

**RE-MEMBERING TRAUMA IN THE FLESH  
LITERARY AND PERFORMATIVE REPRESENTATIONS OF RACE AND GENDER  
IN THE AMERICAS**

by

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This dissertation explores transgenerational traumas of slavery, discrimination, social marginalization pertaining to women and youth of color. The analyses approach novels, *testimonio*, poetry and performances (1985-2005) with feminist, postcolonial, trauma studies, performance, and psychoanalytic criticism.

The manuscript follows three avenues. First, I present a comparative analysis of three novels working through the “postmemory” of slavery. Then I analyze various literary genres that cope with wounded bodies and fragmented identities. This second avenue splits into three streets, exploring repressed sexuality, and naming and internal colonization. Finally, I explore urban youths’ performance. This last avenue stops at various intersections to look at different dances and songs that heal urban youths and help them to affirm their own voices.

With a postcolonial approach to trauma studies, Chapter one connects re-membering with storytelling and ghost embodiment. I observe how “neo-abolitionist” novels heal past traumas in *Beloved* by Toni Morrison, *Ponciá Vicencio* by Conceição Evaristo, and *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem* by Maryse Condé. Chapter two discusses how texts work through violated maternity, fragmented identity and repressed sexuality. I compare scenes from the novels with the *testimonios Reyita: The Life of a Cuban Woman in the Twentieth Century* (María de los Reyes Castillo) and *Borderlands/La Frontera* (Gloria Anzaldúa), and with poems from selected Quilombhoje Collective’s “Cadernos Negros” volumes. This concludes the first section on re-

membering trauma in writing. Chapters 4 and 5 discuss re-membering trauma through performance. Turning to documentaries on dance and music, I analyze performance that promotes self-esteem and agency for/by marginalized youths from Los Angeles and Rio de Janeiro. The last two chapters include José Junior's *Da Favela para o mundo: A historia do grupo cultural AfroReggae*, documentaries *RIZE* (David LaChapelle) and *Favela Rising* (Matt Mochary and Jeff Zymbalist), and the music album *Nenhum Motivo Explica a Guerra* (AfroReggae).

Any artwork presents the potential to heal trauma and its painful portrayal may be difficult to confront. The texts here present struggles against discrimination and selective amnesia bound to questions of race, socio-economic marginalization, and gender. They suggest resolutions through narrative re-membering—retrieval and re-integration of traumatic memories and afflictions into memory.

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## PREFACE

My research topic was a personal choice. I wanted to write about healing and research theory that could apply to daily life. For supporting such an uncommon approach, I thank Dr. Herlinghaus, whose mentoring helped me to challenge orthodox methods, and reminded me that there was “more to life than just rainbows,” that healing came after trauma. I had a personal topic, but my corpus was as scattered as my background. Latin Americanists tend to focus on a corpus of literature from their corresponding nation. Studying a field foreign to my family, my ancestors, and myself, race was a strong connecting point that I could, but—and this was hard to realize for me—I refused to discuss. Yet as I read and re-read novels and theory by women of color throughout the Americas, I found their texts spoke more to me than others. I related to their struggle, their spirituality, their connection with Mother Earth, and their optimism. For arriving to this realization, I thank Dr. Jerome Branche, whose mentoring and academic challenges guided me to accept the urgency of Afro-Latin American studies. His careful revisions grounded my argument and helped me earn confidence as a scholar in comparative and transnational race studies.

I connect deeply with many texts, yet rarely do I get to meet the inspiring voices I read. For teaching me to read a library’s lay-out, taking me into their home or reminding me to believe in my work, I thank the following women who continue to inspire my work: Miriam Alves,

Sylvia Rivera Cusicanqui, Mayra Santos Febres, AnaLouise Keating, Rosario Rodrigues. I also extend my profound gratitude to traditional healers, residents of Oaxaca, Bolivia and Brazil who welcomed me into their homes and exchanged intimate secrets. I protect their identities with anonymity; I preserve their friendship and the lessons they have taught me in my heart. E Robson, sem a sua ajuda nunca teria visitado as favelas e conhecido ao Grupo Afro Reggae. ‘brigadão.

Ph.D.’s come from institutions, but it is still the “little people” who have the greatest influences in our daily lives, who help a graduate student make it through and see the process come to an end. Debbie Truhan, Lucy DiStazio and Connie Tomko, thank you for your support and administrative assistance, you all know you’ve been much more than administrative assistants in the chapter of my “yenger” life. The Center for Latin American Studies’ FLAS fellowship, and the Irvis Diversity Fellowship, both from the University of Pittsburgh, enabled me to complete the research to make this project a reality. I am also grateful to have met the Afro Reggae Cultural Group, whose resources and kind hearts, from José Junior to batucada musicians, helped me realize that optimism is real, meaningful, and truly transformative.

In the long periods between meeting with advisors, writing blocks, endless winters of mind matter and snow, family and friends provided me with the support for doctoral studies. I will especially thank *ma famille*: Papa, Maman, Hugo et Nat, merci d’avoir gardé foi en moi et d’avoir partagé les moments difficiles en me calmant. Johnny DiBlasi, thank you for your infinite faith, patience, compassion, for your calm words of wisdom that reminded me that this was possible—all it took was steady work. You always knew I would get through it. You heard of this idea as a distant dream, and chased it with me from the breathtaking Andes to the painstaking revisions. You are my rock, and I look forward to sharing more of this elastic

moment labeled as life—its pleasant surprises, heartbreaking disappointments, insurmountable obstacles and sky-high achievements—with you.

Dearest colleagues and friends held my unsteady hands at first, from drafting scattered ideas for a proposal on a legal pad, and encouraged me to put the finishing touches on the final version. Whoever says writing is a lonely process has yet to meet kindhearted scholars. From the Hillman Library to Crazy Mocha, from Hemingway's to "the Cage," their small and grand gestures do not cease to justify the importance of friendship, collaboration, and solidarity in academia: Aarti, Alessandra, Amira, Becky, Debbie, Emily, Joanna, Jungwon, Kristin, Luziris, Militza, Leah, Vicky, Alex, thank you.

Sisters from another mother, though foreign to my professional world, patiently lent their ears and calmed my woes, cheered me on and kept me in check with reality: "Rey rey," Carrie, "Meche," "Mixie," Jessie, thank you!

There are many more friends, family and colleagues with whom I am grateful to share this accomplishment, to have met, known and relied on through this arduous process. To thank each one individually would take up an entire book—perhaps one that you might enjoy more than this manuscript. I am eternally grateful for their support and kindness.

I learned in my research and in reality that there is, indeed, more to life than just rainbows. Ironically these last years have been filled with mourning, coping, working through. To those whom I may not thank in person, I miss each one of you every day. You saw me embark on this journey, wondered when it would end, and I know that you are proud to see me make it today. Memories of each of you have kept me motivated and mindful of life: Pèpère Paul, Tonton Gilles, Ted DiBlasi, Uncle Chris, GrandPa Reilly and cousin Frank Jr. Although you departed successively as I was writing this manuscript, your spirits helped me through more

than you might have predicted. Thank you for reaching out to me from the other side, I remember you always. May you rest in peace.

*Paix, amour, et merci.*

## **PART I RE-MEMBERING TRAUMA IN WRITING**

## **1.0 RE-MEMBERING TRAUMA IN THE FLESH**

“It is not so much history, but memory. History is something official. Memory is in the mind of the people. It is something that may be very minute, very unimportant, but it can change a whole life. Memory may be something very trivial, very banal. But not to the person who lives that life.”

- Maryse Condé

“If we are to move beyond a stultifying and false unity toward a more accurate, rich inquiry into the worlds of women, and therefore to new ideas about how liberations might come about, we will have to do more than acknowledge or cite differences; we may have to see the intersections of our many differences as central to the quality of our work.”

- Barbara Christian

## **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1.1 Project Overview**

This project proposes a study of contemporary literary texts, documentary film, dance and musical performances produced in late twentieth century Americas. This project addresses traumatic memories as marginalized individuals narrated them, with a focus on women and

youth of color's authorship and representation. This is about lived or embodied memories speaking against official history, because as Condé aptly explains, as “banal” or irrelevant it may be to official history, a memory is not banal to the person who lived it. “It is something that may be very minute, very unimportant, but it can change a whole life.”

It is important to study women of color and marginalized slum communities' conditions, because they provide counterstories to the main brushstrokes of official History. I aim to argue towards the therapeutic aspects of literary and performative narratives, as they heal literally and/or metaphorically fragmented identities and traumas in terms of race and gender, and pave new narrative paths within Latin American and U.S. feminist of color discourses.<sup>1</sup>

This project presents a constellation of Latin American and U.S. Hispanic cultural works. Each text or performance narrates traumas and afflictions that witness women of color and marginalized slum communities' conditions in the Hemispheric Americas. A comparative framework embraces the same challenges faced by differential feminist frameworks. Women's studies in Latin America and the United States run the risk of separating women from different ethnicities, when they could find a home within these very differences.<sup>2</sup> Like Barbara Christian's claim in the epigraph to this introduction, I couch my study within incongruence. I propose to see the differences and similarities between African American women and Afro-Latin American women, between Latinas and Chicanas, Chicanas and African Americans, as points of departure. I fashion a hemispheric framework with interconnections in the Americas in order “to do more

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<sup>1</sup> The concept of a “therapeutic narrative” does not refer to a scientific/medicinal context, nor do I use it in a functional or deterministic manner. It is a heuristic concept, not an analytical interpretative category. This concept does not imply that narratives allow the imaginary to progress, or to advance towards a better state, either. Rather, it stands as an explorative concept that provides an uncommon focus on cultural interpretation, and a problematization of national imaginaries beyond the nation.

<sup>2</sup> Anthologies like Miriam Alves' *Em fim...Nós/ Finally Us* justly brought Afro-Latin American women writers to the forefront. At the same time, Afro-Latin American writers compartmentalized their writing into a sub-group of literature.

than acknowledge or cite differences.” The interconnections are the central quality of my work. As a feminist of color, I shed light on the intersections of women’s differences in the Americas.<sup>3</sup>

The literary narratives, for the most part, are women of color’s textual representations of African American<sup>4</sup> and U.S. Hispanic women. In her book *We Heal From Memory*, Cassie Premo Steele pursues a comparative study of a Hispanic American, an African American and a white American author (Gloria Anzaldúa, Audre Lorde, and Anne Sexton). I align my approach with that of Steele’s to “begin to listen across our differences, so that we might begin to reconstruct these skipped histories, claim them, and heal from them. This comparative approach opens the possibility of witnessing to these different histories, and this, as we will see, is necessary in order to heal from these histories” (6). The literature studied here reveals voices of one woman of Indigenous descent and several women of African descent in texts published in the United States, Mexico, France and Guadeloupe, Cuba and Brazil. The texts portray women of color in earlier contexts such as the slave trade and plantation life in the United States, Brazil, Cuba and Barbados; or episodes of Mexican American history in Texas as it became a U.S. state, and African, Indigenous, and Chicano religious icons. Together, they present the possibility of witnessing to and healing from different histories.

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<sup>3</sup> I side with with Nada Elia who, in *Trances, Voices and Vociferations*, outlines a transnational women of color approach as an unorthodox woven pattern of interconnections:

My project also presents a feminist analysis of counterdiscourse and the politics of gender in African women writers’ response to Euro-phallogocentric discourse. It assumes and constitutes a reconfiguration of current academic, social and even geographic divisions, for only by disrespecting such divisions can one adequately explore the multilayered realities of the lived experience of members of social groups that inhibit the nodes formed by the intersections of race, class, gender, sex and sexual orientation, and political convictions. Rather than focus on the ‘imagined communities’ (in Benedict Anderson’s sense of the nation-state) that many feminists of color do not always relate to, I look at connections between women in various parts of the world who struggle with aspects of racism, sexism and classism, among other exploitative divisive systems. (3)

<sup>4</sup> I use the term “American” to mean hemispheric American, not limited to U.S. American.

For example, Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1986) witnesses the story of a community of women and men of African descent in 1800s Ohio. Morrison resorts to a non-chronological narrative of flashbacks and shapes her novel with different characters' points of view, from slave owners to former slaves. With a similar objective, Conceição Evaristo's Brazilian novel *Ponciá Vicencio* (2007) unites three voices—Ponciá, her mother and her brother—and their memories. The novel includes their memories of a grandfather who killed his wife and son in an act of frustration, desperation and resistance in a late 19<sup>th</sup> century Minas Gerais plantation, and their isolated attempts for urban prosperity in early to mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. Maryse Condé's novel *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*, in contrast, narrates her protagonist's chronological life story in turn of 19<sup>th</sup> century Barbados and Salem. This novel categorically stops at each moment of discrimination, abuse, and love stories of Tituba, a Barbados-born woman of African descent. On the other hand, the Brazilian poems by Celinha, Conceição Evaristo and Esmeralda Ribeiro (1970-1980) portray Afro-Brazilian women's scenarios of affliction and empowerment. The *testimonios* by Cuban María de los Reyes Castillo (*Life of Reyita*, 2000) and U.S. Hispanic Gloria Anzaldúa (*Borderlands/ La Frontera*, 1986) provide insight on the history of Afro-Cuban women's traumas and the Southwest Texas Hispanic American community's traumatic pasts. The *testimonios* also provide a witnessing of each narrator-author's personal traumas of racial discrimination and oppressed sexuality.

The performances I will study bring in yet another set of witnessing of and healing from different histories. The documentary corpus includes *RIZE* (2005) and *Favela Rising* (2005). Each film traces the formation and growth of 1990's African Diaspora performances in the United States and Brazil. David LaChapelle's *RIZE* depicts the rise of Krump and Clown dancers in Hollywood, Los Angeles. Matt Mochary and Jeff Zimbalist's *Favela Rising* portrays the

growth of Afro Reggae, one of many performance cultural groups in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro. The youth's testimonies narrate the documentaries. Their testimonies underline the significance of youth programs based on performance and their active involvement in the artistic movements. Each documentary emphasizes the context of the performances, born in the aftermath of the Rodney King riots, gang violence and drug trafficking in Los Angeles, and gang violence, drug trafficking and massacres in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro. In their contexts, performance serves as a text to witness and heal from their traumatic histories in marginalized urban neighborhoods like Rio de Janeiro's Vigario Geral favela and Los Angeles' Hollywoods.

With a hemispheric framework and corpus, I started this project with one interest: how a dialogue and contrasts between indigenous healing practices and psychoanalytic literary criticism could formulate a model to study Latin American narratives' therapeutic aspects. Ethnographic fieldwork with indigenous healers allowed me to better understand local definitions of healing and to strive for a theoretical discourse of decolonizing knowledge, at the borders of the "lettered city."<sup>5</sup> I intend to define 'healing' using "border thinking," (Mignolo 45) that is, through a methodology that refers to both global theoretical discourse and local reformulations. I plan to fluctuate in the borderlands of theory, following proposals of decolonizing knowledge as presented in Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Walter D. Mignolo's *Local Histories/Global Designs*, and Rivera Cusicanqui's *Pachamamax Tipusíwa*.

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<sup>5</sup> On decolonizing the humanities' field, Rivera Cusicanqui denounces that social science history silences the indigenous groups, and traces how the *movimiento indio* (indigenous movement) has redefined ethnology making. She advocates epistemological changes towards a discipline that works *with* indigenous societies and a political engagement that extends its academic function towards communities' interests (20). She sees the social sciences as a space to note longstanding oppression with room for those who have fought for generations with their own historical strategies (23). Her work thus advocates oral history's importance, the fact that history did not begin with the written text, as well as a commitment to the communities, and inspires me to not limit my theoretical references and corpus of analysis to the written text either.

Once I adopted a position of “border thinking,” I focused on local formulations of healing texts rather than global psychoanalytical discourses. In the Americas’ context, I noticed that healing texts came long before the Americas were even conceived as such. For example, the Aztec *códice* served as a healing tool at the crossroads of the gods and the underworld, within the world of the living (Anzaldúa 91). Perceiving the text at the crossroad of the living and the underworld will be central to my study, for instance in the first chapter on ghostwriting and healing transgenerational traumas of slavery.

While I refined my argument with local rather than global theory, Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera* notably influenced my conceptualization of the text as a healing and transformative tool. Her groundbreaking book connects the “illness” of her environment with the U.S.-Mexico border’s aggressive “thin edge of barbwire,” and weaves a spiritual connection with the Earth that ties together a transformative theoretical framework—the “mestiza consciousness.” Throughout her book, she defines the act of writing as a shamanic act. She compares it to shape-shifting (52); perceives her text as a ritualistic object (89)<sup>6</sup>; and finds communal art as ritualistically functional as a cave painting or a totem pole once it is “communal and speaks of everyday life. [Invoked art] is dedicated to the validation of humans; that is, it makes people hopeful, happy, secure, and it can have negative effects as well, which propel one towards a search for validation” (89). I propose to follow Gloria Anzaldúa’s definition of the text as a shamanic act, and to associate this with writers who also speak from geographical and psychological wounds.

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<sup>6</sup> As “performances and not as inert and ‘dead’ objects ... the work has an identity; it is a ‘who’ or a ‘what’ and contains the presences of persons, that is, incarnations of gods or ancestors or national and cosmic powers.” (Anzaldúa 89)

A ritualistic object, a communal experience, an element that triggers shape shifting and hope, that propels a journey towards validation; these are components that I look for with my literary critic eyes. My marker for “sickness” does not imply a medical or psychoanalytical framework. I refrain from ascribing pathological conditions to illness. My marker for illness stems from the concept of illness as defined by a shaman, who perceives illness as a transformative initiation to access dreamtime, inner space, or an enhanced psychic sensitivity which, in turn, accesses the hidden and highest potentials of human existence (Kalweit 91).

The literary and performance narratives in question deal with scenarios of affliction and traumatic experiences. Through close readings of these texts written by women from different ethnic backgrounds and nationalities, I argue that their narratives re-member images of common experiences and strength. With the term “re-member,” I refer to the texts’ ability to reintegrate traumatic memories into collective cultural memory, to cope with repressed sexuality and other traumas, and to repair identities through narrative. The hyphen in “re-member” also differentiates my term from the term remembering—usually associated with the psyche. “Re-member” places emphasis on the central role of the body in tune with mind and spirit in the act of remembrance and in healing rituals.<sup>7</sup> Breaking down remember into re-member also implies a struggle with written language’s imposing logocentric system. It implies choosing corporal or intuitive discourses to complement the written text, to accept discursive resistance, and to return to pre-text experiences. And unlike national acts of remembrance, re-membering implies a narrative that comes from the bottom up.<sup>8</sup> Finally, with the hyphen that places a distinction between

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<sup>7</sup> The cultural works analyzed in this dissertation present wounded characters. However, the characters do not enact explicit roles as traditional healers, nor are the texts prescribed as therapeutic tools.

<sup>8</sup> Catherine Reinhardt critiques national projects of remembering in *Claims to Memory: Beyond Slavery and Emancipation in the French Caribbean*. She denounces a continued form of amnesia in France’s 1998 “comemoration” of slavery that glossed over three centuries of slavery, honored French individuals over Caribbean

remember and re-member, I also call attention to members that re-form part of a community *and* re-shape their own diasporic identity. I emphasize the voices of those who are marginalized and asking for visibility and true citizenship, asking to become members of a national community again, to be re-membered. Each text is written from their point of view. The texts affirm their agency, and “re-member” their traumas into the community’s body.

It is a common struggle against discrimination and toward agency that binds the works together. Each text is bound to questions of race, socio-economic marginalization, and gender. Each text conveys an active “re-membering.” Each text presents a retrieval and re-integration of traumatic memories and physical afflictions into the characters’ minds and bodies, and into contemporary imaginaries. Rape, infanticide, personal and collective abuse, social injustice, each scenario recalls the insurmountable moments of suffering that affect women of color in the Hemispheric Americas. At the same time, each narrative underlines the value of story telling and corporal expression. Each narrative teaches us to transform suffering into a shared witnessing and a constructive experience.

The literary texts that make up my corpus fit into discourse of resistance. They speak against canonical and patriarchal discourses. They voice their own self-definitions against a master text. What master texts are they struggling against? Which feminist discourse do they fit into, specifically? Feminist literary criticism considers that the first challenge women writers face is their repressed presence within literary history. The gaps within literary history create an “anxiety of influence” (Gilbert & Gubar 25). Women authors look for female predecessors, yet

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initiatives, Enlightenment philosophers rather than Haitian Revolution’s Toussaint Louverture (3-4). She contrasts France’s “commemorations” with Guadeloupe’s passing of the *nèg mawom inconnu*’s flame (the unknown fugitive slave)—passing a flame from town to town over a year from 1997-98—a collective, corporal, embodied act of re-membering (7-9). France established “memory laws” to institutionalize accurate historical registers of the slave trade, among other events.

these precursors have been cast as alienated by madness before the 20<sup>th</sup> century, or defined as inferior writers. So they write about being limited by texts that have entrapped them in perpetual seams of “appropriate” behavior (*ibid* 26). The writers studied in this dissertation illustrate the same textual acts of survival. They inscribe their own identity within discourses that resist the patriarchal hegemony.

The texts I chose for my study share a struggle against patriarchal hegemony, but they speak from diverse geographical locations, and tell very different stories. This project stores an archive of works that narrate disparate historical and personal trauma to present women and youth of color as heterogeneous identities. The geographical disparity demonstrates how regardless of geographical location, narratives re-member trauma into various national imaginaries and discourses that have excluded them. The narratives describe and contribute to distinct *but not incompatible* contexts. They are all literary and performance narratives produced between 1985 and 2005, years that make up the context of Black and Third World Feminism’s hemispheric boom in the United States, Mexico, the Caribbean, and Brazil, among other places. These are also crucial years in terms of the birth and growth of hip hop in the United States, and the birth and growth of global hip-hop.

In some instances, the works surfaced into the public sphere almost synchronously. Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* and Maryse Condé’s *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*, were published two years apart, in 1985 and 1987, in the United States and France.<sup>9</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La frontera: The New Mestiza Consciousness* came out shortly after Toni

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<sup>9</sup> Maryse Condé is a Guadeloupien author, citizen of an French overseas department, and thus first published her book in French, in Paris.

Morrison's *Beloved*, the same year that *Tituba* reached the United States' audience, in 1987.<sup>10</sup> *Reyita: sencillamente, testimonio de una negra cubana nonagenaria*, was originally published in Spanish (1996) and translated into English in 2000. In the early 1990s, the youths of Holly Watts were creating new dances, Clowning and Krump (1992), and a handful of young Rio de Janeiro inhabitants were starting the cultural group for favela youths "Afro Reggae" (1993).<sup>11</sup> The documentaries that projected each movement onto the big screen, *RIZE* (David LaChapelle) and *Favela Rising* (Matt Mochary and Jeff Zimbalist) both premiered in 2005. *Ponciá Vicencio*, by Conceição Evaristo, was published in São Paulo in 2003 and translated into English in 2007. Of the poems and short stories written by female members of the Quilombhoje group, a writers' collective born in 1978, I selected works taken from the collective's yearly publication *Cadernos Negros* (Black Notebooks), published in the last 10 years.

Although each narrative deals with trauma from different eras and geographical contexts, the writers and performers share common objectives, which make up for their disparity and diverse geographical locations. First and foremost, each narrative brings down a heavy curtain of misrepresentation or invisibility, climbs up the steps from a marginalized past, steps out from the backstage of History and onto the center stage of their stories.

Whether performative or literary (novel, essay, *testimonio* or poetry), each narrative uncovers the story of a marginalized individual wrapped in a post-colonial rhetoric. Toni Morrison, Conceição Evaristo and Maryse Condé's novels relate U.S. American, Brazilian and French Caribbean stories that rewrite their respective precursors' slave narratives with neo-abolitionist novels centered on women. María de los Reyes Castillo's testimony, "the only

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<sup>10</sup> In terms of feminism movements, these works come out during feminism's third wave or the boom of Third World Feminism/Feminism of Color, a response to earlier waves of feminism that did not consider women from different ethnicities, cultural backgrounds, and sexual orientation.

<sup>11</sup> The band AfroReggae, the "face" of the cultural group, was baptized in 1995.

testimony of a former Cuban slave woman” includes her interpretation of Cuban history to recall women of African descent’s role in the foundation of the Cuban nation (Duke 16).<sup>12</sup> Krump, Clowning and AfroReggae choreograph another identity for youth of color in HollyWatts and Rio de Janeiro. They echo Jamaican slums’ rebellious reggae music and East Coast and West Coast revolutionary elements of hip hop.<sup>13</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa reminds her readers of U.S. Hispanic people’s history and their deities’ histories. She formulates a new “mestiza” consciousness at the borders of the United States and Mexico, in between sexual identities, floating among different languages. Each text fights against historical amnesia to re-member traumas into contemporary memory.

Another connection between the works’ diverse loci of enunciation is how they re-work identities and body image. Each character, narrator, poetic voice, author or performer, depending on the genre, finds her body to reflect a site of fragmentation, due to traumas or other afflictions. The body image conveys gaps that are necessary to be discovered in order to fashion a woman of

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<sup>12</sup> Her testimonial narrative comes at a time when Cuba has witnessed “the post-1959 national deemphasis of racialized feminism” (Duke 16). Reyita’s daughter Daisy Rubiera Casillo, who wrote her mother’s testimony, currently investigates the impact of Afro-Cuban women’s social movements to counter the national deemphasis of racialized feminism. From the Partido Independiente de Color (Independent Party of Color) in the early 1900s, who greatly benefited from the women’s organizations such as the Comités de Damas Protectoras del Partido Independiente de Color (Protective Women’s Committees of the Independent Colored Party), to 1958, the number of women’s organization grew to 900 by the beginning of the Cuban Revolution. As Dawn Duke explains in *Literary Passion, Ideological Commitment: Toward a Legacy of Afro-Cuban and Afro-Brazilian Women Writers*, the numerous organizations are now under one umbrella, the Federación de Mujeres Cubanas (Federation of Cuban Women), itself closely allied with the Partido Comunista de Cuba (Communist Party of Cuba), which overlooks gender-specific projects and prioritizes the Cuban Revolution’s project—equality in education, health and labor. In turn, projects with ethnic emphasis, Afro-Cuban or feminist discourse remain secluded to literary publications, other events such as artistic gatherings, etc. (Duke 16-17).

<sup>13</sup> The struggle against amnesia reaches new heights with global hip-hop’s politics of solidarity. According to Sujatha Fernandes’ research on global hip hop in *Close to the Edge: In Search of a Global Hip Hop Generation*, the transnational struggle of solidarity against historical amnesia has brought global hip hop into a firm movement especially in September 11, 2011’s aftermath: “Diasporic hip hop has forged a new global politics of solidarity that connects racism against African Americans to anti-Arab profiling in urban areas and links these issues to the occupation in Palestine and the war in Iraq. . . . These kinds of collaboration are rooted in cross-ethnic activist alliances of black activists from hurricane-stricken New Orleans, Palestinian activists demanding a right to return, and people opposed to the militarization of the US-Mexico border and the apartheid wall in Palestine.” (20) In the last chapter on Healing Through Performance, one of the songs’ analyses will parallel a British hip-hop artist with Brazilian musicians, illustrating the transnational solidarity.

color and a youth of color identity. I would not generalize this phenomenon to be recurring for all women and youth of color; it presents itself in the works that I intend to study. The past traumas that each work deals with (infanticide, rape, lynching, racial discrimination in the household, community massacre, riots, domestic abuse) connote a feeling of threat of extinction, characteristic to members of the African Diaspora. Each “text” evokes a re-membering of traumatic memories into their identities.

For example, in Conceição Evaristo’s Brazilian novel *Ponciá Vicencio*,<sup>14</sup> the protagonist’s name portrays how her past fragmented her identity. Early on in the novel, Ponciá recognizes that “in its signature lived the remainder of the master’s power, of a certain Colonel Vicencio,” a name that “left the mark of those who had become the masters of lands and of people.” (19) Evaristo’s novel consistently refers to a void into which Ponciá progressively dives. She disconnects herself from the external world. As the plot progresses, Ponciá Vicencio loses energy, she stops working and eating, she sits for long hours staring out of her window. At the same time, she embodies her grandfather’s spirit and her family members’ “despair,” the pain that they have gone through as slaves. At this point, her mother recognizes how Ponciá’s spiritual inheritance (her embodiment of her grandfather’s and others’ spirit) is actually a gift. She calls her “my daughter-one-and-many.” While she struggles to accept the name Vicencio that labels their past of slavery and oppression, Ponciá embodies the memories of her family’s traumatic past. She re-members in the flesh.

In María de los Reyes Castillo’s *testimonio* entitled *The Life of Reyita*, the fragmentation stems from her mother’s frustration for not “advancing” racially with Reyita, the offspring of her relationship with a Black Cuban. María de los Reyes Castillo, or Reyita, is depicted as being

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<sup>14</sup> The title is the protagonist’s name.

fully aware that her mother rejected her. She copes with the memory of her mother viewing her as “a remembrance of what for her was the misery of being born black.” (243) The remembering trauma in the flesh is twofold for Reyita. She has to re-member the trauma of verbal, physical and racist abuse from her mother, while coping with the fact that to her mother, she embodied a social complex.

In Maryse Condé’s *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*, Tituba explores a different trauma stemming from a mother-daughter relationship. Her face reminds her mother of being sexually abused by a slave ship seaman. Tituba witnesses her slave-owner’s second attempt to abuse her mother, her mother defending herself and attempting to slay him, and her punishment for it, her hanging. The hanging haunts Tituba later in her life. She witnesses a “witch” being hung in Salem, and instantly recalls her mother’s screams upon her death. Tituba, like Reyita, copes with her body triggering a traumatic memory for her mother. At the same time, she works through remembering the traumas of her mother’s death and the traumas of her life in bondage (e.g. infanticide). Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* explores the trauma of infanticide and violated maternity as well, putting female characters’ bodies at the center of the process of therapeutic work. Their contrasting narratives show different re-writings of the slave narrative, while also revealing differences in re-membering a traumatic past in the flesh of female characters. Each novel presents women re-working their identities and body image while they re-member traumatic memories into their identities. Together, they make up a commentary on the present issues of sexuality in different geographical contexts, reinforcing the necessity for this hemispheric study on women of color’s sexuality.

Aside from family trauma, sexual abuse, domestic abuse, infanticide and violated maternity, the Brazilian band AfroReggae tells the story of a traumatic community massacre.

This event happens a year before they write their first song. Policemen killed twenty-three Vigario Geral dwellers without cause. The song re-members the trauma as it puts forth the community's frustration and voices a story distorted and censored by the official discourse of the press. The song's title, "Tô Bolado," (I'm fed up) alludes to the singer/songwriter, Anderson Sá's frustration, as much as the communities. Bringing this moment into a song, an important part of Vigario Geral's history, allows a collective witnessing of the trauma of police violence, of violence in the favela in general, and specifically of 23 innocent community members' deaths. AfroReggae's song takes one step towards restructuring, reformulating, rebuilding a community's agency. AfroReggae will serve as an example of Brazilian contemporary remembering in the flesh that works through collective trauma through performance, through music.

In Southwest Texas, Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* recalls another community's massacre. Both the theory and poetry sections of her book include images of the lynching of Texans of Hispanic descent (*Tejanos* and *Tejanas*) in 19<sup>th</sup> century Texas. This presents a connection between slaves of African descent and mestizos/Chicanos (Saldívar-Hull 75). Anzaldúa narrates this traumatic event in her poem "They Called Them Greasers."<sup>15</sup> The poem is told through the voice of a white Texan. Told from the perpetrator's point of view, the poem narrates two types of unspeakable violence against *Tejanos*—lynching and rape: "She lay under me whimpering. / I plowed into her hard/ kept thrusting and thrusting/ felt him [her husband] watching from the mesquite tree/ heard him keening like a wild animal/ [...] I walked up to where I had tied her man to the tree/ and spat in his face. Lynch him, I told the boys." (135-135) In another poem that rewrites the Llorona legend from an indigenous woman's point of

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<sup>15</sup> The title that pays tribute to historian Arnaldo de León's book on lynching as an institutionalized threat against *Tejanos* in 19<sup>th</sup> century Texas.

view, the trauma of losing her sons to war builds a bridge between indigenous Hispanic women in the United States and indigenous women in South America. Both share the trauma of losing their children, either to wars in the Middle East or guerrilla wars and dictatorship in Chile and Argentina, respectively. Gloria Anzaldúa's work allows this study to include a comparison with women of indigenous and Hispanic heritage in the southern United States. She, too, attempts to re-work her identity and her community's collective memory to re-member personal traumas of homophobia and collective traumas of rape, lynching, and racial discrimination. She writes to reincorporate the traumas into her self-image, and into the body image of religious icons of her culture.

Each trauma reveals a threat that the characters, performers, poets and *testimonio* writers had to face. For Anzaldúa, the urgency lies in working through homophobia and rape in the 1980s, and in connecting 19<sup>th</sup> century lynching with her community's present (late 1980s Texas). In *Ponciá Vicencio*, a grandfather desperate to escape life on a Brazilian plantation, murders his wife and son. His granddaughter is left with his haunting, to cope with this memory, while she is unable to accept her family name, her previous plantation owner's name. Whether it is about dealing with a mother who despised you for being Black in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Cuba like in *Reyita*, or about realizing how infanticide and rape affected you as a mother during antebellum slavery in *Beloved*, or about your uncle who was one of twenty-three innocent victims of a massacre in AfroReggae's "To Bolado" song, each text portrays the human body as a site of trauma *and* recovery.

Each trauma narrative tells the tale of an existence based on the threat of extinction, with the body portrayed as a wounded site. Facing a threat of extinction, the bodies of the characters, the performers or the *testimonio* narrators become a stand-in for absence. They stand in for the

absence of memories, maternal figures, a grandfather or a lost child's interpretation of their infanticide. Facing a threat of extinction, each narrative is both a stand in for absence to fight for survival, as well as the resurgence of a traumatic memory that was erased in order to survive.

A traumatic memory is essentially an absent memory. It doubly functions as having a painful impact on the psyche, while at the same time being erased from the psyche in order for the psyche to cope. Trauma narratives, in this study, attempt to work through and fill these gaps by putting the bodies of the victims at the very center of the coping process. Thus their bodies and their presence also serve as loci of recovery. As each narrative proposes to implement therapeutic steps, its characters work through or a community copes with trauma that, in turn, triggers a more comprehensive process of resolution.

The representations of trauma introduced above present four intersecting themes: repressed sexuality, love, fragmented femininity, and the body as a site of threat of extinction *and* source of empowerment. For example, the victim of *Beloved's* infanticide in the context of United States' Reconstruction and AfroReggae's performances in Rio de Janeiro illustrate bodies as sites of threat of extinction and source of empowerment. Los Angeles' Clowning and Krump dancers and Reyita's *testimonio* promote the powers of love and self-esteem. Anzaldúa and Condé discuss the impact and possibilities of fragmented femininities. The four intersecting themes place bodies at the center in order to negotiate survival from trauma. In *Searching for Safe Spaces: Afro-Caribbean Women Writers in Exile* Chancy emphasizes that putting bodies at the center:

Not only [makes] Black women visible but also [stresses] the reclamation of the Black female body as the site of our ultimate empowerment. For, inasmuch as our bodies have been the source of our commodification in art, the site of physical

and sexual abuse under slavery and neocolonial ‘domestic schemes,’ it stands to reason that it would be through the body that we might retain a palpable sense of our own identities. (Chancy 123)

The concept of a “palpable” identity is especially relevant to my emphasis on remembering *in the flesh*, with bodily wounds, sensual experiences and performative identities. I extend the breadth of my study to women and youth of color, and my analysis of their trauma narratives presents different representations of women and youth of color whose bodies become sites of empowerment—through performance (in Afro Reggae, Clowning, and Krump), through the embodiment of ghosts (in *Beloved* and *Ponciá Vicencio*), through love and self-esteem (in *Reyita*), and through love-making (in *Tituba*).

The objective of my heterogeneous archive follows postcolonial trauma theorists’ suggestion to enact comparative, differential studies. Recent trauma studies debates have explored the purposes of a heterogeneous study. The special issue of *Postcolonial Trauma Novels*, edited by Stef Craps and Gert Buelens, sets the stage for one of the first dialogues on postcolonial trauma theory. Michael Rothberg responds to their enterprise with his contribution to the journal, “Decolonizing Trauma Studies: A Response.” He proposes to develop a method of literary trauma studies that can be both generalizing and specific: “to pursue an approach between homogenizing universalism and nominalist particularism.” (230) Concerned with the limits of an imperialistic universalist approach as well as a spatio-temporal specific study, Rothberg advances the concept of “multidirectional memory.” With the motive to decolonize trauma studies, he claims that ambiguity, hybridity, and complicity must balance out generalizing theoretical models:

As both trauma studies and postcolonial studies find themselves confronted with an ever-more globally connected world, such a two-pronged approach can add to the ethical and political force of our work... we may want to break out of the isolation imposed by psychical, psychic, and epistemological violence. We may need to wander amidst multiple ruins and practice an archeology of the comparative imagination. (Rothberg 233)

How does Michael Rothberg's "two-pronged approach" instruct my own intentions to decolonize trauma studies? As I will explain below, the geographical diversity of my corpus follows an anti-national approach that agrees with a woman of color epistemology,<sup>16</sup> a diasporic approach,<sup>17</sup> and a "two-pronged approach" to decolonize trauma studies.

My central argument relies on geographical diversity. I weave a web of trauma clusters made up of various traumas and re-membering in a variety of narratives.<sup>18</sup> Episodes of rape, infanticide or lynching portrayed by Morrison, Condé, Evaristo and Anzaldúa present slavery's unspeakable violence in different populations in the United States, the French Caribbean and Southwest Texas. One might argue that their portrayals are more traumatic than those witnessed by what Reyita, Krump/ Clowning dancers and Afro Reggae performers. However, these differences strengthen my discussion on fragmented identities. Couching my argument within these differences, I follow Rothberg's premise. I also take part in the shift proposed by Barbara

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<sup>16</sup> In "Ghostwriting Transnational Histories in Michelle Cliff's *Free Enterprise*," Erika L. Johnson praises the plurality of Michelle Cliff's narrative, a genre which I attempt to emulate although not as a novel, but as a theoretical framework.

<sup>17</sup> The presence and impact of slavery goes beyond a specific space and time. Slavery was and still is a transnational system, and as such, it cannot be addressed within national or even regional parameters (Johnson 118). Stuart Hall, in "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," defines the Diaspora experience not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity.

<sup>18</sup> Similar to Catherine Davies' book, *A Place in the Sun*, that although focused on a time and space (contemporary Cuba), aims "to show the plurality of women's voices, without resolving conflicting interpretations or reducing textual analyses to a synthesis. In this I am persuaded by Vattimo's concept of 'fragile thought,' the refusal to reduce cultural complexity to systematic coherence." (7)

Christian “to see the intersections of our many differences as central to the quality of our work” (Christian qtd. in Manasan Greenberg 15). With different layers of traumatic experiences relating to individuals of color, and looking at various ways to work through trauma as prescribed by women and youth of color, I am able to build a “two-pronged” argument on the therapeutic potential of narratives written and performed by individuals of color.

The literary works and documentaries revisit and remember traumatic memories. A constellation of motifs connects each work: a context of violence and discrimination; traumatic memories; transformation; and healing. Each narrative (literary, performance and documentary film) works through a struggle, suffering or trauma that is transgenerational (e.g. slavery), communal (e.g. massacre in Vigario Geral or Rodney King riots) or personal (e.g. internal colonization, racism in the household, sexual abuse).

As narratives of witnessing, each text and performance adds other voices to History in order to make up a heterogeneous history.<sup>19</sup> Each narrative complements their nations’ official discourses. Each text proposes to recover from trauma by re-membering. That is, they reconstruct memories, myths, ideas, narrative limbs torn away from national history and/or literature, and/or from an identity, and re-member them to the community, to the imaginary, to consciousness, to the flesh. Each narrative formulates the ownership of another identity and claims another history, “Herstory” or “Theirstories.”

They speak against the discursive dictatorship of silencing other histories. With subversive voices, each narrative cures a central symptom of traumatic experiences, “amnesia: the inability or unwillingness to recall due to trauma or enforced taboo.” (Bambara qtd. in

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<sup>19</sup> Sujatha Fernandes’ *Close to the Edge: In Search of the Global Hip Hop Generation* supports the claim that “at its core, hip hop has always been about bearing witness.” (22) I will support this claim as well, and illustrate it in my analyses of Afro Reggae’s songs that bear witness to the traumatic event of the Vigario Geral massacre.

Moraga xxiv). I will engage in this process to rebuild another history—“theirstories.” I will engage in a dialogue to formulate a decolonial trauma theory. This project is about putting back together bodies, narratives, histories, communities and spirits, and re-membling their trauma in the flesh.

### **1.1.2 Trauma and Healing: Shaping Concepts**

As I explore the phenomenon of “re-membling trauma,” I observe representational vehicles on a two-way street. Going in one direction, trauma’s destructive effects fragment and crash into memory and identity, and in the other direction, literary and performative components work to recover from the impact.

#### **1.1.2.1 Witnessing Trauma and Embodied Memory as Healing**

Cassie Premo Steele wrote a comparative study entitled *We Heal From Memory* that studies the healing potential of “witnessing” in literature.<sup>20</sup> Her comparative analysis focuses on trauma in three women’s poetry, as well as the visions of healing that each poet presents in her work. Each poet transforms “real experience” into literary narrative. Each poet’s use of image, metaphor, and “re-imagination” turn a “trauma of history into a poetry of witness.” (5) Steele claims that the poetry allows each writer to deal with personal traumas through narrative. Through narrative, the writers also present the reader, their witness, with possibilities for them to heal from similar personal or historical trauma. In Steele’s point of view, this healing transformation allows the poetry to heal. It allows a witnessing of traumatic events that, are both personal and experienced

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<sup>20</sup> On the experience of trauma and the role of witnessing, see also Dori Laub’s book chapter “Bearing Witness of the Vicissitudes of Listening” in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*.

by other women (like sexual abuse or incest), or collective (like having your land taken away, in Gloria Anzaldúa's case, or the abuses pertaining to slavery, in Audre Lorde's case). Steele underlines a specific process: the poetry turns wordless images of the traumatic memory, and feelings of pain, into a shared narrative—a beginning of witnessing (Steele 8).

The Afro-Brazilian anthology entitled *Women righting: Afro-Brazilian Women's Short Fiction/Mulheres escre-vendo*, underlines the importance of witnessing and claiming an identity. This anthology is made up of Quilombhoje writer's texts, writers who make up a central part of this dissertation's second and third chapters. The title of the anthology forms a play on the words "righting," and writing, and writing and witnessing. "Escre-vendo" splits the gerund "escrevendo" to fuse "writing" ("escrever") with the act of seeing ("vendo"). Secondly, the short stories reproduce scenes of trauma—rape, abortion, racial discrimination—to provide a witnessing, a surfacing of experiences repressed in the Brazilian literature that has always "left us [Black Brazilian women] behind the curtains, camouflaging us generally in domestic work." (Ribeiro qtd. in Alves, *Enfim... Nós/Finally... Us* 23). The act of "writing" becomes a political "right," and a way to "right" the wrong or limited representations of Black Brazilian women. Furthermore, it serves as an act of witnessing trauma in order to overcome it.

In order to overcome a trauma, it is indispensable to express and to share feelings and memories related to the traumatic event. It is the first step that breaks the silence. This step promotes the restoration of psycho-physiological competence in persons with traumatic histories. Steele argues that Sexton, Lorde, and Anzaldúa perform this restoration through their writing (9).<sup>21</sup> This dissertation rewrites Cassie Premo Steele's model of analysis to analyze narratives

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<sup>21</sup> The restoration happens in two ways in their writing. The narrative voice either turns dreams and flashbacks into verbal reconstructions, which Steele terms to be "intrapsychic reconstruction." (10) On other occasions, the voice

and performances that mourn losses or deal with trauma in order to recognize the loss of memories and histories of civilizations of African descent and Indigenous descent, and the loss of others (family member, friends, and community members).

I notice one main difference between my proposal and Steele's project. While she looks at autobiographical poetry, and relates the poets' work to their personal lives, her analysis of traumatic events in the poetry focuses on the "gaps in knowledge and experience that provide clues to a traumatic event," and "signs of having survived trauma in each writer's work." (Steele 6) Her study, then, directly connects the poet's life experiences with their poetry, which I will establish in my study. While I intend to establish a connection between personal and collective trauma and healing, the autobiographical approach in Steele's study will not appear in my work. Her methodological focus on narrative intrusions (or repetitions) of the past onto the present, however, will be my focus in Chapter 2. Both Steele and my contributions revolve around the same objective: to bring critical attention to narratives that undo post-traumatic silence, and to engage in dialogue about healing personal and collective trauma.

Throughout each chapter, I will refer to novelistic portrayals of fictional characters and autobiographical *testimonio* such as Gloria Anzaldúa's testimonial essay and *Reyita*, a Cuban *testimonio*. I will also cite examples of personal experiences with the documentaries *Favela Rising* and *RIZE* and the testimonial narrative *Nenhum Motivo Explica a Guerra* (José Junior). Each narrative works through characters' trauma and re-members, that is, reconnects traumatic memories to the characters' consciousness, and in turn allows integrating a traumatic past into contemporary identities. They restore the lost spirits to the collective organism. Similar to what a Bolivian Kallawayá indigenous healer would do in a healing ritual, restoring the frightened spirit

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engages the reader into "intersubjective witnessing." I will look for similar restorations in works beyond that of Toni Morrison's and Gloria Anzaldúa's.

to a patient's body, the narratives reconnect the collective memory or the organism, with lost spirits or taboo, censored traumatic events.

Built around memories of suffering, each narrative presents a transformative remembrance. My term re-membering also highlights the transformative remembrance with the hyphen that steps away from common remembering. *Beloved* revisits the suffering of men and women during slavery and post-slavery in Ohio; *Ponciá Vicencio* revisits the slave's suffering during both slavery and 20<sup>th</sup> century life in the favela; *I, Tituba* follows a woman from the plantations of Barbados to the witch hunt in Salem and back to Barbados' maroon rebellions; the Brazilian Quilombhoje poems explore contemporary traumas of sexual abuse, racial discrimination, and community massacres. Each narrative points to a transformation and proposes strategies to transform the character, the poetic voice or the represented community.

Each narrative of re-membering or transformative remembrance also engages the character, the poetic voice or the performer's body. We find, for instance, Ponciá hiding her hand behind her back, mimicking her grandfather's chopped hand, embodying his spirit, in *Ponciá Vicencio*; in *Beloved*, Sethe goes through the corporeal reaction to an abortion as her baby's ghost (victim of her infanticide) comes back into her home—her body withers away, she loses her appetite, and is depressed; performers embody their trauma and expression. Thus I propose ways of seeing these texts as cultural productions that provide resolution by *engaging* the “supernatural realm” *and* the body.

Therefore, the relationship between bodies and memories is central to my narrative. Once more, I will refer to Steele in this respect. She demonstrates how embodying the traumatic memory, or *wrapping the body around memory*, creates a possibility for the body to heal an unrecognized wound or unknown trauma. In my argument as well, the healing process is not

entirely psychological, far from it. The healing process requires an awareness of body image, an embodiment of traumatic memories or ghosts, and a performance that uses the body as a site of expression. In each narrative, I will observe how corporal experiences and embodied knowledge trigger the recognition of trauma, witnessing and the healing process. This explains the importance of re-membering *in the flesh*.

#### **1.1.2.2 Healing Narratives: An Interdisciplinary Concept**

Several observations brace my concept of the narrative as ‘healing.’ Firstly, the narratives that I engage with in this project work through the traumatic past of marginalized subjects traumatic pasts. Each narrative speaks from the margins of enunciation in the United States, Latin America and the Caribbean, and each reveals a socioeconomic, psychological or historical wound. Some speak from the margins damaged by the inequalities and oppression of neoliberal hemispheric development, such as Gloria Anzaldúa in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands and the performers from the slums of Los Angeles and Rio de Janeiro. Other narratives stem from inequalities and oppression due to racial discrimination and poverty, such as *Reyita* and *Ponciá Vicencio*. Others find themselves marginalized within their community by carrying the burden of a family murder such as Sethe, Denver, and Baby Suggs in *Beloved*, and Ponciá Vicencio, her mother and her brother, in *Ponciá Vicencio*. The characters in each of these narratives are marginalized subjects who carry the burden of the violent past of the colonized. Each text or performance has the potential to heal for the very reason that it presents a significant trauma.

Secondly, the narratives demonstrate a “technique of ecstasy”—they tap into the collective unconscious in order to engage a healing process.<sup>22</sup> In *Shamanism*, Mircea Eliade explains how the shaman’s “techniques of ecstasy” trigger and control processes that integrate unconscious elements into consciousness without suffering personality disintegration (Eliade 4 & 295-96). The shaman fulfills this function traveling in the supernatural realm to find the components to heal his or her patient. A ritualistic return to past trauma also forms a part of traditional healing, like the Andean Kallawaya and Yatiri who take their patient, to the physical place where the ‘*ajayo*’ (the soul) first left the body, and there, perform a ritual.<sup>23</sup> The ritual allows the patient to revisit the lieu of trauma more than just physically, with body and spirit, and in that way, recuperate her lost ‘*ajayo*.’<sup>24</sup> The return to the space of trauma or loss of her ‘*ajayo*,’ along with the ritualistic engagement with the supernatural realm, the Earth, and the ancestors, constructs theoretical metaphors that formulate a healing narrative. The texts described above return to an emotional and physical site of wounds through narrative. They metaphorically restore a lost spirit, or a lost part of the human organism’s soul, and point to a moment, a space, and a dimension where this soul was lost, in order to restore this trauma as a part of the hemispheric imaginary.

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<sup>22</sup> My approach to narratives thus acknowledges their ability to tap into collective consciousness, or the affirmative realm, and to influence affective disturbances. This concept stems from a lecture by Prof. Hermann Herlinghaus (09.15.2009) on psychotropic mechanisms, or mood altering mechanisms, and teletropy, when a mood or emotional change is achieved through a person or across a distance. Also see *Violence Without Guilt*, quoted at length further in this proposal; and *The Transmission of Affect*, where Teresa Brennan defines the complexity of affect beyond but basically as "material, physiological things...that have an energetic dimension" (6).

<sup>23</sup> This gift consists of a “*mesa*,” or a table of offerings, with candy, shiny ornaments, coca leaves, and lama fetus, to recognize the Patchamama we walk upon in everyday life, to make amends with her, and give her offerings in return for her sacrifices. The coca leaf must be used at all times throughout the rituals, and one Kallawaya healer expressed his sadness to me that the rest of world not recognize the plant’s powers, and how impossible it would be for him to heal anyone outside of Bolivia, where the coca leaf would be illegal.

<sup>24</sup> If the patient remains ill after this ritual, a Kallawaya healer visits a “sacred place”, such as a mountaintop behind his home where healing rituals have been practiced for thousands of years. He may also resorts to hydrotherapy, baths of purification in the river downhill from his home, and musicotherapy. The staple of his remedies are the awareness of the Mother Earth’s powers; the importance to engage his patients with Mother Earth or “*La Patchamama*,” and the use of thousands of plant species disseminated throughout the land around his home.

Apart from the traditional healers whom I have met and who have helped me to achieve a better cultural and theoretical understanding of illness and the art of healing, a variety of academic fields study the relationship between healing and narrative. Scholars from health communications,<sup>25</sup> medical anthropology<sup>26</sup> and psychology have proven that storytelling and dialogue both help patients cope with terminal disease and/or personal trauma as they allow patients to work through the pain and adapt to a new lifestyle.

In the field of literary criticism, a handful of critics engage with diverse studies of healing narratives. In *Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair*, Lindemann Nelson introduces the concepts of “narrative repair” and “counterstory” to argue for the reparative function of a literary narrative. The literary critic establishes that a “counterstory” or “counternarrative” repairs “damaged identities” on the imaginary level, with the narratives’ moral engagement in mind: “To say that counterstories are capable of re-identifying people whose identities have been damaged by oppression is to claim that narratives do moral work.” (36) So how does the “counternarrative” propose to repair identities damaged by systems of economy and/or morally oppressive discourses?

While “master narratives” (e.g. the *bildungsroman* genre) instruct social duties, justify actions based on socially enforced or accepted morals, and represent a select group’s moral agency, they also marginalize a (large) part of society. “Counterstories” or “counternarratives”

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<sup>25</sup> Linda Hunt’s health communications study on physically ill patients finds that the role of the narrative lends for a process of re-identification at the time when the patient confronts a terminal illness (Hunt 89). According to Hunt, narrative aids a terminally ill patient to restructure a sense of self and social location, to articulate and mediate disruption, to find the power to resist and restructure ideas of normalcy, and to reconfigure a disrupted identity (89). Her findings supply my argument for the literary and performative narratives’ ability to formulate new possibilities for fragmented and/or traumatized identities.

<sup>26</sup> For medical anthropologist Lynn Harter, “the efficacy of narrative for sense making becomes especially consequential when the continuity of our lives is disrupted by illness, violence, or trauma.” (16) Harter also brings up an important point, with which I agree, that the narrative does not necessarily give way to a complete healing process: “narrative is not an instant cure—it cannot make pain go away and things do not always make sense.” (16) The therapeutic narrative, then, is sometimes just an engaging step, a part of a process, not an endpoint.

question the “master narrative” and its normatization (Lindemann Nelson 66). Lindemann Nelson does not argue that the “counterstories” resolve the process of marginalization. She points to the possibilities that the “counterstory” offers as a “narrative repair.” A counterstory proposes alternatives to established notions of heroism and justice, and uses a variety of moral resources to prevent the exclusion of communities already marginalized by master narratives. It also restores a marginalized community’s integrity.

In a discussion on restoring integrity, I will argue that healing narratives counter “affective marginalization.” This is a new concept developed by Hermann Herlinghaus in *Violence Without Guilt: Ethical Narratives in the Global South*. According to Herlinghaus, “affective marginalities” are those who carry negative affects or a burden for individuals who embody the norm. They are “positioned at the low end of the class spectrum and ethnic scale, or the geopolitical map, or serving as targets of moral stigmatization in several other regards.” (Herlinghaus 14) Socio-economic, structural, territorial marginalization, visible violence and guilt marginalize affective marginalities. Thus this project will embark on a journey to demonstrate how marginality taps into an authentic awareness to articulate healing as a transformation of guilt. Suggesting that performance is also a narrative, both KRUMP dancers and AfroReggae musicians perform a “narrative repair” of “affective marginality” and guilt.

Only a handful of literary critics tackle the issue of healing through narrative in minority literature. On the one hand, Cassie Premo Steele argues that healing in literature implies a healing from memory. I have discussed her text at length in this introduction, but I will iterate here that to heal from memory, for Steele, means to recognize that “splits between communities and individuals are historically produced effects of traumatic violence.” This is why she opts to study trauma, for one, because it points to the original event that split communities. This is also

why she analyzes literature across ethnic differences, on the other hand, to work against the traumatic split. Steele also defines healing as “shak[ing] off the waking sleep of denial, addiction, harmful repetition that consumes our lives” (Steele 7). Consequently, her corpus includes metaphorical “signposts” that reveal a denied past, a repressed history—the traumatic violence that oppresses them—written to awaken from and heal from traumatic violence (Steele 7). Finally, to heal from memory also implies a connection between “our dreams” and “our histories, to see how the images and fears of our most personal visions *are related to and constructed by collective histories.*” (Steele 8, my emphasis) Steele refers to a neurobiological study on memory’s encoding and its relationship to our identity-formation where past experiences, which could be limited to an individual’s personal experiences, impact more than the individual.<sup>27</sup> Steele expands the encoding to “collective histories,” or knowledge handed down from generations, consciously or unconsciously. From there, Steele argues that remembering and reconstructing personal and collective traumatic memories triggers a transformation and healing (Steele 8).

Steele’s framework of remembering-reconstructing-working through, works hand in hand with a recognition of loss, which, in some of the literary works I will refer to, is symbolized by the image of void (Evaristo 39, 59, 61) or absence in the flesh (Morrison 97). The analytical model presented by Steele will be useful to analyze narratives and performances that mourn losses and deal with trauma in order to engage with the possibility of recognition—recognition of the loss of memories and histories of civilizations of African descent and Indigenous descent, and the loss of others (family members, friends, community members).

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<sup>27</sup> “We remember only what we have encoded, and what we encode depends on who we are—our past experiences, knowledge, and needs all have a powerful influence on what we retain.” (Schacter 52)

On the other hand, Gay Wilentz's *Healing Narratives: Women Writers Curing Cultural Dis-Ease* argues that "wellness narratives" address cultural "dis-ease," which in her opinion tend to be novels written by women. Her work does focus on a minority as well. Wilentz demonstrates how certain novels heal cultural or historical illnesses. She specifically analyzes Black women's novels in the U.S. and the Caribbean; writers who investigate the remaining aspects of their African past "to understand both the postslavery and postcolonial disorders that plague their communities." (Wilentz 24) When it comes to curing a cultural dis-ease, Wilentz asks herself why women in particular write about healing, and why the novel is their preferred form of expression. Wilentz finds that the writers whom she studies consciously compose healing narratives and community-based models of healing with the objective to heal their communities and to re-establish women's role as the "custodian of the culture." (Wilentz 3) Yet she forgets to mention that this type of narrative is not specific to the novel genre, while Steele and Fahey work with poetry and autobiographical fiction. I will argue that novel, poetry, autobiographical testimonies and performance can also manifest a healing narrative.

To define literature as a healing art, Wilentz begins by referring to Terry Eagleton's *Introduction to Literary Theory*, where he defines the novel as a consolation, in the sense that the plot is driven to recover a lost object (15). Wilentz's main argument defends that a "healing discourse" heals both the self and the community from socially constructed diseases, on a metaphorical level. She argues that self-esteem and "discredited" healing practices make up a healing discourse that "[repairs] fragmented communities and dis-eased cultures." (Wilentz 3) Thus she focuses on novels with tropes that challenge conventional notions of ethnicity and

health, which resembles my approach.<sup>28</sup> Narratives, although it may not be scientifically proven, trigger cultural repair.

Wilentz proves literature to be a healing device by going into the importance of language in the process of healing (in scientific medicine and traditional healing). I, however, will take her claim one step further beyond literature. Since indigenous, Afro-centered and folk healing involve dance and music in their practice, I will take up dance and musical performance in my study. She discusses cultural perceptions of illness and medicine, the cultural aspects of healing, the role of women in relation to healing, and the healing potential of literature. I will complement this approach with an emphasis on trauma.

Cassie Premo Steele works with poetry, Wilentz works with novels, and Alicia Lynn Fahey chooses the genre of autobiography. Fahey focuses on “Latin American and Latina women authors [who] have expressed in their fictional explorations of autobiography the psychological struggle to heal from past personal and political traumas.” (xii) In the texts that she analyzes, the autobiographical voice reveals a protagonist who enters a struggle and works to repair a wounded identity. This is similar to the plot progression that Wilentz traces, but Fahey makes no references to traditional healing. Her focus remains strictly political and psychoanalytical. She establishes a direct relationship between personal and political realms, and demonstrates how each protagonist’s personal injuries stems from historical events and/or repressive cultural prejudices. Fahey pinpoints how each autobiography proposes a different

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<sup>28</sup> Wilentz’s work provides a compelling bibliography of research on women healers, to eventually compare them to women ‘ethnic’ writers, and makes sure to connect each novel to the cultural base of healing of the writer’s culture. She directly connects the indigenous healing practice to the analysis of the novel, and argues that the ‘wellness narratives’ bridge gaps between illness and health, mind and body, medical practice and cultural healing. Wilentz’s corpus includes ethnic women writers’ novels with healers as protagonists. One common plot progression leads Wilentz to study specific novels: the protagonist’s move from a mental/physical disease to a reconnection with her/his cultural tradition and healing practices, and eventually ending with personal and/or collective wellness (3).

model for social transformation within society (xii). I will make similar connections between literary resolution and social transformation.

Fahey also defines injury as affecting both the body and the mind. Images of physical pain, illness, and sexual frustration are associated with the protagonist's traumatic state in her literary corpus (xv). This leads the author to argue that the physical and psychological recoveries both "revive the body": "Insofar as women's bodies are revealed here as repressed or scarred by acts of repression and violence, the vision in each novel is to revive the body. Recovery is depicted as sexual, spiritual, sensual, and erotic." (xv) To revive the site of scars, oppression and abuse, to recover the flesh at the site of the womb, the woman's body, desire and sexuality are important parts of the healing process.

Fahey defines healing as a "Recovery," and her definition relates trauma studies, like my definition of re-membering. To recover means to break through self-protection that keeps past wounds intact and prevents recalling a painful past. This is similar to Steele's definition of witnessing and recognition. Recovery requires a desire to find self-acceptance, or as Wilentz explains, to reclaim personal wellness through self-esteem. The autobiographical novels trigger a recall, and provide a catharsis, a purging<sup>29</sup> characteristic of the autobiographical genre.

My study contributes to this recent tradition in unconventional ways to look at healing strategies in literature. In my project, each narrative—whether novel, life writing, poetry or performance—presents the audience or the reader with a cultural or personal trauma related to social marginality and a history of oppression. They do not necessarily provide a resolution or collective wellness at the end of the plot, nor do they illustrate a traditional healer as protagonist.

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<sup>29</sup> her literary analyses trace common images of purging (e.g. vomiting).

Each narrative offers a change in the life the character, life writer or performer, a gift to the community, a solution or a shock to revive, work through, and re-member the trauma.

### **1.1.3 Analyses of Trauma and Healing: An Outline**

Each chapter explores a different trauma characteristic of women of color, while the last two chapters discuss trauma characteristic to marginalized urban youth of color. In each chapter, a different narrative component unfolds as a therapeutic function to cope with traumas. The relationship between trauma, narrative and history serves as a central reference in this project.

In terms of the effects of trauma on memory and identity-formation, the central symptom that I will observe is mental dissociation, which stems from the disorder of memory caused by trauma. The psyche remains incapable of remembering, of becoming aware of its traumatic wound. While the psyche cannot recollect the traumatic event, it is constantly “haunted or possessed by intrusive traumatic memories.” (Leys 2) The novels I intend to work with represent this phenomenon on a metaphorical and imaginary level, through narrative.

In *Beloved* by Toni Morrison, the infant ghost, victim of infanticide, haunts the protagonists Sethe, Denver and Paul D. Sethe committed infanticide and after she returned home from her sentence, her baby’s ghost, Beloved, haunted her home—the place of the crime. In my opinion, the ghost returns due to Sethe’s impossibility to reconstruct, work through, and accept its murder. With the title of the novel being the name of that baby, the book also stands as a grave, forcing the reader to revisit its buried soul(s). The ghost personalizes the “haunting” of the traumatic event, at which point I ask: does the ghost trigger healing, how so, or why not? In Maryse Condé’s *Moi, Tituba Sorcière*, the narrator and protagonist Tituba tells her story as a roaming spirit in Barbados. In this novel, one narrator embodies the traumatic haunting, unlike

the ghost in *Beloved*. In Conceição Evaristo's *Ponciá Vicencio*, Ponciá, her brother, and her mother, all work through flashbacks triggered by the presence of GrandPa Vicencio's spirit. Their grandfather murdered his wife and one of his sons (Ponciá's paternal uncle) in an act of rebellious desperation and delirium, on a Minas Gerais plantation. Ponciá embodies his spirit, which pushes each character to work through an inherited traumatic memory. Chapter 2 discusses the three novels' contributions to neo-slave literature and trauma studies, and the function of "ghostwriting" to re-member trauma in the flesh. What do these ghosts teach us about trauma recognition, inherited memory and psychological transference?

The first two chapters analyze two types of trauma narratives. On one hand, Chapter 2 observes haunting voices that scream to bear witness to the traumatic event. In Chapter 3, I focus on corporeal voices and how scars of trauma inscribe the body and affect body image. "Recovering Our Shattered Bodies: Names, Mirrors and Wombs," mainly discusses coping with and working through the inheritance of a displaced signifier in claiming a name, working through internal colonization and (m)otherhood in texts from Cuba, Brazil, and the United States, written by women of color.

I analyze corporeal voices that scream to bear witness and re-member body with mind. How does a scar turn wounded flesh into women *in the flesh*? Can a wound serve as a point of departure to fashion a sense of self, a mind and body of their own? "Recovering Our Shattered Bodies: Names, Mirrors and Wombs," mainly discusses coping with and working through the inheritance of a displaced signifier that has been branded, literally or metaphorically, onto women's bodies. Divided into three sections, this chapter discusses women of color's fragmented bodies and identities, and narratives' proposal to overcome them, discussing physical and psychological scars from colonization and slavery.

Let me note here the term ‘woman of color’ is not bound to racial connotation, but encompasses gender, class, social marginalization and colonization as well. For instance, in women of color’s texts to be analyzed in this chapter, we will meet characters like Amy in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, a white runaway slave, who shares the same traumas as Sethe, a Black runaway slave, and thus encounter discussions of solidarity among women of different racial backgrounds. At the same time, it is not my intention to gloss over the concept of race or to avoid discussing its real and symbolic impact on identity formation and discrimination.

Chapter 3 also deals with what female-bodied means to women oppressed triply for their gender identity, social class, and race or past of colonization and slavery. The last section titled “Raped of Their Motherhood?” examines traumas related to maternity for women of color, and how their condition as different social subjects opens new ways to analyze motherhood. To make a place for this different social subject, a careful approach to infanticide must be included in this section. Jerome Branche’s *Colonialism and Race in Luso-Hispanic Literature* presents groundbreaking research on the impact of colonialism on racial identity in literature and culture in Latin America. More specific to my study, he denotes how traces of physical deformities, infirmity, and suicide, “highlight the emotional and psychological catastrophe of captivity and the cruel conditions of bondage” (111). Unlike suicide (often committed through poisoning or swallowing the tongue) or scars from bondage and unbearable punishments, the act of infanticide was mainly a woman’s action, and an act of violence inflicted by them onto their own offspring. In this aspect, infanticide stands not only as another element outside of the traditional symbolics of female gender, but in its very own category of cruel conditions of bondage. Thus Chapter 3, “Recovering Our Shattered Identities: Names, Mirrors and Wombs” analyzes how

representations of enslaved women in colonial economies shed light on postcolonial shock and recovering from it.

Aside from being a central component of story telling in written form or oral narratives, remembering is also a characteristic of dance. Dance implies “putting back together all the parts and phases of a life to make it whole and holy again” (Dixon Gottschild 265, “Black Dancing Body”). Opening up the discussion beyond the literary text, I will tackle the question of healing through performance narrative, and performance as agency and a narrative repair of damaged identity, as portrayed in the documentaries as well as AfroReggae founding member’s testimony *Da Favela para o mundo: A historia do grupo cultural AfroReggae*.

South Central Los Angeles’ Holly Watts and Rio de Janeiro’s Vigario Geral both represent neighborhoods where the race war has taken a course of a peaceful war of “state racism” as it is defined by Foucault in *Society Must Be Defended* (53). Holly Watts and Vigario Geral witness limited resources for public health, lower life expectancy, reproduction of AIDS, and policemen and women who serve and protect through unjustified and oppressive violence. All act out the state’s biopolitical regulation of the population. Costa Vargas, in his radical book *Never Meant to Survive*, compares Los Angeles and Rio de Janeiro’s slums, as sites where the ‘State control of biological life’ silently advocates “dehumanizing values [that] produce and become reproduced by the systematic and persistent disregard for the lives of Afrodescended individuals” (xix). With a majority of populations of African descent, both South Central Los Angeles and the Rio de Janeiro favelas represent loci where the “anti-black genocide” is enacted through a heteronormative White patriarchal discourse (Costa Vargas 10).

Each community is also stigmatized as a region reigned by drug trafficking and gang violence. Yet within these communities, Krump and Clown dancers and AfroReggae youth re-

member their own identities based on channeling, or embodying their own community's memory.

Although they were left to die, and never meant to survive, the Krump/Clowning dancers and the AfroReggae Cultural Group imagine alternative realities in Los Angeles and Rio de Janeiro, respectively. When the sovereign power acts to protect and immunize the community from a return to conflict, the KRUMP dancers and AfroReggae Cultural Group shift that paradigm and propose performance responses of transformation. They engage the sickness of gang violence and drug trafficking as elements to integrate and divert as performative tools for transformation. Such a transformation performs a ritualistic 'healing' as they resist both state racism and "affective marginalization." Krump and Clown dancers and the AfroReggae musicians break away from the stigmatized "damaged identity" of their community, construct performative "narrative repair," and resist the official discourse of oppression through rituals of performance.

I dedicate the second part of the dissertation, Chapters 4 and 5, to the study of Clowning/Krump and AfroReggae, as strategies of performative healing that recognize African Diaspora's influence onto their work. For instance, in the documentary *RIZE*, The Krump dancers recognize the influence of African dance onto their choreography, and in my analysis of their choreography I establish precise connections between their dance and African dance movements. I also include a debate on performance and agency, and coin a new term—"performance movement."

There are two forms of *re-membering trauma in the flesh* at work in this second part of the dissertation. One deals with witnessing traumas of urban daily violence and denouncing stigmatization through performed or embodied storytelling, and another offers to re-member original African diasporic traumas and knowledge into African American and Afro-Brazilian

identities. The objective is to indicate the function of dancers' bodies in "performance movements" that undo negative stigma and cope with collective trauma within marginalized urban communities.

In closing, the structure of this dissertation follows *Négritude's* main thematic components, from alienation with the ghost trope, revolt with women's corporeal resistance, and rediscovery with performance and blackness as a source of pride. I also follow a global postcolonial objective to provide a positive re-evaluation of concepts and realities that the West has construed as negative. I understand that my project's premise runs the risk of associating women and youth of color with victimization and trauma rather than other components that make up their identity. Not all women of color have traumatic experiences that have shaped them. This is not part of this project's objective. My premise deals with how each narrative of trauma directs attention towards a message of empowerment in the midst of suffering, and turns the contemporary stereotypes of individuals of color that originated in the locus of slavery on their head. Likewise, I understand that American slavery is not the only trauma there is to study in relation to Latin American women and American women of color's experience. Dictatorship, world wars, social marginalization are represented through literature and film as well. This project will not dialogue or make references to these historical and collective traumas, but welcomes future collaborations with those who do, in trauma studies, Latin American studies, and Women's Studies.

**2.0 RE-MEMBERING TRAUMA AND “GHOSTWRITING” IN NEO-  
ABOLITIONIST *BELOVED*, *I TITUBA BLACK WITCH OF SALEM*, AND *PONCIÁ*  
*VICENCIO***

‘It’s gonna hurt, now’ said Amy. ‘Anything dead coming back to life hurts.’

- Toni Morrison, *Beloved*, 35

“Slavery has ended, but something of it continues to live on, in the social geography of where peoples reside, in the authority of collective wisdom and shared benightedness, in the veins of the contradictory formation we call New World modernity, propelling, as it always has, a something to be done. Such endings that are not over are what haunting is about.”

-Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 139

Toni Morrison’s character Amy, a white runaway, is a secondary character in *Beloved* whose words of wisdom guide this first chapter. Amy helps the protagonist, Sethe, give birth to Denver, who may have lost her life in the womb. Denver may not have survived her mother’s journey away from the Sweet Home plantation onto the other side of the Mason-Dixon line in Ohio. “‘It’s gonna hurt, now’ said Amy. ‘Anything dead coming back to life hurts.’” Amy’s words point to the painful qualities of trauma’s ghosts. They are traces of past events that contain too much pain to be remembered, so much so that one may prefer to assume that they are gone

memories. As soon as they “come back to life” to haunt us, pain ensues. Yet this pain, I will argue, contains constructive qualities.

The ghosts in Morrison, Condé and Evaristo’s novels point to a lingering burden, a trauma inherited from past generations that must be called to attention. What is “coming back to life” in the novels studied in this chapter are forgotten individuals, with references to traumatic events, in the form of a haunting, a ghost, a flash. Each novel clearly establishes a connection between contemporary times and slavery, in the United States, the Caribbean and Latin America. Such manifestations call for “something to be done,” as Avery Gordon explains, in terms of resolving the end of slavery that never came to be. We find, on one hand, personal stories like *Sethe*’s connected to historical discourses of slavery across the Americas. These narratives illustrate the dead coming back to life, and the role of pain at the intersection of personal and historical re-membering.

In this chapter, I trace three novels’ re-membering of slavery. My main argument is that by imagining or narrating their enslaved maternal ancestors’ stories, the novels fill a void, or cope with the inherited traumas of slavery. With the endeavor to contribute to the comparative discourse on U.S. American, Caribbean and Latin American writing by women of African descent, I will compare Maryse Condé’s *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*, Conceição Evaristo’s *Ponciá Vicencio*, and Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*.<sup>30</sup> These women speak from a post- slavery

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<sup>30</sup> In her article “Le surnaturel dans *Moi, Tituba sorcière...Noire de Salem* de Maryse Condé et *Beloved* de Toni Morrison,” Carla Peterson, a specialist in African American women’s literature, proposes to shift the African American analytical focus to an experience shared by women in the American hemisphere rather than turning to Europe, since, after all, these women share the historical past of American slavery and adaptation to the New World:

La critique littéraire a tendance à isoler la littérature des Etats-Unis des autres littératures américaines, plaçant ses sources dans la culture européenne et, à partir de là, construisant une tradition littéraire liée uniquement aux grandes traditions classiques de l’Ouest. Mais la souillure historique de l’esclavage suggère aussi la possibilité de tracer une tradition diasporique africaine dans les Amériques, d’envisager une culture créée par les esclaves emmenés de l’Afrique dans leurs efforts pour s’adapter au Nouveau Monde. (92)

vantage point. Their work was published in the 1980's, while their narratives imagine 17<sup>th</sup> century U.S. and Barbados in Condé's case, 19<sup>th</sup> century United States for Morrison, and turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Brazil in Evaristo's novel. Each novel relates stories from right before or shortly after Brazilian and United States legislations to abolish the establishment of slavery as an economic enterprise (1888 and 1865, respectively). The content of the novels thus makes them a part of contemporary slave literature. Contemporary slave literature is a wide field in U.S. American Literature, and an increasingly recognized field in Latin America. All three novels are contemporary slave literature written by women between 1985 and 2010.<sup>31</sup> I chose them mainly because they include a ghost character at the center of their plot that copes with women's traumatic experiences.

While I explore these literary texts, my objective is to re-visit definitions of trauma within three novels that narrate traumatic experiences, or "trauma narratives," focusing on the literary figure of haunting and "ghostwriting"—when the text lends a ghost character a voice. Does each author lend the ghost a voice? What does this accomplish? Does the literary device of storytelling bear witness to a traumatic experience? Is this therapeutic, and to whom? I will also carry out a comparative study of the novels' cultural contribution in their national contexts in order to answer this question: what does their literary inclusion of haunted subjectivities offer to 20<sup>th</sup> century transnational literatures that revisit American slavery's violence, specifically in the United States, Brazil and the French Caribbean?

My literary analyses' theoretical objective serves to contribute to the current body of literary criticism on "neo-slave" narratives, supplementing it with a comparative analysis of Afro-Brazilian, French West Indian, and U.S. African American novels as "neo-abolitionist"

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<sup>31</sup> My focus here in this chapter is not the representation of female characters; I will discuss this topic in depth in Chapter 3.

novels. How does my argument push conceptual boundaries of existing studies on neo-slave literature? And what do I mean by neo-abolitionist? On the other hand, my intentions participate in the recent concern to decolonize trauma studies. It has come to the attention of late twentieth century trauma scholars to shift the discourse on trauma theory that originally focused on WWII Holocaust victims, in order to adapt trauma theory that would serve for other historical events such as the forced migration during slavery. I will participate in this shift with an African Diaspora vantage point.

Efforts of relating trauma theory to literary trauma studies hardly include literary analyses written from African Diaspora vantage points. This is not a theoretical objective, but rather a choice of content of analysis. Women of African descent write the novels I selected to study, and their plots deal with communities of African descent. In my analyses, I will make references to African theorists. Trauma studies only recently began to include literary studies of African and African Diaspora literatures, and have yet to include Afro-Latin American narratives. To counter this trend, my comparative analysis includes an Afro-Brazilian novel.

These novels stand as parts of *historical processes* with antecedents of literature by women of African descent in the United States, Brazil, and the Caribbean. This is why I will first outline the context of each publication along with their antecedents. Next, with the help of trauma theory from Freudian, postcolonial, and Black feminist scholars, I will present a comparative analysis of Morrison, Condé and Evaristo's works. It will examine how the novels present characters that listen to, are visited by, or tell the story from the point of view of a dead person coming back to confront those who are still alive. I will also trace the process of reconstructing trauma with the novels' use of storytelling as a literary device. What does the ancestors' or deceased's storytelling provide to the novel's structure? What do the ghosts and

haunting images reveal about processing the aftermath of violence? Does one form of storytelling provide a better witness of violence? Do the novels conclude with a revelation that their characters heal from their traumatic experiences?

This chapter serves to analyze the three novels as healing narratives that work through a traumatic experience, while the content of the novels will be further analyzed in Chapter 3 where I will further discuss motherhood and sexuality as traumatic experiences that can be worked through, and will compare these novels with other contemporary narratives. These novels then, will come back to “haunt” my text in the following chapters.

In this section, I define the neo-slave or neo-abolitionist novel, and explain how this genre allows approaching trauma studies from an African Diaspora point of view. Similar to 19<sup>th</sup> century slave narrative, “neo-slave literature” vouches for emancipation. It also serves as a starting point to outline components of a therapeutic narrative written by women of color. In *Black Women Writers and the American Neo-Slave Narrative: Femininity Unfettered*, Elizabeth Beaulieu notes that neo-slave narratives demonstrate “that enslaved persons were not wretched but instead deliberate, determined, and dignified.” (Beaulieu xv) The neo-slave narrative shifts the representation of enslaved persons from a victimized to an empowered community. This shift is part of a healing narrative’s goal. As I underline narratives’ healing potential in relation to the postmemory of slavery, I keep in mind that women in bondage are not just victims. As I will point out in my analyses, they are also empowered. The healing process thereby denotes recognizing that there was a victim of trauma, while at the same recognizing that this victim is not helpless, she can emancipate from her condition.

The study of “neo-slave” narrative is a contemporary area of study in U.S. American literature, which underlines its importance in relation to the history of the United States. This

movement defends a movement of agency that goes in hand with the 1960s Civil Rights movement in the United States and abroad. Yet, the slave trade mostly took place in Latin America, so why is it that most African American literature studies deal only with U.S. American literature?

While visiting the Ellis Island museum with my Malagasy cousin, we looked at a map of slave trade migrations, and she was surprised to see that the biggest arrow of African immigration linked Africa to Latin America. “We [in France] aren’t taught these things,” she told me, while I thought, “many slave literature scholars overlooked this too, myself included.”

In his introduction to *Afro Latin America, 1800-2000*, George Reid Andrews claims: “the heart of the New World African Diaspora lies not north of the border, but south.” (vi) The numbers speak for themselves. The population of African descent represents 25% of the population in Latin America and the Caribbean, and only 13.5% of the population in the United States (Andrews vii). The forced migration of slaves originally represented 10 times more Africans in Latin America and the Caribbean than in the United States (5.7 million versus 560,000). While most references on the topic of “neo-slave” literature refer to United States contemporary literature, I propose a comparative study with French Caribbean and Afro-Brazilian literatures.

If the “neo-slave” literary movement defends filling historical gaps and silences, why should its critique silence Afro-Latin American literatures? To emancipate from national literary borders, I will trace definitions of the U.S. “neo-slave” narrative and provide a transnational definition that relates to transatlantic antecedents such as the Negritude movement and Black

Brazilian literature.<sup>32</sup> Rather than tracing the history of each literary antecedent, I will establish connections between the novels of interest here and their antecedents. If “neo-slave” literature defends agency, why would critics keep “slave” in their labels? I will propose to use the term neo-abolitionist instead, and will explain further why, considering the following question: is “neo-abolitionist” narrative, like Negritude, both a literary and ideological movement?<sup>33</sup>

The neo-abolitionist novels reformulate the African diasporic theme of alienation. The feeling of isolation, having to formulate an identity in bondage and in a social culture that promotes different values; this is essentialized in the ghost character’s role in overcoming trauma. The ghost characters personify the alienating persistence of slavery’s memory. This trope revisits Negritude’s poetic voices that expressed nostalgia, suffering, and the memory of transgenerational slavery in famous poems,<sup>34</sup> while underlining the inheritance that is characteristic of trauma.

In her article, “The Stealers of Fire: The French-Speaking Writers of the Caribbean and Their Strategies of Liberation,” Condé presents the antecedents to her narrative: a first generation of French-speaking women writers from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and *Negritude*. Condé opts for a critique other than the popular argument along the lines of “*Negritude* was a movement

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<sup>32</sup> The first movements to vindicate Black Literature in the Americas take shape during the Harlem Renaissance (early 1920s) in the United States with Langston Hughes’ *The Weary Blues* (1926), Alain Leroy Locke’s *The New Negro*, and Claude McKay’s novel *Home to Harlem* (1928), Zora Neale Hurston’s *Jonah’s Gourd Vine*, among other works; and *Negritude* in Paris and the French Caribbean (1930s). In the Spanish speaking Americas, it was Luis Palés Matos who published an article against white art in 1927, in Puerto Rico. The term *Negritude* was coined in 1935. For Senghor, it referred to “the whole of the Black world’s cultural values,” inspired not by Spanish Caribbean voices, but by the Harlem Renaissance’s voices like Marcus Garvey and Langston Hughes (Combe 18). Césaire argued that its birth occurred in Haiti, “where Negritude first stood up and swore by its humanity” (*Cahier d’un Retour au Pays Natal/ Return to my Native Land*). Senghor and Césaire went on to publish their own journal in Paris, *L’Étudiant Noir*, which included contributions by and for all Black students regardless of origin (whether African, Antillean or American). Meanwhile, between 1937 and 1940, Cuban writers published the *Revista de Estudios Afrocaribíanos* which contained several of Nicolás Guillén’s works.

<sup>33</sup> See Abiola Irele, “Negritude—Literature and Ideology.” *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 3,4 (1965) 499-526.

<sup>34</sup> *Cahiers d’un Retour au Pays Natal* by Césaire, 1958, *Afrique Debout* by Dadie, 1950, *Minerai Noir* by Depestre, 1956, *Poèmes* by Senghor, 1965.

of “mimic men,” or a Black World critique with a Western viewpoint. Though *Negritude* superposed signs, symbols and cultural interpretations of the West onto the culture and experience of the African Diaspora, thereby reproducing Western dichotomies, Condé defends that *Negritude*, in fact, claimed otherness: “The Caribbean declares himself ‘the vomit of slave ships’ and ‘the ventry of the Calabars’ (Césaire, 1990) because he in no way intends to remain a copy of the White man” (Condé “Stealers” 156). They proclaimed themselves as the stereotypical “other” to affirm their identity as “other,” as non-white. They appropriated their own identity, first accepting that they were mimicry, a “bad copy” that was a product of the failed colonial project. This was a first step towards intellectual emancipation. At the same time, they fashioned a strong critique of Cartesianism, of Western and Hegelian modes of thinking and bourgeois values (“Stealers of Fire” 155). With this critique of Cartesianism and bourgeois values, African Diaspora intellectuals of the *Negritude* movement looked to heal modern alienation like modern day *griots* (African storytellers) by reconnecting to collective voices and healing. They do not mention trauma, but rather—*amnesia*: “it is the memory which must break through the walls of black isolation, . . . the word of . . . collective memory—the speech of the *griot*—ancestors and spirits” (Dorsinville 65 qtd. in Chancy xiii). Condé’s ghost of Tituba, Morrison’s *Beloved* and Evaristo’s *Grandpa Vicencio* allow me to establish a relationship between African Diaspora writers and modern day griots, between literature and African ways of healing.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> African traditions, religious practices, and knowledge appear in African Brazilian women’s texts as a form of resistance as well as a longing for a knowledge that partly disappeared with the oppression of slavery.

The arts of healing were known to women and passed on to daughters among past generations of Africans. In the Americas, however, much of this knowledge was lost because Africans were prohibited from practicing their religion and customs. Although the poet [Sônia Fátima da Conceição] recalls the past, she associates it with the present. The desire to cure tape worm has particular relevance in Brazilian society, where intestinal diseases rank among the leading causes of children’s death. (Richardson 95)

Bernard Bell was the first literary critic to use the term “neoslave narrative”<sup>36</sup> for texts he deemed with “residually oral, modern narratives of escape from bondage to freedom.” (Bell 289) In *Neo-Slave Narratives: Studies in the Social Logic of a Literary Form*, Ashraf Rushdy hyphenates the term and applies this label to novels that assume both form and convention of the slave narrative, as well as the first-person voice of Black antebellum (pre-Civil War) narrative. In *Black Women Writers and the American Neo-Slave Narrative: Femininity Unfettered*, Elizabeth Beaulieu defines “neo-slave” narratives as “contemporary fictional works which take slavery as their subject matter and usually feature enslaved protagonists.” (xiv) She concludes that the female figures in neo-slave narrative serve as empowering figures for African American women, which were lacking in pre-Civil War History.

Bell, Rushdy and Beaulieu are the main critics of the movement. The “neo-slave” literary movement itself dates back to the 1960s, when Civil Rights and Black Power movements presented a new set of intellectual and social conditions. The sixties’ politically active university students inspired historians to change their focus to a bottom-up historiography, and encouraged chronicling slaves’ testimonies and cultures. These conditions generated a new mode of thinking about slavery in academia, which in turn influenced the literary representation of slavery. In 1967, William Styron published *Confessions of Nat Turner*, which was instantly canonized as the first slave narrative written from the point of view of a person subjected to slave labor. Yet Black

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In Brazilian neo-abolitionist novel *Ponciá Vicencio*, I will note a reclaiming of this knowledge. Characters like Ponciá Vicencio and Nengua Kainda are in tune with African traditions that represent the power of women’s knowledge and their resourceful role in society—a role that was prevalent in their African past.

<sup>36</sup> In the text, I hyphenate the term neo-slave based on which literary critic I am referring—in the title I refer to Rushdy, who hyphenates the term, but when I refer to Bernard Bell, I omit the hyphenation to respect his coinage.

Power intellectuals extensively criticized the narrative's content. In their opinion, it was a biased white intellectual's discriminating point of view (Rushdy 3).<sup>37</sup>

Thus the “neo-slave” narrative begins with authors initiating a dialogue on historiography, representation and agency. The genre principally claims a space that white American intellectuals were not representing accurately. When Black intellectuals still struggled to publish in the 1980s, “neo-slave” literature formed a contemporary fight for space within the cultural field of production.<sup>38</sup> The genre adapted a literary form directly influenced by American slavery, a moment in African Diaspora that witnessed the formation of a newly emergent Black political subject. The movement associated this emergent discursive formation with a confrontation to hegemonic historical discourse on slavery, and established connections between slavery and postmodern Black identity (Rushdy 13; 22). Thus, the term neo-slave preserved this connection between the identity of an African American individual who adapted to an oppressive social and economic system and formed a diasporic identity and the end of twentieth century Black subjectivity.

Conceição Evaristo publishes as part of the Quilombhoje group, a writers' collective that came together in Brazil around the same time as the “neo-slave” literary movement in The United States, in the 1970s. In the introduction to *Afro-Brazilian Mind*,<sup>39</sup> Márcio Barbosa explains that the Quilombhoje group was created when Brazil was going through its third

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<sup>37</sup> See John Henrik Clarke's *William Styron's Nat Turner: Ten Black Writers Respond*, published in 1968 by Beacon Press in Boston.

<sup>38</sup> On the cultural field of production and symbolic capital, see Bourdieu's *Les règles de l'art*. “In no anthology did African American writing represent more than 5.9 percent of the total. [...] When Toni Morrison appeared on the cover of Newsweek in 1981, ‘two of her books were out of print and unavailable for classroom use’” (Rushdy 10).

<sup>39</sup> This anthology includes articles in Brazilian, and articles in English, but does not provide a translation for the articles. The result is a compilation of two schools of thought, the Luso-Brazilian Studies on one hand, and Anglo Brazilian Studies on the other hand.

military government, led by General Emilio Garrastazu Médici, in the early 1970s (5).<sup>40</sup> In *The Afro-Brazilian Mind*, Cheryl Sterling defines Quilombhoje as an oppositional consciousness movement that fights for “the decolonization of mind, in the quest of legitimacy and inclusion” (5).<sup>41</sup> Like the “neo-slave” writers’ movement in synchronization with the Civil Rights movement in the United States, Quilombhoje advocated agency and accurate representation while reworking previous slave literature and Black activist movements.<sup>42</sup>

Dawn Duke’s *Literary Passion, Ideological Commitment: Toward a Legacy of Afro-Cuban and Afro-Brazilian Women Writers* explains the original influences of the Quilombhoje women writers: “Women of today place the modern roots of their advancement and improved social status in the postslavery era, as former slaves began to enhance their quality of life through education and publications.” (15) In Brazil, some influential group initiatives included the first Association of Brazilian Female Domestic Workers (Santos, São Paulo, 1936), and the Brazilian Women’s Congress (Rio de Janeiro, 1975). Currently, there are major non-profit organizations led by women located in São Paulo, Salvador, Bahia, and Rio de Janeiro such as Casa de Cultura da Mulher Negra (Black Women’s Cultural Center), Criola Organização de Mulheres Negras

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<sup>40</sup> The context in Brazil is that of the third military government led by General Emilio Garrastazu Médici, transitioning to the General Ernesto Geisel administration’s *distensão*, or gradual decrease of authoritarian rule.

<sup>41</sup> The GCAR movement (Grupo Cultural AfroReggae) that I will closely analyze in Chapters 4 and 5 offers an oppositional consciousness movement in 1990s Brazil through performance.

<sup>42</sup> Stefani Edvirgem da Silva’s article “The Written Escape of Conceição Evaristo: Afro-Brazilian Literature as a Strategy of Survival and Emancipation for the Negro” outlines the representation of Black Brazilians in Brazilian literature. She argues that although the precursors, whom I would label the writers of slave or abolitionist literature, although they followed homogeneous models to be accepted, the following writers and works made the first (re)constructions of black identity in Brazil: Cruz e Sousa, Bernardo de Guimarães’ *Escrava Isaura*, Lima Barreto’s denouncing social discrimination in *Recordações de Escrivão Isaías Caminha*, and Machado de Assis’ post abolition chronicles, short stories and novels, *Os Escravos* by Castro Alves and Jorge Amado’s novels and short stories. These writers influenced new tendencies of late 20th century literature to fashion a black identity apart from Brazilian social patterns of miscegenation, and outside of the context of slavery or former slave status. In that sense, Conceição Evaristo’s *Ponciá Vicêncio* and *Becos da Memória* form part of what I will term neo-abolitionist literature in Brazil. Da Silva presents this last wave of Black Literature in Brazil as one that moved away from whitening tendencies, towards a true emancipation from whitening and miscegenation, with strategies for the cultural survival of Afro-Brazilian literature and the creation of a new identity (345).

(Criola, the Black Women's Organization) and Geledés-Instituto da Mulher Negra (Black Women's Institute), which are all known internationally (Duke 15).

In the literary landscape, 20<sup>th</sup> century Brazil witnessed the establishment of Afro-Brazilian writing in the genre of poetry, and contemporary writings by women who gained visibility starting in the 1920s and 1930s (Duke 118).<sup>43</sup> In terms of direct influence onto the Quilombhoje Writers Collective, Maria de Jesus' diaries are often first mentioned. De Jesus' diary is published in 1960 as *Child of the Dark/ Quarto de Despejo: diário de uma favelada* (Feracho 123). After a journalist overheard her saying she would insult her neighbors in her diary, he inquired about her diary and proposed to publish it.<sup>44</sup> Her published journal thus marked the beginning of neo-abolitionist literature in Brazil, because her narrative reclaimed a nation for all Brazilians. Though she was not political in her text, *Bitita's Diary* was originally titled *Brazil for the Brazilians*. This book revealed political arguments on the Brazilian racialized/whitened nation's formative years (1920-30s), when Gilberto Freyre largely influenced Brazil to embrace the foundational myth of *mestiçagem*, or race mixing, as characteristic to Brazil. If we regard de Jesus as neo-abolitionist, her work distinguishes itself from purely aesthetic concerns like avant-garde modernist texts (Mário de Andrade, Carlos Drummond de Andrade, and Patrícia Glavão). She focuses on Afro-Brazilians' discrimination and silencing, not on *mestiçagem* (embracing all races melted into one) or the avant-garde use of African art as inspiration for aesthetic tropes (Ferach 125). Though Carolina Maria de Jesus

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<sup>43</sup> This was mostly in newspapers, with for instance Edna de Mello Silva in *Menelick* (1915). According to Duke, this text established "the standard for the comportment and ideology of the black urban dweller." (118) See Duke's chapter "Makin Her Presence Felt: The Poetics of Poets" for a list of Brazilian antecedents to the Quilombhoje Collective women writers.

<sup>44</sup> His action, the intellectual from outside who comes in to publish a marginalized individual's autobiography, reminds me of the process that brought Manzano's *Autobiography of a Slave* to be published in Cuba, thanks to Domingo del Monte, an intellectual who similarly decided to publish, in his case, a slave's text. For more on Manzano's publishing context see Jerome Branche's *Colonialism and Race in Luso-Hispanic Literature*.

was politically conservative, in the sense that she was mainly concerned with publishing to feed her children, and concerned with hunger rather than racism, her writings fit into my argument that she was a precursor to late 20<sup>th</sup> century Afro-Brazilian literature.

The same focus on discrimination and silencing drove a group of Afro-Brazilians to form their own literary collective, from whence came the Quilombhoje group's *Cadernos Negros* (Black Notebooks):

Sem *lobby* de qualquer tipo, sem recursos financeiros próprios e logicamente sem a oportunidade de se ver acobertada por uma editora, a produção coletiva mostrou-se como uma possível solução. Foi nos *Cadernos Negros* que se abriu a oportunidade singular de um espaço para dar voz a um punhado de escritores que, sem acesso a editoras, sem meios próprios para uma edição do autor, ... ali encontraram a possibilidade de se fazerem divulgados. [Without any type of lobbying, without financial resources and, logically, without the opportunity to have an editor's support, the only plausible solution was to start a collective publication. With *Black Notebooks* came a space and a unique opportunity to lend a voice to a handful of writers who, without any access to publishing houses, without the resources for self-publishing, ... who were able to divulge their work.] (Augel 25)

This quote denotes the motives behind creating the Quilombhoje collective and their publication *Cadernos Negros*. Responding to the monopoly of publishing houses and editors'

disregard, and responding to discrimination and silencing in the literary world, the group came together to form a representation and symbolic space of their own.<sup>45</sup>

Quilombhoje and Carolina María de Jesus' criticism on discrimination is still valid. On the abolition of slavery's hundredth anniversary, Durham describes Brazilian writers' reaction: "Although the anniversary of the abolition may have been considered a cause for celebration, *some of these writers described it, instead, as a cause for national shame.* They used the occasion to take issue with claims of Black progress and to reassess and reconstruct the image of Black women in Brazilian literature" (Durham 90). This quote is taken from her introduction to a short anthology of thirty Black women writers, which did not include Carolina María de Jesus, but did include several Quilombhoje members. It is precisely because such Brazilian individuals argued that abolition never took place that I will choose a term to represent this sentiment and fact. I will label this literature not neo-slave, but a new wave of abolitionist texts, a neo-abolitionist literature, and will explain my decision further in this chapter.

Like Aimé Césaire in Martinique, Guadeloupian Maryse Condé had to repress her Creoleness or *créolité* as she learned French: "It is important for the reader who is unfamiliar with Creole society to realize that, though French language and ways may come to be second nature to educated Blacks, they are not first nature. They have been acquired at the cost of repressing their Creoleness, and these repressed affective relations are likely to return in unexpected and disguised forms" (Arnold 5). This can be seen in her choice of discourse. The novel *Tituba* presents a formal French tone, "*français soutenu,*" which represses the Caribbean

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<sup>45</sup> The choice of wording for their publication title also clearly set up a bridge between *Negritude's* first publications that were also "notebooks," or journals and collaborative publications, and Césaire's famous *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* as well (cahier literally translates as *caderno* in Portuguese and notebook in English). This is not a nostalgic return to the native Homeland however; it is a claim for blackness to be recognized in Brazilian literature. It is a defiance to the literary canon with collections of notes, *cadernos*, meant as "scribbled writings" as well that, in a way, cannibalize the format of literature.

oral tradition and slaves' discourse. Aimé Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, a founding work of African diaspora literature, portrays an Orpheic journey to find his Euridice by communicating with nature and animals, an itinerary coined as characteristic of "Negritude" (Combe 102). Echoing this césairian itinerary, Condé's character Tituba grows up developing an ability to read nature's signs (cats, clouds, water). However, rather than outlining the movement's characteristics, main figures and historical development, I will focus on connections between *Négritude* and Maryse Condé's novel *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*, and especially on how her novel pushes boundaries set by *Négritude* to formulate an empowering feminine character and a healing narrative.

The "neo-slave" literature genre already presented some empowering and healing narrative strategies. A post-1960 literary phenomenon for the United States region, the "neo-slave" literary genre's characteristics included tropes of memory, story telling, and multiple points of view. These characteristics were also components of African American culture (Christian 333). At the same time, "neo-slave" writers experimented with, and then broke away from slave narrative's conventions. For instance, they reformulated the "I was born" phrase that usually introduced slave narratives and enounced identity, the adventure motifs, the lack of well-rounded female characters, and the single point of view narrative. In my analyses below, I will point out which reformulations of *Négritude*, U.S. "neo-slave" and Brazilian slave narrative that the novels adapt to form neo-abolitionist texts.

The first component of neo-abolitionist literature that rewrites slave narrative consists of shifting from a men's perspective to a women's perspective. Phyllis Wheatley's *Poems on Various Subjects* (1773) is the first African text written in the Americas, and Maria Firmina dos

Reis' *Ursula* (1859) is the first novel in Brazil written by a Black woman.<sup>46</sup> Yet the majority of originary slave autobiographies, and those mostly studied in class, focus on male slaves' lives (e.g. *Equiano's Travels* by Olaudah Equiano, 1788, and Juan Francisco Manzano's *Early Life of the Negro Poet*, 1840). The study of slave literature also overlooks women writers: "[It is] one of the most skewed [fields] in Afro-American literary criticism . . . . By focusing almost exclusively on the narratives of male slaves, critics have left out half the picture" (Braxton 380). What is left out of the picture and how can neo-abolitionist novels fill in the blanks? For one, women experience and express coming-of-age differently. This is an issue that *Beloved*, *Ponciá Vicencio*, and *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*, take up in their narratives that shift the focus to empower women. Following are some examples of how their narratives rewrite women's coming-of-age in contrast with literacy, a coming-of-age characteristic of men's slave narratives.

In her article on Harriet Jacobs, Braxton places the early female slave narrative in the United States next to Frederick Douglass as two central antecedents to "neo-slave" narrative. She argues: "the violated woman should be recognized as the archetypal counterpart to the male hero." (Braxton qtd. in Beaulieu 9) In other words, if we are to recognize the violated woman as the counterpart to the male hero, we also have to recognize another form of literacy as coming-of-age to the male hero for the violated woman's coming-of-age.<sup>47</sup> In Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, the "ink" and the act of writing do not produce liberation for Sethe, one of the main characters. In fact, they are synonymous with submission and sexual abuse. *Beloved* narrates the story of

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<sup>46</sup> She was a privileged "free black woman within nineteenth-century colonial slave society who stands out because she was very well-educated and a vigorous opponent of slavery." (Duke 20) Though privileged, her text remains at the margins of the canon, evidencing "that there is another set of cultural variables at work that make difficult [her] unbiased participation in the world of writing" in Latin America (Duke 58).

<sup>47</sup> Although I disagree with the violated woman/male hero dichotomy, I agree with Braxton and Beaulieu to advocate for a woman's place in slave and "neo-slave" literary studies, because they had been ignored. I am also aware that as both men and women in bondage were becoming literate, both were violated, both negotiated ways to find freedom or to build hope towards freedom in their daily lives in bondage, and both negotiated ways to form their own identity.

Sethe, a woman who runs away from Sweet Home, a plantation whose original owner has died. Sethe grew up, married, had one child--Beloved—and was pregnant with another—Denver—in Sweet Home, just before she escapes. The new owner of Sweet Home was nicknamed “School Teacher” after his previous profession. Once he becomes the owner of Sweet Home, School Teacher writes down the characteristics of slaves and compares them to animals. In one of the most violent scenes of the novel, School Teacher proceeds to write down slaves’ characteristics while he “supervises” his sons violating Sethe, who had recently given birth to Beloved and was pregnant with Denver. The act of writing thus does not mark a rite of passage as it has in many male-centered slave narratives (e.g. Frederick Douglass’ *Narrative of the Life*, 1845). Whether literacy or writing a name, written discourse is not associated with acquiring a new awareness or with emancipation. Instead, it brings about feelings of frustration and reminders of oppression. For Sethe, writing symbolizes discursive power (School Teacher animalizes Black individuals with his pen), and it is associated with sexual abuse (as Sethe remembers that he was writing while they took her milk).<sup>48</sup> Sethe’s main concern throughout the novel is not to earn the power of the word, but to keep her family together, and to protect her children. Furthermore, Sethe’s coming-of-age is not triggered by literacy, but by the presence of her baby’s ghost, Beloved. How does the ghost enable a coming-of-age, and is it therapeutic? This will be the main question to answer in my analysis of *Beloved*.

For writer Maria Carolina de Jesus, the liberation that writing might have produced did not free her from estrangement and disillusion. Her 1950s diaries attest that she remained in a “psychological ghetto” (Afolabi 9). Maria Carolina de Jesus published her diaries previous to Conceição Evaristo’s novel, *Ponciá Vicencio*, and was an inspiration to Quilombhoje writers

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<sup>48</sup> In contrast with an early slave narrative from a woman’s point of view, in Harriet Jacobs’ text, it is her family that played a role of earning identity and freedom. She served as a literary antecedent to Morrison’s women characters.

including Evaristo, she may be considered as an influencing antecedent to her work. Like in Carolina de Jesus' diaries, writing does free Conceição Evaristo's protagonist from estrangement and disillusion.

In Conceição Evaristo's *Ponciá Vicencio*, the main character Ponciá Vicencio questions the value of literacy. She is able to read newspapers, but she finds it alienating since all she reads are instances of domestic violence or anecdotes about her corrupt government. Furthermore, she associates the accent in her name, Ponciá, to the pain of lashes, as if she were whipping herself. When she writes her last name, which is a plantation owner's name (Colonel Vicencio), she feels shame for inheriting the name of a tyrant. Though the act of writing and naming will be further analyzed in Chapter 3, what is relevant for this chapter is how the masculine literacy as coming-of-age is rewritten both in *Beloved* and *Ponciá Vicencio*. Literacy is associated with pain and shame, while coming-of-age is associated with family in *Beloved*. In *Ponciá Vicencio*, I will analyze a coming-of-age associated with reuniting with family as well, and with her ancestors and nature. Ponciá's coming-of-age is not triggered by literacy, but by the presence of her grandfather's ghost, Grandpa Vicencio. How does the ghost enable a coming-of-age, and is it therapeutic? This will be the main question to answer in my analysis of *Ponciá Vicencio*.

The Caribbean novel by Maryse Condé, *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem* presents a woman's life of love and journey of emancipation during slavery. The story follows Tituba from Barbados to the United States and back, with a chronological narrative from her point of view. Maryse Condé's literary antecedents consist of the *Negritude* movement and French Caribbean women writers. As I will explain below Maryse Condé speaks as a woman in her national literary context, contrasting men's tropes with women's perspective.

She names her female antecedents to be women writers prior to *Negritude*, with novels such as Suzanne Lacascade's *Claire-Solange, âme africaine*, published in 1928. It narrates a woman protagonist's story that, ashamed of her white father, proclaimed her mother's African royal heritage. The exoticism is far from postcolonial, like Mayotte Capécia's *Je suis martiniquaise* (1948) whose protagonist attempts to "whiten" her offspring upset Fanon in *Black Skin/White Masks* (Condé "Stealers" 161). Yet critics, Condé explains, misunderstand both women. They actually denounce, "each in their own way, alienation and cultural dependency resulting from colonial domination." (*ibid.*) Similarly, in my analysis of Condé's 1987 neo-abolitionist novel, *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*, Condé's character denounces dependency from colonial domination in the French Overseas department. She follows French Caribbean women's voice of denunciation in her neo-abolitionist novel.

In "Stealers of Fire," Maryse Condé also relates to French-Speaking Caribbean women writers with their reaction to the *Negritude* movement. She characterizes this reaction as one that spoke to the very evolution of *Negritude*, and as one that she adopts in her texts as well.<sup>49</sup> Condé explains that Césaire's emphasis on a return to Africa took away from the value of Caribbean culture, while Glissant proclaimed Caribbean culture and broke away from dichotomous thinking: "what Césaire names *bastardization* in negative opposition to authenticity and purity, Glissant renamed *métissage*" (Condé 157). Condé then refers to Lacascade and Capécia as the first generation of French-speaking Caribbean women writers, two writers who influenced her work. The next generation consisted of herself, Myriam Vieyra, and Simone Schwarz-Bart, to name a few (Condé "Stealers" 161). They confronted "Africa—first the shameful face of Caribbean identity, then the womb, the mother lode, thanks to *Negritude*. Going a step further

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<sup>49</sup> I will limit my references to Condé's study of *Negritude*, most relevant to my study on where Condé perceived herself and how she defined her position as an intellectual and writer in relation to the *Negritude* movement.

than Césaire, they undertake a physical journey back to the continent Mother Africa, alas, is nothing but a wicked stepmother. Their search ends in disillusionment, in bitterness, and failure” (*ibid.*). They destroy the mythical, spiritual and biological Mother in order to liberate themselves from a logic created by *Negritude* writers. They deny the technique that would place myths as the essence of Caribbean literature: “no, retort the women in their own individual way. We have to rid ourselves of myths. They are binding, confining, and paralyzing” (Condé “Stealers” 163). This retort is comparable to Toni Morrison’s context in which writers talk back to masculine slave literature with literary discontinuity and multifocal consciousness, and Conceição Evaristo’s context in Brazil that also goes against literacy as a coming-of-age. Condé opts to retort masculine *Negritude* by “rid[ding] ourselves of myths.” What—if not a liberating myth—does the ghost of Tituba symbolize, and does it make up an empowering and healing trope? This will be the main question that gears my analysis of Condé’s novel.

As I have demonstrated, women’s coming-of-age in these three neo-abolitionist novels is different than that of the male-centered coming-of-age (literacy). Aside from this characteristic, what characterizes the women in neo-abolitionist literature? Women in bondage as represented in women writers’ neo-abolitionist narratives (e.g. Sherley Anne Williams’s *Dessa Rose*, J. California Cooper’s *Family*) are mothers with a “subversive gender role” (Beaulieu 14). Hortense Spillers notes that they present a “literary discontinuity” and a “multifocal consciousness” absent from male narratives (Spillers in Beaulieu 14). They also follow through Harriet Jacob’s voice, which stated “slavery is terrible for men; but it is far more terrible for women. *They* have wrongs, sufferings, and mortifications peculiarly their own” (Jacobs 79). In *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*, Maryse Condé contrasts Tituba with her husband, John the Indian,

who has it “easier.”<sup>50</sup> In women’s neo-abolitionist literature, women in bondage work through a “threefold servitude of a slave mother as an epic heroine.” (Beaulieu 5) These women act deliberately, determinedly, and with dignity.

In Brazil, neo-abolitionist literature undoes the shackles that chained Brazilian women to national stereotypes. In her first anthology of Black women authors, *Em fim... Nós/ Finally...Us*, Miriam Alves affirms: “I want to speak about us, because time has always left us behind the curtains, camouflaging us generally in domestic work.” (Alves *Em fim...Nós* 23) Brazilian Black women’s neo-abolitionist writing rejects the common notion of Black women as passive characters, consistently in the background, or as a ‘mulatta’ (woman of mixed and African descent) depicted as the object of pleasure in constant prostitution and without any other perspectives (Alves *Em fim* 25). The main objective is to liberate Brazilian Black women from these stereotypical and objectified images.

Esmeralda Ribeiro explains this movement in her article “The Black Writer and Her Act of Writing/Belonging,” in which she defines the Black Writers’ role. Quilombhoje members Miriam Alves and Esmeralda Ribeiro “locate an Afro-Brazilian feminine discourse that opposes the social hegemonic one. In this sense, writing for Afro-Brazilian women writers is essentially a political and cultural act.” (Ribeiro 10) They recognize “the absence of authentic Black feminine images in Brazilian literature in general and challenge to recognize the political significance of self definition in their works.” (Ribeiro 27) Their first motive is to undo stereotypical representations, and to claim writing as a political and cultural act of defiance, empowerment, and self-definition. Finally, as in the United States and the Caribbean, contemporary writers of

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<sup>50</sup> I would like to note here that comparing women and men’s lives in bondage seems unproductive from my point of view, and that Condé rejects the idea of her novel expressing a point on men and women. Condé also refuses to qualify her novel as a narrative about heterosexual relationships: “I don’t see myself as portraying the relationship between men and women” (208).

African descent in Brazil consciously enact a political act that aims to heal invisibility due to selective amnesia. In their political act, the spiritual component of their culture plays a central role. Afro-Brazilian women refrain from depoliticizing Afro-Brazilian religion and from privileging some stereotypes in Afro-Brazilian literature (Afolabi 11). In my analysis of Conceição Evaristo's novel, *Ponciá Vicencio*, I will not ignore the political resonance of spirituality in my argument of the novel's healing narrative strategies.

In this chapter I examine a coming of age that deals not with literacy, but with women's witnessing or sharing stories of unspeakable violence and empowerment.<sup>51</sup> Neo-abolitionist literature binds to socio-political activism. It presents an ideology and communicates a practice in line with a coming of age related to witnessing. I will argue that the coming of age in women's neo-abolitionist literature relates to working through trauma (rather than literacy) in *Ponciá*, *Tituba*, and *Beloved*, because it relates to the increased importance of sharing personal traumatic experiences, especially in contemporary cases of sexual abuse and domestic violence and in feminist studies on recovering from the impact of such violence. Finally, these acts (of witnessing and storytelling) contribute to the struggle against historical amnesia, misrepresentation and silencing. With this in mind, I propose to use the term neo-abolitionist rather than neo-slave literature.

Beaulieu, Rushdy and many writers coined the term "neo-slave" literature in contrast to "Abolitionist" literature. Abolitionist literature was criticized for promoting abolition to make way for industrialization and paid labor, but did not necessarily eliminate slavery. Slave narrative was about telling slaves' lives from their point of view. "Neo-slave" thus embraces the attention

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<sup>51</sup> Chapter 2 compares moments of naming in relation to literacy and coming-of-age in contemporary narratives, in these three novels as well as in Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* and María de los Reyes Castillo's *Reyita, Life of a Cuban Woman*.

put on slaves' point of view and their lives, along with the empowerment present in slave narrative. I agree with this distinction between neo-slave and abolitionist literature, and do not want to imply that slave consciousness was synonymous with lack of consciousness or empowerment. However, in terms of coining a literary genre, I suggest using the term "neo-abolitionist." "Neo" alludes to a reformulation at a later historical date, but it also assumes a reformulation with critical distancing from the original abolitionist perspective. "Neo-abolitionist" literature rewrites and reclaims the abolitionist message from the point of view of Black contemporary writers who still fight for discursive power. This stance does not argue for abolition with the incentive to promote industrialization and paid labor, like the original abolitionists. Instead, it narrates from the point of view of Black contemporary individuals who find themselves still marginalized from the capitalist and global economy, whether in the industrial or the literary markets.

The texts of interest here are "neo-abolitionist" narratives written by and about women. They present humanitarian and empowering Black women, and vouch for their right to formulate their own identity, and our responsibility to re-member their memories and their identities within contemporary consciousness. These novels are concerned with Black individuals like slave literature was, and are also concerned with the continuation of the slave order. Although they focus on previous historical contexts before, during and shortly after the abolition of slavery (the slave trade in Barbados for Condé's novel, Reconstruction in the United States in Morrison's case, while Evaristo's plot takes place shortly after the abolition of slavery in Brazil), the fact that they were published by Black women illustrates a contemporary preoccupation with an establishment that has not yet reached abolition, and the impact that such past historical events still have on contemporary consciousness. The emancipation that these neo-abolitionist novels

propose is double. They propose to emancipate from the lingering psychological *and* material repercussions on Black woman's identity and reality. In other words, they enact emancipation from inherited traumas of slavery that still linger and affect Black women today, while on the other hand they denounce a continuing discrimination against Black women, who remain identified with and in reality live in marginal spaces.<sup>52</sup> In this chapter, I will focus on the impact of lingering psychological repercussions of slavery's trauma on the character's identities, or the concept of narrative repair.

On postmemory and narrative repair through literary explorations of memory, Rushdy states that "neo-slave" texts change the racial identity of Black Americans who felt shame about their heritage. That is to say, "neo-slave" texts cultivate a feeling of humanity and dignity through African American writing about slaves and slavery, from the sixties to the nineties (227). Most importantly, the texts achieve this without negating the pain and pervasiveness of slavery and captivity (*ibid.*). Rushdy, Bell and Beaulieu only observe the United States' African American "Neo-Slave" narrative, but I propose to extend their study to three novels published by African American women from different regions of the Americas, to present neo-abolitionist novels' therapeutic function as a hemispheric characteristic.

George B. Handley aspires to present a hemispheric study as he refers to a transnational "postslavery" novel in *Postslavery Literatures in the Americas*, where he mainly analyzes Cuban and Mexican literatures. He concludes that the postslavery novel characteristically includes narrative anxieties about genealogy, narrative authority, and racial difference (5). Such anxiety has to do with trauma, which I would emphasize in his position. The characters in the three novels of interest to me are trauma victims. Rather than focusing on genealogy like Handley, my

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<sup>52</sup> These neo-abolitionist novels do not resolve these issues with material or concrete solutions, which may be seen as a limitation. However this study's focus is working through postmemory and inherited trauma.

interest lies in the connection between genealogy, trauma, and haunting. Genealogy paradoxically entails both a deep consciousness of historicity and looking towards the future. Similarly, working through trauma entails both forgetting the past in order to survive in the present, and then working through the past in order to be able to plan towards the future. What Handley reads in the “postslavery” novels are anxieties of genealogy intricately linked to the lingering memory of slavery, and each narrative attempts to work through this trauma that affects genealogy and identity. Amy’s words in the epigraph to this chapter referred to Sethe’s baby, but the womb also implies inheritance of trauma, a traumatic memory that may be inherited. Writing out lingering memories of slavery fills an inherited void, which I find to be relevant for the texts I will study in this chapter.

A neo-abolitionist text, like a “neo-slave” narrative, may be set either before or during the 20th century. I define it as a contemporary literature genre produced throughout the Americas and Africa in French, Spanish, English, Portuguese and other languages. It looks back at slavery from different contexts, with characters that are slaves, or former slaves, or contemporary “wretched of the earth” that look back to previous historical eras, through their own memories, the memories or haunting of a loved one, or even the haunting of a stranger. Rushdy focuses on the political, Handley on narrative authority, and Beaulieu on gender/motherhood in “neo-slave” or “postslavery” novels, while I focus on the haunting, witnessing, and healing of trauma in neo-abolitionist narratives. I will argue that *Beloved* (Toni Morrison, United States, 1987), *Moi, Tituba Sorcière (I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem)*, Maryse Condé, Paris, 1988), and *Ponciá Vicencio* (Conceição Evaristo, Brazil, 2006) form part of a genre of neo-abolitionist narrative that provides haunting stories to fill a void and thus propose to heal trauma and amnesia through fictional narrative.

## 2.1 *TITUBA, PONCIÁ, AND BELOVED: NEO-ABOLITIONIST NOVELS OF* “GHOSTWRITING” OR GHOST STORIES

Naming the dead creates “personal immortality.” All three novels studied in this chapter carry ghosts’ names’ as their title. *Vicencio* (Ponciá’s Grandfather’s last name), *Beloved* (Sethe’s baby ghost’s name), and *Tituba* opens with her mother’s name, “Abena, my mother,” while the title is the ghost narrator’s name. Naming the dead suggests immortality of women that have yet to be immortalized through myth (along with the myths criticized by Condé and other French Caribbean women authors) and historicity, it triggers a conscious remembering, it connects present with past before looking towards the future.

Recalling ancestors is a central component of mourning in African culture. The dead preserve an immortalized state as “living-dead,” while the living human beings establish a connection between past and present. The following analyses fulfill this double function of 1) illustrating African diasporic cultural elements and 2) promoting such components that serve a therapeutic purpose in dealing with traumatic events and mourning. How do the personal immortalities work into each novel, function, and serve the therapeutic purpose of re-membering forgotten faces and voices to contemporary cultural memory? <sup>53</sup>

*Moi, Tituba Sorcière* follows the autobiography model of the originary slave narrative, told entirely in the first person, and proposing a “reversal of the Western travel narrative” (Fulton

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<sup>53</sup> In “Prying Death’s Door Open: Mourning the Living-Dead in Maryse Condé’s *Moi, Tituba Sorcière...Noire de Salem*,” Jaji refers to cultural concepts of African religion and mourning such as naming, and a concept of time more weighted on the past and present rather than on the future: “Within this concept of time, the remembrance of the dead by name is of critical importance in allowing their continued existence as the ‘living-dead’ as long as someone who knew them during life is alive to remember them, and thus in structuring and maintaining a relationship between past and present, Zamani [Swahili term for past]and Sasa [Swahili term for present]” (58).

40).<sup>54</sup> Tituba recalls her entire life-story from bondage to escaping bondage, from Barbados to Salem, New England where Puritans accuse her of being a witch, and back to her island where she hangs for participating in a rebellion. Tituba remembers various social realms of bondage: on a Barbados plantation with her biological mother; secluded from the plantation in her surrogate mother's cabin; back in bondage as a maid in a plantation household; sold to a family to be their 'mammy' in New England; sold to another family in Salem; in prison in Salem; servant and lover to a Jewish salesman; and finally back in Barbados as a conspirator against the plantation economy. While her narrative voice illustrates the tension of her state at the margins of both the slaves' and the masters' societies, between lands, and in turn echoes the current French Caribbean situation. The novel reveals itself as a long flashback, at the end, when we find out that Tituba has been speaking from the realm of the dead. In the book's epilogue, Tituba states that the bulk of her story lies in her haunting, "where [her life] leaves off." In other words, the real story is the one that "has no end," (175) the personal immortality. What remains important, more than life, is the connection between past and present, the value of haunting.

Maryse Condé's explorations of varying geographical contexts (Barbados, Salem, sociocultural interactions, and historical experiences (from the plantation to maroonage) covers multiple layers of one woman's experience in the northern United States and Caribbean, but

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<sup>54</sup> The narrator's complete lack of vernacular language, for Dawn Fulton, "takes the privileged viewpoint of a cultural outsider, [which] recalls the work of Ivorian writer Bernard Dadié, ...*Un nègre à Paris*, a particularly acerbic reversal of the Western travel narrative" (40). Fulton's argument proves valid when he applies it to Tituba's perception of the Puritan community in Salem ("like the European explorer in the New World, Tituba invites the reader to witness through her eyes the behavioral practices of a culture she alone has penetrated" Fulton 42), but in my opinion, Tituba's narrative voice becomes problematic when she describes her slave brethren with an anthropological gaze. Yet this voice is also part of a parody whose critical target is a particular literary reading: "Tituba's story mockingly imitates a nonexistent narrative created by preconceived notions of Third World women's writing" (Fulton 50). It relates to the female author's questioning of feminism (which she has expressed in interviews), a term she sees as imposed upon her "by an external audience, and that the attribution might vary in both meaning and functional significance depending on the context [...] The parody mounted by Tituba, then, is a parody of *misreading*, a parody of what is lost in translation" (Fulton 55). Her protagonist may therefore not be read as incarnating feminist ideologies.

from a single point of view. In contrast, in *Beloved* I find an example of Beaulieu's definition of the "neo-slave" narrative from her encyclopedic work *Writing African American Women K-Z*: "[neo-slave] narratives that engage with the larger cultural and historical effects of plantation slavery" in one specific region of the United States (673). The novel depicts a mother, Sethe, and weaves in and out of other characters' memories, between past and present. The point of reference for the present is 1890's Ohio, north of the Mason Dixon line, during Reconstruction. Toni Morrison's novel pushes the conventions of time and memory as her narrative bounces back and forth, from one character's flashback to another's.

Narrative voices slip in and out of the minds of Sethe, a mother of three children and pregnant with a fourth who ran away from "Sweet Home" to her mother-in-law's home at "124," where she committed infanticide (inspired by real life Margaret Garner). The reader also reads stories from Baby Suggs' point of view, Sethe's mother-in-law who lived in "Sweet Home," a plantation, until her son Paul A. (Sethe's husband) bought her freedom towards the end of her life, when she moved to "124" and became Baby Suggs "Holy," a priestess. Denver, Baby Suggs and Sethe's only living grand-daughter and daughter, was born in the Ohio river and named after Amy Denver, a white fugitive who helped her and Sethe while they ran away from "Sweet Home." This daughter's thoughts also form part of the storyline. Beloved, Sethe's baby and Denver's older sister, now a ghost; and Paul D., another of Baby Suggs' six boys, whose memories include growing up in "Sweet Home," being arrested, running away, living with Native Americans, finding work as a free slave and falling in love with Sethe in Ohio, both of these characters' thoughts also make up the plot. Other characters include Stamp Paid, who helps fugitives to cross the river, and Ella, one of few women in Sethe and Baby Suggs' community who finally understands that the haunted house on "124" should not be stigmatized but rather

saved by the community women's help and prayers. Each character's voice provides a remembering of their trauma into the imaginary of African American identities through the medium of the novel, whether they are men, women, or children. *Beloved*, Sethe and Denver's working through trauma, highlight *Beloved* the ghost's central role. After all, the narrative is geared by her arrival and her presence at 124. The personal immortality at work here deals with remembering and burying the dead properly in order to reconnect past with present.

*Ponciá Vicencio* is a multifocal novel, like *Beloved*. This novel resorts to narrative techniques of the "neo-slave" narrative, with a multifocal text and flashbacks to life on the plantation. The novel is set in an urban early 20<sup>th</sup> century setting, with flashbacks to plantation life in Minas Gerais. Set in the protagonist's adult life "in the city, after so many years away from the land" (Evaristo 2). Ponciá's land is Minas Gerais, a region of Brazil with a strong Afro-Brazilian presence, descendants of slaves.<sup>55</sup> Born on the "Vicencio Village" plantation in Minas Gerais, Ponciá moves to "the city" (which remains nameless and represents any urban space in Brazil) at the age of nineteen, where "she believed she might design a different path, invent a new life" (Evaristo 25). The text goes back and forth between her present status as a maid and her past in Vicencio Village: "She spent all her time with her thoughts, with remembering. She recalled the past life and thought of the present, but she didn't dream about or even invent anything of the future. Ponciá's tomorrow was made of forgetting" (Evaristo 9).

With a journey through memories, *Ponciá Vicencio* provides a melancholic narrative structure based on the flashback narrative mechanism, with multiple narrators. Ponciá, her brother Luandi, and her mother Maria make up the main narrators, while Ponciá's father and her husband's points of view intervene in Ponciá's thoughts throughout the novel. The novel begins

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<sup>55</sup> Carolina Maria de Jesus is from Minas Gerais as well (Levine 21).

with flashes of her childhood in a Minas Gerais plantation with her family, where she made and sold mud sculptures with her mother while her father and brother worked away at the fields for weeks at a time. Ponciá then moves to the city, and with conviction, she finds work, marries and moves in with her husband in a small shack. About two-thirds through the novel, the main narrative voice switches to her brother, and eventually her mother, with their memories and parallel journeys from Minas Gerais to the city. Luandi takes a job as a policeman, and their mother comes to look for them. Ponciá returns to her village, with the hope to find her mother there, but instead she finds an empty home, and a mud sculpture of her grandfather that she had made as a child. She returns to the city, becomes ill, and the three of them reunite once Maria and Luandi find Ponciá running around in circles in the city's central train station.<sup>56</sup>

In her article “Ghostwriting Transnational Histories...” and her recently published book *Caribbean Ghostwriting*, Erika L. Johnson studies a “subaltern historiography” that she names “ghostwriting.” This form of historiography explores historical lacuna through literature, and provides a space for forgotten or blurred historical traces.

Both *Beloved* and *Tituba* pertain to a group of African diasporic texts, often times labeled historical novels or “ghostwriting texts” (Johnson 116). Yet in my comparative analysis, “ghostwriting” goes beyond the act of writing itself, beyond complementing a limited documentation. *Ponciá Vicencio* ghostwrites the voice of an individual unrecorded in history, yet common in Brazil and other Afro-descendant communities. Ponciá's grandfather's ghost

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<sup>56</sup> Evaristo's novel parallels with Carolina Maria de Jesus' picaresque tale. The latter also learns how to read, and leaves her mother to move to the city (the only difference would be that she leaves with her 3 children). Like Ponciá, she feels alienated in the slums of Caninde, São Paulo. She left for the city, yet returns home to visit her mother. Where Ponciá receives wisdom from the village healer, Nengua Kainda, Carolina is harshly criticized for having left and learning to read. Her picaresque story depicts her reaching a new consciousness and criticism for society: “When I arrived in my hometown, I was received hostilely by my relatives. I was now more intelligent and I observed the resentful faces” (De Jesus 127-31). These points in common place Conceição Evaristo's text in a literary historiography of Black Brazilian women's literature.

“writes” through embodiment. In this case, “ghostwriting” is manifested specifically through trance.

Toni Morrison’s novel is a fictional exploration of Margaret Garner’s life, a slave who escaped on January 27, 1856. Morrison met Margaret Garner in a newspaper clipping from the *American Baptist* (Feb. 12, 1856) upon her editing *The Black Book* (1974). Maryse Condé includes a historical note at the end of her novel where she explains that Tituba, the protagonist of her novel, had a recorded confession of her “crime” as a witch in a Witch Trial in Salem. In fact, the long and hysterical process of the witch trials started with her and Sarah Good’s arrests (a secondary character in the novel), in March 1692 (Condé, *I, Tituba*, 277).<sup>57</sup> Fifty women, still imprisoned for their crime in 1693, benefited from a general pardon and were “freed” thanks to Sir William Phips’ report sent to London February 21, 1693 (Condé, *I, Tituba*, 277). Condé also holds a record of Tituba being sold around 1693, but her buyer remained a meaningless topic to the “racism, conscious or unconscious, of the historians” that recorded these facts (278). The rest of Tituba’s story was left “to [Condé’s] choices,” and she decided to follow a “vague tradition” that asserts Tituba was sold to a slave trader who paid for her return to Barbados (278).<sup>58</sup>

In *Ponciá Vicencio*’s case, the ghost left a familial trace, but no historical document.<sup>59</sup> The novel is a journey of recovering Ponciá’s frightened spirit while uncovering a live memory of her grandfather. The first section (the book is divided into 48 short sections) refers to her

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<sup>57</sup> Condé distinguishes her imagining Tituba from Ann Petry (*Tituba of Salem Village*, 1964), a U.S. African American who also wrote a novel about Tituba and imagined her being sold to a weaver in Boston (Condé 278). Note that the U.S. African American has Tituba end her life in the U.S., and the African Caribbean writer imagines her life to end in the Caribbean as a maroon. Both writers chose to “invent” Tituba’s race, Ann Petry imagines her as an African slave, Maryse Condé narrates her as of European and African descent, while historian Chadwick Hansen insists that she was in fact a Carib Indian woman (Fulton 45).

<sup>58</sup> Apart from the haunting that occurs in the novels, both Condé and Petry suggest that their inspiration comes from the ghosts of Margaret Garner and Tituba.

<sup>59</sup> Yet her character could be paralleled or seen as inspired by Carolina Maria de Jesus’ life, an Afro-Brazilian writer from the favelas, who was also from Minas Gerais and published various diaries in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

“shuddering,” “a wave of fear,” “regret,” and the novel opens with: “Ponciá Vicencio shuddered when she saw a rainbow in the sky” (1-3). This “susto” (a shudder that leads one’s frightened spirit to leave one’s body) takes her spirit away from her body, back into the past, to revisit her memory of her grandfather, a man who embodies the daily violence of slavery in Brazil: “the old fear visited her and persisted in her body . . . It summoned the thought of the first man she had ever known [her Grandpa Vicencio]” (3). Throughout the novel, Ponciá attempts to understand what her “inheritance” is, and finds out it is none other than her grandfather’s haunting: “Ah! So that was it! . . . The sound of murmurs arose, of laments and laughter... Grandpa Vicencio. She listened carefully and took a deep breath. No, she hadn’t lost contact with the dead” (73). The grandfather’s haunting suggests a difference between material inheritance of the land, which Ponciá did not benefit of, and the inheritance of spirit, painful yet rewarding in the end. The historical gap filled by ghostwriting in Evaristo’s novel thus relates to a gap in written history filled in with oral history and a ghost’s embodiment.

In *Ghostly Matters*, Avery Gordon defines a ghost story as a narrative concerned with “exclusions and invisibilities,” lending space to silences, filling gaps (17). Ghost stories accept that ghosts have a material effect on society, that ghosts can influence human beings, and be heard by them:

It is about putting life back in where only a vague memory or a bare trace was visible to those who bothered to look. It is sometimes about writing ghost stories, stories that not only repair representational mistakes, but also strive to understand the conditions under which a memory was produced in the first place, toward a counter-memory, for the future. (22)

Gordon's ghost story, although applied to her sociological research methodology, shares points in common with the neo-abolitionist narrative's goals. Providing representation or retribution that "repairs representational mistakes," and more importantly, re-membering a lost memory to provide a "countermemory," this is what the neo-abolitionist narratives accomplish. And the ones I study here pay attention to ghosts and narrate ghost stories, restore lost traces, narrate forgotten lives, and produce countermemories to hegemonic History.

Gordon states that writing from the site of a ghost's pathos speaks to resisting historical amnesia ("It is about putting life back in where only a vague memory or a bare trace was visible to those who bothered to look" 22). Speaking from this site or grave, one finds more than an apparition. A countermemory arises from the dead and provides context, emotions, memories, and the conditions of a wretched soul. Ghost stories are thus a narrative strategy to produce a countermemory. Condé speaks specifically of "conversing with a ghost" in order to write her novel, while Morrison refers to the imagination, the ghosts of the past and her ancestors as inspiration ("Site of Memory" 110-111). For Evaristo, Ponciá's embodiment fills in the blanks of an Afro-Brazilian family's history.

Aside from historical lacuna, their "ghostwritings" indicate a relationship between haunting and working through trauma. They provide me with an alternative approach to trauma studies. What if I read the haunting metaphor literally? How will a ghost instruct my trauma studies theory? And with ghost characters in a U.S., a French Caribbean, a Brazilian novel, what do these characters say about the transnational context or study of slavery or neo-abolitionist literature? In the following section, I will explore the answers to these questions by considering not just the metaphor, but also the act of haunting, in a transnational context of slavery.

## 2.2 RETHINKING TRAUMA STUDIES

A ghost story features a presence that is not “here”—in someone else’s body, as an apparition, a whisper. It accentuates a trace. A history of trauma comprises comparable qualities. It refers to an unreferential experience, an event so violent that it has reverted to an inaccessible part of cognition. It suits victims of trauma’s experiences. As Cathy Caruth’s *Unclaimed Experience* claims, a traumatic experience is essentially “unknown” (6). One who experiences trauma lives the accident “apparently unharmed,” that is, without really being there, cognitively. A traumatic history must speak to this condition: “For history to be a history of trauma means that it is referential precisely to the extent that *it is not fully perceived as it occurs*; or to put it somewhat differently, that a history can be grasped only in *the very inaccessibility of its occurrence*” (Caruth 18). Traumatic histories must utilize a strategy that upholds the inaccessibility of trauma. They are compelling for what they tell, but also for what they fail to tell, their silences: “What returns to haunt the victim, these stories tell us, is not only the reality of the violent event but also the reality of the way that its violence has not yet been fully known” (Caruth 6). The thought that something terrible happened, yet I’m not sure what or how or whether I was involved in it, must come through such stories. The traumatic experience, unknown to the victim who cannot yet reconstruct the event, is felt as a haunting. Dori Laub, in “Bearing Witness or the Vicissitudes of Listening,” explains the double standard of the person who listens to a victim of trauma tell their story as a survivor. The listener’s qualities include: “He or she must *listen to and hear the silence*, speaking mutely both in silence and in speech, both from behind and from within the speech. . . so as to be a guide and an explorer, a companion in a journey onto uncharted land, a journey the survivor cannot traverse or return from alone” (Laub 59). What

better way to impart the unreferentiality of trauma and a listener behind and from within the speech than through ghostly presences?

*Ponciá Vicencio*, *Beloved*, and *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem* form part of a transnational category of neo-abolitionist literature that advocates “ghostwriting” as a tool to chronicle traumatic history both effectively and affectively. *Beloved*’s ghost haunts characters throughout the novel, Ponciá embodies or ‘inherits’ her grandfather’s spirit, and Tituba’s ghost is a narrator. Each ghost stands as a manifestation of slavery’s traumatic experiences and how to narrate this traumatic experience. Silence and forgetting is a form of survival for any individual who experiences trauma. Yet silence and forgetting are also tools of oppression and colonial control of History. Each author creates stories that are absent from History. Each resorts to different and contrasting narrative strategies of “ghostwriting,” or different re-workings of trauma through novelistic narrative. The ghosts serve as a stylistic and political strategy to fill memory gaps, talk back to History’s silencing and fight traumatic dissociation.

Johnson’s “ghostwriting” concept re-evaluates trauma studies’ definition of dissociation via the ghost’s role in society and literature. One symptom caused by trauma is mental dissociation, a memory disorder. Dissociation occurs when the psyche dissociates the traumatic event’s status as a past event—it does not recollect the traumatic event, and is constantly “haunted or possessed by intrusive traumatic memories” (Leys 2). The psyche remains unaware of its traumatic wound: “the ordinary mechanisms of awareness and cognition are destroyed” and incapable of reconstructing the traumatic event (Leys 9). Disconnected memories and states of haunting comparable to spirit possession, along with misconception of time (with the past that haunts the present), characterize traumatic dissociation.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> I will only analyze this phenomenon as a literary trope, not in case studies.

Memories that have been dissociated earn a voice through ghostwriting and haunting. Neo-abolitionist novels' ghosts symbolize such traumatic dissociation, yet they present dissociated memories with agency rather than silencing them. *Beloved's* ghost serves as a good example. In *Beloved*, the baby ghost haunts the mother who killed her, Sethe. She stands as the cognitive realm that Sethe suppressed and "forgot" in order to go on with her daily life. *Beloved* also haunts the community by haunting the 124 House; she affects the entire surroundings and collective dynamic. She symbolizes collective traumatic dissociation. In *Tituba*, Tituba's spirit narrates the traumatic history of a forgotten individual, whose story remained undeveloped in historical records. She also haunts inhabitants of her island at the end of the novel (Epilogue), to preserve her memory, knowledge and rebellion. Condé claims to have listened to her ghost's voice to write her book ("this notion of spectral return also structures the narrative's authorial conceit, introduced in an epigraph that claims Tituba has returned to life for a year of intimate conversations with Condé, furnishing the substance of the novel." Jaji, 56-7) As for *Ponciá Vicencio*, Grandpa Vicencio's spirit visits Ponciá's body; he helps her accept her destined inheritance. The ghosts also reconstruct destroyed mechanisms of remembering and incomplete History. What have been dissociated, then, are not just a traumatic memories or non-referential pasts, but silenced voices of African descent from the unspeakable past of slavery. The ghosts haunt as collective traumatic memories, and aim to complement historical traces erased by destroyed mechanisms of historical awareness.

The ghosts function as double referents. As ghosts, they symbolize the unknown, unspeakability and non-referentiality of American slavery's traumatic past. At the same time, the ghost trope attests to the discursive marginalization of slavery. Firstly, Toni Morrison, Maryse

Condé, and Conceição Evaristo's novels allude to the unsharability of pain, a concept presented by Elaine Scarry in *Body in Pain*:

Physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned. [...] physical pain--unlike any other state of consciousness—has no referential content. (Scarry 4)

Secondly, their characters' unsharability of pain is told in each novel through ghosts, and the main mode of communication for ghosts is not text, nor words, but a communication of feeling, a *sense* (Gordon 18). The ghost trope thus questions slavery's unspeakability in terms of literacy, an issue specific to individuals marginalized by slavery:

Literacy became, then, as Henry Louis Gates Jr. has argued, a key trope in the slave narrative itself, as the writers displayed, referred to, and commented on the possession and illegality of it. The resourceful and often quite ingenious play on literacy in the slave narrative does not alter the fact that the slave narrative, by the very nature of its being a believable document, constituted proof that the slave possessed the recognizable "visible sign of reason" that the European American demanded. (Gordon 146)

The haunting in neo-abolitionist narrative acknowledges a mode of communication in opposition to literacy and psychoanalysis. It presents another sign, that of the ghost, in contrast to the sign of literate and Western reason. As Jaji Tsitsi states in "Prying Death's Door open: Mourning the Living-Dead in Maryse Condé's *Moi, Tituba Sorcière...Noire de Salem*:" "Condé's novel revises the absolute alterity of the dead implicit in Western notions of mourning, proposing an Afro-Caribbean understanding of Tituba's lost relatives as the living-dead, invisible

presences who need recognition in order to participate in Tituba's life." (Tsitsi 56) Indeed, in the novel the main character loses all of her family early on in her life, yet she lives with them throughout her life. Her parents die when she is only five or six years old. Ma Yaya adopts her, but she passes away a few years later too. Ma Yaya teaches Tituba the fluid state of death before she leaves the physical world, and afterwards, Tituba preserves a close relationship with her family.

Ghostwriting speaks *sense-ibly* to formulate the unspeakable. They also refer to African cultural components and practice—ancestors' presence, in spirits communicating through human beings, at the crossroads between the realm of the dead and the realm of the living. A haunting, "neither pre-modern superstition nor individual psychosis," also serves as a sign for the social act of haunting, not as a dead or a missing person, but as a figure taking part in contemporary society (Gordon 8). There is a double meaning then, as the ghosts symbolize traumatic haunting, as well as cultural remembrance.

Haunting is also a form of expression, a narrative text for the invisible voices, comparable to Caruth's definition of a trauma victim's screaming voice. In *Unclaimed Experience*, Cathy Caruth's study begins with Torquato Tasso's *Jerusalem Liberated* (previously analyzed in Freud's third chapter of *Beyond The Pleasure Principle*). Clorinda's voice screams out to Tancred after he has killed her (she was disguised as an enemy knight), when he slashes a tree in the forest. He hears her voice, sees blood coming out of the tree, and the traumatic memory haunts him. Making him relive through the traumatic event, Clorinda's apparition is a voice of bearing witness that cries out from the wound: "always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available" (Caruth 4). The ghosts in the three novels achieve this function. They speak from the wound of

slavery, calling for a witnessing and working through of the traumatic event. Their presence prompts “transformative recognition” (Gordon 8). This applies especially to *Beloved* and *Ponciá*, as I shall demonstrate in my analyses below; they facilitate characters’ transformative recognition of their traumatic past.

The novels’ ghosts also re-evaluate Western psychoanalysis’ represent points of transference that re-define Western psychoanalysis. Transference, a healing process that occurs between patient and therapist, teller and listener, occurs here as a dialogue between the realm of the living and the realm of the dead. *Beloved*’s ghost serves as a point of transference for Sethe and Denver, *Ponciá* serves as a point of transference for her grandfather and her family, Tituba converses with different spirits in her lifetime, and as a story-teller speaking from the realm of the dead, she serves as a point of transference for her listeners.

Yet as they work through past traumas, do they fulfill a therapeutic function for contemporary readers? If I am to speak of a therapeutic role, I will argue that the neo-abolitionist ghost writing offers to heal trauma stored in “postmemory,” with the ghost tropes as central components for narratives that point to inherited trauma.

Marianne Hirsch’s *Family Frames: Photo, Narrative, Post Memory*, studies the relationship between family and historical or ideological scripts, and proposes that the private space of family history or family narratives intersect with the public space and social history (13). I agree with Hirsch that historical traumatic event and personal experience intersect. Based on their family’s history, an individual could be carrying a traumatic memory from one generation to the next that relates to the social history of the Holocaust or in my study, to American slavery. They carry personal traumatic memories as well as “family frames” that relate

to a historical event, but also stand at the intersection of their private realm and a public history. They carry the memory of an event that affected not just their family, but also an entire people.

Marianne Hirsch refers to “re-member” as a generation’s will to fill a void due to a past generation’s traumatic experience. The persistence of past memories subsists in persons who never lived it as a “post memory,” and though temporally distanced from trauma, they feel the need to “re-member, to re-build, to re-incarnate, to replace, and to repair” (Hirsch 53).

Instead of remembrance or remember or recall or other terms, I will use the same term re-member to make a direct reference to Hirsch’s definition. It has the same meaning in the dissertation title. As artifacts of the “postmemory” of slavery, the neo-abolitionist novels’ anxieties towards genealogy suggest working through transgenerational trauma.

I propose the term “postmemory” with some hesitation, conscious that the prefix “post” could imply that we are beyond memory and therefore perhaps, as Nora fears, purely in history. In my reading, postmemory is distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection. Postmemory is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation. This is not to say that memory is unmediated, but that it is more directly connected to the past. Postmemory characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated. I have developed this notion in relation to children of Holocaust

survivors, but I believe it may usefully describe other second-generation memories of cultural or collective traumatic events and experiences. (Hirsch 22)

Tituba carries her mother's sexual abuse with her identity ("I was born of this violent act"), Ponciá unconsciously mimics her grandfather's mutilation and "inherits" his troubled spirit, and Denver fears to inherit her mother's strength to commit infanticide. Each traumatic event is related to the historical moment of slavery, thus the narratives depict cases of intergenerational trauma or "postmemory."<sup>61</sup> There is a distinction, in this study, although it becomes blurry at times, between a fictional character carrying the postmemory of *intergenerational* trauma, and a novelistic narrative illustrating the postmemory of *transgenerational* trauma.<sup>62</sup>

Transgenerational trauma, in regards to slavery and the possibility of healing from this trauma, is defined by Hortense Spillers as pain carried in the flesh: "that information was passed through the body in pain or through the torn flesh. But I would also have to believe that the child of that mother and father can start anew" (Spillers 5). I suggest that these narratives propose to "start anew." And like Hirsch, I would argue that these novels are an imaginative investment and creations that evidence "postmemorial work." They restore traumatic events into collective memory, not by recall but by imaginative projection, events that need remembrance in order to

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<sup>61</sup> See also Marianna Hirsch's "The Generation of Postmemory," where she notes the relationship between the Holocaust and other historical traumas (American slavery among others), and defines postmemory as "the relationship that the generation after those who witnessed cultural or collective trauma bears to the experiences of those who came before, experiences that they 'remember' only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. . . a connection to the past not actually mediated by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation. . . [from] narratives that preceded one's birth or one's consciousness. . . of events that happened in the past [but the effects of which] continue into the present" (106-107).

<sup>62</sup> See Aleida Assman in Hirsch's "The Generation of Postmemory." Assman distinguishes the individual postmemory, transferred through familial remembrance, as intergenerational, whereas the traumatic memory carried through historical or novelistic remembrance would be transgenerational: "For Aleida Assmann, the family is a privileged site of memorial transmission. The 'group memory' in her schema is based on the familial transfer of embodied experience to the next generation: it is intergenerational. National/political and cultural/archival memory, in contrast, are not inter- but trans-generational; they are no longer mediated through embodied practice but solely through symbolic systems." (110)

work against collective dissociation (Hirsch “Generation of Postmemory” 107). They also provide an aesthetic representation of these moments to reach an audience that may not have been engaged in the first place:

Postmemorial work, I want to suggest—and this is the central point of my argument in this essay—strives to *reactivate* and *reembody* more distant social/national and archival/cultural memorial structures by reinvesting them with resonant individual and familial forms of mediation and aesthetic expression. Thus less-directly affected participants can become engaged in the generation of postmemory, which can thus persist even after all participants and even their familial descendants are gone. (111)

The three novels fit a transnational category of neo-abolitionist literature that portrays a “postmemorial” ghostwriting of American slavery. All three novels supply scenarios of a painful past, narrate the unspeakable through ghosts, and validate traces as valuable faces of History. I will now take a closer look at each novel’s ghost trope as recovering silenced histories and working through trauma.

### **2.2.1 Re-membering Trauma Through Communal Storytelling: *Beloved***

With multiple narrators’ points of view, Toni Morrison’s novel traverses a wide range of experiences: plantation life, running away, river crossing (or underground railroad), life as former slaves. The multiplicity of perspectives presents a collective identity that works through trauma in the form of communal storytelling.

In *Slavery and Social Death*, Patterson outlines the social phenomenon of slavery throughout history, enacted onto slaves in any slavery-based economy (Patterson 42). The “ritual” of enslavement or “social death” follows four basic phases: 1) the symbolic rejection of a slave’s past; 2) the change of name; 3) the imposition of a mark of servitude (branding); 4) a new status in household or economic organization (Patterson 47). Many cultures also included a ritualistic ceremony that was “deeply humiliating, even traumatic, for the slave” (Patterson 47). Examples of social death are largely rendered as a loss of ownership or control of the body, like for example the forced smile of the bit (203). The characters in *Beloved* are recovering from this trauma, reconstructing an identity fragmented by slavery’s social death. In this context, Baby Suggs’ character acquires a new consciousness as a former slave. She claims her own name “Baby Suggs” after her husband’s name, and feels her own body as being her own: “These hands belong to me. These *my* hands.’ Next she felt a knocking in her chest and discovered something else new: her own heartbeat” (142). The relationship between social death and ownership of the body, especially in regards to Baby Suggs and her spiritual teachings in “The Clearing” will be further explored in Chapter 3.

Conflict resolution occurs as a collective process: Paul D’s arrival makes past events re-surface into Sethe’s consciousness; *Beloved* prompts both Sethe and Denver to have their past re-surface through telling their stories (she consistently starts conversations with “Tell me...”); even a secondary character like Nelson Lord elicits traumatic memories within Denver: “the thing that leapt up in her when he asked [about her mother] was a thing that had been lying there all along” (102). Denver’s classmate refreshes “the thing” or fear she has of her mother: “certain odd and terrifying feelings about her mother were collecting around the thing that leapt up inside her [...] monstrous and unmanageable dreams about Sethe” (102-103). How will she work

through “the thing that leapt up inside”? Baby Suggs shares traumatic experiences directly related to motherhood, that she only heals from, in my opinion, in the Clearing, as a spiritual mother, as she teaches and learns to praise one’s own flesh (95).<sup>63</sup> The Clearing is another example of a collective form of healing that I will discuss in Chapter 3 on the body and healing fragmented sexuality. Not one trauma in this novel is resolved individually.

For the sake of my argument, I will solely focus on Beloved, Denver, and Sethe’s characters’ coping with and resolving their experiences. The exchange between members of this feminine triangle forms a narrative strategy that resolves trauma with a therapeutic structure. For instance, Denver’s voice invades Sethe’s in several instances (“All that leaving...”12; 18; 19) to provide contrasting points of view and different versions of the same traumatic event. In some instances, the text forms a shared experience: from Denver’s birth told through Denver’s point of view with her own interpretations about her mother’s story, to Sethe’s experience of the same story, to Amy’s own experience in direct discourse (78). This narrative strategy illustrates the murky experience of a traumatic event, and its unreferentiality. Furthermore, Beloved’s presence urges Denver and Sethe to work through their past by turning a “scary ghost” into a tool for resolution.

The mourning mother, Sethe, refuses to re-member her act of infanticide. The only victim of Sethe’s multiple infanticide attempts, Beloved is a symbol of false stability upon her return in Sethe’s life. When her ghost returns in human form, Sethe refuses to work through the trauma of her murder and beat the ghost out of the house through recognition. As painstaking and unstable as Beloved’s ghost’s overstaying her welcome may be, the desire to keep her close and take care

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<sup>63</sup> In the second chapter of the dissertation, in a subsection or chapter on Motherhood, I analyze the representations of alternative forms of maternity, such as Baby Sugg’s spiritual maternity and Tituba who protects her ‘spiritual child’ in the Epilogue, as a spirit. Denver also acts as a mother to Beloved, she feeds her, takes care of her when she arrives at 124; Ponciá Vicencio’s maternity is enacted through sculpting clay.

of her, the fear of seeing Beloved's ghost leave without forgiving her, all prevent her from embracing change and transformation.

The novel's structure illustrates this obstacle as a block in character development and expression. The narrative's rhythm follows Sethe's storytelling ways, with interruptions that fight the past: "[Sethe] stopped. Denver knew that her mother was through with it [storytelling]—for now anyway" (37). The pauses and silences also represent how indispensable it was for her to repress memories, as a form of survival: "she worked hard to remember as close to nothing as was safe. Unfortunately her brain was devious" (6). The adjective devious connotes pain and deceit to remembering. Sethe's character illustrates the difficulty of overcoming trauma and re-membering past events into her identity. She finds her memories to be painful, while forgetting is safe.

Yet I will argue that this novel is not about one character's struggle to heal from trauma. *Beloved*, with characters pertaining to different generations, presents cases of generational memory gaps. An entire community runs on the safety of forgetting. Paul D shares with Sethe the difficulty in telling the past.<sup>64</sup> Baby Suggs remembers how much she has forgotten about her absent children: " 'all I can remember of her is how she loved the burned bottom of bread. Can you beat that? Eight children and that's all I remember.' 'That's all you let yourself remember,' Sethe had told her, but she was down to one herself—one alive, that is" (5). Sethe's character inherits the generational memory gap. Since her sons ran away from home, afraid of the ghost

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<sup>64</sup> "Paul D had only begun, what he was telling her was only the beginning when her fingers on his knee, soft and reassuring, stopped him. Just as well.. Just as well. Saying more might push them both to a place they couldn't get back from. He would keep the rest where it belonged: in that tobacco tin buried in his chest where a red heart used to be. Its lid rusted shut. He would not pry it loose now in front of this sweet sturdy woman, for she got a whiff of the contents it would shame him. And it would hurt her to know that there was no red heart bright as Mister's comb beating in him" (73).

(but really, afraid of their mother who killed their little sister), she has forgotten what her sons were like, so her mind underlines a gap between her and the next generation.

Sethe's own body, with her back covered by a large scar in the shape of a "chokecherry tree; her back skin...dead for years" has no more nerve endings, no connection between the stimuli of the outside and her mind. This very scar came from her most traumatic experience at the "Sweet Home" plantation, where the new plantation owner's sons dug a hole in the ground, laid her there on her belly, whipped her pregnant body to shreds, then raped her. Sethe won't preserve this memory; she keeps it disconnected from any emotion: "The picture of the men coming to nurse her was as lifeless as the nerves in her back where the skin buckled like a washboard" (6). This is a strong example of the dissociation that occurs after trauma. Forgetting allows a victim to survive, while in the text this image succeeds Sethe's thought of her boys' fading in her memory. Her scar stands for generations of scars. Sethe deals with scars that cannot heal yet, and can only heal through re-remembering, working through her trauma, collectively.

Once Beloved re-enters Sethe's life, she validates storytelling. Memories that were as painful to recall as the "tender" scars of bondage felt on her body, actually become an "unexpected pleasure" once she shares them with Beloved (59). Beloved probes Sethe to "re-memory" painful aspects of her life, such as her mother's absence: "I sucked from another woman whose job it was. So to answer you, no. I reckon not. She never fixed my hair or nothing" (60). Beloved embodies the element that allows Sethe to make the unspeakable speakable, she is the witness that Sethe needs in order to tell her story. Re-remembering is not internal to the self in *Beloved*; it is a joint, collective act.

Beloved also urges Denver, Sethe's daughter and Beloved's sister, to recall her past: "'tell me,' Beloved said. 'Tell me how Sethe made you in the boat'" (75). At that moment, as she

tells her story, Denver realizes that she hadn't "remembered" in a long time. Denver actually works through her trauma long before Beloved's ghost comes back from the dead in someone else's body. Beloved aids when she is still a ghost. After witnessing the infanticide and going to jail with her mother, Denver had "monstrous and unmanageable dreams about Sethe" (103). She became mute, and as the baby ghost started to haunt their house, over time it lent "her eyes a power even she found hard to believe" (103). Once she could hear the baby ghost and understand her, i.e. listen to a fellow victim, Denver found her voice.

Storytelling becomes a shared experience in which Beloved witnesses Sethe and Denver's past with her. Like it is for Sethe, this experience is associated with nurturing, as evidenced in the text with words like "nursing, lover, pleasure, overfeed." These are the words that Beloved associates with telling stories to Beloved. To use terminology from trauma studies, I will argue that Beloved's witnessing establishes "the dialogic relation between witness and listener" that leads to recognition. This is an indispensable step to heal from trauma:

The dialogic relation between witness and listener becomes a dialogic relation internal to the survivor. And this sense of an internal witness, a 'you' inside yourself who cares for you and watches over you, is essential to healing from a traumatic event [...]. Mourning these losses constructs us as individuals and as cultures. Thus, the ultimate result of dealing with trauma is the birth of the possibility of recognition. (Steele 10-11)

Once a listener recognizes the victim's traumatic story and listens to it, the victim finds a listener within her. This allows her to confront the silence, the forgetting, and the fear attached to the traumatic event, to start the process of remembering-reconstructing-working through, to mourn losses and deal with trauma, and to finally engage with the possibility of recognition of

the loss of memories and histories. In *Crises of Witnessing: Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*, Dori Laub explains that a traumatic event must be told from the survivors' point of view, even if it has already been exposed in history. For this to occur, there needs to be a "blank screen on which the traumatic event becomes inscribed for the first time" (Laub 57).<sup>65</sup> This is the role that Beloved plays. Even before she became an embodied spirit, Beloved was a therapeutic point of transference for Denver that "held for her all the anger, love and fear she didn't know what to do with" (103). Once Beloved returns in the body of a grown girl, she earns a new role, not to hold, but to help Denver work through the anger, love and fear. Denver shares her trauma of witnessing her baby sister's death and the trauma of going to jail with her mother where "the thing that leapt up had been coiled in just such a place" (106). She is the first character who reconstructs her traumatic experience of the infanticide and realizes who Beloved really is, what role Beloved can play in her existence as a "blank screen," and to what extent this role depends on Beloved (on working through the past trauma with her) and starts to be Denver's independent responsibility (to be about looking towards the future with her community). She becomes independent from Beloved and loses the concern that "the thing that happened that made it all right for my mother to kill my sister could happen again [to her]" (205). She is able to start anew.<sup>66</sup>

Towards the end of the book, Sethe directs her thoughts to her "Dearly Beloved, which is what you are to me," yet she does not fully recognize her traumatic past (184; 196). A poem of

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<sup>65</sup> In "Bearing Witness and the Vicissitude of Listening," Dori Laub explores the role of a witness who listens to yet has not experienced the trauma—a psychoanalyst or a historical witness. The case of Beloved is different in the sense that she has also lived through the trauma, her listening to her mother and sister, her enabling the witnessing of trauma, becomes healing for her and for all of the people that she stands for, the victims of slavery, which I will analyze further below.

<sup>66</sup> Her being able to start anew relates directly to Beloved taking less of an obtrusive role in her coping process. The same goes for Sethe, as long as Beloved holds an obtrusive position, even if she helps her witness her traumatic past, she is not able to overcome the trauma. The listener's unobtrusiveness is central to bearing witness (Laub 71).

call and response between Sethe and Beloved reveals an incoherent dialogue where Sethe has yet to recognize Beloved. Once the trauma recognition ensues, the novel becomes a prose poem where Sethe, Denver and Beloved's voices are, in a sense, freed from the novel's prose. At this point, Beloved's voice joins countless lives trapped in the bowels of a slave ship ("Crouching; others crouching too; the man on my face is dead; I do not eat; the men without skin bring us their morning water to drink; we have none at night; daylight comes through the cracks; small rats; no room; someone is trembling I can feel it over her; they fall into the sea the circle around her neck; the women are away from them and the men are away from the women; storms rock us" 210-213). The lack of punctuation accelerates the rhythm to resemble that of a collective chant; she speaks for a multiplicity of voices as she switches to the plural pronoun "We." Her narrative transcends her personal account and connects with the slaves' past in general, furthering Morrison's structure of a collective storytelling to surface a community's trauma silenced by history.

The feminine triangle's witnessing has become successful: "Successful witnessing . . . leads to an acknowledgment of . . . the loss of the experience, . . . of others through death, . . . of a life untouched by trauma, and . . . of the memories and histories of civilizations" (Steele 10) Beloved's transcending experience also reveals that Beloved is haunted too. The prose poem has three parts to it: in the ground, the collective memory speaks of the slave ship's souls; the second part expresses Beloved's personal memory; and the third part comes to the surface, to Beloved's corporal ghost's personal memory, once she comes back to life, and becomes a "hot thing"—a traumatic yet nurturing element of repressed re-memories of infanticide. I agree with Avery Gordon: "This ghost, Beloved, forces a reckoning: she makes those who have contact with her, who love and need her, confront an event in their past that loiters in the present. *But Beloved the*

*ghost, is haunted too, and therein lies the challenge Morrison poses*” (Gordon 139). *Beloved* works through a transgenerational haunting.

In the end, Sethe and *Beloved* consistently use “re-memory” as a verb. Memories lost their status as such, and had to be re-remembered, they could not be remembered. In the end, Sethe uses the verb to remember. *Beloved* asks: “You rememory me?” and Sethe responds: “Yes. I remember you.” (214) *Beloved* and Sethe are no longer victims of trauma enacting disconnected returns to a past event. They engage in an agency of remembrance.

Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* takes its readers to the traumatic time-space of slavery and the ambiguous historical period of Reconstruction with its multiple narrators, with 28 fragments (a structure like the menstrual cycle) that force an interactive reading and re-working of slavery’s traumatic effects of social death. A contemporary novel that takes its readers back to times and places where women, men, and children lost their social selves, *Beloved* revisits this traumatic space to enable today’s individuals to integrate this past as a part of their fragmented identity. Morrison perceives her reader as a witness that brings together collective trauma into their mind, and for that reason keeps her narrator voice to a minimum, to put forth the reader’s narrating voice.<sup>67</sup> Her narrator guides the reader’s voice to listen to the painful “re-memories,” and makes

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<sup>67</sup> For Morrison, the multiplicity of narrators is actually an illusion. In “The Site of Memory,” Morrison defines the point of view as:

the illusion that it’s the characters’ point of view, when in fact it isn’t; it’s really the narrator who is there but who doesn’t make herself (in my case) known in that role. I like the feeling of a *told* story, where you hear a voice but you can’t identify it, and you think it’s your own voice. It’s a comfortable voice, and it’s a guiding voice, and it’s alarmed by the same things that the reader is alarmed by, and it doesn’t know what’s going to happen next either. So you have this sort of guide. But that guide can’t have a personality; it can only have a sound, and you have to feel comfortable with this voice, and then this voice can easily abandon itself and reveal the interior dialogue of a character. So it’s a combination of using the point of view of various characters but still retaining the power to slide in and out, provided that when I’m ‘out,’ the reader doesn’t see little fingers point to what’s in the text. What I really want is that intimacy in which the reader is under the impression that he isn’t really reading this; that he is participating in it as he goes along. It’s unfolding, and he’s always two beats ahead of the characters and right on target. (121)

This could actually open a new argument, where both Morrison and Condé, in their own way, allow the narrator’s voice, perhaps a contemporary voice looking back into the past, to hide behind the subjects of their narrative.

the reader take how much, in Stamp Paid's words, a slave and a former slave was supposed to take: "All he can." *Beloved's* character haunts Sethe and Denver and the whole community to return to the site of her death, where Sethe had lost a part of herself, and where the former slave community was reminded of the painful resistance to a slave owner's power. *Beloved* the novel haunts neo-abolitionist literature to re-member such traumas into contemporary readers' imaginaries.

### 2.2.2 "Should I Suffer Twice?" Tituba's Haunting

How do the women in Maryse Condé's counterpart reveal the transgenerational effects of the trauma of slavery, and does she present a resolution, like Morrison? The opening of the novel, as Jaji states, introduces a critique of Christianity and Western reason. Tituba's story begins with her conception as her mother, Abena, is violated by a sailor on a slave ship called *Christ the King*, on its way to Barbados, one day in the year 16\*\*. Tituba's storytelling serves as a postcolonial work of mourning that displaces Christian religion, the same religion of *Christ the King* which defended or associated itself with foundational violence such as "New World slavery," New England witch trials and anti-Semitism: "Implicitly, such a critique provides the grounds for valorizing an alternative notion of life in or after death, the Afro-Caribbean belief in the living-dead" (Jaji 58). Tituba's story telling provides a postcolonial work of mourning that values Caribbean life in and after death rather than Western notions of mourning—the working through in *Tituba* pertains to mourning.

Tituba, the protagonist and narrator of her life story, portrays the women of her life, their stories and their influence in a formal narrative tone. The French translation has both a formal tone and intrusions of orality and other connections to her brethren. The formal tone actually

conveys orality in French that disappears in the English translation (Manzor-Coats 742). According to Manzor-Coats, her narrative also includes chant-like passages, for instance when she describes the sight of her mother's hanging when she was seven years old (20) and when she dedicates a song to her aborted child (89).<sup>68</sup> Tituba vindicates African orality as well: "My people will keep my memory in their hearts and have no need for the written word. It's in their heads. In their hearts and in their heads." (176) Thus an emphasis on story telling and orality is felt in Condé's novel, like in Morrison's. Will storytelling equal comfort as well?

Tituba's narrative voice illustrates tension of being in-between. She lives at the margin of the slave community. As a child, once her parents pass away, Tituba moves away from the plantation to Ma Yaya's little shack. They are self-sustaining and for no one. At the crossroads of the living and the dead, she learns to converse with her departed parents thanks to Ma Yaya's teachings. Later in life, she grants a Jewish family a meeting with their deceased mother. In-between lands, she nostalgically recalls her early days in Barbados and wishes to go back, yet once she returns she does not find her place. She dwells in the margins of society as a slave, a witch, and a woman. The tension of in-betweenness is not limited to verbal tension, as I shall demonstrate below; it complicates the novel's proposal of working through trauma.

*I, Tituba Sorcière...* is a ghost's exploration of her identity as she struggled to negotiate a sense of self, as she floats between the signs of "witch," ("Qu'est-ce qu'une sorcière?" *Moi*, 33/"What is a witch" *I*, 17; "Chacun donne à ce mot une signification différente" *Moi*, 225/"Everyone gives that word a different meaning" *I*, 146) "blackness," and "womanhood," all

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<sup>68</sup> Quotes will mainly come from the English translation. If "*Moi*" precedes the page number it will mean that it comes from the French translation. When referring to both translations, I placed the French page number first, followed by a slash and the English page number.

of which connote evil in her times (and arguably still today). Storytelling from a ghost's perspective, Condé's text features an individual trauma nonetheless connected to a community.

The past memory, for Tituba, is heavy with pain and humiliation. This is what she works through (Condé 200). Tituba remains isolated from other individuals of African descent, yet she recognizes the force in "our people's" ability to remember (212). The plot develops from associating memory with shame to associating it with collective strength. Their active memory stores elements of their lives such as remedies for abortion, but also what their tribe chief had traded them for—"liquor, gunpowder, and silk umbrella" (213). Tituba's storytelling, in turn, shares this empowering knowledge with an audience she clearly addresses in her text through call-response. At the same time, she questions the validity of storytelling and remembering when it comes to healing her wounds.

Storytelling is a painful process that Tituba questions (or parodies?) at the end of her narrative: "Et puis, à la raconter [mon histoire] est-ce que je n'en revis pas, une à une, les souffrances? Et dois-je souffrir deux fois? (And, by telling it [my story] do I not relive, one by one, each suffering? And should I suffer twice?)" (254, my translation) Tituba refuses to relive the pain, to share and to witness her life's traumas. Condé's text does not convey a main character that overcomes her trauma like Morrison's. Tituba mocks the function of storytelling and never finds it comforting. Nonetheless, her "ghostwriting" speaks to us from the realm of the underworld, from a roaming spirit's voice, who although she may not have healed her wounds, spends the rest of her days healing others, and supporting rebellions (268).

In that sense, Tituba steps out of a cycle in which she would be repeating her mother's life. Firstly, she earns her freedom before she dies.<sup>69</sup> Benjamin D'Azevedo, her last owner, bails

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<sup>69</sup> In terms of circularity in relation to womanhood and sexuality, see Chapter 3, "Raped of Their Motherhood."

her out of the Salem prison and purchases her as slave to have extra help around the house where his wife passed away. They become lovers, and when he decides to leave Boston with his children, he proposes to buy her freedom and puts her on one of his friends' boat back to Barbados. Tituba comes home free, and finds out that the witch trials have made her a mythical figure at home. She dies hanged for trying to rebel, and she lives on as a ghost improving others' lives: "For now that I have gone over to the invisible world I continue to heal and cure" (175).<sup>70</sup> And she has the freedom to heal, as a ghost, that she did not have as a slave or a fugitive slave in the maroon community.

Does Condé's ghost character signify that ghosts have more freedom than slaves? Or does it defend ghosts' agency and social importance? How does Tituba relate to working through transgenerational trauma? Tituba says that those living in bondage were in the "purgatory of the plantation" (177). They were already ghosts, invisible, not as powerful as the "spirits" above, the spirits with missions. She watches her "people" with an anthropological gaze throughout the novel, while she describes spirits at meaningful work: Abena has many places to be as a ghost or a spirit, crossing the ocean back and forth, always on the move; Iphigene works with Tituba to fight rebellions; Tituba continues to heal as she did as a human being, especially as a midwife spirit. The ghosts in *Tituba* resemble African religious deities. Each has a different function (war, healing, connection with the Motherland) and each spirit manifests itself through different human beings.

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<sup>70</sup> "The other day I heard a boy four or five years old humming [the song about me, Tituba.] In delight, I dropped three ripe mangoes at his feet and he remained rooted to the spot, staring at the tree that had given him such a present out of season. [...I heal] When I run to someone's deathbed. When I take the trembling spirit of a dead person in my hands. When let human beings catch a glimpse of those they thought the had lost forever."

Tituba illustrates a critique of Freud's concept of mourning, the latter of which is quite different from the mourning that Tituba learns to embrace. Tituba meets her mother after she passes away, and explains to her audience:

Les morts ne meurent que s'ils meurent dans nos cœurs. Ils vivent si nous les chérissons, si nous honorons leur mémoire, si nous posons sur leurs tombes les mets qui de leur vivant ont eu leurs préférences, si à intervalles réguliers nous nous recueillons pour communier dans leur souvenir. Ils sont là, partout autour de nous, avides d'attentions, avides d'affection (23).

[The dead only die if they die in our hearts. They live on if we cherish them, if we honor their memory, if we place on their tombs the items that they preferred during their living, if at regular intervals, we gather to commune in their memory. They are there, everywhere around us, hungry for our attention, hungry for our affection] (translation qtd in Jaji 60).

Tituba's definition of mourning differs significantly with Freud's definition in *Mourning and Melancholia*, revealing a cultural difference in working through loss. For Freud, working through loss implies letting go, diminishing the libido attached to the lost object over time, while Tituba preserves a relationship with her dead family members.

Healing does take place for Tituba's character in the end, when she says: "Yes, I'm happy now. I can understand the past, read the present, and look into the future. Now I know why there is so much suffering and why the eyes of our people are brimming with water and salt" (178). *Historical consciousness* equals happiness for Tituba. Historical consciousness, and hope: "I know, too, that there will be an end to all this. When? Who knows? I'm in no hurry now that I am free of that impatience that is peculiar to mortals. What is one life in relation to the

immensity of time?" (178) Historical consciousness and awareness of transgenerational changes, this is what Tituba's story promotes.

In the epilogue, Tituba decides to haunt a little girl and help her become a healer, to haunt her with her knowledge. The ending illustrates the persistence of her memory, and an inheritance beyond family. Tituba's last haunting breaks with the genealogical passing on of trauma or "postmemory." Tituba does not belong to a family, and unlike Sethe and GrandPa Vicencio, she passes on knowledge, rather than trauma. This narrative completely defies the slavery system like other postslavery narratives that "imply that in order for the stories we tell about the past to move beyond an Oedipal struggle with the burdens of slavery, our narratives must not be wedded to following the lines of inheritance." (Handley 145) Tituba's endless life consists of a journey in which she works with her "son and lover" Iphigene, and raises a child designated by the spirits for her to mother through haunting. In this novel then, haunting does not heal a personal trauma, or an intergenerational trauma. Unlike the inquisitive ghost of *Beloved*, Tituba "tells," "teaches," "shares." The transgenerational trauma is suggestive since the narrative is through a ghost's voice, yes. But the ghost's desire lays not in storytelling her life, rather, in sharing her knowledge. The tone of parody, the contradictions and the tension in this novel still prevent me from arriving at a strong conclusion. In the newest English edition's Afterword, an interview with Condé reveals that she *refuses* to send a message in her novel, and purposefully questions each moral message throughout the novel. The lack of an ending of strong moral may have to do with the fact that Tituba does not necessarily carry truth like an all-knowing narrator, but instead she passes it on and it should be complemented by people in the realm of the living: "*Moi, Tituba sorcière* presents mourning as work which in itself undoes the absolute finality of death and maintains the dead as living remainders in the survivors thus presenting the possibility of both

individual psychic therapy and collective imaginative and historical redress.” (57) It is not up to Tituba to present the all knowing all resolving truth; it is up to the reader to find resolution through her and redress history.

Without providing an ending, by underscoring the fact that it has no end, Condé’s novel also resolves to preserve this perception of the dead that remain in our lives, keeping an open door between the living and the dead, thus having no end to a story that should eternally be told, eternally re-membered to contemporary history.

### **2.2.3 Ponciá Vicencio’s Sculpting Cure**

In *Ponciá Vicencio*, another form of haunting occurs, where a spirit embodies a human being without ever expressing himself directly to the characters, or the reader. Ponciá’s memory of her grandfather, “the first [she] had ever known . . . remained fixed in her mind even more firmly than that of her own father” (4). It is fixed like a postmemory: “It was true, even from a young age, she was the living echo of the old man reverberating in time” (58). One night, the despair of having three or four of his own sons born of ‘free womb’ yet sold like so many others, got the best of Grandpa Vicencio. He murdered his wife, and then tried to take his own life. Armed with the same sickle that he had used on his wife, he severed his own hand (46). Ponciá carries this trauma along with his memory, and copes with it throughout the novel.

Ponciá hardly lived with her grandfather, nor did she know him, yet she recalls his amputated arm: “She was just a little girl at the breast when he died, but she remembered one detail very distinctly—Grandpa Vicencio was missing one of his hands, and he always hid the severed limb behind him. [...] The brief time that she had spent with her grandfather proved sufficient for her to have retained certain traces of him. Her memory clung to the tears mixed

with laughter, the little amputated arm and the unintelligible words of her Grandpa Vicencio” (3). This flashback to her childhood mentions his “little arm” three times. This is the “one detail” that she remembers “very distinctly:” “the severed limb behind him; the little amputated arm; the little arm that was cut off” (4-5). That image plays back in her memory like Tituba’s memory of her mother hanging, like Beloved’s death, like Clorinda’s voice to Tancred. Short phrases echo the painful cutting off of an arm and a life, recalling the repetitive aspect of the traumatic memory. The euphemism does anything but downplay the incident. The “little arm” underscores a symbolic amputation. Grandpa Vicencio lost his soul and identity during the social death of slavery.

When Ponciá is still a child, her father quickly notices “that Grandpa Vicencio had left something for the girl,” not a material inheritance, but his spirit (6). When she takes her first steps, she starts walking “with one of her arms hidden behind her back, and her little hand closed into a fist as though it were cut off” (5). This is not an embodiment per se, and is not described as such in the novel (yet), it’s described as a “resemblance” from her father’s point of view. Meanwhile, her mother and her godmother “crossed themselves when they looked at Ponciá Vicencio,” as if they had seen a demon or a spirit. So most people interpret her gesture as a haunting, as her grandpa attempting to contact his living relatives.

The connection with her grandfather continues in her childhood. While she worked to make pans, pots, and animal figurines out of the river’s clay with her mother, “One day she made a short little man, curved, thin, like a little twig with a cut-off hand curled around his back” (11). Again her mother seems frightened, “snatched the figure away and wanted to smash it, but she forced herself to contain this urge as well as the scream that welled up inside” (12). After the mud sculpture incident, the text reveals that Grandpa Vicencio is “inside their daughter”: “Yes, it

was him. Precisely him! How did the girl remember? She had been so small, still at the breast, when the man had passed. How then was it possible for Ponciá Vicencio to remember every last detail?” (12)

The narrative voice comes in and out of Ponciá’s mind, in tune with her confusion about her “inheritance.” At first she is confused: “wherever she went, the inheritance that Grandpa Vicencio had left her would be with her always. And sooner or later, it would indeed unfold and the law would be honored. None of it made sense to Ponciá” (55). She “had been hearing these words since she was a young girl,” but did not understand “what had her grandfather left behind that might belong to her?” (56) She does not find comfort until she understands what this inheritance means, which has to do with her Grandfather’s haunting.

With the mystery of the inheritance (or her grandfather’s haunting), Evaristo implies a reference to material inheritance from which Ponciá did not benefit.<sup>71</sup> She inherits his spirit, painful yet rewarding in the end. To make sense of this inheritance, she returns to her hometown and collects testimonies and histories that give her another sense of self, and clothe her—not materialistically, but spiritually: “She drank in the details, painstakingly patching together the broken web of the past like someone recuperating a first garment so that they would never again be hopelessly naked” (58). In a sense, Ponciá recovers a sense of self that was lost by her grandfather. She works through the postmemory, the void, and the inherited trauma. She becomes aware of her community’s history and wears its broken past like a garment.

She also regains hope in creating a community. Once she understands what the inheritance is, the narrative becomes a shared story telling. Her brother’s voice has just joined the novel’s narrators in the previous fragment, and right afterwards her mother’s voice penetrates

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<sup>71</sup> “We must be prepared to renounce our interest in maintaining the same uneven claims to land and property on which the system of slavery was based” (Handley 145).

the narrative as well in the following fragment. Between the two, Ponciá's fragment expresses lucidity, and relief: "Ah! So that was it! . . . The sound of murmurs arose, of laments and laughter... Grandpa Vicencio. She listened carefully and took a deep breath. No, she hadn't lost contact with the dead. It was a sign that she would find her mother and brother among the living" (73). The connection with the dead gives her hope in life—recognizing the broken past helps her plan towards the future.

In the end, the inheritance is a sign of freedom: "She had *finally* been made the vessel, the heir to a history of all their suffering, and while this suffering lived on in their memory, those that embodied it would not be able to forge a new destiny, not even by force . . . She cried, laughed, muttered. She unraveled the twisted strings of a long history" (130-31, my emphasis). This liberation, like the cobweb garment, stresses the importance of history in formulating identity.

Freud's concept of transference and its importance to heal trauma becomes reformulated by Conceição Evaristo's text.<sup>72</sup> In Conceição Evaristo's novel, Ponciá's Grandfather's storytelling makes way for a transference that occurs within Ponciá Vicencio. Conceição Evaristo's text presents transferences between teller (the grandfather) and listener (Ponciá Vicencio) beyond words, through embodiment of the traumatized ghost into the body of his granddaughter, Ponciá.

This novel reformulates several concepts from psychoanalytical criticism. In his essay "On Narcissism," Freud establishes a relationship between narcissism and trauma in the sense

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<sup>72</sup> According to Peter Brooks' *Psychoanalysis and Storytelling*, transference occurs in storytelling when: Something is being transmitted or transferred from the teller and is told to the listener, and to listening: it has entered into the realm of interpretation. And if the story told has been effective, if it has 'taken hold,' the act of transmission resembles the psychoanalytic transference, where the listener enters the story as an active participant in the creation of design and meaning, and the reader is then called upon himself to enter this transference space. It is here . . . that attention to Freud's discussions of the transference can help us to understand what is at stake in narrative telling." (51)

that “a person who is tormented by organic pain and discomfort gives up his interest in the things of the external world, in so far as they do not concern his suffering” (Ramadanovic 82). As Ramadanovic notes in “ ‘You your best thing, Sethe’: Trauma’s Narcissism,” this occurs in postcolonial trauma narratives at large. Freud’s narcissistic phase and primary narcissism as part of human survival helps Ramadanovic to qualify Freudian trauma theory and post-colonial narratives as “discourses of self-mastery [that] involve processes through which the subject becomes its own, independent entity. Transcending a subjugating relation, the subject’s origin and essence cease to reside outside the subject—with a parent, a master, and a colonial power—and become an inner condition” (Ramadanovic 180).<sup>73</sup> *Ponciá Vicencio* consistently refers to a sentiment of emptiness, with Ponciá being portrayed as progressively diving into this void and disconnecting herself from the external world. The character seemingly delving into her personal suffering is actually similar to *Beloved*’s overstaying her welcome at 124.<sup>74</sup> Like Sethe when *Beloved* settles into her home, Ponciá Vicencio loses energy, she stops working and eating, and

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<sup>73</sup> Although some postcolonial trauma studies critics (including myself) critique Freud’s individualistic framework, in *Moses and Monotheism*, Freud alludes to the possibility of trauma present before an individual’s birth and affecting that individual. He raises the possibility of psychoanalysis to go beyond the individual and toward an analysis of “archaic heritage of mankind.” (157) Freud observes the inheritance of childhood trauma that he explores such as the Oedipus and castration complex, but his concept serves its use in the study of historical trauma:

When we study the reactions to early traumas, we are quite often surprised to find that they are not strictly limited to what the subject himself has really experienced but diverge from it in a way which fits in much better with the model of a phylogenetic event and, in general, can only be explained by such an influence. The behaviour of neurotic children towards their parents in the Oedipus and castration complex abounds in such reactions, which seem unjustified in the individual case and only become intelligible phylogenetically—by their connection with the experience of earlier generations. . . Its evidential value seems to me strong enough for me to venture on a further step and to posit the assertion that *the archaic heritage of human beings comprises not only dispositions but also subject matter*—memory traces of the experiences of earlier generations. (*Moses* 99)

<sup>74</sup> “Ponciá had woven a web of dreams and now she saw one by one how its strands unraveled and everything became a great hole, a great void” (16); “at times, she felt as though her face were a great void, replete with nothing and of nothing” (24); “she only knew that from one moment to the next, it had been as if a hole had opened of its own accord, forming a great fissure both inside and outside of her, a void which confused her”; “in the beginning, when the void threatened to overtake her, she was racked with fear. Now she liked the absence, covered herself with it, with unknowing herself, becoming a distant figure to herself” (39); “she felt the emptiness several times, the absence of her self. She would fall half-dead, swooning, still experiencing the world around her, but not situated there, not feeling its emotion. No one feared them; no one was upset by her absences...she was empty” (59); “she remained empty for several long moments, her gaze fixed as she whispered unintelligible words. He wanted to touch her, call her, shake her, but he was afraid, terrified of nearing the void that belonged only to her.” (61)

sits for long hours staring out of her window (“she found herself quiet, sitting in her corner, looking through the window at the changing time outside, while coming and going in the time that went by there inside of her memory” 50). She becomes mute, and constantly daydreams (96-97).<sup>75</sup>

Evaristo’s novel hones in on the postcolonial difference with a protagonist seemingly stuck in a narcissistic suffering. It would be solely focused on her sense of self if she were not part of a tradition that defined her as part of a community. When her mother Maria finally comes out to the city and finds Ponciá in her urban shack, she finds that “other faces—not only that of Grandma Vicencio—visited Ponciá’s countenance. Her mother knew them all, even the ones that arrived from another space and time. There was her daughter-one-and-many” (129). At the same time, at this point the narrative transcends Ponciá Vicencio’s thoughts and flashbacks to include her brother’s and her mother’s voices (without hardly any direct discourse). Once her mother Maria Vicencio and her brother Luandi Vicencio (the only fully named man in the novel) occupy the text, it earns a status of familial re-membling. The reader witnesses and connects the dots between each family member’s memories. When originally Ponciá’s flashbacks revealed only her and her mother blessing her brother and father as they left for the fields; when Luandi returns home from the city and finds no one there (like Ponciá when she returns momentarily just weeks

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<sup>75</sup> In Evaristo’s novel, Ponciá Vicencio’s name and her awareness of its meaning as she learns to write it and finds “the reminder of the master’s power, of a certain Colonel Vicencio,” present her will to transcend the master’s name’s subjugation, which becomes an inner condition: “In what fold of her memory would the meaning of her own name be written? To her, Ponciá Vicencio was a name that didn’t have an owner” (20). The novel is driven by this condition, with a plot almost stuck in Ponciá’s mind (until about two-thirds through, when her brother and her mother’s points of view participate in the narrative) and her memories. Her struggle to make her name her own begins as a young girl, when she would call her name as she watched her reflection in the pond, and continues as a grown woman: “one evening she spent the whole night in front of the mirror calling to herself. She called and called and didn’t answer” (10). This should serve in the conclusion to the chapter, linking all three texts to trauma studies and the postcolonial condition.

before him), “he could hear the voices of his mother and Ponciá who always called out their blessing when it was time for him to go back to the lands of the whites” (89).

The experience narrated in *Ponciá Vicencio* exemplifies Marianne Hirsch’s concept of “postmemory,” and W.E.B. Dubois’ concept of “long memory,” both types of transgenerational grief, persistent as the memory of a past that one person never lived. In this case, it ties in with DuBois’ ‘Fact of Slavery.’ W.E.B. DuBois defined “long memory” in relation to African peoples in his “Concept of Race” chapter from *Dusk of Dawn*, where he asks himself “what is between us that constitutes a tie which I can feel better than I can explain?” This is the history called the Fact of Slavery:

The fact that since the fifteenth century these ancestors of mine and their other descendants have had a common history; have suffered a common disaster and have one long memory. . . The physical bond is least and the badge of color relatively unimportant save as a badge; *the real essence of this kinship is its social heritage of slavery; the discrimination and insult*” (DuBois “Concept of Race”).<sup>76</sup>

Ponciá’s arm re-enacts slavery’s mutilation left on her GrandPa’s body as she naturally folds it behind her back. To come back to Hirsch’s concept of “postmemory,” it implies a sense of distance, belatedness and loss (Hirsch 243). Her concept sheds light on the very void that Ponciá feels throughout the novel, a void that I noted not be just her own, but her Grandpa Vicencio’s and others from previous generations’ despair as her mother sees her as “her daughter-one-and-many” (Conceição 129).

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<sup>76</sup> W.E.B. DuBois defined “long memory” in relation to African peoples in his “Concept of Race” chapter from *Dusk of Dawn*, where he asks himself “what is between us that constitutes a tie which I can feel better than I can explain?” This is the history called the Fact of Slavery

Conceição Evaristo narrates three family members' reconnection and this reconnection allows Ponciá to regain her sanity. The plot does not resolve her muteness, nor does it conclude her fits of embodiment. Instead, it embraces these characteristics that might, in other cultural contexts, be diagnosed as insanity. *Ponciá Vicencio* affirms an identity as part of an African tradition of connectedness with the dead, and of her family's own historical experience.

Like Asante, I interpret that afro-centeredness provides a form of sanity to the character, thus exposing a lesson on cultural perspective, centeredness and historicity:

Molefi Kete Asante in his book *Afrocentricity* (1980), [originally proposed] the term 'Afrocentric' . . . as 'a perspective that advances the idea that people of African descent who have been moved off of philosophical, physical, economic, social religious, and political terms can achieve a degree of sanity only by returning to a centered place within the context of their own historical experiences.' (Afolabi 5)

In fact, the introduction of the novel agrees that Evaristo presents the reader with an afro-centered perspective. In her introduction, Martínez-Cruz stresses the novel's "Black, feminine ways of knowing" (Martínez-Cruz v). The beginning of the novel introduces Ponciá as a character that inherits "a spiritual ambivalence toward the Orixá called 'Angorô in the Angolan tradition and 'Oxumaré' in the Yoruba tradition . . . Ponciá's ambivalence toward the rainbow is born of ancient African beliefs that continue to shape her community's ways of knowing the natural world" (Martínez-Cruz iii). Furthermore, Black feminine ways of knowing supply part of the cure in *Ponciá Vicencio*. Nengua Kainda's character is a healer that lives in GrandPa Vicencio's community, by the Minas Gerais plantation. After having left her community for several years, Ponciá Vicencio returns, hoping to see her mother Maria, but she is not there. She

finds the mud sculpture of her Grandpa that she had been after his death, takes it with her, and goes to visit Nengua Kainda. As Martínez-Cruz concludes: “the character of elderly Nengua Kainda offers a solution to the pathologies of both racism and misogyny that plague Latin American society... Kainda’s works serve to rehabilitate African practices and to refute colonial messages about authority that sustain patriarchal, neo-feudalistic social orderings” (Martínez-Cruz v). Through indirect dialogue, Nengua Kainda advises Ponciá and helps her prepare herself “to move forward in her life” (55). Healing, once again, does not require just individual therapy, but a collective liberation from time or oppressive history, a “moving forward.”

A final aspect of traditional healing in Ponciá Vicencio is the mud sculpting. As a child, Ponciá sculpts with her mother out of the mud of the river. This is how they earned money while her father and brother worked at the fields for weeks at a time. What was at first a labor becomes a therapeutic tool for Ponciá. The clay sculpting symbolizes finding a voice; one connected to nature, spirits, body and soul, similar to the theoretical voices of women of color. Ponciá’s sculpting hand, in Maria’s point of view, shows a deep connection with her Grandpa Vicencio as well. Maria’s maternal love finds hope and a huge potential in her skill:

And whoever saw, just as she herself [Maria, Ponciá’s mother] saw, when the girl began to go about with her closed-up hand curled behind, as if she had ended up with the cut-off hand of the grandfather, would never believe that it was this very hand, a perfect mimicry of the old man’s, that would give shape to the masses, that would be the greatest curator. (75)

The “talking cure” has been replaced by a sculpting cure.

### 2.3 CONCLUSION

The polyphonic narratives assert Afrocentric polyphonic texts and present trauma resolutions outside of the Freudian individual-centered personal trauma. They demand a reformulation of trauma similar to the one postcolonial trauma theorists propose. Each novel also presents a narrative of “rememory,” what Toni Morrison terms as “the practice of making present and real, that which was forgotten and lost,” (Johnson 117). In “The Site of Memory,” Toni Morrison discusses challenges that “any person who is black, or who belongs to any marginalized category” faces as they attempt to unveil unspeakable events. When, “historically, we were seldom invited to participate in the discourse even when we were its topic,” Morrison finds it crucial to trust recollections. Whether they are her own or others’, only with these recollections and the act of imagination can one gain “total access to the unwritten interior life of these people” (110-111).

If imagination, conversations with ghosts, and recollections shape a text, does it support factual information? Will it supply History its missing facts? Neo-abolitionist writers access truths with life’s traumas in the same way that Morrison argues is the way she accesses truths:

if I’m looking to find and expose a truth about the interior life of people who didn’t write it (which doesn’t mean that they didn’t have it); if I’m trying to fill in the blanks that the slave narratives left—to part the veil that was frequently drawn, to implement the stories that I heard—then the approach that’s most productive and most trustworthy for me is the recollection that moves from the image to the text. Not from the text to the image. (119)

Neo-abolitionist writers narrate through fiction, mystery and magic, from image to text. They unveil the unspeakable, shift transference from ghost tellers to present listener/writer, not

through language but through image in Morrison's argument, or through embodiment and image in Ponciá Vicencio's fictional case.

For example, Conceição Evaristo's novel utilizes Ponciá's embodiment as the main drive for the plot. It recognizes the importance of imagination to heal trauma through narrative. Condé listens to Tituba's ghost for a year to write her novel. Morrison reaches the depths of her imagination that take her to marginalized individuals' lives. Each novel serves as a case of "flooding," where a rush of imagination invades the character with a past that needs remembering.

You know, they straightened out the Mississippi River in places, to make room for houses and livable acreage. Occasionally the river floods these places. 'Floods' is the word they use, but in fact it is not flooding; it is remembering. Remembering where it used to be. All water has a perfect memory and is forever trying to get back to where it was. Writers are like that: remembering where we were, what valley we ran through, what the banks were like, the light that was there and the route back to our original place. It is emotional memory—what the nerves and the skin remember as well as how it appeared. And a rush of imagination is our "flooding." (119)

What do these novels have in common that is therapeutic? They flood their readers with remembrance.

What does their flooding contribute to Trauma Studies? Michael Rothberg notes in "Decolonizing Trauma Studies" that this field mainly discusses the Holocaust, overlooking Frantz Fanon's theory of trauma influenced by phenomenology, Marxism and psychoanalysis. Post-colonial trauma studies turn from psychic reality to economic and political materialities

responds to criticism about Bhaba-style postcolonial theory that “distracts from power differentials in capitalist and imperial domination” (Rothberg 230). For Rothberg, the regions represented in post-colonial trauma narratives questionably comply with Freud’s initial formulations “[that] tend to import individualizing and psychologizing models onto the terrain of collective violence” (Rothberg 230).

In this chapter I used trauma theory while contributing to the decolonizing movement of trauma studies with, as I demonstrated above, references to Afro centered ways of knowing and theorizing trauma and healing. As I explore the trauma of slavery in neo-abolitionist trauma narratives, I keep in mind that Freudian trauma theory originated in Western modernity’s concepts of progress and individual advancement. This model relates to a tradition of Enlightenment thinking. Enlightenment philosophers are falsely recognized as the main cause for the abolition of slavery, and for changing the perception of slaves from animals to individual and free human beings. In *Colonialism and Race in Luso-Hispanic Literature* Jerome Branche makes light of this important distinction between how Enlightenment philosophers defined egalitarian personhood as supposedly universal, while they referred only to white males and perceived all others as subpersons (83).<sup>77</sup> In the French context, *Claims to Memory* by Catherine Reinhardt states that:

Powerful symbols of progress and social justice, the French *philosophes* largely contributed to the idea that the eighteenth century is at the origin of the nation’s advances. They are considered the ideological fathers of the French Revolution,

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<sup>77</sup> “Charles Mills, in his critique of the Enlightenment revolt against the social theory and practice of the Occidental ancien régime, points out the limitations of the movement’s rights-based individualism, especially with regard to the moral egalitarian of philosopher Emmanuel Kant, its premier theorist on race. He asserts that the Enlightenment’s refutation of feudalism’s veneration of lineage and wealth, its entitlement of the individual to respect, and to an inherent worth and social personhood, although purportedly ‘universal,’ was meant, in reality, to refer only to white males. The remaining social subjects were the *Untermensch*, or subpersons.” (Branche 83)

which in turn is thought to have brought about the destruction of the slave regime. However, in the process of remembering the *philosophes*, the French Revolution, and the abolition of slavery in 1848, the foundation of France's wealth on the slave economy is passed over in silence. (12)

The challenge remains in my own analyses to step back from Modernity's psychoanalytical patterns, such as character-based and individualizing analyses, in order to contribute to the 21<sup>st</sup> century's decolonizing movement within the field of trauma studies.

*Beloved* traces Sethe's running away through flashbacks and different points of view, a collective storytelling of a mother who runs away from a plantation, from slavery, but also from her past and taking her baby's life. Her daughter Denver works through this trauma with her, and eventually with the entire former slave community. Denver's birth, the only birth that takes place in this novel (and is told in a variety of ways), occurs off of the plantation, on the river that leads Sethe and Denver to freedom. It symbolizes the potential of the next generation. Her birthplace also houses "silvery blue spores," a symbol of hope for the future (84). Toni Morrison's trauma narrative offers a literary concretization of Hortense Spillers' belief in a transgenerational working through of trauma; where "the child of that mother and father can start anew."

On the other hand, Maryse Condé's *Moi, Tituba sorcière...* explores the complexities of the healing potential of a trauma narrative from a Caribbean point of view. Her protagonist, who carries the trauma of her conception (sexual abuse on a slave ship), and mourns her mother's death, loses her parents at an early age and learns to listen to the living-dead throughout her life. Condé's protagonist questions the validity of storytelling; the pain of reliving her life story serves little purpose in her point of view. Whereas Sethe and *Beloved* appreciate telling their stories to *Beloved*, Tituba never finds a witness within her to help her work through her trauma.

Condé's ironic play on the slave narrative almost reduces her novel to just that. Yet as her narrator questions her story's potential, she compares the collective memory of slavery to a pool of blood with memories floating like water lilies (253). Her voice is conflicted, often portraying herself as a parodied epic heroine. Yet she finds that stories like hers (and I would add like *Sethe's*, *Denver's*, *Beloved's*, *Baby Suggs*, *Ella*, *Grandpa Vicencio*, etc.), when they are revisited, turn into water lilies among the pool of blood that is the memory of slavery and its struggle to remember it. The irony and Tituba's instability as a narrator who questions her actions yet never fully takes responsibility for them (nor for the act of storytelling), leaves room to interpret her traumatic narrative as a tortuous post-modern play on the autobiographical genre. It will further be explored as a critique of contemporary feminist reformulations in the following chapter.

In *Ponciá Vicencio*, the main healing argument deals with the importance of embodiment and African ways of knowing in healing trauma. Her family works through her grandfather's trauma thanks to her being able to listen and embody his voice, his memories, his laughter, his sadness, and his madness. The "daughter of one and many" that could be seen as alienated and ill, is actually a gateway to new forms of therapy, the sculpting cure rather than the talking cure.

All three novels unfold a re-membering of past trauma and connect them to a collectivity. They correlate a relationship between narrating trauma and healing and most importantly, they underline the importance of raising historical awareness in order to work through and overcome collective, transgenerational trauma. I do not conclude that these novels automatically heal, but that they take steps forward in the act of witnessing, of working through trauma, and teach me that ghosts, although invisible, can tell us a thing or two about history if we are willing to listen, embody and re-member.

### 3.0 RECOVERING OUR SHATTERED BODIES: NAMES, MIRRORS AND WOMBS

“Even as different strains of feminism and activism sometimes directly contradict each other, they are all part of our third wave lives, our thinking, and our places: we are products of all the contradictory definitions of and differences within feminism, beasts of such a hybrid kind that perhaps we need a different name altogether.”

- Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake, *Third Wave Agenda* (3).

“To grow up with such overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one’s birth of one’s consciousness, is to risk having one’s own stories and experiences displaced, even evacuated, by those of a previous generation.”

- Marianne Hirsch, “The Generation of Postmemory” (107).

“For, inasmuch as our bodies have been the source of our commodification in art, the site of physical and sexual abuse under slavery and neocolonial ‘domestic schemes,’ it stands to reason that it would be through the body that we might remain a palpable sense of our own identities.”

- Myriam Chancy *Searching for Safe Spaces: Afro-Caribbean Women Writers in Exile* (123).

This chapter revolves around thematic analyses comparable to the ghost trope in the previous chapter. Claiming a name is a central tenet of one’s identity and selfhood. In some cases, literacy is also a part of the process of reclaiming bodies and selfhood<sup>78</sup>. I will perform a comparative

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<sup>78</sup> Jerome Branche’s *Colonialism and Race in Luso-Hispanic Literature* dedicates an entire chapter to “Slavery and the Syntax of Subpersonhood,” calling attention to the impact of coloniality on forced migrants of African descent, in relation to their bodies, physical appearance, and identity: “Notwithstanding the presence of Blacks in colonial Latin American literature, therefore, I shall pay attention in this chapter to other, nonliterary aspects of discourse pertinent to Africans and their descendants and to other nonwhites in race-making in the Latin American colonial context. I propose that these aspects of discourse are arguable of much greater potency than merely ‘literary’ ones, since they go to the heart of subject formation especially for the forced migrants as they inhabit their new material

analysis of these themes in pertinent texts. I will also present a comparative analysis of claiming or rejecting the role of motherhood, focusing on characters' choices rather than victimization. Finally, I will analyze the trope of mirroring. The "mirror effect" that interests me occurs literally on one hand, in specific scenes where a secondary character or a protagonist looks at herself in the mirror. On the other hand, I find its occurrence in scenes where a character internally reflects on the image that her self gives off, how she is perceived (by others) and how she carries herself. Each theme brings me to discuss internal colonization in discursive, sexual or physical realms of identity formation. Like the spectral trope in Chapter 2, each of these themes (naming, motherhood, the mirror) presents more components of literature's therapeutic function.<sup>79</sup>

Due to the large number of texts at hand in this chapter, I place them in an interlaced dialogue different from Chapter 1's structure. I do not intend to arrive at general conclusions from a comparative cultural analysis that would, for instance, enlighten the reader on main cultural differences between women of color in the United States, Cuba, and Brazil. Instead, this chapter builds bridges of commonality and differences between each narrative, allowing the texts' differences to speak for themselves.

I will refer to the following texts: Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Maryse Condé's *Moi, Tituba Sorcière*, Conceição Evaristo's *Ponciá Vicencio*, Gloria Anzaldúa's *testimonio Borderlands/La Frontera* (and other of her texts), María de los Reyes Castillo's *testimonio Reyita*, and several

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and social environments as slaves and exslaves and are designated identities in they dynamic of social stratification and its taxonomies. . . This physiognimoc rationale would operate on the premise that the body is lefible and subject to diagnosis, constituting a textuality that attests to the binary of superiority and inferiority according to various rubrics of social, moral, and ethical worth." (82)

<sup>79</sup> For a lack of space and time, I do not embark on a comparison between women of color's works in each nation. I limit this chapter to an introduction to what could later become an expansive comparative study or anthology of works from Chicana, Afro-Cuban, Afro-Brazilian, Indigenous and queer writers' narratives of exploration of the woman of color's violated body, repressed sexuality, and fragmented identity.

Quilombhoje writers' works, specifically poems written by Celinha, Conceição Evaristo and Esmeralda Ribeiro (published in São Paulo, Brazil, from 1978-2008).<sup>80</sup> Of the poems written by female members of the Quilombhoje group, a writers' collective born in 1978, I selected works published in the last 10 years from the collective's 1970's yearly publication *Cadernos Negros*,<sup>81</sup> and from two anthologies compiled by Miriam Alves, one of the group's members, published in 1995 and 2005. All of these women's rhetorical objectives form part of a feminist of color discourse.

Marianne Hirsch's epigraph points to the impact of an "inherited" memory onto one's experience and identity. She is referring to the children and grandchildren of Holocaust victims, and the "risk" that they run from having this traumatic heritage. I pursue the following question in this chapter—what "risk" do women of color run by carrying their foremothers' memories? Marianne Hirsch's idea of "risk" assumes the idea that a generation with postmemory experiences displacement. How is this displacement, or the feeling being set aside by the memory of a trauma, expressed in women of color's texts? I will trace it in reflective images—moments when women of color reflect on their identity and resist subordination—and analyze the images' subversive function to answer another question: how does each text represent displaced sexuality in moments of claiming or refusing a name, or motherhood and in mirror scenes? What arguments do they put forth in order to work through postcolonial repressed sexuality?

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<sup>80</sup> When available, I quote from the English translation of the texts, and refrain from making comments on translation. In other instances, mainly when I quote Quilombhoje writers' texts that have not been translated into English, I provide my own translation of their Brazilian Portuguese. In that case, the quotes will be in Portuguese first, followed by my English translation in brackets.

<sup>81</sup> The name chosen for their publication, *Cadernos Negros* ("Black Notebooks"), relates to Negritude's first publications by Aimé Césaire, *Cahiers d'un retour au pays natal*. Césaire chose this as a title to counter the genre-specific titles like *Écrits, essais, roman*, etc. and the Quilombhoje's publication title strives for the same goal.

Alongside Marianne Hirsch's theory, I include Third World feminist theory to formulate an approach similar to Moraga and Anzaldúa's "theory in the flesh" and bell hooks' "lived theory," who advocate to include their own bodies within their theoretical praxis. In *We Heal From Memory: Sexton, Lorde, Anzaldúa, and the poetry of witness*, Cassie Premo Steele anticipates the potential for such an approach. Anzaldúa's borderland experience instructed Steele to recognize the borderlands' wounds as part of the author's body. The border creates a possibility for Anzaldúa to accept her fragmented cultural identity. She copes with the borderlands' wounds as if they were a part of her body, and in this way works through personal wounds that would otherwise remain unrecognized (52). Anzaldúa's coping pushes me to ask, like Steele: could recognizing the wounds of slavery and racial discrimination as part of their fragmented sexualities make way for a decolonized identity formation?

In this chapter, the works of literature present traumatic memories as referential marks in women's bodies. Adopting an unorthodox methodology, in the next three sections I will be referring to new texts and to the novels already analyzed in the first chapter. This circular approach respects the fact that beyond a victim's voice as a ghost and a haunting, the victims' bodies play a central role in working through, surviving, and claiming a sense of identity in the postmemory of American slavery. I will compare the novels from Chapter 2 with other genres of neo-abolitionist texts such as *testimonio* and poetry by Afro-Cuban, Afro-Brazilian and U.S. Hispanic women. Each text sketches women of color's repressed sexualities and fragmented bodies in late 20<sup>th</sup> century contexts.

In *Slavery and Social Death* (1982), Orlando Patterson reminds us that any individual in bondage must undertake a recovery from the first trauma that affects all individuals in bondage,

“social death.”<sup>82</sup> Before the event of sexual abuse or infanticide, the ritual of social death affected these women’s identity formation. The characters to be studied in this chapter will present attempts to reconstruct what was fragmented by slavery’s social death. Enslaved women were seen as an object of sexual abuse, or bestial attraction—men were attracted to them because they saw them as beneath them, as animal-like. Furthermore, unable to nurse their own children because they had to work in the fields or complete other forms of labor, some women were “dispossessed” mothers. They were violated of their maternity and their sexual identity. In turn, their children lacked a connection to their mothers, and lost a part of their identity through this gap. This also affected their sexual identity. Analyzing “fragmented sexualities” assumes both recovering from social death and the later reconstruction of sexual identity. I will compare novels, short stories and poems focusing on how women reclaim their sense of selfhood in 19<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century fictional spaces.

What do I mean by “fragmented sexualities”? With Hortense Spillers’ research, I have found that women “in the flesh,” or captive mothers, or mothers that lived in bondage, offer another perspective to define femininity and gender.<sup>83</sup> They hold a double status, as mother as well as mother in bondage or dispossessed of her maternity. Living in bondage, their maternity was taken away from them at the same time as they bore children; their children became their owner’s property upon their birth. Following Hortense Spillers, I am especially compelled by how “violated maternity” may help better understand contemporary sexualities. Enslaved or

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<sup>82</sup> Like I explained in Chapter 2, “social death” follows four basic phases: 1) the symbolic rejection of a slave’s past; 2) the change of name; 3) the imposition of a mark of servitude (branding); 4) a new status in household or economic organization (Patterson 47).

<sup>83</sup> “If we think of the ‘flesh’ as a primary narrative [of social conceptualization], then we mean its seared, divided, ripped-apartness, riveted to the ship’s hold, or ‘escaped’ overboard. [...] The flesh is the concentration of ‘ethnicity that contemporary critical discourses neither acknowledge nor discourse away. It is this ‘flesh and blood’ entity, in the vestibule (or ‘pre-view’) of a colonized North America, that is essentially ejected from ‘The Female Body in Western Culture.’” (458)

otherwise marginalized mothers fit a category for thinking gender that remains “out of the traditional symbolics of female gender,” yet their experiences and their presence in contemporary literature underscores that “it is our task to make a place for this different social subject.” (Spillers, “Mama’s Baby” 80) This chapter rethinks sexuality with their subjectivity in mind. Thus I include a careful approach to infanticide, an element that stands outside of the traditional symbolics of female gender, in the category of cruel conditions of plantation slavery as well as contemporary urban slavery. As an element that stands outside of the traditional symbolics of female gender, I do not mean that it is a component of a non-gendered space, on the contrary. The gendered identity and sexuality of Black women presents a differential gendered identity because it was articulated in the context of slavery, because the rape of women and infanticide were part of those conditions of the cruelty of slavery.

My intentions thus follow Hortense Spillers’ proposal in “Mamma’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe.” (1987) She explains that the African female subject 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. A female body strung from a tree limb, or bleeding from the breast on any given day of field work because the ‘overseer,’ standing the length of a whip, has popped her flesh open, adds a lexical and living dimension to the narratives of women in culture and society. This materialized scene of unprotected female flesh—of female flesh ‘ungendered’—offers a praxis and a theory, a text for living and for dying, and a method for reading both through their diverse mediations. (458-59)

To pursue a differential gender study I aim to advance a complex understanding of motherhood with the novels' cases of violated maternity and infanticide. With the concept of "fragmented sexualities," I mean to define sexuality as differential and coming out of the traditional symbolics of female gender, comprising of both the experience of "female flesh "ungendered" or captive women, and "liberated" women.

Going along with the parallel between trauma theory and feminism of color, Patricia Hill Collins' *Black Feminist Thought* relates the trauma of women in bondage to the signifier of their repressed and scarred sexuality or flesh. Like Spillers, she establishes a relationship between traumas that women experienced in captivity, a repressed sexuality bound to their identity, the transgenerational transmission of such a marker onto Black women today. On the other hand, in her paper "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," Audre Lorde opens a critical perspective that recognizes the inherited power of the erotic.<sup>84</sup> Collins, Lorde and Spillers' concepts will inform my literary analyses.

For example, Conceição Evaristo's novel *Ponciá Vicencio* begins with a flashback: Ponciá remembers the fear of walking under a rainbow, and how she patted herself when she walked under a rainbow, as a child, to check whether she had turned into a boy (11). The novel thus begins with her questioning her gender. In the previous chapter, I associated this moment with her spirit shuddering and leaving her body, triggering a journey where she would recover her soul, and work through her family's inherited traumas. Relevant to this chapter, the same example reveals a concern with gender. Based on a common belief handed down from one generation to the next, Ponciá believed the folktale that walking under a rainbow could turn her

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<sup>84</sup> This pamphlet does not have page numbers.

into a boy.<sup>85</sup> This moment symbolizes the complex process of articulating a gendered identity as a woman whose foremothers were mothers and mother-dispossessed. Growing up in a racist, patriarchal, and erotically oppressed society, Ponciá Vicencio's character grows up to be traumatized and repressed, mute, paralyzed, depressed; in her condition she remembers this moment first. Unconsciously, she associates her condition with that moment in her childhood. By beginning her novel with this flashback, Conceição Evaristo's novel associates the afflictions within her character with knowledge carried down from her foremothers. With the myth of the rainbow symbolizing inherited knowledge, the moment when she crosses the rainbow symbolizes inheriting this questioning of her sexuality. Evaristo's character, with the myth of the rainbow, illustrates the correlation between inheriting repressed sexuality and previous generations' experience; and the flashback symbolizes having to cope with this moment when a signifier of repressed sexuality was imposed or inherited onto an identity. I will approach this transmitted signifier, moments when women realize its impact on their identities, and the power of the erotic in women of color's identity formation or women of color consciousness today.

In her article "The Curse of Constant Remembrance: The Belated Trauma of the Slave Trade in Aye Key Ramah's *Fragments*," Laura Murphy discusses the long-term effects of trauma, or transgenerational trauma, in postcolonial states. To explain how transgenerational trauma affects the post-colonial identity, however, she refers to Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok's idea of an inherent relationship between trauma/repressed secrets and the post-colonial state. Postcolonial identity originates with a trauma or a repressed secret, which becomes a transgenerationally-transmitted signifier of repression. In turn, the trauma or repressed secret comes through in the form of haunting or melancholia that manifests itself in the present. This is

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<sup>85</sup> This belief also points to the fluidity of gender in Brazilian religion and deities.

illustrated in Conceição Evaristo's novel, Ponciá Vicencio is haunted by her grandfather and in a consistent state of melancholy. Laura Murphy explains that a trauma or repressed secret will change to a signifier of repression, and be later transmitted transgenerationally as a post-colonial identity is born. Abraham and Torok and Laura Murphy's conceptualization of the post-colonial identity coincide with my argument on the experience of women of color's sexuality as fragmented due to a history of repressed sexuality transmitted transgenerationally. An identity based on a signifier of repression agrees with my argument on the experience of women of color's sexuality: it is "fragmented" due to a history of repressed sexuality transmitted transgenerationally, which began with the ritual of social death.

In Chapter 2, I analyzed ghosts' voices that haunted victims of trauma in order to re-member trauma in the flesh. In this chapter, I deal with corporeal components: scars that have inscribed bodies; moments when scars become parts of a personal identity and one's own body; scars that turn a woman in bondage into a woman gendered in the flesh—with a sense of self and sexuality that incorporates her body's wounds. In this chapter, the scars lend these women a differential identity and sexuality worth re-membering into our concepts of gender. The following chapter listens to and answers other voices' calling, not the ghosts. I will listen to the bodies' voices that scream to bear witness and re-member their trauma in the flesh.

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To mark the early development of feminism of women of color, Angela Davis' book chapter "Rape, Racism and the Myth of the Black Rapist" notes Black feminism's first declarations in the context of rape accusations punished by lynching after the Civil War. In the aftermath of Civil War, capital punishment for sexual abuse had become a new form of oppression. White folks continually and wrongly accused Black men of raping white women,

and lynched them for crimes they did not commit. That and “the continued rape of black women [by white men], became an essential ingredient of the postwar strategy of racist terror” (Davis 55).<sup>86</sup> Thus white women’s sexuality, along with Black women and men’s sexuality, served as tools to preserve a system of oppression that marginalized Black women and men.<sup>87</sup> They guaranteed the continuation of the slavery institution. Davis’ study parallels this context of oppression with women of color’s political messages, such as Ida B. Wells, whose rhetoric condemned sexual abuse, unjust accusations and the racism prevalent in white women’s organizations. Fighting these taboos of oppressed sexuality and continuing racism, unveiling their presence, overcoming their oppression, then and now, constitutes main issues for women of color’s emancipation.

As I will show in this chapter, today’s literary discourse on overcoming sexual abuse maintains early Black feminism’s values. The women in this chapter speak out against this silence like Ida B. Wells did, putting their bodies and their voices at the center of working through trauma. They expose issues of sexual abuse and states of enslavement with images such as an enslaved womb, and articulate discourses of resistance to the colonial sexual economy with characters that reject motherhood while in bondage. The concluding section of the chapter analyzes the narratives as spaces to work through internal colonization and emancipate from colonial economies being imposed onto their bodies.

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<sup>86</sup> Lynching Black men did not occur until after the Reconstruction (since they were still perceived as a valuable commodity), although white abolitionists were being lynched before the Civil War (Davis 55).

<sup>87</sup> “Ida B. Wells’ analysis of lynching and her demystification of the political motivations behind the manipulation of both Black male and female and white female sexuality led her into direct confrontation with women like Frances Willard, president of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, who considered themselves progressive but refused to see lynching as an institutionalized practice. Willard’s attitude and Wells’ conclusion that Willard was ‘no better or worse than the great bulk of white Americans on the Negro question’ are indicative of the racism that Cooper condemned in white women’s organizations. As Harper pointed out, there was not a single Black woman admitted to the Southern WCTU.” (Carby 270)

Women of color had pointed out the differential aspect of their gender category, in contrast to white feminism, well before the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with central figures such as Ida B. Wells and Sojourner Truth. Though in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Truth was not considered a central ‘feminist’ figure, 20<sup>th</sup> century feminists took up and analyzed the way in which “ain’t I a woman” put tension on the category of a woman. This is also why it remains important to underline how women of color’s fragmented sexualities speak to the postcolonial condition of women of color and propose to decolonize this representation. From displaced motherhood to repressed sexuality, the following analysis outlines colonial economy’s repercussions on identities of women of color with bodily experiences that point to some origins of transgenerational trauma. Recognizing the wounds of slavery and racial discrimination as part of their bodies, as I will demonstrate, paves a path towards a decolonized identity formation.

As historical silencing affects women of color’s sexuality, their postcolonial narratives undo that in order to work through fragmented sexualities and produce a decolonizing narrative. Feminist literary criticism considers that the first challenge women writers face is their alienation from literary history. The gaps within literary history create an “anxiety of influence” (women writers are unable to look up to female predecessors), and turn the female text into an act of survival (Gilbert & Gubar 25). Female authors look for female predecessors who were cast as alienated by madness before the 20<sup>th</sup> century, perceived as inferior writers. At the same time, they find their identities to be limited by texts that trapped their gender in a perpetual seam, in the wrinkles of confining discourses (Gilbert & Gubar 26).

Gilbert and Gubar fail to mention the female predecessors cast as alienated by slavery and racial discrimination, which would give a pertinent layer to their argument about survival. The Third World feminist writers I refer to in this chapter turn their texts into acts of survival

directly related to physical survival. They do not write for leisure; they write about hunger, poverty, and survival. They inscribe their own identity with their body within it, to formulate a discourse that resists the patriarchal hegemony. This act of survival, however, is not limited to the text. For women of color, it is also associated with the struggle to survive. To recall bell hooks' concept of lived theory and Cherríe Moraga's concept of theory in the flesh, what I will present here are texts that formulate a *living* theory and a *fleshing out* of the trauma in order to survive physically.

In *This Bridge Called My Back*, Cherríe Moraga's introduction to "Entering the Lives of Others: Theory in the Flesh" defines theory in the flesh as:

One where the physical realities of our lives—our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings—all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity. Here, we attempt to bridge the contradictions in our experience:

We are the colored in a white feminist movement.

We are the feminists among the people of our culture.

We are often the lesbians among the straight.

We do this bridging by naming our selves and by telling our stories in our own words. (21)

Note how Cherríe Moraga places emphasis on the act of naming as a central function to "bridge contradictions" in order to create their own political discourse. The act of naming will be analyzed further below in this chapter. The political discourse that Moraga supports is also "born out of necessity," coming from their "physical realities," thus directly related to physical survival and women of color's bodies. I propose to unite the flesh of foremothers that was whipped,

violated and scarred, with their skin color, the land, and their sexual longings; and to observe how their trauma is fleshed out through text.

I follow the method that Moraga proposes to develop: “We are interested in pursuing a society that uses flesh and blood experiences to concretize a vision that can begin to heal our ‘wounded knee’ (Chrystos)” (21). The following analyses of Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands*, Conceição Evaristo’s “Eu-Mulher,” Celinha’s poem “Negritude,” María de los Reyes Castillo’s *Reyita: sencillamente, testimonio de una negra cubana nonagenaria* will trace herstories behind the repressed sexualities, looking at how they flesh out the trauma and place women’s flesh back into theory and history. The texts analyzed in this chapter shape a vision similar to Moraga’s. With images of flesh and blood experiences, they re-member the psychological with physical trauma, they bridge contradictions, and begin to heal by articulating a decolonial identity—naming their own selves and telling their stories in their own words.

First I will introduce examples of decolonizing narratives that work through repressed sexuality that make use of past icons and symbolic figures, in the works of Gloria Anzaldúa and Celinha. Anzaldúa’s third chapter of *Borderlands/La Frontera*, “Entering Into The Serpent,” exemplifies a rhetoric that places women’s bodies at the center of history in order to start the process of decolonial identity formation. She analyzes female icons in Chicana culture with the objective to undo a colonial tradition that repressed, demonized or ‘darkened’ Nahuatl deities’ sexuality. Anzaldúa’s text, which I will further analyze in this chapter’s last section on “Repressed Sexuality,” turns a relationship of fear of the Serpent into acceptance of its ancient indigenous symbolism. She portrays the Serpent, a symbol of affirmed woman-ness, as both “dark sexual drive” and “the basis of all energy and life,” and studies its dichotomic nature. She

traces the “taming”<sup>88</sup> of sensual feminine religious images and the demonizing of other female deities that, in turn, influence literary representations and performance of Chicana sexual performances. To delineate the process of desexualization, Anzaldúa analyzes three symbolic maternal figures in the Chicano imagery (*La Virgen de Guadalupe*, *La Chingada*, *La Llorona*). In relation to women’s sexuality these figures also represent images of repressed and fragmented sexuality:

After the Conquest, the Spaniards and their Church continued to split *Tonantsi/Guadalupe*. They desexed Guadalupe, taking *Coatlalopeuh*, the serpent/sexuality, out of her. They completed the split begun by the Nahuas by making *la Virgen de Guadalupe/Virgen María* into chaste virgins and *Tlazoteotl/Coatlicue/la Chingada* into *putas*; into the Beauties and the Beasts (50).

She unveils the colonial history behind the Catholic Hispanic female saints and the parallel symbolic destruction of Aztec female deities. Her research, in turn, helps her understand the colonial effects onto her body.

Anzaldúa realizes that her closeted sexuality stems in part from the desexualization and demonization of feminine images. Her work thus highlights two cultural phenomena in relation to deities of color: 1) the symbolic oppression enacted onto the discursive and iconic representations of female deities’ bodies (objectification/exoticization/exploitation); and 2) the contrast between female virginal icons of Catholic religion and the sensuality of deities of color (Yemayá in Santería, Coatlicue in Aztec culture, among others). Anzaldúa unveils the process of

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<sup>88</sup> Taussig finds another example of the “taming” or changing the name of an “Indian-manifested Saint” in Colombia, where religious icons were transformed in the local imaginary, from “Wild Women of the Forest” to “Our Lady of Remedies.”

desexualization beyond personal experience, in iconic representations. Then she formulates a decolonial identity of her own body; to undo the colonial sexual economy's values previously oppressing her foremothers and that now oppresses her sense of self.

She concludes that her sexuality and her perception of self are marked by an inherited “*virgen/puta*” dichotomy imposed on the “three mothers” and her ancestors’ deities. The colonial process that covers over deities’ original indigenous symbolism with Catholic symbols erased the women of color difference and categorized religious icons into either sexual or virgin, contaminating or pure. In this process of epistemological violence, the male-female balance was divided into either male or female figures. The end product consisted of iconic figures, no longer associated with the original indigenous meaning of sensuality and woman-ness. Anzaldúa’s research demonstrates how the civilizing colonial mission manipulated indigenous iconic symbols to fit the colonial discourse, while it degraded their symbolic roots. These covered-over identities are important to re-member in order to work through repressed sexuality.

Though not explicitly related to her body, the poetic voice in Celinha’s poem “Negritude” undoes the signifier of displacement from enslaved peoples, similar to Anzaldúa’s undoing the demonization from indigenous deities.<sup>89</sup> “Negritude” defines slavery as a force of inspiration within the poetic voice. With references to acts of war “um canto guerreiro/ um vôo rasante [a warrior’s chant/ a low passing flight]” (34), she promotes the relationship between self-identity and a constant struggle fueled by the memory of struggles against slavery. Aggressive verbs underline how this inspiration pushes her to participate in the struggle. With the verbs’ tenses, the poetic voice establishes a linear time that connects past, present and future. The first two

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<sup>89</sup> However, Anzaldúa remains distinctively separate in her dealing with her Southwestern heritage. While Anzaldúa dies at the center of herstory in order to decolonize her past, Celinha establishes links to her identity to embody her ancestors’ past.

stanzas, with verbs in the past, contrast with the third stanza’s verbs in the present progressive, as the poetic voice brings in images of a future generation (“semente” [seed]; “criança” [child]). The inspiration to fight for liberation connects different eras and enables the poetic voice to look towards the future. The poem also maintains a connection between past and present in the poetic voice’s consciousness. She brings up the memory of children left in the Middle Passage (“deitada nas águas [left in the waters]”) and establishes a connection with her ancestors’ land and their spirituality, a connection with wild animals’ energy alive within her. “Negritude” thus defines the historical moment of enslavement not as an inherited sign of displacement, but as a force of inspiration which, once reintegrated into her identity, allows her to fashion an empowering poetic voice.<sup>90</sup>

In other respects, “Um sol guerreiro” is directed to a child who she asks to sing, believing that this child has the ability to calm a collective weeping (“Cante menino,/ cante uma canção que emudeça os prantos [Sing my child,/ Sing a song that quiets the weeping]” 37). The introductory verses of the poem establish a setting of sadness to overcome, and the child’s role suggests that the next generation may accomplish this. Unlike “Negritude,” “Um Sol Guerreiro”

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<sup>90</sup> In his book review of *Cadernos Negros*, Elio Chaves Flores presents Celinha’s poem as a declaration of diasporic identity, as a voice that anchors her Black identity in the Middle Passage. The waters give each Black individual a “small piece of land,” or sense of being. But without recognizing this traumatic remove, there is no I, from which stems “N E G R I T U D E:”

Ainda em torno das representações africanistas, a poesia “Negritude”, de Celinha, aponta a identidade negra no fulcro das construções históricas da travessia atlântica. São as águas, fronteiras líquidas, que aportam nos continentes e fazem de cada negro “um pedaço de terra”. A autora, ao se situar na Negritude o “eu lírico” abre o seu poema para os golpes da própria história

[In terms of Africanist representations, Celinha’s poem “Negritude” points to a Black identity centered on the Atlantic crossing. The waters, liquid borders, bring to the continents and to each Black individual “a piece of land.” The author, by situating the poetic voice within *Negritude*, opens her poem to history’s blows]:

De mim [from me]  
 parte N E G R I T U D E [comes N E G R I T U D E]  
 um golpe mortal [a deathly blow]  
 negrura rasgando o ventre da noite [Blackness scratching? the belly of the night]  
 punhal golpeando o colo do dia [a knife striking]  
 um punho mais forte que as fendas de aço [a fist stronger than the steel gates]  
 das portas trancadas [of the doors]  
 da casa da história [of history’s house].

overlaps images of blood and sacrifice with the act of writing to illustrate transformation from fragmentation to unification (36).

The first five verses establish a feeling of muteness and deafness, a lack of sensory or bodily control: “já não ouço meu pranto/ porque o choro emudeceu/ nos meus lábios/ o grito calou-se/ em minha garganta. [I no longer hear my cries/ as the sobs quieted/ on my lips/ the screaming stopped/ down my throat.” v. 1-5) Why did the senses stop functioning? The poetic voice does not explain clearly. What is obvious is the relationship between trauma and her body shutting down. What she cannot hear, express, or feel are her cries, her screams, feelings of sadness and anger.

To overcome this breakdown, the poetic voice reverses the roles of enunciator and recipient. She urges the recipient to sing and to calm her down. The poem earns an interactive structure that engages a participatory audience. It presents a call for solidarity with an African call and response structure. The ensuing song connects to a “midnight sun,” a glimmer of hope in the midst of darkness; a first step towards healing that must come from unification between self and other:

cante...porque amanhã não haverá mais [sing...because tomorrow will not come  
with]  
nenhum resto de esperança [any trace of hope]  
[...]  
pois certamente muito antes [and certainly long before]  
de surgir um novo dia [a new day comes]  
um sol . . . [before a ray of sunlight]  
há de raiar [will dawn]

à meia noite, para despertar o teu sono, [the midnight darkness, and awake you  
from your slumber]

como uma nova alvorada [like a new dawn]. (v. 23-33)

After the chant, the poetic voice's body splits, shatters into the sky, from which it falls like blood droplets. The drops then spring from the earth to sprout seeds—the fragmentation served as a sacrifice (36). The poetic voice evolves from mute, to blind due to the midnight sun, to spread out into the sky. There arises a connotation of sacrifice, of death; with the image and the red color of her body, but also with the dusk. This stanza sets up a contrast with the following half of the poem about birth, germinating, chanting, dawn, and an “I” becoming “us.” The blood becomes rain springing from the earth that falls onto “our” (“nossos”) feet—onto her and the warrior-child whom she addresses in the poem (v. 9-18). The sacrifice (b)led to a new beginning.<sup>91</sup>

Celinha's “Um Sol Guerreiro,” with its contrasting connotations to the night and its references to the loss of senses, establishes connections between losing a sense of self, a lack of solidarity and historicity. Both “Um Sol Guerreiro” and “Negritude” present a poetic voice's self-identification in tune with recognizing a historical past of struggle (rather than victimization) and trauma in order to look towards the future. In fact, Celinha's “Negritude” claims to break the “bolted doors of history” with “N E G R I T U D E,” a voice that speaks from and recognizes the violent memories of slavery (35). Furthermore, the chanting and singing in “Um Sol Guerreiro” suggests that an Africanist performance will contribute to a constructive process of identification. The call and response structure works in this process as well; it creates a community based on those that ‘respond’ being those who recognize the memories of slavery.

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<sup>91</sup> As I analyze Anzaldúa's writing below, it will show points in common with Celinha's poems, namely the concept of sacrifice and revival as a part of self-identification through writing.

The act of chanting and working through past memories in order to look towards the future is also present in Conceição Evaristo's "A Noite Não Adormece Nos Olhos das Mulheres" (42). The title alludes to a dissonance between night and rest, "Night Does Not Bring Sleep to Women's Eyes." Then what does the night bring to women? Evaristo's poem associates night with a time to reconstruct and preserve lost memories, thus presenting a connection with self, collectivity and women. The solidarity that helps self-identification, coping with a heavy past, here is symbolized not by chanting but by guardians of memory and collective dreaming.

In this poem, women carry the night and serve as metaphorical guardians of memory, in their eyes. And in the dark, they see. They see their past, a millennial resistance. With the change of tense to the future, "A noite não adormecerá [Night will not put anyone to sleep]," the poem tells the becoming identity of these women as guardians of memory. Memory becomes a part of their blood and a nourishing part of their womb: "nosso líquido lembradiço/ um fio invisível e tônico pacientemente cose a rede de nossa milenar resistência [our amniotic fluid/ an invisible and tonic thread that patiently ties the net of our millennial resistance]" (v. 24-27). The poetic voice's use of the first person plural pronoun underlines a sense of collectivity associated with nurturing memory, nurturing a constructive identity that preserves its history rather than repeats oppression. "Us women" articulate a decolonial identity.

Evaristo's poem also raises a question: if at night we do not fall asleep, can we not dream, can we not creatively envision our future? Preserving past memories, the act of remembering should coincide with a shift into the future, without necessarily dealing with the future. "Adormecerá" is in the future tense, but the stanza itself is still about the act of remembering. Unlike other poems who include a "seed"— a dream, hope, a future event or a following—this poem underlines the importance of incorporating a past, placing oneself into a

history of women, “our millennial resistance,” in order to reshape her fragmented identity into a decolonial one.

With these three poems, “Negritude,” “Um Sol Guerreiro,” “A Noite Não Adormecerá,” I have presented the self-identification in tune with a historical past of struggle and trauma. They recognize both before they can emphasize healing with belonging to a community. Celinha’s “Negritude” claims to break the “bolted doors of history” with “N E G R I T U D E,” a voice that speaks from and recognizes, re-members their past of oppression (35). “Um Sol Guerreiro” brings a child’s chant as a soothing call to solidarity. Evaristo’s “A Noite Não Adormecerá” urges her reader to recognize the millennial resistance of women in order to be able to dream again.

In each poem, what is first presented as a woman’s unstable identity shapes into an affirmation of self through such recognitions of an inspiring past, but also through the representation of women’s bodies as sites of nurturing and resourceful force. One woman’s body and mind is a point of connection with earth and animals, another woman’s body splits and sheds blood that becomes growing seeds, and the last woman reminds her sisters that their amniotic fluid, guardian of memory, threads the net of millennial resistance. Preserving memory and finding strength within their body make up productive forces to formulate a decolonial identity. With this power, each voice undoes colonial sexual economy’s oppression and envisions a liberating future. Like Anzaldúa, these women share an objective to undo signifiers that oppress their sexuality and identity formation.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> I argued in the first chapter that Morrison, Evaristo, and Condé presented contrasting narratives that re-write the slave narrative with haunting and “ghostwriting,” pointing to the necessity of rewriting history by listening to the voices of the invisible, by witnessing and working through the trauma of those we forget to hear. In this chapter, I will present how these novels, along with Reyita, Anzaldúa, and Quilombhoje writers’ texts, resolve colonization’s traumas that fragment women of color’s identity and sexuality.

The works selected for this chapter, such as Anzaldúa and Celinha's texts studied above, will draw a hemispheric map. As they narrate traumatic memories, the texts will present women's bodies as sites of fragmentation owing to such trauma. Images of fragmented bodies convey obstacles in the process of fashioning a woman of color identity.<sup>93</sup> As Laura Murphy argues in her article "The Curse of Constant Remembrance: The Belated Trauma of the Slave Trade in Ayi Dwei Armah's *Fragments*," gaps result from the effort that must be made to recover from shock. Such gaps are a part of the post-colonial identity that originates in a trauma or a repressed secret, a fashioning of self whose history began with abuse, violence, shock—a transgenerationally transmitted signifier of repression.<sup>94</sup>

Gaps in historical memory and signifiers of oppression are transmitted transgenerationally and define these women's post-colonial identities, generating fragmented identities and repressed sexualities. For instance, in the *testimonio* *Reyita*, Reyita inherits her mother's shame. Her mother viewed her as the embodiment of "the misery of being born black," or the signifier of slavery (243). Reyita's mother is frustrated for not "advancing racially" with Reyita, the offspring of her relationship with a Black Cuban. Reyita's physical features, I will demonstrate, carry a transgenerational signifier of oppression that marks Reyita's consciousness, yet can be undone. Maryse Condé's Tituba was conceived from rape on the slave ship. Her face reminds her mother of being sexually abused by a slave ship shipman, which Tituba copes with through the novel. In Conceição Evaristo's *Ponciá Vicencio*, the protagonist's name and her awareness of it portrays an identity fragmented by its past of oppression. Early on in the novel,

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<sup>93</sup> I would not generalize this phenomenon to be recurring for all women and youth of color, but as present in the works that I intend to study.

<sup>94</sup> This argument, that I made use of in relation to transgenerational traumas in the first chapter, will be observed in relation to sexuality in the following two chapters. I have already presented examples of how Anzaldúa's "Into The Serpent" chapter, Celinha's "NEGRIUDE," "Um Sol Guerreiro," and Conceição Evaristo's "A Noite Não Adormecerá," rewrite History in which women's bodies are sites of force and trigger a reconnecting and resolving a past of persecution.

Ponciá recognizes that “in its signature lived the remainder of the master’s power, of a certain Colonel Vicencio,” a name that “left the mark of those who had become the masters of lands and of people” (19). Her name’s spelling carries a signifier of slavery. Undoing colonial oppression implies struggling to accept or reject names and bodies that carry such signifiers in order to prevent further transgenerational inheritance. At the same time, these her-stories must complement History, and be re-membered into contemporary cultural memory.

### 3.1 “WHAT’S IN A NAME?” (ANTI) NAMING AND POST-SLAVERY SHOCK

“Sugar comes into the world without a last name, like a slave.”

- Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*

Fernando Ortiz compares slaves to the over processed and nameless product of sugar, in contrast to refined tobacco that earns a name through its harvesting. Perhaps unknowingly, Ortiz alludes to individuals of African descent forced to immigrate to the New World, where they lost their name through the ritual of social death and enslavement. Part of the ritual of social death consists in eliminating an individual’s original name, branding a symbol onto their skin and a monetary value based on the physical state of different parts of their body. As I explained before, in *Slavery and Social Death*, Patterson outlines the social phenomenon of slavery throughout history of social death as a “ritual” of enslavement. How does one undo the ritual of social death imposed onto her? What happens when women, who were once in bondage, claim a name of their own, or realize that their name carries a signifier of colonial economy’s oppression? What

does the act of changing her name, introducing herself, writing her name have to do with fashioning a decolonial identity?

To demonstrate that literary characters embody transgenerational signifiers of repression and ways to work through them, I will look into representations of naming, moments when characters introduce themselves, or when they earn their name upon birth, or upon freedom. This is an initial step in the identification process, and a process that also, for these women, has a history. The colonial connotations of this process become undone or critiqued by the following literary representations.

I will use the term anti-naming to refer to instances when a character resists her name, finds negative connotations associated with it, and refuses to associate herself with what the name embodies—the slave order, the colonial economy, the daily violence of life in bondage. I will not to argue that naming is either colonizing or decolonizing. It is more complex than a dichotomy, and could represent, as I will argue in the following section on motherhood, a complex process of undoing or reinforcing (or both) the colonization of fragmented identities and abused bodies.

The objective of this section is to look at the works' representation of "naming moments," when a character thinks about her name, introduces herself, writes her name for the first time, earns a name, and to see what occurs within each character at this moment. What will be of interest here is the relationship between a woman's naming act and the colonial economy or the slave order. What does this moment unveil once she has runaway from a plantation, or bought her freedom, or in more contemporary contexts, what does her name reveal about internal colonization?

### 3.1.1 “Eu-Mulher/ I-Woman” and Pre-Naming

Conceição Evaristo’s poem “Eu-Mulher” deals with accepting her body once objectified as a mammy. A mammy is a servant, property of the dominant class, who usually nurses a family’s children, a recurring image in Brazilian and Latin American canonical literature. In this poem, Evaristo focuses on naming her womb and vagina to undo discursive representations. She claims the power of her reproductive organs rather than submission, all under an anonymous name, “I-Woman.”

With a hyphen in its title, “Eu-Mulher” establishes that this woman’s self is inherently bound to her gender. The first verse alludes to her body’s nourishing virtue that was another’s property for so long: “Uma gota de leite/ me escorre entre os seios. [A milk drop/ runs between my breasts]” (v.1-2). The image of the milk drops freely running down her breasts suggests non-ownership, or self-ownership. Her freedom concretizes with a verse that claims a strict contrast from breeding for a slave owner; she inaugurates life (“inauguro a vida.” v. 9).

In “Eu-Mulher/ I-Woman,” her fertility relates to the image of blood, which could stand as a symbol of war, of suffering, struggle, and beating, but instead it reflects an embellishment, an adornment: “Uma mancha de sangue/ me enfeita entre as pernas. [A blood stain/ adorns my legs.]” (v.2-3) The same blood is alluded to with a “red rivers” image that inaugurates life: “Eu-mulher em rios vermelhos/ inauguro a vida.” (41) A woman’s menstruation inaugurates life, her menstrual cycle is an adornment; both remind her of her powerful maternity and identity, one that she can claim to be her own.

Such empowerment lends her voice a new strength that attacks the world’s eardrums, softly (v.10-11). Empowerment implies a female matrix at the center; as the starting point for growth, a womb, as the “força matriz.” (v.17) It activates over time, alive among past, present

and future: “Antevejo./ Antecipo./ Antes-vivo/ Antes—agora—o que há de vir. [I foresee./ I anticipate./ I fore-live./ Before—now—what has yet to come.” (v.12-15) The poem ends on a positive and hopeful note, looking towards the future with the image of the seed recurrent in this volume: “Eu-mulher/ abrigo da sementes/ moto-contínuo/ do mundo. [I-woman/ a coat for the seeds/ a continuous motor/ for the world.” (v.41) The poetic voice is clearly aware of her power as a woman, a motor for the world as she houses its seeds.

All of these deal with the poetic voice’s acquiring a name, I-Woman, but why the anonymity? Is she a woman before she is an individual? This is not about individuality; this is a declaration to acquire selfhood pre-signifier, not as a specific individual, but as a woman. Not for one person, but a community who lost their names and gender through “social death.” The poem’s title claims a return to before social death’s threshold, to reclaim the body and identity that were no longer hers, after she lost her name, yet before she was branded and turned into a breeding commodity. Returning to this threshold, before claiming a name, she claims that she is “I-woman.” The intertextuality with Sojourner Truth’s “Ain’t I a Woman?” is relevant here. She did not ask “ain’t I Sojourner Truth?” but rather, “ain’t I a woman?”

Comparable to Evaristo’s images of milk, blood, womb and vagina, Sojourner Truth’s speech inscribed her body before it affirmed her name. She showed her breasts to prove a basic yet overlooked point to her audience, that she, too, was a woman, regardless of what they had decided to label her. This was also a crucial point to argue for her emancipation. She associated her identity with physical achievements and scars, demonstrating how her race and gender equaled Black women’s strength: “Look at me! Look at my arm! ... I have plowed, and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me—and ain’t I a woman? I could work as much as any man (when I could get it), and bear de lash as well—and ain’t I a woman?” (qtd. in hooks

“Ain’t I A Woman?” 160) Sojourner Truth’s argument affirmed her strength to equal “as much as any man’s.” Yet ending her sentences with “ain’t I a woman,” she underlines her gendered identity over her physical abilities to undo her body’s image that was read as animal-like, that only served to “plow and bear the lash.” However, she did not emphasize her name in her identity. She underlined the importance in recognizing her gendered identity and her equality of strength.

Conceição Evaristo’s poem returns to this “basic” point to undo the ritual of social death by underlining the power of women. Her poetry returns to a point that is pre-signifier, pre-naming, a point of liberation from literary discourse and its signifiers of Black women characters. This poem relates the name of any Black Brazilian woman to just that, to being a woman, rather than a victimized, silenced or objectified body that carries a branded name. The poetic voice claims that her objectified, un-gendered identity is actually the identity of a woman, an “I-woman” with a womb that possesses a central force (“força matriz”).

### **3.1.2 “B-E-L-O-V-E-D” and Naming a Collectivity**

Beloved’s identity enters the text with lengthy descriptions of “her” body (as a ghost that takes over a drowned teenager’s body). Rather than focusing on someone else naming her (like with Denver), Morrison chooses to introduce her physical appearance. Firstly, this is because Beloved’s character symbolizes the haunting of trauma, as I explained in chapter two. Her introduction to the plot underlines the embodiment of her ghost into a human form. Secondly, Beloved represents an individual connected to a larger community, to generations of suffering slaves and their ghosts. As I will explain later, even her name connects to this community.

Nameless at first, Beloved is instead identified to the reader by her body and her clothes:

A fully dressed woman...her head resting on the trunk in a position abandoned enough to crack the brim in her straw hat. . . she was smiling . . . Her neck, its circumference no wider than a parlor-service saucer, kept bending and her chin brushed the bit of lace edging her dress. [...] All [Sethe, Paul D and Denver] saw was a Black dress, two unlaced shoes below it, and Here Boy nowhere in sight... (50-51)

Morrison associates Beloved with “women who drink champagne when there is nothing to celebrate,” and to Sethe’s water breaking: “there was no stopping water from a breaking womb and there was no stopping now” (51). Her character’s description refers to women’s bodies that are not her own. It’s also discombobulated, disproportionate. This underlines the process of embodiment of the ghost. Her skin stands out most in her presentation:

She had new skin, lineless and smooth, including the knuckles of her hands . . . Her skin was flawless except for three vertical scratches on her forehead so fine and thin they seemed at first like hair, baby hair before it bloomed and roped into the masses of Black yarn under her hat. . . Sethe saw that her feet were like her hands, soft and new. (52)

The text poignantly refers to details of her infanticide through the reader cannot foresee this yet. With her skin as smooth as an infant’s, and the scars from Sethe’s strike, Beloved’s body is associated with an event characteristic of the unspeakable violence of slavery.

The only character to be introduced into the text without a name, Beloved introduces herself in a conversation conveyed through direct discourse: “ ‘What might your name be?’ asked Paul D. –Beloved,” she said, and her voice was so low and rough each one looked at the other two. *They heard the voice first—later the name*” (53, emphasis mine). Again, the emphasis

lies not in her name, but in the physical sound and its impact on her peers (“low and rough...they heard the voice first—later the name.”)

“Beloved. You use a last name, Beloved?” Paul D asked her.

“Last?” She seemed puzzled. Then “No,” and she spelled it for them, slowly as though the letters were being formed as she spoke them.

Sethe dropped the shoes; Denver sat down and Paul D smiled. He recognized the careful enunciation of letters by those, like himself, who could not read but had memorized the letters of their name.

[...]

Sethe was deeply touched by her sweet name; the remembrance of glittering headstone made her feel especially kindly toward her . . . “That’s a pretty name, Beloved.” (53)

The moment when Beloved spells out her name represents a connectedness with other illiterate individuals (symbolized by Paul D) who identify with the way she introduces herself, with the relationship between a name, an identity, and literacy. She spells out her name, slowly, reminding Paul D of the unavoidable or the common illiteracy associated with their experience. She is also “puzzled” by the term “last name,” which she never had, a characteristic of social death as well as of her not living long enough to know it. Her relationship to “name” thus illustrates a collective Black experience in the New World. Finally, her name, the title of the novel, stands as the “glittering headstone” of not just a child, but also a people’s history. Perhaps this is why she is not introduced at first, because her self is connected to a wider group.

### 3.1.3 “TI-TU-BA” and Personal Immortality

In the case of Tituba in *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*, she acquires her name from one who loves her most. Yao, her adoptive father, names her Tituba, “probably to prove that I was the daughter of his will and imagination. Daughter of his love” (6). The ritual of naming, as described in the novel, indicates Yao’s Ashanti ritual of naming. Her father buries the amniotic fluid into the ground, picks up his daughter and points her to the four cardinal points, enouncing her name for the first time. Tituba’s naming is thus counter to the ritual of social death. It connects her to nature, her ancestors, her father, and an identity.

Tsitsi Jaji’s article, “Prying Death’s Door open: Mourning the Living-Dead in Maryse Condé’s *Moi, Tituba Sorcière...Noire de Salem*” discusses naming in the novel. According to Jaji, *Tituba* recognizes African beliefs in bringing the dead back to life through memory. While the novel memorializes Tituba in title and content, the fictional Tituba memorializes Abena in her first printed word:

The importance of naming here cannot be overstated. The novel identifies both Abena and the partner she lives with in Barbados as Ashanti-born *bossales*, and they join the ethnic Nago, Ma Yaya in raising Tituba. Thus, it is reasonable to interpret the cultural values she knows from an early age as largely African-based. (58)

Jaji insists that naming in *Tituba* has to do with African healing strategies: “by naming Abena with her first name, *Tituba* performs a specifically African-based work of mourning, bestowing on her mother the *personal immortality* which only remembrance can effect.” (59) His article explains that by naming the dead, the novel performs an African-based mourning strategy

through which the dead are remembered and given a status of personal immortality. It enacts a relationship between past and present, '*Zamani*' and '*Sasa*.'

The written text is broken with a sudden tone of orality as Tituba proclaims her name: "He took me in his big bony hands and anointed my forehead with the blood of a chicken, after having buried me up by the feet, he presented me to the four corners of the horizon. It was he who gave me my name: Tituba. TI-TU-BA." (6) A name that was given to her by her adopted father becomes her own as she repeats it. Syllable by syllable, she breaks it down to make it her own in her story telling. The repetition brings out the orality of storytelling mode, and brings the narrator's voice closer to the reader. It conveys an image of Tituba saying this name to her self, pausing in her story telling to reminisce.

The pause and repetition emphasize the importance of two moments in her life: her father naming her, and her now realizing *that* was when she earned her name, and inscribing that moment for herself. TI-TU-BA. Her father names her, but Tituba reiterates her name at this moment, and by doing so, she makes it her own to the reader. Both represent an important moment in her becoming her own self, in her acquiring a sense of self, an identity associated with a father figure as well as her own voice.

Tituba's naming implies magic, imagination and African culture instead of branding. It is representative of Caribbean culture and the survival of African-based knowledge in diasporic culture; the power of imagination in order to form kinship beyond "blood" family. Baby Suggs in *Beloved* presents an act of naming that also deals with healing. Her act of naming brings into discussion the topic of post-slavery survival with other forms of healing, not necessarily related to African-based mourning.

### 3.1.4 “Suggs, Baby Suggs.” Making Acceptance Her Own.

In Morrison’s *Beloved*, most characters are introduced by their name, except for Beloved herself, as explained earlier. In Baby Suggs’ case, she earns another name once she moves away from the “Sweet Home” plantation. Once her son Halle paid for her freedom, Baby Suggs “stepped foot on free ground” and her character’s consciousness changed. At this point she earns a different perspective of her body, but also thinks that the time has come to ask Mr. Garner “something she had long wanted to know,” about her name. Naming directly relates to her new status in Suggs’ consciousness.

“Mr. Garner,” she said, “why you all call me Jenny?”

“‘Cause that’s what’s on your sales ticket, gal. Ain’t that your name? What you call yourself?”

“Nothing,” she said. “I don’t call myself nothing.”

Mr. Garner went red with laughter. “When I took you out of Carolina, Whitlow called you Jenny and Jenny Whitlow is what his bill said. Didn’t he call you Jenny?”

“No, sir. If he did I didn’t hear it.”

“What did you answer to?”

“Anything, but Suggs is what my husband name. [...] Suggs is my name, sir. From my husband. He didn’t call me Jenny.”

“What he call you?”

“Baby.”

“Well,” said Mr. Garner, going pink again, “if I was you I’d stick to Jenny Whitlow. Mrs. Baby Suggs ain’t no name for a freed Negro.”

Maybe not, she thought, but Baby Suggs was all she had left of the “husband” she claimed. A serious, melancholy man who taught her how to make shoes. The two of them made a pact: whichever one got a chance to run would take it together if possible, alone if not, and no looking back. He got his chance, and since she never heard otherwise she believed he made it. Now how could he find or hear tell of her if she was calling herself some bill-of-sale name? (141-42)

This passage tells much about the significance of naming in the context of slavery. First of all, this character illustrates the lack of a name consequent to the ritual of social death. Both names that Suggs refers to are given to her, alluding to the fact that previous to “some bill-of-sale name” or her husband, she has no name of her own: “Nothing, I don’t call myself nothing.” But after this critical dialogue with Mr. Garner, she claims her own name and introduces herself as “Suggs, Baby Suggs.” Unlike Mr. Garner’s “going pink” with laughter, the first person to hear her name responds “Glad to meet you, Mrs. Suggs.”

Her previous owner advises her to pick the name worthy of a “freed Negro,” but Baby Suggs goes against his advice and picks the name worthy of her identity. This is a name fashioned from her marital relationship, and the faith they had to one day be together, and free. She chooses the name that will favor her being reunited with her husband, and preserve what she has of a family: “Now how could he find or hear tell of her if she was calling herself some bill-of-sale name?” She associates the bill-of-sale name with a lack of identity and anonymity, “*some* bill-of-sale name” that would not allow anyone to find her. Mr. Garner qualifies “Baby Suggs” as worthless in terms of social status (“ain’t no name for a freed Negro”). Baby Suggs, by choosing this name, chooses that her social status will not reflect whiteness but a past with which she identifies. She feels closest to her “matter of speaking” marriage with Suggs, “a serious, melancholy man who

taught her how to make shoes.” (141-42) Upon earning her freedom, she also quits her first job as launderer, and becomes her own employer, repairing shoes. Articulating her new identity thus centers on building herself from the happiness she shared with her husband, building shoes and named Suggs, Baby Suggs. Finally, as I will analyze in the next section on “mirroring” or “recovering,” the last part of her name “holy” has to do with her claiming her own spirituality, and “making her own acquaintance” with God. Baby Suggs, holy, exemplifies the process of naming as claiming an identity as a woman outside of bondage, post-slavery, and making her own acquaintance. This is a symbolic rebirth.

### **3.1.5 “Denver,” or Hope of Solidarity and Freedom**

The only physical birth portrayed in *Beloved* is Denver’s. It happens on her mother’s way to freedom. The fact that several characters tell its story reinforces the symbolic importance of Denver’s birth. Sethe’s water breaks in the river while she is running away from Sweet Home. This is the river that separates her unborn child from freedom. On the other side of the river, in the actual place of birth, Sethe notices “silvery blue spores,” a symbol of hope for the future (84). This child’s birth is thus associated with crossing over to a new life, to hope, to a future.

When she acquires her name, it is not verbally or in written form, but in her mother’s mind. She names her Denver after the travel companion who helped her give birth. Amy Denver is a white slave who was also running away, and they part ways shortly after Denver’s birth. Her name connotes friendship, a miraculous encounter, and interracial feminine solidarity.

Denver continues to uphold her name’s symbolism as she grows up. As a teenager, Sethe’s daughter does not associate herself with any memories of the Sweet Home plantation. She was not born there and she reminds her mother and Paul D of their irrational attachment to such a

dark past. When Paul D and Sethe reunite, they share their memories of Sweet Home, the plantation where they both lived, where Sethe met and married his brother Paul A. They share fond memories and Denver abruptly interrupts them: “How come everybody run off from Sweet Home can’t stop talking about it? Look like if it was so sweet you would have stayed.” (13) Denver represents a new generation ready to re-member and move forward, beyond the memory of Sweet Home, and her birth name symbolizes this as well.

### **3.1.6 Ponciá Vicencio and the Frustration of Post-Slavery Naming**

For Ponciá Vicencio’s case, I propose a comparative study with key naming in Carolina Maria de Jesus’ *Bitita’s Diary*. Maria de Jesus was an influential figure for Afro-Brazilian writers. Conceição Evaristo is one of such writers, so I find it relevant to bring a parallel between Carolina’s diaries and Conceição’s character. Although the texts are different genres (journal vs. novel), each author’s approach to naming and literacy formulates an insightful comparison.

Carolina Maria de Jesus describes a complex process of self-identification and owning a sense of self in relation to naming and literacy, whereas Ponciá finds it painful to carry her family’s master’s last name, and finds no use for literacy. *De Jesus’ Bitita’s Diary* underlines a significant moment of identification after her teacher reminds her of her baptismal name. Carolina prefers to go by her nickname, which has become truer to her identity than her Christian name.

I became furious and responded insolently, “My name is Bitita.”

Your name is Carolina Maria de Jesus.

It was the first time that I had heard my name. ‘I don’t want this name, I’m going to exchange it for another.’ . . . I decided to study diligently, understanding

that we should even thank someone when they teach us. . . Later, I noticed that I now knew how to read. . . I felt greater happiness. . . I noticed that those who know how to read have a better chance of understanding. If they get off track in life, they will be able to readjust. (*Bitita's Diary* 91-93)

In “Metaphor of Home in the Diaries of Carolina Maria de Jesus” Ferach analyzes this scene as an important moment in de Jesus’ narrative. She argues that this section of Carolina’s diary, titled “School,” establishes a relationship between acquiring identity or naming and literacy.

*The contrast of her two names on the one hand emphasizes De Jesus’ dual selves: one that is familiar and the other that marks the complete identity that will be realized with her future transition to adulthood. [...] As a result of the professor’s continued attention (and even threats) we see a young De Jesus that eventually realizes the importance of reading, not just because of the feeling of self-fulfillment that it gives her but also because of its social benefits. (Ferach 130, my emphasis)*

I would not establish a connection with the baptismal name and identity so abruptly, however. Furthermore, the direct relation between the professor’s naming and Carolina’s self-affirmation, the author’s emphasis on the professor’s influence (“as a result of the professor’s continued attention”) takes away from de Jesus’ agency. It is the process of literacy and education (that happen thanks to the professor, yes, but mostly within Carolina) that give de Jesus a sense of self more than her baptismal name. The baptismal name, which her teacher insists to use, triggers a process of self-affirmation, but does not affirm her sense of self *per se*.

I propose not to focus on De Jesus' rebellious reaction ("I don't want this name, I'm going to exchange it for another") especially in comparison to Ponciá Vicencio's character. She responds with a fervent desire to learn ("I decided to study diligently"), and the consciousness that comes along with this process is what lends her a feeling of gratification and a stronger sense of self ("I noticed that I now knew how to read. . . I felt greater happiness. . . those who know how to read have a better chance of understanding.") The act of naming denotes empowerment that she earns through writing, reading, learning, and the social benefits this brings, but not so much through accepting her baptismal name. On the contrary, she affirms her agency by defying her given name. She insists to invent a new sense of self, to exchange her baptismal name "for another."

In Conceição Evaristo's novel, which presents intertextualities with Carolina's diaries, both of these reactions occur within Ponciá. Ponciá confronts her name's colonial connotation. She carries its signifier of oppression and the impossibility of liberating her identity from it: "Time went by and the girl grew, but she never grew accustomed to her own name" (19). She calls herself as one would call someone to bring him or her back, and this oral repetition is an important component in Evaristo's narrative. She calls her name over and over in the mirror, as if to call her soul back to her body. Rather than empowerment, Ponciá's name recalls pain and alienation:

When she learned to read and write it became even worse to discover that there was an accent mark over Ponciá. Sometimes in an act of self-flagellation, she set herself to copy her name and repeated it in an attempt to locate herself, to hear herself in its echo. It was so painful to write the accent. It was as though she

were torturing herself with a sharp blade that pierced her body. In its signature lived the reminder of the master's power, of a certain Colonel Vicencio. (19)

Writing her name designates violence and pain with words like: “self-flagellation, painful, torturing, sharp blade, pierced.” These images specifically refer to acts of violence that form a part of the slave experience. The “self-flagellation,” notwithstanding a critique of Catholicism, is an allusion to the crack of the whip, here an act of internal colonization. She applies this violent accent onto her name feeling the same whip one would get from a slave owner (or would be given by a colonizing priest). The image of “a sharp blade that pierced her body” could be associated with branding. Both images also portray self-inflicted violence using a blade or self-flagellation. This passage reveals a complex relationship between Ponciá and her name. It ties her to an oppressive figure that she is hardly able to dissociate from her sense of self. And every time she writes her name, she does not empower her self, she reiterates or renews a plantation owner's power. Carrying his last name, she remembers her antebellum past each time she writes it.

Ponciá thus feels an affective distance from writing her name, which begins early in her childhood:

As a girl it had been her habit to go to the brink of the river and when she got there she would look at herself in the waters, shouting out her own name: Ponciá Vicencio! Ponciá Vicencio! She felt like she was calling out to someone else. She never heard a reply to her name from within. She tried others. Pandá, Malenga, Quietí—but none of these seemed like her either. She, unnamed and trembling with fear, was afraid of this game but she pressed on. Her head rolled in the void, she felt empty without a name. (10)

Outloud, her name feels empty, appropriated by someone else, like an “echo” (“she set herself to copy her name and repeat it in an attempt to locate her own self, to hear herself in its echo” 19; “One evening she spent the whole night in front of the mirror calling to herself. She called and called and didn’t answer” 10). The echo implies distance and disowning.

As a maturing child, Ponciá repeated her name, expecting to feel it naturally associate with her image, yet frustrated when this feeling did not arise. Ponciá’s name does not feel like her own. It echoes in her mind, but does not fix to her identity, it does not allow her to “locate herself” the way Tituba locates herself when she repeats her name. The melancholy associated with her name symbolizes a strong will to return to a time previous to social death, or to find a voice similar to the one presented in “Eu-Mulher,” a voice that finds a sense of self previous to the act of naming, previous to discourse itself.

Like her body, over time her name becomes a bridge between her physical self and her GrandPa Vicencio’s spirit. “She was no one. That was when it would seize. The urge to laugh and cry” (9-10). The void from feeling anonymous now relates to her grandfather’s identity and suffering. The urge to laugh and cry implies her grandfather’s madness. He always laughed a laugh that was a mix of laughter and cries. The flashback follows her husband walking in and finding her saying “something that he couldn’t understand,” as if she were in a trance: “The woman seemed dim-witted. She spent hours and hours there silently looking out and seeing nothing. She spoke little and when she spoke, it was usually to say something that he couldn’t understand” (10).

The image of trance recurs in another instance. She defies her name inherited from the Colonel, in a trance, embodying her grandfather calling her name:

One evening she spent the whole night in front of the mirror calling to her. She called and called and didn't answer. In the morning she seemed more upset than ever before. She asked the man [her husband] not to call her Ponciá Vicencio anymore. Fearfully, he asked her what should she be called. Looking deeply and frantically into his eyes, she told him that he should call her nothing. (10)

She would rather have no name than one with the trace of a whip and a master's name. "The man" points to dissociation from her husband. She embodies her grandfather and does not see her husband for who he is. Her trance frightens him. She embodies her GrandPa Vicencio, a spirit who firmly rejects the slave order and the Colonel that drove him mad. Ponciá's naming thus alludes to a complete separation of self and body. Calling her name puts her in a trance, makes her leave her body, and embody her grandfather's rejection of any personal connection to the slave order's violence, pain, and alienation.

Ponciá's name relates to losing herself in order to reconnect with her grandfather's identity and to channel it. She attempts to undo social death by dissociating from a name associated with colonial economy, her master's name and a first name that reminded her of the crack of the whip. Ponciá's name also suggests her perception of literacy as an antonym to emancipation.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> She learns to read but this knowledge only leads her to isolation in the city, and she reads the city newspaper only to find that the daily violence remains, even if the people are not in bondage. This moment of the narrative depicts Ponciá in an alienated state:

Ponciá Vicencio didn't want to have anything more to do with the life that was unfolding before her. She was always seeing into other places and times. It didn't matter to her if the sun was out or if it was raining. Who was she? She couldn't say. She would happily anticipate these moments of self-absence. Before, she had enjoyed reading. She had kept several magazines and old newspapers. She would read and reread everything. There had been a time when she had learned the news by heart: "Child Dies of Apshyxiation in Latrine" . . . "Bricklayer Kills Wife With Fifteen Stabs" . . . "Wife of Police Officer Arrested for Indecency" . . . "Misallocation of Funds in City Hall" . . . One day Ponciá gathered all of the magazines and newspapers and used them to make a great bonfire. What difference did it make that she learned to read? (90-91)

With the nostalgia of her childhood, the time when she could still dream, I will argue that Ponciá's stance defends the liberating power of dreaming over that of literacy: "In other times she had dreamt so much! As a child she had even dreamed up another name for herself. She didn't like the one they gave her" (9). With this final example, resisting literacy and naming denote a wanting to return to pre-discursive experience, or pre-literacy discourse, similar to "Eu-Mulher."

The novel, titled as her name, repeats Ponciá's name and overcompensates for her refusing it. Why the over-compensation, the obsession with her name? She repeats her name yet the text associates it with a void: lack of a past; lack of a history; lack of association to her identity. "Time went on and left the mark of those who had become the masters of lands and of people. And Ponciá? Where had Ponciá come from? Why? In what fold of memory would the meaning of her name be written?" (19-20) The novel uncovers her name to narrate a fictional story dedicated to individuals like Ponciá. The literal obsession inscribes a memory of Ponciá Vicencio, gives her a historical and literary space. The "fold of memory" that she longs for now exists, with her name written to embody a forgotten people, those who carried the whiplash of their past in their name and had to find another name, another identity. Now Ponciá belongs in a small fold of Brazilian memory, in this novel.

### **3.1.7 Conclusion**

The act of naming presents a complex relationship between women of color and language. The female characters I analyze in this section resist a strategy colonial domination through (anti) naming. "Correspondingly [to the fact that identity includes both how one sees oneself and how others see one], in Latin America, we find the colonial power of naming and its panoptical gaze

producing a vocabulary of difference as a strategy of domination.” (Branche 82) The act of naming also unveils how the discursive power of the colonial sexual economy influenced the relationship between women of color and language. From “I-Woman” to *Ponciá Vicencio*, I find a Pan-American theme where women of African descent wrestle with their names in order to shape a self-affirmed identity.

Whether they accept an anonymous yet gendered label (“I-Woman”), struggle with illiteracy and represent a group of individuals who lost their last name (B-e-l-o-v-e-d), affirm a name given by their loving father in an African ritual (Ti-tu-ba), name themselves to find their husband and reconnect after life in bondage (Baby Suggs Holy), earn a name that recalls an interracial friendship and freedom (Denver), or find painful echoes of the slave order within their own name (Ponciá Vicencio), each character’s coping with her name represents a symbolic struggle. Why should they accept a name that carries signs of colonial power? Colonial power has, from the moment they landed in the Americas, oppressed them as objects of sexual abuse, and imposed names onto them and their families that disconnected them from their heritage. Each text presents a struggle with this discourse and thus alternatives to literary discourse as well, since it has misrepresented African women’s subjectivity. Each text shows a step towards undoing colonial domination and canonical literary representations. Each character presents a different way to deal with identity formation in the aftermath of colonization and slavery. The differences point to the fact there is no right way to recover from such shock. They present different forms of coping with postcolonial shock, as the female characters find ways to claim their own name, question, or reject a name that was imposed onto them.

### 3.2 AND NOW WE SEE: MIRRORS OF INTERNAL COLONIZATION

“If we do not stop killing  
the other in ourselves  
the self that we hate  
in others  
soon we shall all lie  
in the same direction.”

- Audre Lorde, “Between Ourselves,”  
*Making Faces, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras*  
(140-141)

“There is another quality to the mirror and that is the act of seeing. Seeing and being seen. Subject and object, I and she. The eye pins down the object of its gaze, scrutinizes it, and judges it. A glance can freeze us in place; it can ‘possess’ us. It can erect a barrier against the world. But in a glance also lies awareness, knowledge.”

- Gloria Anzaldúa *Borderlands/La frontera* (64)

Interior reflection was a common theme in feminist first wave literature. Writers presented a vision of the body that was still unknown in literary representation. Instead of being viewed by an outsider as a muse or object of desire, it became a site for women’s inner expression. As women of color critiqued and presented their own feminist discourse with Third World Feminism, they defined the text as a site that was more personal, oriented towards their bodies, their flesh, as well as a tool to articulate collective and social critiques. Their texts were sites of inner expression as well windows into the pain of slavery, racial and gender discrimination. In this section I will compare mirror tropes with the process of working through repressed sexuality in women of color’s narratives. The literary genres analyzed will range from *testimonio* to poetry, and the contexts of colonization and decolonization will be different in each text,

varying from post-slavery Cuba's racial caste society in early to mid 20<sup>th</sup> century to Southwest Texas' discrimination towards Hispanics in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

I do not necessarily refer to a literal "mirror." At times, the female characters think about their body and view their body's reflection within their mind. This usually happens when they become aware that or of how others perceive their body. For example, Tituba, who lives on her own in her formative years, realizes that "Up until now I had never thought about my body. Was I beautiful? Was I ugly? I had no idea" (15). She begins to think about her physical appearance when she first encounters another person, who happens to be a man to whom she is attracted: "What had he said? 'You know, you could be lovely.' But he had been such a joker. Perhaps he was laughing at me" (15). She proceeds to examine her appearance, not in the mirror, but with her hand: "I took off my clothes, lay down, and let my hand stray over my body" (15). She adapts to her body's shape, curves, and her sensuality. Her hand plays the role of the mirror, showing her body's reflection. Although her looking within, reflecting on her self-image comes from what this man thought of her ("what had he said?"), my point with this example is that the mirror is not meant to be used literally in this study. It refers to any instance in which women of color reflect on their self-image. I will get back to analyzing Tituba's case more closely in the analyses below.

I thus define the mirror as reflecting an image that, through the experience of colonization and oppression, whether internal or external, has been wounded, fragmented, disowned or no longer owned by the self, objectified, shattered. The mirror is also a tool through which this shattered image can be recuperated, re-owned, healed. Does it reflect just one identity? Is it worthwhile to think of identity as a fixed entity? This would construe a structuralist argument that embraces identity politics, which is not the direction that I will take in this study. I

will thus trace symbols of a mirror an inner reflection, reflection on self-image, and identity-formation processes, in which the mirror is either a thought, or the domestic space, or even what others think of a character. In the same vein, I will not perceive identity as fixed. I will demonstrate in this chapter that both the mirror and identity represent spaces of becoming for women of color who have been wounded.

The decolonizing step in the process of self-identification begins with accepting, preserving, nurturing “the other in ourselves that we hate” (Lorde *Making Faces* 140). This can occur by viewing one’s self in the mirror, or reflecting on the image of one’s body. The mirror trope thus proves to be essential in shaping one’s identity, one that has long been studied by psychoanalysts, but I will focus on women of color’s theoretical perspective.

Marcia Ann Gillespie’s “Mirror Mirror” critiques the contemporary ideal of beauty that distorts the image Black women see in their mirrors (“can one ever see beauty through a distorted mirror?” 74). In today’s consumer society, the capitalist oriented image of beauty pushed Black women to wish that they had wavy hair, smaller noses, lighter skin, etc. She interprets the mirror to be both the literal mirror in which we look and are disappointed by what we see, as well as the Western capitalist standard of beauty to which we compare our self-images. The tension between Western ideal of beauty—a force of oppression, and self-image is one I will look for in the analyses below, pertaining the women of color fashioning a sense of self that overcomes this oppression. However, the force of oppression against which the characters I analyze work is different from late 20<sup>th</sup> century capitalist United States.

There are two more symbols that the mirror represents, which will be pertinent for this section. One is the colonial “gaze” which must be undone in the decolonial process. Another is the reflection of fragmentation. I mentioned earlier that Baby Suggs’ character copes with the

trauma of slavery's social death, a gaze that took away her sense of self. Tituba's character also deals with man's gaze in her text, a man that personalizes a colonial, objectifying gaze, that makes her wonder about her kinky hair and, in more general terms, her beauty as it is seen by others. Each character copes with a fragmented identity due to racial and sexual discrimination, and undoing the influence of another's gaze onto their self-image. In "Agora Falamos Nós: Literatura Feminina Afro-Brazileira [And Now We Speak: Afro-Brazilian Feminine Literature]," Moema Parente Augel explores a form of fragmentation due not necessarily to sexual abuse but to racial discrimination and racial difference.<sup>96</sup> Accepting discrimination as inevitable influences a person of African descent to lose her sense of self. Augel calls this acceptance the "disintegration" of identities. It implies an attempt to embody the white subject's Ego, to refuse one's own race and to embody negative attitudes towards one's heritage. It inhibits the accepting one's heritage, and it prevents the possibility of a positive psychological balance (Augel 29). The tension between giving up, rebelling, and adapting reflects psychological adjustments of whitening. Accepting your own body image thus plays a central role in becoming your own. This is "the ultimate resistance:" "the way in which one thinks, the values that one espouses, and the faith that one has in one's self" (Richardson 96). In the process of self-identification, or becoming, both internal colonization and decolonizing steps begin with one's view of herself, and can be best reflected by viewing one's self in the mirror.

In the previous section on "naming," I argued that Baby Suggs' character in *Beloved* claimed her identity, as she transitioned from bondage to freedom, by choosing her name. This transition also presents an internal mirror--what she thinks about her body and self-image: "These hands belong to me. These *my* hands.' Next she felt a knocking in her chest and

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<sup>96</sup> Here you could make a reference to what Fanon explains in that one text about the boy's fright at seeing a Black man—and the ensuing confusion, fragmentation, tension that arises in him.

discovered something else new: her own heartbeat” (142). Baby Suggs copes with her recovery from slavery’s social death as she realizes that she has a heart, that she owns her hands. Yet this section does not illustrate her finding ways to heal from slavery’s social death right away:

And no matter, for the sadness was at her center, the desolated center where the self that was no self made its home. [... The] fact that she knew more about [her children] than she knew about herself, having never had the map to discover what she was like. (140)

Regardless of finding her own heartbeat, she still feels a void (“the desolated center where the self that was no self”). The origin of social death, the ritual that the enslaved go through, is where she lost her sense of self, where her self became “no self.” Recovering it will be a process much longer than listening to her heartbeat. It will require a new cognitive mapping, “the map to discover what she was like.”

She begins this process by questioning the components that make up her social identity in a series of rhetorical questions: “Could she sing? (Was it nice to hear when she did?) Was she pretty? Was she a good friend? Could she have been a loving mother? A faithful wife? Have I got a sister and does she favor me? If my mother knew me would she like me?” (140) The switch from third-person to first-person hints at a progress towards narrating her own self, but the rhetorical questions still mark the difficulty to overcome social death and claim her own identity. This process is more collective than individual. Once Baby Suggs helps others such as Sethe, she learns how to claim her own sense of self: “Bit by bit, at 124 and in the Clearing, along with the others, she had claimed herself. *Freeing yourself was one thing; claiming ownership of that freed self was another*” (95). The main issue I will discuss in this section is the second step, claiming ownership of that freed self, recovering from social death, with two main questions in mind.

How do women resolve internal colonization within the inner reflection of their bodies, with a definition of their own self? What role do the various symbols of the mirror (inner reflection, colonial gaze, image of fragmented identity, domestic space) play to resolve internal colonization, to claim ownership of that freed self?

### **3.2.1 Quilombhoje Writers Working Through Internal Colonization in Brazil**

In Esmeralda Ribeiro's Brazilian poems, the mirror scenes unfold into three thematic avenues. Some highlight the importance of sensuality, others emphasize memory and African heritage, while another fraction stresses "taking off the white mask." The "white mask" is a mask of internal colonization very often applied to Brazilian women of color. The context in Brazil is one in which *mestiçagem*, or race mixing, is widely accepted as part of Brazilian national identity. This impacts women of color negatively as it erases the African-ness that forms part of their identity, since race mixing implies blending or whitening rather than recognizing blackness, thereby internally colonizing the concept of Black beauty. Internal colonization is basically a process where a behavior supports colonization onto colonized identities— rather than another person or another country colonizing one another, it is done onto itself—whether a nation or a person. For example one could reject their native language or their heritage as inferior; this also applies at the national level, as economists have argued that Latin American countries perform internal colonization when they choose to side with neo-liberalism and enrich a few while continuing to oppress the poorer masses, thereby continuing the process of colonization, but internally. In the following analyses, I will demonstrate how some examples of Brazilian poetry cope with internal colonization.

“E agora nossa guerreira,” Esmeralda Ribeiro’s poem, addresses a female warrior who pertains to Afro-Brazilian women’s community. The poetic voice feels close to this figure, calling her “mãinha” or “my darling, momma.” This poem, like others in this volume, refers to a connection with the night. “Nossa Guerreira” is described as the woman “who looks into night’s eye/... in the hour of solitude we/ keep you at our gate” (my translation, v. 16-23). She turns out to be a spiritual guardian, guardian of Oxalá, figure of protection and spiritual connection with the motherland. The poetic voice describes her as the one “Quem/ em sã rebeldia/ tira a mascara esculpida na/ ilusão de ser outro e/ não ser ninguém ‘Who/ in a healthy act of rebellion/ takes off the mask sculpted in/ the illusion to be someone else while/ not being anyone]” (my translation, v. 1-5). This mask is the mask of internal colonization that a woman of color must take off in order to be herself, not someone else that she appropriated to whiten or assimilate with the national behavior towards *mestiçagem*—“the illusion to be someone else while/ not being anyone” (v. 5).<sup>97</sup> The poem’s argument is to recognize her African heritage, rather than not being anyone if she were to accept *mestiçagem*. She looks into the night, into the darkness that it the loneliness of coming to this recognition, and reconnects with souls of the disappeared, souls of her ancestors.

Esmeralda Ribeiro’s “Olhar Negro” centers on the theme of mirroring, fragmentation, and self-definition (64). The first stanza establishes a feeling of fragmentation: “Naufragam fragmentos/ de mim/ sob o poente/ mas,/ vou me recompondo/ com o Sol/ nascente” (v. 64). The chorus reverberates the image of a fragmented body throughout the poem: “Tem/ Pe/ Da/ Ços.” These two components of the poem would lead one to think that it is about fragmentation, yet

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<sup>97</sup> This woman also embraces her sensuality, as the woman “Quem/ inteira, completa/ Deixa a poção afrodisíaca/ untar o céu dos lábios/ sem medo de heresias [Who/ wholesome, complete/ Allows the afrodisiac potion/ to anoint her palate/ unafraid of heresies]” (v. 11-15). “Our female warrior,” in a way, embodies the qualities of a woman who has become in tune with her racial self, and her sensuality.

along with the consistent repetition of “mas [but],” the poem points to struggling with and healing from fragmentation.

Each stanza reveals a contrast between fragmentation and unification, with an optimistic poetic voice that attempts to work through her issues with body image. The word “fragments” echoed throughout the poem (v. 1; 18; 24; 43) is set up against contrasting words such as “recomposing” (v. 5) and “I refashion within myself/ what is beautiful” (v. 16-17), “I reinvent/ feel the fragrance/ of a new time” (v.21-22), “I get to determine/ my steps” (v. 38-39), “I keep going/ certain that I will always be a woman.” In the last stanza, the word “fragments” disappears from the poetic voice’s vocabulary and positive actions take place: “não desisto; vou atravessando; vou navegando; vou buscando; vou vôo” v. 54-64). The verb “vou” (I go) implies an ongoing action or evolution from passive reflection in the mirror. “Olhar negro [Seeing blackness]” portrays how seeing blackness reverses identity fragmentation and inspires emancipative action.

Esmeralda Ribeiro assigns “Olhar negro” as a solution to her healing, “Seeing/Looking at Blackness,” finding Black awareness (“vou buscando o meu/ other negro [I keep looking for my ability to see blackness]” v. 60-61). It implies liberation, as going becomes one with flying in a pun (“vou vôo [I go flying]”). The closing punctuation further emphasizes this struggle with a comma; the poem concludes that the struggle is ongoing. An incomplete sentence implies that healing ends beyond the written word, as she increases her Black awareness in action, in real life. It also emphasizes the idea that this is a process of becoming, rather than imposing a fixed identity onto her, this will be a constant transformation, a fluid identity.

Gloria Anzaldúa, lesbian Chicana writer from the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, presents working through internal colonization as centrally corporeal. Her context is one of marginality within a

nation as well; in the 1980s United States women of Hispanic-indigenous descent had no national category to belong to, unlike Native American or African American or Asian American women (though these categories were not necessarily accepted either). Furthermore, in her community, Catholic religion did not accept homosexual relations. Being a lesbian further marginalized her from her peers and her family, who did not accept her gender identity or the way that she carried herself in everyday life. Strong gender norms were a phenomenon with ancient roots in her community, with which she struggled daily.

### **3.2.2 Gloria Anzaldúa: “Entering Into the Serpent” in Southwest Texas**

Gloria Anzaldúa’s context is one in which her body forms part of a centuries-long process of symbolic colonization. That very process also helps her undo internal colonization. Earlier in this chapter, I performed a close reading to demonstrate Anzaldúa’s decolonial framework. Part of her corporeal framework puts women’s bodies back in colonial history, by tracing indigenous deities’ desexualization as an important part of colonial history. Another part of her corporeal framework entails a similar act—to trace desexualization--but with her own body image. This is mostly apparent in “Entering Into The Serpent” from *Borderlands/ La Frontera*. This chapter begins with wives’ tales that instigated fear while at the same time molded her body image: “Don’t go to the outhouse at night, Pieta, my mother would say. . . A snake will crawl into your nags, make you pregnant. They seek warmth in the cold. . . can draw milk out of you” (47). Such common urban myths from her Southwest U.S. Hispanic culture, such as this serpent tale, made a girl associate her body with being a target for sinful desire, and a site of victimization. A mundane task turns into a moment of exposure and attack, illustrating the young Anzaldúa’s

constant fear. The most intimate part of her body becomes associated with pain and fear of invasion: “Always when they cross my path, fear and elation flood my body” (48).

The rest of the chapter traces how iconic figures lost their original meaning of sensuality and femininity, like her vagina lost its meaning of sensuality and femininity to be associated with fear of invasion, and target of sinful desire. She recovers the iconic female figures’ original meanings that, for Anzaldúa, are important in order to work through her repressed sexuality and fragmented identity. Anzaldúa follows her analysis of indigenous deities with Chicano imagery. She illustrates how the latter cultural symbols of “motherhood” in Chicana culture influence her fragmented identity:

*La gente chicana tiene tres madres.* [The Chicano people have three mothers.]

All three are mediators: *Guadalupe*, the virgin mother who has not abandoned us, *la Chingada (Malinche)*, the raped mother whom we have abandoned, and *la Llorona*, the mother who seeks her lost children and is a combination of the other two.

Ambiguity surrounds the symbols of these three “Our Mothers.” *Guadalupe* has been used by the Church to mete out institutionalized oppression: to placate the Indians and *mexicanos* and Chicanos. In part, the true identity of all three has been subverted—*Guadalupe* to make us ashamed of our Indian side, and *la Llorona* to make us a long-suffering people. This obscuring has encouraged the *virgen/puta* (whore) dichotomy. (52-53)

These symbolic mother figures imprint the Chicano imaginary, and in relation to feminine sexuality they attach an image of repressed and fragmented sexuality for Chicana women. Anzaldúa finds her sexuality and her perception of her self to be influenced by this inherited

virgen/puta dichotomy imposed on the 'three mothers' image and her ancestors' deities. She copes with this through her text, by recovering sexuality in these deities in order to accept her own sexuality.

As another example, Anzaldúa traces the genealogy of the Serpent figure and female Chicana sexuality. The Serpent was one of the most notable symbols for the Olmecs (Anzaldúa 56). The same animal that she associated with fear of bodily invasion as a child on her family's patio teaches her to acknowledge her body as a woman: "She—that's how I think of *la Víbora*, Snake Woman. Like the ancient Olmecs, I know Earth is a coiled serpent. Forty years it's taken me to enter into the Serpent, to acknowledge that I have a body, that I am a body and to assimilate the animal body, the animal soul" (48). Anzaldúa undoes the stigma that is placed onto the Serpent symbol of sexuality that until now was portrayed to her as a symbol of sexual violence. She discovers that the Serpent originally symbolized a connection with the Earth: "Like the ancient Olmecs, I know earth is a coiled serpent" (48). She then begins a process of self-identification in which she accepts her sensuality. She undoes the repressed sexuality triggered by her mother's discourse, common myths, and colonial history with the use of ancestral knowledge and a renewed connection with the Earth.

The Olmecs associated the Serpent with womanhood, a creative womb from which everything came from and to which everything returned. The Serpent, symbolizing the vagina, was life cycle's center for the Olmecs:

The Olmecs associated womanhood with the Serpent's mouth... They considered it the most sacred place on earth, a place of refuge, and the creative womb from which all things were born and to which all things returned. Snake people had holes, entrances to the body of the Earth Serpent; they followed the

Serpent's way, identified with the Serpent deity, with the mouth, both the eater and the eaten. The destiny of humankind is to be devoured by the Serpent. ... I realized she [the Serpent] was, in my psyche, the mental picture and symbol of the instinctual in its collective impersonal, pre-human. She, the symbol of the dark sexual drive, the chthonic (underworld), the feminine, the serpentine movement of sexuality, of creativity, the basis of all energy and life. (56)

In the passage above Anzaldúa exemplifies how to transform a relationship of fear with the Serpent into acceptance of its ancient indigenous symbolism. Like Baby Suggs, she has to learn to be conscious of her own body, to claim her corporeality: "40 years it's taken me to enter into the Serpent, to acknowledge that I have a body, that I am a body and to assimilate the animal body, the animal soul." (48) She now perceives the Serpent as both "dark sexual drive *and* "the basis of all energy and life," a symbol of affirmed femininity. She exemplifies a Chicano lesbian that realizes the same problematic put forth by Baby Suggs' character in *Beloved*: "*Freeing yourself was one thing. Claiming ownership of that freed self was another.*" (*Beloved* 95) Claiming ownership of that freed self occurs beyond the context of enslaved African American women; to all women of color who inherit a colonial past.

As I presented in the above analysis, Anzaldúa critiques wives' tales' discourse to extract indigenous symbols' core. What role does the mirror play in this process, besides her undoing a self-image that was fragmented by colonial discourse? Anzaldúa proceeds to examine mirror symbols in her culture and her personal life, and their symbolic relationship to colonization. She realizes that she must face her mirror image to let go of colonization-enabling fear.

There is another quality to the mirror and that is the act of seeing. Seeing and being seen. Subject and object, I and she. The eye pins down the object of its

gaze, scrutinizes it, and judges it. A glance can freeze us in place; it can ‘possess’ us. It can erect a barrier against the world. But in a glance also lies awareness, knowledge. These seemingly contradictory aspects—the act of being seen, held immobilized by the underground aspects of *Coatlicue*, *Cihuacoatl*, and *Tlazolteotl*, cluster in what I call the *Coatlicue* state. (64)

The feeling or state that one is in as they look at themselves in the mirror--both seeing and being seen--illustrates the “*Coatlicue*” state for Anzaldúa. It is in this state of in-betweenness, as observer *and* observed, that one earns conceptual tools to decolonize her perception of herself. Seeing and being seen, however, does not necessarily trigger a decolonizing thought process unless one works through fear, through anger, and through internal colonization:

One’s attention cannot be captured by something else, one does not ‘see’ and awareness does not happen. One remains ignorant of the fact that one is afraid, and that it is fear that holds one petrified, frozen in stone. If we can’t see the face of fear in the mirror, then fear must not be there. The feeling is censored and erased before it registers in our consciousness. (65)

This quote points to a crucial process in going from fragmented or colonized identity to decolonized identity—letting go of censorship. There is seeing, and *seeing without censoring*. Seeing is thus like “freeing yourself,” one part of the process, and *seeing without censoring* compares to “claiming ownership of that freed self,” the second part of the process of corporeal decolonization.

Anzaldúa offers herself as an example. She was always afraid of what she saw in the mirror—talking about the otherness that she saw, or that other from which she felt the need to separate herself (as a Chicana, a lesbian, etc.):

When I was older I would look into the mirror, afraid of *mi secreto terrible*, the secret sin I tried to conceal—*la seña*, the mark of the Beast. I was afraid it was in plain sight for all to see. The secret I tried to conceal was that I was not normal, that I was not like the others. I felt alien, I know I was alien. I was the mutant stoned out of the herd, something deformed with evil inside. (64-65)

In this quote it is obvious with her lexicon (the mark of the Beast, a terrible secret, a secret sin, alien, mutant, with evil inside) that she deals with fear and censoring parts of her identity as she sees herself in the mirror. Such fear and the censorship prevent her from undoing internal colonization. “The secret sin,” and the parts of herself that she is afraid to expose “for all to see,” are parts of her identity construed as evil by Catholic religion, her community, social norms, and English speaking society that are all difficult for her to integrate as a multilingual lesbian Chicana. Does the mirror image allow her to only see her fears and censor herself, or will it give way to a liberated Anzaldúa?

Before *seeing* through the fear, Anzaldúa explains that the way of seeing only repeats defense strategies that isolate one from their true identity:

There are many defense strategies that the self uses to escape the agony of inadequacy and I have used all of them. . . I have reciprocated with contempt for those who have roused shame in me. I have internalized rage and contempt, one part of the self (the accusatory, persecutory, judgmental), using defense strategies against another part of the self (the object of contempt). As a person, I, as a

people, we, Chicanos, blame ourselves, hate ourselves, and terrorize ourselves. Most of this goes on unconsciously; we only know that we are hurting, we suspect that there is something ‘wrong’ with us, something fundamentally ‘wrong.’ (67)

By focusing on her mirror image, she copes with rage and contempt attached to parts of her self that are the object of contempt. She traces the process of internal colonization. First she responded to contempt by reciprocating it, then internalized the rage and contempt, and blamed herself, hated herself, terrorized herself, so much so that she, and her people, would “suspect that there is something fundamentally wrong” with them. “Wrong” remains in quotes, underlining the unsayable or abstract aspect of internal colonization. It is ironic that something be simultaneously “fundamental” and “wrong” without being defined. Coping with these mechanisms, Anzaldúa realizes that she may be able to undo them by making sure that the contempt does not alienate her from recognizing and nurturing her racial difference. So this is not about erasing or censoring contempt altogether, but rather, to look through it and recognize the importance of racial and gender difference. Then, she is able to *see*:

During the dark side of the moon something in the mirror catches my gaze, I seem all eyes and nose. Inside my skull something shifts. I ‘see’ my face. Gloria, the everyday face; Prieta and Prietita, my childhood faces; Gaudi, the face my mother and sister and brothers know. And there in the black, obsidian mirror of the Nahuas is yet another face, a stranger’s face. *Simultáneamente me miraba la cara desde distintos ángulos. Y mi cara, como la realidad, tenía un carácter múltiple.* [Simultaneously, I looked at my face from different angles. And my face, like reality, revealed a character of multiplicity.]

The gaping mouth slit heart from mind. Between the two eyes in her head, the tongueless magical eye and the loquacious rational eye, was *la rajadura*, the abyss that no bridge could span. Separated, they could not visit each other and each was too far away to hear what the other was saying. Silence rose like a river and could not be held back, it flooded and drowned everything. (66-67)

She sees multiplicity, gaps, and the difficulty in reconciling different images of herself. Such is the in-between state that works through internal colonization. It is a becoming aware of the different parts that make up one identity—coloniality and colonized, desire to whiten and heritage of color, family and self, global and local, public image and private self, etc. In this mirror scene that resembles a transcending spiritual experience, rather than erasing each identity to fuse them in a falsely fixed identity, Anzaldúa accepts her racial differences. The mirror symbolizes this process in which she accepts her fragmented identity as her own becoming self.

Anzaldúa proposes this process of identification through writing and in life in her anthology *Making Faces, Making Soul/ Haciendo Caras*.

In this anthology and in our daily lives, we women of color strip off the *máscaras* others have imposed on us, see through the disguises we hide behind and drop our personas so that we may become subjects in our own discourses. We rip out the stitches, expose the multilayered ‘inner faces,’ attempting to confront and oust the internalized oppression embedded in them, and remake anew both inner and outer faces... ‘Making faces’ is my metaphor for constructing one’s identity...This book aims to make accessible to others our struggle with all our identities, our linkage-making strategies and our healing of broken limbs. (xvi)

“Making Faces” is a “metaphor for constructing one’s identity.”<sup>98</sup> It is a process of undoing internal colonization: “to confront and oust the internalized oppression embedded in [the multilayered ‘inner faces.’]”

For Anzaldúa, the mirror also symbolizes healing that originates in ancient ways as well, implying a connection with divine forces and intuition to look into the future:

The mirror is an ambivalent symbol. Not only does it reproduce images (the twins that stand for thesis and antithesis); it contains and absorbs them. In ancient times the Mexican Indians made mirrors of volcanic glass known as obsidian. Seers would gaze into a mirror until they fell into a trance. Within the black, glossy surface, they saw clouds of smoke, which would part to reveal a vision concerning the future of the tribe and the will of the gods. (Anzaldúa 64)

Her point on the ambivalent symbol of the mirror recalls the ambivalent process of reflecting on one’s self-image. The women studied in this section reflect on two images, thesis and antithesis—their self and the self seen by others—but also cope with an image seen by others that ends up containing and absorbing their self-image. It is similar to asking oneself—where does my sense of self begin and does it end before the image that others perceive of me? How independent can my self-image be from how my family, society and an oppressive colonial state have defined my body image? This ambivalence goes back to the blurred dichotomy discussed in Marcia Ann Gillespie’s “Mirror Mirror.” A constant struggle remains between a woman of color’s perception of herself, and the capitalist consumerist society’s definition of beauty.

At the same time, Anzaldúa reminds her reader that the mirror also symbolizes healing. The symbol’s ambivalence lies in this double function as well—the mirror symbolizes possibility

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<sup>98</sup> It also reminds one of the archetype of the jester and Gates’ the signifying monkey.

for healing as well as an attack, a window to one's innermost fears, perception of ugliness and beauty. For ancient Mexican Indians, it was a window a step into a trance, an ability to look into the future. This is similar to the power that Anzaldúa sees in minorities, the powerful intuition that lends superior awareness over those who have not felt oppression. And this ability to look into the future in several texts by women of color as the characters reach empowerment—in Esmeralda Ribeiro's poem as well as in Toni Morrison's character, Denver.

Mirror scenes in Anzaldúa's text incorporate colonial past, indigenous symbols and contemporary prevalent cultural symbols as parts of her identity. Her seeing reflections in the mirror as well as her seeing without censoring it help her work through internal colonization. As I trace the mirror image in texts from different contexts, the concept of working internal colonization remains a common component, though dealt with differently and responding to different contexts in each text.

### **3.2.3 Reyita: Becoming Within Her Cuban Home**

As I noted previously, reflections do not always come from glass mirrors. In the next section, I will analyze the domestic space as a symbolic mirror that serves as a strategy for emancipation in 20<sup>th</sup> century Cuba, a context of colonization that was very different from Anzaldúa's context. The Cuban *testimonio* *Life of Reyita* (1997) is about a nonagenarian Cuban woman's life, María de los Reyes Castillo (1909-1997). Her testimony narrates life in Cuba from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century through the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Cuba. As told to her daughter, Daisy Rubiera Castillo, María de los Reyes Castillo's testimony demonstrates the racial complexities in Cuba's racial caste society, a special case in terms of issues of race in Latin America and the Caribbean. Her narrative exposes how to negotiate racial and social norms as a woman of African descent in

Cuba.<sup>99</sup> I will analyze Reyita's home serves as a mirror and a strategy to liberate her from internal colonization.

Reyita's identity formation as a woman of color in Cuba earns relevance through analyses of her body image and domestic spaces. Her *testimonio* follows the changes in racial tension in her country as well.<sup>100</sup> Her identity formation begins with a mirror scene as a child, and evolves in her home as a mother. The mirror, in Reyita's case, is not necessarily a literal mirror. I will argue that the domestic space symbolizes her reflection once she is a mother.<sup>101</sup> The nonagenarian Cuban narrates her upbringing in domestic racial segregation, and she is well aware of how it influenced her to be a victim of internal colonization, internalizing the Cuban racial caste system.<sup>102</sup> At the same time, she argues that her awareness played a role to undo this process with her children's upbringing. She contrasts her mother with her own liberating and loving attitude towards her children. The difference between a literal mirror and the mirror as

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<sup>99</sup> Jerome Branche's *Colonialism and Race in Luso-Hispanic Literature* delineates clearly the racial complexities that arise out of the Spanish Conquest of the Americas and its ensuing racial hegemony and tensions. He traces legal documents and everyday realities to contextualize the Luso-Hispanic racial background, with for instance the study of *cédulas de gracias al sacar*, or certificates of whiteness, José Celestino's *castas* paintings ("powerful visual signifiers [that ordered] the increasingly miscegenated colonial populace" 90), and verbal signifiers of the racial taxonomy.

<sup>100</sup> Alejandro de la Fuente's *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality, and Politics in Twentieth Century Cuba* outlines the complexities of race in Cuba. Cuba promoted a message of equality across races, free education and universal suffrage that would enable lower class individuals of African descent to have upward mobility. At the same time, this is the same country that went along with the massacre of the Independent Colored Party (Partido Independiente de Color) in 1912. Some Cubans viewed it as a movement that was unpatriotic for being Afro-centric, since being Cuban meant embracing Cuba's authentic race-mixing. Later in the twentieth century, the Cuban Revolution brings its share of ambivalence, as it first associates Fulgencio Batista with Afro-Cubans since he was a mulatto, while Afro-Cubans are afraid that post-communist Cuba will reduce their children's future from engineers and doctors to "being maids again." (de la Fuente 1) Furthermore, contemporary Cuba still witnesses traces of its colonial structure. In colonial times, Cuba divided its population into racial castes, based on how much African heritage an individual had, they would be placed further down the social scale (traced with their lineage, or "their blood"). Reyita's *testimonio* follows this complex development, and in this chapter I will focus more on her personal coping with the internal colonization and thinking based on colonial caste system inherited by her mother.

<sup>101</sup> In her introduction to the *testimonio*, Dore points to several contradictions within Reyita's household which reflect contradictions within a national Afro-Cuban identity.

<sup>102</sup> Isabel's love affairs lead her to have a lot of children with different fathers, Black and white, and she discriminates them within the family: "Isabel continued to have the complex between her almost white, mulatto and Black children. So she set herself up in the extension of Gloria's house, and even cooked separately, so when her Black children and grandchildren came to visit they wouldn't interfere with the life of the lighter-skinned part of the family" (40).

domestic space as a mother has to do with this evolution. First I will provide a close reading of a mirror scene during Reyita's childhood, then address the domestic space as mirroring her evolving identity and domestic maroonage.

Reyita refers to her mother by her first name, not an affectionate nickname (Mama, etc.) "Everything I did bothered Isabel. It seems I was in the habit of keeping my mouth open; this was the cause of great distress for her, so every time she saw me she'd shout: 'Reyita close your mouth before your *bemba* hits your knees'" (31). Isabel embodies her childhood's voice of discrimination; she does not connote endearment. Reyita thus detaches herself from this abusive mother-daughter relationship. This dynamic sets up the context for the first mirror scene.

The first mirror scene is also the only instance where the reader and the interlocutor find María de los Reyes Castillo observing her physical features in the mirror. She presents this moment with a context of her mother's indignation. The term *bemba* expresses a negative connotation when Isabel uses it. She refers to a grotesque African physical feature that embarrasses her. With this in mind, Reyita reflects on her racial identity:

Everything I did bothered Isabel. It seems I was in the habit of keeping my mouth open; this was the cause of great distress for her, so every time she saw me she'd shout: 'Reyita close your mouth before your *bemba* hits your knees.' And I'd look in the mirror and it seemed to me I didn't have any such *bemba*, comparing my lips to other black people—some of whom did have very thick lips—I noticed that mine were quite thin, but, of course, not like my brother and sister's. (31)

Isabel's discontent towards blackness pushes Reyita to associate a negative connotation to thick lips, or *bemba*. She compares herself to other Black Cubans willing to differentiate

herself from them, to prove to herself that she is not as ugly or shameful as her mother thinks she is. In the process, she convinces herself that, contrary to her mother's words, *she is not as black as her mother thinks she is* ("comparing my lips to other black people—some of whom *did have very thick lips,*" my emphasis).

The thin lips are a sign for whiteness, in contrast to the *bemba*, a sign of blackness that carries multiple connotations such as slavery, poverty, backwardness, etc. Her mother's perception of Reyita's lips also echo the colonial economy's fragmentation of body parts, the open mouth in a context of selling slaves could be a sign of a degeneracy, and in 19<sup>th</sup> century Cuba the thick lips were a sign of African descent in contrast to Spanish descent, a sign that meant one belonged at the bottom of the racial and social ladder (although, in some cases, if a woman was white enough for instance, the thick lips were a sign of desirable exoticism, of an attractive mulatta). Her mother's perception of the lips also illustrates colonial power's objectification of the African body, and the discursive power of measurement, discrimination, and classification. They also stand as a reminder that outsiders' perception of one's self play a central role in one's racial identity. Finally, the lips' thickness represents the Cuban racial continuum, or a trace of the internalized racial caste system.

When Reyita looks at herself in the mirror, she looks through her own eyes but uses the passive voice ("it seemed to me"). With the passive voice, her discourse expresses the complexity of self-definition. It expresses the blurred divide between perceiving her body and the perception that others (in this case her mother) have of her body. With the connector "of course," she refers to her mother's perception. She also alludes to her mother's shame. Isabel separates her from her 'whiter' siblings, a perception based on a "complex [that] made her see

things” (32). Reyita’s tone addresses the tension between what her mother thinks of her, which is “of course” different from what she sees, or so she thinks.

Isabel established a clear racial hierarchy within her family, in this case illustrated by the “thick lips,” the “*bemba*,” that becomes internalized within Reyita. This is a clear example of internal colonization. Reyita internalizes the colonial system of racial caste society in Cuba as she defines her beauty. Isabel objectified Reyita and in turn influenced her to objectify others around her. Earlier Reyita already defined herself in comparison to darker Cubans, with a definition of racial identity linked to physical features like hair and skin color. Here, her attitude towards her lips, a synecdoche that stands for her body and her identity that are subject to racial hierarchy, represents a desire to whiten (“I noticed that mine were quite thin”) in order to gain social value. Reyita’s mirror scene exemplifies how her perception of beauty relates to race and coloniality. Reyita internalizes the colonial racial hierarchy of the Cuban caste society that was promoted by her mother in her home. As she looks at herself in the mirror, her subjectivity re-enacts this racial hierarchy. She measures her facial features to place her image above that of “blacker” Cubans, yet below her “whiter” siblings, whose lips are thinner than hers. The English translation emphasizes this separation between her and “other black people” with the auxiliary verb “did” (“some of whom *did* have very thick lips”). Furthermore, the narrator, Reyita, emphasizes the separation between her and “blacker” Cubans with the anonymity and otherness that she imposes onto them with the phrase “other black people.” Finally, she distinguishes herself from the “blacker” group with her gender. Reyita’s narrative voice does not define the group’s gender. She does associate femininity with the thick black lips. Reyita’s discourse displaces the thick black lips from her body, placed onto her by her mother, and onto “other black people.” She denies her blackness. She eliminates the association between femininity and

blackness, and prefers “thin” lips, a sign of whiteness. Reyita presents the dilemma at the heart of internal colonization in a caste society and her struggle to undo a value system of coloniality. She associates the thin lips, thus whiteness, with femininity and beauty, and her desire to have this physical quality highlights the relationship between gender, race and social value, how upward mobility in Cuba implied upholding the values of coloniality.

Once Reyita establishes this context and the mirror scene, she goes on to describe further instances of discrimination within her childhood and upbringing. Her text has gone through a process of editing and selection of her oral story-telling to present a written narrative. In terms of narrative structure, with the mirror scene coming first, followed by childhood episodes of discrimination, the structure leads the reader to notice Reyita’s internal racism first, and to understand from where Reyita’s internal racism originated second. The *testimonio* told from her point of view provides insight into her subaltern point of view, how coloniality affects her perception of her body and her identity, at the bottom of the social ladder. One would wonder how it is that she would repeat the cycle of coloniality and racism, instead of associating pride with her physical feature of African descent. The narrative follows this logic and sheds light on possible origins of Reyita’s internal racism, aside from the national racial hierarchy and the caste society.

Isabel made Reyita wash “the white folks’ dishes” instead of going to a birthday party with her siblings, to save face. As she shares these events, Reyita maintains a critical stance. She does not present it as racial discrimination or injustice towards her, personally. Instead, she notes that her mother’s behavior originates from her “complex,” from being “a victim of the misfortune we blacks all suffered, as much in previous centuries as in this one” (32). As a great-grandmother telling her story, she narrates with awareness of the internal colonization that her

mother inherited and transferred onto her. She expresses that she inherited a signifier of displacement, that her body carries the signs to be displaced in society.

This is central to my argument about Reyita's identification because it affirms her motive as a woman of color. The experience within her home connects her to a larger time frame and a collective experience, a greater cycle that may be difficult to break, which she was willing to break as she fashioned her own identity. Will she accept her body as such, or undo this perception of her body as inheriting displacement? Reyita's process of identity formation continues with life decisions such as marriage. Her internal conflict continues to unfold not in front of the mirror, but in the household, with the domestic space as a reflection of her identity. I will now analyze her "marrying white" and her definition of home as representations of her working through internal colonization and her racialized identity.

Isabel's discrimination, among other traumatic events throughout her childhood, influenced Reyita to perceive herself as an Afro-Cuban woman capable of social mobility only if she 'married white.' The book's first chapter, "White Hair, Black Skin. Who Am I?" correlates her marriage to her upbringing as well as the Cuban situation:

I was the victim of terrible discrimination on my mother's part. And if you add what was then the case in Cuba, you can understand why I never wanted a black husband. I had good reason, you know. I didn't want to have children as black as me, so that no one would look down on them, no one would harass and humiliate them. Oh, God only knows...! I didn't want my children to suffer what I'd had to suffer. That's why I wanted to *adelantar la raza*, that's why I married a white man. (21)

Expressions such as “good reason; you can understand; God only knows” show Reyita justifying her marrying Rubiera. Perhaps with the motive to justify a decision that may seem out of place, or to contextualize a choice that seems racist, Reyita explains that her marital choice was a socioeconomic choice directly related to her experiences as a child, and specifically to her mother’s upbringing. Wanting to protect her children from the victimization that she felt, she set out to ‘whiten’ her offspring. Marrying white would protect them in the public space (“given the situation in Cuba”), while her love and respect would protect them within the home.

Yet her “marrying white” repeats the oppression that her mother inflicted onto her, as well as colonial discourse and practices, since it justifies colonial superiority and racial hierarchy. She marries a white man to guarantee her children’s future would be better than her past. In the introduction, Dore explains: “Although Reyita was denigrated by her own mother on account of her colour, Reyita herself subscribed to aspects of the ideology of white superiority/black inferiority; she strove to improve the race—at least her family—through whitening” (5). However, at the end of her testimony, she confesses that this marriage was never official; Antonio Rubiera never signed any papers. The falsity of his performance could serve as an allegory to question Cuba’s racial equality and race mixing. It also underlines the nuances of Reyita’s interracial marriage. She viewed this as an opportunity for her children to advance socioeconomically, but her husband never made this an official union, thereby enacting a racist behavior.

The racial unity and the appreciation of racial difference thus start within the domestic space for Reyita. Although some ambivalence remains in the household (“I always tried to keep the shade of discrimination from falling on you, my children, so it bothered me when some businessmen—who your dad dealt with—called someone by saying: ‘Hey Blackie’, not in an

affectionate tone but somewhat scornfully” 118), this is the space over which she earns control. The domestic space is Reyita’s space of becoming, where she earns a sense of owning herself through actions such as her healing practices and her religious practices (110-13); her dancing (135); and singing (136-37). Each of these demonstrates the growth of individual integrity.

Associating maroonage with the domestic space, Reyita shapes her household as a space for emancipation. Maroons are individuals of African descent who withdrew from life in bondage and created their own communities. In Reyita’s life, home meant bondage and servitude on the plantation, then it became synonym with her mother’s racial discrimination during her childhood, still a form of servitude. Afterwards, it represented a space of domestic and verbal abuse from her husband, where she still felt discriminated. Yet eventually, she makes room for her own liberation, and enforces feminist values and a fervent will for upward mobility within her home. She creates her own communities, promotes her own values and withdraws from servitude in her home. Thus Reyita’s household mirrors a transformation in which maroonage— withdrawing from life in bondage and creating her own community—becomes associated with the domestic space. Unlike the first glass mirror reflection that symbolized the complex process of internal colonization, this figurative mirror—the domestic space—reflects emancipation.

Reyita’s work ethic, represented through home furnishing, illustrates the possibilities of independence. The section on her household’s modernization and sophistication is entitled “Earning my way.” The title denotes control (“my way”) and upward mobility associated with independence. It begins with a feminist’s frustration, unable to control her home and her family:

My husband wore undershirts with gold buttons, very fine clothes and shiny leather slippers. On the other hand, we barely had clothes to cover us or shoes on our feet. That didn’t frighten me; it’s why I began my struggle. Rubiera

guaranteed [...] house, food, doctor and medicine. The rest I decided to go after myself. I began to make a life, up to a certain point, independent of your old man's. (85)

Limitations motivate Reyita to emancipate ("I began to make a life"). This chapter traces her emancipation and growth.

When I was first married I was quite obedient to my husband . . . He didn't demand it of me, I did it willingly and for a long time. Your dad didn't allow me to develop myself the way I wanted, to struggle to fulfill the ambitions you all had. I couldn't do it, Rubiera wouldn't let me; he loved all of you very much, he never looked down on you, but never shared the aspirations I had. I wanted you all to be something in life . . . As my children grew and started leaning out into life and finding out about existence, I battled for them to get ahead. But Rubiera wouldn't let me, thinking a woman had to dedicate herself to running the household and nothing more. So I sacrificed everything, I sacrificed myself as a woman to be just a mother, I had to break with tradition and begin to struggle alone. That's why I separated from Rubiera . . . I was the only one who knew what went on inside the house. (141)

Freedom for Reyita means power within her home, and being a mother in the sense of providing opportunities for her children, working constantly, sacrificing all of her free time and pleasure. She escapes tradition and in that way performs domestic maroonage within her home. She has politicized her home, which has become a space that she governs with her own rules ("I was the only one who knew what went on inside the house.")

For a feminist of color like Reyita, to reach economic independence, even if she doesn't work the job of her dreams, is "the only way to be free." (142) Her house becomes the space that allows her to obtain economic independence. She creates a *tren de cantinas* from her own kitchen (142), then a diner in her living room (145). Without her husband's help, she furnishes and modernizes her home with electricity, a radio then a fridge (145-47). Her independence culminates when she silences her husband: "'No, Rubiera, it's my radio! I bought the radio.' And I picked it up, and took it into the kitchen to listen to the soap" 145; and when she gets 'tipsy' for the first time in her life, on Christmas Eve (147). She now has a territory to call her own. Her determination to solve domestic problems lends her power, turning the patriarchal household into a matriarchy that both her and her "*Virgencita*" oversee. Ironically, what her modernized and economically independent home also cultivated were social norms of consumerism, the value that made her a slave to the economy.

She "marries white" to protect her children from the racial discrimination that she endured as a child, but she does not discriminate among her darker and whiter children, nor does she influence them to *adelantar la raza* ("to marry white"). As Reyita admits to her daughter, unlike her mother, she did not influence any of her children: "Isabel was proud because Pura's husband was white. I didn't ask the Virgin for that, they met and fell in love. I didn't intervene in any of your choices of partners. I always advised on the qualities to look for in a person: to guarantee happiness, you need calmness and stability as well as love" (150). She underlines differences between her and Isabel as she lists personality traits her children should look for in a partner, none of which relate to race.

Domestic maroonage mirrors political independence, financial freedom and racial democracy.<sup>103</sup> As a grandmother, Reyita recalls her great-grandson's colorblindness in a chapter entitled 'My Rainbow': "The children were fighting over who had the prettiest grandmother, I was the only black one. Carlitín—my great-grandson—stood up and said: 'No one can deny it, my grandma is the prettiest of all.' That made me proud, of course it was love that made the child see'" (159). With this quote she demonstrates that she has broken the cycle of internal colonization. Reyita's *testimonio* thus presents her working through internal colonization, which originally fragmented her identity, from her personal point of view.<sup>104</sup> Originally, in the first mirror scene, she divides her image between what her mother saw and what she tried to prove wrong to her mother. The latter was not yet her self, but still an internally colonized version of her self. With the domestic space as a mirroring image, Reyita reconciles her sense of self with internal colonization's fragmentation.

Reyita's domestic maroonage presents another form of working through internal colonization and fragmented racial identity. She addresses her identity-formation not by healing her sexuality, not just within her body, but also within her home. She claims her independence as a woman of color: she challenges her husband, who was verbally abusing her and oppressing her with his machista behavior; she redefines the domestic space where she was once a victim of racial discrimination from her mother and her aunt; her home mirrors an emancipation strategy. Reyita moves a lot from one home to another, which reflects her socio-economic instability. Eventually she finds a stable home. Her definition of 'home' and her changing homes represent

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<sup>103</sup> Not coincidentally, these are tenets of the Cuban Revolution as well, raising the question of how much is this discourse Reyita's discourse, or a discourse that would promote the Cuban Revolution's values in order to be published in Cuba?

<sup>104</sup> As a *testimonio* told from her point of view, Reyita's narrative shows inconsistencies and a personal viewpoint. I do not argue explore her inconsistencies in depth like David Stoll would with the Guatemalan *testimonio* by Rigoberta Menchú as told to Elisabeth Burgos, *I, Rigoberta Menchú*. This is because it is not my project's goal to undermine Reyita's narrative authority, agreeing with John Beverley's response to Stoll in *La voz del otro*.

the search for self-definition and social mobility, and her final stable home marks the point in which she finds her self.

In the end, emancipation is not synonym with whitening for Reyita. She embraces her blackness when she joins Marcus Garvey's United Negro Improvement Association. She claims that her will to "prevail over discrimination" comes from that movement's inspiration (29). Her political participation occurs in her home, following other women of color's political aims. She attended meetings in Miss Molly's house, and in her grandmother's home. Her grandmother influenced her to preserve her heritage and join political movements: "her native land, her beloved, never forgotten Africa, which I learned to love too from all the stories she told us. This love for her homeland that my grandma instilled in me had a big influence on my decision to join Marcus Garvey's movement—to go to Africa" (26).

And yet, as she embraces mythical Africa and African political movements, Reyita maintains distance from blackness in her discourse. The strongest example of this is when she describes her grandmother Antonina's beauty in passing: "She had beautiful skin, not black-black but a very deep dark shade" (24). Reyita still differentiates between shades of blackness, here insisting that a "very deep dark shade" is more beautiful than "black-black." At the same time, she critiques President Batista's racial amnesia: "Batista invented some Indian ancestors for himself. He didn't want to acknowledge his black ones even being President of the Republic" (54). With these examples I simply point out that there may not be a complete resolution, just as healing is a process, not an end point. Reyita's identity is not fixed, but a process of becoming.

The central theme of this testimony, in my opinion, isn't social mobility like Dore argues, but about Reyita's identity involving gender, race, social class, and how all three shape Reyita's domestic maroonage. Reyita, the voice of a *testimonio*, embodies the collectivity of women who,

as products of the Diaspora and descendants of women who were forced to migrate on the slave ship. She struggles to unite what fragmented her identity—social death (24), rape (25), infanticide, etc. At the same time she embraces the fragmentation, aware that it is only a process, devoid of complete resolution. The nurturing atmosphere that she offers to her children, she has to offer to herself as well. She nurtures herself with confidence and respect to make up for the discrimination from her mother, and attempts to break the cycle of domestic racial discrimination. Her testimony concretizes her self-nurturing, while unveiling the complexities of undoing psychological mechanisms of internal colonization.

By tracing mirror tropes in works by Toni Morrison, Esmeralda Ribeiro, Gloria Anzaldúa and María de los Reyes Castillo, I presented connecting points to map out a struggle with self-image represented through mirror reflections in these texts. Each text reveals a different national and historical context, and makes use of a different mirror image. For Baby Suggs, the mirror is internal retrospection; she recovers by claiming ownership of her body. For Esmeralda Ribeiro's poetic voice, the mirror reflects the image of a female warrior and spiritual guardian that help her take off her white mask. It also signifies acquiring a new awareness--"Seeing blackness." In Gloria Anzaldúa's "Entering Into The Serpent," the mirror is internal retrospection, a symbol she retrieves from Aztec seers' practices. It also stands for historical icons' reflection, and as a strategy to fight internal colonization. Like Ribeiro, Anzaldúa finds a new way of seeing, "seeing without censoring." Reyita's testimony serves as a useful example of the mirror reflecting internal colonization. Her text also includes a figurative mirror, with her home as a mirror that reflects a political space of liberation, or where she enacts domestic maroonage.

In these four texts, I find a Pan-American theme where women of color wrestle with their reflections and body image, in order to shape a self-affirmed identity. The fact that each text

includes mirror images points to the force of the gaze, both colonial (as Mary Louise Pratt argued in *Imperial Eyes*) and decolonial (as Lorde presents in her poem “Between Ourselves.”) That is precisely the dilemma that each woman of color works through. Seeing as how the narratives represent women in late 1800s U.S., 1980s Southwest Texas, 20<sup>th</sup> century Cuba, and post-dictatorial Brazil reveals a harsh truth. Recovering from post-colonial shock, women of color attempt to claim ownership of their free selves in different eras. Looking in the mirror, each voice trembles, each body shakes and tries to find balance in the troubling intersection of freeing her self and claiming ownership of that freed self.

### **3.3 RAPED OF THEIR MOTHERHOOD?**

This next section analyzes the fragmentation of identity in selected women of color’s literary representations, answering one main question: How do the texts fill in the gaps of post-colonial shock, and resolve such trauma? In this section I shift the focus of study to images of maternity and fertility. Though this topic briefly came up in the previous section, in relation to identity formation in mirror scenes, here it will be the center of the discussion. Do the texts illustrate a will to preserve kinship, or a refusal to give life to children in bondage? Does their behavior arise out of resistance to colonial economy of slavery?

In *Black Feminist Thought*, Patricia Hill Collins explains that instead of being providers and mothers to their children, enslaved African women were controlled to maintain “race, class, and gender inequality” that characterized the slave order and sexual colonial economy (50). The colonial economy, based on a system of “so-called racial purity” inherently turned Black women into biological breeders of slaves: “Since children followed the condition of their mothers,

children born of enslaved black women were slaves” (Collins 50).<sup>105</sup> According to Jerome Branche, as he demonstrates in *Colonialism and Race in Luso-Hispanic Literature*, motherhood for women in bondage is thus a “corrupted signifier” (112). A slave woman could only be a surrogate mother to the master’s offspring, and could not tend to her own children. In *Beloved*, Sethe’s mother finds a surrogate mother for Sethe because she cannot nurse her, and has to go back to work in the fields. Her offspring, Sethe, is erased. In the case of Tituba in *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*, Tituba’s mother Abena refuses to love Tituba, because she is the offspring of her master’s physical abuse. Have both mothers been raped of their motherhood, turned into breeders that can only serve the white slave-owning class?

The captive mother, or as Spillers calls her, the woman “in the flesh,” redefines femininity and gender, as both “mother and mother-dispossessed,” or in my text, motherhood and (m)otherhood. The wounded mother is at the center of a different cultural text that redefines, or “reconfigures certain representation potentialities for African-Americans” (Spillers 80). Motherhood within the context of slavery both divides the concept of motherhood and creates a new category for thinking gender, where the enslaved mother is “out of the traditional symbolics of female gender, and it is our task to make a place for this different social subject” (Spillers 80).<sup>106</sup> My definition of motherhood includes mothers who were captive mothers, wounded, in the context of slavery. These women perceived and experienced having children different from the traditional symbol of motherhood. While living in bondage, having children could be seen as perpetuating the economic system of slavery. Taking their situation into consideration, and their

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<sup>105</sup> Sexuality was controlled on both sides of the color and gender line, since any children born of a Black male and White woman liaison were automatically seen as the product of rape: “Motherhood and racism were symbolically intertwined, with controlling the sexuality and fertility of both African-American and White women essential in reproducing racialized notions of American womanhood” (King qtd. in Collins 50).

<sup>106</sup> On comparisons of controlled images from the context of slavery and contemporary controlled images, see Collins pp.72-96.

choices to commit infanticide or not, will shed light on other ways to think about motherhood and choices relating to maternity.

In the process of enslavement, cases of Black infanticide stood as acts of resistance “against the slave order that prevented kinship, and dehumanized African lives” (Collins 49). Acts of infanticide stand as acts of survival to 1) resist raising an offspring who was a product of rape and 2) resist raising a child bound to inherit her mother’s status in bondage. The women in *Beloved*, *I, Tituba*, *Black Witch of Salem*, *Ponciá Vicencio*, and *The Life of Reyita* carry memories of infanticide and traumas associated with the womb. Physical and psychological attachments to their children, as well as with their identity as mothers have been shattered, violated. Still problematic for women of color today, they portray traumas that the attempt to repair. I will first delineate the texts’ representations of maternity, fertility, motherhood, and infanticide, and then examine what alternatives each story proposes. My goal consists in finding out whether each text provides a signifier other than that of violated maternity.<sup>107</sup>

The question mark in the title points to the questionable association between sexual abuse and rejecting the role of mother. Are these women raped of their motherhood? Are they victims or do they enact a conscious choice? It also calls to attention the issue with automatically perceiving women in bondage as violated of their maternity, or associating slavery with displaced motherhood. Although life in bondage was a reality for many women, many lived in established family networks as well. Nowadays, similarly, although there are a wide number of

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<sup>107</sup> For a comparison with Jewish women of color, I would suggest looking at Marianne Hirsch’s image of “maternal loss” during the Holocaust, or the reverse of my focus on the “violated maternity.” She recalls in “The Generation of Postmemory” that feminists should indeed focus on gender issues such as the figure of maternal loss, while at the same time she warns not to limit the association to a generational trauma like the Holocaust to this limited figure of the woman (124). Likewise, I will focus on losing a child, but do not condone a limited view of enslaved women as childless or family-less.

single mothers of color, one should not fall in the trap of associating woman of color with single motherhood, abortion, or child abandonment.

*Tituba* represents (m)otherhood. By that I mean that she stands as an image of a woman that is not associated with the traditional meaning of motherhood, but instead is associated with an alternative meaning of motherhood—motherhood as a displaced signifier, as a reminder of life in bondage, as (m)otherhood. The novel associates her refusal to have a child with the oppressive environments in which she lives.

Though it unveils cases of (m)othering, I will argue that Condé's novel also portrays maternity. *Tituba* does experience a short few months of pregnancy, at the end of the novel. At this point in the novel, her current lover Iphigene offers to raise her child as if it were his own (like *Tituba's* father did). I will argue that although it seems that *Tituba* cannot found a family, she is actually bound to found a family other than a traditional nuclear one. Conceição Evaristo's novel presents a similar loss. In the context of a Brazilian slum, one generation after the 'free womb law' in Brazil (1871),<sup>108</sup> Ponciá Vicencio's character associates suffering, loss, haunting and ghost's voices with birth and maternity. *Beloved's* characters will serve as further examples of resisting the slave order with infanticide, kinship and the power of choice, specifically with Sethe and Baby Suggs. In *The Life of Reyita*, María de los Reyes Castillo narrates her foremothers' painful trauma, mainly in relation to broken families and frustrated maternity. *Reyita's testimonio* represents the signifier of displaced motherhood as something present throughout Cuban history. *Reyita's testimonio*, as my analysis demonstrates, suggests a

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<sup>108</sup> The law of free wombs permitted children of slaves to be born free.

possibility for change by claiming motherhood.<sup>109</sup> She also sets up the difference between (m)othering and claiming motherhood.

Maryse Condé's *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem* is devoid of any motherhood, on both sides of the color line.<sup>110</sup> (M)otherhood is first underlined with Tituba's mother, Abena. Abena has trouble loving her daughter who was conceived as the result of sexual abuse on the slave ship. The first time that she shows signs of affection towards Tituba she faces another attack of abuse, this time from her owner; and because she fights back, she is condemned to be hung. Tituba witnesses the hanging. This painful event is later echoed in the scene of a witch hanging in Salem, Massachusetts. Tituba witnesses a public hanging and as she hears the condemned woman's screams, she remembers her mother's screams and recalls: "they hang my mother."<sup>111</sup> As a grown woman, she still carries the trauma of seeing her mother die; she relives the very event that ended the possibility of her bonding with her mother. Since this moment haunts her, it illustrates how Tituba still carries this image of her mother dying and remaining (m)other. This traumatic haunting also establishes a relationship between the traumatic event and Tituba's inheriting (m)otherhood.

When it is her turn to give birth, Tituba performs an abortion with natural herbs to prevent her and her husband John Indian's child from being born into bondage—they were a Puritan priest's slaves in Salem. She loses her fertility due to this procedure (she never tells her husband). She chooses not to let her child into the world, to avoid raising a child bound to inherit her life in bondage. She repeats a song dedicated to her unborn child several times throughout

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<sup>109</sup> The change in attitude, ironically or not, is paralleled with Reyita being alive during the Cuban Revolution, leaving a doubt in one's mind about the propagandish tone of her *testimonio*.

<sup>110</sup> Tituba serves in several homes, none of which figure a strong maternal characters. The women are either without children, dying, ill, or already passed.

<sup>111</sup> Note the haunting of the traumatic event.

the book, underlining her longing to be a mother and the melancholy attached to (m)otherhood.<sup>112</sup>

As I explained in Chapter 2, *I, Tituba...* is a woman's exploration of her identity in bondage as she struggles throughout her lifetime to negotiate a sense of self. Tituba expresses an awareness of her sexuality and sexual attraction that I did not find present in *Ponciá Vicencio*, *Reyita*, or *Beloved*. When she questions why she is falling in love with her first lover, John Indian, she realizes that she is only attracted by "la butte monumentale de son sexe [the huge bump of his penis]" (23/19). The first time that they make love resembles a fight (*Moi* 42) and this ambiguity towards love, sex, submission and violence remains an unsolved dilemma throughout the novel. She analyzes her actions and realizes her inconsistencies, how her choosing sex and men tied her down and enslaved her more than other women in bondage (45/25). In that sense, her ambiguity towards love, sex, submission and violence speaks to the Caribbean contemporaneity, and more specifically to Condé's Guadeloupean experience as a French Overseas Department citizen. She also illustrates the closest example to a character that embraces the power of the erotic.

In "Reading in Circles: sexuality and/as history in *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*," Michelle Smith DeBruin explores the circular structure of *Moi, Tituba sorcière...* For Smith DeBruin, and I agree with her, "Tituba and her mother are read as a circularity encompassing the subjectivity of Caribbean womanhood" (603). She places this structure alongside the novel's relationship to the current French Caribbean situation: Tituba is *métisse* (of mixed descent); she expresses a desire to write her own history, but she questions her "choosing sex" throughout the

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<sup>112</sup> Hester, an Anglo American arrested for adultery, meets Tituba in prison when Tituba is arrested for witchcraft. The encounter between Tituba and Hester also shows that not wanting to bear children was true for both white and Black women. Both were marginalized, victims of the colonial sexual economy's oppression. Several months pregnant, Hester commits suicide in prison.

novel. The tension, in turn, alludes to the current French Caribbean situation. The circular structure and “choosing sex” are central to understand the trauma narrative in the context of the French Overseas Departments.

Tituba lives out a life similar to her mother’s: she also befriends her white mistress, and is hung like her mother. She returns to Barbados, and before she is hung for participating in an uprising, she dreams of being raped (by Salem’s Inquisition priests who violated her earlier in the story). At this point she screams “No, no! Haven’t I already gone through that?” She has, and so has her mother Abena. Her mother was violated twice, and Tituba witnessed her mother’s second sexual victimization. The circular structure addresses an inescapable fate, with the doubles of Abena and Tituba, yet Tituba refuses to relive this nightmare; she refuses to repeat the cycle. If she is determined to break the cycle, why does her behavior towards sex involve violence and submission, and why does she choose to have sex with several men, one of them being her owner?

Tituba chooses sex her whole life, perhaps to avoid being forced to it. Her sexual pleasure is commingled with coercive violence, in which the roles of victim and perpetrator (of sexual abuse) are both present within her. The dilemma of her “choice,” her feeling that she has “already gone through that,” and her perpetrator-victim<sup>113</sup> status symbolize French Overseas Department islands. Their status is a form of colonialism that has left them with a “voluntary” relationship with the colonizer.

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<sup>113</sup> I am referring to the instance where she makes love to John Indian, soon to be her husband, and the scene is described as violent, and her character seems to embody both a perpetrator of sexual abuse and a victim of sexual abuse, yet the scene is not one of sexual abuse—the lines are completely blurred, the sexual encounter is very ambiguous.

On the other hand, Tituba's voice as a narrator explores her sexuality in relation to her life's traumas. She relates her slave condition to her sexual desire.<sup>114</sup> She realizes that desire remains bound to oppression in her life. She asserts her right to choose to be with men. She challenges her mother Abena and Ma Yaya's spirits warnings. For instance, when she first meets John Indian, she calls upon Mama Yaya who warns her: "Men do not love. They possess. They subjugate. . . [Your father Yao] was one of the great exceptions. . . They say that this cock has coupled with half the hens in Carlisle Bay" (15). Shortly afterwards, her mother's spirit appears to complain and sigh:

'Why can't women do without men?' she groaned. 'Now you're going to be dragged off to the other side of the water.' Surprised, I interrupted her. 'To the other side of the water?' But she said no more, merely repeating in a distressed voice: 'Why can't women do without men?' Mama Yaya's reluctance, and my mother's lamentations might have warned me to take care. But this was not the case. On Sunday I set off for Carlisle Bay. (15-16)

Tituba does not grasp that "the other side of the water" can refer to the side of the enslaved. If she follows her first love, John Indian, she will lose her life off of the plantation. Yet her attitude towards her elders' advice challenges "the assumption that female sexuality exists to serve the sexual needs of men. Her efforts enhance the struggle to end sexual oppression. The right to choose must characterize all sexual interactions between individuals" (hooks 157). Tituba chooses when to be or not to be a mother as well.

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<sup>114</sup> Note that her Jewish lover, who is also her master, is portrayed as the most caring, respectful and giving, comparing to John Indian (her husband who takes her back into life in bondage) and Christopher (a Maroon in Barbados who wants to use her 'witch' powers to gain eternal life). Iphigène, her last lover compares to D'Azevedo.

Apart from the environment void of motherhood, which I underlined in the *Tituba* novel, Tituba does experience a short few months of pregnancy at the end of the novel. When she finds out that she is expecting, she no longer lives in the maroon community. She is with Iphigene, a man she loves but that she also perceives as a son, though he offers to raise their child together. Yet later, they are condemned for participating in a rebellion with Iphigene, Tituba is hung carrying her unborn child.

The novel, devoid of mothering characters, communicates a sense of infertility in relation to the historical context of the Caribbean slave trade and the Salem Witch Trials. It conveys a context in which raising a family was not only difficult but also unthinkable for many women, where women did not associate their identity with performing the role of a mother. The sexual colonial economy's oppression affects women's identity-formation; these characters indeed perceive motherhood as counterproductive. This is not to say that these women give up, on the contrary, they resist the sexual colonial economy's oppression by refusing to give birth in it. This is their choice.

In Tituba's case, being hanged with her unborn baby was not her choice; she chose not to give birth to her first child. Her hanging when she was pregnant builds another argument, the difficulty or impossibility to have children in bondage. The novel's epilogue breaks this logic. In Tituba's life as a spirit, she gets to choose a "descendant," a child: "Since I died without giving birth to a child, the spirits have allowed me to choose a descendant. I took a long time making up my mind. I spied into every cabin. . . I fingered and prodded and finally I found her, the one I needed: Samantha. . . A child I didn't give birth to but whom I chose! What motherhood could be nobler!" (176) She chooses to be a mother as a spirit. What does this say about (m)otherhood and the possibility to be a mother in a context of life in bondage?

This novel presents another motherhood, a spiritual one, which in turn relates to African religious matriarchy. Making her own choices, Tituba also liberates herself from the inherited signifier of displaced motherhood. She undoes her mother's anger towards men, and her anger towards herself. She chooses sex, she chooses not to be a mother, and whereas her mother only projected guilt onto her when she talked to her as a spirit, Tituba chooses to teach her healing ways to her spirit-child.

In *Ponciá Vicencio*, the main character lives a similar experience, and performs a similar choice when she questions fertility and refuses motherhood: "As morning approached, the nearby chorus of infants that awoke to complain of hunger or cold suddenly invaded Ponciá's ears. She remembered the seven children that she had brought into the world, all dead." (86) Notwithstanding the connotations of suffering associated with the infants ("complain, hunger, cold, invaded"), this sentence's rhythm is dramatic. With her memory of children that have yet to enter the narrative, one could imagine children growing up, a continuation of the flashback into actual past events shared with the children. Instead, the sentence concludes abruptly with "all dead" (47). When Ponciá's husband would find out about failed pregnancies, he would beat her each time. Her character is aware of how difficult it would be to raise a child, and questions the validity of fertility. The omniscient narrator explains: "When Ponciá Vicencio's children, all seven of them, were born and then died, the first losses had brought great suffering. Afterward, with the passing of time and with each pregnancy, each birth, she found herself wishing that the child would not survive. Was it worth it to bring a child into the world?" (80) Aware of continuing oppression, Ponciá changes her mind and chooses to reject the desire of fertility. colonial economy's persistence in Brazil, one generation after the law of the free womb, keeps her from desiring a family.

Toni Morrison's novel represents the displaced motherhood signifier with recurring images of infanticide. Sethe's mother had to throw over infants who were the product of white men's rape on the slave ship; Ella, a friend of Stamp Paid and Baby Suggs, refused to nurse her baby, conceived during sexual abuse as well; and Sethe, in a crazed yet instinctive reaction to the plantation owner finding her and her children after she had fled to Ohio, runs into a shed to take her children's lives. These acts result from slavery's trauma that broke women's social roles. They are acts of resistance to an oppressive system. Sethe attempts to save her children from the colonial economy's social death through physical death, or in Sethe's words, a "perfect death."

*Beloved* represents a world with women losing their children, yet ends with sustaining matriarchies. This contrast comes out with differences between Sethe and Baby Suggs. After Sethe runs away with Denver, she is reunited with all of her children in her mother-in-law Baby Suggs' home. This is before Schoolteacher finds her. Her four children surround Sethe, and she simultaneously nurses both of her daughters. The portrait reminds Baby Suggs how it would "be nice if there was a groom to go with it"—Sethe's husband, Baby Suggs' son, has yet to flee Sweet Home's plantation and come home (94). Another generational contrast is set up between Sethe and her children: "Nan had to nurse whitebabies and me too because Ma'am was in the rice. The little white babies got it first and I got what was left. Or not. There was no nursing milk to call my own" (200). Her children, on the other hand, did have nursing milk and a mother to call their own—once she left Sweet Home. *Beloved* clearly establishes a causal relationship between slavery and (m)otherhood.

The passage below illustrates Sethe's fervent will to maintain her newborn's bond. She had her newborn leave the plantation on a wagon, along with her sons and other women to run away before her. Her milk symbolize this bond, a right first taken away from her, then claimed

by her (“I had to get my milk to my baby girl”). It marks the difference between (m)othering and mothering. “They took my milk” marks the beginning of storytelling how she was sexually abused by “Schoolteacher” and his sons:

“I had milk,” she said. “I was pregnant with Denver but I had milk for my baby girl. I hadn’t stopped nursing her when I sent her on ahead with Howard and Buglar.”

Now she rolled the dough out with a wooden pin. “Anybody could smell me long before he saw me. And when he saw me he’d see the drops of it on the front of my dress. Nothing I could do about that. All I knew was I had to get my milk to my baby girl. Nobody was going to nurse her like me. Nobody was going to get it to her fast enough, or take it away when she had enough and didn’t know it. Nobody knew that she couldn’t pass her air if you held her up on your shoulder, only if she was lying on my knees. Nobody knew that but me and nobody had her milk but me. I told that to the women in the wagon. Told them to put sugar water in cloth to suck from so when I got there in a few days she wouldn’t have forgot me. The milk would be there and I would be there with it.” (16-17)

In Sethe’s discourse, the act of nursing goes against the slave order, which promoted breeding. It establishes a bond between mother and child: “Nobody knew that but me and nobody had her milk but me.” The repetition of the pronoun “nobody” underlines this special bond that Sethe attempts to preserve. Despite her efforts, she still faces colonial economy’s reality:

“Those boys came in there and took my milk. That’s what they came in there for. Held me down and took it. I told Mrs. Garner on em. She had that lump and

couldn't speak but her eyes rolled out tears. Them boys found out I told on em. Schoolteacher made one open up my back, and when it closed it make a tree. It grows there still."

"They used cowhide on you?"

"And they took my milk."

"They beat you and you was pregnant?"

"And they took my milk!" (18)

After this episode, once she has reunited her family and Schoolteacher finds her wanting to take her and her family back to Sweet Home, Sethe slays the youngest of her daughters. Afterwards, she attempts to take her life and her other children's lives. Schoolteacher cannot handle this, ironically, though he has been perpetrating worse acts of violence. The police arrive and arrest Sethe, who goes to prison with her surviving daughter Denver, while her boys stay with her mother-in-law, Baby Suggs. Like the other characters studied above, Sethe refuses to choose life for her children, thus resisting the colonial economy. At the same time, the milk symbolizes a resistance centered on familial bond. She illustrates what Patricia Hill Collins describes as two acts of resistance to the slave order: "both childbearing and infanticide were acts of resistance against the slave order that prevented kinship, and dehumanized African lives" (Collins 49).

Once she returns from her jail sentence and Baby Suggs passes away, Sethe's sons run away from her, partly to start their own lives and partly because they are still afraid of their mother; and afraid of the house haunted by Beloved's ghost. At this point, Sethe's friend Paul D, from Sweet Home, visits her, and she admits to him that all she has left is love for her remaining daughter, Denver. For Paul D., and before him for Baby Suggs, her maternal love seems "too

thick.” They find it unfit and unhealthy to cultivate such love and survive life in and after bondage (165).<sup>115</sup> Yet with her “thick love” and her one act of infanticide, Sethe enacted two acts of resistance to the sexual colonial economy. Paul D. may have these actions in mind when he reminds her in the end that “*You your best thing, Sethe.*”

An omniscient narrative voice explains:

In all of Baby’s life, as well as Sethe’s own, men and women were moved around like checkers. Anybody Baby Suggs knew, let alone loved, who hadn’t run off or been hanged, got rented out, loaned out, bought up, brought back, stored up, mortgaged, won, stolen or seized... What she called the nastiness of life was the shock she received upon learning that nobody stopped playing checkers just because the pieces included her children. (23)

In this quote, the verbs are either in the passive voice (moved around, hanged, got rented out, loaned out, bought up, brought back, mortgaged, won, stolen or seized) or refer to actions to which they are the direct object, not the agent. The ones in power, not the (m)other, choose to move the pieces. This last reality comes as a “shock” to Baby Suggs, a shock from which she tries to recover. She had hoped that this would change with her children, but it did not. Once her son bought her freedom, Baby Suggs “decided that, because slave life had ‘busted her legs, back, head, eyes, hands, kidneys, womb and tongue,’ she had nothing left to make a living but with her heart—which she put to work at once” (87). Seeing how the rest of her self has been taken away from her, including her womb, she decides to nurture from her “great heart,” beyond familial ties.

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<sup>115</sup> Sethe is not consistently satisfied with her family situation. She loses her daughter, and her two sons runaway, frightened that she might kill them too. When she complains, Baby Suggs reminds her: “Be thankful why don’t you? I had eight. Every one of them gone away from me. Four taken, four chased, and all, I expect, worrying somebody’s house into evil” (5).

Though Baby Suggs criticizes Sethe's "thick love," and advocates spreading "her love thin," Suggs realizes that making her love thin reinforced the oppressive sexual colonial economy's forces. She decides to cope with her fragmented identity by reaching out beyond her family: "uncalled, unrobed, unanointed, she let her great heart beat in their presence" (87). With a humble title after her name, "a small caress after it," Baby Suggs becomes Baby Suggs, holy. She brings people together in the woods periodically for a healing ritual: "With Baby Suggs' heart in charge, the people let go" (94). Healing others in The Clearing, crying, laughing, singing and dancing as a community heals her displaced motherhood. She transforms from (m)other to spiritual mother, and reminds her community to appreciate their flesh, their bodies.

Reyita was not a loved child, but she breaks that cycle as a mother. Her story retrospects women's lives during the Middle Passage.<sup>116</sup> She tells her daughter: "My grandmother didn't want to have children—and she took preventative infusions of herb and roots" (24). Her grandmother chose not to have children, but she could not avoid colonial sexual economy's oppression, and sexual abuse. Isabel, her daughter, was a child of "one of her masters" (25). Reyita superposes her mother's birth with irony. Regardless of the country's supposed emancipation, Isabel was born into bondage: "[My mother] had to work as a slave doing housework for the masters even though this was after the *law of free wombs*" (25). The Cuban *law of free wombs* (July 1870) permitted children of slaves to be born free, yet it allowed institutional ownership over a slave woman's maternity.<sup>117</sup> The legal rights over a mother's child

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<sup>116</sup> The term "Middle Passage" refers to the crossing of the Atlantic Ocean during the slave trade, when tribal chiefs and heads of state traded their people to Spanish, Portuguese, English and French colonial traders for weapons, money, etc., and loaded the chosen West African people onto slave ships headed for the European colonies in the Americas. For example, Reyita's great-grandmother, Tatica's mother, and her great aunts Casilda and Nestora came to Cuba in a slave ship and they "were put up for sale" (25). In the Middle Passage, on the slave ship, they witnessed seamen who "started throwing men overboard—the oldest, the most frail" (24).

<sup>117</sup> *The Life of Reyita's* footnotes explain that the law's 21 articles "masked" but did not abolish slavery: "The first article stated that children born to slave mothers after the date on which the law came into effect would be declared

still form part of State legislative debates. The law owned mothers' wombs; it—not the women—decided that their children be born free. At the same time, slave owners did not respect this law. Women could not claim freedom for their children, nor could they have a free family. Only one generation before Reyita, in Cuba women were still being denied of their motherhood. They resisted this by opting for abortion or infertility, to prevent that their children be born as someone else's property. These real women are a Cuban example of resisting the oppression of the sexual economy of the colony. Their struggle may not have led to institutional changes, but it was a form of taking agency.

It was a “game of checkers” to maintain a family together in Cuba as well. Reyita grew up knowing the difficulty, as a Black woman in Cuba: “when [Tatica, my grandmother] talked about [being able to stay together with her sisters in the slave trade] she'd give thanks to God” (25). She presents her mother as a case in point. Isabel lost her mother at a young age, yet she had to stay with her father and work for him at the Echevarría plantation (32). As a mother, Isabel admitted to love only two of her children, José and María, born from a loving relationship with a white man, *adelantados* or “whitened” (33).<sup>118</sup> She had four children with a Black soldier, “Carlos Castillo Duarte, the only black man Isabel would ever share her life with” (34). Their names are Candita, Evaristo, Nemesio, and Reyita. Candita dies during the 10-year war, when Isabel and Carlos joined the *Mambí*, Cuban insurgents who fought against Spanish

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free; nevertheless in article 6 it said that those freed by this law *remained under the patronage of the owners of the mother*” (171, my emphasis).

<sup>118</sup> This term actually comes from colonial times. An *adelantado* was a Spaniard with rights granted by the Spanish crown to conquer and settle newly discovered lands. See “Cortés, Velázquez and Charles V,” in *Hernán Cortés Letters of Mexico*, Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 1986.

domination.<sup>119</sup> In the context of war Isabel's motherhood was also challenged, she was faced to commit infanticide, and lose a child "once again." (34)<sup>120</sup>

Reyita survived the war, but still lived without her mother, this time due to economic survival. Slavery had been 'abolished,' but her mother worked in the fields for money, so Cherisse was her Haitian mammy (35).<sup>121</sup> Isabel's life exemplifies the difficulty of mothering in a sexual colonial economy that lasted past the abolition of slavery, with a situation where it was hard to be self-sustaining economically on a day-to-day basis.

After placing herself in her foremothers' lineage, Reyita differentiates her story from theirs. Her discourse emphasizes the importance of family, the power of motherhood and the strengths of a nurturing domestic space. The *testimonio* underlines the interlocutor's familial connection with references to her family members ("your aunt, your sister, your grandmother" etc.). These references also call attention to the centrality of the domestic, familial space, and the importance of the mother-daughter relationship in this testimony. What does that say about Reyita's perception of motherhood? It conveys a Black feminist responsibility similar to Maria W. Stewart's on the power of motherhood: "O, ye mothers, what a responsibility rests on you! You have souls committed to your charge...It is you that must create in the minds of your little

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<sup>119</sup> Candita kept crying while a column of Spaniards were passing by:

The rest of the women, afraid of being caught, said to your grandmother: 'Isabel find a way to make that child be quiet.' Not knowing what to do, she left the other children and walked until she came to a little stream. She was carrying her daughter pressed against her chest. When the little first stopped crying Isabel realized she was dead. Once again she had to dig a grave with her bare hands and bury her child wrapped in leaves. She couldn't stop to cry or to mourn, she would run the risk of the rest of the group moving from where they were and not being able to find the rest of her children. Evaristo and Nemesio didn't survive either (34).

<sup>120</sup> The *Mambi* asked Isabel to quiet her baby while they were hiding. She pressed her child tightly against her to silence his cries, not knowing that once the troops walked away, her child would never again speak up. He died from suffocating in her arms (34).

<sup>121</sup> Her whiter siblings stayed with a cousin in La Maya, far from the fields, and in a way less exposed to the displacement of motherhood like Reyita was—they stayed with a family member, whereas she was raised by a Haitian mammy (35).

girls and boys a thirst for knowledge, the love of virtue... and the cultivation of a pure heart” (qtd. in Collins 4).<sup>122</sup>

Celsa Albert Batista notes that the “domestic maroonage” apparent in Reyita’s life historicizes the role of motherhood: “All her work is performed within the home, using medicinal herbs and spiritual spells to help people. In this way, her example of ‘*cimarronaje doméstico*’ [domestic maroonage] transforms motherhood into a site of production and resistance” (Batista 45).<sup>123</sup> Reyita’s discourse and way of life transforms (m)otherhood into nurturing and productive motherhood, similar to West African motherhood as described by Hill Collins, one that was associated with being a maternal breadwinner.

Gloria Anzaldúa, in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, refers to another type of (m)otherhood, the mythical representation of “Our Three Mothers,” three iconic images of Mexican mothers that influence or shape Chicana identity: Guadalupe, Malintzin, and la Llorona. The Virgin Guadalupe was a religious icon associated with an indigenous appropriation of Christianity. It was an indigenous man, Juan Diego, who saw her appear. He told his discovery to a Spanish priest; and from there the Virgin grew to become a national symbol beyond the borders of Mexico, into the United States where she also remains a strong cultural figure. Malintzin, a Nahuatl woman, played a key role during the Conquest of Mexico. Her family sold her as a slave when she was just a child, and going from one community to another she learned different indigenous dialects, but also spoke Spanish with Spanish occupants. Her linguistic skills earned her a strategic role as negotiator and interpreter during the Conquest, her status rose from slave to crucial character in Cortéz’s military feats. How she earned this role and how her life really

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<sup>122</sup> Maria Stewart is an intellectual who formed a part of the first Black women feminist movement to write about the Black woman’s condition in the United States in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>123</sup> Maroonage is the culture associated with previously enslaved individuals who ran away and formed their own communities as free people. Domestic maroonage here implies Reyita’s becoming independent in her household.

was remains a polemic. Because of the role that she had in the conquest, she is often interpreted as a traitor. La Llorona is the character of a wives' tale; her story has passed on and told through generations, and mothers still use it to scare their children into staying home rather than venturing out into the dark night. People say that she cries at night near any body of water, looking for her lost children who drowned in a river. These three women, for Anzaldúa, make up the Chicana community's mothers. The (m)otherhood discussed in Anzaldúa's text consists of the displacement of these three iconic mothers' signifiers. Their symbols become transformed and denied of their original maternal connotation.

These three women, for Anzaldúa, make up the Chicana community's mothers:

*La gente chicana tiene tres madres.* All three are mediators: *Guadalupe*, the virgin mother who has not abandoned us, *la Chingada (Malinche)*, the raped mother whom we have abandoned, and *la Llorona*, the mother who seeks her lost children and is a combination of the other two.

Ambiguity surrounds the symbols of these three "Our Mothers." *Guadalupe* has been used by the Church to mete out institutionalized oppression: to placate the Indians and *mexicanos* and Chicanos. In part, the true identity of all three has been subverted—*Guadalupe* to make us ashamed of our Indian side, and *la Llorona* to make us a long-suffering people. This obscuring has encouraged the *virgen/puta* (whore) dichotomy. (52-53)

The symbolic mother figures present in the Chicano imaginary address a dangerous association to motherhood, changing them from influential mother figures into (m)others. Anzaldúa's words, "this obscuring has encouraged the *virgen/puta* (whore) dichotomy" underlines how three mothers' transformed images illustrate the displaced signifier of

motherhood. Malintzin is reduced to “whore” status, selling herself and her people when she was in fact abused. She negotiated a place for herself after being sold by her family and abused by Spaniards. Guadalupe, originally a symbol of resistance and agency for the indigenous, turned into a tool for the Catholic Church to further oppress and exploit the subaltern population. La Llorona promotes a subaltern image of a suffering people without a voice, with only an ability to cry and suffer.

Unlike the other authors, Anzaldúa does not describe women struggling with motherhood per se, nor does she deal with having to let go of an unborn child. She discusses the impact of cultural icons who are women turned into cultural symbols of (m)otherhood. The *virgen/puta* dichotomy is a phenomenon that she finds within her culture, in the public and domestic space. These iconic women offer to either be seen as a virgin or an overtly sexual woman, as quiet and following the rules or overtly rebellious and asking for trouble. Anzaldúa longs for a resolution in which outgoing, ambitious women would not be stigmatized, and cultural icons would promote women’s agency rather than support patriarchal discourses.

Gloria E. Anzaldúa’s work makes up one of the many Chicana works that contribute another history, a history repressed by the national discourses on both sides of the border. From the foundational period to today’s transnational era, Anzaldúa’s reflections on motherhood question the Chicana civil right’s movement’s constricting walls of protest, and advocate another solidarity. Chicano activists had already enacted a retrieval of pre-conquest histories to revive their people’s historical consciousness, themselves influenced by antecedents of U.S. Hispanic Literature that superposed “official” history with another history. As Saldívar-Hull states in “Mestiza Consciousness and Politics: Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/ La frontera*,” the publication of *Borderlands/ La Frontera* distinguished itself from the Chicano movement as it

unveiled the curtain that hid the Aztec goddesses and kept aspects of pre-conquest history behind a cloud of blood sacrifices and military power (60).

By including Gloria Anzaldúa in this discussion, I call attention to (m)otherhood outside of the dynamics of family structure or individual identity-formation, which was the main topic of discussion in the previous texts' analyses. Anzaldúa brings forth another type of (m)otherhood, which, through very different from previous analyses, makes this discussion more productive in its differential content. Displacing the maternal signifier of influential cultural icons impacts a collective imaginary, as we have seen with the un-representation, so to speak, of "Our Three Mothers," three iconic images of Mexican mothers that influence or shape Chicana identity—Guadalupe, Malintzin, and la Llorona. Anzaldúa unveils the curtain that turned foremothers into (m)others, with the objective to change engrained cultural behaviors of (m)othering that force daughters into dichotomies of otherness, either silent accepted virgins or banned overtly sexual women. Her main argument advocates for a renewal of kinship with foremothers Guadalupe, Malintzin and la Llorona in the sense if one re-adopts them as mothers instead of (m)others, one can take steps towards transforming and improving their cultural identity, and motherhood.

### 3.4 CONCLUSION

I originally claimed that the representations of infanticide, motherhood, and alternative motherhood, might be interpreted as displaced signifiers or images devoid of a traditional motherhood signifier. After analyzing the images of “displaced motherhood,” I find it inappropriate to conclude that the representations analyzed above illustrate a displaced motherhood. I answer my own question, were they “raped of their motherhood?” with a negative answer not to undermine the sexual abuse, which was overwhelmingly present, but to highlight the *rewriting of feminine resistance within sexual colonial economy*, of the literary canon’s and hegemonic representations of (m)others. The characters analyzed above present not displacement, but ownership and decision, and overall a resistance through infanticide and/or kinship, beyond the historical context of slavery—during witch trials in puritan United States, postslavery Brazil, 20<sup>th</sup> century Cuba, and Southwest United States, in contexts of displaced (m)otherhood.

Collins states that there are two forms of resistance to the colonial sexual economy—infanticide and kinship. Although the characters mentioned above do not all get to live out a life as nurturing mothers with their children, some narratives do present women claiming motherhood, while others include alternative motherhoods that resist the slave order, supporting the argument that these women were *not* raped of their motherhood. They recovered the power of choice.

Reyita’s *testimonio* covers 90 years of her life and articulate, through her experiences, her definition of motherhood. The text presents an attitude that compensates for the discrimination and psychological abuse she endured throughout her childhood. It also narrates her finding

independence as a woman of color in Cuba. Her discourse of independence introduces another form of marronage.<sup>124</sup>

Rethinking these characters' actions helps one to reflect on today's practice of abortions and strong mother figures, undoing the negative stigma in both. The relationship between slavery and sexuality/gender does provide an understanding of infanticide and abortion then and now. Still today, resistance to the established order remains a key term, one that gives agency to the mother, counteracts the idea of 'giving up' a child, and finds a political statement through the control of their own body and their offspring, in contexts where their ownership of maternity has been displaced from their person.

Baby Suggs' experience shows how a slave and a former slave community have to build its kinship on fragmentation and disconnections, or "checkers," to shift from (m)otherhood to claiming a sense of self. She teaches others to overcome the trauma of life in bondage through appreciation of their flesh, an appreciation they can learn to cultivate post-slavery. Baby Suggs' strategy of resistance thus requires to re-member in the flesh, with love.

The traumas of sexual abuse and objectification, violated maternity, naming and internal colonization, in the contexts presented by the above texts in the last two chapters, establish a relationship with contemporary sexuality and original contexts of colonization. They cast shadows to connect one to the original moment of repressed sexuality, to the shock of colonization. In such historical contexts lies a trauma such as rape on a slave ship, or a repressed secret like the true nature of a Nahuatl female deity Coatlicue. The re-remembering of such traumatic memories into contemporary representations alludes to different traumas (infanticide,

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<sup>124</sup> Marronage is a term applied to the act of running away from a plantation or any form of slave order and forming one's own community, with its own social rules separate and independent of the existing slave order.

rape, lynching, racial discrimination in the household, domestic abuse), yet casts a liberating rather than looming shadow.

The two chapters above outlined the texts' working through a transgenerationally-transmitted signifier of trauma. From a post-colonial sexuality or repressed sexuality, these women of color's texts provide a space to cope with such afflictions, and a step towards healing or fashioning decolonizing narratives, and in turn teach us how to profess the "power of the erotic," which I will return to in the conclusion of the dissertation.

**PART II**

**RE-MEMBERING TRAUMA IN PERFORMANCE**

#### 4.0 HEALING IN URBAN SPACES OF EXCEPTION

“Music becomes vital at the point at which linguistic and semantic indeterminacy/polyphony arise amidst the protracted battle between masters, mistresses, and slaves. This decidedly modern conflict was the product of circumstances where language lost something of its referentiality and its privileged relationship to concepts. . .

This orientation to the specific dynamics of performance has a wider significance in the analysis of Black cultural forms than has so far been supposed. Its strengths are evident when it is contrasted with approaches to Black culture that have been premised exclusively on textuality and narrative rather than dramaturgy, enunciation, and gesture—the pre and anti-discursive constituents of Black metacommunication.”

- Paul Gilroy, *Black Atlantic* (74-75)

“They all had been choreographing a dance of protest and resistance, set in motion from the first day an enslaved man or woman set foot on the shore of Jamaica.”

- Osha Pinnock “Rasta and Reggae” (96)

“Let’s turn to you, young poet. Know this: if you are a child of hip-hop, the simple truth is that in the beginning was the word, and the word was spoken in body language.”

- Marc Bamuthi Joseph, “(Yet Another) Letter to a Young Poet” (qtd. In Chang, *Total Chaos*, 12)

The “re-membering in the flesh” that triggers healing, in this second part of the dissertation, consists of performances that re-member the diasporic foundational experience into contemporary identities, through dance and music, and help individuals work through and

witness personal and communal trauma. KRUMP/Clowning and AfroReggae stand apart from the women of color's "re-membering" studied in previous chapters in the sense that they are not published written texts that promote embodiment; they *are* embodied performance movements. Rather than published texts that engage the body and spirit through written words, they engage bodies to reconnect with the spirit, through physical movements. Like the texts, they defend a cultural space to work through personal and collective trauma of racial discrimination and violence. Like the texts I analyzed until now, the antecedents of the two "performance movements" of interest in this section are found throughout African diasporic history, mainly the history of performance that I will trace below. They adapt foundational choreographies and music to promote African diasporic values of self-esteem, cultural preservation, agency and resistance as a part of African American and Afro-Brazilian identities.

Musical communication played a role in fashioning an identity during and after the shock of forced immigration from various parts of West Africa to the Americas. Written language served little purpose for the individuals who had been taken away from their land, lost connections to their family as well as their social role, had no resources to write or communicate to others who spoke their language. An intertribal language was born, through song and music. This language allowed for survival, rebellion, and cultural rebirth. This final section of the dissertation applies my main argument beyond the literary text as I tackle the question of healing through performance. Following the dissertation's topic of 're-membering in the flesh,' the next two chapters' main objective is to indicate bodies' function in "performance movements," a concept I will define below. Chapter Four's objective is to present Krump/Clowning and AfroReggae as performances of resistance to the State's racist biopolitical power.

Chapter 4 will present Krump/Clowning and AfroReggae as hybrid entities that mix artistic performance and social activism, which is what I mean by “performance movements.” I will present them as “performance movements” whose missions entail a resistance to the State’s biopolitical power.<sup>125</sup> After I outline a brief overview of the communities’ history and describe each “performance movement,” I will present the communities’ socio-affective context of marginality with theory by Giorgio Agamben, Roberto Esposito and Hermann Herlinghaus. In that section I will limit my argument to facts relevant to my thesis on how the community performance organizations’ resist their State’s marginalizing policies, and their society’s stigmatizing images. Using Foucault and Agamben, I will contextualize the site of enunciation of each performance group in HollyWatts and Vigario Geral as a “state of exception”—a geopolitical site where the State’s law does not apply. I will demonstrate how these communities can be seen as “states of exception,” and how in this context each performance movement resists their “state of exception.” Using Herlinghaus, I will argue that guilt has played a role in marginalizing the communities on an affective level, through stigmatization. I will demonstrate how each performance movement formulates a resistance to this affective force as well, by undoing the guilt-ridden, stigmatized image of their communities.

Chapter Five’s focus will consist of a close reading of documentaries, choreography and music to align each performance with their activist messages and a transnational African Diasporic aesthetic. The performance analyses will focus on coping mechanisms, undoing stigmatized representations, and the contrast between film representations versus performers’ self-representation. I will question ethical validity and audiovisual representation in the documentaries *Rize* and *Favela Rising*, respectively on Clowning/Krump and AfroReggae, using

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<sup>125</sup> I further explain my choice of terminology “performance movements” below.

Bill Nichols' *Representing Reality* and other texts on documentary film. Using Lindemann Nelson, I will demonstrate how Afro Reggae and Krump/Clowning work on identity formation and repair "damaged identities." For that purpose, I will expose symbols of transformation in each "performance movement," and how they relate to articulating positive identities and counterstories.

Since this is the first comparative study on Krump/Clowning and AfroReggae, a considerable amount of Chapter 5 will relate each performance movement to African diasporic cultures. That section will nonetheless focus on their therapeutic function. Other studies on AfroReggae like George Yúdice's "AfroReggae: Parlaying Culture Into Social Justice," Patrick Neate and Damian Platt's *Culture is Our Weapon*, and José Junior's *Da Favela para o mundo: A historia do grupo cultural Afro Reggae* [From the Favela onto the World: Afro Reggae Cultural Group's History], fail to outline AfroReggae's cultural contributions, or its therapeutic abilities.<sup>126</sup> This will be my contribution to their respectable body of work.

The youth living in Vigario Geral and HollyWatts' communities could be seen as victims of marginalization from a state that ignores their well being, a socio-economic structure that does not promote their upward mobility, a culture that limits their image to stigmatized stereotypes, and an affective environment that stunts their emotional growth. Or they could be analyzed as a group of individuals who find empowerment, agency, and cultivate self-esteem. This second part of the dissertation will not favor one for the other, or discredit one perspective as 'bad,' and the other as 'good,' but rather will focus on how both sides of the representations work to *influence* the performance movements' therapeutic function.

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<sup>126</sup> I have yet to find any study of Krump/Clowning, aside from a colleague's dissertation in progress in the theatre department at the University of Pittsburgh.

The following two chapters thus open up my study beyond the literary text by discussing the question of healing through performance. Analyzing two performance movements provides its share of challenges. First of all, the analytical tools I have previously resorted to in my literary analyses do not necessarily apply here, except when I analyze lyrics as poetry. I will state here that I will limit my study to present how Krump/ Clowning and AfroReggae provide another facet of working through and coping with trauma for youth of African descent. I will limit my focus to the analyses of unstudied performance movements rather than contributing to polemic debates on the different definitions of race in Brazil and in the United States.<sup>127</sup>

My focus of study shifts to youth of African descent in marginalized urban communities in the United States and Brazil,<sup>128</sup> and advances a contrast between the performances studied here and the literary texts analyzed in Part I. What role does performance play in undoing negative stigma and coping with collective trauma within marginalized urban communities, specifically HollyWatts (Los Angeles) and Vigario Geral (Rio de Janeiro)? Firstly, how did these neighborhoods come to be? Secondly, what values and neighborhood associations were present before the “performance movements” of Krump in Los Angeles and AfroReggae in Rio de Janeiro arise in the mid 1990s? Thirdly, how do these performances fit within hemispheric African diasporic performances’ corpus and how do they contribute to them? Finally, can these performances serve a therapeutic function in their social context, and if so, what do they ‘heal’? Is it ‘that easy’ to overcome marginalization through performance?

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<sup>127</sup> Perlman also cites the difference in socioeconomic status across gender and race between 1969 and 2000, and demonstrates that race and gender are no longer factors in socioeconomic differences, at least in the favelas (161).

<sup>128</sup> In Brazil, in 2000, one in five people lived under conditions of concentrated urban poverty (Perlman 156).<sup>128</sup> In the United States, “the total number of poor people living in ghettos increased 29.5 percent, from 1.9 million in 1970 to 2.4 million, in 1980” (Lynn & McGeary 11).

Such are the questions that guide the following two chapters, a comparative approach that reaches into South Los Angeles and *carioca* favelas (Rio de Janeiro slums) to situate two “performance movements” within their sociopolitical context, and to validate the power and persistence of diasporic culture. I will present Krump/Clowning and AfroReggae as “performance movements,” that is, performances attached to an ideology and a social movement, as performances of resistance to the State.

Music and dance were a cultural part of American culture long before the “discovery” of the Americas, but the largest importation of humans, with the slave trade’s 9.5 million Africans forced into the Americas, marks the moment when African forms of music and dance landed in this hemisphere. At this point, it is useful to provide an overview of the history of African diasporic music and dance in the Americas, in order to better understand the meaning of performance for individuals of African descent in the Americas. In a context of forced immigration and bondage, what was seen as high art forms in other cultures actually played a sociopolitical role of survival and rebellion for African men and women. Music and oral traditions already made up the social net in various African nations, where the *griot*, a poet, political figure, story-teller, vehicle a nation or a tribe’s history through music or interactive storytelling. On the slave ship, singing was a way for people to communicate among themselves, to remember their homeland, and to prepare rebellious struggles. Marcus Rediker, in *The Slaveship*, reminds his readers that singing was a form of survival through nostalgia as well as a form on non-threatening communication to strategize for upheaval. Already, performance meant more than staging an aesthetically pleasing product. It preserved cultural identity and agency in a space of social death and bondage.

Once the slave ships arrived at the shores of the Americas, although the enslaved might lose part or all of their original identity in social death, their music would gain cultural influence over time. In *Africa in Latin America*, Isabel Aretz's book chapter on "Music and Dance in Continental Latin America, with the Exception of Brazil," traces where and how African music is preserved throughout the Spanish and English speaking parts of the continent. Over four hundred years, the cultural influence has been noted from Venezuela to Cuba, from popular music to local rituals. In some cases rituals retain their original imported structure, such as the *lumbalú* ritual of the dead in Cartagena, Columbia, or the cult of the Kromanti jaguar gods in Suriname.<sup>129</sup> In other cases European dances were transformed to create Afro-American dance, such as the contradance that became *danza*, then *danzón*, and *merengue* (Aretz 190). In yet other cases new music genres arose in Black settlements or communities of African descent, such as the *tango*, synonymous with *candomble*, a genre of farce music practiced in Uruguay and Buenos Aires in the 1800s (Aretz 218).

Off of the slaveship, African immigrants preserved music to survive through the pain of living in bondage. In the earliest days of slavery, there were *candomblés*, drum-accompanied dances. In the late 1500s and early 1600s, communities of African descent put together *cofradías* (fellowships), *hermandades* (brotherhoods), *candomblés*, and the most common were *cabildos* (councils or chapters). These organizations provided mutual support, with a king and a queen in charge of coordinating rituals and celebrations, based on customs from their country of origin. These gatherings "permitted the slaves to survive even the most adverse conditions." (Aretz 193) Pagan gods, exorcisms, war incantations, initiation rites, coronation ceremonies, magicians' and

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<sup>129</sup> Isabel Aretz refers to an interview with Batata, the members of the San Bilsio group's chief, in 1956, to explain the ritual. They celebrate death, perceived in their group as the end to all suffering, just as they cry during childbirth since, to them, it marks the beginning of suffering (191).

witch doctors' masquerades, all of these central cultural components were revived and preserved behind innocent masks of community celebrations, thereby maintaining cultural agency. The *cabildos* became increasingly stigmatized, then prohibited, with the Lima prohibitions in 1598, to Argentinean and Paraguayan suspension in the late 1700s.

Performance thus became associated with resistance and risk of persecution, but also with a power to soothe the ailments of life in bondage, and as manifestations of culture mixing. As workers, whether in agriculture, mining, as porters, harvesting tobacco, sugar or cacao, herding cattle with *gauchos* and *llaneros*, music would ail hard or forced labor's wounds, and motivated the animals with whom they worked (Aretz 206). Women porters and wet nurses' work songs and lullabies produced transculturated forms of Afro-Latin American music, with Spanish words, verses originating overseas, and others expressing their emotions as Blacks in the Americas (Aretz 207). As they entered and acquired public life, African immigrants and individuals of African descent contributed to folk culture: "as poets, singers, musicians, and dancers. They followed the processions of saints, they danced *cuecas*, *bambucos*, *tamboritors*, and *zoropos*." (Aretz 209) They had been occupying the streets with dance gatherings since the early 1500s, though such gatherings met restrictions from the colonial authorities, and would keep on expressing themselves through performance in the public space. Contemporary forms of such expressions will be the focus of the next chapters. In sum, Latin American music and culture has been largely influenced by African diasporic music, which has come directly from different local traditions in various regions of the African continent. The same connections will be made as I analyze Krump/Clowning and AfroReggae, products of 20<sup>th</sup> century African diasporic music's evolutions, mainly East Coast hip-hop and Jamaican reggae, which I will introduce further below.

It is important to bring performance into my discussion, because of its omnipresence in hemispheric American culture, and the sociopolitical role it has played over time—as a tool for rebellion, a cultural vehicle of memories, and a soothing ailment in the face of oppression. It is also important to bring performance into my discussion, because it brings forth a topic I have already brought up in previous chapters—the dichotomy formed by having written discourse on one hand and on the other hand, orality—*sense-uality*,<sup>130</sup> corporeal language and sexuality—or anti-discursive modes of Black metacommunication. Literary text and analyses may at times step away from the foundational Black experience I traced above, from the slaveship and throughout colonial periods in Latin America, where music, dance and rituals played a central role in cultural preservation, survival and strategies for resistance against the colonial order. In previous chapters, I consistently concluded that those literary texts, and my literary analyses, pointed to pre- or anti-discursive modes of Black communication. With these chapters on performance, I continue to look at possibilities for creating pre or anti-discursive modes of communication, in the sense that performance communicates feelings and ideas without resorting to written discourse. The following chapters reinforce this premise, supporting Paul Gilroy’s argument.

Paul Gilroy’s *Black Atlantic* underlines the importance of studying Black performance precisely because of its significance a Black cultural form, which is significant in relation to other Black cultural forms and in relation to all cultural productions. He states:

This orientation to the specific dynamics of performance has a wider significance in the analysis of black cultural forms than has so far been supposed.

Its strengths are evident when it is contrasted with approaches to black culture that have been premised exclusively on textuality and narrative rather than

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<sup>130</sup> See in Chapter 2, the discussion on ghosts that contribute another form of expression, based on senses, since they have no voice or written text, but rather traces and *sense* to express themselves.

dramaturgy, enunciation, and gesture—the *pre and anti-discursive constituents of Black metacommunication*. (75)

Street performance and reggae music are forms of communication that mark this relationship between symbolic-corporal expression and contemporary African diasporic cultural identities' foundational dynamics. They bring forth the importance of “dramaturgy, enunciation, and gesture” over “textuality and narrative,” and in that way, return to the “pre and anti-discursive constituents of black metacommunication.” In that sense, they promote the foundational dynamics of African diasporic culture.

To note the importance of music in understanding cultural identities of the African Diaspora, Gilroy underlines the relationship between a musician's body and her performance. A performer of African descent returns to an originary experience as she expresses herself through her body rather than mere speech (73). Gilroy goes on to quote Glissant: “This [music, gesture, dance] is how we first managed to emerge from the plantation: aesthetic form in our cultures must be shaped from these oral structures” (73). I will follow Glissant's proposal to formulate my hypothesis below.

Glissant's quote upholds two important concepts. Firstly, there is the connotation of survival. This concern recurs in Osha Pinnock's “Rasta and Reggae” book chapter in *Caribbean Dance from Abakuá to Zouk*, quoted in this chapter's epigraph. Glissant alludes to survival implicitly here, with the expression “we managed to emerge from the plantation,” in which music serves to survive from one day to the next, to “manage,” while at the same time it leads to revival, “to emerge.” Music, gesture and dance allowed the enslaved men and women not only to construct an identity but, basically, to survive as they lived in bondage, thereby associating corporeal expression with survival and identification. Secondly, he presents the argument that

music is an integral part of Africana identity precisely *because* music is how these identities were first articulated, “This is how we first managed to emerge from the plantation.” The verb choice “to emerge” supposes physical and cultural survival and cultural identity formation. Individuals coming from different cultural backgrounds, survive forced migration and slavery’s social death, the day-to-day struggle of being treated as subhumans, and rise up with as a collective cultural entity able to identify each other outside of slavery’s context. With music, forced immigrants of African descent “emerge[d] from the plantation.”

Osha Pinnock interprets the foundational musical experience as the first symbolic step enslaved women and men took on the island of Jamaica as a collective diasporic African people. I refer to his quote in the epigraph to couch my argument that performance and ideology go hand in hand. Pinnock points out how musical performance served beyond being a strategy to survive day-to-day life in bondage. It founded not only a cultural experience, but also an ideology: “They all had been choreographing a dance of protest and resistance, set in motion from the first day an enslaved man or woman set foot on the shore of Jamaica.” (96) The past perfect tense “had been choreographing” implies an act with conscious awareness of the consequences, and consistent effort to raise consciousness over time, initiated by enslaved men and women during the first day they stepped off the slaveship. For Pinnock, dance is associated to protest, resistance, and a collective ideological movement that originated when forced immigrants from different regions of Africa’s West Coast landed in Jamaica. This musical and ideological message was one of the first symbolic steps that enslaved women and men took on the island of Jamaica as a diasporic African people. They had been choreographing to survive.

The first collective voices that shaped African diasporic culture spoke through bodies as voice, not speech-writing as voice. As Aretz, Rediker, Gilroy, Glissant and Pinnock note, the

first forced African immigrants of the Americas were using performative communication to cope with their collective trauma as victims of a global economy suddenly run on the slave trade of their people—as a tool to preserve cultural memory and survive the ritual of social death. Marcus Rediker reminds us that it began on the slaveship, Gilroy defines it as pre- or anti-discursive form of metacommunication that founds the Black experience, Glissant represents it as the “emergence” of a new aesthetic, Pinnock finds in it the origin of ideological protest and resistance, while I will establish the following hypothesis: there is a connection between the components outlined by the scholars above, and the healing function of performance. By connecting the foundational experience of African diaspora with contemporary reformulations of African diasporic performance, it is possible to argue that contemporary performance is therapeutic for urban youths.

Looking at the latest performance movements establishes continuity between 16<sup>th</sup> century and 21<sup>st</sup> century Africana identity construction. In the slums of Rio de Janeiro and Hollywatts, dance and music reiterate the ideology of resistance, the daily need to find ways to survive precarious conditions (beyond physical sustenance), and the healing function of dance and music. In the slums of Rio de Janeiro and Hollywatts, youth of African descent articulate their identity with values and modes of communication similar to those of their antecedents. The following is the study of this struggle to heal through performance, a struggle with deep historical and cultural roots, in foundational moments in Africana identity construction and 21<sup>st</sup> century youth still articulating their identity with similar values.

When discussing the fashioning of a diasporic identity, Glissant and Gilroy separate ‘the gift of speech’ from ‘music, gesture, and dance’ as separate forms of communication, yet argue that it was both speech and corporeal expression that fashioned an emergent identity. Including

performance in my study supports this claim. What does the urban community of the ghetto in Los Angeles and the favela in Rio de Janeiro have in common with 18<sup>th</sup> century life in bondage? They are sites where structures that include music, gesture and dance as forms of communication shaped African diaspora identity. They are sites where performance served as a mode of survival, and geared identity-formation in contrast to oppression (in the form of life in bondage in the 18<sup>th</sup> century; in the form of drug trafficking in the 20<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> century).<sup>131</sup> They connect foundational African diasporic music and dance with its 20<sup>th</sup> century reformulations reggae and hip-hop, all of which express a resistance to violence-ridden communities, and present forms of expression, survival and rebellion at the margins of an oppressive State. They constitute sites in which music, gesture and dance serve as forms of communication that shape African diaspora identities.

In the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Rio de Janeiro and Los Angeles' marginalized neighborhoods house globalized networks of gangs and drug trafficking, increased policing—even militarization—and targets of social stigma, with police abuse linked to racial discrimination. In this context, performance becomes a mode of survival that helps to cope with daily violence and to articulate an identity other than one associated to drug trafficking, poverty or gangs, to “emerge from the plantation” of neoliberalism. In that way, contemporary urban performances connect to traditions established in the 16<sup>th</sup> century through the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They also reflect 20<sup>th</sup> century reformulations of such traditions, with influences from Jamaican Reggae and United States East Coast Hip Hop, two musical movements that triggered cultural rebirth in

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<sup>131</sup> Drug trafficking, as portrayed in much of the literature and film, is another form of enslavement disguised as an opportunity for upward mobility, a way out. An infinite number of characters, in fiction and in real life, embody the possibility and the dream to improve their lives by turning to drug trafficking (*Menace to Society*, *City of God*—the novel and the film—, etc.). The global network of drug trafficking is another complex of oppression, in which minorities do not have opportunities for empowerment or liberation, or other opportunities to find work. In that sense, it is parallel to the plantation economy.

marginalized urban communities, as forms of expression, survival and rebellion at the margins of an oppressive State. I will explore the sociopolitical relationship between a simultaneously oppressive and neglecting State and the marginalized community members in Rio de Janeiro and Los Angeles, as well as the chronological relationship between reggae and AfroReggae, and East Coast hip hop and Clowning/Krump, to present how the two “performance movements” resist the forces imposed onto them (and simultaneously lifted off from them, such as the sense of security) by their respective States, and form part of African diasporic cultural history.<sup>132</sup>

Being an evolution of ska music in Jamaica, reggae forms part of a series of Jamaican musical genres created during the 1950s and the 1970s, while the island witnessed its name stamped with an international approval of reggae. As Jamaica grew musically and its music’s popularity spread across the globe, the Jamaican DJ Kool Herc unknowingly gave birth to east coast hip-hop.<sup>133</sup> The birth, development and varied definitions of hip can be found in Jeff Chang’s collection of essay, *Total Chaos: The Art and Aesthetics of Hip-Hop*. Nowadays, hip-hop is defined as a philosophy of *doing* rather than writing its manifesto as a cultural movement (Chang x), as a *lived* culture rather than carried over through written discourse. It is a discourse constantly in motion, it is an embodied discourse that re-members specific values in the flesh.

Afrika Bambaataa, an important figure in the formation and global exportation of hip-hop, defines the movement as made up of four elements: graffiti writing; b-boy/b-girling; DJing and MCing. The four elements make up a “superforce,” to use Harry Allen’s term, the first hip hop critic and hip hop activist. Thus is defined the east coast hip-hop movement, from the end of

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<sup>132</sup> Two texts I will introduce below, João H. Costa Vargas’ comparative studies on Rio de Janeiro and Los Angeles’ precarious conditions and Patricia Rose’s work on the formation of hip hop, from the United States’ East Coast to the West Coast, contextualize musical struggles in violent urban contexts, or spaces that have been left behind by State institutions and laws, which I will further compare to Giorgio Agamben’s “space of exception.”

<sup>133</sup> Kool Herc’s DJing or first public appearance seems to be the ‘beginning’ of the hip hop movement, though it must be noted that graffiti-writing predated it (Chang 9).

the 1960s to the end of the 1970s. Later, hypercapitalism transforms these essential components of hip hop that make it a folk culture, an ideological revolution, an avant-garde interdisciplinary art form. In *Total Chaos*, Chang makes a direct correlation between the birth of hip-hop and Krump dancing, describing Krump as an example that “hypercapitalism hadn’t killed the folk ways.” (xiii) Hip-hop’s participants (graffiti writers, b-boy and b-girls, DJs, MCs) were mostly from Brooklyn and Harlem. However, the West Coast in Los Angeles witnessed a parallel movement, and it may be questioned whether hip-hop was born on the East Coast or the West Coast.

Simultaneously, on the U.S. West Coast, the first spoken word records were produced by The Watts poets: Amiri Baraka, Sonia Sanchez, Etheridge Knight and Nikki Giovanni, who formed part of the Black Arts movement in Los Angeles. Hip-hop dancing, which I will further study below, also witnessed parallel creations on the opposite coasts. Being one of the four elements of hip-hop, dance remains the least studied form of hip hop discussed in academia. The ritual of style war and art of battling makes up a central component of hip-hop’s culture and its evolution as a movement, in all of four elements (DJing, MCing, graffiti writing and b-boying or b-girling).<sup>134</sup> In this study, both the “traditional” folk aspects of dance, as well as the social dances at parties and staged performance dance will be of central interest.

This comparative study analyzes Krump/Clowning and AfroReggae, creating a productive point of comparison due to the fact that they are created at the same time, in parallel urban contexts, and in a context during which reggae and hip hop music had become “new global forms of solidarity” among urban marginalized youths worldwide (Fernandes 20). In the early

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<sup>134</sup> The four elements of hip-hop were seen as one in the 1970s, until 1979. To claim turntablism, rap, graffiti, or pop blocking as separate entities where one would be consider closer to ‘true hip hop’ than another would go against the essence of hip-hop. it cannot be hip hop unless it’s four elements as one. In my study of Krump/Clowning, I will keep in mind that the dance forms part of a greater movement.

1990s, the youths of HollyWatts were creating new dances—Clowning and Krump (1992)—while a handful of young Rio de Janeiro inhabitants were starting a performance-based non-profit association for favela youths Afro Reggae (1993), and created the association’s trademark band, AfroReggae (1995).<sup>135</sup> I chose to compare Krump/Clowning and Afro Reggae partly because of their synchronous births. I also selected these two “performance movements” because of their parallel missions. Clowning and Krump allow HollyWatts youth to connect with an Africanist style of performance, to cultivate agency in the context of a marginalized community, to find other options for role models and upward mobility aside from professional sports or drug trafficking; Afro Reggae’s cultural centers achieve the same goals in Rio de Janeiro favelas.

Thirdly, I chose movements from different geographic locations to emphasize the hemispheric presence of empowering performance in precarious urban settings. Two texts I will introduce below, João H. Costa Vargas’ comparative studies on Rio de Janeiro and Los Angeles’ precarious conditions and Patricia Rose’s work on the formation of hip hop, from the United States’ East Coast to the West Coast, contextualize musical struggles in violent urban contexts, or spaces that have been left behind by state institutions and laws. I will further contextualize the performance movements using Giorgio Agamben’s concept of “spaces of exception”—sites where the rule of law does not apply, comparable to concentration camps during WWII’s Holocaust. Finally, the comparative approach reinforces my overarching argument that the phenomenon of “re-membering trauma in the flesh,” whereby African diasporic art heals collective trauma, presents itself as a hemispheric phenomenon.

One of AfroReggae’s songs, “Nenhum Motivo Explica a Guerra,” establishes a global connection between urban marginalized neighborhoods. The rapper’s lyrics introduce the current

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<sup>135</sup> The distinction in spelling between AfroReggae the band (in one word) and Afro Reggae the association (in two capitalized words) will be respected throughout the chapters.

conditions in United States, Brazil, and in some cases Britain's metropolises. It is well known that today's cities encounter problems with gang violence and drug trafficking, in which youth are at war with each other and with police or military forces. This is the war that the song calls attention to:

War, what is it good for?

Who is it good for?

When is it good for?

You being good poor

Or me being good poor

It's never been good for

Us in the hoods

Or favelas

In the verse "us in the hoods or favelas," the rapper (from Britain) refers to an English and Brazilian term for marginalized neighborhoods, thereby highlighting the commonality between marginalized youth in the United States and even Britain's "hoods" and Brazilian favelas. The hyperbole underlines a global phenomenon ("Every single inch of this earth is considered turf/ to be fought to the death over") in which marginalized urban youth, "the powerless" are the victims: "Who gets the left overs? / And who is left over? / The powerless while politicians brush their left shoulders/ Now, wait a minute." In Los Angeles and Rio de Janeiro, members of the Community Against Police Abuse (CAPA) and the Grupo Cultural Afro

Reggae (GCAR) denounce this war's consequences on their marginalized communities, and ask youth to "wait a minute," to vouch for alternative options and change their communities.<sup>136</sup>

The "performance movements" promote similar alternative options and positive change. Their impact is witnessed in two documentaries that bring each movement to the big screen. *RIZE* by David LaChapelle follows the birth of Clowning and Krump in Los Angeles' Hollywoods neighborhood, while *Favela Rising* by Matt Mochary and Jeff Zimbalist describes the birth of Afro Reggae, the non-profit organization, and AfroReggae, the band, in Rio de Janeiro's Vigario Geral neighborhood. Both documentaries premiered in 2005, and appeared on the short list for the Academy Awards' Best Documentary nominations. The filmmakers' contrasting missions portray marginalized urban communities in similar ways: with a focus on aesthetic and affective transformations. They have played a role in placing two marginal performance movements on the global scene, Clown/Krump dancing in Los Angeles and the Afro Reggae Cultural Group in Rio de Janeiro. For that reason, part of this chapter will include an analysis of the documentaries, questioning the cinematic rendition of said communities and performance movements' ideologies.<sup>137</sup>

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Hip hop developed as a movement, not just a genre of music, that integrated any type of rhythm: DJ beats, dancers' moves, an MC rhyming, a graffiti writer's name or message on a wall (Pabon 19). The dance forms came from both New York City's early hip-hop developments in

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<sup>136</sup> For a close study of CAPA and GCAR's legal actions, see Costa Vargas' *Never Meant to Survive* and *Catching Hell in Los Angeles*, and José Junior's *Nenhum Motivo Explica a Guerra*. Costa Vargas' books explain in detail what CAPA has achieved in order to reduce police brutality and provide a place for marginalized citizens to speak up against police brutality, and in order to work towards gang truces to reduce violence in general. José Junior's book *Nenhum Motivo Explica a Guerra* similarly narrates how the Grupo Cultural Afro Reggae contributed to a truce between rival favelas Vigario Geral and Parada de Lucas.

<sup>137</sup> Since then, the performers have made their own films and articulated their own representations, which I will mention in this chapter, though I will not analyze them in depth.

the 1970s, as well as the West Coast's "funk" culture and movement (Pabon 18). Before it was identified as such,<sup>138</sup> hip-hop dancing was performed by b-boys and b-girls, during long breaks, or a section of a music recording with the most aggressive and hard driving rhythms, that a DJ would prolong to have dancers react to the "breaks."

The first DJ to perform this with the use of two turntables, a mixer, and two records, was the Jamaican DJ Kool Herc. He is also responsible for the terms *b-boy* and *b-girl* ("break boys" and "break girls"), dancers he would call onto the dance floor when he was about to mix in a "break." (Pabon 19) B-boys and b-girls would often "battle" on the dance floor, or take turns dancing to compete for who was the best dancer, based on the audience's reaction.<sup>139</sup> These pioneers' dancing was known as "top rockin," which in the late 1960s and early '70s developed into another dance form, "rocking," or "uprocking," where dancers performed a "war dance" in partners, facing each other, or opposing dance crews challenged each other in "Apache Lines." (Pabon 21)<sup>140</sup> The main difference between toprocking and uprocking was how the dancers took up space (toprocking was one dancer at a time, uprocking was two dance partners at a time), but also at what point of the DJ mix they would come out and dance. For the latter style from Brooklyn, uprocking, the DJ would play the whole song, and dancers' choreography responded to the lyrics, the rhythm changes and the song's entire details (Pabon 22). Both types of dancing developed specific techniques, and a new language. From its inception, hip-hop dance forms communicated a language tinted with humor, insults and wit between dancers (Pabon 19, 22). These two styles, like the 1990s Clowning and Krumping that I will analyze below, developed at the same time while preserving their own stylistic differences (Pabon 22).

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<sup>138</sup> Afrika Bambaataa coined the term of this urban movement in the 1980s (Pabon 19).

<sup>139</sup> For a list of dance techniques that were created around this time, see Pabon pp. 20-21.

<sup>140</sup> This dance came from Brooklyn, New York.

On the West Coast, the 1970s scene witnessed the arrival of Rhythm and Blues (R&B), soul and funk music, present in events held outdoors as well as dance clubs. This is where “locking” is born, when Don Campbell imitated the “funky chicken:” “Campbell added an effect of locking of the joints of his arms and body that became known as his signature dance. He then formed a group named ‘The Lockers,’ who all eventually shared in the development of this dance. [...] The main structure of the dance combines sharp, linear limb extensions and elastic-like movement.” (Pabon 22) The “freezes,” “drops,” spins and other moves came from New York City’s “top rockin’,” while the popping and locking moves came from the West Coast’s “locking.” The development of “locking,” with Don Campbell or Don Campbell as the leader of a group of dancers, will serve as a reference for the development of Clowning.<sup>141</sup> The Lockers went on to perform on several television programs including *The Tonight Show* and *The Dick Van Dyke Show*, *Saturday Night Live* and *The Carol Burnett Show* (Pabon 23). On the other hand, California also witnessed the birth of the boogaloo in the 1970s, with the Electronic Boogaloo Lockers—Sam “Boogaloo Sam” Solomon, Nate “Slide Johnson, and Joes “Slim” Thomas—from Fresno, California (1976): “This form includes isolated sharp angles, hip rotations, and the use of every part of the body,” inspired by everyday people, cartoons, and James Brown dance moves (Pabon 23). One of its inspirations was James Brown’s “The Popcorn,” a term that may have influenced the creation of the term “popping,” which was Boogaloo Sam’s creation (Pabon 23).

Boogaloo Sam’s “popping” became “Electric boogie” and “Boogie” in New York. Across the country, when they saw the Electric Boogaloos perform “popping” on the program *Soul Train*, they called it “Electric boogie” and “Boogie” to name it after the performers. Over

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<sup>141</sup> For a comprehensive list of dance techniques of “locking,” see Pabon pp. 22-23.

time, “popping” was used to refer to a variety of steps, forms and moves, and lost its original meaning as well as its original choreography components—a quick jolting effect created by contracting the triceps, the neck, forearms, chest and legs (Pabon 23). In Los Angeles, they changed Fresno’s dance performers’ trademark “popping” to “pop-locking.”<sup>142</sup>

Thus the term “pop-locking,” commonly used to refer to hip-hop dancing, actually came from West Coast 1970s dancing, specifically Don Campbell and Sam “Boogaloo Sam” Solomon.<sup>143</sup> This brief introduction to hip-hop as a movement and a dance form points to its diasporic characteristics. This was a diasporic movement, with Jamaican DJ Kool Herc’s central role, the influence of African dances across the hemisphere and the Atlantic Ocean (funk, soul, the Brazilian dance-fighting-game of *Capoeira*<sup>144</sup>, salsa, Afro-Cuban, African and Native American dances, African American funk, soul and R&B)<sup>145</sup>, and simultaneous developments in the United States East and West coasts.<sup>146</sup> Music and dance movements from different parts of

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<sup>142</sup> “Originally, “popping” was a term used to describe a sudden muscle contraction executed with the triceps, forearms, neck, chest, and legs. These contractions accented the dancer’s movements, causing a quick, jolting effect. Sam’s creation, popping, also became known as the unauthorized umbrella title to various forms within the dance, past and present [...]. Eventually, popping was also misrepresented and lost its purity, as younger generations strayed from its original forms.” (Pabon 23)

<sup>143</sup> “Other townships in central California are credited with creating original forms of dance as well. Each region was identified by its style: San Jose was known for ‘flying tuts’ and ‘dime stopping;’ San Francisco had the ‘Chinese strut;’ ‘Fillmore strutting’ originated, obviously, in the Fillmore neighborhood. Oakland became known for ‘Frankenstein hitting’ and ‘snake hitting.’ East Palo Alto was also known for ‘snake hitting.’ ‘Roboting’ and ‘bopping’ were popularized in Richmond, Sacramento had its own dances called ‘oak parking,’ ‘bustin,’ and ‘sac’-ing (pronounced ‘sacking’). Dime stopping, strutting and hitting all predate popping and have their own histories within the West Coast funk movement. In summary, all of these dance styles have contributed to the evolution of phenomenal forms of expression.” (Pabon 24)

<sup>144</sup> Capoeira is an important cultural sign in Brazil, symbolizing resistance against persecution during slavery, but also a way of life. In *Capoeira, Roots of the dance-fight-game*, Nestor Capoeira clarifies the definitions of Brazilian *capoeira*: “capoeira is a form of “seeing” and living life. It is a specific point of view about the world and mankind, transmitted from teacher to pupil throughout the generations. Capoeira is a practice that overflows from the *rada*, the circle where capoeira is played, into our day-to-day personal life with a lot of tropical swing and ancient knowledge. Capoeira is the cream of the refined *malandragem*, the philosophy of street smarts, which materializes itself in the game played to the sound of the berimbau.” (xv)

<sup>145</sup> See Pabon p. 20.

<sup>146</sup> In France, pop-locking was called Le Smurf (Pabon 23).

the world were transformed to create a new body language, a new cultural phenomenon, and another form of re-membering trauma in the flesh.

In *Hip Hop Wars*, Patricia Rose reminisces the original function of hip-hop upon its birth as a movement. What strikes her is its power to regenerate a community, to heal: “I am not prone to nostalgia but I will admit, with self-conscious wistfulness, that I remember when [East Coast] hip hop was a locally inspired explosion of exuberance and political energy tethered to the idea of rehabilitating community.” Rose associates rehabilitation with hip-hop, which is the function that I will emphasize in performances by AfroReggae and Clowning/Krump dancers. Rose does not idealize hip hop, rather, she underlines its virtues that were most constructive for marginalized urban communities: love, respect, mutuality, inspiration, creativity, affirmation (“it had its gangsters, hustlers, misogynists, and opportunists; it suffered from the hallmarks of social neglect and disregard; it expressed anger and outrage in sometimes problematic ways.” ix) Hip hop, as a music genre, thus promoted values that enabled a marginalized community to rehabilitate, and empowered individuals, especially the youth.

Patricia Rose’s definition of hip-hop also addresses my argumentative concerns on the socially therapeutic role of performance as she presents it at the “fracture” of two cultures:

Hip hop is a cultural form that attempts to negotiate the experiences of marginalization, brutally truncated opportunity, and oppression within the cultural imperatives of African-American and Caribbean history, identity, and community. It is the tension between the cultural fractures produced by postindustrial oppression and the binding ties of Black cultural expressivity that sets the critical frame for the development of hip hop. (Rose 21)

Hip-hop as fracture implies a broken bone, a wound, a clash, a point of tension from which a community tries to recover. In a global and wider historical context, communities of African descent have witnessed oppression throughout history. First there was the transnational colonial economy based on the slave trade and forced migration of individuals of African descent. Following this, the industrialization and modernization of the Western hemisphere continued to marginalize groups of African descent, while the abolition of slavery remained questionable in both the United States and Brazil. By the end of the twentieth century, in the era of postindustrialism, the oppression towards African Americans and Afro-Brazilians continued through urban segregation and the boom of drug trafficking and violence in inner cities.<sup>147</sup> Each era witnessed a parallel African diasporic voice of resistance. In postindustrial New York, Los Angeles and other parts of the Americas, hip-hop artists spoke up to denounce the continuing oppression of the postindustrial era. In the analyses that follow, I will focus on this characteristic

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<sup>147</sup> “Drug Use in the Inner City: Impact on Hard-Drug Users and the Community” defends the thesis that the increased use of hard drugs (especially heroin and cocaine) makes up a symptom in the continuing decline of inner-city neighborhoods in the United States. Bruce D. Johnson et al. present the history of inner-city increased violence from 1940-1990, and statistics on the “deterioration of the inner city:” numbers of low income blacks and Hispanics living in inner city communities has doubled between 1960-80; while affordable housing for low-income families decreased considerably; the employment rate for nonwhites (majorly blacks) decreased from 78 to 55 percent between 1968 and 1980; the probability that a black child will experience poverty is that of 90 percent if she or he lives with a single mother under age thirty; the number of black children living in single mother households has gone from 30-51 percent between 1970 and 1985 (10); inner city communities present the lowest numbers in public health indices (42). Bruce D. Johnson et al.’s study supports the dramatic increase of a subculture of violence in relation to hard-drug sales’ rise from the 1960s-1990s. They relate the violence subculture to protecting financial interests and drug markets, escaping and defending from the police, defending illicit businesses from robbers, competitors, citizens who may notify the police. Inner-cities in the United States have become increasingly dangerous to live in not because all of the members of its community are engaged in drug dealing and violence, but because as police forces adapted to preserving drug dealing “off the streets,” freelance sellers became organized into stronger vertical organizations of drug trade: “Crack-selling groups have expanded dramatically since 1985. Many have a vertical, business-like, organizational structure, control the actions of several employees, have well-armed guards, and are willing to use violence and its threat on a daily basis to maintain optimal selling conditions [in] New York, Los Angeles, Detroit, Chicago and Washington, D.C.” (Johnson 34) Such an environment is difficult to change, as the city’s policing strategies do not decrease criminality in inner-city neighborhoods, ironically like crack users, they only look for a quick fix. Low-rank crack sellers are incarcerated but the organizational structure remains. Bruce D et al. trace the history of the increased hard drug use in inner-city communities, emphasizing first that it is not representative of the majority of the community, yet a considerable trait in analyzing the deterioration of inner-city neighborhoods.

of hip hop as Krump/Clowning and AfroReggae work towards their communities' recovery in the specific contexts of 1990s HollyWatts<sup>148</sup> and Vigario Geral.<sup>149</sup>

In 1992, when HollyWatts citizen Thomas “Tommy the Clown” Johnson decided to change his lifestyle, he went from being a small time offender to starting a small crew of entertainment-hosts for birthday parties, dressed up as clowns. This group of young men and women formed a dance crew, “The Clowns Group,” with a new choreographic style based on improvisation and “pop-locking,” an aesthetic that came from hip-hop dance, itself a reformulation of African isolation techniques.

In his book on the history of hip hop, *Total Chaos: Art and Aesthetic of Hip Hop*, Jeff Chang notes that Krump and clowning are 21<sup>st</sup> century revisions or “regenerations” of hip-hop traditional dance, originally established by a performer by the name of Jorge “Popmaster Fabel” Pabon, Zulu Nation Elder, Rock Steady Crew dancer, and hip hop historian (quoted at length earlier in this text). Hip-hop dance, according to Pabon, originates from Afro-Latino and African American social dance techniques (Chang 4). The ritual of “style wars” is central in hip-hop as a

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<sup>148</sup> See Johnson et al. For more information on the context of Los Angeles' drug trafficking networks. During the time of hip hop's birth and boom in New York, the big apple was also witnessing a boom in heroin use and drug trade in Harlem, the Lower East Side among other parts of New York City. It reached a point where the city's police forces lost control, and resorted to “drastic” changes (Johnson 31). The first black police commissioner Benjamin Ward orchestrated “Operation Pressure Point,” turning inner-city communities into highly policed zones and targets of bulldozing. Similar policies were enacted in Los Angeles to eliminate “rock houses” and sellers (Johnson 32). Thus the turn of the 1970s to mid-1980s, in New York and Los Angeles, was a time in which inner-city streets housed drug users and sellers alongside major police operations, urban renovation at the expense of inner-city dwellers. Hip hop artists took to those very streets, with four elements that countered this violence with a positive beat.

<sup>149</sup> Costa Vargas' “When a Favela Dared to Become a Condominium” provides insight on important turning points in the history of Rio de Janeiro's public policy that increasingly marginalized favela inhabitants in Rio de Janeiro in the twentieth century up to the 1990s. The height of the military regime's repression in 1968 gave way to intimidation, torture and assassination by military troops. While hard drug use increased in the United States and affected inner-city communities' growing violence and poverty, it was the military regimes between the 1960s and 1970s, the numbers game (*jogo do bicho*) and the drug commerce in the 1980s that changed the favelas' dynamics. The military regime destabilized neighborhood associations and entire communities, as they removed up to 100,000 individuals from their favela homes to housing projects (Costa Vargas “When a Favela” 61). The drug trade factions Comando Vermelho and Terceiro Comando took over favelas of Rio de Janeiro just like the CRIPS and Bloods had done in the early 1980s in Los Angeles. In parallel, Rio de Janeiro was struck with a great number of layoffs (for example General Electric), which led to an exponential increase in underemployment and poverty in the favelas.

dance. Individual dancers face each other off in dance circles, while the audience responds to their choreography, a dynamic that has been lost in filming or staging hip-hop dancing. The dancer with the most positive audience response would win the dance-off, a ritual that Krump/Clowning performers maintain in their dance routines.

Krump/ Clowning initiated a new form of improvisational hip-hop dance in Hollywood, which later became popular in neighboring areas, and then in mainstream hip hop music videos and choreography such as Madonna's music videos. Some of Tommy's followers (among them, Dragon) parted from Tommy's group and developed clowning techniques into another form of hip-hop dance, "Krump." Krump adopts a "looser" style. According to "Krumpers," their dance form emphasizes improvisation more so than "Clowning." They eliminate what they found to be choreographic restrictions in Clowning, to promote a dance form completely based on improvisation. Krump integrates elements of break dancing, Jamaican dancehall, African dance and Hip-Hop dance, with its main focus being on improvisation.<sup>150</sup>

In 1994, a Vigario Geral (a favela in Rio de Janeiro) citizen made the same decision to change. Anderson Sá had just lost his brother in a police massacre. For the first time, he channeled his anger through lyrics. With other young men and women, he formed "o Grupo Cultural Afro Reggae" (the Cultural Group Afro Reggae, or GCAR) and the "AfroReggae Notícias" newspaper, a communication vehicle for Afro-Brazilian culture and news of the

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<sup>150</sup> This remains a point of discussion between Clowns and Krumpers, the idea that structure relies on rehearsed choreography or rehearsing letting go through improvisation, and whether improvisation can be less technical than planned choreography. According to Pabon, improvisation is the essence of hip-hop dancing that has been lost in televised recordings, music videos, and staged performances: "A stage performance creates boundaries and can restrict the free-flowing process of improvisation. Nailing cues and choreography become the objectives. Riding the rhythm makes the difference between dance and unstructured movement. The formula is simple: submission to the music, allowing it to guide and direct, equals dancing." (24-25)

favela.<sup>151</sup> He went on to be the lead singer of AfroReggae, a reggae band that was also the “public face” of the GCAR. In the context of a Rio de Janeiro that grappled with the realization that the city was not so paradisiacal<sup>152</sup> and should unite its divided neighborhoods (Ventura 69-72), the GCAR became one of many performance activist movements that worked to undo social stigma in its marginalized communities.<sup>153</sup>

The antecedents to Afro Reggae in Vigário Geral are made up of Caio Ferraz, leader of Mocovige (Movimento Comunitário de Vigário Geral, also cited in José Junior’s book) who organized a music festival to cope with the trauma of the massacre. Other works of art that demonstrated a will to cope through art include murals and graffiti on the walls of the street that connects Vigário Geral to what used to be its rival favela, Parada de Lucas. There is a wall replete with gunshot holes. The holes have been painted over and make up the hearts of flowers, with a Bob Dylan quote on how many deaths must occur to realize there have been too many (Ventura 55).

I will pinpoint how Anderson Sá, Tommy the Clown, Dragon and their fellow performers enact resistance through performance in marginalized urban contexts. They articulate alternative discourses with the potential to shift power relations, to establish new configurations of knowledge and power. These movements present the possibility to use art as a healing tool. They

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<sup>151</sup> The first issue of *AfroReggae Notícias* had a cover with Martin Luther King Jr, and the association already had a reputation of “Black pride,” according to Zuenir Ventura (58).

<sup>152</sup> The notion of a ‘golden age’ in Rio prolongs into the late 1950s, when the capital moves to Brasília, the sadness is quickly replaced by a will to truly transform Rio de Janeiro into a balnear destination, a residential paradise for the middle class (Ventura 28). Meanwhile, the *carioca* ambiance remained captured by writers rather than the press. Chroniclers such as Stanislaw Ponte Preta, Rubem Braga, José Carlos Oliveira, Manuel Bandeira, Antonio Maria, Fernando Lobo, Carlos Drummond, Fernando Sabino, Paulo Mendes Campos; all foreign to Rio de Janeiro, they celebrated it lyrically (Ventura 29). On the other hand, Nelson Rodrigues painted a darker vision of the Zona Norte, Rio’s suburbs.

<sup>153</sup> In an encounter with an administrative director of the GCAR, it was made clear to me that the Group did not see themselves as the only performance activist group. The director insisted that there were many other associations, naming the theatre troupe Nós do Morro in the favela Vidigol as an example, and portrayed the GCAR as part of a larger movement in Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and other urban spaces in Brazil.

introduce models of performance as a social tool for change. Patricia Rose claims that hip-hop's aesthetic represents its role for urban inner-city youths at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Hip-hop demonstrates qualities of "flow, layering, and rupture" which stand as both a reflection and contestation of the roles that society offers to urban inner-city youth (Rose 22). Do AfroReggae and Clowning follow hip-hop's contestations? Does their aesthetic promote values that go against social roles imposed on urban inner-city youths at the end of the twentieth century? What do Krump's brisk pop locking or AfroReggae's reggae mixed with alternative rock and samba beats address in their respective communities? Do they advocate properties that go against social roles? Krump's dancing gives a new meaning to 'violence' as the dancers channel the violence around them into a dance form unlike any other, making their own form of 1990s "pop-locking," more fitting to their specific context. AfroReggae mixes and layers rhythms and melodies to accompany the Afro Reggae Cultural Group's (GCAR) heterogeneous social resistance strategies.

There are two driving forces that fashion hip hop, social and political forces on one hand, and Black culture on the other hand: "It is, in fact, the dynamic and often contentious relationship between the two—larger social and political forces and Black cultural priorities—that centrally shape and define hip hop." (Rose 23) Following this cultural development at the fracture of two cultures, Clowning/Krumping and AfroReggae/GCAR intervene in sociopolitical tensions and address them with an empowering Black art form, following the cultural priorities of the African diaspora. My study stands at the intersection of these two driving forces. In the first section of this chapter, I will present how Clowning/Krumping and AfroReggae overcome their community's sociopolitical marginalization, or "state of exception"—the social and

political forces. At the same time, I will explain how their local forms of Black cultural expressions allow for communal healing, and how they shape their own community activism.<sup>154</sup>

One form of resistance that I will pay attention to in each performance movement is their potential to undo stereotypes and marginalizing sociopolitical structures. Krump/ Clowning dancers and AfroReggae musicians foster projects that detach their identities from the stigmatized identity of their community. Their performances undo the stereotypical images of their social structure and of their current cultural conditions. By undoing these stereotypes, they also undo the State's racist discourse that marginalizes their communities as spaces undeserving of the State's protection or public services, and the guilt that has been imposed onto them as criminalized individuals. They denounce police violence and the precarious conditions that their state has put them in, and overturn current policies and guilt-ridden identities enforced in their communities. They propose practical changes and discourses of hope and agency.

Their performance comes from a history of community activism in Los Angeles and Rio de Janeiro that has attempted to undo precarious conditions and the State's racist legislations, with representative traumatic events—the Rodney King beating and the Vigario Geral massacre. Zuenir Ventura's *A Cidade Partida*, João Costa Vargas' *Never Meant to Survive: Genocide and Utopias in Black Diaspora Communities* and *Catching Hell in the City of Angels*, and *A favela fala* will serve as central texts to contextualize the struggle against the State's racist policies and increasing marginalization in both communities.<sup>155</sup> I will address community activism history in this chapter, more so than in other chapters, to highlight how AfroReggae and Krump/Clowning fit in their communities' history of social activism.

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<sup>154</sup> I will define the term “state of exception,” taken from Giorgio Agamben's *Homo Sacer*, further below.

<sup>155</sup> *A favela fala* tells the stories of this evolution from activists' points of view, and their efforts to improve local infrastructure, education, and public health.

This chapter also relies on sociological and historical contextualization. Using Costa Vargas' *Never Meant to Survive* and *Catching Hell in the City of Angels*, and José Junior's *Nenhum Motivo Explica a Guerra*, I contextualize how biopower, in close relationship with capitalism, functions to enact "state racism" within the communities of the HollyWatts ghetto and the Vigario Geral favela. Both communities represent spaces of threat where a war is being waged to defend society (the White privileged) against a contaminating entity (the marginalized of African descent), and where the state's biopolitical power "lets die" rather than "makes life". In this stifling context, two performative movements of resistance find alternative ways to "make life" through performance.

Each performance movement also recognizes the African Diaspora's influence onto their art and a connection with liberating and empowering components of foundational African diasporic cultures. This makes up the objective of the next chapter, Chapter Five, "Youths Healing Through Performance," in which I will analyze each movement's aesthetic contribution to Africanist performance and their role as therapeutic performances.

In *Black Noise*, Tricia Rose does not speak of communal healing as such, but she discusses communal "pleasure" in relation to hip hop, an aesthetic and leisurely pleasure. For Rose, hip-hop communicates:

A style that has the reflexivity to create counterdominant narratives against a mobile and shifting enemy—may be one of the most effective ways to fortify communities of resistance and *simultaneously* reserve the right to communal pleasure. In the postindustrial urban context of dwindling low-income housing, a trickle of meaningless jobs for young people, mounting police brutality, and

increasingly draconian depictions of young inner-city residents, hip hop style *is* Black urban renewal. (61)

Clowning/Krumping and AfroReggae manifest a similar ability to both fortify resistance in their community while, at the same time, they trigger communal pleasure. In terms of Black urban renewal, both movements offer an opportunity for upward mobility through performance and community building (thus they “fortify communities of resistance”) *as well as* a therapeutic, spiritual ritual. This is why in my analyses of Clowning/Krump and AfroReggae, I will discuss spirituality in relation to not just “communal pleasure” but also communal therapy. For example, when the performers define their performance, they blur the lines between religion and performance, spirit and dance. Furthermore, their performance promotes a spiritual presence (channeling a spirit, feeling the spirit, etc.) that serves a therapeutic function. At the same time, each performance group promotes solidarity in the community, and socioeconomic opportunities, all of which enable upward mobility.

Each performance disseminates an *embodied knowledge* similar to some religious practices in Africa—which I will analyze in chapter 5. With the term “embodied knowledge,” I am referring to a form of communication and a practice that opts for corporeal communication rather than written communication. Some religious practices in the African continent, as Gottschild explains in *The Black Dancing Body*, developed a communication strategy that employed human bodies rather than written or spoken discourse. Through dance and through physical movements, individuals communicated with their ancestors. They received, practiced, and handed down this *embodied knowledge*. In turn, *embodied knowledge* remained a part of African diasporic cultures, mostly practiced in religious rituals and dance, but remained a part of social and traditional dances as well (Gottschild 44). Afro Reggae and Krump/Clowning

recognize the importance of *embodied knowledge*, and promote this discourse by enacting social activism through performance.

I use the term “performance movements” rather than “performance” to denote a distinction from performance art, from staged performance and from street performance. Krump/Clowning and Afro Reggae exist as institutions both on and off stage, so they have more to them than just staged performance or street performance. Their message is political beyond being an art form that revolutionizes the aesthetic and institution of art, so it is more than just performance art. Finally, they tackle more than just activism or social change, so I chose not to label them as performance activism. Clown dancing has turned into an integrated part of life in HollyWatts and other neighborhoods, and serves a sociopolitical role in the community by changing educational institutions (with after-school programs) and children’s’ socioeconomic opportunities. Afro Reggae now encompasses a non-profit organization, a reggae band and a for-profit organization. Both Krump/Clown dancing and Afro Reggae work on the sociopolitical level as well as the interpersonal level, since they pay specific attention to raising cultural, political and historical consciousness in their students, along with cultivating self-esteem in their communities’ youth. For all of these reasons, I choose to label them as “performance movements.” The term “movements” connotes both physical *and* ideological action, which respects each organization’s mission. All aspects of these performance movements will be considered in this study. In terms of healing, I will zero in on the intersection of personal, socio-political and socio-affective impact of the performance movements. I will argue that the performances’ affective presence as well as the groups’ impact on the community is able to “heal” at the institutional and political levels.

One question remains unanswered in this second section's introduction: is "healing" that easy? What do these performance movements "heal"? An argument in defense of "performance movements work," in terms of concrete social reform, is that of "collective efficacy." Since the cultural centers and dance troupes establish bonds among children and families and promote respect, they develop bonds of trust among favela and ghetto dwellers, and in that sense contribute to increasing upward mobility. In her article "Metamorphosis of Marginality: Four Generations in the Favelas," Janice Perlman establishes a correlation between trust and upward mobility in Brazilian favelas:

My data also indicate a relationship between upward economic mobility and two and other measures of social capital: the possession of friendship and kinship ties and having relations of trust with neighbors. Among those who report many friends and relatives in the community with whom they interact frequently, 42 percent scored high in upward mobility, as opposed to only 23 percent among those who were more socially isolated. In terms of trust, 47 percent of those who felt they 'could trust most or all of their neighbors' experienced upward mobility compared with just 25 percent of those who said 'few or none' could be trusted, demonstrating the importance of what Sampson (2004) called 'collective efficacy.' (164)

The transformation or healing to be studied here occurs not just on the level of the individual psyche or identity formation, but also on the social level. The performance movements' impact on social and institutional structures within their community establishes a stronger sense of community that promotes "collective efficacy" and upward mobility.

This study also validates Carol Stack's premise in *All Our Kin: Strategies for Survival in a Black Community*, to focus on daily mechanisms for coping with poverty and chronic catastrophes. Carol Stack explains that poverty and chronic catastrophes partly arise from pressures coming from both outside and within the ghetto. For that reason, she finds it necessary to shift the focus of study daily life, inside the communities, on strategies and institutions that are developed within the ghetto in order to cope with poverty (25).

My study agrees with Stack's claim that one must recognize the mechanisms that arise within marginalized neighborhoods in order to cope with daily trauma. I focus on observing how organized movements based on performance provide coping strategies for Black youth. They create their own discourse of resistance, through performance, thereby providing an example of an "adaptive institution developed inside the ghetto for coping with poverty" (Stack 25). The performance movements I will analyze in the following two chapters underscore a mutual trust in order to survive, characteristic of alternative kinship in ghetto neighborhoods in the United States (Stack 28-29).

HollyWatts and Vigario Geral, among other ghettos and favelas in Los Angeles and Rio de Janeiro, have been hosts to valuable community activism, especially during the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I find both performance movements to function like community organizations, while they contribute a genuine aesthetic component to wider African diaspora. I will focus on how each performance movement contributes to the tradition of African diasporic cultures, and how each performance resonates within the communities' history of community organizations.

I will end the introduction to this second part of the dissertation with a few final questions. To use Agamben's terminology on State marginalization (which I will define shortly hereafter), do the GCAR/AfroReggae and Krump/Clowning resist their community's "state of

exception”)? This is a term that Agamben defines to illuminate the relationship between the State’s legislative power, and its power to lift the rule of law in order to justify extreme oppression and extermination of one section of the population in order to promote the life of another part of the population.

Agamben’s political and philosophical demonstration examines how the concentration camp and genocide could have been rationalized as legal by the State, and speaks to some laws that have been lifted to police the favela and the ghetto outside of the rule of law. I will further explain his concept below, and answer questions about the performance movements’ reaction to their States’ disregard such as: firstly, can performances provide solutions for a “state of exception,” or social reforms that would undo the State’s legal and institutional disregard? Or are these performance movements providing tools for personal transformation/individual improvements? On the other hand, would it be more apt to discuss the possibility of institutional, political *and* personal transformation *through* performance? Perhaps the dichotomical approach—social transformation versus personal transformation— would not be faithful to this study’s focus, the discourse of embodied knowledge, that erases lines between discursive (institutional) and performed (corporeal) discourses.

In my discussion of Agamben, Esposito Herlinghaus, I will deal with the interconnections between a rule of law suspended in a community (e.g. police forces that do not serve or protect, State services that do not support basic resources or social services), a community’s options to provide life (as in socioeconomic resources) for its survival, and personal identity (trans)formation.

Performance triggers and cultivates agency as well as a “narrative repair” of fragmented identities. This is what I will look for in the documentaries, written testimony, and performances.

Yet Krump/Clowning and Afro Reggae do not provide absolute answers or resolutions to a long history of oppression, nor do they put an end to it completely, nor are they the sole entities to work on these changes in their communities; they are not all of a sudden achieving something that no other organization ever achieved before, but they do instruct ways to “perform” social activism. Thus with a brief study on the history of favelas’ and Hollywatt’s neighborhood organizations, I will present how these performance movements form part of a long history of resistance. I will also advance how the movements contribute another form of social activism by putting performance first in their activism, thus promoting embodied healing or *re-membering in the flesh*. This is what they bring to their communities’ activist past and to their present audience and participating members. Although, I must insist, this premise manifests itself in other movements within their communities, and only constitutes part of a step towards healing as a process, not as an end.

#### **4.1 FROM QUILOMBO TO FAVELA, FROM RANCH TO GHETTO**

Since this section of the dissertation focuses on particular places, a historical contextualization of the both the Rio favelas and the Los Angeles ghetto sheds light on its contemporary situations. The favela’s history is one of marginalization and resistance to the established order. The Watts or HolyWatts’ history is one of continuing ghettoization and resistance to police brutality in a main United States urban setting of Los Angeles.

In *Do Quilombo a Favela*, Andreilino Campos correlates the favela with its antecedent of “Quilombo” communities of individuals of African descent in the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries in Brazil. *Quilombo*, originally a Bantu word meaning camp or fort, acquired a legal connotation in the

colonial context when the Portuguese king began using it in 1740. He used *quilombo* to denominate an illegal establishment consisting of any group of more than 5 black runaways. Not yet with a connotation of a large resistance,<sup>156</sup> *Quilombo*'s values were that of group survival, communal living and an alternative mode of organized living in contrast to the imperial order and life in bondage. *Quilombo* was a term used by the imperial order; its inhabitants preferred to call themselves "cerca" or "mocambo" (Campos 32). Androlino Campos' study places the birth of the first favela in the late 1800s, as a place where "mocambos" would start a new life. Brazilians of African descent who were "mocambos" had escaped from plantations and moved closer to the city, where they could pass as freedpeople more easily. They could avoid *corregidores* more easily, who commonly chased "mocambos" settled in isolated rural areas.<sup>157</sup> There were thus rural and urban *quilombos*. The latter of the two evolved, in many cases, into favelas or slums in today's Brazilian main cities, such as Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo.

Absent in Los Angeles' history, the relationship between Quilombo and favela not only lends a historical antecedent that explains its population of African descent, but also attaches the persistence of African diasporic values of solidarity and resistance to the establishment of these communities. The relationship between Quilombo and favela raises the issue that these spaces were exceptions to the rule of law or, as I will label them below with Agamben's term, "spaces of exception," as soon as they became settlements where subjects stepped out of the state order of slavery, living as outlaws.

In contrast, the city of Watts was originally a ranch, Rancho La Tajauta, settled by Spanish-Mexican settlers and dedicated to grazing and beef production. La Tajauta was sold and

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<sup>156</sup> In 1604, Quilombo dos Palmares is founded, the first confederation of various Quilombos in the Northeast of Brazil, an area known as Palmares in Alagoas. Today Quilombo dos Palmares remains a symbol and myth of liberation, resistance, and dignity for Brazilians of African descent.

<sup>157</sup> *Corregidores* or "correctors" were individuals commissioned by plantation owners to look for runaways.

subdivided for smaller homes and farms in the 1870s, as Southern California saw an influx of white American settlers. In 1907, after the arrival of a railroad, the city of Watts was created, named after the Watts Station railroad station built in the town. In 1926, it was annexed to the city of Los Angeles. It became predominantly black in the 1940s with the “Second Great Migration”—thousands of migrants from segregated states (Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Arkansas) came to find better opportunities in California. Several large housing projects were built at the end of the 1940s to house war industry workers, which were mostly inhabited by individuals of African descent by the 1960s. As the 20<sup>th</sup> century progressed, so did the image of city of Watts. For instance, it increasingly acquired a stigma during the Prohibition era, since Watts did not have dry laws, many crossed over from Los Angeles to spend time in Watts, especially movie stars.

During this time, as Brazilian major cities were shaped to resemble modern European cities, the favelas grew and provided a contrast to Brazilian modernity’s urban landscape. Campos outlines the urban *quilombo* as historical antecedents to the favela, concluding that by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Afro-Brazilians were very much segregated and prevented from any emancipation, whether based on rights or financial opportunities. Although they housed one fifth of the population in Rio, the State perceived the favelas as a “parallel State [Estado paralelo]” (Campos 21). This phenomenon will be useful as I explain how public institutions and legislations increasingly marginalized favela inhabitants to the point where they no longer recognized them as part of their responsibility, but rather as exceptions to their rule of law, not deserving guarantees of service or security. The transition from runaway slave (of slavery) to the increasing force of guilt (guilty for increased criminal activity and violence in the city) in the favelas came over time and was affirmed by the increase in criminal activity by the “jogo do

bicho” and drug trafficking in the 1950s and 1960s (Campos 25-26). This is when Brazilian media portrays the individual of African descent as a guilty individual, but also when Brazilians of African descent become increasingly marginalized through socially and economically, while their domestic space becomes associated with urban spaces’ criminalization (Campos 27).

The favela remained in the shadows of Rio’s modernization, beginning in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At the same time, it went from consisting of one neighborhood at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to over 500 at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with 603 registered favelas (Ventura 13; Campos 92). The growing divide between the “modern” Rio de Janeiro and the “barbaric favela,” became a central phenomenon marked throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>158</sup> Zuenir Ventura’s book *A cidade partida* debunks the paradisiacal image nostalgically painted of 1950s Rio de Janeiro in the second part of his book, “os tempos bárbaros [barbaric times],” in which he analyzes contemporary events. With the adjective “barbaric,” Ventura refers to the Roman term, which meant “foreign to the empire,” and to the more common definition that designates those who practice barbarism (12). Rather than stigmatizing the favela as backward, Ventura sets forth an image of the favela as set apart from the State, like the Roman “barbaric” who were foreign to the empire. He means to emphasize that these urban spaces’ status are marginalized by the State. If they are perceived as foreign entities by the State, are they perceived as such by Brazilian citizens, and by favela dwellers? There is a difference in perception in Rio de Janeiro, where citizens outside of the favela perceive the favela differently from how favela dwellers perceive themselves. The outsiders’ perception impacts the favela dwellers’ identity, which AfroReggae will intend to undo.

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<sup>158</sup> Zuenir Ventura’s book *A cidade partida* presents a history of Rio de Janeiro’s urban space, throughout the twentieth century, to a certain extent a continuation of Campos’ study of the favela. He traces this increasing divides and underlines its centrality with the title of his book, *A Divided City*.

Ventura traces the evolution of Rio de Janeiro's imaginary, as perceived by its inhabitants. Some define the 1950s as Rio's golden age, until the press began spreading news of city crime related to the favelas. Yet the press was not as influential at this time, and television did not play a role as important as the widely read chroniclers and poets, so the golden Rio sentiment prolonged into the late 1950s. When the capital moves to Brasília, a will to truly transform Rio de Janeiro into a tourist destination, a residential paradise for the middle class, replaces the sadness and nostalgia of a capital status rather quickly (Ventura 28). Meanwhile, writers capture the *carioca* ambiance. Chroniclers such as Stanislaw Ponte Preta, Rubem Braga, José Carlos Oliveira, Manuel Bandeira, Antonio Maria, Fernando Lobo, Carlos Drummond, Fernando Sabino, Paulo Mendes Campos; all foreign to Rio de Janeiro, celebrate it lyrically (Ventura 29). On the other hand, Nelson Rodrigues paints a darker vision of the Zona Norte, Rio's suburbs. Where does this 'darkness' come from? A sense of divide, guilt placed onto a community that was merely guilty of living.

In parallel, Los Angeles' 1950s also witnessed a golden age, and the Watts Towers, built by an Italian immigrant, symbolized the utopia of the suburbs:

The Watts Towers were Rodia's personalized vision of a fantasy community. Created over a thirty-year period, they were completed in 1954 at the pinnacle of the Southern California suburban housing boom. The towers offered a distinctly urban counterpoint to the new suburbs, albeit an equally utopian one. Although Rodia intended the work as a celebration rather than as a critical statement, this fanciful grouping of swirling steel structures covered in a colorful mosaic of discarded glass and ceramic fragments effectively flouted the qualities of newness, cleanliness, and homogeneity championed within mainstream suburbia.

Yet the affective mapping of Los Angeles drew Watts as a site of “white flight,” as white citizens moved to new suburbs outside the central city. As industrial jobs disappeared, families in Watts lost economic opportunities. Alongside this phenomenon, a longstanding resentment towards the police by the working-class community increased, as police’s discriminatory treatment and inadequate public services became frequent. For outsiders, Watts seemed to be an ‘easier target’ to stigmatize and label as to enforce stronger policing.

Back in Rio, though favelas were increasingly stigmatized, the first famous criminals did not come from there. Ronaldo Guilherme de Souza Castro and Cássio Murilo Ferreira da Silva were from the upper class. They commit the first widely publicized crime on June 14, 1958 (Ventura 33). Rio’s decline thus begins, with an increase in burglaries and crime, directly followed by an institutional change in police investigation (Ventura 34). The late 1950s and early 1960s mark the beginning of Rio’s “cleansing,” with policemen assigned to pursue their own investigation and executions, as part of the Serviço de Diligências Especiais (SDE). According to Ventura, this marks the beginning of a long relationship between corruption and violence, since these “Golden Men” or “Death Squad” had no restrictions imposed on their missions (Ventura 35). One died by 13 machine gun shots, the other by 100 (Ventura 38). The death squad’s execution of ‘Minheirinho’ triggered reactions of disgust, embarrassment, and compassion from chroniclers such as Clarice Lispector and Jose Carlos (Carlinhos) Oliveira (Ventura 37).<sup>159</sup> This strikes the beginning of an urban space where the sovereign power, here enacted by the police, ultimately steps outside of the rule of law.

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<sup>159</sup> “A morte de Mineirinho sensibilizou a literatura de Clarice Lispector e de José Carlos (Carlinhos) Oliveira. Clarice dedicou-lhe uma sentida crônica na revista *Senhor*. “...O décimo terceiro tiro me assassina—porque eu sou o outro. Porque eu quero ser o outro.”

The first 'big' criminals did not come from the favela, yet what ensued from their hunt and death was an increased policing of the favelas. As a result, favela dwellers did not earn basic citizenship rights. Ventura argues that to this day, the main issue at hand is the lack of citizenship for favela dwellers. He calls them the "barbaric" in reference to the barbaric inhabitants of Rome who were not considered citizens of the Empire. What would be the solution? For Ventura, it's not about eradicating drug dealing, but about changing an entire system that supports drug trafficking, an economy based on production and consumerism and whose focal points remain far from the favela. In his opinion crime reduction must be accompanied by lending citizenship to the marginalized masses (Ventura 14). For Afro Reggae, the solution also consists in providing basic rights of citizenship, to include favela inhabitants in the legal system and under the State's protection.

Wilson's book, *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy* mentions that the "catastrophic" urban crisis began in the mid-1970s in the United States, which sets up an interesting comparison with the notion that Rio de Janeiro's 'golden years' ended in the 1960s. Similar to Rio de Janeiro's case, the preservation of a paradisiacal Los Angeles went hand in hand with the fear of subaltern rebellion, an increasing will to contain the marginalized neighborhood, and a contrasting effort to resist that intent through activism. This sentiment is synthesized in reactions to the Watts Towers:

From their inception, the Watts Towers served as an icon for the ethnically diverse, working-class residential community of Watts. Not surprisingly, then, the towers were quickly perceived as a threat by the forces that sought to contain and control this community in the name of urban improvement. Central among these was the Los Angeles Building and Safety Committee, which deemed the towers a

public safety hazard and called for their destruction in 1959. Those who fought successfully to keep the towers standing included members of the local arts community, some of who were producing assemblage works sympathetic to Rodia's junk aesthetic. In subsequent decades, the Watts Towers became an integral aspect of the state's image and were even included on the cover of a 1969 issue of *Time* magazine devoted to California. (Barron et al. 1949)

The tension between the State attempting to contain a community by excluding it, to maintain a public image of utopia and fantasy by repressing a community's problems, and the reality of this marginalized community, were thus present in Rio de Janeiro as well as in Los Angeles. At this time, California enters a phase of prosperity *and* protest, with influential figures such as the Beat poets, César Chavez, protesters and victims of the Watts riot in 1965.<sup>160</sup> The riots' impact on the community strengthened Black militancy; the Black Panther party in Oakland, was founded by Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale to defend armed resistance and socialist rhetoric. This marked the beginning of organized social activism in Watts. It also affirmed stigmatization of the community as a threat to the city, an area that required containment and policing.

Economically, California changed radically in the 1960s through the 1990s, from an industrial to a post-industrial economy. Service industries replaced manufacturing industries, leaving minority and uneducated populations with fewer opportunities to find work. With the "Silicon Valley" phenomenon, most of its economy invested into the high-tech boom. While an

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<sup>160</sup> Los Angeles' African American community grew from 40,000 to 650,000, while residential resources would not accommodate such growth. The 1964 Rumford Act, which banned racial discrimination in housing, was revoked when Proposition 13 was approved with two-to-one votes in 1964. Reacting to a series of arrests and police brutality, six days of rioting ensued in L.A.'s Watts neighborhood, with violent clashes between African Americans and police, 13,900 National Guards, \$40 million of property damage and thirty-four people dead, of which only three were not Black.

equal number of extremely low-wage, low-skill jobs arose (apparel manufacturing, agriculture and canning), an increasing lower class boomed side-by-side with a high-wage demography.<sup>161</sup>

In California's main cities, by the 1990s, federal cuts undid a lot of the nation's welfare programs, which especially affected urban residents such as South Central L.A. inhabitants. In these conditions, communities took responsibility to change their fate, resist police abuse and claim their citizenship. Lacking citizenship and in highly policed environments, marginalized urban spaces began to shift.

In order to avoid victimizing these urban communities, I insist on demonstrating that the favela and ghetto are marginalized, but that they are also sites of meaningful growth for solidarity, community organizing and cultural renaissance. Here I want to present both sides of the coin, not just neighborhoods as symptoms of society's disorders. The overview of associations' history below shows that the favelas were not necessarily a marginalized space without a political voice. However, some studies have shown that neighborhood associations, over time, focused on acquiring basic needs in order to survive, rather than political representation and relationships with the State.

Janice Perlman conducted a study in 1969 and again in 2000 that consisted of interviewing favela dwellers to measure their daily life and changes of social opportunities over time. On the evolution of violence in the favela, Perlman notes that the significant increase in violence was accompanied with a fear of the State. Perlman's article on marginality over four

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<sup>161</sup> "The gap between social classes widened abruptly for all during the Reagan years, but for Blacks the abyss was much more pronounced. The relatively few Blacks who climb the social and occupational ladder only underscore the great gap between them and other African Americans. Social mobility, which for Whites is coterminous with wealth and work, is for most Blacks a defunct American dream. . . South Central has been left with deteriorating housing stock, very high levels of poverty, and latent inter-and intraracial conflict. It is quickly becoming the exclusive home of the Brown and Black California version of the *lumpenproletariat*, and as such has become the site for an unprecedented volume of imprisonments and deaths." (Costa Vargas 28)

generations in the favelas provides insight on the evolution of the favelas' conditions.<sup>162</sup> In 1969, favela dwellers no longer felt protected by the law (Perlman 173); their urban space became an exception to the rule of law. The violent environment affected the public space of the favela, and resulted in reduced membership in community organizations. The decrease in membership to community organization such as church or sports clubs or neighborhood associations led women to limit themselves to one 'leisure' activity, Evangelical Church, and young men to turn to drug trafficking (Perlman 174). This is a component of favela life that community organizations attempt to improve throughout the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, to promote youth membership to community organizations, and a comparative phenomenon arose in Los Angeles.

Rio de Janeiro community associations are recorded as having been first established in the 1950s. Working with the Archdiocese of Rio de Janeiro, city and state governments initiated and cultivated them mainly to prevent any form of communist agitation in the favelas (McCann 151).<sup>163</sup> The relationship between the associations in the favelas and the State changed as the

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<sup>162</sup> Perlman's study provides insight on the evolution of favela dwellers over 40 years; economically and socially. For instance, she notes that only one third of the individuals she had interviewed in 1969 had remained in the favelas, leading her to argue that poverty is not chronic, nor is social mobility limited (160). Forty percent had become owners or renters of homes in "legitimate neighborhoods," 27 percent had been relocated in housing projects in 1970 and actually witnessed, past the shock of relocation, a long-term improvement in their lives. Others bought land and constructed homes in peripheral parts of the city, and others 'made it' to the affluent South Zone: "In a random sample of children of respondents, the pattern was similar: 35 percent were living in a favela, 21 percent in a housing project, and 44 percent in an established neighborhood" (Perlman 160). Wilson's book, *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy* mentions that the "catastrophic" urban crisis began in the mid-1970s in the United States, which sets up an interesting comparison with the notion that Rio de Janeiro's 'golden years' ended in the 1960s:

In the mid-1960s, urban analysts began to speak of a new dimension to the urban crisis in the form of a large subpopulation of low-income families and individuals whose behavior contrasted sharply with the behavior of the general population. Despite a high rate of poverty in ghetto neighborhoods throughout the first half of the twentieth century, rates of inner-city joblessness, teenage pregnancies, out-of-wedlock births, female-headed families, welfare dependency, and serious crime were significantly lower than in later years and did not reach catastrophic proportions until the mid-1970s. (3)

Wilson argues for the refocusing of the liberal perspective on the growing problems of social relocation in inner cities. His book attempts to explain why such problems have increased sharply, and concludes that a policy agenda that would resolve this problem would confront fundamental problems rather than be race-specific.

<sup>163</sup> The military dictatorship of 1964-85 proved a curious nurturer of the favela associations... The favela associations ... became the beneficiaries of this repressed political energy, emerging as a forum for popular

government went from dictatorship to populist democracy.<sup>164</sup> The Federação das Associações das Favelas do Estado da Guanabara held several associations together under a bigger umbrella, and by 1975 it constituted a vital congress for *favelados* (favela dwellers) as the FAFERJ, Federação das Associações das Favelas do Estado do Rio de Janeiro. Such associations in Rio have been created since the early 1960s, starting with the Associação dos Moradores. Then there were different types of associations that came about—some were “spontaneous”—and this is the category into which AfroReggae fits.<sup>165</sup>

The favelas grew along with their neighborhood associations, but remained devoid of a legal recognition, “usually achieved partially and precariously, if at all” (McCann 152). *A favela fala* tells the stories of this evolution from activists’ points of view, and their efforts to improve local infrastructure, education, and public health. The precarious status of most neighborhoods pulled activists’ energy to focus on material necessities (water, light, schools) rather than political ideology: “activists today are also of a different type: they value more concrete, more direct and more restricted work, and they don’t believe anymore in ideological discourse” (Zaluar 163).

Neighborhood associations have become increasingly authoritative, though without the power to settle property lines, distribute state resources or appoint government employees or

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mobilization in ways that were initially acceptable to the regime but which ultimately challenged its control. The massive mobilization in the ranks of the association movement throughout the 1970s appeared to present a challenge to corrupt populist vote-trading, and in the short run, the associations indeed played a key role in defeating the corrupt machine of Governos Gavas Freitas (1971-1975). The politicians who mastered a style [that couched the exchange of political favors in the language of universal rights and citizenship] developed a symbiotic association with the favela associations... The associations increasingly became an avenue towards entry into party politics and government employment rather than a means to bypass parties and confront government. (McCann 153)

<sup>164</sup> In terms of relationships between the state and the favela dwellers, Perlman mentions the assistance programs that improve families’ lives. Small cash transfers to poor families under President Fernando Henrique’s government, the *bolsa escola*, and the Family Grant Program organized by Luiz Inacio da Silva’s Labor Party government. The latter offered a debit card for eligible families with a about \$24 a month (Perlman 161).

<sup>165</sup> In an interview, the administrative director of the GCAR also brought to my attention that there is a wide array of performance-based non-profit organizations in Rio de Janeiro. I would point out, however, that GCAR is unique in its ability to project its performers onto the global market and global non-profit organizations.

drive out undesirable representatives. Unfortunately, as McCann poses, organizations have had difficulties in resolving major issues within the favela, especially the problem of citizenship. This sense of non-representation, lack of citizenship, is expressed in AfroReggae's songs, and forms a part of the non-profit organization's mission.<sup>166</sup>

As favelas become 'included' into the national imaginary as areas producing highly talented soccer players, musicians and dancers, they became integrated popular culture at the city and national levels (McCann 161-62).<sup>167</sup> However, their connection to formal city structure did not imply public security, citizenship or infrastructure. They remained marginalized, as "they constitute separate city-states within the city" (McCann 162). At the same time, though they influenced national culture, individuals from the favela became increasingly stigmatized in the public sphere and the sphere of spectacle.

The beginning of media coverage of drug trafficking in the favela comes with the boom of drug trafficking in the 1980s, itself due to international policing changes, which turned Rio de Janeiro into an important export node for cocaine produced in Bolivia and Colombia. Here is one of the first representations of local adolescents depicted as heavily armed gangsters:

The 1987 Santa Marta 'war'—a weeklong struggle between rival organizations for control of this South Zone favela and its access to the expanding middle-class market—brought these patterns to the attention of most cariocas for

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<sup>166</sup> Residents actually lost civil liberties with certain neighborhood organizations. "For most residents, there is no dilemma—many fled more violent neighborhoods and are happy to sacrifice theoretical individual liberties [taken away by associations such as Rio das Pedras] for real safety" (McCann 154). Some favela associations such as Rio das Pedras are "attenuated by the local drug gang's implicit control over the association" (McCann 154). This is important to note since they contrast with AfroReggae (and probably other performance based associations) that are not influenced by drug gangs.

<sup>167</sup> McCann mentions Vigario Geral, but only the favela's massacre. At the same time, he critiques 'hip-hop classes,' discrediting performance-based associations. I will go against this argument, especially in relation to restituting citizenship within the favelas. McCann's perspective presents a contrast with how Grupo Cultural Afro Reggae perceives its community. On the other hand, Perlman's data gathers factual information about stigma and about the efficiency of community solidarity to counter social stigma.

the first time. Television and journalistic coverage of the conflict made it clear that drug trafficking in the favela was no longer a homegrown phenomenon dedicated primarily to the distribution of marijuana within the neighborhood, but now involved well-connected, heavily-armed gangsters violently taking over key territory in order to sell cocaine. Coverage focused in particular on the recruitment and arming of local adolescents by both factions. (McCann 156)

From the labyrinthine favela often called *boca sem saída*,<sup>168</sup> voices of hope break through. After this, a series of actions ensue to change such a stigmatized image of the city, and for the tourism industry's sake. City officials, NGOs, government social welfare agencies and foundations emphasized the cultural aspects of citizenship. Their goal was to mediate a "better" image of Rio, to mediate between divided sectors of the city, to restore the lost 1950s golden era and promote tourism. I question this motive, and prefer to focus on local organizations that did not have the city's public image, but rather acted to improve the favelas' public image and environment.

#### **4.2    LOOKING FOR WAYS OUT IN *BOCAS SEM SAÍDA***

Aside from working on material recuperation, favela organizations of the 1980s and 1990s begin to work on restoring their image within the realm of the spectacle. They transform their bodies that have served as "targets of moral stigmatization" into vehicles of African diaspora culture

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<sup>168</sup> Translated literally, this means a mouth shut, but a flytrap, like the plant, could also serve as a translation.

and empowering tools for agency. The best way to achieve this is precisely in the realm of the spectacle, where they became targets of moral stigmatization in the first place:

I would like to emphasize that the task before the people of Vigário Geral necessarily had to take place in the realm of spectacle, for it was precisely there that the negative stereotypes of favela residents reinforced discrimination and legitimated abusive police invasions” (Yúdice, “AfroReggae” 54).

In the realm of the spectacle, Afro Reggae performs healing work by restoring citizenship. Yet precisely since Afro Reggae works both as an NGO and a band, it enacts healing on several levels: by restoring an image of the favela that is truer to its daily life and reality (1% of its inhabitants engage in drug trafficking), and working through collective traumatic events such as the massacres of innocent favela dwellers in 1993.

The turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century made room for heterogeneous social activism. In his article “AfroReggae: Parlaying Culture Into Social Justice,” Yúdice appeals to Viva Rio’s ability to go beyond the NGO’s publicity discourse, their ability to bring individualist language of rights in contact with principles that regulate social life in the favela (56). The 1980s and 1990s thus also witness a change in activism. Viva Rio and its contemporaneous agents, such as Afro Reggae, contribute another strategy for social change. They shift the paradigm to fit a framework for a truly inclusive civil society rather than tourism-enabling societies. In turn, José Junior, creator and director of GCAR, respects the same paradigm that goes beyond Westernized social circuits. Instead of prescribing immediate answers, they look for solutions based on the social context:

How to relate [citizenship, that is, participation] to the hierarchies based on kinship, to different upbringing and ethnic backgrounds, to respect for one’s leaders, to the protection one expects from one’s superiors, to informal networks

of mutual aid, to motherhood, to the cult of saints, to witchcraft, to mediumship, to charismatic gifts? These are the questions Third Sector activists must face if they really mean to move beyond Westernized social circuits. And there are no immediate answers to such questions. They are typically contextual, varying according to the specific partners involved in a communication, the issues in question, and the dynamics in operation. (Fernandes qtd. in Yúdice 56)

AfroReggae, by putting music at the center of its social activism movement, shifts the Western epistemology of social activism to fit their plural context. Music, a sampling, a fusion, speaks for the “polyglossia of sociability” that is useful for their movement to work: “Although [José Junior] may not have thought it at first, the musical practice of Afro Reggae was to become the polyglossia of sociability that he imparted to these youths” (Yúdice 56). In other words, José Junior’s sociopolitical strategies, which included a hybrid music genre, spoke to the multiplicitous needs of urban youths. It fit the uncommon need of heterogeneous strategies to provide social mobility to the youth.

This was a project with a history in Brazil. Funk and rap already critiqued society, fashioning a new sense of anti-national identity that claimed local citizenship: “Through the new, nontraditional music such as funk and rap, they seek to establish new forms of identity, but not those premised on Brazil’s much-heralded self-understanding as a nation of nonconflictual diversity. On the contrary, the song is about the *disarticulation of national identity and local citizenship*” (Yúdice “Funkification” 197). Funk and rap, important influences of the later fusion band Afro Reggae, provided a language that went against the unified national discourse. Funk and rap spoke against a discourse that followed the myth of *mestiçagem* (or race mixing). Funk

and rap also provided favela youth with role models that fit their social context, or “new forms of identity.”

The lyrics of funk songs went directly against the paradisiacal image portrayed in Bossa Nova, and spoke to the favelas’ context. Funk dance parties were also a place where youth came together to express themselves through social dance, as portrayed in the film *City of God*, and the documentary *Favela Rising*.<sup>169</sup> The disarticulation of national identity made way for new identities that would be readily available and relatable for favela dwellers. This is what Yúdice refers to with his term “polyglossia of sociability.” What these young marginalized citizens needed was a multiplicity of new forms of identities to relate to, in order to work through the stigmatized identity that had been imposed onto them, and in order to identify with something other than the falsely unified national identity that marginalized them. Funk and rap paved the way to establish such discourses, and associations like Afro Reggae embraced this musical phenomenon as they build their organization’s structure and established their mission.

In Los Angeles, established networks of community activism were reinforced after the 1965-Watts riots with the Black Panther Party’s organization. The Coalition Against Police Abuse created in 1976 to bridge 1960s social movements with contemporary social problems and educate communities with political fundamentals and constitutional rights, played a central role in the 1992 gang truce established shortly before the Rodney King riots. CAPA follows the Black Panther Party’s principles of community organization: “to present CAPA’s interpretation of historical facts about the systematic police abuse endured by inner-city dwellers, and to

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<sup>169</sup> During interviews with Afro Reggae administrators and favela youth, DJ Marlboro’s name came up in several instances. He was a famous funk DJ over ten years ago, whose name still resonates as a central figure to rejuvenate the favela’s marginalized space, its state of constant war, and help to transform it into a place where youth could find entertainment and come together to dance at funk parties. Other DJ names that were mentioned include Furação and DJ Romulo Costa.

suggest strategies to cope with police despotism” (Costa Vargas 111). Their manual prescribes the police’s role as detrimental to their community and inherently colonial.

CAPA’s activism upholds a transformative vision different from the antecedent Black Power Party, relying on new strategies of social mobilization and constantly seeking new leadership: “Although Zinzun still plays a central role in the organization, younger leaders with new outlooks have emerged, and relations within the inner-city communities may be in the process of transformation. Actualizing its critiques of the BPP’s structure, the Coalition today exists as less centralized and more open to ideologies that do not automatically conform to the Black Power perspectives” (Costa Vargas 130). They preserve the Black Panthers’ strategy to use media resources and public exposure, especially with Zinzun, the main spokesperson of the organization. Zinzun has publicly presented concrete numbers and facts reporting police brutality in the 1980s and 1990s, and increasing evidence of CIA involvement in the distribution of crack cocaine and assault weapons in disadvantaged Black communities (Costa Vargas 129). CAPA has seen ex-members join its coalition to fight against the increasing police repression against generations of Black and Brown youth in the Wilson/Reagan/Bush/Clinton presidencies (Costa Vargas 129).

The CSGT, Community in Support of Gang Truce is another activist organization that promotes individual engagement and radical changes in neighborhood policing. They also demand better recreational facilities, a constitution right to education to be respected and actually enacted, they insist that “without addressing the conditions in the community which give rise to gangs, any truce will only be temporary.”

Both CAPA and CSGT advocate *full citizenship* of the community’s individuals, poor people living in the inner city, not based on neoliberal frameworks that promote individual

success and free competition, but collective cooperation and social belonging that “integrates personal and communitarian responsibilities” (Costa Vargas 194).

They host workshops for community members to develop skills using cameras and technology (Costa Vargas 195-198). Though they do not generate enough employment to boost their neighborhood’s economy more than a very small business would, the CSGT’s projects promote cultural pride, self-esteem, and agency:

Youngsters from underprivileged backgrounds often suffer from doubts about their capacity. Many of them arrive at the office with very low self-esteem. CSGT’s programs—indeed, the entire atmosphere of the building, with its celebrations of Black history, pride, and collective struggles—directly challenge these doubts. . . . In politicizing the conditions and lives of poor youth, CSGT also establishes a public voice that in itself breaks the silence to which grassroots movements are usually condemned” (Costa Vargas 198).

Following the Watts rebellions of 1965, when community members rioted against police abuse in their community, a Black arts movement was formed, made up of poets Wanda Coleman, Odie Hawkins, Eric Priestly, K. Curtis Lyle, Quincy Troupe, Emory Evans, and Ojenke who create the Watts Writers Workshop in the late 1960s. There was also the Underground Musicians and Artists Association (UGMA) joined by poets, musicians and artists. There was a persistent link between poetry, music and politics, with poets experimenting with jazz musicians getting together in informal meetings at the Watts Happening Coffee House, where Black Panther Apprentice “Bunchy” Carter, street poet and member of the Slausons gang, the Los Angeles Black Party leader, often attended informal gatherings.

The South Central Los Angeles community as João Costa Vargas describes it houses a variety of art communities. The World Stage storefront workshop and performance space in Leimert Park, “the epicenter of a Black cultural renaissance that has been taking place since the 1980s,” hosts jazz shows and jam sessions; and Fifth Street Dick’s also hosts jam sessions. The World Stage was founded by post-Watts riots artist Kamau Daaood and triggered a cultural revitalization in South Central Los Angeles. Down the street from the World Stage, a small foreign objects gift shop’s owner, Juno Lewis, is known worldwide for having patented several models of drums, played and recorded with John Coltrane’s *Kulu Se Mama*, among other Jazz tracks.<sup>170</sup> South Central Los Angeles, though a space of exception, is not devoid of cultural renaissance and behaviors that “emphasize Black agency [and] assert a crucial need for Black people to determine the form and content of the lives we desire. Historical forms of oppression have systematically rendered Black people *objects* of control, surveillance, and critique. In sharp contrast, the projects that can be observed in Leimert Park radically affirm Blacks as *agents* of our own destiny. . . . As tense as Leimert’s public places, norms and utopias can be [in relation to its prevalent Islam culture] they nevertheless seem to be invariably rooted in this assertion of Black agency and the active work of individual and collective change.” (Costa Vargas 171-72)<sup>171</sup>

Clowning and Krump reflect the type of competition and upward mobility prevalent in the context of the birth of hip-hop:

Fab Five Freddy, an early rapper and graffiti writer, explains the link between style and identity in hip hop and its significance for gaining local status: ‘You make a new style. That’s what life on the street is all about. What’s at stake is

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<sup>170</sup> The track is in fact titled after one of Juno’s poems, and his vocals and percussion are featured on the track.

<sup>171</sup> The neighborhood also houses important community meetings with political intent: “One of the first local meetings held to discuss allegations that the federal government participated in the trafficking of crack cocaine in South Central took place in Leimert’s Vision Theatre.” (Costa Vargas 171)

honor and position on the street. That's what makes it so important, that's what makes it feel so good—that pressure on you to be the best. Or to try to be the best. To develop a new style nobody can deal with.' Syles 'nobody can deal with' not only boost status, but also they articulate several shared approaches to sound and motion found in the Afrodiaspora. (Rose 38)

What could be perceived as the stereotypical Black youth wasting time on the street, being lazy, through artistic expression, turns into representations of youth forming part of a movement where they can feel, see, touch upward mobility and be in control of it, in their own cultural system—hip hop. This occurs in Clowning/Krumping and AfroReggae as well. Street dance that could be seen as avoiding their reality, dancing instead of looking for work, is actually youth finding ways *to* work. They dance at birthday parties and bigger events. Then the competition among them, which could be perceived as violent, is part of climbing the ladder of success in street dancing, earning credentials to be a respected dancer by developing styles “nobody can deal with.” That's exactly what Dragon finds interest in when he distances himself from his mentor, he invents a new style, and earns a higher position on the street, leader of his own dance crew, Krumpers.

Though the favela was not necessarily a marginalized space without a political voice, over time its inhabitants still had to focus on satisfying basic needs in order to survive, rather than political representation. At a time when many organizations were challenged to choose between political representation and basic survival needs in Rio de Janeiro, and organizations dedicated to gang truce, police violence or “Amer-I-Can” programs in South Central Los Angeles, AfroReggae and Clowning/Krump contribute to a long history of community organizing from a different perspective, a collective vision aware of the State's infrastructure's limitations communicated

through *embodied knowledge*.<sup>172</sup> The next section is dedicated to outlining how AfroReggae and Clowning/Krump make room for a citizenship that lies in the beat of youth's drum through *batidania*, or beat-citizenship (Yúdice, "AfroReggae" 57), and how *batidania* beats a drum of citizenship, survival and empowerment.

#### 4.3 "GENOCIDE," "AFFECTIVE MARGINALITIES," AND A POSSIBILITY OF LIFE

If there is healing, there must first be trauma, pain, and affliction, something from which to heal. What trauma do the performance movements heal, if any? Forces of state racism (Foucault and Costa Vargas), martial law (Agamben), affective marginalization (Herlinghaus) and damaged identities (Lindemann Nelson) impact the day-to-day reality and perception of one's self as a marginal urban citizen. This section will define the terms "state of exception," "illness" and "affective marginalization" as they relate to performance movements' "healing." I will discuss these concepts here to indicate how the performance movements AfroReggae and Clowning/Krump intersect these forces and attempt to cope with, transform, undo, or overcome them.

Costa Vargas' *Never Meant to Survive* describes the communities I analyze as "diasporic communities that have no choice but to resist and overcome genocide" (x).<sup>173</sup> Both South Central

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<sup>172</sup> Amer-I-Can is a program promoted by CSGT that advocates individualism and economic success. Though it promotes accountability, agency and self-esteem, it fails to critique the infrastructure that marginalizes poor inner city Black population, nor does it condone a collective voice.

<sup>173</sup> He does not use the 'common' definition of genocide, but the United Nation's definition of genocide:

Any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group as such:

Los Angeles and Rio de Janeiro favelas are stigmatized as communities of drug trafficking and gang violence from which society must be defended. I agree with Costa Vargas' definition of genocide, a concept that influenced me to apply Agamben's theory on the Nazi concentration camp to the urban marginalized communities of interest in this chapter. That is not to say that the violence inflicted onto Nazi concentration camps' victims is equal to the one inflicted onto HollyWatts residents or Vigario Geral residents. Each instance presents a variation of an oppressive State. However, Giorgio Agamben's theory as presented in his book *Homo Sacer* is productive to discuss marginalization and the resistance of oppression, especially when we are dealing with geopolitical sites in which the State has abandoned its citizens. If the State has marginalized South Central L.A. and Vigario Geral, what will it take for performance movements to work through this phenomenon and convince the State to include them?

Based on my previous description of the Rio de Janeiro favelas and Los Angeles' HollyWatts in South Central L.A., both communities present contemporary variations of Agamben's "state of exception." A site in a state of exception is one where the law is suspended. In "The Logic of Sovereignty," Agamben defines a site where the law is suspended as being in a "relation of exception" with the State:

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- a) Killing members of the group;
  - b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
  - c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
  - d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
  - e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group. (xx)

Ventura would agree with João Costa Vargas in terms of perhaps not the genocide, but the frightening apartheid that has been going on in Rio de Janeiro:

a política de exclusão foi um desastre. Não apenas moral e humanitário, mas também do ponto de vista da eficácia. O seu principal produto, o apartheid social, corre o risco de ter o destino que teve o apartheid racial em outros lugares.

[The exclusion politics were a disaster, not just on the humanitarian and moral levels, but only from a practical standpoint. Its main product was social apartheid, running the risk of fulfilling the tragic fate that other site of social apartheid have witnessed.] (13)

The relation of exception is a relation of ban. He who has been banned is not, in fact, simply set outside the law and made indifferent to it but rather *abandoned* by it, that is, exposed and threatened on the threshold in which life and law, outside and inside, become indistinguishable. It is literally not possible to say whether the one who has been banned is outside or inside the juridical order. (29)

In other words, the law no longer protects a person or a community in a state of exception; it “exposed and threatened on the threshold in which life and law, outside and inside, become indistinguishable.” Thus abandoned by the State, a community in a state of exception is neither included nor excluded in the juridical order. Agamben goes on to define the development of this state as a “camp.” In the 1990s, how do Vigario Geral and Watts communities serve as Agambenian camps to their respective states? In “When a Favela Dared to Become a Gated Condominium,” João Costa Vargas presents a clear example of the law no longer applying in the favela. The law was literally suspended, and all civil rights taken away from its citizens, when Operação Rio (“Operation Rio”) occurred in 1994. Military forces invaded the favela streets, suspending the residents’ civil rights as the military’s artillery was pointed directly at the residents.<sup>174</sup>

If favela inhabitants are banned from the State, and how will they reintegrate themselves?

Agamben claims:

The camp is the space that is opened when the state of exception begins to become the rule. In the camp, the state of exception, which was essentially a temporary suspension of the rule of law on the basis of a factual state of danger, is

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<sup>174</sup> “The Human Rights Watch 1996 report (1997:33) concluded that the operation was ‘punctuated by torture, arbitrary detentions and warrantless searches and at least one case of unnecessary use of lethal force.’” (Vargas 63)

now given a permanent spatial arrangement, which as such nevertheless remains outside the normal order. (Agamben 169)

Although there are flagrant differences with the Nazi concentration camp, there are some useful parallels to be made with the United States and Brazil and how they have managed their marginalized urban communities, with “essentially a temporary suspension of the rule of law on the basis of factual danger.” As the United States and Brazil perceived a “state of danger” in each community (with drug trafficking, gang violence, etc.), they suspended the law within each community in order to ensure the security of the state (with for instance the Watts riots, the Rodney King riots, the Operation Rio, and the Vigario Geral massacre that led to a death toll as high as the Watts riots).<sup>175</sup> This sociopolitical process situates the performance movements in a context of marginalization that would be difficult to overturn, since each community exists in the threshold of the juridical order.

Yet within these “camps,” organizations such as CAPA (Coalition Against Police Abuse) in Los Angeles and GCAR (Grupo Cultural Afro Reggae) in Rio de Janeiro, among others, are created. CAPA functions as a legal support for victims of police brutality, an advocate for social justice that collaborates with CSGT (Community in Support of the Gang Truce). They have created their own juridical order. AfroReggae produces music videos that portray police corruption and brutality. They call attention to the law that has been suspended in their communities. AfroReggae also organizes youth programs and workshops where favela youth teach policemen about theatre, graffiti, and music, and consequently, that children from the

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<sup>175</sup> The statistics that present favela dwellers as “killable life,” or indiscriminately persecuted by the police force, are stunning. 900 people were killed by the Rio de Janeiro police from January to August 2003; 73% occurring in the favelas; the police in Rio de Janeiro are responsible for two and half more deaths per month compared to New York’s Police Department in a year; the number of “suspects” killed by Rio’s police men doubled in two years, going from 427 in 2000 to 900 in 2002, most of them being young black males, putting the number of casualties at 1,500 in 2003, almost equal to Bagdad’s 1,700 civilian deaths (Costa Vargas “When a Favela Dared” 56).

favela are not inherently part of the drug army. They have also built a cultural center in the Lucas favela, a longstanding drug war enemy of their home favela, Vigario Geral. The organizations, the workshops and the cultural centers attempt to take their community out of a state of exception.

While President George Bush Sr.'s 'Weed and Seed' plan to root out the core of the problem in South Central L.A. supported a legal structure for repressive policing, Rio de Janeiro's "Operation Rio" enacted the same policies with military forces.<sup>176</sup> In the following pages I will illustrate the concept of favela and ghetto as concentration camps with witnesses' examples and examples from other studies.

In Zuenir Ventura's *Cidade Partida*, Ventura describes 1990s Vigario Geral in a "post-war state." Ventura compares the neighborhood to a concentration camp, when the municipal police force arrives to 'guard' Vigario Geral and prevent another massacre, during the music festival (Ventura 65). He describes the children he runs across with a certain lack of confidence or comfort, questioning whether they can survive this situation. In contrast, the AfroReggae members stand out in a bright light amongst the chaos in his text. Aside from his dichotomic representation, Ventura exemplifies my point. Both movements resist the genocidal political projects that plague their communities.

Costa Vargas' *Never Meant to Survive Favela Rising* analyzes the contemporary genocidal politics as "dehumanization that sustains this ever more fragmenting and domineering and globalized neoliberal heteropatriarchal capitalist White supremacist world" (Costa Vargas xx). In a context of weakened or absent citizenship, South Central Los Angeles' Krump and

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<sup>176</sup> "Weed and Seed" is a federal program that mainly "targets communities as being non-rehabilitable, subject to repressive law enforcement programs and places social service monies under the jurisdiction of law enforcement agencies." (*Community in Support of Gang Truce Manual* qtd. in Costa Vargas 190).

Clown dancers and Rio de Janeiro's Afro Reggae are placed under the threat of genocide, yet they re-member pride, hope and agency to their identities.

The documentaries *Rize* and *Favela Rising* also portray each community as a space of exception. *Favela Rising*, the documentary about Afro Reggae, starts with a dictionary definition of "favela" on a Black background: "illegal squatter settlement." Throughout the documentary, text captions educate the viewer with numbers and statistics, to contrast the state of exception of the favela with the movement's actions: in Vigario Geral, 3,000 children died compared to 300 in Israel and Palestine in 1994. In contrast, and also in Vigario Geral, the total number of 150 drug soldiers in 1994 was reduced to 25 in 2004, during the time AfroReggae became active in the favela. AfroReggae's members amount to roughly 2000 participants in 2000. In one scene, the filmmakers allude to the ubiquitous martial law. When the camera pans over to the documentary's interpreter, he admits to his interviewee (a favela youth) that he is scared "for him, for us," because they are discussing drug trafficking and police violence. The words "for you, for us" emphasize the lack of protection. This is not a context unknown to the viewer, with films like *City of God* (Cacá Diegues) and *Menace to Society* (Spike Lee) that depicted a long history of marginalization in Rio's case, and an existing lack of resources or lack of a way out in South Central L.A.<sup>177</sup> Both *Rize* and *Favela Rising* documentaries witness striking deaths and the hostile environment that portray Rio's favelas and Los Angeles' HolyWatts' environment. Groups mourning are shown on camera, relaying the environment's challenges to the viewer.

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<sup>177</sup> Both of these films begin with a shot of the neighborhoods' grid or labyrinthine structure, depicting the stifling conditions. *Menace To Society* tells the story of a teenager, football player who is accepted to go to college, yet tragically fated to be entangled in a shooting, he dies from a gunshot wound. *Cidade de Deus* (City of God) an adaptation of Paulo Lins' novel, portrays the evolution of crime from 1960s rural favelas' hold ups through 1990s highly organized crime and territory wars in dense urban favelas in Rio de Janeiro.

Although they make life through performance, they remain bodies of bare life, which could be victims of crossfire at any time.

José Junior's *Da Favela para o Mundo* includes various descriptions of a daily violence or a post-war state as well. His testimony contributes to a limited scholarship on the inner workings of favelas, the growth of drug trafficking and its logic, and most importantly for this study, the favela's state of exception—how the State abandoned entire communities and left them to their own will, without any juridical order. Junior reveals the military state of the favela, with 48,000 armed men, none of which belong to the State's armed forces. They make up Rio de Janeiro's biggest gangs: the most influential gang, O Commando Vermelho (CV); the best located gang, Terceiro Commando (TCP); and the Amigos dos Amigos (ADA), the most violent gang. His text includes numerous examples of daily violence, where the State's law has been lifted, and citizens have become victims to any type of violence. Such conditions demonstrate the favela's state of exception:

Por instinto, [Sérgio Henrique, um instrutor de futebol em Vigário Geral], botava os garotos menores debaixo do braço e corria. Queria apenas proteger os alunos, mas depois descobriu que estava aplicando uma tática de guerra: usar crianças como escudo [Reacting instinctively, Sérgio Henrique, a soccer coach in Vigário Geral, would take kids under his arms and run. All he wanted to do was to protect them, but he later realized that he was resorting to a war strategy—using children as a shield.] (73)

A daily soccer practice turns into a military retreat, turns a soccer instructor into a soldier, and children into human shields. This occurs during crossfire that the AfroReggae group faced in the 1990s, during the most violent time of the favela Vigário Geral's history. José Junior

includes these moments as he tells AfroReggae's history to illustrate how the movement was born in a time of extreme violence, thus illustrating how the favelas had entered a state of exception. The law of the State had been lifted; there were no police or military to protect the citizens; citizens were reduced to become targets, collateral damage to the drug war. As they learned how to survive as a non-profit organization, the members of AfroReggae also learned how to survive as favela dwellers even if they lived outside of the favela:

Aliás, outra coisa que aprendemos com o tempo: no meio de um tiroteio, deve-se correr sempre para o lado dos bandidos. Porque a polícia não sabe quem você é, não conhece a sua cara e pode atirar achando que é você quem está no ataque. [Another thing we learned with time: in crossfire, always run towards the drug traffickers. The police won't know who you are; they don't know your face and will shoot you thinking you're on the attack]. (73-74)

In the favelas, the police shoot anyone, "thinking you're on the attack." The State's law does not apply there, and the police does not serve or protect the citizens within the favela. They protect and serve the State that has abandoned the favela as part of its entity. Even outside of the favela, members of AfroReggae make use of survival with the favela. Yet these survival strategies do not necessarily have any use outside of the favela. They have learned the exceptions to the juridical order that apply in the favela; they learn the laws of the favela's state of exception, where the State's laws do not apply. GCAR members would have to side with gang members to survive the crossfire because they trusted that they would not shoot them, whereas the police, who abused their power in the favela, would shoot anyone, thinking that they were a part of the gang's offensive.

With a majority of Afrodescendant populations, both South Central Los Angeles and the Rio de Janeiro favelas represent sites of national neglect, where the state's rules are lifted to a point at which they are not "meant to survive:" limited resources for public health; lower life expectancy; reproduction of AIDS; and police men and women who serve and protect through unjustified and oppressive violence; all act out the state's biopolitical regulation of the population. The disciplinary power that regulates "man-as-body," as well as the "symbolic violence" that performs the biopolitical power by regulating "man-as-living-being," persecutes HollyWatts and Vigario Geral. There, local strategies of biological (saving lives) and cultural (raising awareness and expression) survival must arise.

In the documentary *RIZE*, David LaChapelle inserts text into the documentary at the beginning, to catch up the viewer on HollyWatts' historical past: "Watts Riot, Los Angeles, 1954" (with a news announcer's comments on the accompanying newsreel that depicts the "Negro neighborhood" riots); then "Rodney King Riots, Los Angeles, 1992" come on the screen followed by another series of media representations of HollyWatts' more recent riots; and finally "Los Angeles, California, 2002" announces the documentary's present, with Dragon, one of the KRUMP dancers' voice who expresses the dance movement's birth and development: "this was our board . . . from this board we built us a big ship." The film clearly historicizes the dance movement as a different response, a breakthrough in comparison to the riots that previously characterized HollyWatts. It places the documentary in direct opposition to previous media representations of the location as a state of exception. Both Krump dancers and AfroReggae performers are aware of their situation—they have been left behind. In a state of exception, how does Afro Reggae intervene and cope with it?

In Rio de Janeiro, Reggae musicians from Vigario Geral organized a dance party with other activists from Viva Rio to raise funds for their future plans of a non-profit organization. Their idea was to replace the Brazilian's imaginary of a drug trafficking favela with its reality—less than 1 percent of locals participate in drug commerce—and to go against the impact of the State's racist discourse on youth's self-esteem and daily lives. At the same time, “Tommy the Clown” trained dancers like Dragon who later identifies as a Krump dancer rising from ashes of the Rodney King riots. Both factions performed to let the state know that though “they were never meant to survive,” they manifested their ability to live.

In *Never Meant to Survive*, Costa Vargas validates that Los Angeles and Rio de Janeiro's slums represent State control of biological life in which “*Black people were never meant to survive*. The degrees of inhumanity according to which black communities exist and against which they resist only attest to the continuity of modernity's genocidal impetus” (Costa Vargas xx). Based on a contestation of their state racism's “purification of the race,” the performers enact resistance through performance; they articulate alternative discourses with the potential to shift power relations, to establish new configurations of knowledge and power.

Now that I have presented how the communities can be interpreted as spaces of exception, I will present how the concept of “illness” applies to the same communities, and how performance movements could heal it. In *Bíos*, Roberto Esposito's concept of an immune system in society presents the State as able to have immunizations from diseases created within society, and society's attempts to preserve life by suppressing life. This relates to the case of concentration camps as well, but could be applied to the communities of Vigario Geral and HollyWatts. In biological terms, immunization usually “produces a greater illness than the one it wanted to prevent” (Esposito 91). Similarly, when the state immunizes society, it preserves and

negates the contaminating community (Esposito 51). This echoes Agamben's inclusion by exclusion. To apply Esposito's concept in HollyWatts and Vigario Geral, the illness—violence and drug trafficking—becomes greater with programs like “Weed and Seed” and “Operation Rio.” So instead, a different pathogen (a vaccine of immunization consists of a virus, or pathogen that immunizes the body from future infection) is needed in order to resist violence and drug trafficking—violent performance.

Clowning/Krump dancers and AfroReggae musicians interject images and gestures of violence, with choreographies similar to fighting, and costumes of drug army soldiers, to resist the drug trafficking and gang violence's “viral infections.” José Junior's activist strategies, as I will explain further below, integrates techniques of networking taken from gang members' experience and drug trafficking institutions. The Clowning/Krump dancers and Afro Reggae members imagine alternative realities that engage their communities' “illness” rather than quarantining it. While the sovereign power acts to protect and immunize society by negating their communities, Krump/Clowning dancers and AfroReggae Cultural Group members break that paradigm and propose performance responses of transformation. They perform an example of “the force of life [prevailing] over that of death” (Esposito 7).

Biopower regulates the body and its embodied subjectivity, the official discourse makes use of anti-Black genocide, and an affective force imposes a normalized guilt onto the communities. This presents another point that, in my opinion, the performance movements resist as well, which has more to do with affective experience and identity formation.

Benjamin's “*Rausch*” concept of intoxication from the Surrealism essay enables Hermann Herlinghaus to underline the sensible economy of emotion, “since this concept can have a powerful bearing on the distribution of a ‘sensible order that parcels out places and forms

of participation in a common world.” (Benjamin qtd. in Herlinghaus 10) Globally, the sentiment of guilt is distributed in an uneven manner, through images and symbols, in order to put the blame on one type of community (poor) rather than another (elite). The “affective marginalities” are those who carry these negative affects, or the burden, for individuals who embody the norm:

In one important sense, affective marginalities can be considered *those that ‘carry the negative affects for the other,’* acting as potential or imagined trespassers that allow governing desires and anxieties to incur in projection and thus occupy a morally safe place. *Those carrying the burden are . . .* profane actors in sacred territories, or *subjects and communities that are being positioned at the low end of the class spectrum and ethnic scale,* or the geopolitical map, or *servicing as targets of moral stigmatization* in several other regards. (Herlinghaus 14)

Not limited to socio-economic or structural and territorial marginalization, or to visible violence, affective marginalities are marginalized through guilt. This is why, in this work, the question of healing as transforming guilt becomes a central concept. The “affective marginalities” are those who carry the negative affects, or the burden, for individuals who embody the norm, they are the problem, carry blame so ‘we’ can feel normal and safe, say that the drug problem is their problem, rather than an ominous part of neoliberal global economy.

Affective marginalities are marginalized through guilt (nation’s drug problem is their fault). Afro Reggae and Clown/Krumping resist what Hermann Herlinghaus calls “affective marginalization.” Their healing implies transforming the guilt. They transform their bodies that have served as “targets of moral stigmatization” into vehicles of African diaspora culture and

empowering tools for agency. The best way to achieve this is precisely in the realm of the spectacle, where they became targets of moral stigmatization in the first place.

The world is globally ordered around an economy of affectivity geared by a sense of guilt, where “a politics of foundationalist assumptions, together with a repertoire of images and symbols for rendering evident guilty territories and bodies, have succeeded in ‘crowd[ing] out the possibility of reason, care, and collective responsibility.’” (Herlinghaus 10) According to Herlinghaus, this goes along with Rancière’s concept of the “distribution of the sensible,” itself related to social and political struggles (qtd. in Herlinghaus 9). This distribution of the sensible creates “aesthetico-political fields” and modes of subjecting the other that determine what is sayable, desirable, performable, secret and excluded (Herlinghaus 9). With this we encounter a drug war associated with sacred symbols, while drug trafficking and drugs connote evil in global narratives (Herlinghaus 9). What symbols or representations form part of this aesthetico-political field in Rio de Janeiro’s and Los Angeles’ cases?

As I mentioned earlier in the history of the favelas’ evolution, Rio’s social “cleansing” began as early as the 1950s with policemen allowed to pursue their missions unrestricted by law. The death squad’s execution of ‘Minheirinho’ triggered reactions of repulsion, embarrassment, and compassion from chroniclers such as Clarice Lispector and Jose Carlos (Carlinhos) Oliveira (Ventura 37). With references to literary representations, Ventura notes both the history of extreme violence against these bandits, and the contrast between who they were as individuals versus how they were portrayed by society either as stigmatized by the mass media or sympathized by chronicle writers.

Other representations of favela criminals went against the grain, associating an executed drug dealer with the title of “hero.” For example, Hélio Oiticica, who was a friend of the

infamous Cara de Cavalo, immortalized the assassinated drug trafficker in a work of art titled “*Homenagem a Cara de Cavalo*.” He placed copies of the official photo of his corpse lying in the shape of a cross, killed by numerous bullets, along the insides of a box wrapped with fabric. At the bottom, in a bag with red spots, he wrote as if on a grave: “Here he lies and will remain. Admire his heroic silence.” In 1968, Hélio Oiticica creates another work of homage to Cara de Cavalo with a flag-poem (“bandeira-poema”) “Seja marginal, seja herói, [Be marginal, Be a Hero]” which became an emblem for the Tropicália movement in Brazil (see Figure 1 below). Ventura’s insightful study thus explores an existing relationship between art and the daily favela experience and undoing its stigmatized image. It shows how Tropicália played a role in the polarized representation of favela criminals, with for instance Oiticica’s works of art.

Yet Oiticica laid dead, anonymous to most. The individuality and the image of a collective voice or positive aspect of favela life were lost in this banner, regardless of the contrast with heroism versus criminality. How would Afro Reggae reveal an image that countered the anonymity and guilt?



Figure 1. "Seja Marginal, Seja Herói." Hélio Oiticica (1986).

The media remained a counter-productive source of stigmatization as it earned a central role in daily life in late 20<sup>th</sup> century Brazil. In "AfroReggae: Parlaying Culture Into Social Justice," George Yúdice construes that the media "overdramatized" the series of *arrastões* (looting rampages) which panicked the middle class population (53), and explains how key events of 1993 altered the Rio de Janeiro's residents' image of their city:

The *arrastões* on the beaches introduced an element of fear into the space of leisure. The murders in front of the Candelária Church [at the major intersection of Rio's downtown avenues] undid the assumed sociability among classes that is taken for granted at this inevitable space of encounter. The massacre in the favela reversed the role of the police, much like the Rodney King beating in Los Angeles. The police became the criminals who defiled a now-sacred space otherwise identified with abjection. (54)

Introducing a feeling of fear associated with home and leisure, Rio went from being imagined and lived as a paradise of leisure to feeling ill with violence in a space of fear. Zuenir

Ventura emphasizes illness, depression and suffering when referring to 1990 Rio de Janeiro. He compares the city to an ill organism stuck in a discourse of complaint (69). The traumas of daily violence, the state of exception and civic illness, but also the guilt imposed onto favela dwellers affected the communal and personal identity. The fear and guilt was imposed onto the favela dwellers, as a form of affective marginalization.

Costa Vargas' "When a Favela Dared to Become a Gated Condominium" puts forth other examples of "affective marginalization." He describes a favela activist Gabriel's intent to decrease drug dealing and expose police violence by putting up cameras in the Jacarezinho favela in Rio de Janeiro, the city's second biggest favela. Brazilian newspapers interpreted the activist's actions as a proof of collaboration with drug dealers in coercing violence, falsely accused Gabriel of burning down a school bus, and emphasized the favela's racialized and criminalized otherness.<sup>178</sup>

Costa Vargas' ethnographic study presents how the media constructs images to stigmatize and impose the guilt onto favela dwellers rather than the State. Aside from image composition in national newspapers (favela's photos are framed with steel bars, window frames, highlighting poverty and suspicious activists), televised interviews favored NGO representatives and elected officials who supported the assumption that the activist worked with drug dealers. Gabriel's point of view remained marginal to Brazilian network Rede Globo's news. The news

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<sup>178</sup> "The [newspaper's front page] photograph at the top of the page is the same one that *O Dia* utilized in its front-page description of the gates and cameras: a young man and a little girl walking through the gate. Underneath it, another photograph shows a panoramic view of Jacarezinho, composed of a multitude of houses built close to one another, varying from apparent poverty typify favelas. The third photo depicts Gabriel, a black man in his late forties, in a suit and a tie in Pan-African colors, pointing to the horizon with his raised left arm and pointer finger. . . a world described as distant, poor, and dangerous, especially to reader in São Paulo, where common sense has construed Rio as a beautiful but favela-riddled and thus overtly dangerous city. . . These images and the accompanying articles constituted a compelling, albeit indirect, statement about the connections between favelas, criminality, and race." (Costa Vargas "When a Favela" 56)

anchor interviewed Gabriel briefly and “frowned after Gabriel’s interview, [whereas] she introduced her other guests with a confident smile” (Costa Vargas 58).

Similarly, years before in the early 1980s, instead of placing the blame and analyzing the crisis that ensued from massive layoffs, its impact on favela communities, and how racial stereotyping disabled many residents from re-entering the work force, the detrimental consequences of the drug trade were blamed on the conditions of the favelas, feeding stigmatization like oil on a fire: “In the absence of critical analyses of the conditions in which the drug trade flourished, the long history of negative racialized stereotypes associated with the favelas was recycled by including the alleged effects of drugs on these supposedly already degraded, amoral, and violent communities.” (Costa Vargas “When a Favela” 63)

Imagining Rio as a violent urban space, and imposing the cause of violence onto the favelas thus affected communal and personal identities in favelas. A similar affective marginalization took place in Los Angeles’ HollyWatts. This is why I put forth the following: Clowning/Krump dancers and AfroReggae musicians perform a narrative repair of community trauma and guilt. I argue that the performances provide therapeutic tools by repairing “damaged identities.”

In *Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair*, Lindemann Nelson introduces the concepts of “narrative repair” and “counterstory” to argue for the reparative function of a literary narrative. While “master narratives” (e.g. the *bildungsroman* genre) instruct social duties, justify actions based on socially enforced or accepted morals, and represent a select group’s moral agency, they also marginalize a (large) part of society. “Counterstories” or “counternarratives” question the “master narrative” and its normatization. The literary critic establishes that a “counterstory” or “counternarrative” repairs “damaged identities” on the imaginary level. How does the

“counternarrative” propose to repair identities damaged by systems of economy and/or morally oppressive discourses?

People who can't be sophisticated readers of literary texts, whose options for redescribing themselves are severely limited by how other people identify them, who don't comfortably fit into established and well-respected social roles, or whose life histories seem to mean something that can't be captured by a quest narrative, can't ultimately achieve the moral purposes adopted by these approaches through the narrative means that the approaches recommend. Counterstories are one solution to most of these problems. . . . Rather than *invoking* master narratives as a means of moral justification, counterstories *resist* these narratives by attempting to uproot them and replace them with a better alternative. (Lindemann Nelson 66)

Lindemann Nelson does not argue that the “counterstories” resolve all of the master narratives' moral marginalization, but rather points to the possibilities that the “counterstory” offers as a “narrative repair.” It proposes alternatives to understanding lies, heroism, and justice, and uses a variety of moral resources to prevent the exclusion of communities already marginalized by master narratives. It also restores the marginalized community's integrity.

The performance movements offer another type of counterstory. In reference to Krumping, Clowning, and AfroReggae performances, the narrative repair is not achieved through literary narrative, nor is it enacted through a literary counterstory's moral engagement. Each individual formulates her counterstory through performance, restoring her integrity on a personal and social level rather than on the imaginary level.

In *Da Favela para o mundo*, José Junior draws a line between the Brazilian films' representation of and contribution to the favela community. He cites the film "Pixote," and critics of the GCAR who would put AfroReggae and Pixote in the same category:

[Os críticos] diziam que estávamos fabricando os *futuros pixotes* do Brasil, referindo-se à história do menino Fernando Ramos da Silva, que viveu um jovem delinqüente no filme *Pixote* e acabou se transformando em marginal na vida real—foi morto ainda adolescente, roubando na periferia de São Paulo. [Critics would say that we were forming Brazil's "pixotes," referring to Fernando Ramos da Silva's story, playing a young delinquent's role in *Pixote*, the film, the kid ended up becoming a real marginalized individual in life, and died as a teenager while committing a robbery in São Paulo's suburbs. (66)

For José Junior, there is a distinct difference between films like *Pixote* and Afro Reggae's intentions. *Pixote* illustrates a master narrative that disallows favela dwellers. The film as well as the opportunity to act, both "narratives" still promoted dispossession and marginalization. *Pixote* fits José Junior's metaphor of the net, trapping the child in the character rather than providing him with the tools to transform "into a fish." And José Junior fervently defends that the AfroReggae cultural group's mission is its opposite. They strive to shape youth into independent, skillful, educated and empowered individuals. Their mission also clearly states to break these stereotypes. The fish analogy of transformation implies a "narrative repair" of the "damaged identity," a struggle against the embodied "affective marginality," in which case the GCAR lends children the tools to repair their damaged identities. However, as counterstories of performance, they also emphasize that re-membering comes from the child herself, that they re-member empowerment and agency to their identity.

The GCAR founder understands and perceives favela children's potential, yet does not discredit drug trafficking's influence on the children's identity-formation. This perspective also supports a counterstory approach that questions the master narrative, which rejects drug trafficking as immoral. José Junior notices how some ex-drug traffickers had acquired valuable skills to become reliable leaders in the GCAR. He respects some of drug dealing's values, structure, and doctrines and rules it implements into the children's lives (119). On the other hand, he rejects the concept of "anti-marketing," and prefers to allow the group members, old and new, to consume and wear brands to "combat the image of the poor favela dwellers with dirty noses and rotten teeth" (140).

To demonstrate how Afro Reggae and Krump/Clowning work on identity formation and repair damaged identities (Lindemann Nelson 66), I will outline the performance movements' symbols of transformation and how they relate to articulating positive identities and counterstories.

José Junior's book, *Da favela para o Mundo*, includes recurring images of transformation. For instance, he indicates that for the GCAR "o mais importante não é o cara cair na rede; é ele virar peixe [what's important isn't to catch the kid into our net, it's that he transform into a fish.]" (68) This image renders his intentions as the founder of the AfroReggae Cultural Group (GCAR). Rather than catching children into an ideological net of ideology and a non-profit organization's premise, GCAR advocates letting go, allowing children to embrace becoming their own. The transformation here implies self-respect, self-worth instead of being constrained, molded into an ideology.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> It also exemplifies the social activist strategy of pluralism noted in the introduction; rather than catching them into a generalized net, the association adapts to the child's identity and promotes heterogeneity.

The GCAR associates its activism with two deities. The image of Orilaxé attests to the importance of transformation: “a cabeça tem o poder da transformação [the head has the power to transform].” (197) The GCAR named its yearly awards after this Orixá (a Candomblé deity) that, aside from supporting neighborhood activism efforts, promotes their African diasporic culture and underlines the importance of transformation. José Junior also associates the GCAR with the “Shiva Effect,” moving from chaos to destruction to change, which goes with Tight Eyes’ idea about how Krump and Clowning, that they rise like a phoenix from the ashes.

Another transformation thwarts the discourse of narco-culture and shapes it into a discourse of “culture-culture.” It ingests its chaotic and destructive forces, but also its organizational structure, and redirects its values:

O fato é que o proprio GCAR está inserido nessa realidade. Desenvolvemos duas estratégias básicas para que a ‘cultura AfroReggae’ se aproprie da narcocultura, supere-a e crie, a partir daí, um viés positivo de atuação. [The fact is that GCAR is inserted into this reality [of narcoculture]. We developed two basic strategies to ensure that the ‘AfroReggae culture’ consume the narcoculture, supersedes it and rises from there, a positive path to action.]

The GCAR creates its own culture aside from the narco-culture, but at the same time, the association recognizes the narco-culture’s principles. What happens then, according to José Junior, isn’t a rejection of narco-culture altogether, but a redirection of the narco-discourse to fit a certain cultural attitude. He believes that this strategy differs from other cultural discourses that make up or narrate the narcoculture. For him, the narcoculture is a network beyond the favela, with tentacles that allow it to touch upon different social instances. It does not necessarily imply violence or illegal acts, and can actually reject those very aspects of narco-culture. For example,

a large number of novels, chronicles, short stories, and films such as *City of God* or *City of Men* would be a part of narco-culture. In that way, AfroReggae is a part of this culture, but at the same time, it reformulates narcoculture. Rather than supplementing the neo-liberal regime and feeding the “tentacles” that support narco-trafficking, AfroReggae embraces cultural values of the African diaspora and performance. José Junior explains how narco-culture’s values and organizational structure have trained GCAR members who were former drug traffickers to possess the right set of skills to work in administrative positions of the association as mediators, guides in the favelas, networking agents, etc. José Junior and other organizers made use of drug traffic’s organizational structure, having new members earn their way through the association by rewarding them with increasing responsibilities. Rather than earning a gun to move up from kite flying to watchman, they shift from *batucada* percussionist to *batucada* section leader, to workshop leader, and so on.<sup>180</sup>

In AfroReggae’s second album, *Nenhum Motivo Explica a Guerra*, the first track speaks to undoing the stereotype of the favela as well. “A fast-paced, live-sounding Hip-Hop fusion track,” (Analogue) with spots from United Kingdom rappers Ty and Est’Elle, is the “scene of exposition” in other words, the track that presents the characters and the main argument. Its title “*Nenhum Motivo Explica a Guerra*” (“War, What is it Good For?”) reflects the band and the album’s premise, a critique of global politics and the favela’s situation within this global geopolitical order. Where do the favela, the favela dweller, and the musician stand within it? How should they perceive themselves, and present themselves to the world, if the world sees a war prevalent in their community, and if they see this war as a useless conflict?

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<sup>180</sup> See *Culture is Our Weapon* for testimonies from the GCAR members, and detailed descriptions of skills that they make use of in drug trafficking as well as in the GCAR.

The critique begins with the first stanza: “Nenhum motivo explica a guerra/ Nem a grana/ Nem a ganância/ Nem a vingança, nem avanço industrial ... Nem a conquista territorial. (War, what is it good for?/ Not for dough/ Nor victory/ nor vengeance, nor industrial progress ... Nor territorial conquest)” (v.1-4). Aside from the anaphora emphasizing critique with “nem (nor, not even),” the song establishes the world order of war that marginalizes “us,” poets speaking from the “hoods/ favelas” and to their community. With the term “conquista territorial,” however, the poetic voice relates drug gangs fighting for territory with the global neoliberal world order.

Starting with a chorus of homage to Bob Marley and the Wailer’s track “We don’t Need No More Trouble” sung by Est’Elle, this album is a cry for peace anchored in African diaspora’s reggae music. This is an example of versioning characteristic in hip-hop remixing. The reworking of an entire composition redefines traditional notions of authorship and originality; “the *referenced* version takes on *alternative lives and alternative meanings* in a fresh context.” (Rose 90) The sampling of “we don’t need” (in voice rather than technological sampling using a sampler) recontextualizes, highlights and privileges Bob Marley’s cut, establishing that this song is a step towards the search for the ‘right’ path, yet not a path of righteousness. The poetic voice explains that not even hope, an ideal, in the name of good versus evil justifies war. An ethical concern is thus at work here, a counternarrative. The poetic voice finds that there is no right or wrong, finds himself apart from the world order in general (the master narrative), trying to find his identity. “War, what is it good for” (or the world order without a purpose in their community) is associated with “No one needs to be something that they are not” (or identity crisis). This is the chorus of the song, and the only verse repeated in this song (besides the chorus) is “not race, nor faith.” The poetic voice is preoccupied with the way war has affected identity, with some

individuals accepting it as “national pride,” “shame,” or “population control.” He affirms a stance against all of these discourses.

With such emphasis on, on one hand, a world order based on ‘war,’ and on the other hand, individuals identifying with it for a variety of reasons, the poetic voice urges his audience (favela dwellers) to break free from both the stereotype and the neoliberal world order that has been imposed onto them. The song concludes, directed at gang members—“Pull out your gun if you’re looking for death/ You’re no better/ you’re as bad as the rest/ Listen!” This call to the audience is followed by a synthesis of the song’s arguments, with a fast pace, the rapper lists all of the justifications: Grana, ganância. Sede de poder/ Ira, mentira/ Medo de perder/ Defesa, vingança / Raça, fé / Esperança.” The rhythm is key here to mark the quantity of justifications. He lists these characteristics very fast, then pauses to state his stance: “Nenhum motivo explica a Guerra! [No motive justifies war!]” The song ends with the chorus fading with “We Don’t Need No More Trouble.” The two theses of the album are exposed, and I will explore them further in other song analyses. In summary, this song presents one of the ways that AfroReggae calls attention to their affective marginalization, their damaged identity, and to change it in the public realm of imagined narratives, through performance and music.

Zuenir Ventura documents how public discourse stigmatizes favela dwellers. In an interview with drug lord Flávio Negão’s brother, Ventura notes the lack of judgment behind professions, whether worker or drug trafficker, specific to the favela epistemology.

Mecânico honesto, sem antecedentes criminais, Djalma tem pago o preço de ser irmão de Flávio. Há uns oito meses, a polícia quase o matou de pandada, ele e a mulher grávida. Mas não entregou o irmão.

Eu sou otário e ele é bandido, mas a polícia confunde tudo’, revelou, sem emprestar nenhuma conotação pejorativa àquelas palavras, como é hábito na favela. Diz-se que alguém é bandido como se poderia dizer que é pedreiro, vagabundo ou trabalhador. Faz-se uma constatação, não um julgamento.

[An honest mechanic with no criminal history, Djalma pays the price of being Flávio’s brother (a wanted and influential drug trafficker in Vigário Geral). Eight months ago the police practically killed him, and the pregnant woman that was with him. But he did not turn in his brother.

I’m an idiot and he’s a bandit; the police confuse everything, he revealed, without lending any negative connotations to the word bandit, as was the habit in the favela. People say that someone is a gang member like they say someone is a carpenter, bum or worker. It’s a fact, not a judgment.] (77)<sup>181</sup>

The stigma to undo is not one they have internalized, “a was the habit in the favelas,” but one that has been imposed onto them from outsiders and society overall, like the police who do not see the difference, they see “an idiot and a bandit.” Within the favela, individuals do not judge drug traffickers; they do not weigh the word ‘bandit’ with stigma. This is important to note that Afro Reggae is not a grand savior in the favela; they speak the collective perspective of their community.

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<sup>181</sup> Other breaks with stereotypes: “O irmão dá uma informação inesperada que seria confirmada depois por outras pessoas: o gerente do tráfico de Vigário Geral não fuma maconha, não bebe álcool nem cheira cocaine, a exemplo do falecido chefe do tráfico colobiano, Pablo Escobar. ‘O vício dele é a Coca-Cola. Se tomar um copo de cerveja, fica de porre’, informa Djalma” (77). And another: “Quando se refere ao crime organizado, [Djalma Negão] é tazativo: --Isso é uma besteira. É invenção da mídia e da polícia—garante, dizendo um pouco do que eu já ouvira inclusive do secretário de Polícia Civil Nilo Batista. --O que há é amizade, enturmação. Cada um ajuda o outro. Por exemplo: o Negão é capaz de reunir trezentos homens armados. Mas quem consegue isso é ele, não é nenhuma organização.”

Krump and Hip Hop Clown dancers and Afro Reggae break away from the stigmatized “damaged identity” of their community, with their performative “narrative repair,” and resist the State’s oppressive discourse through performance. I will pursue specific examples and analyze their affective impact in the following section.

## 5.0 YOUTHS HEAL IN PERFORMANCE: AFRO REGGAE AND KRUMP/CLOWNING

I outlined in the Chapter Four how each community is in a state of exception and is a victim of state racism, as defined by Agamben and Costa Vargas, respectively. I also determined each community's social activist history of each community in resistance to this marginalization. In this chapter my close analysis of the performance movements will unfold into two parts.

As I presented earlier with Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic*, maroonage, or the act of creating communities outside of the plantations, consisted of individuals who decided to leave the plantation and fight for their freedom. This pinpoints the origin for political and performance discourse that still influence African Diasporic activism and epistemology. One of the objectives of this chapter is thus to inscribe both 'performance movements' within African diaspora cultures and African diasporic activism, which began with maroonage.<sup>182</sup> Each performance movement recognizes the African Diaspora's influence onto their art, which makes up another objective of this next chapter. For instance, in the documentary *RIZE*, the Krump dancers recognize the influence of African dance choreographies, and in my analysis of their choreography. I will establish precise connections between their physical movements and

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<sup>182</sup> I will explain further how maroonage, or the act of creating communities outside of the plantations, made up of individuals who decided to leave the plantation and fight for their freedom, was a point of origin for politics and performance that still influence African Diasporic activism and epistemology, following one of Paul Gilroy's arguments in *The Black Atlantic*.

African/ Afro-Caribbean dance to include them as part of 20<sup>th</sup> century African American techniques. In my analysis of AfroReggae's music, I will similarly establish correlations between their music, Reggae and Brazilian Hip Hop.<sup>183</sup>

Including documentary film and the performances of Krump, Clowning, and Afro Reggae allows me to put forth a genre often ignored in film studies (documentary) and an art form often left at the margins of cultural studies (performance), and to undo the bias for verbal texts and visual object-based investigations, the core of ideological analysis in British and North American cultural studies. It becomes especially pertinent as I deepen the study of Krump/Clowning's kinesthetic semiotics by relating it to ritualistic healing and provide a section of cultural analysis beyond Modernity's product—the written text.

Since this is the first comparative study on Krump/Clowning and AfroReggae, a large part of this chapter will describe their aesthetic contribution to or their position within African diasporic cultures, in relation to my overarching argument on their ability to transform, or “heal,” affective and social traumas. Previous studies on AfroReggae such as George Yúdice's “AfroReggae: Parlaying Culture Into Social Justice,” Patrick Neate and Damian Platt's *Culture is Our Weapon*, and José Junior's *Da Favela para o mundo: A historia do grupo cultural Afro Reggae* [From the Favela onto the World: Afro Reggae Cultural Group's History], focus on social activism and social history, with limited analyses of the band's lyrics, choreography, stage direction, etc. In contrast, my study will present an extensive study of AfroReggae's cultural

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<sup>183</sup> The GCAR makes use of early 20<sup>th</sup> century community organizing in the Caribbean, by having reggae dancing parties then larger concerts and compact disc revenue to fund their non-profit organization, as was done in early 20th century reggae parties to collect money for church organizations and other activist groups (see Lara Putnam's forthcoming *Rights of Passage/Radical Moves: Migrants, States, and the Politics of Race in the Jazz Age Circum-Caribbean*.)

contributions, and encourage comparative approaches with a focus on therapeutic performance.<sup>184</sup>

I will focus on elements of the performances that point to coping with and working through the traumas from living in the slums, and to undoing the stigmas of living in such communities, as presented documentaries and each movement's cultural productions (music videos, self-documentaries, testimonies, publications).<sup>185</sup> With the documentaries' analysis, *Rize* and *Favela Rising*, I will question the documentaries' ethical import and their aesthetic. Using Bill Nichols' *Representing Reality* and other sources on documentary film, I will situate where each documentary falls within the genre of documentary, and analyze their audiovisual representations to establish the film directors' ethical import, and in turn, my ethical responsibility as an intellectual. Julius William Wilson's *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy* analyzes the changes in urban ghettos in the United States, and raises an important question—what ethical implications does applying the concept of illness and repair in the ghetto imply? His study reminds me to address pathology and inner city problems with ethical care. With my approach to healing, do I imply that something is inherently 'wrong' with those who live in marginalized urban communities? I will remain aware of this fine line in my following analyses.

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<sup>184</sup> I have yet to find any study of Krump/ Clowning, aside from a colleague's dissertation in progress in the theatre department at the University of Pittsburgh.

<sup>185</sup> My next development of this study will include interviews with youth performers. I have maintained contact with GCAR's administrators and plan to pursue a deeper analysis of their impact on the community by including the performers' input directly into my data.

## 5.1 REPRESENTING 'ILL' COMMUNITIES: *RIZE* AND *FAVELA RISING*

In 2005, David LaChapelle's *RIZE* and Jeff Zimbalist and Matt Mochary's *Favela Rising* both made the short list for the Academy Awards' Best Documentary nominations. Both films reflect a positive transformation happening around African diasporic performance movements, and they raise ethical issues on the representations of marginalized urban communities, while both. The contexts of each documentary, the context of the birth of each performance movement, make up the profilmic realities, "the scene to which the camera is exposed," the coded, incomplete segmentation and translation of the afilmic reality (Chanan 13). In my analysis of the audiovisual representations, rather than focusing solely on audiovisual composition, I propose to examine audiovisual *and* affective composition. The camera translates a profilmic reality [the reality outside of the camera] into an afilmic reality [the reality portrayed on the screen] that produces certain emotions/sensory experiences to the viewer. What emotions and impressions of the performers do the films trigger for the viewer? Before I reflect on such affective components of the films, I will place the text in the more traditional documentary movements based on Bill Nichols' *Representing Reality*.

In her article, "Injured Identities: Pain, Politics, and Documentary," Belinda Smaill presents how the documentary film genre became a tool for social change in the 1960s and 1970s, and especially offered a way to communicate marginalized communities' pain:

It is documentary that offers a particularly fruitful site for the exploration of the filmic narrativisation of this pain. There are a number of reasons for this. It is this genre that is most consistently employed to draw attention to issues of social justice, many of which pertain to the exclusion of marginalized identities" (Smaills 154).

Documentary film has seen a growing popularity at the turn of the century (Smaills 153). Films questioning corporate capitalism, its impact on media, environment, government, labor rights or consumer culture kindled its popularity. A list of documentaries comes to mind when bringing up the topic of broader formation of corporate and social responsibility, but what about experiential narratives on the experience of pain among minorities? The latter topic is of interest to Smaills, and to this chapter's section. Smaills claims: "the faith the viewer invests in documentary infuses individuals and predicaments in the narrative with the sense that they are historical agents rather than imagined characters" (153). The documentary genre places the subjects as historical agents within a broader democratic public sphere, I agree, and I would add that these two documentaries project the subjects as agents of resistance in a space of exception. In my interest especially are the benefits and the limits of two documentary films as they represent performance activism. In contrast to the members of performance activism, I will show whether each documentary distorts their representations. The contrast will answer questions based on Chapter Four's terminology: do the documentaries help to undo the communities' status as a space of exception; do they repair "damaged identities" and do they resolve "affective marginalization"? Or do the performance movements accomplish this more so than the documentaries, while the documentaries repeat the State's discourse of oppression?

In terms of the documentary film genre, both *RIZE* and *Favela Rising* refrain from using the "expository mode," known as the classic voice of God commentaries. They make use of an "observational mode," in order to minimize the filmmaker's presence. They also include rare moments of "interactive mode." These are points in the film when the filmmaker acknowledges

the social actors, and vice versa, in conversations (Nichols xiv).<sup>186</sup> *RIZE* and *Favela Rising* do not promote the fetishization of the Word or logocentrism seen in the “expository documentary.” Instead, as I shall demonstrate further, the filming favors sensory and affective representation. The documentary gaze suggests that the represented subjects are objects of desire, which will make up another concern of ethics of representation in my analysis. Documentaries “bring a world into sight” (Nichols 77). By doing so, do they promote a certain set of values?

Axiographics would address the question of how values, particularly an ethics of representation, come to be known and experienced in relation to space. The presence (and absence) of the filmmaker in the image, in off-screen space, in the acoustic folds of voice-on and voice-off, in titles and graphics constitutes an ethics, and a politics, of considerable importance to the viewer. *Axiographics extends those classic topics of ethical debate [...] to include the ethical implications conveyed by the representation of time and space itself.* Axiographics, then, is an attempt to explore the implantation of values in the configuration of space, in the constitution of a gaze, and in the relation of observer to observed. Axiographics ask us to examine how the documentary camera gaze takes on distinctive qualities and poses concrete issues of politics, ethics, and ideology in terms of space (Nichols 77, my emphasis).

What would be *Rize* and *Favela Rising*’s ethical implications? Does their configuration of space, time, the relation of observer to observed that they present support a certain ideology? Is it

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<sup>186</sup> “In documentary film history, the interactive mode arose from the observation “Voice of God” documentary, at a point when filmmakers opted for a more interactive representation of the documentary’s subject, with interviews, testimonials, so that “the filmmaker could also recount past events by means of witnesses and experts whom the viewer could also see” (Nichols 33). This was a step away from documentaries with an argument stated through a voice soundtrack separate from the images, which fetishized the Word and the Platonic logocentrism with a narrative voice detached from the represented body, inherently separating the institutional authority from the represented body.” (Nichols 89-90)

possible that these documentaries achieve to put forth the subject's values, and if so, what components of their "gaze" allow for this to happen onscreen? Or could it be that depending on the gaze, the ideology changes throughout each film (e.g. when in *RIZE* the camera is in slow motion and closes up on dancers' oiled bodies, rather than when the camera's gaze 'wastes time' in the dancers domestic space, listening to their testimonies)? The following analysis evaluates several scenes from each documentary to examine the axiographics—how the gaze demonstrates what values, ethics, politics, ideology the film promotes, and to remember Smaills' concern, how 'well' they represent the subjects' origin of pain.

Both *Favela Rising* and *RIZE* fall under the documentary genre or direct cinema, another term that applies to the observational mode, by playing "the role of uninvolved bystander" (Rouch qtd. in Nichols 39). This gaze creates a historical present that depicts the "immediate, intimate, and personal that is comparable to what an actual observer/participant might experience. [...It] encourages an emphasis on the activity of individuals within specific social formations such as the family, the local community" (Nichols 40). *Favela Rising* and *RIZE* take the viewer into the homes of AfroReggae singer Anderson Sá and KRUMP creator Tommy the Clown, but also allot film space for family and community members to express themselves on camera. The camera wastes time in the performers' bedrooms and living rooms to narrate each movement's historical present. This gaze thus promotes an ethical behavior and a politics of representation that creates space for the represented to represent themselves, at least in this part of the film.<sup>187</sup>

In contrast to the expository mode, the observational mode adapts to the historical time of the represented community. Rather than slicing and editing scenes to force them into the

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<sup>187</sup> I would add here a comparison with Cacá Diegues' documentary on Afro Reggae, *Nenhum motivo explica a guerra*.

filmmaker's argument, they stress the represented world's historical specificity, and offer a nonjudgmental representation of the community's argument. This documentary mode presents an "affective form of learning" based on the lived experience of others (Nichols 42). The filmmaker's presence, as defined by its absence, still promotes a voyeuristic relationship between the viewer and the documentary's social actors, and "clears the way for the dynamics of empathetic identification, poetic immersion, or voyeuristic pleasure" (Nichols 44). At the same time, the filmmaker's presence does not prevent the social actors from interacting naturally. Such interaction shows evidence of a rapport between the filmmakers and the subjects. *Rize* and *Favela Rising* opt for voice-over commentary told by the main social actors. I agree with Nichols that this technique adds to the intimacy between filmmaker and subject (Nichols 93).

*Favela Rising* opens with the representation of the favela as a state of exception, told in the voice of Anderson Sá, the lead singer of the band AfroReggae. The following scene narrates the 1994 massacre in Vigário Geral, through community members' testimonies. First, a former-drug trafficker shares how what he saw. He witnessed his gang's druglord walking up to a fiercely abusive policeman. This policeman and his colleagues were entering a plaza in their police car, looking to physically abuse innocent citizens, as they were known to do. The druglord walked up to the car, and shot the policeman and his colleagues point blank. This triggered a reaction of retaliation from the rest of the police force, and caused the massacre.<sup>188</sup> Both he and Anderson Sá, however, insist that the druglord shot a policeman that was feared throughout the favela for his excessive violence.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> For details on this ambiguous event, see Ventura's account in *Cidade Partida*, to which I will be referring in this chapter.

<sup>189</sup> In Cacá Diegues documentary on AfroReggae, *Nenhum Motivo Explica a Guerra*, the documentary starts off with this event. It's narrated by several members of the community, to present the variety of versions to the story, all pointing to the police's abuse of their power.

The *Favela Rising* documentary then goes on to Anderson Sá's testimony, which describes how policemen barged in a bar, demanding everyone's credentials, and then walked out, leaving a grenade behind them that took the customers' lives. We discover through the camera's gaze that Anderson's brother, among other customers, had no relationship to the druglord who shot the police, and died from the explosion. Rather than an expository documentary's re-enactments, it is Anderson Sá's voice-off that narrates the massacre while archival footage of the victims' bodies occupies the screen. The spectator hears the story from the community members, and the close-ups of the narrators' faces and lips erase the distance between the viewer and the represented subjects. With Anderson Sá's words, the viewer sees his lips, his eyes, expressing emotion that goes along with his story. The close-ups also generate a high affective relationship between the viewer and the represented subject. The film's axiographics suggests an affective experience from its aesthetic; the intimacy between subject and director is transferred to an intimacy between subject and audience.

The axiographics in *Rize* change as the camera's gaze changes. David LaChapelle's *RIZE* tells the Clown and Krump dancers' past through their own testimonies, yet not with extreme close-ups. Mothers confess their past drug addictions ("statistically my kids should be messed up", says Dragon's mother—Dragon is a KRUMP dancer) and Tommy the Clown's role in the community ("I use him as a threat—I'm going to call Tommy and tell him! —He's like a father to them"). The dancers relate their family's destructive past—being shot trying to defend their mother and little brother from their drunk grandfather, witnessing their father's suicide in the front yard, having their father take them along to become a part of the gang against their will,

etc.<sup>190</sup> Each testimony is told in alternating shots with each dancer revealing his or her past either directly to the camera, or in a voice-off narration. David LaChapelle's shots, however, present a marked distance between the camera and the represented subject, with medium shots or close-ups less dramatic than Jeff Zimbalist and Matt Mochary's close-ups.

Finally, in *Favela Rising*, each time a character is introduced to the viewer, the scene is interrupted after they first talk, and a still image of the character, accompanied with their name written in a graffiti-like font, stops time for the viewers to learn their name. It surprises the viewer, allows her to stop and think to remember the person's name, their role in the community, and the paused image fixates their face onto the viewer's memory, unlike LaChapelle's discreet inserts at the bottom of a testimonial.

With different techniques, both documentaries unveil the performers' traumatic past to the viewer. What happens then, in my opinion, is that the viewer feels sympathy towards the performers, which the soundtracks implement as well. This sets up a consequent feeling not of pity, but of admiration as each documentary traces the performers' evolution and emancipation through performance.<sup>191</sup>

During pre- and post-production, *RIZE* collaborates with KRUMPers by including them into the soundtrack, but not the editing of the film or the filming itself. The cultural product is inherently the director's, and he cites it as a stepping stone in his long photography career that geared him to take a new turn in his work towards, not social work or activist photography and filmmaking, but gallery work. This is an example of how the documentary is repeating a hierarchical pattern of control or top down power relationship between director and represented

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<sup>190</sup> Ethically, in both documentaries, when the viewer experiences the gaze of death, human loss stands behind the frame, and the viewer faces the "indexical representation of the thing itself" (Nichols 81).

<sup>191</sup> I've noticed this in students' reaction to the film as well, after showing the film without previous remarks—to avoid my influencing their judgments.

subjects. On the other hand, *Favela Rising* filmmakers Jeff Zimbalist and Matt Mochary taught youth members of the AfroReggae cultural group to use digital cameras, to establish bonds of trust as well to ensure self-representation within the documentary. Their editing was done in close collaboration with the AfroReggae Cultural Group coordinators, José Junior and Anderson Sá, thus presenting almost equal control of the representation of the favela community and AfroReggae; it was a collaboration, not the directors' manipulation.

An important part of the film, where Anderson Sá becomes paralyzed after an accident, made it to the final cut per Anderson Sá's request, when the filmmakers were still torn about its exploitative inclusion into the narrative. It could be seen as exploitative and sensationalist. They made this decision five months into taping the film, which was originally about contrasts of wealth and poor in Rio, with only a fraction on AfroReggae. Anderson had Junior call Matt and Jeff to ask them to tape his personal obstacles that, in his opinion, had to be in the film as well. As their friend, at this point, Jeff Zimbalist and Matt Mochary agreed to fulfill Anderson's wish, and this collaboration led to *Favela Rising's* production.<sup>192</sup>

In terms of sensuality and representation of the body, the sensual representation of the performers' bodies does not impose a power being asserted onto them. In *Rize*, whether in the dance-offs, in their bedroom, or in church, they are in complete control of the orchestration of their own movements (the choreography itself will be analyzed further below in this chapter's last section). That is the main lesson that Tommy the Clown teaches them, yet this is reversed at the end of the film, where some Krumpers are staged in specific sites and positions within these

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<sup>192</sup> The filmmakers remain connected to the Group, and have been invited to Anderson Sá's wedding. In the years following the documentary premiere, they keep showing the documentary around the world to encourage community organizations like AfroReggae and to build international dialogues between similar organizations. Anderson Sá and José Junior have attended screenings in Harlem, the Bronx, and even HollyWatts, where they met KRUMP and Hip hop clown dancers Miss Prissy and Larry.

sites to render a musical video aesthetic. At those points, another power does assert itself onto their bodies—that of the director, and the excessively oily skin that reflects the sunlight and enhances the dancers’ muscles reiterates the exoticization of the Black body. The gaze exoticizes the Krump and Hip Hop Clown dancers, as the closing scene represents their performance to fit an MTV video aesthetic. The KRUMPers address this in their official website where they announce their own documentary’s production: “This is the end of imitation movies about supposed life in the underground dance scene with all the make believe struggles of life. This is the real movie. Not a documentary. Like some of y’all said, ‘It’s about time...’” (<http://www.Krumpkings.com/projects.html>). Since then, Krumpers have developed their own cultural productions; documentaries, DVDs, cds, etc that safeguard images of their dancing.<sup>193</sup> The documentary *RIZE* replicates a hierarchical pattern of representational control, while the performance itself involves a liberating act. In the following analysis of dance, I will explain how the dance is liberating—with African dance studies, quotes from performers about identity formation, independence, emancipation, and spiritual release.

The documentaries’ axiographics promote a politics of self-representation, affective proximity to the viewer, and an aesthetic of sensory experience that is conflicting in the end, in my opinion, since it includes both spectacle and exoticization of the subjects while promoting a positive identity. Yet the self-representation happens once the performers take full control of cultural production, through their own performance.

I share Smaills’ concern that documentarians face an ethical dilemma, as intellectuals do, as we represent and discuss marginalized communities, with the ‘bad habit’ to associate pain with social exclusion. Does the documentary (and the intellectual project of studying

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<sup>193</sup> Though I do not analyze it here, I encourage further studies on this movement and self-representation of a new dance, the divisions between Clowning and Krump, and questions of identity and gender in relation to the divisions.

marginalized communities) perform “social subversion,” or does it exploit its viewers’ voyeuristic cinematic (or the intellectual’s academic) desire? Do we reduce these populations to the experience of pain, and do we take pleasure in doing so? Towards the end of her analyses, Smaills proposes a valid questioning of the documentaries’ ethical responsibility. When they represent minorities in pain, do they distort minorities’ identities?

As E. Ann Kaplan and Ban Wang observe the “aestheticisation of the other does not simply render traumatic history into images, but in its obsession with violence and trauma, it flattens difference, history, memory, and the body into an abstract, pleasing mold” (11). This function of trauma also holds for the painful effects of other degrees of injury. Yet, more significantly, what is at stake here is not only an ethico-political empathy, but also the terms of desire, power, knowledge and voyeurism that, as film scholars have thoroughly established, structures cinematic reception. This confluence of pleasure and pain registers, for documentaries focusing on minoritarian injustices, a potential for these texts to lend themselves to an interpretation of pain as the reductive authentication of otherness. This effectively again fossilizes the subject's identity in the moment of perceived pain and eclipses the cogency of their political claims. (158)

The forces at stake in the camera gaze—pleasure, voyeurism and aestheticization—present an image that places limits on representing minoritarian injustices. The main limit lies at the intersection of pain and represented otherness, that reduces the authentication of otherness to “illness,” “victim,” “pain,” and erases the subjects’ political actions. There is an important line to draw between the audience’s desires to fulfill their visual expectations about the represented community, and the community itself. For Smaill, it is important to include the origin of pain in

order to avoid repeating the schema of pain as reductive authentication of otherness. It is important to look beyond the cameras, at the performers themselves, and to include both the origin of pain as I presented in the previous chapter, the representation of pain and empowerment in the documentaries' analysis, but also the subjects' historical, political, cultural and personal coping with pain and earning agency through performance. To these performers, life does not stop with daily trauma and violence. They see a possibility to rise from the ashes, and perceive destruction as a tool for transformation.

## **5.2 WORKING THROUGH TRAUMA WITH PERFORMANCE**

Aside from the documentaries, the Krump and Hip Hop Clown dancers and the AfroReggae musicians ignited their own projects to detach their identities from the stigmatized identity of their community, and rebel against the State through a ritual of performance. They construct a performance that resists a fixed point in their social structure and their current cultural conditions (Turner, *The Performance Studies Reader* 79), as well as a performance that allows working through personal and collective traumatic events, and manifests a strong anchoring in African diasporic cultures of resistance and agency such as hip hop and African dance.

As Yúdice argues, Afro Reggae is an example of how the insertion of such a group into “global civil society” of grassroots community movements facilitates “performative injunction,” mobilizing in the pursuit of social justice through performance. AfroReggae’s music reveals images of police violence, exposes and protests its cruelty, and overturns the marginalizing policies enacted in the favelas. One scene of the documentary portrays the band performing a song about the massacre to an elementary school, where we see how their aesthetic drama or

performance “proposes something to get done” while at the same time “gives pleasure to those who participate in it or observe it.” (Schechter 69) The best way to achieve this is precisely in the realm of the spectacle, “for it was precisely there that the negative stereotypes of favela residents reinforced discrimination and legitimated abusive police invasions.” (Yúdice 54) The citizen action initiative Viva Rio’s first performance was to transform the house, a Casa de Paz (House of Peace), in which eight of 23 innocent residents were killed by the military police. Military police responded to an influential gang’s offensive, in which some gang members shot four policemen, and retaliated by invading the favela and attacking several parts of the slum, killing 23 innocent residents. Working in the realm of the spectacle enabled performers and community members to cope with this trauma and initiate community building. This is the same trauma that Anderson Sá will address in “Tó Bolado,” a song I will analyze further below.

In David LaChapelle’s documentary, the testimonies of Krump dancers and Clowning dancers reveal another healing function of dance as it promotes a new sense of communal family structure. This is also the case in *Beloved*, where we find that the trauma of infanticide can only be fully worked through and healed with the help of the entire community. One of the dancers’ mothers explains that she uses Tommy the Clown’s authority to give structure to her household; sometimes she threatens her children that they won’t get to go to the next dance competition (“dance-off”), or that she will tell Tommy they misbehaved so he withdraws them from the Clown group. Tommy feels the same way that “clown groups are in a sense like families.” And one of the Krump members, “Tight Eyez” (who now produces his own videos), mentors a younger member of the group, “Baby Tight Eyez.” Clown and Krump dancers in this chapter substantiate how dancers become a family, illustrating how “people acquire socially recognized kinship relations with others. Friends may be incorporated into one’s domestic circle: if they

satisfy one another's expectations, they may be called kin—cousins, sisters, brothers, daddies.” (Stack 30) It is imperative that I uphold Stack's definition of “family” as the smallest, organized, durable network of kin and non-kin who interact daily, providing domestic needs of children and assuring their survival” (Stack 31).

David LaChapelle's scene focused on the domestic space, with a song from pop star Cristina Aguilera playing in the background as a group of mothers, Clown dancers, and toddlers, dancing and braiding their hair. This scene aimed to translate the sentiment of home, belonging, and kinship beyond nuclear family bonds that accompanied the Clown and Krump dance movement. This type of community building, along with Viva Rio and AfroReggae's performances, indicate a growing sense of trust, which in turn has been proven to result in upward mobility (Perlman 164). In fact, the performances themselves have allowed many children to find jobs as choreographers, dancers, band members, but also to train future generations to have professional skills such as basic technology, interpersonal communication, etc.

When the cultural group Afro Reggae was gaining ground and stability, they encouraged a few musicians from Vigario Geral to form a band. Their first song told the story of a traumatic event, a massacre, and re-membered the trauma to the community and the city's memory. In other words, they helped to resurface and talk about a traumatic event that impacted their community's psyche. Their narrative became especially poignant since the event had barely acquired full visibility in the media. In contrast to all of the accounts on Vigario Geral's 1993 traumatic event, Zuenir Ventura chooses to first describe the massacre before mentioning that it was an act of vindication/vengeance (68). The author follows the public timeline of the event.

First citizens found out about the massacre. Only later did the hypothesis that it was a vengeance come out in the media.

Dias antes [que eu conhecer ao Flávio Negão, chefe do tráfico de Vigário Geral], a polícia admitira a hipótese de que a chacina de Vigário Geral for a mesmo por vingança. Tudo indicava que os quatro PMS assassinados na praça Catolé do Rocha teriam ido ali reivindicar sua parte nos 67 quilos de cocaine vinda de São Paulo. Ao exigirem pagamento maior do que o combinado, teriam sido executados pelos traficantes. (A história que Flávio Negão nos contará no capítulo 17 é mais compleza e implica outros policiais, mas esta era a versão que circulava então.

[Days before I met Flávio Negão, the boss of Vigário Geral's drug trafficking cartel, the police revealed the hypothesis that the massacre was an act of revenge. Everything indicated that the four policemen assassinated in the Catolé da Rocha plaza had gone to claim their part of 67 kilos of a cocaine cargo coming from São Paulo. They requested a payment higher than previously arranged, so the drug traffickers executed them on the spot. (Ventura 75)

There were various versions to this story, contrasting between the public/mediatized space (a declaration from the police) and the more complex version of what actually happened from drug traffickers' point of view. Here I will analyze the favela dwellers' point of view, from those who witnessed and felt the deaths of innocent victims. The performance is a result of coping with this traumatic event, in which the police killed 23 inhabitants even though they had less to do with drug trafficking than the police did, and had absolutely nothing to do with their colleagues' deaths.

The song's title, "Tô Bolado," (I'm fed up) alludes to the community's collective frustration. This is also the chorus of the song, and with a fast-paced rhythm and aggressive guitar riffs, it nudges the audience to dance away the frustration. The first stanza states the date, time, and a short description of the traumatic event, setting up the song as witnessing the traumatic event. The second stanza reveals more details of the event, with one verse dedicated to the victims ("moradores assassinados") and another to the perpetrators ("o ódio e a violência de policiais vingadores").

Each verse is separated by the singer's breath. His breath breaks up the story into layers with first the cause of the trauma, the effects of violence, and the police force as a force of death. I interpret the latter as a reinforcement of the concept of martial law in a space of exception or Agamben's 'concentration camp.' The third stanza has a similar construction, divided into effect and cause: "essa crueldade aconteceu porque [this cruelty happened because]," in contrast to "no dia anterior traficantes mataram quatro policiais [the day before drug traffickers had killed four policemen]." The relationship between effect and cause places the blame on the drug dealers' violence. Is Anderson Sá's frustration aimed at the drug traffickers? Are they to be blamed for this traumatic event? If so, then the song would only be replicating the affective marginalization, placing guilt onto the drug traffickers who live in Vigário Geral.

In the last stanza, what seemed to have rational cause-effect logic is debunked by the *ironic* moral of the story: life in the favela follows no rules. Anderson Sá concludes that "o caminho certo é o caminho da sorte [the right way is the way of luck]," and the 'wrong' way, that is, the unlucky way, is the path to death ("o caminho errado pode te levar a morte"). This is the logic that makes the singer, and the favela community, fed up. The irony, characteristic of Brazilian hip-hop, justifies why they would be "fed up." The song ends with "my pride still

resides in this community,” replacing stigma, sadness, shame, with pride and a sense of belonging to a community. Telling this story through song narrates the community’s history, interjecting the media and other public discourse in the realm of the spectacle with the community’s point of view. It also witnesses the trauma of police violence, of violence in general, the death of 20 innocent victims who just happened to be at the wrong place, at the wrong time. The song shares the lingering frustrations after the massacre, reflecting the lack of logic that rules the favela; this state of exception that governs their lives yet can be undone with a sense of pride.

On the birth and evolution of Krump, one of the Krump dancers shares his consciousness of the stigma that his community carries, and the contrast between that stigma and the reality that they channel through their performance: “A lot of people will think ‘oh, those kids out there are just heathen, thugs...’ No, no; what we are—are oppressed.” Their dance is more than a performance; it’s a movement of resistance to the oppression, as well as a response to the current popular African American hip hop art scene. These dancers are thus aware of their presence as historical actors, and of their agency as voices from their community.

Dragon also explains that in his neighborhood -“there’s no after-school programs,” and the community lacks places for youth who “[do] not play basketball or football.” He has a sense of the marginalization in relation to performance arts and the opportunities of “better neighborhoods [where] you have dance schools.” For Dragon, Krump dancing, which he and his friends have created, challenges the limitations that they face in their community: “This is our ghetto ballet.”<sup>194</sup> This is their form of expression, a corporeal form of empowerment and agency

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<sup>194</sup> Unknowingly, Dragon’s remark puts him in relation to Alvin Ailey, African American ballet choreographer who strove to include African American cultural history into his choreography (Dixon Gottschild, “Black Dancing Body” 259). Dragon speaks to the same motive, but beyond the establishment of institutionalized dance.

that defines their own form of art, distinct from the high art of ballet, and they mark it as a clear contribution to African diaspora. In a way, Dragon is claiming the black body as a loud voice, and a presence, undoing what Dixon Gottschild found to be an art world where “the black dancing body was the negative space around which the white dancing body was configured” (“Black Dancing Body” 2). Krumpers and Clowners claim that their performance aesthetic fills a gap in the Hip-Hop world that lacks “morals, values” (Dragon in *RIZE*). They contribute their own dance to the arts of Hip-Hop that, in their opinion, has yet to emerge in the commercialized Hip-Hop scene. While AfroReggae’s song responds to silencing media and abusive police, Krump dancers respond to artistic scenarios that have stereotyped their identity and do not speak to their own experience as youth of color.<sup>195</sup> Dragon explains that Krump is “the only way [they] see fit for storytelling.” Krump, for dancers like Dragon, is a form of storytelling through performance in the way that Chancy defines storytelling, as a means of “undo[ing] the conditions of slavery and colonialism” still present in HollyWatts (Chancy 183). Two forms of storytelling, song on one hand and dance on the other hand, witness oppression and make room for empowerment. If Krump is a form of storytelling and empowerment, what is AfroReggae, in the musicians’ own words?

Still with a theme of war like “Nenhum Motivo Explica a Guerra,” “Mais uma chance” conveys a strong political tone. The melodic rock track reminds me of newer alternative rock bands such as Incubus. Music critic Analogue states that “at times the tendency [of this album] is towards tight, upbeat alternative rock, for example on ‘Mais Uma Chance,’ ‘Benedito’ and ‘Coisa De Negão.’” The song “Nenhum Motivo Explica a Guerra,” which is also the title of the

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<sup>195</sup> In the same way that Reyita responds to the representation of her people in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Cuba, Quilombhoje poets respond to Brazilian literary representations of Black women, and neo-abolitionist literature responds to abolitionist and slave literature.

album, critiques the reason for sacrifice and war, and reveals the internal struggle one encounters when trying to fashion their own identity. The chords that open up the harmony are repeated throughout the song to build a harmonious, upbeat rhythm while a minor chord notes an unsettled feeling. AfroReggae's splicing rock music with rap music in their album also follows early U.S. American hip hop that sampled rock music (long before Run DMC's use of samples from rock band Aerosmith's "Walk This Way" in 1986). "Beats selected by hip hop producers and DJs have always come from and continue to come from an extraordinary range of musics." (Rose 52)

The first verse sets up the struggle felt by the poetic voice as it presents a divide between the public discourse that describes about his community, in contrast to his own life experience: "Porque nas segundas chegam notícias tão ruins/ Quero expulsá-las da minha vida [Because in a matter of seconds we get such bad news/ I want to get these news out of my life]." (v.1-2) He reveals how difficult it is to be a part of the traumatic event one would find about on the news. One verse is repeated besides the chorus, "gerações sem chance (generations without an opportunity)." These two characteristics—having private life exposed in the public realm, and feeling like a generation without opportunities—establish the song's thesis. This song argues that belonging to a violent community directly impacts self-identity formation in a negative way. At the end of the song, the rhythm picks up for the bridge and the singer begins to rap:

Damned heritage  
Fighters, guerrilla fighters without a cause  
There are so many mothers who cry  
When they lose their children  
I pray to a God whom I don't know

But who surely knows who I am

The bridge is directly followed with a melodic verse, “I want to have a tomorrow,” again with this chord that sounds harmonious but ends on a sharp note, the bitter fact that they can only hope to have a tomorrow. And the back up singers wrap up the song with a harmony, while the singer’s voice talks, reminding the audience that these “guerrilla fighters fight a war without a cause.”

The critical tone of the first two songs (“Nenhum Motivo Explica a Guerra” and “Mais Uma Chance”) changes with the reggae track “Quero só você [I only want you.]” The album shifts from critique to desire. “Nenhum Motivo Explica a Guerra” and “Mais uma chance” did not include narrative about the future, metaphors of dream or desire. They expressed anger and frustration. “Quero só você” is also the first song in which the poetic voice uses the direct object pronoun “us.” This song shifts the album’s mood to one of a love song, first with the harmonizing back up voices at the beginning, then the chorus “quero só você [I only want you]” and the first lyrics “O que eu quero e o A do amor [What I want is the L of love].”

The following lyrics, however, set up the argument of the song to be about sanity, health: “Quero o B do bem/ ...quero o bem estar (I want the G of good, I want well being).” The first stanza lists everything that the poetic voice wants: love, good, a future with “you,” well being, no one else (other than “you”), understanding, peace helping “us.” The first stanza sets up the utopia that the poetic voice strives for—a peaceful time, day and night, in which “you” would not abandon him.

The first stanza sets up the tone for a love song, yet the chorus establishes that this song is about a way of life: “Quero liberdade/ Não quero caridade/ Que o vento nos carregue/ Pra paz do nosso reggae (I want freedom/ I don’t want charity/ I want the wind to carry us/ Towards our

reggae's peace).” The poetic voice desires freedom, not charity, which is a political message directed to the city's behavior towards the favela dwellers and NGOs who may not necessarily be helping to set free the favela dwellers but, rather, perform acts of charity that do not emancipate them.<sup>196</sup> The association with the wind could be related to true freedom, being one with nature and not bound to the state of exception's boundaries, being able to strive for peace rather than bound to daily violence.

It is in the chorus that the possessive adjective “our” first comes up, which speaks to ownership, property, and is associated here with “reggae.” The motive of the poetic voice, then, is to define “our reggae.” What should “our” reggae consist of?

The bridge is made up of rap that breaks with the rhythm, and makes the song's main point. While back up singers accompany the harmony, they echo the beginning of the song and mark the poetic tone's changes. What was first setting up a romantic harmony now backs up a political stance:

Sigo numa estrada sem direção  
Aonde todos os caminhos levam a um só  
Vagando entre mentes e corações  
Olho pra trás com dignidade

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<sup>196</sup> Funk in Rio de Janeiro was associated with *conscientização* or political consciousness for militants of the Black Brazilian movement around 1975. However, this sentiment became less evident in the 1980s on, when funk became a middle-class phenomenon. Nowadays, as Yúdice argues, the *funkeiro* culture could be seen as apolitical or resisting notions of national identity altogether (“Microphone Fiends” 211). What ensued was a strong sense of militancy arose in Hip Hop and Rap, especially in São Paulo but also in Rio de Janeiro (Yúdice, “Microphone Fiends” 206-207). The rap movement, which has earned more visibility in the last three decades, expresses itself clearly against state racism. Its political stance is clearly defined to critique issues of race, poverty, violence, with for instance the *Group Esquadrão Urbano*, that protests police's threatening presence (Yúdice 207). Other groups show involvement in the community to construct citizenship: *Rap nas Escolas...pensando a educação*—Rap in the Schools—Rap...thinking education; *Associação hip hop Attitude Consciente*—hip hop Association for a Conscious Attitude); *Ceap (Centre de articulação das populações marginais*—Center for the articulation of Marginal Populations).

Chega de lagrimas  
Chega de confrontos  
Nao encontro o que procuro  
Mas insisto, nao desisto  
[I'm on a destination-less road  
Where all the paths lead to one  
Roaming between mind and hearts  
I look back with dignity  
Enough with the tears  
Enough with the conflicts  
I can't find what I'm looking for  
But I insist, I won't desist]

This new path is a path of desire, of dreams, and the lack of destination suggests the possibility to go on with hope regardless of the lack of opportunities, and not letting the conflicts, tears or lack of possibilities put one down, with “I insist, I won’t desist” being the last verse of this stanza, the only one with a rhyme, underlining the persistence. The anaphora of “Chega (Enough)” also puts the critique behind, alluding to the two previous songs. The poetic voice looks back “with dignity,” rather than the anger it had when reading the news in “Mais uma chance.” After this bridge, the first stanza is repeated and earns new meaning.

Another meaningful aspect of this song is the call and response between two singers. The harmonizing singer and the rapper are two different voices, and their call and response, in my opinion, transforms this “you” and the loving relationship that is the focus of desire in the song. “I want only you,” the second time around, could be referring to this ability to dream? A

community able to dream? The chorus returns (“I want freedom/ I don’t want charity/ I want the wind to carry us/ Towards our reggae’s peace”), to introduce the rapper’s voice:

Cabeça erguida  
A hora é essa, o momento é agora  
Seguir naquilo que acredita  
E tudo que resta  
Pra mim, pra voce e pra todo mundo  
[Head high  
This is the time, the time is now,  
To follow that in which you believe  
And everything else  
For me, for you and everyone]

The rapper’s voice reiterates a sense of dignity (“head high”) and this time around, is not lost or wandering but calling to seize the moment (“this is the time, the time is now). It makes a call to follow faith and desire and strive for unity (“for me, for you and everyone”), which once again, will transform the perception of the relationship from just a loving relationship between two people to solidarity within a community. “I want only you” now changes to mean you, a community full of faith, hope and pride. The two singers end with a call and response not stanza to stanza, but verse to verse, the rapper takes the verses that were first dedicated to the harmonizing and romantic voice:

Quero só você  
Quero e o A do amor  
Quero o B do bem

Quero só você

Quero que o futuro venha com voce

Quero só você

Quero o bem estar

Não quero mais ninguém

Quero só você

Quero procurar no mundo e so te ver

Wooo.... Só você

[I want only you

I want the L of love

I want the G of good

I want only you

I want the future to come with you

I want only you

I want well-being

I don't want anyone else

I want only you

I want to look into the world and see only you

Wooo.... Only you]

The song ends on a note of solidarity. Both voices intertwine, looking towards a hopeful future and in a way, resolving this questioning of identity prevalent in the previous two songs. The poetic voices' perception of time also defends historical agency, ownership, and the power to look back with dignity and look forward with hope.

The dance performance, both for HollyWatts and in Rio's youth, further empowers the performers as they claim control over their own bodies, and gain freedom through dance. For Krump dancer Miss Prissy, trained in ballet, modern jazz and modern dance, to join the circle of Krump dancers instantly meant to join a space where she could be herself, and be liberated ("it was like, do *you*, and be free.") In an MTV interview, she admits that at first she thought the Krumpers were like a "motorcycle club," then learned about Krump dancing's spiritual component, and felt it to be more liberating than ballet dancing. For Miss Prissy, the opportunity to liberate her self through a dance that embraced a violent rhythm and aesthetic, triggered a "letting go" of her problems, anxieties, and oppression. In *RIZE*, different Clown, Krump, and Stripper dancers explain that in their performance, a woman's sexuality breaks boundaries put onto them in everyday life. A male Stripper performer states:

I've seen some parents see little four year olds are out there poppin' their booties, sayin' 'Oh, I would never let my daughter do that.' Why? She's out there havin' fun she's not doing *anything wrong*, she's not being sexual, there's nobody out there with her, there's nobody touching her, she's out there poppin'. What's wrong with poppin'??

Breaking free from binding forms of ballet and modern dance to embrace the aesthetic of improvisation, young girls, adolescent women and mothers turn their exoticized, objectified, and otherwise misrepresented or misread bodies into an artistic source of empowerment, that takes them far from an oppressive "here" to "out there" where they are empowered while "poppin'."<sup>197</sup> Miss Prissy has taken her claiming to another level, trying to contribute another voice to the realm of Hip-Hop music with songs about "the way we [women of South Central L.A.] love, and

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<sup>197</sup> Yet if the empowerment is enacted "out there," it still needs to be brought back "here"?

who we are, because there's no one out there that's representing that." It will be fruitful to include her lyrics in a future study on Miss Prissy's evolution as a hip hop artist.

Afro Reggae, a Cultural Group at first led by a majority of men, and with a male Reggae band as the face of their Group, also promotes young women's artistic expression and representation. The subgroup Akoní comes out of the Vigário Geral favela's Afro Reggae Cultural Center, whose "streets, squares and houses remain spaces where the machismo characteristic of our societies looked to stigmatize, exclude and submit."<sup>198</sup> In this context, Akoní creates music based on Ijexá and Afoxé rhythms, with dance and percussion expressions that find their roots in Brazilian African ancestry. They place their band within a history of rebellious "warrior women" such as New Yorker strikers from a fabric factory in 1857, and Luíza Mahin Lélia Gonzalez. They name themselves after a Iorubá (West African) term that means "brave and strong person," and emulate this being through their performances that aim to redefine a future based on differential consciousness and togetherness.

Each performative movement recognizes the African Diaspora's influence onto their work. The group Akoní I have just mentioned named their band after a Iorubá term, serving as an example of African influence. In the documentary *RIZE*, Krump dancers note the influence of African dance onto their choreography, and in my analysis of their choreography I will establish precise connections between their dance and African dance movements. Both performance movements anchor themselves in a cultural tradition of the African Diaspora.<sup>199</sup> On one hand,

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<sup>198</sup> The Akoní quotes come from their description on the Afro Reggae website:

[http://afroreggae.org/sec\\_subgrupos.php?id=11&sec=subgrupo](http://afroreggae.org/sec_subgrupos.php?id=11&sec=subgrupo)

<sup>199</sup> Afro Reggae inscribed its role as preserving Black culture and educating community of African culture beyond Brazil: "Rafael é um legítimo exemplar do orgulho negro. Inteligente, bonito, simpático, é professor de história em duas escolas municipais de Santa Cruz. Fala do movimento negro com conhecimento de militante. Não é um radical, mas sua serenidade parece esconder sólidas convicções. Mostra o número dois do *Afro-Reggae Notícias*, cuja reportagem de capa, escrito por ele, é sobre Malcom X. Rafael é também o responsável pela seção de livros. [Rafael from AfroReggae is a legitimate example of Black Pride. Smart, beautiful, nice, and a history professor in two

the band AfroReggae's lyrics follow reggae's objective to denounce social injustice and racial discrimination. They also embrace characteristics of African music with their rap. There are specific similarities between African music and rap in terms of the rhythm, the repetition and breaks:

Rhythm and polyrhythmic layering is to African and African-derived musics what harmony and the harmonic triad is to Western classical music. Dense configurations of independent, but closely related, rhythms, harmonic and nonharmonic percussive sounds, especially drum sounds, are critical priorities in many African and Afrodiasporic musical practices. The voice is also an important expressive instrument. . . . Consequently, the instrument is not simply an object or vehicle for displaying one's talents, it is a 'colleague in the creation.' . . . African melodic phrases 'tend to be short and repetition is common; in fact, repetition is one of the characteristics of African music.' Rhythmic complexity, repetition with subtle variations, the significance of the drum, melodic interest in the bass frequencies, and breaks in pitch and time are also consistently recognized features of African-American musical practices. (Rose 66-67)

The narrative mechanism of repetition that represents industrialization also stands for African cultural traditions of blurring past and future into an everlasting present, an erasure of the passing of time.

On the other hand, Krump/Clown dancing relates their choreography to African dance. I will dedicate this section to the analysis of Krump/Clowning in an effort to contribute to existing

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municipal schools in Santa Cruz. He talk about the Black political movement with a militant's knowledge. He's not radical, but his serenity seemingly hides solid convictions. He shows me the *Afro-Reggae News* issue whose front page article, his own work, is about Malcom X. Rafael is also responsible for the newspaper's book reviews]" (Ventura 58).

studies on Africanist dance practices. Rather than follow Gottschild's methodology—referring to dance productions and ritualistic Afro-centered dance rituals—I will focus on describing the characteristics of these street dance groups.

The core of Clown dancing, as Tommy the Clown taught his students, is improvisation. This is what still connects the Krump dancers to the Hip-Hop Clowns. This is what they have learned from Tommy the Clown, before the Krump dancers decided to start their own aesthetic and part ways from Tommy the Clown's aesthetic.<sup>200</sup>

The premise of improvisation in dance, according to Dixon Gottschild, goes “hand in hand with the circle” (9). The structure of the circle, a consistent form of performance and audience participation in the Krump and Clown performances, as well as improvisation, disrupt linearity and the performer-audience divide, and promote authenticity, working both on the individual level and the collective front (Dixon Gottschild 9). This structure also breaks the biopolitical power that oppresses the members of the HollyWatts community, promoting another flow of energy: “When the circle rules, there is an abundance of energy, vitality, flexibility, and potential” (Dixon Gottschild 9). This is partly how, although they were never meant to survive, the dancers articulate a new way of making life.

Jonathan David Jackson, in his article “Improvisation in African-American Vernacular Dancing,” explains that improvisation should be understood as a characteristic of African American Vernacular Dancing. He bases his analysis on the principle that “in African-American

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<sup>200</sup> On improvisation:

There is a cruel contradiction implicit in the art form itself. For true jazz is an art of individual assertion within and against the group. Each true jazz moment (as distinct from the uninspired commercial performance) springs from a contest in which each artist challenges all the rest, each solo flight, or improvisation, represents (like the successive canvases of a painter) a definition of his identity: as individual, as member of the collectivity and as link in the chain of tradition. Thus, because jazz finds its very life in an endless improvisation upon traditional materials, the jazzman must lose his identity even as he finds it. (Ralph Ellison 36)

vernacular dancing improvisation *is* choreography,” which problematizes the way improvisation is perceived in literature (Jackson 43). The fact that improvisation *is* choreography in Black vernacular dancing makes African American vernacular dancing place a central value on oral communication as well as sensing.<sup>201</sup> Two aspects are of interest here. On the one hand, oral communication refers to the sense that the “passing on of values, aesthetics, and actual movement traditions [occurs] through experiential knowledge and ritual work.” (Jackson 43) One example of this oral communication could be the “stripper dance.” As one of the Krump dancers describes it, this new style of dance they recently created, expanded on Clowning with a different improvisation style, the stripper dance is “a flow...it’s a vibe... It’s like a connection.” On the other hand, “sensing” means that the emotions serve as a path to intelligent knowing, that the improvisation choreography requires an “in-the-moment” perception of the self in tune with the environment around the body, as well as the acknowledgment of mystical forces and psychosomatic forces that may be perceived by faith (Jackson 43).<sup>202</sup>

With the cultural understanding of improvisation choreography and its relationship to an African diasporic dance practice in contrast to Western dance practices, the newly appropriated and created dance forms take on a new meaning. The aspects of the dance that make improvisation possible, “oral communication” and “sensing,” suggest the ways in which Krump and Clowning can heal the traumatic experiences of the youths’ lives in HollyWatts—through ritual work, with a strong sense of self in-the-moment and a connection to mystical forces. David

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<sup>201</sup> Improvisation is not a characteristic that only pertains to African American Vernacular dancing, on the contrary, most dances resort to this technique. What the author expresses here is the particularity of improvisation’s role in African American Vernacular Dance.

<sup>202</sup> Ritual “work” and “sensing” point to the importance of engaging the spirit through dance, and establish a relationship between healing and religion. The therapeutic function of religious dance is a central component of African dance cultures. For example, it is very similar to the “work” performed by Haitian Vodou performers such as Rara. For more information on the connection between spritual “work,” engaging with the spirit world at a crossroads between the physical and spiritual realm, and the role of performance in terms of spirituality, community building and healing, see Elizabeth McAlister’s *Rara!: Vodou, Power, and Performance in Haiti and its Diaspora*.

LaChapelle's documentary dedicates a long scene to a "Krump session" in the street. In this scene, one of the dancers gets "struck, something we *all* been waitin' for," presenting one of many instances where the performers show their faith and their connection to mystical forces.<sup>203</sup> Their choreography illustrates both a resistance to an aesthetic of European-derived or Western dance, as well as the aesthetic of hip-hop's commodification and variations of Black vernacular dancing (Jackson 42).

The dance techniques of Clowning and Krumping follow other African dance techniques that Dixon Gottschild denotes in "Crossroads, Continuities, and Contradictions: The Afro-Euro-Caribbean Triangle." Firstly, Clowning/Krumping choreography uses African dance techniques of polycentrism and polyrhythm. Polycentrism is an Africanist perspective that defends that "movement may originate from any body zone, and two or more areas of the body may simultaneously serve as centers of movement" (Dixon Gottschild 6). Polycentrism and polyrhythm make up important tenets of African dance. "Africanist-based movement is also polyrhythmic. The feet may maintain one rhythm while torso, legs, arms dance to the beat of different drums. This democracy of body parts is demonstrable in Africanist dance forms throughout the Motherland and across the diaspora" (Dixon Gottschild 6). The "democracy of body parts" in Clowning and Krumping is manifested through isolated movements of the shoulders, the rib cage, in a concurrent but separate flow with the feet and legs that move to an independent rhythm below. Both of the movements, the latter being an 'evolution' of the first, also use "high-affect juxtaposition" in their choreography, which are "movement, mood, or attitude disruptions that ensue abruptly, rather than with a transition phase" (Dixon Gottschild 6). The dancers go from extremely fast movements to slowed-down movements to violent 'attacks,'

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<sup>203</sup> In *Borderlands/ La frontera*, Gloria Anzaldúa finds that writing also relates to ritual work and a connection with the self and spiritual forces.

and their projected mood changes accordingly, especially in dance-offs, from playful to aggressive.

The dancers' make-up, vibrant colors inspired from clown make-up for the clown dancers, and tribal lines inspired from African tribal masks for Krump dancers, also builds a bridge to the Africanist "aesthetic of the cool," "their faces resembling ancient African masks in stillness, calm, and self-possession, while their bodies dance beyond their quotidian potential...the two illuminate each other in a symbiotic dance that is emblematic of the full spectrum of Africanist aesthetic characteristics" (Dixon Gottschild 7).

And the dancers' belief in a connection with a spirit through dance, as well as their occasional "being struck" (a spiritual experience where the dancer falls into a trance, loses control of their body, and faints) connects them to the "continuities between body/mind/spirit" also prevalent in Africanist performance practices" (Dixon Gottschild 8).

Another spirit catcher is the torso articulation that is integral to all African-based movement forms. Just as in traditional Africanist religions, where cosmic forces are embodied through similar torso motifs, the articulation of shoulders, rib cage, stomach, pelvis, buttocks, and neck with rolling, undulating, shaking, circling, or rocking motions, combined with syncopated rhythms and movement repetition are known means of calling forth the spirit. There is an undeniable connection between these kinesthetic (muscular and motional) movements and their ability to generate certain affective (emotional and spiritual) states. (Dixon Gottschild *Black Dancing Body* 260)

The scene of the documentary where one of the dancers is struck, she is performing this very type of choreography, with her whole body engaged in rocking motions, and when the

dancer faints, the rest of the dancers who had formed a circle around her conclude that the spirit has taken her, that she has been struck.

In another part of the documentary, Miss Prissy and Dragon explain their reconnection with the church and the spirit. Their choreography in this part of the film is slower, with antithetic movements and elongated gestures. They represent central moves of “catching the spirit.”

[One] way of dancing holds exceptional possibility for spirit catching. . . the dancer, with her spine in a deep, deep arch (so that her back is nearly parallel to the floor—“laid out”—with chest and face open to the ceiling), simultaneously lifts one leg forward and stretches it so far up and out—simultaneously high and away from her body—that the pelvis and standing leg are pulled forward from her center of gravity by the force and direction of the lifted leg. It looks as though she will tumble but she doesn’t, because one or both arms are stretched overhead (meaning parallel to the floor) pulling her in the opposite direction and, thus, creating a seesaw counterbalance. This kind of dramatic movement, a reaching of every part of the body in opposite directions, is a metaphor for human longing, for aspirations beyond our means and desires beyond our condition—paradoxically, body tension implying mind/spirit release. (260)

Miss Prissy’s choreography especially when she bends over, arms in their, flat back, and her leg pulled back, as the organ concludes the song, communicates this longing movement, reaching out beyond her condition as a marginalized subject both in the field of dance as well as socio-politically, as a Black woman living in Hollywood. The audience’s reaction, and the film direction here also underline her mind/spirit release, taking it to another level as other individuals

begin to dance with her. Miss Prissy, a Krump dancer, as she dances in the space of religious praise, embodies the relationship between Krump and the basic praise dance, still “the most prevalent” form of African spirit dance in which “individuals who are inspired by and enthralled in the Holy Spirit simply get up and dance as the spirit moves them” (Dixon Gottschild *Black Dancing Body* 280). For a moment, it seems, the room, the image, her body, mind and spirit stop to cherish the moment, and dance the spirit.

Finally, a recurring image is that of Miss Prissy looking up, their gaze going beyond where their body and other dancers’ bodies are around them, physically. This is another component of spiritual dance:

Yet another spirit catcher lies in the gaze. Eyes may look outward, upward, seemingly beyond the physical to the supernatural. Head and chest may follow through, lifted up and open or thrown back. The savvy dancer may luxuriate in these techniques and, like a Method actor, fill them with her subjective subtext for whatever this kinetic challenge may suggest on the affective level. (Dixon Gottschild, *Black Dancing Body* 261)

In every dance routine represented in the film, dancers are caught with this gaze, and their energy spills onto their audience, past their dancing bodies, echoing *Vodun* or *Candomblé* as well as Africanist Pentacostal ritual spaces: “[where the ritual] event is charged by the proceedings so here, too, the stage space—not just the bodies moving in it—is charged by the energy spill taking place” (Dixon Gottschild 272). Miss Prissy’s dancing represents a form of African religious dance, an *embodied knowledge*.

Dixon Gottschild analyzes institutionalized dance forms in ballet, tap dance, and dance productions such as *Revelations* (Ailey, 1960) and *Gate Keepers* (Brown, 2000). The above

quote actually comes from a West coast choreographer's technique, Lester Horton's technique, but I attempted to apply her analyses and concepts to Krump and Clowning's "street" technique. Like the established choreographers that Gottschild alludes to, their dances form abstractions rather than narrative, examples of symbolic movement, in which the body dances concepts, symbols, takes on an abstract rather than narrative dance form (Dixon Gottschild 261). In Clowning, the abstraction from a birthday party is placed in the artifice of the dancing body. In Krump, the essence of battle is expressed through a codified war dance. Both follow what Gottschild underlines to be an important component of African dance: "traditional Black dance genres place high value on technique and artifice in the service of expressiveness" (261). This leads me to argue that Clowning and Krump, in their technique to evoke the spirit and their expressive and symbolic choreography, reformulate traditional Black dance techniques—improvisation; isolation; the circle structure, and embodying the spirit.

Stemming from hip hop culture, Clowning and Krump reject Western forms of art: "to understand or deal with rap music you must be innocent [as in] a commitment to formal Western musical priorities must be abandoned, or at the very least interrogated and revised, especially as they are articulated in the rules of sound production and reproduction." (Rose 83) They insist that this is their 'ghetto ballet,' meaning it is their urban Africanization of a Western aesthetic.

They also put forth a spiritual component in their reformulation of hip hop breakdancing: "It's not about the thing-in-itself (for Africanist art forms are seldom naturalistic, which is why there is no landscape art of portraiture in traditional genres), but the reinvention of the thing *through* the self, if you will" (Dixon Gottschild *Black Dancing Body* 261). What would be the "thing" reinvented by Krump and Clowning, in their case?

Each performance abstracts more than a birthday party or a war dance, in my opinion, they reinvent the state of exception that they live and that has affected their identity *through* their bodies, *through dance*. Dixon Gottschild states that the abstraction is based on the dramatic use of human affect, rather than the suppression of it (261). If dance is based on the human affect, then it also allows working on the affective level of an individual's condition. Therefore, I suggest that these dances' choreographies work against "affective marginalization." The emotion and expressiveness that the performers put forth present a performative struggle against "affirmative marginalization," or against the guilt that has been imposed onto them. The performers' choreographies enable the performers to free their bodies from affective marginalization" and to turn their criminalized bodies into sites of empowerment and agency at the crossroads between the physical and spiritual realms. The thing that is reinvented by Krump and Clowning is the context of the story that the dancers narrate, their lives, their community, their identities. By earning the agency to reinvent, Clowning and Krump performers are able to narrate and share their traumas through dance. They are able to communicate their stories to a wide audience. They make their bodies visible and integral members of a marginalized community. In these respects, they are re-membered in the flesh.

### 5.3 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, AfroReggae and Krump/Clowning offer Africana performance narratives of empowerment in order to overcome affective marginalization and collective trauma. With components such as religious dance and "our reggae," both movements impart discourses of hope, embodying, channeling, and looking forward and beyond an oppressive context.

In the concrete jungles of HollyWatts and Vigario Geral, individuals such as Tommy the Clown, Anderson Sá and José Junior, decided not only to change their criminal lifestyles, but also fashion a cultural weapon to fight oppression. David LaChapelle's *RIZE* portrays the beginning and evolving of Tommy the Clown's dance school into fifty different schools that split into two main types of dance, clowning and Krumping. Jeff Zimbalist and Matt Mochary's *Favela Rising* follows Anderson Sá's founding of the AfroReggae Cultural Group and the AfroReggae Band, a constellation of after-school educational programs and a Reggae band that spread an image of the favelas founded on peace.

Both films' titles underline the movements' optimism, with the word rise in each, that introduces a connotation of making life in site that have been left to die. And the movements themselves echo a history that to this day remains insufficiently heard, that of the oppressed African Diaspora, which, from slavery until now, still finds cultural resistances to the genocidal statist discourse. Their performances promote a blend of Africana experience with slum epistemology. Improvisation, circular structure, spirit, survival, meta-communication, reconnection with Africana experience, which resists the neo-liberal and affective marginality, damaged identity and state political racism.

## 6.0 CONCLUSION. RE-MEMBERING DIASPORA IN THE FLESH

“Have you forgotten, that once we were brought here, we were robbed of our name, robbed of our language, we lost our religion, our culture, our god. And many of us by the way we act, we even lost our mind.”

- Martin Luther King, Jr.

“We realize that the only people who care enough about us to work consistently for our liberation are us. Our politics evolve from a healthy love for ourselves, our sisters and our community which allows us to continue our struggle and work.”

- The Combahee Collective Statement

This project consisted of tracing therapeutic elements in literature and performance by women and youth of color, in works from 1986-2001. I mainly focused on how each work called attention to traumas of women and youth of color, and proposed strategies to work through trauma. As I wrote each chapter, my goal was to underline the narratives’ potential to heal and to undo colonial projects.

I established a web, connecting works from the United States, French Caribbean, Cuba and Brazil. Firstly, my web weaves the threads of a continental phenomenon—a diasporic experience. Secondly, it connects work by women of African descent with U.S. Hispanic texts—specifically Gloria Anzaldúa’s work. I wove a network to strengthen conceptual and experiential bonds among women of color. Thirdly, with urban youth’s voices included in my web, I wanted

to create bonds beyond literature. The finished product, the woven web so to speak, weaves around traumas that make up women of color's historical identities, and the afflictions that shape youth of color's identities, then and now. My web weaves around and creates clusters around each trauma.

### **The first “cluster”**

In Chapter 2 (with chapter one being the introduction), “Re-Membering Trauma and ‘Ghostwriting’” I focus on the ghost as a symbol of the murky experience of trauma and the unspeakable violence of slavery. I analyze how “ghostwriting” serves as a counter-memory—a story that counters hegemonic History—and a type of narrative that favors *sense*-uality over textuality. By *sense*-uality I am referring to a ghost's voice. A ghost does not communicate with written or even spoken text, a ghost communicates through feeling, through sense.

Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Conceição Evaristo's *Ponciá Vicencio* and Maryse Condé's *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem* include ghost characters that ask to heal a transgenerational (through family) or intergenerational (carried over beyond the family structure) trauma. They enable a healing of the postmemory of slavery through contemporary literature, since a postmemory is the memory of an event that was not experienced, but inherited. The interactions between ghosts and other characters also represent the relationship between witness and trauma survivor established by Dori Laub, “[with the witness] who accompanies a survivor onto uncharted land”, who is able to “listen and hear the silence.” (59) For example in *Beloved*, *Beloved*'s presence helps Sethe and Denver “tell” their past to transform it from “rememory”—a passive recall, a forgetting in order to survive—to “remember”—an active and painful recognition of a past trauma, a form of coping.

To be flooded by a forgotten individual's memories and their inner lives, trusting a ghost's sensing over facts—these are strategies to decolonize History with their stories. They also present non-Western practices to cope with trauma. *Ponciá Vicencio* heals with a sculpting cure that integrates nature, spirituality and ancestors into her therapy, instead of the talking cure.

### **The second “cluster”**

Chapter 3 analyzes these three novels, alongside other texts (poems by Quilombhoje Collective, Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands, Life of Reyita*—a testimonio by María de los Reyes Castillo). As the title suggests, in this chapter I analyze three central moments in each text: the act of naming, scenes of mirroring, and making a choice on motherhood.

The section titled “What's In A Name?” explores characters that ask themselves: how can I overcome a trauma when this very trauma resonates in my name? Their acts of naming resist the discursive power of the colonial economy. Whether characters or poetic voices, their relationship to their names propose to recover from slavery's social death with names that promote family and religious ritual (Tituba), claiming your own identity and spirituality (Baby Suggs, holy), interracial solidarity (Denver), or anti-naming (with Ponciá Vicencio rejecting her previous owner's last name; and the accent in her first name reminds her of the crack of the whip).

Fernando Ortiz claims in *Cuban Counterpoint*: “a slave is born without a name.” Each act of naming reacts to this epistemological violence, forming a Pan-American motive to wrestle with a name in order to overcome social death. They are connecting points for a strategy to undo slavery branding, as well as a resistance to logocentric discourse.

In the next section “And Now We See,” I connect mirror scenes with overcoming internal colonization. In some cases, the mirror is the domestic space; in other cases, it is synonymous with introspection—how do I see myself? How do others see me? Each mirror scene reflects a scar or better yet, a queloid that did not heal from postslavery shock. At an intersection between “being free” and “claiming ownership of your freed self,” the texts ask—where do I go from here?

Through the mirrors, I stared into women’s decolonizing gaze. Turned inwards, a gaze can “kill the other in herself” or overcome the impact of social death and colonization. For example, Esmeralda Ribeiro’s poem describes her gaze as seeing empowered Blackness—“Olhar Negro.” In the texts, the gaze was sometimes as colonial as *Imperial Eyes* (with Reyita’s mother) and as decolonial as Audre Lorde presents it. In the end, I unveiled a mirror that relied on the decolonial inner gaze and claimed a self-loving image. The texts asked—where do I go from here? And with the texts, I answered: go from “seeing yourself” to “seeing without censoring” yourself.

The last section “Raped of Their Motherhood?” inquires: according to each text, did life in bondage take away women’s choice to be mothers and turn them into (m)others, or did these women resist the establishment by *choosing not to be a mother*? The characters I analyzed thought about their motherhood in the context of slavery *and* post-slavery; they asked themselves: “After living in bondage, having been abused, been torn away from my children, or terminating a pregnancy, can I still be a mother?”

A woman can be maternal and choose not to have children, so that they are not subjected to slavery; or she chooses to be a spiritual mother (Tituba), or a mother with a “thick love” (Sethe), or a mother who emancipates her children (Reyita). When a woman’s flesh was a site

where political and social vectors converged, black women's bodies were commodities of exchange. Deprived of her blood rite *and* her right to motherhood, she was a (m)other, either perceived as an other before a mother (breeder), or her being a mother reinforced the process of *othering* (mammy). Each character attempts to recover from these traumas by affirming a choice.

A woman's flesh is a site where political and social vectors converge still today—with pro-life legislators moving in to our wombs, trying to dictate our choices. So beyond slavery, I called attention to the difference between being free *and* claiming ownership of your freed self, which is the shift from (m)other to mother.

### **The third “cluster”**

Chapters 4 and 5 shift the focus from literary texts to performance. The “re-membering in the flesh” consists of performances that re-member the diasporic foundational experience into contemporary identities, through dance and music, and help to cope with trauma in slum neighborhoods. Chapters 4 and 5 hone in on traumas specific to marginalized urban youths in Los Angeles and Rio de Janeiro in two “performance movements,” Clowning/Krump and AfroReggae.

Daily violence, dehumanization, political and social marginalization, lack of self-esteem, these are the forms of suffering that AfroReggae and Krump/Clowning performers strive to overcome. They follow a movement manifested through time by African Diasporic performances, such as 1970s reggae that was born out of Jamaican slums to affirm an identity apart from the national project that marginalized poor Jamaicans, and late 1970s hip hop that came out of New York's cement work, while the city built a throughway and annihilated Harlem's community, further marginalizing poor, African American youths.

I focus on two “performance movements:” Clowning/Krump as latest re-writings of hip hop “pop and lock” dance, created in Los Angeles at first with Tommy the Clown early 1990s, and Afro Reggae. Afro Reggae is a non-profit organization, reggae-rock fusion band from the early 1990s, and now a network of Cultural Centers in Rio de Janeiro favelas, with multiple performance groups (batucada percussion group, street theater group, all girl percussion dance and vocal group, etc.) I label them “performance movements” because they choreograph dance and perform music, and they choreograph activism. This term coins an ideology of resistance based on performance.

Clowning/ Krump and Afro Reggae’s performances create a cultural space to work through discrimination, police abuse, gang violence, and earn visibility and agency in the realm of the spectacle, or the public space. For instance, Miss Prissy, a Krump dancer, affirms her agency as she complements a now-canonical space that misrepresents her community—mainstream hip hop. She contributes another voice to hip hop musica and dance with songs about “the way we [women of South Central L.A.] love, and who we are, because there’s no one out there that’s representing that.” Each performance movement, as activism *and* choreography, vibrates in the echoes African Diaspora’s aesthetics and its politics. They raise awareness of a new form of citizenship: *batidania* or beat-citizenship (Yúdice 57).

Afro Reggae and Krump/Clowning also inject healing strategies similar to a vaccine. Afro Reggae integrates drug trafficking techniques—like networking and organizational structure—from previous gang members’ experience. They don’t repress. They re-member their past. Clowning/ Krump’s fast paced isolation choreography re-memembers the violent, fast-paced drug trafficking lifestyle, and their community’s spirit.

In Chapter 4 I traced the history of the movements and their locality. I looked at the historical background of the *favelas* or slums in Rio de Janeiro, and of HollyWatts in Los Angeles, and each performance movements' precursors in activism, mainly to provide the history of socio-affective marginalization and resistance through performance. Then chapter 5 compares two documentaries, *RIZE* and *Favela Rising*, and asks: do they portray the performers' traumas and performance movements accurately? In the future, I plan to supplement that analysis with oral narratives and input from the performers. In that same chapter, I place the filmic representations in contrast with the performances themselves. I finished with close readings of Krump/Clowning choreography and Afro Reggae songs.

I conclude that each performance movement re-writes the foundational African diaspora performative texts. They make use of improvisation, circular structures, the role of the spirit, survival through meta-communication (as in beyond written discourse), all in order to re-member communal traumas of being casualties of neo-liberalism and affective marginalities, stigmatized, victims of racist state policies. These are all traumas that I did not explore in the first part of the dissertation. Finally, the "performance movements" channel the guilt that was imposed on their bodies, or to use Hermann Herlinghaus's term, the "affective marginality" or the burden, and negative affects of society that they carry. They undo stigmatized images through meta-communication.

Each chapter attests to a healing and decolonial strategy that implies a return to the original diasporic experience and supports a discourse prior to writing that resists Western practices and History's amnesia. I focus on discursive forms that survived the Middle Passage: a belief in ancestors' continuing presence and influence, chants, memories, looks and gazes. This emergent discourse formed among individuals from diverse backgrounds, languages, tribes, and

kingdoms. Without access to a written affirmation of their identities, it was dance, collective story telling, names and religions that wove a heterogeneous culture together.

Each chapter underscores these discursive forms: the voice of a ghost or embodied memory; names that promote collective identity, orality, ritual; valuing a gaze for truer body image; restoring motherhood into (m)otherhood with spiritual mothering; choosing African diasporic dance, music, embodied knowledge as resistance.

Restoring the relationship between pre-written discourse and diasporic cultural identity articulates a decolonial and revolutionary strategy. By stepping away from heteropatriarchal White-dominated discourse, the rhetoric of these texts and performances challenge the dehumanization of racism that began with colonial epistemological violence. A return to pre-writing discourse, to the original diasporic experience, to the moment when individuals of African descent were taken from their lands, onto a ship and across the ocean, is also a return to the first slave revolts on slave ships—the beginning of a tradition based on cultural pride and perseverance.

Thus I conclude that the healing process shifts diasporic awareness forward with a step “backwards”—prior to written discourse. Or, if you accept progress as non-linear, and rather as a cycle, healing does not come to an end. Re-membering diaspora in the flesh brings forth a cycle that *re-connects with experiences prior to written discourse*.

Finally, the texts suggest including love in this pre-text revolutionary praxis. How does the power of the erotic arise as a powerful ethic for a population who experienced social death? This is precisely what is re-membered in the texts, and the condition from which postcolonial subjects attempt to recover. This is where the power of the erotic earns its theoretical and psychological strength as a healing and decolonizing tool. The power of the erotic was taken

away from a community *through social death*, yet was preserved by that community, and used as a rhetorical subversion.

Gloria Anzaldúa suggests how the “erotic power” changes identity formation. I conclude that all of the narratives studied in this dissertation promote this journey. She lays out three scenarios: conforming, not conforming and taking another route. Each “route,” is a different way to integrate “homophobia.” For Anzaldúa, “homophobia” means both the fear of going home and re-membering her machista community *and* repressing her queer identity. She moves from repression (conforming); to seeing how heterosexual males projected their hatred onto her (not conforming); to facing said projections and accepting her repressed sexuality’s “darkness” (taking a different route). This last step unveils a demonized eroticism, “the Shadow Beast” that she repressed, seeing only its darkness. She turns her repressed sexuality and trauma of homophobia into erotic power, into “not lust but tenderness,” into a force of sensuality that feeds self-esteem, creativity, and emotion over rational thinking.

The power of the erotic is a form of activism put forth by each narrative. My claim that art *works towards* healing victims of colonization, joined with the statement that the works of art re-connect with original diasporic experiences, together make up my final conclusion. Healing work must re-member the original diasporic identity and experience, *with love*, in and through the flesh.

Beloved, victim of Sethe’s infanticide is a symbol of (false) stability for Sethe. When her ghost returns, Sethe refuses to work through the trauma of her murder and beat the ghost out of the house through recognition. As painstaking and unstable as Beloved’s ghost’s overstaying her welcome may be, the desire to keep her close and take care of her, the fear of her ghost leaving

her without forgiving her, all prevent her from embracing change and transformation, and facing her “Shadow-Beast,” or erotic power.

In this instance, the “Shadow Beast” is the projection of her actions as cruel, when they are the result of slavery’s trauma that broke her self and pushed her to resist its oppressive system, to save her children from its social death through physical death, or in Sethe’s words, a “perfect death.” For Sethe’s character, this projection also translates into a repressed love. She is unable to “put her guard down” in front of Paul D., yet her love for her children is “too thick,” almost suffocating. (165) Most of the novel’s characters, in contrast, spread their love “thin.” For them it’s a question of individual survival. For Sethe, her love is a question of her offspring’s survival’s dependence on her: “Love is or it ain’t. Thin love ain’t love at all. [And it works, my boys] ain’t at Sweet Home. Schoolteacher ain’t got ’em.” (165) Although she defies the system of slavery and keeps her children out of it, she does not resolve her trauma until she realizes that she has erotic power. Once the community exorcises Beloved’s ghost, Sethe finds herself in pieces, and she asks herself: “will the parts [of my body] hold?” (272) What happened to the thick love that held her family together? Could it not hold parts of her body? Paul D.’s love and care do not seem to be enough for her, not without the presence and acceptance of Beloved. Sethe does not realize that the Shadow-Beast that pushed her to put her baby out of a potential slave misery was not cruelty, but tenderness. You do not understand that “*you your own thing, Sethe*”—that you have erotic power.

Representative of the other texts studied in this dissertation, Toni Morrison’s Pulitzer Prize winning novel proposes a way out of a downward spiral by manifesting love fully to found transformative politics. The ending underlines how much Sethe needs to let go of the false stability that she found in Beloved’s presence and embrace her fragmented self in order to claim

it. A large part of the novel is geared by Paul D's arrival and presence. This is not to underline the importance of a heterosexual relationship. Nor does this prove that a man's superiority helps a woman being stable. Paul D being at the center of the plot development and Sethe's resolution emphasizes how the feeling of letting go, how the very act and state of mind of falling in love works towards radical transformation.

Referring to Audre Lorde's claim that the master's tools cannot dismantle the master's house, Costa Vargas claims:

The confusion of meanings, the transformation of being, the embracing of the 'abyss,' and the coming to a utopian nonsite, a 'no-place' where everything is possible, are the corollaries of the refusal to utilize the master's tools and inhabit the master's house. Radical transformation—that which characterizes both falling in love and embracing transformative politics—implies precisely our 'gentle hemorrhage,' the necessary death of our dependence on stable (and therefore suspicious) references. (*Never Meant to Survive, Genocide and Utopia in Black Diaspora Communities* 144)

Can falling in love be synonymous with embracing transformative politics? Falling in love brings Sethe to the point of recovery where "you your own thing." The thick love gets Sethe to survive through life in bondage. Recognizing that the thick love can help her resolve and overcome and most of all apply to her recovery, *that* is what allows Sethe to survive *beyond* bondage, to claim her free self. If it is a manifestation of erotic power, if it leads to loving your own flesh and sexuality, then yes, falling in love can be synonymous with radical transformation and with embracing transformative politics.

The quote from Costa Vargas hones in on two central points that I will bring home in these last few pages of my conclusion. “Our ‘gentle hemorrhage’” is a fragile scar that has healed, but as difficult as it is to go from being free and claiming that free self, it can bleed internally and not heal unless an extra step is taken to claim that freed self. In order to do so, we have to adopt a rhetoric close to transformative politics, closer to the act of falling in love. I propose a vision of a new world close to this state of mind that accepts being unstable and constantly shifting, like hip hop’s premise.

I propose to recognize manifestations of erotic power. For Baby Suggs Holy, being free is one step, and accepting and claiming your freedom is another. She preaches in the Clearing “*You got to love [your flesh]. You!*” (88) For Krump dancer Miss Prissy, who was trained in ballet, modern jazz and modern dance, when she joined the circle of Krump dancers (who seemed at first like a “motorcycle club” to her), she learned how to “do *you*, and be free” (MTV interview). Krump dance allows Miss Prissy fall in love with her self entirely to the point that her identity becomes action (“do *you* and be free.”) The dance that embraces a violent rhythm and aesthetic, a Shadow Beast or “motorcycle club” at first, triggers a “letting go” of her problems, anxieties, and oppression. Other Clown, Krump, and Stripper (another variation of Clown dance) dancers explain that their performance breaks free the stigmatized sexuality imposed onto them in everyday life. A male Stripper performer asks:

I’ve seen some parents see little four year olds are out there poppin’ their booties, sayin’ ‘Oh, I would never let my daughter do that.’ Why? She’s out there havin’ fun she’s not doing *anything wrong*, she’s not being sexual, there’s nobody out there with her, there’s nobody touching her, she’s out there poppin’. What’s wrong with poppin’??

Stepping away from strict choreographies of ballet and modern dance—the master’s tools—, these dancers develop an aesthetic of improvisation. Young girls, adolescent women and mothers transform their exoticized, objectified, and otherwise misrepresented or misread bodies into an artistic source of empowerment. They leave the oppressive “here” and go “out there” in a space of performance where they are empowered while “poppin’.” If ballet and modern dance is as restricting as the “master’s tools,” how could Prissy and other dancers use that to undo “the master’s house” in HollyWatts? Clowning, Krump and Stripper dance triggers a letting go like falling in love, and thus choreographed a transformative politics in HollyWatts for many dancers.

Afro Reggae, a Cultural Group at first led majorly by men, and with a male Reggae band as the face of their Group, now promotes young women’s artistic expression and representation. The subgroup Akoní comes out of Vigario Geral’s Afro Reggae Cultural Center, whose “streets, squares and houses remain spaces where the machismo characteristic of our societies looked to stigmatize, exclude and submit.”<sup>204</sup> In this context, Akoní creates music based on Ijexá and Afoxé rhythms, with dance and percussion expressions that find their roots in Afro-Brazilian ancestry. They place their band within a history of rebellious “warrior women:” the (nameless) New Yorker strikers from a fabric factory in 1857, Luíza Mahin, Lélia Gonzalez. They name themselves after a Iorubá term that means “brave and strong person,” and emulate this being through their performances that aim to redefine a future and define place based on difference and togetherness. I will return to the valuable balance of difference and togetherness in my final point of a vision for a better world, shortly.

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<sup>204</sup> The Akoní quotes come from their description on the Afro Reggae website: [http://afroreggae.org/sec\\_subgrupos.php?id=11&sec=subgrupo](http://afroreggae.org/sec_subgrupos.php?id=11&sec=subgrupo)

Repressed sexuality, love, fragmented femininity, and the body as a site of threat of extinction and source of empowerment are points of intersection between representations of trauma such as the narrative of *Beloved*'s infanticide in the context of Reconstruction, youth's contemporary performances in Rio de Janeiro's Afro Reggae and Los Angeles' Clowning and Krump in the context of neoliberalism and drug trafficking, as well as *Reyita* and Anzaldúa's experiences. My analyses of their trauma narratives presented different representations of women and youth of color whose bodies became sites of erotic power—through performance (in Afro Reggae, Clown, and Krump), through embodiment of ghosts (in *Beloved* and *Ponciá Vicencio*), through spiritual mothering (in *Tituba*), by promoting love and self-esteem in the private space (in *Reyita*).

Each text presented the necessity to return to pre-written discourse and to promote an ethics of love. Each text presented this with steps in their narrative that went through overcoming colonialist discursive formations, and undoing these formations at the personal, collective and symbolic-imaginary levels. Going through these steps, each text presented a decolonial discourse that was also a healing discourse. The therapeutic discourse, in each text, visualized healing with the body at the center of the therapeutic process. With the ghost, (anti) naming, with bodies as sites of unification and alternative motherhood, with music and dance, the flesh earned a therapeutic potential, but also introduced another form of theoretical discourse—a vision for a better world.

The concept of “re-membling trauma in the flesh” turns Western History on its head, empties its pockets of all rational monies, to reclaim other histories, agencies and bodies:

The flesh is the concentration of ‘ethnicity’ that contemporary critical discourses neither acknowledge nor discourse away. It is this ‘flesh and blood’

entity, in the vestibule (or ‘pre-view’) of a colonized North America, that is essentially ejected from ‘The Female Body in Western Culture’, but it makes good theory, or commemorative ‘herstory’ to want to ‘forget,’ or to have failed to realize, that 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.” (Spillers 67)

“Re-membering trauma in the flesh” is about going back to this point in memory, in a historical past, when “a female body strung from a tree limb, or bleeding from the breast on any given day of field work because the ‘overseer,’ standing the length of a whip, has popped her flesh open.” (Spillers 68) In this dissertation, the narratives that “re-member trauma in the flesh” materialize the unprotected female and youth flesh that were repressed from contemporary memory. As they materialize the “unprotected female flesh,” the narratives offer a new methodology in which the flesh serves as a point of departure (Spillers 68).<sup>205</sup>

If we deserve to live in a better world, the narratives offer a new methodology to name the culprits and recover from trauma. They offer a balance between textuality and performance, a palpable narrative that returns to pre-text experience, listening to our ghosts instead of being afraid of them, accepting our bodies that have been objectified or violated, accepting a name outside of written discourse, being a mother in all the ways it entails, witnessing trauma through performance. They help me to visualize a better world in which falling in love gives way to transformative politics, in which cultural experiences are woven together by diversity and

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<sup>205</sup> “This materialized scene of unprotected female flesh—of female flesh ‘ungendered’—offers praxis and a theory, a text for living and for dying, and a method for reading both through their diverse mediations.” (Spillers 68)

sameness. A world where narratives float in a web, all remotely connected. Connected to the same historical determinants, they propose different responses with a similar end product: heterogeneity and common experience of trauma—the essence of a diasporic experience.

To push the boundaries of my own reflection, in a future project, I intend to take the therapeutic experience of re-membering in the flesh further, and dialogue with authors regardless of ethnicity, to formulate a study without categorical separation between women of color and white women, to expand a web of solidarity. I will end with the woman that first inspired my project, and now pushes me to open up my discussion further. In the prologue to an anthology that re-thinks the first women of color anthology *This Bridge Called My Back*, as Toni Cade Bambara (1981), Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa explain in their introductions (1983, 2002), and as Gloria Anzaldúa explains in the latest edition of *this bridge we call home*:

Twenty-one years ago we struggled with the recognition of difference within the context of commonality. Today we grapple with the recognition of commonality within the context of difference. While *This Bridge Called My Back* displaced whiteness, *this bridge we call home* carries this displacement further. It questions the terms *white* and *women of color* by showing that whiteness may not be applied to all whites, as some possess women-of-color consciousness, just as some women of color bear white consciousness. This book intends to change notions of identity, viewing it as part of a more complex system covering a larger terrain, and demonstrating that the politics of exclusion based on traditional categories diminishes our humanness. (2)

The works I analyzed in this dissertation are “testimonies” of witnessing historical and personal violence written by women who bear “women-of-color consciousness.” This is not

bound to their race, but their awareness. I will continue to pursue the relationship between individual perspectives to collective trauma and healing, by including women regardless of race in future projects, to truly move beyond individual perspective onto to socio-political frameworks of conceptualization, across ethnic experiences in the Americas, and recognize “the commonality within the context of difference,” (Anzaldúa, *this bridge we call home* 2) indispensable for contemporary comparative women’s studies.

I understand that my position about healing trauma may be ‘utopic,’ ‘too easy,’ for some. In fact there are studies on “disremembering,” as Spillers points out in her article “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe.” Douglass’s *Narrative* and Malcolm El-Hajj Malik El Shabazz’s *Autobiography of Malcom X* present cases of “estrangement and ‘disremembering’ that require many years to heal, and even then, only by way of Malcolm’s prison ordeal turned, eventually, into a redemptive occurrence.” Having “lost our mind” (Martin Luther King) for four hundred years may be impossible to recover.

The healing framework that I propose mostly works as the beginning of symbolic steps towards a healing process, not the means to a healing end or prescription to overcome oppression in real life. This process, I find, is like a cycle, and the product of an untraditional methodology, inspired from women of color’s framework. This is a call for change in theoretical approaches to cultural studies as well. Far from a political act of reform, I only call attention to political strategies, and have yet to put them in action fully in my classes, daily life, or public life. This was a project inspired by and promoting women of color’s theories that embrace bodies, spirits and minds, and most importantly, forgotten voices and repressed images that counter White heteronormative patriarchal discourse.

Slavery makes up the originary locus of contemporary stereotypes about Black sexuality and the Black family. Yet in this dissertation, slavery constitutes the originary locus of to construct strategies for healing social death and struggle in bondage; it overcomes these contemporary stereotypes. If I base my argument on the historical peculiarity of the Middle Passage, what can I apply from my framework to comparative women's studies? It boils down the experience of a collective trauma and oppression, which women across cultures have had to overcome. The episteme grounded in metaphors of captivity and mutilation becomes an episteme of resistance, empowerment, and unification.

The marker for "sickness," in this project, did not refer to a medical and psychoanalytical symptom, a pathological conditions to illness. It served like the shamanic concept of illness, as a transformative initiation to access dreamtime, or inner space, as well as an enhanced psychic sensitivity, which, in turn, accesses the hidden and highest potentials of human existence, the Shadow Beast and the power of the erotic. The marker for "sickness" from which to heal, the signifier of oppression, the inherited trauma of slavery or internal colonization, served in each text and performance as a sensibility and strategy for change, an ability to fashion a transformative framework that re-members trauma in the flesh to change it into erotic power.

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