. The significance of dispossessing Native people from their lands cannot be overstated. As Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang suggest in *Decolonization is Not a Metaphor*, because settler colonialism functions on the theft of Native peoples' land and the erasure of this theft, resistance to settler colonialism can be neither ethical or effective if it does not concern itself with Native peoples' relationships to land:

Land is what is most valuable, contested, required. This is both because the settlers make Indigenous land their new home and source of capital, and also because the disruption of Indigenous relationships to land represents a profound epistemic, ontological, cosmological violence. This violence is not temporally contained in the arrival of the settler but is reasserted each day of occupation. (5)

This violence and the relationship to land on which it is predicated is apparent in Sir's construction of the mansion, since it requires both ecological destruction and the dispossession and displacement of Native people. This is true both in terms of the actual land on which Sir constructs this mansion, as well as through the ecological, racial, and colonial violence inherent to sugar production and the slave trade in Barbados.

King weaves an analysis of settler colonialism together with the logics of racial slavery and antiblackness, which construct Black people as fungible bodies, with the potential to both *produce* commodities and to *exist* as commodities, specifically through making land profitable. In this formation, Black female bodies, for their productive and reproductive capacities are imagined as space making units available to the settler. King writes, “The creation of Black female gender by the Settler-Master works to produce a spatial unit of conquest, enslavement, and an exclusionary form of humanism through the Black female body” (62). The sexual and gendered violence against Black female bodies inherent to their position as a spatial unit was illegible as violence, since Black bodies were positioned outside of humanness. Egbert Alejandro Martinez also discusses the geographic and ontological consequences of conquest and the defining of territory, writing:

Territory is not only the spatial conditions that allow a nation-state to *be*, to reference Joel Wainwright, but also the sphere of action and thought (for example, laws, and treaties) that produce the effect of a spatial-ontological separation between one nation-state and another. Moreover, the spatial conditions on which the nation-state is premised produce also a spatial-epistemic separation, through epistemic violence that creates that nation-state’s “Others” and excludes them from body politic (A Topography of Misreadings).

What King and Martinez highlight are the ways that the project of nation-building is about constructing both spatial boundaries as well as ontological and epistemic ones. King’s work is especially important to my analysis and understanding of *A Mercy*, since Morrison situates an enslaved Black girl/woman during the early parts of U.S. empire as the central protagonist of the novel. In this way, *A Mercy* offers a space for thinking through the simultaneous unfolding of

transatlantic slavery and settler colonization, and the geographic and ontological consequences for Black women of such an arrangement.

Jamaican theorist Sylvia Wynter details what she calls the inventions of Man, referring to the European conquest of the ‘New World’ and the reconceptualizations of what it meant to be human that occurred when European colonizers encountered Indigenous people on Turtle Island as well as Indigenous Africans who were stolen during the transatlantic slave trade. Wynter suggests that theological and enlightenment era notions of knowledge and logic both contributed to the invention of Man, in which Man, that is the liberal European male subject, came to overrepresent the totality of humanness and exist as the definitive standard of human normalcy, against which Black and Indigenous people were defined. Wynter writes,

This means that the large-scale accumulation of unpaid land, unpaid labor, and overall wealth expropriated by Western Europe from non-European peoples, which was to lay the basis of its global expansion from the fifteenth century onwards, was carried out within the order of truth and the self-evident order of consciousness, of a creed-specific conception of what it was to be human—which, because a monotheistic conception, could not conceive of an Other to what it experienced as being human, and therefore an Other to its truth, its notion of freedom (291).

Wynter suggests that the invention of Man creates the “genres of the human”, which are informed by constructions of race, gender, and nation. Wynter’s work here is an important aspect of thinking through Black feminist critique, because the idea of the genres of the human necessitates an interrogation of how both race and gender, as well as sexuality and ability, are constructed in order to produce various degrees of violence and precarity for individuals and

communities, depending on their proximity to Man (whiteness; heteronormative, cis-normative maleness; able-bodiedness, etc). Katherine McKittrick traces the geographic consequences of the inventions of Man, arguing that “If Man is an overrepresentation of humanness, Man’s human geographies are an extension of this conception” (128). McKittrick comments on the connection between the conquest of land and the domination of Black and Native people, suggesting that Native lands considered uninhabitable through discourses of terra nullius were made inhabitable for European colonizers through a reordering and reconceptualization of humanness. McKittrick details this transformation of land, writing “The now profitable and workable lands of the uninhabitable are not so much unlivable and unimaginable as they are grids of racial-sexual management and geographic growth (which ‘grew’ due to free slave labor)” (130). In the settler imaginary, then, the colonial trope of Native land as wild and chaotic, is transformed through the domination of land and non-white bodies. McKittrick’s work here also relates to Andrea Smith’s discussion of heteropatriarchy and settler colonialism, in which colonizers use heteropatriarchal norms to naturalize violence and domination of Native peoples, whose communities largely were not based on heteropatriarchal domination prior to colonization. McKittrick describes Wynter’s notion of ‘demonic grounds’ to explore the material and theoretical geographies of Black women and the potential these geographies hold to disrupt Man’s colonial conceptions of space, which construct and do not interrogate the racial, colonial, and gendered violence inherent to the delimitation of territory. McKittrick suggests that Black geographies “expose the limitations of transparent space through Black social particularities and knowledges” and “locate and speak back to geographies of modernity, transatlantic slavery, and colonialism” (7). Demonic grounds expose traditional geographies as incomplete by demonstrating that Black women’s geographies are not simply marginal, but rather that they exist in relation to traditional geographies. In my

reading of *A Mercy*, I am particularly concerned with Florens's engagement with demonic grounds through both her disavowal of the genres of the human and the antiblack, colonial project of Man's geographies with which these genres have been constructed and maintained.

Racializing assemblages uphold and reproduce the inventions of Man. In *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*, Alexander Weheliye engages Wynter's theories of the human in his discussion of racializing assemblages, or the way that race is constructed and contingent upon sociopolitical processes. Weheliye writes:

If racialization is understood not as a biological or cultural descriptor but as a conglomerate of sociopolitical relations that discipline humanity into full humans, not-quite humans, and nonhumans, then Blackness designates a changing system of unequal power structures that apportion and delimit which humans can lay claim to full human status and which humans cannot. (3)

In the novel, Morrison constructs several significant moments in which racialization (and un/gendering) of Florens and her mother take place. The last chapter of the novel is narrated by Florens's mother. During this narration, she describes her experiences during the Middle Passage, being auctioned in Barbados, and being sold and sent north. Florens's mother discusses the process of being auctioned and the particular moment of racialization that occurs. She says,

I was burning sweat in cane only a short time when they took me away to sit on a platform in the sun. It was there I learned how I was not a person from my country, nor from my families. I was negrita. Everything. Language, dress, gods, dance, habits, decoration, song—all of it cooked together in the color of my skin. So it was as a Black that I was purchased by Senhor, taken out of the cane and shipped north to his tobacco plants (194).

In this narration, Florens's mother describes a rupture from her family and community that is shaped both by a geographic separation and the violence of being racialized as fungible Black flesh. This description reflects the presence of racializing assemblages in its articulation of the construction of fungible Blackness through the flattening of multiple diverse and distinct West African cultures and traditions. This narration of being publically auctioned illuminates how the process of racialization is also gendered and sexualized. A *minhae mae* explains to Florens, "There is no protection. To be female in this place is to be an open wound that cannot heal. Even if scars form, the festering is ever below" (191). Katherine McKittrick suggests that the auction block is a geographic site that economizes domination in the form of both antiblackness and sexual violence. McKittrick writes, "In part, the Blackness 'purchased' on the auction block naturalizes Black women's identities as, primarily, reproductive working-sexual bodies. Significantly, public auction and the auction block displayed and scrutinized Black women's sexual bodies in response to the need to reproduce the slave population" (80). Immediately following this account of the "platform in the sun", Florens's mother describes being *shipped* north, where she briefly feels a sense of hope that is immediately interrupted when she is raped on Senhor's tobacco plantation. Later in this closing narration, it becomes clear that Florens's mother's experiences of being racialized and sexualized, auctioned, sold, and sexually assaulted are central to the conditions of possibility for her separation from Florens. When Sir visits Senhor's plantation, she observes that "There was no animal in his heart" (191). She asks him to take Florens, hoping that this will protect her from the violence on Senhor's plantation.

For Florens, the experience of being racialized marks the beginning of a transformation in her sense of herself. When Rebecca Vaark becomes ill with small pox, the illness that has killed Jacob Vaark, she sends Florens on a journey to find the Blacksmith, who they believe will be

able to treat Rebecca. Florens travels through the wilderness by herself in search of the Blacksmith, who is also her lover. The notion of wilderness described here reflects a geographic space that Florens imagines to be saturated with danger. She says, “Who lives in the wilderness between this farm and you and will they help me or harm me?” (5). When she loses her way, Florens stops in a village of Puritan settlers, at the home of Widow Ealing her daughter Jane, who feed Florens and provide her with shelter for the night. The next morning, several puritan visitors, whom Widow Ealing and Daughter Jane are expecting, arrive at their home, accusing Daughter Jane of being a demon because of her ‘wayward eye’. When they see Florens, they are scared and shocked, as it is the first time they have seen an African person. The puritans assume that she has been sent by the devil, suggesting that she is the “Black man’s minion”. The puritans insist upon inspecting her naked body for signs of the demonic. During and after this examination, Florens experiences a transformation from being degraded and humiliated in this way. She says, “Naked under their examination I watch for what is in their eyes. No hate is there or scare or disgust but they are looking at my body across distances without recognition. Swine look at me with more connection when they raise their heads from the trough” (133). The puritans leave, uncertain about whether or not Florens is working for the devil, with a promise to return and take action. After they leave, Daughter Jane boils duck eggs for Florens and leads her back into the woods with instructions on how to find the Blacksmith. Florens thanks Daughter Jane for aiding in this escape, to which Daughter Jane replies, “No, I thank you. They look at you and forger about me” (135). Florens’s experience of being and becoming the racialized object of the white gaze stays with her after she leaves Widow Ealing’s home. As she continues on her journey, Florens says, “I climb the streambed under watching trees and know I am not the same. I am losing something with every step I take. I can feel the drain. Something precious is leaving

me. I am a thing apart” (135). She describes something “small, feathered, and toothy” emerging from inside of herself, and as she continues her journey through the landscape, she is no longer afraid. Florens connects the dehumanization of being racialized with being abandoned by her mother, and eventually, with being rejected by her lover. This encounter with the puritans marks an aspect of Florens’s relationship with the categorization of the genres of the human, what Wynter calls the colonality of being. In the scene that occurs at Widow Ealing’s home, the differences embodied by both Florens and Daughter Jane mark them as deviant, demonic, and outside of normative humanness. Florens’s relationship with the landscape throughout these moments of dehumanization demonstrate the connectedness of the genres of the human and the geographic aspects of racializing assemblages.

Toward the end of the novel, I am particularly interested in thinking about how Florens’s sense of self shifts and how her actions and thoughts unsettle both the genres of the human and the geographic imbrication of slavery and settler colonization. Florens eventually makes her way to the Blacksmith, and finds that he has adopted a small boy. Florens is threatened by this child’s presence, ultimately leading to a violent confrontation and the Blacksmith expelling Florens from his home. Before she leaves, the Blacksmith tells Florens “Your head is empty and your body is wild ... You are nothing but wilderness. No Constraint. No mind” (165). The Blacksmith’s rejection of Florens in order to care for the boy recalls her separation from her mother, which Florens perceives as an act of abandonment, since Florens’s mother gave her away and kept her younger brother. Florens, after being rejected by her lover, returns to Vaark’s homestead. When Florens returns to the farm, she inhabits the empty mansion of the now deceased Jacob Vaark. Others on the farm assume that this presence in the empty mansion is the ghost of Jacob Vaark. Morrison however, hints that perhaps it is actually the ghost of Florens

that haunts the mansion and the land. At this point, Florens is described by others on the farm as “feral”, and she begins to write a story by carving it with a nail into the walls of Sir’s mansion. While inhabiting Sir’s mansion, Florens responds to the Blacksmith’s indictment of her wildness, “You are correct...I am become wilderness but I am also Florens. In full. Unforgiven. Unforgiving. No ruth, my love. None. Hear me? Slave. Free. I Last” (161). While wilderness in the novel initially signifies both a geographic natural landscape that is wrought with unknowable danger and a colonial conception of non-white people, Florens disidentifies with this trope being placed upon her. She eschews what might be considered a kind of respectability politics by refusing to make a plea to be recognized as something other than wild. She affirms that she is a kind of wilderness, as a result of being separated from her mother, racialized and dehumanized by the puritan settlers, and abandoned by her lover. Florens refuses to legitimize the version of humanness that is implicated in racialization and severed kinship ties. Jack Halberstam’s description of the ‘wild beyond’, a space and time born out of refusal of the present order of things, is useful for thinking about Florens’s response to being racialized and abandoned. Halberstam writes, “The path to the wild beyond is paved with refusal. In *The Undercommons* if we begin anywhere, we begin with the right to refuse what has been refused to you” (8). Halberstam argues that to refuse what has been refused or withheld is to call for an entirely other arrangement, it is a rejection of the schema which predetermines and limits possibilities for being. In this way, I read Florens’s refusal to be tamed as a rejection of the gendered racializing assemblages that have been imposed upon her.

When Florens has finished writing her story, she has thoughts of burning down the mansion. She says, directing her words to the Blacksmith:

There is no more room in this room. These words cover the floor...If you never read this, no one will. These careful words, closed up and wide open, will talk to themselves ... Or perhaps no. Perhaps these words need the air that is out in the world. Need to fly up then fall, fall like ash over acres of primrose and mallow. Over a turquoise lake, beyond the eternal hemlocks, through clouds cut by rainbow and flavor the soil of the earth. Lina will help. She finds horror in this house and as much as she needs to be Mistress' need I know she loves fire more (161).

Florens writes herself into being on the literal walls of the master's house. She shifts from the urgent need for the Blacksmith to read her words to thinking about burning down Sir's mansion and letting her writing turn to smoke and cover the earth. The alterability of Man's geographies that McKittrick argues is central to demonic grounds might be found in Florens's desire to burn down Sir's mansion, especially with the understanding of Sir's mansion as a metaphor for empire and the settler colonial project of constructing the United States. "To flavor the soil of the earth" would mean for Florens to embed her story and histories of abjection and severed familial ties into the geographic space and land necessary for colonization. Furthermore, I read her reference to seeking Lina's help in this process as a metaphor for Black and Native relationality and solidarity in refusing belonging in the U.S. settler state. Florens's reference to land and nature in this statement conjures a response to an earlier passage in the text, when Lina is telling Florens a story about a mother eagle who is separated from her eggs, after the mother eagle is injured by a traveler who seeks ownership of the land. The story follows,

One day a traveler climbs a mountain nearby. He stands at its summit admiring all he sees below. The turquoise lake, the eternal hemlocks, the starlings sailing into

clouds cut by rainbow. The traveler laughs at the beauty saying, ‘This is perfect. This is Mine.’ And the word swells, booming like thunder into valleys, over acres of primrose and mallow...Mine Mine Mine...Spotting the traveler, she swoops down to claw away his laugh and his unnatural sound. But the traveler, under attack, raises his stick and strikes her wing with all his strength. Screaming she falls and falls. Over the turquoise lake, beyond the eternal hemlocks, down through the clouds cut by rainbow... (73).

The traveler articulates a relationship with the land that is based on domination, marking him as a settler. This assertion of ownership of the landscape and natural world creates catastrophic consequences for life in the area. Florens’s narrative regarding the story she has inscribed re-articulates a relationship to wilderness that speaks back to the domination of conquest that continually results in ruptures between mothers and their children. In her suggestion of burning down the mansion, she recalls the place of Lina’s story, describing the same landscapes of the “turquoise lake and eternal hemlocks” being layered with the boisterous laugh of the traveler, the mother eagle’s screams, and the ashes of her own story on the walls of the burned down mansion. Recalling the earlier discussion of Sir’s mansion, if the members of the Vaark household embody a microcosm that mirrors the social relations among groups of people in the unfolding U.S. Empire, indeed Sir’s mansion, marked with unfettered excess and unnecessary extravagance, represents that Empire. “To flavor the soil of the earth” suggests that colonial geographic stories, ones predicated on both making and making illegible histories of Black and Native oppression, would be altered by Florens’s narrative and reclamation of herself. Florens’s literacy and poetics create geographic and spatial consequences. What becomes part of the geographic story of the United States is her gendered, sexualized, racialized experiences of

subjection and separation. If Florens is to flavor the soil of the earth with her words, they would necessarily alter and haunt whatever is built or remembered on that soil. Florens's telling holds the capacity to unravel antiblack, misogynoir, settler logics of the human and Man's geographies, thus I read her response to oppression not as an appeal to be included into either the genres of Man or the U.S. settler state, but instead a rejection of both and a recognition of the ways that she has suffered because of them. In *A Mercy*, Toni Morrison reminds the reader what the United States is built on, cautioning the reader from taking for granted its existence and instead calling for the interrogation of the quotidian violences that are foundational to its construction and continue to haunt its landscapes. I explore the temporal dimensions of this continuation of antiblackness in the following chapter on Octavia Butler's *Kindred*.

Chapter 3 | But I Was Still Caught Somehow

“To what end does one conjure the ghost of slavery, if not to incite hopes of transforming the present?” (170).

--Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*

While my reading of *A Mercy* takes up the concept of racial slavery's haunting in a spatial, geographic sense, I look to Octavia Butler's 1979 novel *Kindred* to think about the temporal aspects of haunting: how the historical violence of racial slavery has created wounds that have not healed, and how its fundamental structures remain intact. I read *Kindred* in conversation with the work of Saidiya Hartman, Walter Benjamin, Alexander Weheliye, and Hortense Spillers in order to argue that the novel interrupts the chronopolitical emphasis on Emancipation, and insists on what Hartman describes as the “continuities between slavery and freedom” (*Scenes of Subjection*, 13). While there are certainly distinctions between antebellum slavery and contemporary Black life, the overemphasis on chronopolitical moments such as Emancipation and the civil rights movement as completed projects of Black liberation forecloses

the ways that antiblackness and the afterlife of slavery remain structuring factors in society as it is today. In *Kindred*, the corporeal and affective resonances of Dana's experiences of time travel, enslavement, and violence demonstrate how the logics of antiblack racial slavery continue to shape the present. In *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*, Saidiya Hartman describes the 'afterlife' of slavery as the ways that Black people's' relationship to the United States continues to be structured by the logics of racial slavery and antiblackness, despite its supposed abolition. In this chapter, I offer a discussion of how *Kindred* makes sense of the afterlife of slavery, that is, the way that the structuring violences of slavery are still intact, particularly through a discussion of the processes, the racializing assemblages, which equate Blackness with flesh.

Kindred is narrated by Edana (Dana) Franklin, a young Black woman writer living in Los Angeles in 1976 with her husband, Kevin, who is white. Dana is transported back through time to a plantation in antebellum Maryland in 1812, where she encounters who she finds out to be her ancestors--both enslaved and slave-owning. Each time that Dana is called back in time, she saves the life of Rufus Weyelin, the young son of a white slave owning family and Dana's own great great grandfather. As the frequency and duration of these unexplainable and involuntary trips increase, Dana struggles with living as a Black woman facing the monstrous racialized and gendered realities of enslavement. Dana tries to ensure her own survival in multiple temporal contexts by strategically navigating violence inflicted against her and against her ancestors. Dana's relationship with Rufus shifts throughout the novel, as he grows from being a young, somewhat neglected boy that Dana feels responsible for protecting, to a young white man who exhibits more and more of his father's cruel and racist attitudes toward enslaved Black people. Dana traces her family's genealogy through what has been recorded inside of the bible of her

great, great grandmother, Hagar. Dana learns that Hagar's father is Rufus, and her mother is Alice Greenwood, a young Black woman who strongly resembles Dana. Alice is born free and remains that way until she is eventually assaulted and enslaved by Rufus.

Like *A Mercy*, *Kindred* begins with what the reader learns is actually the end of the narrative. Florens and Dana both begin their stories after a significant rupture has occurred in their lives. For Dana, it is the violent amputation of her left arm during her final journey to the past, which is unexplainably severed from her body and absorbed into the wall of her living room. The prologue of the novel begins with Dana saying, "I lost an arm on my last trip home. My left arm" (9). As Kimberly Juanita Brown observes, this dismemberment of Dana's body is present throughout the text, making the reader familiar with the kind of corporeal loss that will ultimately result from Dana's travels. Brown writes, "*Kindred* is exceptional in that the reader is constantly aware of Dana's impending physical *not wholeness*. Her amputation does not come abruptly at the end of the narrative but instead haunts the text, threading together the repetition of pain that has become Dana Franklin's present life" (101). Many scholars, including Brown, have theorized about the meaning attached to Dana's loss of her left arm and how it connects to the inherited ancestral experiences of bondage. Brown writes that the "phantom limb in *Kindred* is slavery -- throbbing, pounding, and sending sharp jolts of pain through the body, forcing a recognition of the flesh that used to be" (97). In this chapter I explore some of these possibilities around what it means that Dana's body is wounded and literally torn apart as she encounters her enslaved and slave-owning ancestors, to show how *Kindred* offers an understanding of the ongoing nature of the structure of antiblackness and racial slavery.

Dana's returns to the past coincide with two events that signify progress and growth: her own birthday and the United States Bicentennial. Dana's first "trip" occurs on the evening of her

26th birthday, in the year 1976. Her returns to the past disrupt linear notions of time and space as rational and progressive, and this disruption is both personal and political. This moment of supposed progress, the US bicentennial, is interrupted by Dana's trips to antebellum Maryland. The bicentennial was in many ways marked as a celebratory moment glorifying the history of how the United States came to be, thus in Dana's experience of time travel, the U.S.'s existence is challenged by calling attention to the histories of antiblack violence that are often presented as an anomaly within an otherwise progressive trajectory of U.S. history, rather than a foundational violence upon which the U.S. settler state is constructed. Dana acknowledges this violent past and its connection to her contemporary life, explaining in the opening lines of the first chapter, "The trouble began long before June 9, 1976, when I became aware of it, but June 9 is the day I remember" (12). The 'trouble' that Dana refers to is of course is her complex and ancestral entanglement with slavery.

Saidiya Hartman writes that "Slavery had established a measure of man and a ranking of life and worth that has yet to be undone. (6). Hartman cites various indicators of the afterlife of slavery, ranging from disproportionate rates of incarceration and police violence against Black people, to poverty, infant mortality and lack of access to healthcare and education. As Jared Sexton points out, what is critical about Hartman's concept is that the vocabulary of "afterlife" of slavery indicates slavery is still *living*, even after Emancipation and even after the dismantling of Jim Crow segregation. (People of Color-Blindness Lecture). In *Thesis on the Philosophy of History*, Walter Benjamin critiques historicism for its tendency to compartmentalize and periodize moments in the past as if they are not mutually implicated with the present. Benjamin is critical of the way that progress as a concept becomes attached to notions of history and time, arguing that "The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the 'state of emergency' in which we

live is not the exception but the rule” (257). In *Habeas Viscus*, Weheliye discusses Giorgio Agamben’s engagement with Benjamin’s writings, particularly how Agamben’s notion of the way that ‘bare life’ is produced from the state of exception. Weheliye’s intervention calls into question the state of exception as a prerequisite for the emergence of the kinds of political violences that result in bare-life, writing, “...the normal order is differentially and hierarchically structured and does not necessitate a legal state of exception in order to fabricate the mere life of those subjects already marked for violent exclusion; in fact, we might even say that this is its end goal” (86). Weheliye suggests that racializing violence against particular bodies, processes of transforming bodies into flesh, do not need the suspension of law in order to happen, since such violence is always already normative within prevailing structures. Both the enslavement of African people and continued efforts to disappear Indigenous people in the United States are examples of this. It is not uncommon to observe assumptions that slavery and genocide are historical violences of the past that have since ended and do not continue to be embedded in United States law, culture, politics, and economics. These assumptions and arguments are often deployed in response to Black and Native people struggling against and resisting the ways that their communities continue to be targeted with racial and colonial violence. The “normal order” of U.S settler colonialism is not a deviation from Indigenous genocide or antiblackness, even though their constant transmutations are largely illegible. Thus, as I have argued in the previous chapter, it is critical to make clear that structures of racial slavery and genocide are ongoing and permanently embedded into the United States’ existence. Hortense Spillers’s conception of the flesh is particularly important to understanding the continuity of antiblackness.

In *Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book*, Spillers describes the construction of normative white gender categories as they relate to Black female slaves. She

discusses both the formation and unraveling of gender and its rootedness in the racialization of African people in the transatlantic slave trade. Spillers examines the relationship between gender, kinship, and property/ownership, arguing that the “ungendering” of Black people is a means by which to foreclose possibilities for their subjecthood. In her excavation of racialization and gender, Spillers points to the way that kinship and gender have been constructed and defined against Black people, resulting in Black people being unable to conform to normative, hegemonic ideals of gender and sexuality. Since normative ideas of kinship within the settler/master imaginary were also reliant on gender, this ungendering also made illegible kinship relations among Black slaves. Spillers discusses how enslaved Black females were “un-gendered” by being subjected to forms of violence that femininity was defined around being protected from. She writes, “...the African female subject, under these historic conditions, is not only the target of rape- in one sense, an interiorized violation of body and mind - but also the topic of specifically externalized acts of torture and prostration that we imagine as the peculiar province of male brutality and torture inflicted by other males” (68). In the context of *Kindred*, this “un-gendering” is visible in the multiple beatings, whippings, and assaults administered to Dana and Alice when they both attempt to run away (violence which is also inflicted upon enslaved men), in addition to the threat and actuality of sexual violence against enslaved women on the Weyelin plantation.

Like many neo-slave narratives, *Kindred* emphasizes the quotidian nature of sexual violence. Toward the end of *A Mercy*, the reader learns from the perspective of a minha mae how central the threat and reality of sexual violence has been in shaping the circumstances of Florens’s life. This is also the case in *Kindred*, in which there are multiple examples of sexual violence against women who are enslaved on the Weyelin plantation. During Dana’s second

return to save Rufus from a fire he started, she is nearly raped by a patroller who mistakes her for Alice's mother. Later, when Rufus is older, Dana is called back in time to save his life, when he is being beaten by Isaac for raping Alice. This violence continues when Alice becomes enslaved by Rufus and is forced into a non-consensual, sexually violent relationship from which Alice gives birth to two children, including Hagar, Dana's direct matrilineal ancestor. As many Black feminist scholars, including Spillers, have noted, sexual violence against Black women during enslavement was largely illegible as violence, since Black women existed outside of (were defined against) a normative gendered humanness. Dana alludes to this point in the final chapter. After Alice's death, Rufus attempts to sexually assault Dana, and struggles with deciding whether to kill Rufus or to be assaulted by him, thinking, "A slave was a slave. Anything could be done to her" (260). Each of these scenarios and this final scene in particular mark the routinized gendered forms of violence directed at enslaved Black women. However, other instances of violence which would fall under the purview of what Spillers's describes as "peculiar provinces of male brutality" which "un-gender" Black female slaves also occur in the novel (68). In "The Storm", Dana fails to save the life of Tom Weyelin, who has had a heart attack, and as punishment, Rufus orders her to work in the fields cutting corn. Dana is whipped by Evan Fowler, the new overseer, for not working fast enough. Dana learns that in the fields, gender offers no protection from physical violence:

I raised the knife and chopped at the first stalk. It bent over, partially cut. At almost the same moment, Fowler lashed me hard across the back. I screamed, stumbled, and spun around to face him, still holding my knife. Unimpressed, he hit me across the breasts. I fell to my knees and doubled over in a blaze of pain. Tears ran down my face. Even Tom Weyelin

hadn't hit slave women that way--any more than he'd kicked slave men in the groin. Fowler was an animal. I glared up at him in pain and hatred.

“Get up!” he said. I couldn't. I didn't think anything could make me get up just then -- until I saw Fowler raising his whip again. (211).

Drawing on Spillers's work to insist that this “un-gendering” still creates very gendered consequences, Tiffany King writes, “For Black female bodies, gender hails violence, specifically a violence that puts them beyond the limits of the liberal category of the human. Black women and the discourse of gender that they are interpellated by is merely an enactment of property, not a humanizing move” (61). In other words, if the inability of Black people to conform to hegemonic (white) gender norms through their “un-gendering” prevents them from subjecthood, the gendering of Black women is to perform specific acts of violence against them which reinforce their position outside of normative femininity. This is indicated by Dana, when she describes the violence the overseer uses, and is surprised at the extent of his physical brutality toward enslaved women. King and Spillers offer an understanding of the ways that constructions of Blackness and gender collude in order to make impossible the inclusion of Blackness within an understanding of humanness as it is defined by the socio-political order of conquest and slavery, or the possibility of Black subjects to be deemed worthy of protection under the law. Spillers articulates how violence and constructions of gender and kinship against Black people transformed them from bodies to flesh, arguing that the body represents the “liberated subject-position”, while the flesh is what remains in the absence of personhood, kinship, and gender.

Discussing how the markers of violence on the flesh remain present through time and the supposed juridical abolition of slavery, Spillers describes the “hieroglyphics of the flesh”, which

indicate the marks of violence on the body begin to be signified by racial Blackness. Spillers writes,

These undecipherable markings on the captive body render a kind of hieroglyphics of the flesh whose severe disjunctures come to be hidden to the cultural seeing by skin color. We might well ask if this phenomenon of marking and branding actually "transfers" from one generation to another, finding its various symbolic substitutions in an efficacy of meanings that repeat the initiating moments? (67).

Spillers suggests that the hieroglyphics of the flesh can be past down through generations, foreclosing a degree of legibility within the law. Weheliye argues that the hieroglyphics of the flesh epitomize a contemporary racializing assemblage. In his engagement with two cinematic texts focused on slavery, namely *Sankofa* (1993) and *Mandingo* (1975), Weheliye explores how each of these films present the making of Black bodies into flesh through pornotroping, the sexual dimensions of subjection which simultaneously mark the captive body and the captor with their respective relationships to subjection and power. Weheliye writes,

Perhaps, then, rather than exclusively serving as painful and exploitative illustrations of a forgotten past, these scenes of subjection in *Mandingo* and *Sankofa*, bearing witness to the processes of the Black body becoming-flesh, stand as stark reminders of what covertly underpins modern political formations, namely visual instantiations of naked life or the hieroglyphics of the flesh (110).

Weheliye's critique in the context of *Kindred* encourages a reading of the novel that does not assume that since the time of slavery, Black people have gained access to the world of Man or

the transcended the flesh. Dana's body, moving between impossible spatial and temporal modes exemplifies the hieroglyphics of the flesh. Throughout Dana's trips to Antebellum Maryland she experiences and witnesses various degrees of physical and sexual violence, processes which turn Black bodies into flesh, which leave marks on her body and psyche, even after she has returned to her present time in Los Angeles. Each of the six chapters in *Kindred* is named to signify what has threatened Rufus's life and called Dana back to save him. For example, in 'The River', Dana saves Rufus from drowning, and in 'The Fire', she helps him when he has set the curtains in his room on fire. However, in the last chapter of the novel, 'The Rope', Butler complicates this pattern to demonstrate how Dana's survival and actions are entangled with those of Rufus and Alice. Whereas the other chapters clearly indicate what is directly putting Rufus in danger (the river, the fire, the fall, the fight, the storm), in the last chapter, when Dana returns, Rufus's life is not directly being threatened. Instead, Dana returns to find that Alice has killed *herself* using a rope. After Alice kills herself, Rufus tries to rape Dana, while emphasizing the similarities between her and Alice. Dana contemplates whether or not she could accept this violence without fighting back, but ultimately kills Rufus in self-defense, using the knife she carries to stab him. After she stabs Rufus, Dana gets sick and dizzy and begins her return home to present-day Los Angeles. The chain of events after Alice's suicide does lead to Rufus's death, and thus the end of Dana's returns to the past, but since Butler names this chapter for what has killed Alice rather than what is threatening Rufus, she complicates the way that Dana's movements are tied to Rufus's survival. Importantly, this final trip to the Weyelin plantation, during which Dana kills Rufus, takes place on July 4, 1976. While it may be tempting to read this final scene and its chronological significance as Butler offering a kind of closure or resolution to slavery's foundation in U.S. history, Dana's wounded, dismembered body imply otherwise. After Dana

stabs Rufus, he grabs onto her arm as he is dying, and Dana becomes dizzy as she is sent back to her home in Los Angeles. Dana's arm is removed from her body during these events:

Something harder and stronger than Rufus's hand clamped down on my arm, squeezing it, stiffening it, pressing into it -- painlessly, at first-- melting into it, meshing with it as though somehow my arm were being absorbed into something. Something cold and nonliving. Something ... paint, plaster, wood -- a wall. The wall of my living room. I was back at home -- in my own house, in my own time. But I was still caught somehow, joined to the wall as though my arm were growing out of it -- or growing into it (261).

Despite her permanent return to her own place and time, Dana is "still caught somehow" by her complex experiences with slavery and kinship. Before she pulls her arm from the wall, severing it, it is unclear whether Dana's arm is 'growing out of it' or 'growing into it', or whether she is emerging from this history or going back to recover it. By choosing to have Dana's arm violently amputated during this final trip, Butler frustrates normative understandings of the separation of the past and present and of geographically distinct sites. The marks and scars left on Dana's body are largely unexplainable within her contemporary time, that is to say that they cannot be made sense or read as legible within the epistemic frame of U.S. historical amnesia around slavery. Within such a frame, it should not be possible for Dana to be wounded by racial slavery since she was born and lives in the 20th century, and yet she has been. Butler's construction of time in the novel suggests that although Dana does travel to a different time and space, importantly, the time of the past and the time of the present are occurring simultaneously, though not at the same speed, since time is still passing in 1976 Los Angeles, even when Dana is elsewhere. When she

and Kevin return to present-day Maryland to look for traces of the people she knew in the past, she says “If we told anyone else about this, anyone at all, they wouldn’t think we were so sane” (264). Dana knows that attempting to provide the actual explanation for how she came to be missing her left arm would result in her not being believed and possibly being institutionalized. The illegibility of Dana’s experiences, mapped onto her body with the amputation of her arm, indicates not only her own experiences and ancestral connections with slavery, but also reveals the extent to which the normal order of U.S. society, both discursively and geographically, depends upon this violence. In an interview, Butler suggested that her choice to have Dana’s arm amputated was meant to reflect a kind of ancestral wounding that affects Black people as a result of slavery, stating “I couldn’t really let her come all the way back. I couldn’t let her return to what she was, I couldn’t let her come back whole and that, I think, really symbolizes her not coming back whole. Antebellum slavery didn’t leave people quite whole” (498). While this amputation signals the generational trauma that is a consequence of racial slavery, Butler’s decision to have Dana’s arm absorbed into the wall also highlights how Dana’s contemporary surroundings are complicit in this trauma. Dana’s arm has not disappeared, even though these events are spectacular and unexplainable. Her arm becomes part of the wall, part of the infrastructure of something “cold and nonliving”, and the amputation occurs on the specific part of Dana’s arm that was grasped by Rufus, a slave owner. In this way, the amputation of Dana’s arm and its transformation into part of a contemporary geographic infrastructure locates antiblack violence within the connection between past and present.

David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder’s notion of “narrative prosthesis” describes the way that within cultural texts, characters with disabilities often function to maintain various norms. They write, “disability has been used throughout history as a crutch upon which literary

narratives lean for their representational power, disruptive potentiality, and analytical insight” (49). Butler uses disability in order to convey a particular argument about the persistence of racial trauma, though it is not in order to reify norms, but rather to expose their construction. Rosemarie Garland-Thompson traces the way that some Black women novelists, namely Audre Lorde, Toni Morrison, and Ann Petry, engage with disability within the construction of their characters. She suggests that within these texts, disability functions as an affirmation of embodied differences and the politicized histories they signify, and that often characters with disabilities or “extraordinary bodies” “resist assimilation into a narrow category of humanness and challenge all exclusionary physical standards in racial and gender systems” (120). Theri Pickens demonstrates how Butler often writes characters whose embodiments are explicitly informed by being racialized, gendered, and abled. With respect to *Kindred*, she argues that Dana’s disability functions as more than metaphor, but that the amputation of her arm signals the reality of her enslavement and the vulnerability of her body to others’ desires and projections. She writes, “...first, normalcy understands disability as inherent lack and, second, national belonging configures the nation-state as an able, unified whole. To place a disabled person at the crux of understanding the bicentennial unveils these narratives as dismissive fantasy” (171). In this way, Dana’s body is a text that interrupts the celebration of a particular U.S. origin story. In the novel, normalized notions of time, space, and bodies rely on the construction of Dana’s body as other, as lacking. Although Butler describes Dana as not being “whole”, corporeally or psychically, she does not position wholeness as the resolution that Dana must achieve, but instead, exposes wholeness as a trope whose construction relies on refusing to reckon with the violence underpinning United States society. In her intervention, which explores *Kindred* from the vantage point of race, gender, and critical disability studies, Alicia Dawn Sellitti argues that

an analysis of the material consequences of Dana's amputation, rather than solely its metaphorical and theoretical meaning reveals alternative possibilities for Dana to transgress and expose the normative racialized and gendered expectations imposed upon her, suggesting the potentiality for alternate forms of life through the hieroglyphics of the flesh. Sellitti writes, "Amputation does not restore the body to its pre-slave condition; rather, it exposes completeness as the fantasy of the dominant discourse. Instead of 'filling in,' or prostheticizing, historical gaps, Butler's text calls for an acknowledgement of the absence embedded in a Black female history" (33). Sellitti's analysis warrants asking what the flesh, in this case Dana's amputated arm, exposes about the world of Man, a question that can only be produced from a vantage point outside of juridical recognition. Butler does not offer a sense of closure or resolution, for Dana or the reader, but instead suggests that reading Dana's body as disabled requires a normative body that is constructed as whole and able, and in such a norm, the violence of U.S. sovereignty is always present, yet illegible. In this way, Dana's loss of her arm necessarily troubles dominant constructions of time, bodies, and national belonging.

Spillers discusses the way that Black people were supposed to have been granted the body (and its accompanying freedom) after Emancipation, arguing that the flesh actually persists and that this continued logic of equating Blackness with captivity remains intact, but illegible.

She writes,

Even though the captive flesh/body has been "liberated" and no one need pretend that even the quotation marks do not matter, dominant symbolic activity, the ruling episteme that releases the dynamics of naming and valuation, remains grounded in the originating metaphors of captivity and mutilation so that it is as if neither time nor history, nor historiography and its topics, shows movement, as

the human subject is "murdered" over and over again by the passions of a bloodless and anonymous archaism, showing itself in endless disguise. (68)

While the flesh is the result of processes of racialized violence and desubjectivations that characterize Blackness as it is understood within the frame of modernity, Spillers, Weheliye, and other scholars of Black studies posit that the flesh is also a site of radical potentiality for freedom. Rather than seeking to widen the exclusionary realm of Man by making appeals to the law to be included within its reach, Weheliye, drawing on Spillers, suggests instead "claiming the monstrosity of the flesh", since the flesh produces forms of life that do not "equate humanity and personhood with a status bequeathed or revoked by juridical sovereignty" (131). Butler, by refusing to offer a sense of closure, presents Dana as "claiming the monstrosity of the flesh", since Dana's loss of her arm validates that her experiences with her ancestors are real.

Kindred suggests that the afterlife of slavery continues to shape the lives and experiences of contemporary Black subjects in ways that are affective, corporeal, psychic, and even impossible/not explainable within the frameworks of history and modernity. Butler does not divulge how Dana's encounters with the dead are possible. She does not grant the reader a sense of closure or even a cognitive schema from which to make sense of Dana's experiences. At the end of the novel, Dana and Kevin, back in Los Angeles in 1976, travel to present-day Maryland in order to make sense of what they have experienced and to trace the histories of the people they knew. Dana learns that after she killed Rufus, most of the slaves were sold, likely being separated from their families in the process. The novel does not offer a resolution to the afterlife of transatlantic slavery, or even a sense of closure for Dana. Dana returns to the present with her body wounded and with an ancestral consciousness that is largely illegible in the time during which she lives. Rather than offering a resolution, Butler ends the novel with Dana's uncertainty

around what has happened to her kin, and how her actions have determined their fates. Hartman, M. Nourbese Phillips, and other scholars of transatlantic slavery have explored questions around the archive of slavery, its insufficiency, and contemporary Black subjects' relationships to our enslaved ancestors. These questions directly confront and permanently unsettle Dana. Hartman argues that these relationships with the dead should be characterized by responsibility and refusal to seek inclusion into the structures responsible for upholding antiblack violence. In the closing chapter of this thesis, I explore what such a refusal of resolution of inclusion might look like in the context of the hauntings of slavery and settler colonialism, and in particular, how Black women's literacy and literature inform such haunted refusals.

Conclusion: Towards Refusal

"Haunting, by contrast, is the relentless remembering and reminding that will not be appeased by settler society's assurances of innocence and reconciliation" (642)
 –Eve Tuck & C. Ree, *A Glossary of Haunting*

In this thesis, I have presented an argument that there exists a haunting to contemporary U.S. society based on its foundations in transatlantic slavery and settler colonialism. This haunting is rooted in both time and space, that is, it remains present through various historical moments despite chronopolitical apparatuses that insist on slavery's end. This haunting is also geographic, since slavery and settler colonialism are the foundational bones upon which the United States is built, both ideologically and materially speaking. Through readings of Toni Morrison's *A Mercy* and Octavia Butler's *Kindred*, I have demonstrated that Black women's relationship to the landscape of the United States is in many ways shaped by the originating metaphors of conquest and slavery, in which Black women were understood as fungible forms of property that signified spatial units available to the settler/master to attain capital and accumulate the land. In this way, constructions of race and gender in the U.S. emerge from and are

inextricably linked to racial slavery, antiblackness, settler colonialism, and dispossessing Indigenous people of their land. There is a kind of cartography of haunting to be found in Black women's literature that focuses on gender formation in the context of slavery. If cartography can be understood as a colonial project in its attempts to name and demarcate territory and make land inherently knowable, this notion of a cartography of haunting is meant to speak back to colonial cartographies and map out possibilities for their disruption. Eve Tuck and C. Ree suggest that the haunting of the United States that has resulted from its foundations in slavery and settler colonialism cannot be undone. They write, "Haunting lies precisely in its refusal to stop. Alien (to settlers) and generative for (ghosts), this refusal to stop is its own form of resolving. For ghosts, the haunting is the resolving, it is not what needs to be resolved" (642). As long as the United States and the genres of the human continue to exist as such, they will remain haunted.

This thesis on this haunting and its spatial and temporal manifestations, explained through *A Mercy* and *Kindred*, respectively, is meant to insist, particularly in the fields gender and feminist studies that these histories are integral to our understandings of race, gender, and sexuality, and that we must locate these and other identity categories/assemblages in the world that slavery, conquest, and settler colonialism has created. There is no way to adequately or thoroughly theorize gender or gender oppression without taking into account how gender categories have been created, defined, and normalized through the structures of slavery and settler colonialism, against Black and Indigenous people. Thinking about slavery and settler colonialism as histories which are ongoing, are haunting, necessarily means interrogating how these histories exist in relation to the present and contemporary efforts at dismantling systems of oppression and creating spaces of liberation.

In *Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging*, Dionne Brand grapples with the irrecoverable losses and ruptures that have resulted for Black diasporic peoples whose ancestors passed through ‘the door of no return’, the space marking an exit from the coast of West Africa during transatlantic slavery. Brand writes,

Flung out and dispersed in the Diaspora, one has a sense of being touched by or glimpsed from this door. As if walking down the street someone touches you on the shoulder but when you look around there is no one, yet the air is oddly warm with some live presence. That touch is full of ambivalence; it is partly comforting but mostly discomfoting, tortured, burning with angered, unknowable remembrance. More disturbing, it does not confine itself to remembrance; you look around you and present in embraces are equally discomfoting, present glimpses are equally hostile. Art, perhaps music, perhaps poetry, perhaps stories, perhaps aching constant movement -- dance and speed-- are the only comforts.

Being in the diaspora braces itself in virtuosity or despair (26).

Brand articulates the sense of haunting experienced in the personal and collective consciousness of Black people in the diaspora. The ambivalent touch which she describes, “partly comforting but mostly discomfoting” does not confine itself to memory, but rather continues to present itself anew, suggesting that the violence which produced this haunting is not rooted only in the past, but representative of something far more elusive and persistent. Brand does not center a pursuit for belonging to a particular geographic space or nation-state, but instead suggests that one can glimpse moments of comfort or reprieve in creative work, emphasizing again the radical potential of Black women’s poetics and the kind of imaginative, liberatory space that can be carved out when Black women create art. Brand’s suggestion that ephemeral, fleeting moments

of comfort can be found in art, music, poetry, stories, and movement has shaped my decision to explore these issues through literature and to let myself be moved by the chaos of Morrison's and Butler's writing. I am thinking about Brand's point about Black aesthetics not only in the context of the work that Morrison's and Butler's novels do in the world, but also in the way that within each text, writing and literacy are risky and contested spaces for the characters. *A Mercy* and *Kindred* both represent the precarious relationship enslaved Black people had to literacy, and in each novel, under great risk slaves are taught to read. Alice Walker discusses this in her essay "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens", in which she theorizes about the ability of Black women to create art while living under antiblack racism and misogynoir, systems which have been extremely invested in inhibiting the creative expression of Black people, since often art, music, drumming, stories, and dance are woven into struggles for freedom.

In *Kindred*, Dana begins the novel as a writer, and throughout her trips to the past she teaches Rufus, as well as enslaved children to read, an act that results in her being brutally beaten. Her ability to read, write, and teach, informed by her life as a writer, give her additional skills to help navigate her enslavement. After returning to present-day Maryland, Dana is left with few answers and an unresolved relationship with her ancestors. While some scholars have argued that Butler's novel suggests just how much progress has been made since the days of legalized slavery, this thesis' critical reading of Dana's body suggests otherwise. Instead, *Kindred* demonstrates an unresolved relationship with the past. Saidiya Hartman points out, "Dana finds to her surprise that she is not able to rescue her kin or escape the entangled relations of violence and domination, but instead comes to accept that they have made her own existence possible" (*Two Acts*, 14). Hartman suggests that *Kindred* provides a model for thinking about a relationship to the past that does not center resolution or demanding answers from the dead,

advocating instead framing the past in terms of responsibility. If reading Dana's narrative evokes the question of what our accountability or responsibility to the dead is, perhaps the answer, per Florens's narrative, is refusal.

Hartman also articulates a debt to the dead that is rooted in refusal. She eschews the framework of racial justice that centers seeking reparations or recognition of wrongdoing from the state. She rejects this framework with the concern that it may reify the abject position of Black people, in the way that asking for or petitioning those responsible for subjection does not pose a fundamental challenge to the positionality of the oppressor. She writes:

This is the intimacy of our age with theirs—an unfinished struggle. To what end does one conjure the ghost of slavery, if not to incite the hopes of transforming the present? Given this, I refuse to believe that the slave's most capacious political claims or wildest imaginings are for back wages or debt relief. There are too many lives in peril to recycle the forms of appeal that, at best, have delivered the limited emancipation against which we now struggle (170).

Hartman suggests a reimagining and transformation of society. She is less interested in nationhood than in autonomy. This is to say that Hartman's sentiments reflect a rejection of a politics of inclusion into nationhood or nationalist belongings. Her move towards autonomy transcends the limits of the nation-state by reaching for a notion of belonging that is instead centered on collective struggle. In this way, Hartman's desire for autonomy exists as a response to living in the afterlife of slavery and in the legacy of the genealogical rupture of uprooting African people and enslaving them in settler landscapes. Hartman reminds the reader that there exists no return to a life before conquest, colonialism, and slavery, but rather, the responsibility to ancestors who endured such violences is a radical one, which she explores in her writing on

the archive and its inability to produce the closure, or perhaps the resolutions to haunting, that may be desired. Instead, for Hartman, these gaps in the archive are the point of departure for rethinking resolution.

For Florens, it is storytelling and her ability to read and to write that ultimately figure as a means by which she takes possession of herself and disrupts the discursive domination of herself and of the land. The haunting which results from Florens's experiences of subjugation occurs through her "flavoring the soil of the earth". All that is built on top of the ashes will necessarily be flavored by her story, her experiences. Florens uses her ability to write to speak back to the multiple ways that her racialized and gendered body becomes defined through empire. Her writing articulates a new relationship with place and to the land, not a relationship based on property, ownership, or the replication of settler claims to land, but actually to disrupt them, and to imagine something other than the nation-state. Florens's disidentification with the colonial trope of wilderness reveals a mode of Black feminist refusal that abandons belonging within the settler state or within Man, and in doing so imagines Black liberation along side the freedom of land from the clutches of settler colonialism and its inherent ecological violence. In the foreword of *The Undercommons*, Jack Halberstam suggests that we must refuse what has been refused, arguing that "The path to the wild beyond is paved with refusal" (8). This notion of the wild beyond refers to the space that exists beyond the structures that shape the word. When recognition, inclusion, and the ability to attain normative gendered colonial notions of humanness are withheld or denied, this refusal is a move away from appeals for recognition or inclusion into the realm of the human, and instead an insistence on rejecting the antiblack structure of humanity. Refusal is essential, when the state is assumed to be an appropriate and sufficient resolution for seeking reparation from racism.

In the closing chapter of *In the Clearing*, Tiffany King also discusses the politics of refusal, particularly as a Black feminist mode of critique that positions itself alongside Native self-determination and decolonization. While I think of this project as a Black feminist inquiry that centers a critical pursuit of Black women's ontological position as it is produced through processes of racialization and (un)-gendering, the ideas here are not meant to be exhaustive, but rather to move in the direction of theorizing Black feminism in the context of/in conversation with settler colonialism, which is to say, in relation to the discursive and material erasure and genocide of Indigenous people, and to Indigenous theorizing and resistance. Doing so allows for an understanding of the complex, overlapping, and interwoven histories of Black and Native people in the United States, illuminating both shared struggles and contradictions, tensions, and conflict, as well as possibilities for coalition and solidarity in contemporary movements like #BlackLivesMatter, #IdleNoMore, #SayHerName, and the campaign for missing and murdered Indigenous women under the hashtag #MMIW. For King, a politics of refusal holds the possibility to disrupt relationships that are rooted in violence, and to create new ones, with the land and with people, that are constantly in flux and always willing to be transformed. King writes, "The choice to be unsettled, to rest nowhere comfortably is also a choice to be vulnerable and relational" (230). Refusal in this sense insists on an unknown futurity and calls for a constant interrogation of where liberation and belonging are assumed to be found.

A politics of refusal demands abolition, rejects the narrow and limited potential for freedom from violence offered by the very state that produced such violence, and is indeed structured by it, recognizing that any version of liberation granted by the state can always be taken away again, and that inclusion into the state is always already at the expense of someone else's exclusion. Fred Moten and Stefano Harney offer the following take on the issue of

abolition. They write, “What is, so to speak, the object of abolition? Not so much the abolition of prisons but the abolition of a society that could have prisons that could have slavery, that could have the wage, and therefore not abolition as the elimination of anything but abolition as the founding of a new society” (42). Similarly, refusal calls not just for the end of the genres of the human and the coloniality of being, but for the end of the arrangement in which these are possible. The kind of refusal that Florens embodies at the end of *A Mercy* also offers a way to imagine Black feminist refusal that aligns with Native queer and feminist politics of decolonization that challenge the gendered domination of land and bodies that settler colonialism enacts. Healing from and dismantling the antiblack structure of humanity necessarily means refusing notions of time, space, the nation-state, and belonging, as they are defined by racism and colonialism. As Weheliye suggests,

To make claims for inclusion and humanity via the U.S. juridical assemblage removes from view that the law itself has been thoroughly violent in its endorsement of racial slavery, Indigenous genocide, Jim Crow, the prison-industrial complex, domestic and international warfare, and so on, and that it continues to be one of the chief instruments in creating and maintaining the racializing assemblages in the world of Man. (82).

Weheliye’s reminder cautions careful attention to strategies for resisting antiblackness, since the settler state so thoroughly positions itself as the only appropriate and effective way to address racism. The Black Lives Matter movement, created by three Black queer women moves to dismantle the genres of the human by exposing the law’s complicity in antiblackness and the exclusion of Black people from the realm of humanity. Created in response to the impunitive killings of unarmed Black people by police and vigilantes, specifically the acquittal of George

Zimmerman for the death of Trayvon Martin, the foundations of Black Lives Matter are not an appeal to the U.S. settler state or a moral appeal to those who do not believe that Black lives matter. In other words, it is not meant to convince others of Black peoples' humanity, but instead calls for the imagining of a different world, one which is not structured by antiblackness or by defining justice in terms of what the carceral state can offer. While public responses to the deaths of Black cisgender men generally garner far more support than violence against Black women, Black queer and trans people, and Black disabled people, Black Lives Matter creators and organizers have worked to highlight the continuity of antiblack racism and its entanglement with ableism, heteropatriarchy, queerphobia, and xenophobia. Jared Sexton writes, "You understand now that Black lives matter, not in or to the present order of knowledge that determines human being, but only ever against it, outside the limits of the law" (*Unbearable Blackness*, 162). To declare that Black lives matter then, is to refuse the world in which they do not, to call for something else, something beyond the world that has produced antiblackness, slavery, settler colonialism, and structuring forms of violence that create vastly uneven life chances for those living in the world.

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